

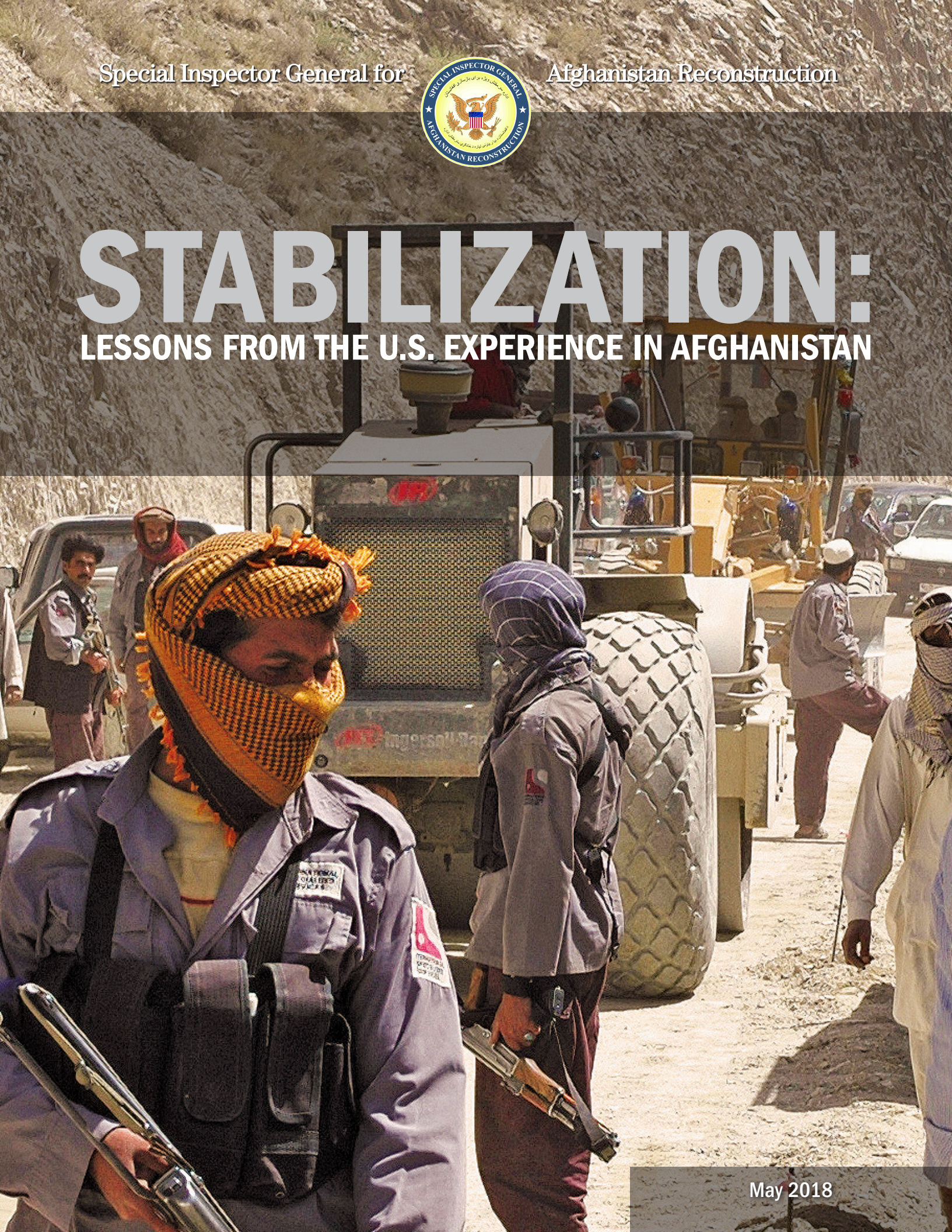
Special Inspector General for



Afghanistan Reconstruction

STABILIZATION:

LESSONS FROM THE U.S. EXPERIENCE IN AFGHANISTAN



May 2018



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USAID Afghanistan photo of the Khost-Gardez road construction project.



Special Inspector General
for Afghanistan Reconstruction

Stabilization: Lessons from the U.S. Experience in Afghanistan is the fourth lessons learned report issued by the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction. The report examines the U.S. stabilization effort in Afghanistan, detailing how the U.S. Agency for International Development and the Departments of State and Defense tried to support and legitimize the Afghan government in contested districts from 2002 through 2017. The report identifies lessons to inform U.S. policies and actions to stabilize a country or region before and during a contingency operation and provides recommendations to do so. With the rise of the Islamic State and its affiliates, making poorly governed spaces inhospitable to transnational terrorist groups remains a vital U.S. national security priority.

Our analysis reveals the U.S. government greatly overestimated its ability to build and reform government institutions in Afghanistan as part of its stabilization strategy. We found the stabilization strategy and the programs used to achieve it were not properly tailored to the Afghan context, and successes in stabilizing Afghan districts rarely lasted longer than the physical presence of coalition troops and civilians. As a result, by the time all prioritized districts had transitioned from coalition to Afghan control in 2014, the services and protection provided by Afghan forces and civil servants often could not compete with a resurgent Taliban as it filled the void in newly vacated territory.

SIGAR began its lessons learned program in late 2014 at the urging of General John Allen, Ambassador Ryan Crocker, and others who had served in Afghanistan. Our lessons learned reports comply with SIGAR's legislative mandate to provide independent and objective leadership and recommendations to promote economy, efficiency, and effectiveness; prevent and detect waste, fraud, and abuse; and inform Congress and the Secretaries of State and Defense about reconstruction-related problems and the need for corrective action.

Unlike other inspectors general, Congress created SIGAR as an independent agency, not housed within any single department. SIGAR is the only inspector general focused solely on the Afghanistan mission, and the only one devoted exclusively to reconstruction issues. While other inspectors general have jurisdiction over the programs and operations of their respective departments or agencies, SIGAR has jurisdiction over all programs and operations supported with U.S. reconstruction dollars, regardless of the agency involved. Because SIGAR has the authority to look across the entire reconstruction effort, it is uniquely positioned to identify and address whole-of-government lessons.

Our lessons learned reports synthesize not only the body of work and expertise of SIGAR, but also that of other oversight agencies, government entities, current and former officials with on-the-ground experience, academic institutions, and independent scholars. The reports document what the U.S. government sought to accomplish, assess what it achieved, and evaluate the degree to which these efforts helped the United States reach its strategic goals in Afghanistan. They also provide recommendations to address the challenges stakeholders face in ensuring efficient, effective, and sustainable reconstruction efforts, not just in Afghanistan, but in future contingency operations.

SIGAR's Lessons Learned Program comprises subject matter experts with considerable experience working and living in Afghanistan, aided by a team of seasoned research analysts. I want to express my deepest appreciation to the team members who produced this report, and thank them for their dedication and commitment to the project. I thank David H. Young, project lead; Jordan Kane and Paul Kane, research analysts; Jordan Schurter, student trainee; Olivia Paek, graphic designer; and Elizabeth Young, editor. In producing its reports, the Lessons Learned Program also uses the significant skills and experience found in SIGAR's Audits, Investigations, and Research and Analysis directorates, and the Office of Special Projects. I thank all of the individuals who provided their time and effort to contribute to this report. It is truly a collaborative effort meant to not only identify problems, but also to learn from them and apply reasonable solutions to improve future reconstruction efforts.

I believe our lessons learned reports will be a key legacy of SIGAR. Through these reports, we hope to reach a diverse audience in the legislative and executive branches, at the strategic and programmatic levels, both in Washington and in the field. By leveraging our unique interagency mandate, we intend to do everything we can to make sure the lessons from the United States' largest reconstruction effort are identified, acknowledged, and, most importantly, remembered and applied to ongoing reconstruction efforts in Afghanistan, as well as to future conflicts and reconstruction efforts elsewhere in the world.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'John F. Sopko', written in a cursive style.

John F. Sopko
Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This lessons learned report draws important lessons from the U.S. experience with stabilization in Afghanistan from 2002–2017, with a special focus on the years after 2009 when most of the \$4.7 billion in stabilization funds was spent. With the rise of the Islamic State and its affiliates, making poorly governed spaces inhospitable to transnational terrorist groups remains a vital U.S. national security priority. We anticipate U.S. government efforts to stabilize these areas by clearing them of terrorist groups and helping generate sufficient governance to keep them from returning will continue in fragile and conflict-affected states around the world. With U.S. stabilization efforts nascent in Syria and ramping up in Iraq, it is important that lessons from stabilizing Afghanistan inform these efforts.

The term “stabilization” is frequently invoked in U.S. foreign policy circles and by other donor nations, yet it is not uniformly, precisely defined across relevant stakeholders. Definitions have varied by U.S. agency and even changed over time within agencies. In 2018, the U.S. government defined stabilization as:

A political endeavor involving an integrated civilian-military process to create conditions where locally legitimate authorities and systems can peaceably manage conflict and prevent a resurgence of violence. Transitional in nature, stabilization may include efforts to establish civil security, provide access to dispute resolution, and deliver targeted basic services, and establish a foundation for the return of displaced people and longer-term development.¹

However, the concept of stabilization and notions about how it was to be implemented in Afghanistan took shape gradually and only coalesced as an explicit U.S. strategy in 2009.

Our analysis identifies seven key findings regarding the stabilization strategy in Afghanistan and the programs used to achieve it:

1. The U.S. government greatly overestimated its ability to build and reform government institutions in Afghanistan as part of its stabilization strategy.
2. The stabilization strategy and the programs used to achieve it were not properly tailored to the Afghan context.
3. The large sums of stabilization dollars the United States devoted to Afghanistan in search of quick gains often exacerbated conflicts, enabled corruption, and bolstered support for insurgents.
4. Because the coalition prioritized the most dangerous districts first, it continuously struggled to clear them of insurgents. As a result, the coalition couldn't make sufficient progress to convince Afghans in those or other districts that the government could protect them if they openly turned against the insurgents.

5. Efforts by U.S. agencies to monitor and evaluate stabilization programs were generally poor.
6. Successes in stabilizing Afghan districts rarely lasted longer than the physical presence of coalition troops and civilians.
7. Stabilization was most successful in areas that were clearly under the physical control of government security forces, had a modicum of local governance in place prior to programming, were supported by coalition forces and civilians who recognized the value of close cooperation, and were continuously engaged by their government as programming ramped up.

From 2003 to 2005, the U.S. military executed a counterinsurgency (COIN) campaign in the east and south of Afghanistan. With only two brigades “to prevent a Taliban resurgence and to build support for the coalition and the central government,” U.S. military forces, the State Department, and the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) used a growing number of provincial reconstruction teams to implement projects together and strengthen provincial and district governments.²

From 2005 to 2007, military and civilian agencies continued to adopt policies that called for synchronized interagency stabilization programming. However, on the ground, the agencies rarely operated in concert with one another, as the military continued with the “clear, hold, and build” phases of COIN operations, and USAID implemented several stabilization programs. U.S. Embassy Kabul was “normalizing” its operations as it moved away from a war footing and toward the kind of embassy presence State had in most countries. Still, momentum for interagency cooperation was building, particularly within the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), as more resources and troops were devoted to Afghanistan.

From 2008 to 2009, it became apparent that security in Afghanistan was worsening as the numbers of suicide attacks and improvised explosive devices skyrocketed. COIN and stabilization efforts were thought to be responsible for dramatic improvements in security in Iraq, and many policymakers felt compelled to use the same methods to help the Afghan government secure the country and out-govern the Taliban in rural communities.

Throughout 2009 and 2010, the U.S. government committed to an explicit stabilization strategy, surged more than 50,000 military forces to clear insurgents from the most dangerous and contested districts in the south and east, and deployed hundreds of civilians to use stabilization programming to hold and build those areas so the Taliban would be unwelcome and unable to return. To implement the strategy, State, USAID, and the Department of Defense (DOD) leveraged a dramatic increase in resources to refocus existing programs

and create new ones to “strengthen the reach and legitimacy of the central government in outlying regions.”³ Using a robust framework for civilian-military (civ-mil) cooperation extending all the way down to the battalion level, the coalition intended to help the Afghan government out-govern the Taliban and provide services to contested populations to win their support. The coalition surge, however, was constrained to 18 months. These two decisions—to prioritize the most dangerous parts of the country and to draw down forces on timelines unrelated to conditions on the ground—had a profound and harmful impact on countless downstream decisions regarding stabilization planning, staffing, and programming.

For example, during this time, there was significant friction between military forces and the civilians tasked with stabilization programming. In theory, ISAF would choose the areas to clear in partnership with its civilian counterparts, and together they would plan and execute the holding and building of those areas. In practice, however, despite a significant increase in civ-mil interactions, the military made (or had considerable influence on) most of the key decisions on the ground, including deciding which districts to clear, hold, and build; determining when communities were ready for civilian stabilization programming; and deciding what kind of projects should be implemented to win local hearts and minds.

Some senior USAID officials said ISAF bulldozed the agency into going along with clear-hold-build and demanded it implement ineffective cash-for-work programs, despite USAID’s protests; other officials said ISAF only needed to cite President Obama’s compressed timelines and ask USAID, “How else are we going to do this if not quickly and in the most dangerous areas?” Military forces were under immense pressure and accountable for making fast progress; that pressure also affected civilian personnel, with few at State or USAID in country believing they had the ability to push back against the military’s decisions. Only rarely did USAID and DOD show significant levels of collaboration, a practice that was instrumental in the coalition’s successful stabilization of certain key terrain. One example can be found in SIGAR’s case study of Marawara District in appendix A.

More broadly, moving at such speed and in such dangerous areas created a collection of mutually reinforcing problems. First, by prioritizing the most insecure areas, the coalition made it difficult to showcase the full clear-hold-build cycle, as insecurity kept much of the coalition perpetually stuck in the clearing and holding phases as forces moved prematurely from one community to the next. Thus, rather than connecting increasingly stabilized “ink spots” of government control and influence, creating new ink spots often meant removing old ones. Focusing on the most dangerous areas first—and then generally failing

to stabilize them—meant Afghans had few models of communities that had been rewarded for publicly turning on the insurgents. Lacking reliable and continuous security in newly cleared territory, stabilization programs frequently offered services in fiercely contested communities because there was no time to wait for the fighting to stop.

Second, while insecurity created severe restrictions on coalition access to communities, spending on stabilization projects in those communities increased significantly in the hope of compensating for a lack of time. In turn, more money went to communities whose local political dynamics were poorly understood, which often exacerbated conflicts, enabled corruption, and bolstered support for insurgents.

Third, it was difficult for coalition personnel to recognize these unintended consequences in any given community, as the same chronic insecurity that inhibited thoughtful project identification and implementation also precluded adequate monitoring and evaluation of those projects.

Fourth, the coalition's inability to reduce violence in many ISAF-designated key terrain districts made it exceptionally difficult to recruit Afghan civil servants to help implement and sustain stabilization programs, particularly under the timeline provided. As a result, hiring standards were lowered, and the civil servants who were recruited were often less experienced and less well-suited for the roles. Persistent insecurity meant that even the civil servants who were successfully recruited faced significant mobility constraints. An area deemed relatively permissive by the military, with its heavily armed convoys and vehicles designed to withstand improvised explosive devices, presented a very different risk to Afghan government officials and informal leaders, who relied on civilian vehicles and did not live on heavily guarded bases.

DOD implemented stabilization programs that faced similar pressures and created similarly perverse incentives as some civilian programs. For example, the Commander's Emergency Response Program (CERP) aimed to provide "urgent humanitarian or reconstruction projects," in part, to reduce violence.⁴ Starting in 2009, the program encouraged military commanders to spend money in a way that would benefit the Afghan population through projects that could be transferred to the Afghan government and thus help improve the government's legitimacy. CERP generally suffered from poor data collection and struggled to develop measures of effectiveness to understand the impact of its projects. The limited number of qualified and experienced civil affairs teams to oversee the program's implementation led CERP to focus less on effective programming and more on spending. Once DOD deemed money a "weapon system" in 2009, commanders were often judged on the amount of CERP money

they disbursed. With insufficient attention to impact and a frequent assumption that more money spent would translate into more progress, these projects may have exacerbated the very problems commanders hoped to address.

Taken together, these and other obstacles meant that most Afghans in key terrain districts were not convinced of the Afghan government's benevolence or staying power, and their communities had not stabilized when transition began in the summer of 2011. The next deadline, transitioning control of the entire country to the Afghan government by the end of 2014, proved equally unrealistic. "We went from an end state to an end date," former ISAF commander General John Allen observed in a SIGAR interview, adding, "Stabilization requires time to measure and adapt, and we lost all that. It was pulled out from under us."⁵ In Kabul, U.S. civilian agencies tried to shift their focus from the district level to the provincial and municipal level to reflect a new orientation toward traditional governance support, akin to the support provided in USAID governance programming around the world. However, for both DOD and the civilian agencies, efforts to transition proved difficult, as insecurity compelled DOD to continue stabilizing key terrain (albeit with decreasing force levels), and USAID continued to be tethered to military operations and was thus mostly unable to realign with the new policy focus on governance until after transition. As a result, many of the challenges stabilization efforts faced from 2009–2012 continued during transition, through 2014.

A second DOD stabilization program, Village Stability Operations (VSO), showed early potential during the surge but deteriorated during transition as the program scaled too quickly. U.S. Special Operations Forces (SOF) implemented VSO from 2010 to 2014 to stabilize strategically located villages. The military hoped to connect these villages to formal district and provincial government by offering communities various services, particularly security, in the form of an Afghan Local Police (ALP) force, whose members were drawn from the same communities being protected.

While VSO began on a solid conceptual footing during the surge, once transition began in 2011, the program compromised many of its core principles. DOD came to believe VSO could compensate for the aggressive transition timelines by using the ALP to fill the security void created by the coalition's withdrawal, which compelled the program to focus on ALP development at the expense of the political and other nonmilitary aspects of the larger program. The ALP grew at an unsustainable rate, from 6,500 ALP across 93 sites in 2011 to 24,000 ALP in 2013. Some militias that operated outside of government control were absorbed into the ALP without the vetting that ALP units had initially received. As conventional forces drew down, SOF teams withdrew with them, so there were not enough U.S. SOF to staff VSO sites and train the ALP units, forcing

the coalition to rely on other SOF with little experience in training indigenous security forces or communicating across cultures. VSO sites often transitioned to Afghan control before they were ready, and some were overrun, while others reverted to the influence of strongmen and the chaos of a predatory or absentee government. With little oversight, some militia commanders coopted the program and simply continued their predatory practices with the appearance of government sanction, ultimately undermining the government's legitimacy.

Even programs that were otherwise well-implemented had trouble compensating for the effects of the timeline and the continued focus on the most insecure districts. Nonetheless, during transition, there were several noticeable improvements in how stabilization programs were implemented on the ground. For example, the coalition balanced its reliance on small infrastructure activities with an increased use of "soft" programming, like training for government officials and informal leaders. Projects became smaller, more manageable, more consultative, and thus more likely to be implemented in line with community wishes. More projects were implemented directly by partners, rather than being subcontracted out with less oversight and poor quality control. While working through Afghan government officials in the districts had always been explicitly viewed as vital to the mission, during transition, the coalition followed through on this commitment more often.

More broadly, our analytical review of stabilization points to a number of coalition assumptions that proved problematic: (1) communities were unstable because of the government's absence, rather than its behavior when present; (2) communities would only stabilize if the government provided them diverse social services, even if the Taliban had stabilized them with only modest law and order efforts; and (3) stabilization could succeed despite obstacles inherent to the Afghan government's structure and the divergent interests of its political leadership.

LESSONS

Given the constraints explored at length in this report, Afghanistan was likely among the most difficult environments for a large-scale stabilization mission. The challenges there make it difficult to discern whether and how the problems seen in Afghanistan were specific to the environment or systemic to stabilization.

In fact, the poor results of this particular stabilization mission make it tempting to conclude that stabilization should not be conducted in the future at all. However, in any area that has been cleared, the absence of reliable alternatives to stabilization means that rather than discourage the use of stabilization writ

large, the best course of action may be to help the U.S. government (1) balance the importance of any given stabilization mission with a realistic understanding of the level of effort required and what is achievable and (2) improve its ability to prepare for, design, execute, monitor, and evaluate stabilization missions when it elects to undertake them.

Given the substantial recent increase in investment in stabilization efforts in Syria and Iraq, realistic assessments that align the ends, ways, and means of prospective and ongoing stabilization efforts are critical.

Moreover, given that stabilization was occasionally effective in Afghanistan, we believe it may be more effective in other countries if the lessons below are learned and applied in future stabilization missions.

1. Even under the best circumstances, stabilization takes time. Without the patience and political will for a planned and prolonged effort, large-scale stabilization missions are likely to fail.
2. Most U.S. government capabilities and institutions necessary in a large-scale stabilization mission should be established and maintained between contingencies if they are to be effective when they matter most.
3. Having qualified and experienced personnel in the right positions at the right times is vital to stabilization's success.
4. Increased funding alone cannot compensate for stabilization's inherent challenges, and believing that it will can exacerbate those challenges.
5. Physical security is the bedrock of stabilization.
6. The presence of local governance is a precondition for effective stabilization programming.
7. Stabilizing communities requires a tailored approach.
8. Stabilization efforts must be rigorously monitored and evaluated.
9. Successfully conceiving and implementing a stabilization strategy requires extensive local knowledge of the host-nation government and population.
10. Winning hearts and minds requires a close examination of what has won and lost the hearts and minds of that particular population in the recent past.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations drawn from the U.S. stabilization experience in Afghanistan may help increase the likelihood of success in future stabilization missions. Some of these recommendations require substantial effort. However, given the inherent difficulty of stabilization missions, without the political will and technical investment necessary to implement the reforms outlined below, in our view large-scale stabilization missions should not be conducted.

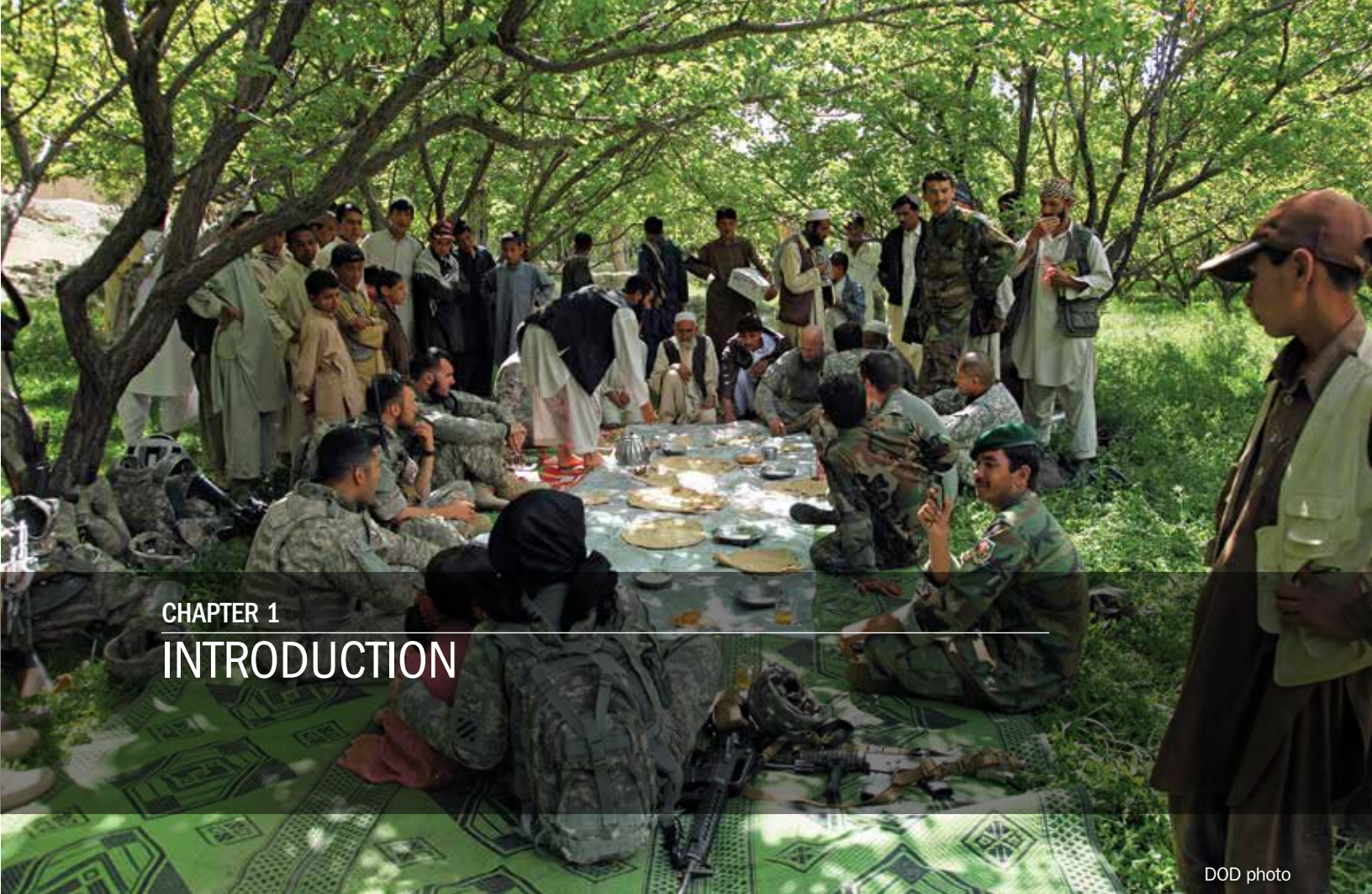
Executive Branch

1. State should take the lead in laying out a robust whole-of-government stabilization strategy, USAID should be the lead implementer, and DOD should support their efforts.
2. DOD and USAID should update COIN and stabilization doctrine and best practices to stagger stabilization's various phases, with the provision of reliable and continuous physical security serving as the critical foundation. SIGAR offers a blueprint to serve as a model. (See page 196.)
3. DOD should develop measures of effectiveness for any CERP-like program in the future.
4. USAID should prioritize the collection of accurate and reliable data for its stabilization projects.
5. DOD and USAID should prioritize developing and retaining human terrain analytical expertise that would allow a more nuanced understanding of local communities.
6. DOD should ensure it has a sufficient number and mix of civil affairs personnel with the right training and aptitude for the next stabilization mission.
7. State and USAID should designate a new civilian response corps of active and standby civilian specialists who can staff stabilization missions.

Legislative Branch

Congress should consider providing adequate resources to ensure executive branch agencies implement the reforms laid out above. Specifically, Congress should consider:

1. Funding a modified civilian response corps.
2. Requiring State, the designated lead on stabilization, to develop and implement a stabilization strategy within a broader campaign strategy and in coordination with USAID and DOD.
3. Requiring USAID, the designated lead on implementation, to develop and implement a monitoring and evaluation plan in coordination with State and DOD.
4. Focusing its oversight on stabilization outcomes.



CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

DOD photo

This lessons learned report draws important lessons from the U.S. experience with stabilization in Afghanistan from 2002–2017, with a special focus on the years after 2009, when most of the \$4.7 billion in stabilization funds was spent. With the rise of the Islamic State and its affiliates, making poorly governed spaces inhospitable to transnational terrorist groups remains a vital U.S. national security priority. We anticipate U.S. government efforts to stabilize these areas by clearing them of terrorist groups and helping generate sufficient governance to keep them from returning will continue in fragile and conflict-affected states around the world. With U.S. stabilization efforts nascent in Syria and ramping up in Iraq, it is paramount that lessons from stabilizing Afghanistan inform these efforts.

In the last two decades, the U.S. government has become increasingly aware of the dangers posed by poorly governed spaces around the world. In particular, the Taliban’s ability to host al-Qaeda as it prepared and launched the 9/11 attacks made it clear that unstable or fragile states constituted a key threat to U.S. national security interests. As the 2002 U.S. *National Security Strategy* noted, “America is now threatened less by conquering states than we are by failing ones. We are menaced less by fleets and armies than by catastrophic technologies in the hands of the embittered few.”⁶

Poor governance, particularly at the subnational level, was viewed as fueling the creation and sustainment of transnational terrorist groups. To address the problem, foreign governments needed the will and capacity to deny these groups safe haven and to provide their populations with sufficient governance and development to preclude such groups from taking root. Security, governance, and development were thus interlinked in ways that required “whole of government” responses that went well beyond the exclusive purview of the military.⁷ U.S. policymakers came to believe that merely clearing a remote area of insurgents or other belligerents to prevent them from hosting transnational terrorist groups would be insufficient if the conditions that allowed those groups to take local control in the first place were not addressed. In practice, this generally required helping host-nation governments become legitimate and effective enough that such safe haven was impossible.

In Afghanistan, the stabilization strategies varied and evolved over time, but they usually shared the following chain of logic. In order to defeat al-Qaeda, the group had to be denied territory to plan and launch attacks. The territory likely to be used by al-Qaeda was controlled by the Taliban, so the Taliban had to be targeted and pushed out of the most important areas it controlled. Yet, because the Taliban had a history of providing some services to these populations, to keep the Taliban (and by extension, al-Qaeda) out, after clearing the area, the coalition needed to “stabilize” those communities by extending the reach of the government, building



Marines speak to an Afghan elder through an interpreter to offer assistance after three days of heavy rain at Turah Shah Ghundey, Helmand Province, on February 13, 2011. (U.S. Marine Corps photo by Gunnery Sergeant Bryce Piper)

up the capacity of local officials and institutions, and convincing the population that legitimate government was preferable to having the Taliban return. U.S. policy makers believed that only after such a paradigm shift occurred could the coalition withdraw and have the confidence the Taliban would be consistently repelled by the population, with its newfound appreciation for the continuous services and protection of the Afghan government.

Our analysis identifies seven key findings regarding the stabilization strategy in Afghanistan and the programs used to achieve it:

1. The U.S. government greatly overestimated its ability to build and reform government institutions in Afghanistan as part of its stabilization strategy.
2. The stabilization strategy and the programs used to achieve it were not properly tailored to the Afghan context.
3. The large sums of stabilization dollars the United States devoted to Afghanistan in search of quick gains often exacerbated conflicts, enabled corruption, and bolstered support for insurgents.
4. Because the coalition prioritized the most dangerous districts first, it continuously struggled to clear them of insurgents. As a result, the coalition couldn't make sufficient progress to convince Afghans in those or other districts that the government could protect them if they openly turned against the insurgents.
5. Efforts by U.S. agencies to monitor and evaluate stabilization programs were generally poor.
6. Successes in stabilizing Afghan districts rarely lasted longer than the physical presence of coalition troops and civilians.
7. Stabilization was most successful in areas that were clearly under the physical control of government security forces, had a modicum of local governance in place prior to programming, were supported by coalition forces and civilians who recognized the value of close cooperation, and were continuously engaged by their government as programming ramped up.

Our report is divided into 12 chapters. After the introduction, chapter 2 details how stabilization programming took shape between 2002 and 2009. Chapter 3 describes how in 2009, stabilization was nested within counterinsurgency and became the overarching strategy for the war. Chapter 4 recounts how the stabilization strategy was operationalized and executed between 2009 and 2012. Chapter 5 details the coalition's policy shift from stabilizing Afghan districts to transitioning their control to the Afghan government. Chapter 6 separately examines the two stabilization programs implemented by the Department of Defense (DOD): the Commander's Emergency Response Program (CERP) and Village Stability Operations (VSO). Chapter 7 details the difficulty of measuring effectiveness in a stabilization context and assesses the effectiveness of such

programming in Afghanistan. Chapter 8 is an analytical review exploring in depth the assumptions, implications, and challenges of the stabilization effort in Afghanistan. Chapters 9 through 12 contain the report’s findings, lessons, conclusions, and recommendations, respectively. As an example of effective stabilization, appendix A provides a case study of the remarkable interagency stabilization effort in Marawara District, Kunar Province, in 2010 and 2011.

WHAT IS STABILIZATION?

The term “stabilization” is frequently invoked in U.S. foreign policy circles and by other donor nations, yet it is not uniformly, precisely defined across relevant stakeholders. Definitions have varied by U.S. agency and even changed over time within agencies. Properly defining stabilization is particularly difficult because it is often used by policymakers in cables, strategic documents, and speeches as a vague euphemism to mean “fixing” a country or area mired in conflict. Adding to the confusion, stabilization was also the term used to describe the overall U.S. strategy during the surge of resources to Afghanistan from approximately 2009–2012.

On the ground in Afghanistan, where much of this report will focus, stabilization refers to a specific process designed to keep insurgents out of an area after they have been initially expelled by security forces.⁸ In practice, this process was implemented through more than \$4.7 billion in efforts and programs of the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), DOD, and the Department of State between 2002 and 2017, though 75 percent of these stabilization efforts took place after 2009, and nearly 60 percent took place between 2009 and 2011.⁹ Most programs and funding started tapering off as responsibility for governance and security shifted to the Afghan government, beginning as early as 2011.

Stabilization projects were intended to be a temporary stopgap measure to solidify the military’s gains in territorial control through improvements in local governance, better position the Afghan government to assume control and build upon the initial gains, and create the necessary conditions to allow a coalition drawdown. As the former commander of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), General John Allen, observed, “Stabilization is the decisive factor in putting down government roots and economic activity.”¹⁰

*“Stabilization is the decisive factor in putting down
government roots and economic activity.”*

—General John Allen

Stabilization vs. Development

Put simply, stabilization is designed to be short term and focused on insecure areas, while development is often long term and focused on secure areas. However, the more important difference between stabilization and development centers on intent. Both efforts might result in schools being built, but for different reasons. For example, a development program might build a school because education triggers a process that leads to greater long-term prosperity and development. Educated children are more likely to grow up to be healthier and more qualified to administer government, succeed in business, and help grow the economy.

In contrast, a stabilization program might build a school to trigger a process that leads to improved security. The school would demonstrate the government is working on behalf of the community, the local population would come to prefer government services over the return of insurgents, and insurgents would lose control over territory that could be used to host transnational terrorist groups. The stabilization approach recognizes that contested communities are not yet suited for long-term development and must first be stabilized with catalytic, short-term programs, after which long-term development can begin.

However, like development, stabilization efforts can vary considerably in size and scope. Both can be instrumental in a large effort to build a country from scratch, and both can be limited to meeting strategic objectives in small patches of territory, even relying on the support of foreign militaries and foreign civil servants to do so.¹¹

The United States Institute of Peace's *Guiding Principles for Stabilization and Reconstruction* defined stabilization as “ending or preventing the recurrence of violent conflict and creating the conditions for normal economic activity and nonviolent politics.”¹² As applied in Afghanistan, USAID defined stabilization as:

Strengthening the reach and legitimacy of the central government in outlying regions. . . . Stabilization programs are designed to improve security, extend the reach of the Afghan government, and facilitate reconstruction in priority provinces. Their core objective is to implement projects that will improve stability so that more traditional forms of development assistance can resume.¹³

Joint military doctrine issued by the Joint Chiefs of Staff in August 2016 defined stabilization as “the process by which military and nonmilitary actors collectively apply various instruments of national power to address drivers of conflict, foster host-nation resiliencies, and create conditions that enable sustainable peace and security.” It identified five U.S. government stability sectors: (1) security, (2) justice and reconciliation, (3) humanitarian assistance and social well-being, (4) governance and participation, and (5) economic stabilization and infrastructure.¹⁴

In 2018, State, USAID, and DOD collectively defined stabilization as “a political endeavor involving an integrated civilian-military (civ-mil) process to create conditions where locally legitimate authorities and systems can peaceably manage conflict and prevent a resurgence of violence. Transitional in nature, stabilization may include efforts to establish civil security, provide access to dispute resolution, and deliver targeted basic services, and establish a foundation for the return of displaced people and longer-term development.”¹⁵

At various times and with varying resource levels, the war in Afghanistan was viewed by U.S. officials as a counterinsurgency (COIN) effort, which, along with an increasing emphasis on interagency coordination, helped crystalize thinking on stabilization as part of an integrated civ-mil effort. In fact, stabilization was often conceptually nested within COIN doctrine’s sequential steps of “clear, hold, build.” Specifically, after military forces “cleared” an area of insurgents, the area was then stabilized—or “held” and “built”—with USAID and DOD programs that attempted to help the government become more legitimate and effective.¹⁶

Counterinsurgency

DOD defines an insurgency as “an organized movement aimed at the overthrow of a constituted government through the use of subversion and armed conflict.”¹⁷ Counterinsurgency refers to a collection of “comprehensive civilian and military efforts taken to simultaneously defeat and contain insurgency and address its root causes.”¹⁸ More broadly, COIN is designed to “build popular support for a government” and undermine the insurgency fighting it.¹⁹

Throughout much of the war, the concept of stabilization was often paired with “reconstruction,” and the line between the two was sometimes blurred. Put simply, reconstruction is “the process of rebuilding degraded, damaged, or destroyed political, socioeconomic, and physical infrastructure of a country or territory to create the foundation for long-term development.”²⁰ Given that stabilization programs created similar infrastructure and for similar reasons, the distinction between the two concepts was not always instructive. In practice, using both terms together provided agencies the flexibility to implement projects that ranged all the way from building culverts to building hospitals, and from training carpet weavers to training government ministers.

WHY STABILIZATION MATTERS

Concepts inherent to stabilization remain integral to how the U.S. government fights asymmetric conflicts and supports fragile governments struggling with internal threats. While USAID said in 2015 that it had “gradually shifted away from a focus on stabilization toward long-term capacity building,” since 2008

the U.S. government has sponsored explicit stabilization programs or local development projects with a stated stabilization objective in numerous conflict zones, including Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iraq, Syria, Nigeria, Libya, and Yemen.²¹ There has also been significant growth in the number of stabilization-like programs across the Middle East and Africa that are characterized by such terms as “resilience” and “countering violent extremism,” which in practice bear a striking resemblance to stabilization. Ultimately, it may be difficult to move away from stabilization; no matter what the solution is called, the problem set that originally made stabilization so urgent is still prevalent around the world, and it cannot be addressed by the military alone. As the 2015 U.S. *National Security Strategy* noted:

An array of terrorist threats has gained traction in areas of instability, limited opportunity, and broken governance. . . . Our military will remain ready to defend our enduring national interests while providing essential leverage for our diplomacy. The use of force is not, however, the only tool at our disposal, and it is not the principal means of U.S. engagement abroad, nor always the most effective for the challenges we face. Rather, our first line of action is principled and clear-eyed diplomacy, combined with the central role of development in the forward defense and promotion of America’s interests.²²

The effort to retake Islamic State-held territory in Syria and Iraq highlights the enduring importance of stabilization. Echoing comments made by USAID Administrator Mark Green and U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM) commander General Joseph Votel in Raqqa in 2018, the State Department recently said:

Our efforts in post-ISIS areas will be strictly focused on stabilization and thus meeting the immediate needs of civilians in order to enable them to return home and to prevent the return of ISIS. . . . The efforts are limited to the provision of humanitarian assistance, clearing explosive remnants of war, and the restoration of essential services.²³

As will be explored in depth in this report, “the restoration of essential services” in contested territory is far more difficult than simply turning the lights on. To expel an insurgent force indefinitely, stabilization must offer a nuanced political toolkit that helps host-nation governments address the expectations of battered communities and matches the threat posed by a resilient and adaptive insurgency.

In Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, and beyond, stabilization is often regarded as a slippery slope to multi-billion dollar **nation-building** efforts, yet the importance of stabilization goes well beyond costly contingency operations and extends to smaller-scale and ongoing U.S. stabilization efforts around the world. In the 2018 interagency Stabilization Assistance Review (SAR), to which SIGAR contributed, State, USAID, and DOD all agreed on the nature of the threat facing the United States:

The United States and our allies face an increasingly complex and uncertain world in which many of our adversaries sow instability and benefit from

Nation building—or more precisely, **state building**—is the process of helping a country emerging from conflict establish and improve its governmental functions. In practice, it is a broad term that can encompass everything from advising a single ministry to building an entire government and economy from scratch.

it. Protracted conflicts provide fertile ground for violent extremists and criminals to expand their influence and threaten U.S. interests. These conflicts cause mass displacements and divert international resources that might otherwise be spent fostering economic growth and trade.²⁴

As the SAR further noted, the U.S. government “must more rigorously define stabilization missions based on national security interests and undertake institutional reforms based on hard-learned lessons.”²⁵ It is our hope that this report addresses a number of these concerns and highlights a way forward with its lessons and recommendations.

SCOPE OF THIS REPORT

For well over a decade, there have been widespread allegations that the Taliban received various kinds of strategic and tactical support from factions within the Pakistani government. This support almost certainly contributed to the resiliency of the Taliban and the coalition’s struggle to stabilize Afghan communities. However, as the nature of this support has been explored in depth elsewhere, it will not be covered in this report.²⁶

While stabilization was often framed as the civilian component of COIN, the military also spent considerable resources on stabilization programming. In priority districts, there was significant overlap between the civilian and military roles in COIN, as the military could often respond faster and operate in more dangerous areas than coalition civilians could. Two programs in particular illustrate how DOD attempted to rebuild Afghanistan from the bottom-up: CERP and VSO. These programs are discussed in depth in chapter 6 of this report.

A number of U.S.-sponsored programs and organizations incorporated the word stabilization or stability into their names, for example, the Task Force for Business and Stability Operations (TFBSO). While TFBSO and other organizations and programs like it were regarded as part of the broader effort to stabilize Afghanistan (and SIGAR has reviewed some of them extensively elsewhere), these programs and their staff were not integrated into the clear-hold-build process in the way the following programs were, and will therefore not be discussed in this report.²⁷

STABILIZATION PROGRAMS REVIEWED FOR THIS REPORT**USAID**

Afghan Civilian Assistance Program

Afghan Civilian Assistance Program II

Afghanistan Social Outreach Program

Afghanistan Stabilization Initiative

Afghanistan Stabilization Program

Afghanistan Transition Initiative

Afghanistan Vouchers for Increased Production in Agriculture

Community Cohesion Initiative

Community Development Program, previously called
Food Insecurity Response for Urban Populations Program

Community Based Stabilization Grants

District Delivery Program

Kandahar Food Zone

Local Governance and Community Development

Measuring Impact of Stabilization Initiatives

Provincial Reconstruction Team Quick Impact Projects

Rule of Law Stabilization–Informal Component

Stability in Key Areas

Strategic Provincial Roads–Southern and Eastern Afghanistan

DOD

Commander's Emergency Response Program

Village Stability Operations



CHAPTER 2 STABILIZATION TAKES SHAPE (2002-2009)

DOD photo

After the initial military successes of late 2001 and 2002, the U.S. government attempted to fund and operationalize a strategic vision for Afghanistan.²⁸ In December 2002, Congress passed the Afghanistan Freedom Support Act, which authorized federal funding for humanitarian, development, and security assistance, and reiterated the U.S. objective of creating a stable society that would remain inhospitable to terrorist networks.²⁹ However, the United States lacked a comprehensive strategy for effectively applying non-security assistance, despite demands from the most senior levels of government.³⁰ In April 2002, for example, Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld wrote to Under Secretary of Defense for Policy Douglas Feith:

The fact that Iran and Russia have plans for Afghanistan and we don't concerns me. I keep getting an answer that 'the Deputies are working on it.' Well, I can't believe that it takes that many months to figure it out. . . . We are never going to get the U.S. military out of Afghanistan unless we take care to see that there is something going on that will provide the stability that will be necessary for us to leave.³¹

The plans for Afghanistan that did exist were outgrowths of the international conference held in Bonn, Germany, in December 2001. Particularly as the United States prepared for the invasion of Iraq, the deliberate focus in Afghanistan was a light military footprint and limited top-down institutional development that began and ended in Kabul.³² For years thereafter, the U.S. government and the



Members of PRT Kunar at a ribbon-cutting ceremony for the Fatimah Girls' School outside of Asadabad in 2005. (Photo by Harold Ingram)

international community mostly hoped that governance would filter down to the local level in Afghanistan through the institutions they nurtured in the capital.³³

This early stage in the “post-conflict” period saw USAID development efforts concentrated in eight sectors: agriculture, economic growth, education, governance, healthcare, infrastructure, media, and women’s issues.³⁴ Meanwhile, U.S. military operations focused almost exclusively on targeting remnants of the Taliban and al-Qaeda.³⁵ The first major foray into localized stabilization efforts began on December 31, 2002, with the introduction of the inaugural Afghan Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) in Gardez in Paktiya Province.³⁶

U.S. PRTs were 50- to 100-person interagency teams composed of a security force, medical and logistics components, a civil affairs team, command and control elements, and representatives from State, USAID, and sometimes the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA).³⁷ The mission of these joint civ-mil interagency teams was to extend and legitimize the central government’s presence in the provinces by improving security and facilitating reconstruction and development.³⁸ Additional PRTs followed in 2003 in relatively secure and stable areas, including the provinces of Bamyán, Balkh, Parwan, Herat, and Kunduz.³⁹

The PRTs were beset with problems from the start.⁴⁰ Officially, they were interagency civ-mil teams, but initially, in practice, they were composed almost exclusively of military personnel.⁴¹ In addition to a lack of civilian personnel, confusion reigned over the PRTs’ primary purpose: Were they meant to improve security in conjunction with Afghan forces and thereby create the conditions for development, or were they intended to directly implement reconstruction,

development, and humanitarian assistance projects?⁴² By late 2003, Lieutenant General David Barno's command of U.S. forces in Afghanistan brought the first efforts to integrate the PRTs into an overarching counterinsurgency strategy in insecure areas of the south and east.

EARLY STABILIZATION EFFORTS (2003–2005)

By October 2003, officials within the President George W. Bush administration and UN representatives in Kabul were increasingly concerned that poor security in the Pashtun-dominated south and east of Afghanistan would hinder the 2004 Afghan presidential election, thus undermining the legitimacy of the nascent Afghan government.⁴³ Lieutenant General Barno had recently assumed command of the two brigades of U.S. forces in Afghanistan, with instructions from CENTCOM commander General John Abizaid to integrate and coordinate his efforts with civilian officials.⁴⁴ In summer 2003, the Office of the Secretary of Defense for Policy enshrined “stabilizing the south and east” in its policy guidelines entitled “Principles for Afghanistan,” calling for a “political-military strategy . . . to prevent a Taliban resurgence and to build support for the Coalition and the central government.”⁴⁵

In response to this guidance and the UN's security concerns, Barno and his staff began developing plans to improve security and preserve the legitimacy of the elections and the political roadmap laid out in the Bonn Process.⁴⁶ The result was “Security Strategy South and East,” which later grew into a detailed interagency campaign plan entitled “Counterinsurgency Strategy for Afghanistan.”⁴⁷

According to U.S. Army Colonel Tucker Mansager, who served as a political-military and civil affairs officer under Barno, part of the strategy's aim was to use PRTs to extend the writ of the state via Regional Development Zones, the first of which was centered on Kandahar.⁴⁸ Barno's implementation plan called for a localized surge of security forces around Kandahar, to be followed by a new PRT, one of eight PRTs that would be dotted across the south and east before the spring of 2004.⁴⁹ Recognizing he had few forces at his disposal, Barno's use of PRTs to stabilize parts of the country was an experiment he and his staff hoped would prove successful and be replicated elsewhere.⁵⁰

In fact, PRTs did remain the core of U.S. stabilization efforts during Barno's tenure and thereafter. U.S. Embassy Kabul's Mission Performance Plan for 2007, which was completed in March 2005, described not only a planned expansion of PRTs, but also foreshadowed more localized stabilization programming:

We will continue with the deployment of [PRTs] throughout Afghanistan. The PRTs not only will support reconstruction through quick impact and other projects but also will provide platforms to extend the reach of U.S. civilian agencies. The role of

PRTs will evolve as conditions change on the ground, with economic development replacing security as the principal focus over time. We will use the PRTs to support Afghan efforts to strengthen provincial and district government, with the goal of transitioning efforts of PRTs to the Afghan government as soon as feasible.⁵¹

One of the principal stabilization programs within the PRTs was a joint endeavor between USAID and the military, called Quick Impact Projects (QIP). With an overall budget of more than \$85 million, the QIP program began in Afghanistan in 2003 and continued through the fall of 2007, during which time it funded over 440 relatively small-scale projects.⁵² The intent of the program was to provide USAID PRT representatives with funds to implement small-scale projects that would, in theory, extend the reach of the Afghan government by engendering good will among local communities and priming them for more traditional, long-term development programs.⁵³ QIPs were intended to “create links and increase confidence between communities and the district, provincial, and central government” through the process of project conceptualization and implementation.⁵⁴ During the four-year program, QIP funded the construction of clinics, schools, bridges, and irrigation canals, among other small-scale projects.⁵⁵

PRT project funding also came from CERP, a DOD program focused at the time on urgent humanitarian and reconstruction needs in the hope these activities would help reduce violence.⁵⁶ Throughout the war, while PRTs sought to extend the reach of the government and used CERP to do so, CERP itself would not adopt that goal until 2009, as detailed in chapter 6.⁵⁷

In parallel to PRT QIPs, USAID’s Office of Transition Initiatives (OTI) funded other projects reminiscent of later stabilization programming, but without the military and security integration. The Afghanistan Transition Initiative (ATI), for

example, was active from 2002 through 2005, during which time it sought to build capacity in the ministries and implemented 700 projects across the country via small grants, including schools, clinics, potable water and irrigation efforts, and secondary and tertiary roads.⁵⁸ One objective of the program was to support interactions between communities and the Afghan government to improve service delivery and good governance.⁵⁹ According to a 2005 ATI program evaluation, “The basic methodology for mobilizing rural communities and linking them with their government at increasingly higher levels [was] through infrastructure projects.”⁶⁰ The same document suggests there was a tension within OTI between officials who favored developing and strengthening the



Members of PRT Kandahar and Italian troops deliver humanitarian aid to residents of Spin Boldak in 2003. (Photo by Harold Ingram)

central government in Kabul, which comported with the Bonn Agreement, and those who advocated for bottom-up approaches to participatory governance.⁶¹ Whatever challenges were created by USAID's intra-agency discord, however, were overshadowed by those created by a dearth of interagency planning and coordination at the national level.

U.S. AGENCIES AT ODDS (2005–2007)

When Lieutenant General Karl Eikenberry assumed command of Combined Forces Command-Afghanistan from Lieutenant General Barno on May 4, 2005, he continued important aspects of the counterinsurgency program Barno initiated.⁶² According to Brigadier General Martin Schweitzer, who commanded U.S. forces in eastern Afghanistan at the time, the overarching objective during that period was to link local Afghan communities with the Afghan government to eliminate “seams” that allowed insurgents to come between them. What was lacking, he noted, was an interagency strategy that brought the military, USAID, State, and other civilian agencies together to plan and execute an integrated strategy.⁶³ As a consequence, uniformed members of the military with no governance experience were assigned the difficult task of training and mentoring Afghan civilian government officials.⁶⁴

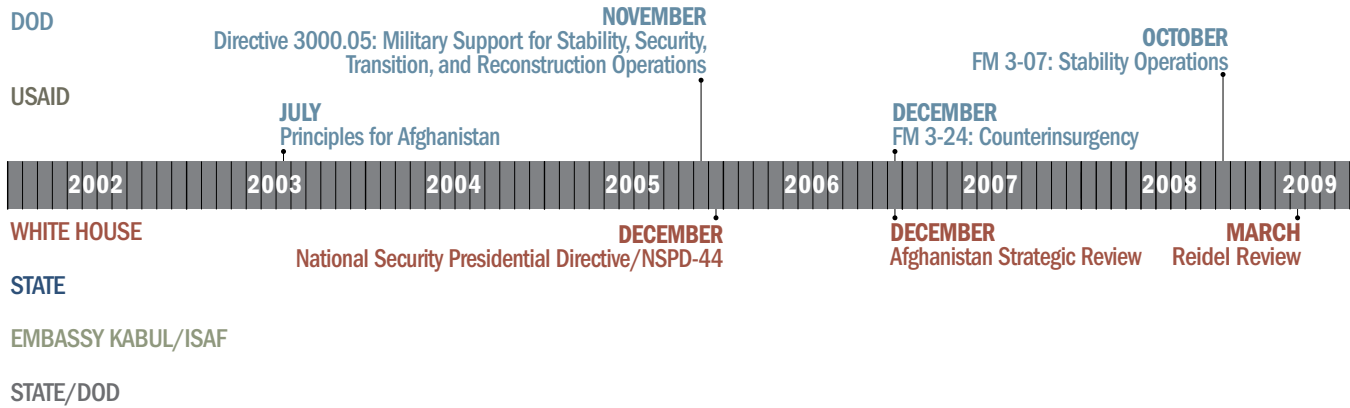
The disconnect between the agencies and military was evident in the public statements of senior civilians. In March 2006, James Kunder, USAID's Assistant Administrator for Asia and the Near East, told the House Committee on International Relations that USAID had entered the second stage of the “transition strategy” in 2005, focusing on “stabilization and building systems.”⁶⁵ As part of that effort, USAID began funding a program called Local Governance and Community Development (LGCD) through its PRT office in Kabul, which oversaw USAID projects implemented through PRTs.⁶⁶ The goal of the original three-year initiative was to “extend the reach of the Afghan government into underserved, insecure, and hard-to-access communities.”⁶⁷ In turn, the program sought to “strengthen the legitimacy of the government of Afghanistan, increase constituent confidence in the government, and promote stability.”⁶⁸ USAID was essentially implementing stabilization programming separate from, and in parallel to, military operations.⁶⁹ In fact, Embassy Kabul was “normalizing” its operations during this period, moving away from a war footing and



A USAID-funded judicial center in Qarghayi District in July 2005. (Photo by U.S. civil affairs officer)

FIGURE 1

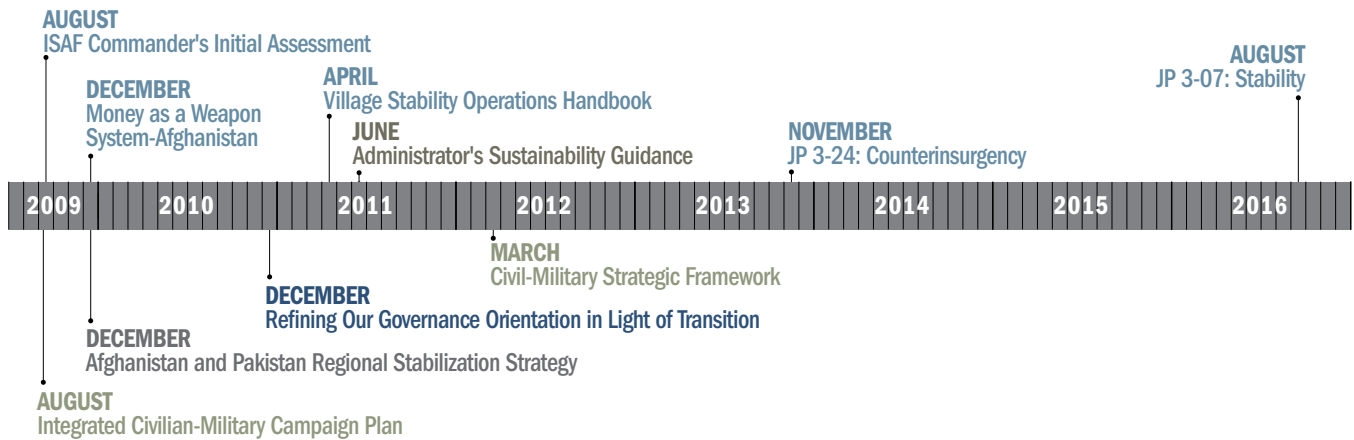
U.S. GOVERNMENT STRATEGIC DOCUMENTS FOR AFGHANISTAN, 2002-2016



toward the kind of embassy presence State has in most countries.⁷⁰ Still, the PRTs were a useful vehicle for USAID to monitor projects.⁷¹

Throughout this period, the military and civilian bureaucracy continued to adopt policies that called for synchronized interagency stabilization programming. (See figure 1.) In November 2005, DOD published Directive 3000.5, which stipulated that stability operations activities included “encouraging citizen-driven, bottom-up economic activity and constructing necessary infrastructure,” as well as developing “representative government institutions.”⁷² Then, in December 2005, the White House released National Security Presidential Directive 44, *Management of Interagency Efforts Concerning Reconstruction and Stabilization*, which instructed the Secretaries of Defense and State to “integrate stabilization and reconstruction contingency plans with military contingency plans” and “develop a general framework for fully coordinating stabilization and reconstruction activities and military operations at all levels where appropriate.”⁷³ The emphasis on interagency efforts continued into 2006 with the U.S. Army’s Field Manual (FM) 3-24, *Counterinsurgency*, which devoted its entire second chapter to integrating civilian and military activities.⁷⁴ The 2008 FM 3-07, *Stability Operations*, likewise underscored the importance of a “whole of government” approach.⁷⁵

The approach that most closely reflected the U.S. government’s evolving stabilization framework was that of British General David Richards, who served as ISAF commander from May 2006 to February 2007.⁷⁶ His tenure, which overlapped with Eikenberry’s command of U.S. forces, saw a growing role for NATO forces and a more concerted push to stabilize the southern provinces.⁷⁷ In Kabul, Richards also tried to address the interagency and international cooperation shortfall that others had identified as a major impediment. Richard’s



flagship effort was the Policy Action Group (PAG), which aimed to improve coordination between the international community and the Afghan government through regular meetings and working groups.⁷⁸ The PAG was a coordinating mechanism that included a number of key Afghan ministers and senior advisors to the president, plus ISAF senior officers, ambassadors, and members of multilateral organizations, including the UN and World Bank.⁷⁹

One of the early products of the PAG was the concept of Afghan Development Zones (ADZ).⁸⁰ The ADZs were essentially localized, interagency civ-mil efforts to foster governance, economic growth, and development at key locations in southern Afghanistan where ISAF was taking on a larger role.⁸¹ The ADZ concept recognized that resources were limited and sought to concentrate those resources in a few critical areas to demonstrate to Afghans in adjacent areas that they would similarly benefit by rejecting the Taliban and embracing the coalition and Afghan government.⁸² ADZs were established to varying degrees in at least seven provincial capitals, most notably by the British in Helmand, by the Canadians in Kandahar, and by the Americans in Zabul. According to Richards, the goal was to replicate the PAG process on a smaller scale at each ADZ to facilitate local coordination and improved governance, much as the concept of key terrain districts and the 2009 “Integrated Civilian-Military Campaign Plan” would later attempt on a larger scale during the surge.⁸³

In September 2006, ISAF launched Operation Medusa, the alliance’s largest-ever ground operation, against an estimated 1,000 Taliban militants in Kandahar’s Panjwayi District.⁸⁴ Before the arrival of 8,000 ISAF forces in Afghanistan’s four southern provinces that July, all four provinces were covered by a solitary U.S. infantry battalion.⁸⁵ Consequently, insurgents were able to begin



As part of Operation Medusa, soldiers from 4th Platoon, Bravo Company, Royal Canadian Regiment, burst into a suspected Taliban stronghold in Pashmul, a small village north of Panjwai District, on September 11, 2006. (Photo by Graeme Smith)

constructing a well-designed and heavily reinforced defensive position in Panjwayi and gained control of a nearby section of the Ring Road.⁸⁶

General Richards and his ISAF forces aimed to improve security by winning over the population through a coordinated effort to clear insurgents and inject a large amount of U.S., Canadian, and Afghan development assistance, all while militants hunkered down in Pakistan for the winter.⁸⁷ The Taliban were eventually cleared from the area, but the Canadian-led development assistance that followed the clearing operation was delayed and underwhelming.⁸⁸

According to Richards, “The plan for Medusa was a good model for integrated COIN and stabilization, but execution faltered. NATO’s ability to assist the Canadians and the Canadians’ ability to conduct the operation were severely limited by resources. Canadians were knackered after clearing, and they didn’t have the capacity to hold Panjwayi and continue protecting Kandahar.”⁸⁹ Ultimately, Operation Medusa marked the beginning of increased violence in Panjwayi, rather than economic development and political stability.⁹⁰

In February 2007, Richards turned over command of ISAF to General Dan McNeill, who was criticized by the media and some NATO partners for reportedly eschewing civ-mil coordination in favor of more aggressive military operations.⁹¹ According to Richards, McNeill disbanded the PAG and discontinued the ADZs in support of a more exclusive focus on security.⁹² However, McNeill’s emphasis on the preeminence of security was shared by Richards, who observed, “You have to get security right first . . . for the development to follow smoothly and efficiently. . . . You have to put security first, but with the aim of the more important development and governance component coming right behind it.”⁹³

ON-BUDGET EFFORTS

From the start of the reconstruction effort, international donors disagreed as to whether funds should be provided through the Afghan government's budget (on-budget assistance) or spent by the donor nations themselves on their own projects in Afghanistan (off-budget assistance). While most stabilization programming was implemented off budget by third parties contracted by the coalition, there were also efforts to stabilize the country through on-budget assistance, with funding that went directly to the Afghan government.

One early on-budget effort, the Afghanistan Stabilization Program (ASP), was developed in 2003 as a collaboration between the ministries of Urban Development, Telecommunications, Interior, and Finance.⁹⁴ The objective of the program was to link governance, development, and security by extending governance and service delivery to the local level, thereby stabilizing the country from the ground up.⁹⁵ At this early stage, efforts were often as modest as building a district's first government facility, or district center.

From the start, outside observers and donors criticized ASP. Two years after it was initiated, the program was described as having weak projection into the provinces, a lack of overall progress, and insufficient transparency and accountability that undercut international confidence.⁹⁶ The root cause of the program's problems apparently stemmed from management failures by Afghan officials, which precipitated the withdrawal of international funds and program failure.⁹⁷

A second effort, the National Solidarity Program (NSP), was a World Bank-administered and U.S.-funded program that began in 2003 under the auspices of the Ministry for Rural Rehabilitation and Development (MRRD).⁹⁸ While NSP was not officially on-budget, MRRD played an unusually central role in the program. NSP was intended to set conditions for local governance by establishing elected local councils and training them to manage small, grant-funded development projects. NSP was designed to combine traditional Afghan practices, such as collective decision making and communal labor, with international development experience.⁹⁹ While not designed as a stabilization program, per se, NSP proved to be an influential model for future stabilization efforts.

Although NSP projects were implemented away from combat operations and focused on relatively secure areas during this period, security was still a problem. One NSP program report from late 2008 said that 16 facilitating partners (contractors or nongovernmental organizations [NGO] that executed aid projects) had suspended work in 1,151 communities across 29 districts and 16 provinces in the prior month due to poor security.¹⁰⁰ Nonetheless, NSP was regarded as having been successful enough to be a model for stabilization programming as the U.S. strategy evolved to focus more on building from the ground up.¹⁰¹

DETERIORATING SECURITY DRIVES A RETURN TO STABILIZATION (2008–2009)

USAID expected to enter the third stage of a transition strategy—“the normal development process”—in 2008.¹⁰² Earlier, in 2005, the embassy had painted an overly optimistic picture of the situation in its Mission Performance Plan:

Improving security and stability is our most important strategic goal. The successful national election, as well as an improved coalition counterinsurgency strategy, has diminished the threat of the Taliban and other extremists. If this trend continues and steps are taken to end sanctuaries in neighboring countries and to implement a reconciliation and accountability program, the insurgent threat could be effectively eliminated in 2005 and 2006.¹⁰³

Unfortunately, this was not the case. There were just two suicide attacks in Afghanistan in 2003 and five in 2004, but that number increased to 17 in 2005 and 139 in 2006. There was also a dramatic increase in the combined number of improvised explosive devices (IED) that were found or detonated during the same period, from 81 in 2003 to 1,922 in 2006.¹⁰⁴ (See figure 2.) In some cases, these numbers were increasing because troops were deliberately exposing themselves to more danger in support of a classic COIN mission; however, COIN theory suggests these numbers should decline after initially spiking, as the increased troop exposure helped solidify the government’s control and legitimacy. Yet, in most cases, that decline never came. U.S. casualties continued to rise throughout this period, from 17 hostile fatalities in 2003 to 83 hostile fatalities in 2007, and the sharpest increases were yet to come.¹⁰⁵ When Lieutenant General Eikenberry departed Afghanistan in February 2007, the security situation was deteriorating rapidly.¹⁰⁶

As the situation worsened, it became apparent to policymakers in Washington that something had to change. A National Security Council (NSC) strategic review in 2006 concluded that the United States needed to adapt the strategy to “prosecute a ‘counterinsurgency’ to augment and complement ongoing ‘post-conflict stabilization’ activities so that, together, they can succeed.”¹⁰⁷ The review considered stabilization activities as separate from counterinsurgency, noting that “NATO now conducts stability operations throughout Afghanistan and is fighting a counterinsurgency campaign in the south.”¹⁰⁸

In fact, both civilian and military components of the U.S. government were already tilting toward a more heavily resourced, concerted stabilization campaign to arrest the deteriorating security in Afghanistan. According to a retrospective Embassy Kabul report from 2010, the U.S. government recognized the need to “re-introduce” stabilization programming in 2007 and subsequently “began implementing programs designed to coordinate closely with combined international and Afghan security forces to support and sustain security gains.”¹⁰⁹

FIGURE 2

AFGHANISTAN IEDs—FOUND AND DETONATED, COMBINED, 2003–2009



Source: ISAF, “State of the Insurgency: Trends, Intentions, and Objectives,” December 22, 2009.

During this time, the British were explicitly conducting an integrated civ-mil stabilization campaign in Helmand Province, where the Brits were in the lead, and field-grade U.S. officers—majors, lieutenant colonels, and colonels who commanded troops across the country at the Brigade Combat Team level and below—were also pursuing the “softer,” or non-kinetic, aspects of COIN.¹¹⁰ In a 2007 interview, then-Colonel Martin Schweitzer, who was responsible for six provinces in the southeast, emphasized that non-kinetic operations, including the construction of roads, schools, and clinics, were decisive in extending the reach of the Afghan government.¹¹¹ Still, the White House remained focused on Iraq, where security was unraveling quickly.¹¹²

By the middle of 2008, violence levels in Iraq had subsided enough for the Bush administration to refocus on Afghanistan, where violence was spiking.¹¹³ In May 2008, Lieutenant General Douglas Lute, the Deputy National Security Advisor for Iraq and Afghanistan, traveled to Afghanistan with a team of advisors to assess the situation. Their findings alarmed President Bush, who asked for a full strategic review, similar to the one that preceded the troop surge in Iraq.¹¹⁴ In November, Lute briefed the president on the assessment’s findings, which called for additional troops and prioritized counterinsurgency over counterterrorism.¹¹⁵ Although President Bush approved the report, the decision about whether to pursue a “fully resourced” counterinsurgency strategy would be left to the next administration.¹¹⁶



CHAPTER 3

ORIGINS OF THE STABILIZATION STRATEGY (2009)

White House photo

As early as 2002, Illinois State Senator Barack Obama voiced support for the effort to root out al-Qaeda in Afghanistan.¹¹⁷ During his presidential campaign years later, he repeatedly called for a renewed focus on what he would come to call the “just war”—and almost immediately upon being elected president, he committed to stabilizing Afghanistan.¹¹⁸

However, as detailed below, the new administration did not fully grasp the level of political, financial, and military commitment the rejuvenated effort would require. The administration’s assumptions about resources and timelines were out of step with those of some key military and civilian officials. It would take months and multiple strategy reviews to develop a common understanding of the Obama administration’s desired time frame and willingness to commit resources, which exposed differences of opinion and competing priorities. The ultimate policy trajectory was a compromise that left many dissatisfied.

THE OBAMA ADMINISTRATION’S FIRST SURGE CREATED DIVERSE EXPECTATIONS

Even before he moved into the White House, Obama received three assessments of the war in Afghanistan from Lieutenant General Lute, who stayed on to

become President Obama's senior NSC coordinator for the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan; Admiral Michael Mullen, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff; and General David Petraeus, CENTCOM commander.¹¹⁹ With multiple opinions and assessments of the Afghan effort on his desk, Obama solicited a fresh assessment from Bruce Riedel, a former CIA analyst who had served as one of Obama's foreign policy advisors during his presidential campaign.¹²⁰ Obama also elevated the focus on Afghanistan and its relationship with Pakistan by creating the office of the Special Representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan (SRAP) within the State Department, naming Richard Holbrooke its first director.¹²¹

Riedel, working in conjunction with a team of advisors that included SRAP Holbrooke and Undersecretary of Defense for Policy Michèle Flournoy, was given just 60 days to complete the assessment.¹²² After making allowances for internal reviews and vetting, Riedel determined he would have only about three weeks to complete the draft.¹²³ Some members of the working group were reportedly concerned that the short timeline would prevent the team from doing its due diligence.¹²⁴ Holbrooke and Lute in particular had reservations about the process, saying it reflected the conclusions of Riedel's recent book on al-Qaeda, rather than a thorough policy review.¹²⁵ Reflecting on the process years later, Petraeus told SIGAR, "The Riedel review was very rapid and the idea at the time was to get some fingers in the dike and then do an assessment later."¹²⁶

The policy trajectory and general consensus within the foreign policy establishment—including the senior members of the administration who were well-positioned to influence the conclusions of Riedel's report—were already clearly oriented toward counterinsurgency.¹²⁷ Chief among the cohort of counterinsurgency advocates was General Petraeus, who was credited with snatching victory from the jaws of defeat in Iraq through the application of the COIN doctrine he and a study group developed at the U.S. Army's Combined Arms Center in 2006.¹²⁸

In January 2009, even before his review had begun, Riedel had advocated for deeper involvement in Afghanistan, including more troops, infrastructure assistance, and economic development.¹²⁹ Thus, the convergence of the review's compressed timeline, the widely held belief that COIN had been effective in Iraq, and the credibility and political acumen of COIN advocates like Petraeus and Riedel all influenced the outcome of the assessment.

In fact, the growth of stabilization programming in Afghanistan—from an under-resourced, scattershot approach to the constellation of costly programs nested within an overarching COIN strategy—was already underway when Riedel and his team embarked on their assessment. On February 9, just five days after Riedel's initial meeting with his assessment team, U.S. Ambassador William Wood in Kabul sent a cable to senior civilian and military leaders stating,

“The way forward includes an explicit recognition that USAID is pursuing development within the context of a broader U.S. counterinsurgency strategy.” The cable then outlined in detail a new, fully formed stabilization strategy for USAID that Wood said would “ultimately replace” its 2005–2010 strategy. The cable underscored that consensus building for the new approach was underway, and that the plans had already been socialized with the civilian leadership in Afghanistan and their military counterparts.¹³⁰

Meanwhile, the new administration was being pressured by the U.S. military to authorize the deployment of more forces to Afghanistan. ISAF commander General David McKiernan had a longstanding request on the table for more than 30,000 additional troops, 9,000 of which had been ordered to deploy by President Bush during the presidential transition of late 2008.¹³¹ Admiral Mullen signaled to the administration that, at a minimum, the president needed to make a decision on 17,000 additional troops to provide security during the upcoming Afghan presidential election.¹³² When Riedel agreed an increase was needed, even before the strategy review was complete, the president signed off on Mullen’s requested 17,000 troop deployment, an increase in U.S. forces of nearly 50 percent.¹³³ In a written statement, Obama said:

General McKiernan’s request for these troops is months old, and the fact that we are going to responsibly draw down our forces in Iraq allows us the flexibility to increase our presence in Afghanistan. This reinforcement will contribute to the security of the Afghan people and to stability in Afghanistan. . . . This increase is necessary to stabilize a deteriorating situation in Afghanistan, which has not received the strategic attention, direction, and resources it urgently requires.¹³⁴

In March 2009, Riedel’s assessment concluded that “the core goal of the [United States] must be to disrupt, dismantle, and defeat al-Qaeda and its safe havens in Pakistan, and to prevent their return to Pakistan or Afghanistan.”¹³⁵ The means of achieving that goal, according to the report, were wide-ranging and included measures on both sides of the Afghanistan-Pakistan border. At the top of the list was a recommendation for an integrated civ-mil counterinsurgency strategy in Afghanistan, which sought to “secure Afghanistan’s south and east against a return of al-Qaeda and its allies” and “provide a space for the Afghan government to establish effective government control.”¹³⁶ In the assessment team’s view, the strategy should aim first to dry up the supply of Taliban recruits and al-Qaeda sympathizers by creating agricultural sector jobs in rural areas that contained 70 percent of the country’s population and suffered from high unemployment.¹³⁷ These measures would help stabilize the south and east by giving Afghans more reason to support the government and less reason to support or join the insurgency.

However, a counterinsurgency effort focused on protecting the population and implementing village-level projects depended on adequate security forces and the Riedel assessment never fully addressed those requirements; Riedel

left it up to the military and the administration to determine troop numbers.¹³⁸ There were varying expectations, even within the assessment team, as to how many U.S. troops would be needed to implement the group's policy recommendations.¹³⁹ Months later, Obama would say that subsequent troop requests from ISAF commander General Stanley McChrystal exposed how much confusion was sown by Riedel's assessment.¹⁴⁰

President Obama and the NSC did not resolve the ambiguity in Riedel's report before announcing the administration's new policy. Although Obama had recently authorized the increase of 17,000 U.S. combat forces in Afghanistan, plus 4,000 trainers for Afghan forces, the military wanted to discuss even more troops before the 17,000 had even deployed.¹⁴¹ Obama declined, as he wanted to wait at least until after the Afghan presidential election—five months away—to see whether the injection of U.S. forces had made a difference before making additional commitments.¹⁴²

The ambiguity of Riedel's report came through in the president's strategy announcement on March 27, 2009. In his speech that day, Obama drew on Riedel's report when he outlined (1) his goal of defeating al-Qaeda in Pakistan and Afghanistan and preventing their return; (2) the conditions for success, which included a weakened Taliban and stronger more capable Afghan government; and (3) the means of accomplishing this, including policies to bring about a “dramatic increase in our civilian effort . . . to advance security, opportunity and justice . . . not just in Kabul, but from the bottom up in the provinces.” He went on to say that “indispensable investments in our State Department and foreign assistance programs . . . contribute directly to security.”¹⁴³

President Obama was, in essence, endorsing the concept of a civilian stabilization component of counterinsurgency, on a large scale. Unfortunately, not everyone in the administration fully grasped what they were signing up for; many senior staff had different ideas about what counterinsurgency meant for future force levels.¹⁴⁴ Obama himself reportedly believed this increase in military and civilian resources fulfilled his commitment to the war—that this was “the surge”—and he was not expecting to revisit the issue for months.¹⁴⁵

The ambiguity in the strategy precipitated a months-long period of debate within the administration over the way ahead in Afghanistan. A small cohort of counterinsurgency skeptics, led by Vice President Joseph Biden, advocated for a less ambitious campaign that focused on counterterrorism, in direct opposition to counterinsurgency advocates who sought to transform Afghanistan from the bottom up. Meanwhile, counterinsurgency advocates tried to apply political pressure and strengthen their case by soliciting an on-the-ground assessment from the new ISAF commander, General McChrystal.¹⁴⁶

NEW COMMANDER HINTS MANY MORE TROOPS NEEDED

President Obama replaced General McKiernan with General McChrystal in June 2009.¹⁴⁷

Some Pentagon officials felt McKiernan was too focused on offensive actions against insurgents in the remote border region of eastern Afghanistan and not focused enough on southern Afghanistan, particularly Kandahar City.¹⁴⁸ Secretary of Defense Robert Gates and Admiral Mullen reportedly believed that McKiernan had not fully embraced counterinsurgency, as evidenced by his relatively modest troop request and inability to articulate how he would use additional troops if he had them.¹⁴⁹ Furthermore, McKiernan was not taking steps to mitigate civilian casualties (CIVCAS). According to a senior U.S. official, “McKiernan’s responses to damaging CIVCAS incidents, particularly one in Farah, were insufficient. McKiernan continued insisting the casualties were combatants, and when it came out they were not, Secretary Gates asked him what he would do differently regarding the rules of engagement, and McKiernan’s response wasn’t adequate.”¹⁵⁰



President Obama meets with General McChrystal in the Oval Office on May 19, 2009. (White House photo by Pete Souza)

When asked at his Senate confirmation hearing on June 2, 2009, what success would look like in Afghanistan, General McChrystal responded by saying that security in contested areas would create opportunities for more active, locally based governance, followed by more traditional development and economic growth. According to McChrystal, the desired end state was “steady growth underpinned by solid governance.”¹⁵¹

McChrystal clearly supported the concepts underlying stabilization and counterinsurgency, but his hearing also foreshadowed a request for additional troops. He was noncommittal about citing specific numbers for U.S. forces, saying that he was “reticent to speculate.” He did, however, reveal his methodology for calculating recommended troop numbers based on population size, and his belief that 160,000 Afghan National Defense and Security Forces (ANDSF) would be insufficient for Afghanistan to manage its own security even in peacetime, let alone in the face of a burgeoning insurgency.¹⁵² At the time, the United States had about 60,000 troops in Afghanistan, in addition to 30,000 from partner nations.¹⁵³

Troop numbers were only one consideration, however. The civilian and military components of the strategy were interdependent. In theory, the troops could

clear an area, but it was up to the civilian development and governance experts to provide stabilization programming. In fact, in June 2009, National Security Advisor James Jones pointed out to Obama that additional military personnel were of limited utility without the accompanying governance and development efforts.¹⁵⁴ Conversely, stabilization programs could not be implemented without security.

A GLIMMER OF HOPE IN THE SOUTH SEEMS TO VALIDATE THE STRATEGY

Secretary Gates told General McChrystal to assess and report on the situation in Afghanistan within 60 days of arriving in country.¹⁵⁵ McChrystal's initial assessment, like the Riedel review, was developed by a team of advisors, who were asked to answer two fundamental questions: "Can ISAF achieve the mission?" and "If so, how should ISAF go about achieving the mission?"¹⁵⁶

Similar to the Riedel review, conclusions were reached early in the assessment process. On July 4, 2009, roughly one week after arriving in Afghanistan, the assessment team delivered an interim briefing.¹⁵⁷ The team painted a gloomy picture: ISAF was not operating under any coherent strategic guidance, and the troops' practices—conducting mounted patrols during the day and returning to their bases in the evening—were out of step with counterinsurgency doctrine.¹⁵⁸ The team concluded that the coalition needed to modify its operations to avert an otherwise inevitable defeat.¹⁵⁹



A civil affairs specialist with Regimental Combat Team 3 interacts with a village elder during a patrol in Helmand Province on August 18, 2009. (U.S. Marine Corps photo)

During his confirmation hearing, McChrystal had said the coalition needed to "start making progress within about 18 to 24 months."¹⁶⁰ The tone of his initial assessment, completed in August, was decidedly more urgent, suggesting that failure to turn the momentum of the Taliban insurgency within 12 months would "risk an outcome where defeating the insurgency is no longer possible."¹⁶¹ The report concluded that it was necessary to implement a new strategy based on a "properly resourced" civilian-military model that would create a secure environment and prioritize areas where "the population is threatened."¹⁶²

From a force distribution perspective, McChrystal and his advisors believed the emphasis should be on the Taliban heartland in southern Afghanistan, particularly Kandahar.¹⁶³ But before McChrystal deployed, General

McKiernan had already made the decision to send an injection of 9,000 Marines—part of Obama’s election security surge—to Helmand, despite the province’s relatively small population. That decision was based on three key factors: (1) Canadian partners in Kandahar were reluctant to relinquish control of their area of responsibility; (2) the Marines requested to control a contiguous piece of territory with their own logistics infrastructure, rather than rely on Army logistics in jointly controlled territory; and (3) the Marines were in the unique position of having sufficient forces for the mission, which gave them considerable leverage when they requested their own battlespace in Helmand, rather than share responsibility in Kandahar.¹⁶⁴ Once the decision had been made, McChrystal felt the Marines needed to remain in Helmand to demonstrate to the Afghans that the United States was committed.¹⁶⁵

The Marines’ surge into Nawa District in Helmand, part of Operation Khanjar, initially appeared to be successful.¹⁶⁶ A declassified August 2009 cable from U.S. Embassy Kabul painted an optimistic picture of the situation in the wake of the clearing operation, including a successful Afghan government-led *shura* with 600–700 attendees and a revitalized bazaar.¹⁶⁷ The cable noted, “Several elders in the bazaar told a [State Department representative] that the duration of the new Marine role in Nawa represented the most important factor for stability, alongside a persistent [ANDSF] presence.”¹⁶⁸ Within six months of the Marines’ arrival, attacks were down 90 percent in the district.¹⁶⁹ (See figure 3.) Government officials were reportedly meeting with their constituents to address grievances, and locals were marginalizing the Taliban and reporting on insurgent activity.¹⁷⁰

Shuras (Arabic) and *jirgas* (Pashto) are gatherings of informal leaders to confer, make decisions on behalf of constituents, and resolve disputes. As evolving institutions with varying purposes, formats, and structures across the country, the terms are sometimes used interchangeably.

“The duration of the new Marine role in Nawa represented the most important factor for stability, alongside a persistent [ANDSF] presence.”

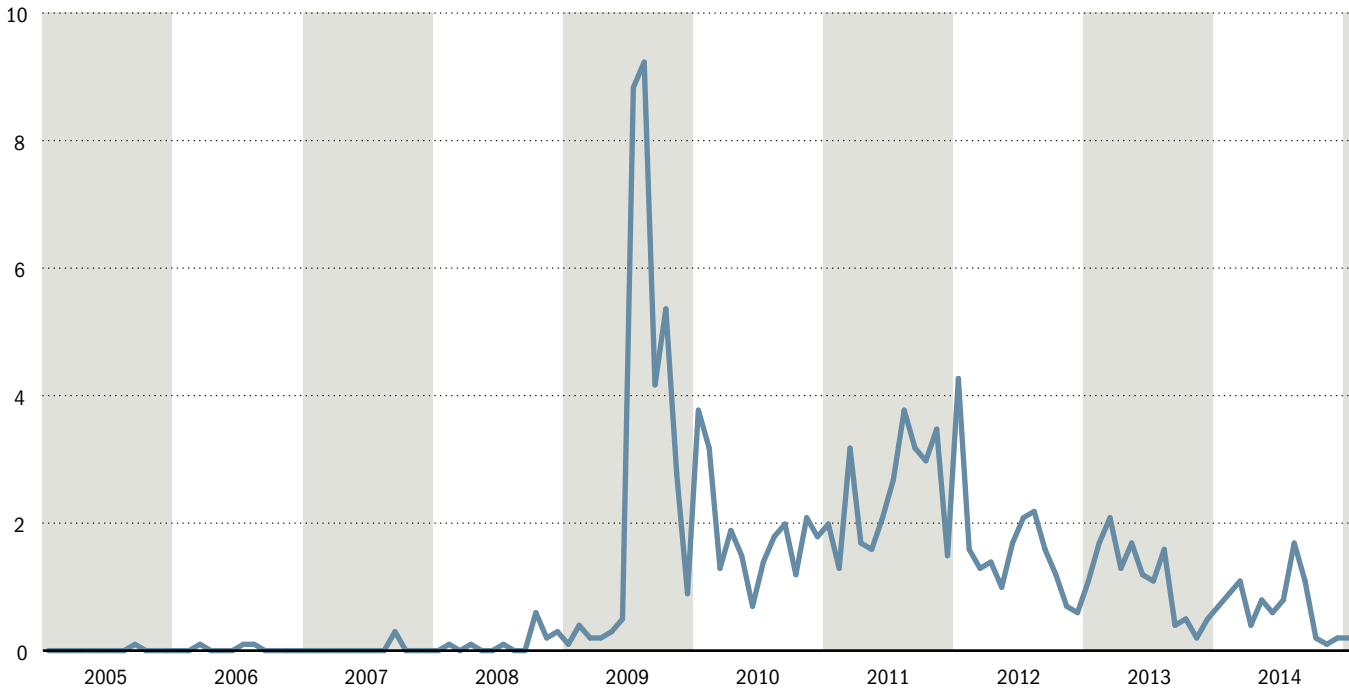
—U.S. Embassy Kabul cable

Overall, the Marines embraced COIN in central Helmand. Marine battalions were repeatedly sent to the same areas to ensure they cultivated and retained an understanding of the local population over multiple rotations. Marine civil affairs teams employed a methodical approach to building relationships in a process they first cultivated in Iraq’s Anbar Province.¹⁷¹

In August 2009, another portion of the 17,000 troops Obama authorized in February arrived in Kandahar, including a Stryker brigade which took some of the heaviest casualties of any similar U.S. unit.¹⁷² The violence in Kandahar stood in stark contrast to the apparent success in Nawa, which seemed to be a function, in part, of the number of forces available. Within a few weeks of the Stryker brigade’s arrival, McChrystal decided that he needed more forces to secure Kandahar.¹⁷³

FIGURE 3

MONTHLY COMBAT EVENTS IN NAWA DISTRICT, HELMAND PROVINCE, 2005–2014 (PER 10,000 POPULATION)



Source: Empirical Studies of Conflict Project (ESOC) analysis, data from Andrew C. Shaver and Austin L. Wright, "Data on Combatant Activity During Afghanistan War Advance Scientific Investigation of Insurgency," Technical Report, 2017.

The ratio of U.S. forces to Afghan civilians in Nawa was thought to be about 1:50, precisely the minimum recommended by counterinsurgency doctrine.¹⁷⁴ Still, to reach even that recommended minimum force ratio in other areas, including parts of Kandahar, the United States would need to commit more forces. McChrystal used that information, combined with the apparent success in Nawa, to justify his request for more troops.¹⁷⁵

A LONG-TERM STRATEGY COMPRESSED INTO 18 MONTHS

In early September 2009, Obama and the NSC held the first of what would come to be nine official Afghanistan strategy review sessions.¹⁷⁶ The attendees typically included National Security Advisor Jones, Vice President Biden, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, Secretary of Defense Gates, White House Chief of Staff Rahm Emanuel, the intelligence chiefs, and senior military personnel and diplomats.¹⁷⁷ The legacy of the Iraq conflict loomed large over the policy discussions. According to one senior U.S. official, the dramatic improvement in the security situation in Iraq following the U.S. troop surge there gave many in the deliberations the impression that counterinsurgency was a winning strategy, which bolstered the military's credibility with its civilian counterparts.¹⁷⁸

Over the next few months, the military was joined by senior members of the NSC Principals Committee, including Secretary Clinton, in urging the president to take more dramatic steps to salvage the situation in Afghanistan.¹⁷⁹ Still, despite the crystallizing consensus that the administration should make a deeper commitment to Afghanistan, the particular form of that commitment remained a point of contention. Vice President Biden remained the most outspoken opponent of committing to McChrystal's counterinsurgency strategy.¹⁸⁰ In a letter to the president, Biden warned:

I do not see how anyone who took part in our discussions could emerge without profound questions about the viability of counterinsurgency. Our military will do its part: They will clear anything we ask them to clear. They will hold anything we ask them to hold. But no one can tell you with conviction when, and even if, we can produce the flip sides of COIN that are required to build and transfer responsibility to the Afghans: an effective and sustainable civilian surge, a credible partner in Kabul, basic governance and services, and competent Afghan security forces. We simply can't control these variables, yet they're essential to the success of COIN.¹⁸¹

Notably, most of those variables were given far less attention during the fall 2009 strategy review than the numbers of troops and their geographic priorities.¹⁸² As NSC senior coordinator Lute reflected, "If you over-rely on the military, there tends to be a fixation on troop numbers. It's as if the only dial in the engine room is troop numbers."¹⁸³

"If you over-rely on the military, there tends to be a fixation on troop numbers. It's as if the only dial in the engine room is troop numbers."

—Lieutenant General Doug Lute, NSC senior coordinator

On September 30, 2009, Obama met with his advisors to discuss troop numbers.¹⁸⁴ If he did decide on a troop surge, the president reportedly did not want to blindly pick a number; he wanted the number to be derived from an overarching strategy.¹⁸⁵ But fundamental questions remained about what conditions would prevent al-Qaeda from returning in force to Afghanistan, with Biden advocating for counterterrorism and Petraeus and McChrystal arguing for counterinsurgency.¹⁸⁶ The discord persisted, with at least eight more meetings over the course of the next two months.¹⁸⁷ As late as October, the Principals Committee was still debating whether the Taliban or al-Qaeda should be the focus of security operations, while Obama and the Joint Chiefs were parsing the implications of a strategy to disrupt, as opposed to defeat, the Taliban.¹⁸⁸

The Pentagon was convinced there was only one path to follow—a counterinsurgency strategy supported by a large troop surge—and they steered the policy options in that direction in two ways.¹⁸⁹ First, there were interviews, speeches, and leaks to the media, which served to essentially end-run the

COMPARISONS TO IRAQ

In 2009, when President Obama's first strategy reviews were taking place, the contrast between Afghanistan and Iraq was stark, particularly in terms of government capacity, levels of education, and functioning infrastructure.¹⁹⁰ If helping the government deliver services and improving human development was the metric of success in building a government's legitimacy, repeating Iraq's success would be far harder in Afghanistan, as the difference between the baselines in each country was enormous.

In Iraq, 67 percent of the population lived in urban areas, compared to 24 percent in Afghanistan.¹⁹¹ Eighty-five percent of Iraqis had access to an improved water source, while less than half of Afghans (and only 39 percent of rural ones) did.¹⁹² Infant mortality in Afghanistan was more than double that in Iraq, and maternal mortality was nearly 13 times higher.¹⁹³ At 40 percent, unemployment was rampant in Afghanistan and more than double the rate in Iraq (18 percent).¹⁹⁴ Only 28 percent of the Afghan population over the age of 15 was literate; in rural areas, only 10 percent of women and 40 percent of men were literate.¹⁹⁵ Iraq, in contrast, had a literacy rate of 74 percent before the 2003 war.¹⁹⁶

In particular, a largely illiterate population has wide-ranging significance for reconstruction efforts. Examples include soldiers who cannot read an artillery manual, police officers who cannot read a map, and administrators who cannot draft a rudimentary budget or document constituent grievances.¹⁹⁷ Illiteracy presents profound challenges for any underdeveloped society undergoing a prolonged transformation, to say nothing of the speed and volume of reform that was under consideration during the Afghan strategy reviews.

As a 2009 CSIS analysis noted:

The challenge in Iraq is essentially one of rebuilding, whereas in Afghanistan it is one of building from scratch. . . . [In Iraq,] there was some tradition of central authority and organization on which a new, more reasonable order might take root and grow. In addition, Iraq boasted an educated population and professional business and government classes. None of these factors exist in Afghanistan.¹⁹⁸

Further, despite the prevailing narrative of the success of COIN in Iraq, it was not entirely clear that COIN and the surge were the decisive factors in deescalating the conflict in Iraq.¹⁹⁹

The differences between the two countries were at least briefly discussed during the fall 2009 strategy review and were well-known among the COIN advocates involved in the deliberations; yet, it appears none of these differences constituted red flags sizable enough to deter or alter the strategy.²⁰⁰

administration by broadcasting the military's opinions and assessments before they could be filtered by the White House.²⁰¹ The Pentagon's public framing of the Afghanistan narrative as a choice between a troop surge and defeat constrained the administration's policy options, as going against the military's best advice could seem imprudent, especially if the outcome was unfavorable.

Second, the Pentagon also limited the policy options by providing only three strategy proposals to the president. On September 24, 2009, General McChrystal submitted a request for more troops as a follow-on to his initial assessment. The request included three surge options: 10,000 troops to ramp up training efforts, 40,000 troops to prioritize counterinsurgency in the south, or 85,000 troops to conduct a more robust COIN campaign in the south and east.²⁰² The first and third options were considered essentially untenable, and the second was not palatable to the president. The surge of 40,000 troops was simply too big and too slow, and it did not get the United States closer to Obama's ultimate objective of extracting the last U.S. combat forces from Afghanistan before leaving office.²⁰³ On the other hand, while the military never recommended or estimated a specific timeline for the surge, in the eyes of some principals, McChrystal's recommended strategy hinted at a 10-year commitment.²⁰⁴

In contrast, Obama was overtly searching for a short-term exit strategy.²⁰⁵ He told the Pentagon to develop a fourth policy option, but the Pentagon either would not or could not conceive of viable alternatives that met the president's requirements.²⁰⁶ As General Petraeus later explained, "An 'option' in the military



President Obama attends a briefing on Afghanistan in the White House Situation Room on October 9, 2009. (White House photo by Pete Souza)

needs to accomplish the mission. There's no sense in providing an option that will not be viable and will not accomplish the mission. Our view was that 40,000 additional U.S. forces was the minimum needed to do the mission."²⁰⁷ Moreover, when Obama constrained the time frame of the surge from an estimated 10 years to 18 months during the deliberations, the military leadership and the civilian principals who supported them did not revise their existing options to reflect the new time frame, suggesting to the president that the same missions could be fulfilled on a compressed timeline.²⁰⁸ Ultimately, Obama personally involved himself in the development of not only a new strategy, but also a new and definitive timeline for the new approach.²⁰⁹

In a meeting with his key advisors, Obama reiterated that the core goal of the war remained to defeat al-Qaeda and deny them safe haven in Afghanistan and Pakistan. The goal with regard to the Taliban—who could topple the Afghan government and provide safe haven to al-Qaeda—was to deny them access to key population centers, disrupt their operations outside those population centers, and degrade their forces to the point where they could be managed by Afghan forces.²¹⁰ The path to achieving those interrelated goals was described as a hybrid of COIN and counterterrorism, and Obama resourced it with a surge force of 30,000 U.S. troops (along with hundreds of civilian specialists), rather than the 40,000 in the Pentagon's "middle option."²¹¹ When the president asked his civilian and military advisors in late November whether they agreed with the plan, all endorsed it.²¹²

Obama's decision to impose a deadline of July 2011 to begin the drawdown of surge forces was reportedly inspired by Secretary Gates' idea that success or failure could be revealed during an assessment conducted 12–18 months into the surge, an idea which Obama apparently hardened into a time-based surge of similar length.²¹³ The president reportedly believed, with good reason, that an open-ended surge would divert critical resources away from mitigating the damage from the 2008 financial crisis; it could give the military more room to pressure the White House into future extensions or escalations; and it could further cultivate Afghan dependency on U.S. aid.²¹⁴ As Obama noted in his announcement of the policy shift at West Point in December 2009, "Our troop commitment cannot be open-ended. . . . It must be clear that Afghans will have to take responsibility for their security."²¹⁵

Still, the mission had all of the ambitions and expectations of a long-term counterinsurgency effort, but without the recommended, prolonged timeline.²¹⁶ Regarding the timeline restrictions, there are inconsistencies between media accounts and senior U.S. civilian and military officials, some of whom claim the president first mentioned a time-constrained surge only two days before announcing the strategy at West Point.²¹⁷ For example, according to Petraeus:

The timeline was just sprung on us. We had no discussion of that during the process. Two days before the president made the speech, on a Sunday, we all got called and were told to be in the Oval Office that night for the president to lay out what he would announce two evenings later. And he laid it out, there it is. Take it or leave it. He said, we're going to begin the drawdown in the summer of 2011. None of us had heard that before. And we were then asked, are you all okay with that? He went around the room and everyone said yes. And it was take it or leave it. . . . Until that point in the review, nobody ever thought this was going to last forever, but nobody presumed we would begin drawing down in July 2011.²¹⁸

Despite agreeing, Petraeus also calculated the military could buy more time later if they made enough progress by the time the July 2011 deadline arrived. “Obviously, that’s in the back of your mind,” Petraeus recalled. “We hoped for an extended surge, and we also had not discussed the speed of the drawdown, so I hoped for a slow one.”²¹⁹

Regardless of how much time the president’s advisors were given to react to a time-constrained surge, they all chose to support it rather than highlight the gaps between the evolving strategy’s scope, resources, and timeline. As former SRAP senior advisor Barnett Rubin noted, without the will for a prolonged campaign, the strategy should have been scoped down to something more suitable and realistic for the timeline.²²⁰

Afghanistan-Pakistan Regional Stabilization Strategy

Although stabilization was loosely viewed as a component of counterinsurgency prior to 2009, during the 2009 strategy reviews the White House and NSC principals more often used the term counterinsurgency as a catch-all to include the kind of civilian and governance improvements inherent to stabilization. When the review was complete, however, DOD and State together used the president’s December 2009 guidance to draft the Afghanistan and Pakistan (Af-Pak) Regional Stabilization Strategy, putting the idea of stabilization front and center in the effort to build the Afghan government’s capacity and legitimacy.

While the president was insistent during the fall strategy review that he was not authorizing a fully resourced counterinsurgency, by the winter his administration appears to have changed the strategic emphasis from COIN to stabilization, at least on paper. The Regional Stabilization Strategy stated, “Improving the Afghan people’s confidence in their government requires improved service delivery, greater accountability, and more protection from predatory government practices, particularly at the district and community level, where the Taliban is providing its own brand of brutal but efficient governance.” The strategy further noted, “We are also broadening our support and engagement at the provincial and district levels, where our most consequential programs will be delivered.”²²¹

Thus, while military efforts to protect the population were intended to create the space for these developments, stabilization became the new emphasis across the board.



CHAPTER 4

STABILIZATION RAMPS UP FOR THE SURGE (2009–2012)

U.S. Marine Corps photo

CONCEIVING STABILIZATION

While policymakers in Washington were refining the strategy throughout 2009, State, USAID, and DOD pushed ahead with the guidance they had. By the time the interagency Af-Pak Regional Stabilization Strategy was published in December 2009, the Obama administration's initial vision of COIN and stabilization had already been solidifying for nearly a year.²²²

COIN theory presumes that significant investments will be made in development-like activities to increase the legitimacy of the government. State and USAID had to operationalize this theory, even as the strategy was evolving, and devise a framework for those civilian-led activities that supported COIN. As with earlier efforts in Iraq and Afghanistan, State and USAID recognized that their traditional development programming would be ineffective in the clear-hold-build process because communities that continued to be physically contested even after clearing were not ready for long-term development.²²³

Instead, activities that resembled development were to be used more narrowly to achieve explicit security outcomes, such as expelling the Taliban and reducing violence. In the near term, the theory was that programming would

win the support of rural Afghans so they would report insurgent activity as they increasingly allied with the government.²²⁴ Meanwhile, stabilization programs were also intended to create the space for rudimentary governance so that proper long-term development could eventually take place and maintain the population's trust indefinitely. Using Iraq as a guide, State and USAID came to believe that connecting Afghans to their government and building its capacity to meet Afghan demands for service delivery at the local level would give the government the legitimacy prescribed by counterinsurgency doctrine and decrease support for the Taliban accordingly.²²⁵

While the overall intent was to reduce violence and keep the Taliban out of contested territory, to get to that point, COIN was designed to be temporarily *destabilizing*. Many areas that were cleared were not previously wracked by violence; many were quite stable by most metrics.²²⁶ They were simply controlled by the Taliban and thus had to be cleared, held, and built in order to reverse the Taliban's momentum. Through a series of local interventions, counterinsurgents had to expel the Taliban from select districts they had ruled, install or shore up government rule, and ensure the district's communities and officials had the means and motivation to repel Taliban attempts to return. Thus, reading between the lines, the point of COIN and stabilization was not to stabilize communities already wracked by violence, but rather to instigate a destabilizing revolution in local control and then stabilize the fallout.²²⁷

Operationalizing Stabilization: Civ-Mil Integration and Key Terrain Districts

Prior to 2009, the integration of U.S. military forces and civilian personnel in Afghanistan varied considerably. The two were particularly disconnected between 2006 and 2008, as Embassy Kabul normalized its operations and ISAF prioritized targeting insurgents. Beginning in 2008, however, additional senior U.S. civilian and military officials in Kabul came to recognize the merits of civ-mil integration, sometimes at the urging of officials deployed by State's Coordinator for Reconstruction and Stabilization (S/CRS).²²⁸ Efforts to promote regional civ-mil planning began in Regional Command (RC)-East, quickly spread to the south, and filtered down to the PRT level.²²⁹ At the same time, civilians on PRTs began to slowly shift from reporting to program implementation as the role of civilians in plans and operations was elevated.²³⁰ The political advisor role that was traditionally subordinate to military commanders in southern and eastern Afghanistan was refashioned as the Senior Civilian Representative, on par with the regional commanders.²³¹

By the spring of 2009, civ-mil planning and integration were gaining momentum. Using documents like the Riedel review and guidance from SRAP Holbrooke and newly appointed Ambassador Karl Eikenberry, Embassy Kabul hosted the



U.S. Marine Corps Lt. Col. William McCollough, second from right, commander of the 1st Battalion, 5th Marine Regiment, talks with members of the USAID team at Patrol Base Jaker in Nawa District, Helmand Province, on August 16, 2009. (U.S. Marine Corps photo by Staff Sgt. William Greeson)

Integrated Civil-Military Affairs Group, which included officials from State, USAID, and DOD, to develop the Integrated Civilian-Military Campaign Plan (ICMCP).²³² The August 2009 ICMCP operationalized the concept of stabilization and described how civilian and military organizations would work side-by-side in Afghanistan to stabilize priority areas from the bottom up. There were three primary lines of effort—security, governance, and development—with the assumption that State and USAID would do the heavy lifting on governance and development. This plan also laid out the rationale for the civilian surge in personnel accompanying the troop surge.²³³ While there had been only 15 Chief of Mission civilians in Afghanistan in early 2004, that number had risen to 320 in January 2009, 470 in August 2009, 1,004 in June 2010, and 1,124 in December 2011.²³⁴ These numbers did not include the many civilian representatives of other coalition partners, such as the UK and Denmark, whose numbers also rose gradually over the course of the war.²³⁵

The ICMCP established 14 thematic working groups, including agriculture and counternarcotics, at the headquarters level, many of which were replicated all the way down to the district level.²³⁶ These civ-mil working groups up and down the chain met regularly and tracked progress in their sector under the guidance of the military commander and ranking civilian representative at every command level, including PRTs, battalions, brigades, divisions, and ISAF headquarters.²³⁷ Regional

platforms were created to serve as civilian equivalents to military divisions in the regional commands, and greater funding authority was pushed out to these platforms in an attempt to make them more nimble and decentralized.²³⁸ The core leaders of each Regional Command/Platform combination were a military commander, a senior civilian representative from State, and a senior aid officer from USAID, each of whom was of equal rank. This structure attempted to enhance coordination and centralize lines of reporting that had previously run separately through each agency's chain of command.²³⁹

While the provincial level had been the lowest level at which coalition civilians had previously focused, the new unit of organization was to be the district. However, there was confusion and disagreement about which of the nearly 400 districts should be prioritized. According to a State retrospective, "Between 2007 and 2010, ISAF, U.S. forces, the UN, and the embassy identified four rounds of 'priority districts' based on four different theories of what would 'win' the COIN and stabilization campaign."²⁴⁰ According to Embassy Kabul reporting, this planning took place in coordination with the Afghan government, whose officials generally agreed that the initial focus would be on the south and east. Meanwhile, the same reporting noted that the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) used an "integrated approach" to prioritize "tipping point districts" where combined security, development, and governance interventions were thought to be able to turn a deteriorating situation around.²⁴¹

Perhaps taking a cue from UNAMA, by the late summer of 2009, some U.S. officials were using "20 priority districts" that were "seen as tipping points" as the basis for aligning their efforts.²⁴² The Afghan government agreed to support this pilot district strategy by staffing the districts with competent governors and ministry officials.²⁴³

The U.S. strategy soon moved away from focusing on districts seen as tipping points to those districts that had long since tipped toward the Taliban. Rather than preventing particular districts from deteriorating *further*, the military prioritized "clearing" the Taliban from heavily contested districts, which became known as key terrain districts (KTD).²⁴⁴ The next step would be to help the Afghan government hold those areas with projects and essential services that demonstrated the benefits of a strong relationship between the population and legitimate local government.²⁴⁵ Whereas the previous focus had been primarily on areas that were contiguous to already stable regions, the priority was now often on "critical high-population areas" that included "key infrastructure" and were controlled or contested by insurgents.²⁴⁶

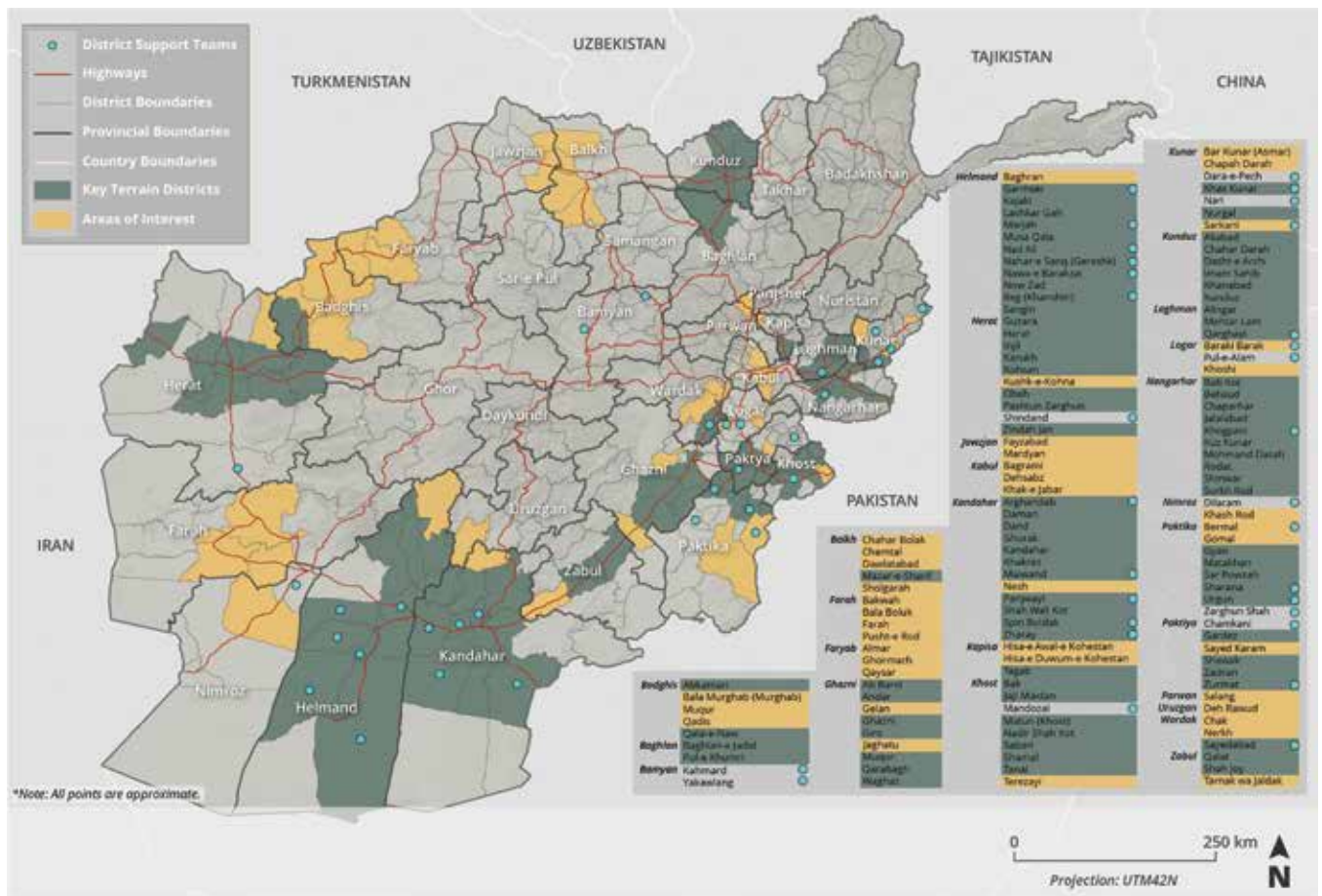
Afghan government representatives expressed concern about this approach from the outset. They pointed out the primacy of enduring security and

argued that only districts that Afghan and international security forces could hold over the long term should be targeted with ministerial support. Ministry representatives also cautioned that their existing level of capacity for service delivery was quite limited.²⁴⁷

By December 2009, some of the most insecure districts in the country were identified as the focus of coalition efforts, primarily in the south and east.²⁴⁸ What began as six pilot districts eventually expanded to 83 KTDs, along with 41 second-tier “area of interest” districts.²⁴⁹ (See figure 4.) Soon after, dozens of civ-mil District Support Teams (DST) were staffed with personnel from State, USAID, and USDA, and deployed to many of these KTDs. Once on site, DST personnel were tasked with integrating all stabilization activities and planning at the district level to build local governance capacity.²⁵⁰

FIGURE 4

U.S. GOVERNMENT DISTRICT PRIORITIES IN AFGHANISTAN



Source: USAID, “Stability In Key Areas (SIKA) West, RFP 306-10-0034, Amendment No. 01,” awarded to AECOM, December 9, 2010, p. 5; State, “Field Platforms and Personnel Numbers,” Office of Interagency Provincial Affairs, May 25, 2010. Map produced by John M. Steed.

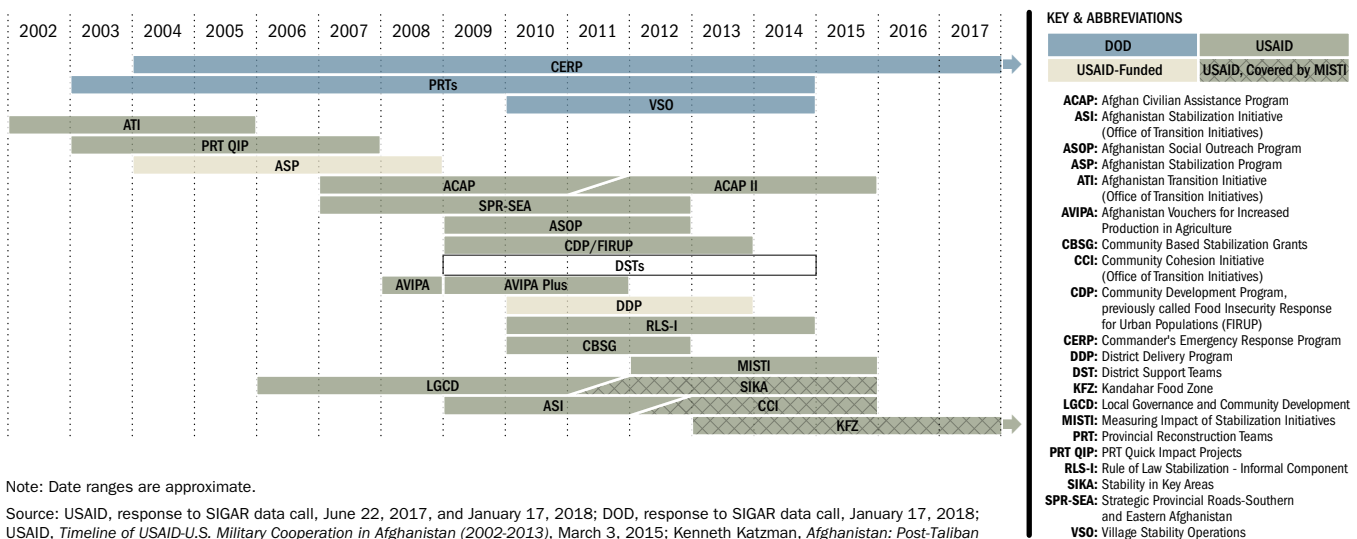
IMPLEMENTING STABILIZATION: PROGRAMS AND TOOLS

Even as the campaign plan was being developed in the spring and early summer of 2009, USAID had to push forward and design a new wave of stabilization programs, while at the same time adapting existing programs to the new strategy. (See figure 5.) Programs like the Afghanistan Vouchers for Increased Production in Agriculture (AVIPA), Local Governance and Community Development (LGCD), and Food Insecurity Response to Urban Populations were refocused both geographically and conceptually to align with stabilization priorities.²⁵¹ For example, AVIPA was originally designed to help drought-affected wheat farmers increase production across 18 provinces, but was overhauled in spring 2009 to target contested districts in Kandahar and Helmand with cash-for-work activities after clearing operations were finished.²⁵²

Likewise, new stabilization programs ramped up as military operations did, justifying the redesignation of USAID’s PRT office as the Stabilization Unit (Stab-U) in February 2010 to oversee programming that was closely integrated with the military and distinct from USAID’s traditional development portfolios.²⁵³ State and USAID recognized that a different kind of programming would be needed as a stopgap measure, particularly in the most dangerous districts.²⁵⁴ Stabilization programs were intended to create a degree of stability that would, in turn, create the conditions necessary for long-term development programs to commence.²⁵⁵

FIGURE 5

AFGHANISTAN STABILIZATION PROGRAMMING FROM 2002–2017



Note: Date ranges are approximate.

Source: USAID, response to SIGAR data call, June 22, 2017, and January 17, 2018; DOD, response to SIGAR data call, January 17, 2018; USAID, *Timeline of USAID-U.S. Military Cooperation in Afghanistan (2002-2013)*, March 3, 2015; Kenneth Katzman, *Afghanistan: Post-Taliban Governance, Security, and U.S. Policy*, Congressional Research Service, October 9, 2014, p. 35; DOD, NSOCC-A Response to SIGAR, April 7, 2014; Donald Bolduc, "The Future of Afghanistan," *Special Warfare*, vol. 24, no. 4 (2011), p. 24.

The Stabilization Unit's Performance Management Plan (PMP), finalized a few months after the creation of Stab-U, defined stabilization in more detail as “help[ing] to reduce key [sources of instability] by engaging and supporting at-risk populations, extending the reach of [the government of Afghanistan] to unstable areas, providing income generation opportunities, building trust between citizens and their government, and encouraging local populations to take an active role in their development.”²⁵⁶

In practice, USAID's stabilization program objectives generally aimed to improve either government-society relations or community cohesion.²⁵⁷ The theory was that these improved relationships would, over the course of a multi-step process, lead to a decrease in violence and lessen the appeal of anti-government elements, resulting in an increase in stability. Ultimately, the steps that would lead to stability were not well articulated during this period, leaving each program (or even each region within each program) to devise its own and preventing any overarching “theory of change” from emerging.²⁵⁸ For an in-depth discussion of the theories of change underlying USAID's stabilization approach, see chapter 8 of this report.

With “extending the reach of the government” as stabilization's overriding principle, Stab-U programs created and funded the following, among other initiatives:

1. Local shuras, to resolve problems and represent constituent interests²⁵⁹
2. Cash-for-work jobs for thousands of Afghans, many of whom were otherwise anticipated to fight for the Taliban²⁶⁰
3. Financial compensation for civilians killed, injured, or who suffered property damage, to stave off the possibility that new grievances might drive them into the arms of the Taliban²⁶¹
4. Training for formal and informal local government officials²⁶²
5. Development-like projects, ranging from seed distribution and agricultural classes to repairing irrigation canals and building roads²⁶³

Implementing Partners

Often called contractors or grantees depending on the award type, implementing partners are for-profit companies or not-for-profit NGOs that governments hire to implement aid programs on their behalf.²⁶⁴ Most of the larger USAID awards went to U.S. companies or NGOs that would often issue sub-awards to other companies and NGOs.²⁶⁵ While typical of USAID and most other coalition development agencies, this model meant that coalition civilians oversaw the work of implementing partners, but had less of a role in the day-to-day implementation of stabilization programs.



A SIKA-East stabilization workshop in Ahmadabad District, Paktiya Province, on February 22, 2014. (USAID photo by Ahmad Salarzai)

Coalition military, diplomatic, and development professionals saw the need for a uniform methodology to help Afghans identify and target local “sources of instability” (SOI), or grievances the Taliban could exploit to make their presence in the community more valuable and desirable.²⁶⁶ Borrowing heavily from its Tactical Conflict Assessment and Planning Framework,²⁶⁷ USAID created the District Stability Framework (DSF) to walk coalition members and Afghans through the process of:

1. Forming “stability working groups” at the local level to bring together varying combinations of representatives from the U.S. military, USAID, implementing partners, local communities, and local governments.²⁶⁸
2. Mapping out local SOIs that allow the Taliban to drive a wedge between the people and the government, for example, the Taliban resolution of local disputes.²⁶⁹
3. Identifying “resiliencies,” or strengths the community could leverage to drive the Taliban out, for example, a highly respected shura or council of elders that could mobilize the community.²⁷⁰
4. Prioritizing projects or interventions that would show the community the value of being connected with the government and then strengthen that connection, for example, constructing small-scale infrastructure, such as a school boundary walls, through an interactive process in which a shura of local government officials and community members jointly identified projects and oversaw their implementation.²⁷¹

Tailoring Stabilization by Program and Region

The District Stability Framework was unevenly applied and more prominent in the eastern part of the country. In the south, the government's lack of reach was seen by coalition civilians as the main driver of instability, so even identifying local sources of instability was not emphasized.²⁷² There, simply ensuring the people and government were communicating—and that they had plenty of projects to communicate about—was often assumed to eventually build trust.

In the south, where violence levels were substantially higher than in the east, the challenges of working in such insecure areas led senior USAID officials in 2010 to create an alternative to DSF called the Regional South Stabilization Approach (RSSA). This new tool set preconditions for different types of programming to ensure security in an area was determined to be sufficient for effective implementation, monitoring, and evaluation before USAID programs were launched there.²⁷³

Varying theories of stabilization were used for different programs, which led to a diverse collection of projects and programming tools that were used in different ways. For example, cash-for-work was used broadly during this period, both as a means of achieving other goals, such as building infrastructure that would allow the government to better serve the community, and as a justification for programming in and of itself. Programs like the Afghanistan Stabilization Initiative (ASI) and LGCD used community labor as part of programming designed through assessment tools, such as DSF, in close consultation with local leaders and the community, to connect populations to their government and address sources of instability.²⁷⁴ LGCD evolved so that, by 2009, it would not accept project requests directly from communities, but required communities to petition their local government representatives.²⁷⁵ In contrast, programs such as the Community Development Program (CDP) and AVIPA embraced the philosophy that “if you give a man a shovel, he won't pick up a rifle.”²⁷⁶ In those programs, cash-for-work was its own goal: Every day that someone was working was a day that he was not emplacing IEDs or fighting. This was quite different from hiring local laborers as part of a broader consultative approach of bringing together local leaders and residents to solve community problems and build trust. The theory was that short-term employment (usually 30–90 days) would reduce the pool of fighting-age men available to support the insurgency.²⁷⁷

Much like the projects themselves, cash-for-work was intended to build community relationships with government officials. These officials would, in theory, facilitate local procurement and labor for the project, help identify and draw laborers proportionally from competing local groups, and mediate disputes that arose among laborers or between the implementer and the community. In turn, it was hoped that Afghans would attribute the opportunity (and the labor



Afghans work on a road construction project in Spin Zurat village, Dand District, Kandahar Province, on June 22, 2010. (U.S. Air Force photo by Technical Sgt. Joselito Aribuabo)

it generated) to their increased engagement with the Afghan government, and conclude the relationship was worth cultivating further.²⁷⁸

Cash-for-work was seen as an approach that could be used in less secure areas because of its relative simplicity and quick implementation.²⁷⁹ Unlike stabilization methods that relied heavily on consultations with communities and government representatives or larger-scale infrastructure projects that required a more sustained presence in a contested area, cash-for-work projects were often implemented with minimal consultation and tackled simple, low-skill projects, enabling implementing partners to get in and out of an area quickly. Because cash-for-work projects were often focused on the least secure parts of the country, they were more closely coordinated with ISAF clearing operations than other types of programming. At the beginning of the program, CDP even operated prior to or during clearing operations, and, starting in 2009, LGCD did the same.²⁸⁰

In addition, cash-for-work programs spent indiscriminately because the number of laborers hired and person-days of employment were the primary measure of success.²⁸¹ The AVIPA Plus program spent so heavily on cash-for-work programming in Nawa District in Helmand in 2010 that it was estimated to have tripled or quadrupled the local economy.²⁸² As an unintended consequence, these programs sometimes paid such high daily wages that teachers quit their jobs because their government salaries could not compete with those offered through stabilization programs.²⁸³

Civ-Mil Tensions

Among the 17,000 additional troops approved by President Obama in February 2009 was a brigade of Marines that began clearing Taliban-controlled territory in July of that year, allowing a test case for stabilization in districts like Nawa in central Helmand.²⁸⁴ In Nawa and other pilot districts, it became clear to civilian officials that the military would be in the lead, both in recognition of the war's heavy emphasis on physical security and the complete civilian reliance on the military for life support, including food, housing, transportation, and protection. Therefore, across the KTDs, the military chose which areas to clear and worked with their civilian counterparts to plan and execute the holding and building of those areas.²⁸⁵ At the operational level, it took time for the military to begin incorporating State and USAID into the clear-hold-build planning process and, to some practitioners, the consultations seemed superficial.²⁸⁶

In addition, while the KTDs were diverse, the fact that the most insecure areas of the country were prioritized for the intensive resources of clear-hold-build had significant implications for civ-mil cooperation. In a 2009 letter to his staff, Ambassador Eikenberry confirmed this dynamic, stating the State Department would take the lead in Kabul, but would follow the military's lead at the provincial and district levels.²⁸⁷ In practice, the strategy of rapid stabilization in KTDs forced USAID to lower the level of security it had previously required before it would initiate projects in an area.²⁸⁸

There was often significant tension between USAID and the military over USAID's reluctance or inability to work in the most contested and insecure districts—the same areas the military believed to be the most important to reversing the Taliban's momentum.²⁸⁹ The military would often claim a district was cleared and thus ready for USAID to start stabilization programming. Yet “clear” meant something very different to the expeditionary military than it did to the Afghan contractors tasked with, for example, paving a road in an insecure area. According to a senior USAID official, when it came to programming, “soldiers defined ‘secure enough’ on behalf of the community.”²⁹⁰

Some senior USAID officials said ISAF bulldozed the agency into going along with clear-hold-build and demanded that it implement cash-for-work programs on a large scale despite USAID's protest, while other officials said ISAF only needed to cite President Obama's words and ask USAID, “How else are we going to do this if not quickly and in the most dangerous areas?”²⁹¹ Few at State or USAID in country felt they had the ability to push back.²⁹² The dynamic was very unequal, in that even when a disagreement involved a military officer and a civilian who were theoretically of the same rank, the military representative often had the upper hand because of the overwhelming difference in size between the military and civilian contingents.²⁹³ U.S. PRTs, for example,

typically had one to three civilians and 80 to 100 military members.²⁹⁴ It was also difficult to argue against the belief that stabilization projects would buy the support of the population, convince them to share information about IEDs, and thus save coalition lives.²⁹⁵ “The military expected us to be bags of cash,” said one USAID official.²⁹⁶ British civilians experienced similar tensions with their military in Helmand over the military’s expectation that civilian programming would follow behind front line troops and immediately begin highly visible infrastructure projects, regardless of security conditions, which often reduced project effectiveness.²⁹⁷

“The military expected us to be bags of cash.”

—USAID official

Prior to the surge, USAID advisors were often able to exercise veto power about where and how military commanders used CERP funds. Later, USAID’s influence over CERP expenditures was significantly diminished, and the military leveraged CERP to pressure USAID to expand the latter’s programming.²⁹⁸ As one official noted, when USAID tried to stop implementing projects in areas where they could not be monitored or evaluated, the military set aside the civ-mil model and used CERP unilaterally to fill the void.²⁹⁹ The military was also able to put pressure on reluctant USAID officials and implementing partners to increase spending and expand other stabilization programs into new areas by pointing to the flexibility of AVIPA and complaining to their superiors in Kabul.³⁰⁰ Their relationship was at times so fraught that influential civilian advisors to the military were asking whether civilian agencies should be involved in stabilization programming at all.³⁰¹ As one senior USAID official observed:

We had to get in line. The military was in charge. We were always chasing the dragon—always behind, never good enough in the military’s eyes. Then ambassadors were yelling at USAID because they were receiving complaints from General Petraeus or the battle space owner that USAID was not being cooperative. It was the battle space owner who told us to move to another location, and if we didn’t, word got to the ambassador, who yelled at the [USAID] Mission Director, who yelled at me.³⁰²

As a result of this inability to push back, all types of stabilization programming were often implemented during all stages of clear-hold-build. This occurred even when USAID knew the sequencing was inappropriate and programs would be ineffective.³⁰³ Under pressure from the military, USAID built schools in inappropriate places where they could not be monitored, the government could not maintain and staff them, and students attended only sporadically (if at all) due to insecurity.³⁰⁴ CERP likewise concentrated its larger projects on less secure areas, where they were less likely to succeed.³⁰⁵ Because the military determined where programs were implemented, USAID sometimes did not even develop guidelines for establishing when an area was too insecure

to accomplish anything. A USAID stabilization contractor recalled that the Afghanistan Stabilization Initiative “formally articulated ‘entry criteria’ for initiating programming in a district and ‘exit criteria’ for when stability was achieved (that it never used), but it had no ‘exit criteria’ for when a district became too dangerous to effectively work in.”³⁰⁶

ASOP in Service of VSO

The military directed the work of USAID’s Afghanistan Social Outreach Program (ASOP) and determined the program’s district priorities, even more directly than it did other stabilization programs. ASOP was designed to help the Afghan government create district councils to “strengthen” security and peace, as well as “revive” traditional governance practices and cooperation between communities and government.³⁰⁷ Yet starting in 2010, U.S. Special Forces instructed ASOP which districts to include, based on the districts the military had already selected for its own program, Village Stability Operations (VSO), compelling ASOP to operate in some of the most remote and dangerous parts of the country.³⁰⁸



Local district council members of the Afghan Social Outreach Program pose for a photograph with ASOP trainers at the Oshay School, Shahid-e Hassas District, Uruzgan Province, on April 25, 2011. (DOD photo)

ASOP-created councils were tasked with endorsing the creation of VSO’s Afghan Local Police (ALP) units, nominating participants, vetting their senior commanders, and providing oversight to the units.³⁰⁹ Toward the end of the program, creating new ASOP councils explicitly to support VSO/ALP sites required the program to forego opportunities to work in safer areas, where the chances of success were higher.³¹⁰

In fact, ASOP worked in areas that were often so remote and insecure that Special Forces teams had to provide helicopter transport to enable the implementing partners to access them. As the program grew, the teams were unable to provide transport to all of these difficult-to-reach areas, and ASOP had to scale back its activities in response to limited access.³¹¹

Inaccessibility of Key Terrain Districts

Implementing partners faced significant movement constraints because of insecurity.³¹² As a result, they came to rely heavily on private security companies (PSC), in the same way that the military relied on these companies for base protection.³¹³ Many of these PSCs contributed to instability through ties to predatory power brokers and payments to antigovernment elements to buy safe passage through contested areas.³¹⁴ They have also been accused of staging attacks on their own convoys to justify the continued need for their services.³¹⁵

Similarly, the civilian surge was almost entirely reliant on the military for logistical support, and supporting civilian stabilization programming was

frequently a lower priority for military forces than targeting insurgents. The resulting limitations on civilian movement significantly impeded their ability to meet with their Afghan government counterparts and to monitor the work of their implementing partners.³¹⁶

The highly insecure nature of some of the areas in which stabilization program personnel worked also led to other problems. USAID's Office of the Inspector General documented an instance in which a local LGCD program subcontractor inflated projected costs by up to 20 percent, obfuscated its intent by attributing the expense to "mobilization costs," and then used these funds to pay insurgents not to attack the project sites.³¹⁷

CIVILIAN PERSONNEL ISSUES

In contrast to DOD, the two agencies that provided the majority of personnel for the civilian surge, State and USAID, did not have built-in staff redundancy to enable rapid mobilization to the field.³¹⁸ To meet the demands of the civilian surge, the two agencies pulled staff from other assignments and hired outside staff through congressionally approved temporary hiring authorities.³¹⁹ According to State, the number of civilian personnel under the embassy's control more than tripled from 320 to 1,142 civilians between January 2009 and December 2011.³²⁰ By 2011, more than 20 percent of all USAID worldwide staff were in Afghanistan.³²¹

"At the height of the civilian surge, our existing numbers were so limited we were forced to bring on roughly 250–350 people per year to do the work of USAID across Afghanistan, many with little to no practical USAID experience."

—USAID official

Moreover, the staff hired under these temporary hiring authorities had varied levels of experience.³²² A USAID official told SIGAR, "At the height of the civilian surge, our existing numbers were so limited we were forced to bring on roughly 250–350 people per year to do the work of USAID across Afghanistan, many with little to no practical USAID experience."³²³ One of those temporary stabilization hires agreed that USAID was desperate for personnel, noting, "I got this job because I had a pulse and a master's degree."³²⁴ By 2011, the demand for personnel had so exceeded the supply, State and USAID were unable to hire enough people to fill all of the civilian personnel slots identified by ISAF.³²⁵

Limited Influence of Field Staff

State and USAID's temporary hires were concentrated at the District Support Team level.³²⁶ Even the temporary hires who had significant experience in

development often had little to no experience working within the bureaucracy of the U.S. government.³²⁷ Because they lacked both an understanding of how to work the system and key connections in positions of power, they were unable to influence U.S. policy on, for example, whether stabilization priorities and programming needed to be changed to reflect realities on the ground.³²⁸

The feedback loop from field staff to policymakers in Kabul and Washington was also weak for other reasons. For example, the manner in which the bureaucracy was focused in and on matters in Kabul is demonstrated by the fact that civilians in Kabul significantly outnumbered those in the field.³²⁹ According to a report by the Center for American Progress, even State and USAID direct hires, seasoned in the art of bureaucracy, reported that their opportunities to provide feedback were limited and the feedback they did offer seemed to fall on deaf ears in Kabul.³³⁰ The fact that voices from the field rarely influenced policies formulated in Kabul undermined the achievement of the coalition's policy objectives.³³¹ As a result, the ostensibly bottom-up stabilization strategy had few voices at the bottom pushing best practices up to the national level to be disseminated.

*“Only halfway into my tour did I know the lay of the land
and what projects were going on where.”*

—USAID stabilization official

The temporary hiring mechanisms did have the advantage, however, that staff were not limited to the one-year tours typical of Foreign Service officers, and thus temporary hires tended to remain in country for longer periods of time.³³² This advantage was significant, as the short tour length of both civilian and military personnel undermined the counterinsurgency effort through the loss of critical understanding of local power dynamics. Short-term, high-pressure tours also actively disincentivized personnel to learn and change so that they could adjust programming to more adequately tackle the complex context and long-term problems they were faced with.³³³ There was an overwhelming consensus among civilian personnel that one-year tours were insufficient.³³⁴ In areas flooded with programming, it often took months for new personnel to understand all of the activity in their area of operations. National-level programming run from Kabul was particularly challenging to track.³³⁵ One USAID stabilization official admitted, “Only halfway into my tour did I know the lay of the land and what projects were going on where.”³³⁶

Program Oversight was Limited

The relative lack of experience of many temporary staff also reduced the oversight capabilities of stabilization programs. The authority to oversee programming required training and certification to ensure taxpayer dollars

were not wasted or misallocated, yet few of those working at the PRT or DST level had such authority. Therefore, many temporary hires were reduced to making recommendations and writing reports for the decision makers in Kabul, who were quite removed from the action. At one point, USAID's Regional Representatives—the agency's most senior civilian officials at each regional command—had no oversight authority over programs in their area of operations.³³⁷ USAID Contracting Officer's Representatives (COR), the officials responsible for providing direction and oversight to implementing partners, as well as other officials with authority to approve expenditures, were often based in Kabul, which meant every spending decision had to go through the capital. Beginning as early as 2009, there was a push at USAID to delegate COR authority to the regional platform level, but this delegation and decentralization of authority was not properly addressed until the Stability in Key Areas (SIKA) programs during the post-surge period of 2012–2017.³³⁸

There also were just not enough personnel dedicated to contract oversight at the USAID Afghanistan Mission. At one point, USAID's Director of the Office of Acquisition and Assistance determined that, in order to meet the U.S. government's average ratio of dollars to contracting officers, USAID would have to send nearly its entire overseas workforce to work only in Afghanistan.³³⁹ The number of contractor personnel overseen by direct-hire State and USAID personnel was similarly large. In 2011, there were approximately 18 contractors to one direct hire at State and 100 to one at USAID.³⁴⁰

This imbalance occurred, in part, because increasing spending levels on programs was politically easier than increasing the number of oversight personnel, especially those posted at high-risk missions like Afghanistan. In addition, it was not until 2011 that training in USAID's contract management system and regulations was provided to all agency representatives.³⁴¹ USAID contracts, cooperative agreements, and grants are managed through a highly complex regulatory regime that differs both in mechanism type and individual awards of the same type.³⁴² Without this training, the thousands of temporary USAID employees hired without prior USAID experience did not have the tools to monitor projects. The legal authority to provide oversight of USAID contracts was not delegated to most field staff, either.³⁴³ Nor were most USAID staff assigned to field positions; most were in Kabul, far from where programming actually took place. By 2010, the USAID mission had a goal of sending just 60 percent of its staff to the field.³⁴⁴

Ultimately, lacking local spending authority, oversight mechanisms, and awareness of national-level programming often meant that the main role of many civilians in the field was to advise the military, which in turn dictated civilian staffing patterns.³⁴⁵ Because the military was organized into regional

commands, its civilian counterparts were organized the same way through the civilian regional platforms, and senior civilian leadership was concentrated at this level.³⁴⁶ Although the military regional commands and the civilian regional platforms were theoretically co-equal, in reality there was a striking disparity in terms of resources and power in favor of the military commands, often causing the senior civilian representatives to defer to their military counterparts.³⁴⁷

In turn, because civilian PRT officials who mentored provincial government officials were outranked and often overruled by their bosses at the regional level who deferred to military priorities, this organizational structure and the relationships that drove it undermined civilian considerations.³⁴⁸ For example, the Afghan government had no equivalent to the regional headquarters level. As a result, by concentrating so much power over provincial affairs at the military-centric regional level, capacity building of civilian institutions at the provincial level—where attention and capacity was most needed—was undermined and unsustainable.

USAID Viewed Stabilization as a Distraction

Stabilization's personnel issues extended to operations in Kabul, as well. There were significant cultural, physical, and intellectual gaps between stabilization efforts and those of USAID's other more traditional portfolios, leaving the USAID Stabilization Unit poorly integrated into the USAID mission. In fact, there was a perception by some within the mission that stabilization was a distraction from USAID's true priority of creating regional economic growth through the construction of the Ring Road and development of major economic centers. According to a senior USAID official, "USAID had to be dragged kicking and screaming into COIN because it saw development as its mission."³⁴⁹

"USAID had to be dragged kicking and screaming into COIN because it saw development as its mission."

—Senior USAID official

Subsequently, as the military's plan to wind down its physical presence in the PRTs and DSTs was implemented, the USAID mission perceived its role in stabilization as even less of a priority. As though to emphasize its role as an aberration, Stab-U was physically housed adjacent to the rest of the USAID mission in a temporary trailer on the embassy compound. Furthermore, given its poorly integrated role in the USAID mission, the stabilization effort in Kabul was often resourced accordingly. Unlike the mission's other sections, Stab-U was staffed almost exclusively by short-term hires, many of whom lacked a full understanding of USAID systems, which further hampered their ability to articulate and coordinate their role in the broader interagency development effort.³⁵⁰

THE CIVILIAN RESPONSE CORPS

The personnel problems seen during the surge were neither new nor unanticipated. In 2004, based on initial experiences in Iraq and Afghanistan, the Bush administration recognized a need to improve coordination between civilian agencies and the U.S. military before, during, and after armed conflict, and to properly mobilize the right personnel to staff such “stabilization and reconstruction” (S&R) missions abroad. The White House issued National Security Presidential Directive 44 (NSPD 44), *Management of Interagency Efforts Concerning Reconstruction and Stabilization*, requiring State to develop “a strong civilian response capability including necessary surge capabilities, [and to] analyze, formulate, and recommend additional authorities, mechanisms, and resources needed to ensure that the United States has the civilian reserve and response capabilities necessary for stabilization and reconstruction activities to respond quickly and effectively.”³⁵¹

State’s new Coordinator for Reconstruction and Stabilization established a Civilian Response Corps (CRC) to mobilize “federal employees and volunteers from the private sector [and] state and local governments,” with an active, standby, and reserve component.³⁵² By design, State would lead the interagency efforts of eight agencies, including USAID, USDA, and the Department of Justice.³⁵³ The active response corps would have 250 federal employees, spread across the eight agencies but funded by State, who were hired specifically to be ready to deploy in as few as two days, if asked. They would take on other assignments within their agency as they waited to deploy. The standby response corps would have 2000 current federal employees, who would have jobs spread across the eight agencies but could deploy within 30–45 days. The reserve response corps would have 2000 civilians from the private sector, as well as state and local governments, who would temporarily leave their jobs to deploy for S&R missions.³⁵⁴

Problems developed with the CRC almost immediately. According to Michael Miklaucic, who helped establish the corps, there was no appetite in Congress to fund the civilian reserve component, as it would require the same kind of legislative framework as the reserve component of the armed forces to ensure jobs would be available when personnel returned from active duty.³⁵⁵ After years of military reserve deployments, Congress was already under pressure from employers who were required to provide job protections for deployed military reserves. Traditionally, businesses that hired “citizen soldiers” only had to fear losing them for the rarest of deployments; however, the operational tempo of the Iraq and Afghanistan wars meant that year after year, many businesses were losing employees they could not legally replace. For this and other reasons, Congress refused to create another reserve corps for civilians, and the reserve concept was postponed indefinitely.³⁵⁶

The standby component faced a different set of challenges. According to a senior State Department official:

The standby component assumed that the government has the slack to give for the effort, but where there is slack to give, those are often not the people with the skills you need. Those people are already doing other important work. They all had jobs that were deemed to be a higher priority. So we only managed to get a handful of State employees out of their day jobs as part of the standby.³⁵⁷



Matthew Flynn, USAID field program officer and head of the Kandahar City stabilization cell, and other members of PRT Kandahar visit the Shur Andam Industrial Park in Kandahar City on June 11, 2011. (U.S. Air Force photo by Chief Master Sgt. Richard Simonsen)

The active component also faced challenges. All eight agencies had their own ideas about what types of personnel should be in their respective active pools, often based on how they could use them when not deployed, rather than their suitability for S&R missions.³⁵⁸ State was ultimately unable to corral the other agencies; while NSPD 44 gave it the authority to oversee the other agencies on this specific endeavor, in practice the agencies had their own equities to protect. Out of 250 personnel in the active component, only 36 were allotted to S/CRS, whose active pool was best suited to the lion's share of civilian stabilization work in Afghanistan, primarily on PRTs and DSTs. These 36 active members, as well as USAID's contingent, had utilization rates as high as 60 percent, but with so few members of the overall active component suited to challenging deployments to places like Afghanistan, much of the rest never rose above 20 percent utilization.³⁵⁹

The endeavor became difficult to justify with so few active component members being used. After S/CRS became the Bureau for Conflict and Stabilization Operations in 2011, it defunded the active component and adopted a bullpen model instead, where dozens of international affairs and development professionals would be available on call, but not paid unless deployed, and not necessarily willing to deploy if asked.³⁶⁰

SPENDING TOO MUCH, TOO FAST

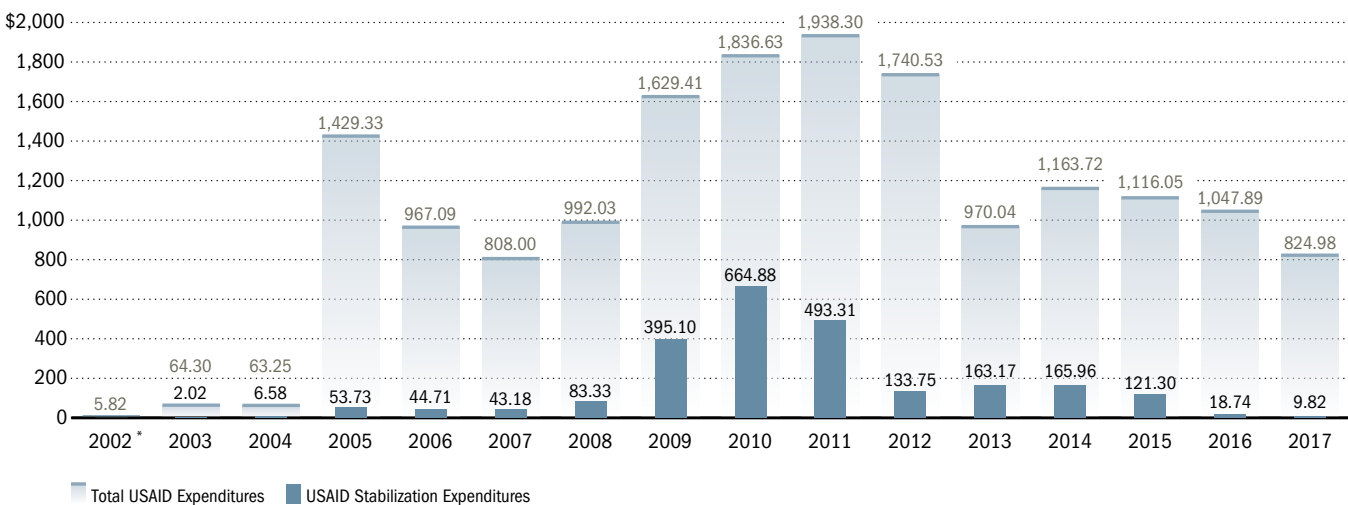
From 2009 through 2014, USAID stabilization programming resources increased nearly 800 percent compared to the six years prior to 2009.³⁶¹ (See figure 6.) With exceptional pressure to show progress over the 18–24 months of the surge, not only did available funding seem abundant, but because it was the only variable exclusively in the coalition’s control, the rate of expenditure, or “burn rate,” skyrocketed and became the easiest measuring stick for success.³⁶² The lack of emphasis on achieved impact stemmed, in part, from the assumption that the greater the expenditure of money, the more coalition lives were saved from enemy attacks.³⁶³ According to a USAID stabilization official, “No one talked about sustainable development because we knew the mission. In this environment, there was no motive to question a project’s viability.”³⁶⁴ A senior USAID official in RC-South told SIGAR there was also an implicit belief that greater expenditures could somehow speed up the slow and messy process of stabilization to fit the compressed timeframe.³⁶⁵ According to another senior USAID official, “The military asked USAID to spend money faster than USAID could get it, so when you got your money, you spent it and immediately asked for more.”³⁶⁶

“No one talked about sustainable development because we knew the mission. In this environment, there was no motive to question a project’s viability.”

—USAID stabilization official

FIGURE 6

USAID IN AFGHANISTAN: TOTAL EXPENDITURES VS. STABILIZATION EXPENDITURES, 2002–2017 (\$ MILLIONS)



Note: *USAID did not disburse any funds for stabilization in 2002.

According to USAID, historical funding levels may not be comprehensive prior to 2006. For example, the Afghanistan Transition Initiative ran from 2002 to 2005, but USAID reporting does not include any disbursements for ATI until 2003. USAID spent nearly \$2.4 billion on stabilization programs in Afghanistan from 2002 to 2017, \$1.5 billion of which was spent between 2009–2011.

Source: SIGAR analysis of USAID response to SIGAR data call, January 18, 2018.



Afghan contractors unload bags of fertilizer at the Nawa District government building compound in Helmand Province on October 13, 2009. (U.S. Marine Corps photo by Lance Cpl. Jeremy Harris)

USAID's spending far outpaced the capacity of its personnel tasked with managing programming under what were extremely challenging conditions for oversight. As a result, U.S. spending fueled corruption and resulted in power brokers exporting excess funds to Dubai and beyond.³⁶⁷ The USAID/Afghanistan Mission's total proposed 2010 budget, almost \$4 billion, was the largest in agency history.³⁶⁸ According to one senior USAID official, the budget for each of the four SIKA programs, which were under development at the time, was larger than most USAID mission budgets around the world.³⁶⁹ Yet, ever more funds were thought to yield more results. When USAID briefed SRAP Holbrooke on its plans to spend a staggering \$150 million on AVIPA in Kandahar and Helmand in a single year, he instructed them to "double it."³⁷⁰ As a result, AVIPA's budget was dramatically expanded, from \$150 million to \$300 million, over objections from USAID leadership, who argued that such large sums would prove ineffective and wasteful.³⁷¹

"The Hill was always asking, 'Did you spend the money? What's your burn rate?' I didn't hear many questions about what the effects were."

—USAID official

Despite the Riedel review's claim that "assistance will be limited without the achievement of results," the urgency to show quick results on such a compressed timeline led to unrestricted and often unaccountable spending.³⁷² As a USAID official explained, "The Hill was always asking, 'Did you spend the money? What's your burn rate?' I didn't hear many questions about what the effects were."³⁷³

Money changed the culture of governing in Afghanistan, particularly in the south. Money became the primary method for influencing local government officials and processes, and only certain groups had access.³⁷⁴ As one senior USAID official noted:

We had no legitimacy if we weren't flooding the area with cash. How can you get the attention of a district governor in Arghandab if you're not spending money like everyone else is? Why would he care about a \$5,000 training or shura process when he's trying to negotiate a huge infrastructure project or cash-for-work for hundreds of his people?³⁷⁵

Because the primary goals of stabilization programming were to reduce insecurity and improve support for the government (rather than to build schools or retaining walls), process was more important than product.³⁷⁶ The degree to which implementing partners substantively engaged communities and local leaders in project identification and execution was one key determinant of whether they achieved their desired outcomes of increasing trust between communities and their government, and addressing sources of instability.³⁷⁷ The process of project implementation, and securing popular participation and ownership, was critical to its success.³⁷⁸

Process-focused community engagement was, by its very nature, slow. Yet, USAID was expected to implement stabilization projects in weeks, making it impossible for them to spend time on lengthy consultative processes, such as those that formed the backbone of the influential National Solidarity Program (NSP).³⁷⁹ For perspective, NSP's ideal timeline was approximately two to two and one-half years from the implementing partner's first contact with the community to the completion of one project.³⁸⁰

LOCAL GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS: TOO FEW AND TOO UNQUALIFIED

After COIN and stabilization were piloted in Helmand's Nawa District, a handful of key terrain districts in Helmand and Kandahar became central to the coalition's effort to prove the merits of population-centric counterinsurgency and the stabilization model nested within the clear-hold-build cycle.³⁸¹ The highest-profile example was the campaign for Marjah, which was a sub-district of Nad Ali in Helmand in 2009.³⁸² (See figure 7.)

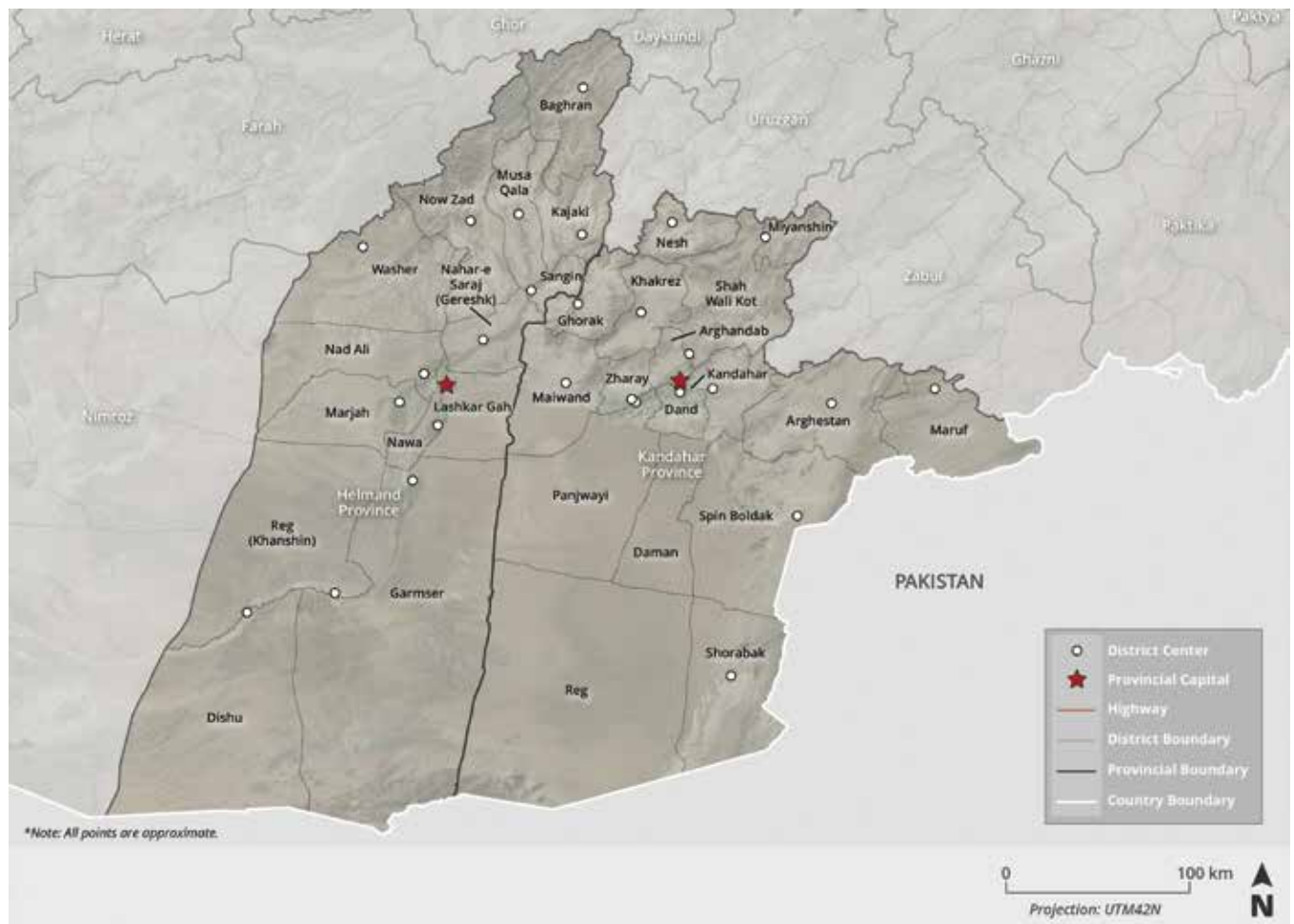
The campaign began in February 2010, when the coalition attempted to install a "government-in-a-box" after clearing the area.³⁸³ The Taliban had controlled Marjah for so long that the sub-district had seen little formal government in years.³⁸⁴ From the coalition's perspective, it needed exactly the kind of improvements in service delivery that stabilization programming was meant to provide. In theory, these services would convince the population of the merits of formal government and help repel the Taliban if they tried to return.

The military's expectation that government would be set up as soon as an area was cleared proved to be unrealistic, despite the fact that this was precisely what had been outlined in clear-hold-build strategy.³⁸⁵ In descriptions of the Marjah operation, General McChrystal reportedly envisioned an enormous team of Afghans showing up as soon as the shooting was over to set up a variety of institutions, including schools and a hospital complete with adequate supplies and trained personnel.³⁸⁶

In reality, however, the Afghan government's contribution to the operation in Marjah was minimal; despite six months of planning, the Independent Directorate for Local Governance (IDLG) only sent one official, an ex-convict, to serve as district governor.³⁸⁷ More generally, a lack of experience and knowledge was a problem. According to a former USAID official, "Some of these local

FIGURE 7

SOUTHERN AFGHANISTAN



Source: Map produced by John M. Steed.



Marjah District Governor Haji Zahir speaks to elders gathered in the Shorshorak area of Marjah on January 8, 2010, shortly before the U.S. Marines push into the district in Helmand Province. (U.S. Marine Corps photo)

officials didn't even know how their own government's budget worked."³⁸⁸ Facing a dearth of Afghan civil servants—both in Marjah and elsewhere—State and USAID officials who were supposed to “advise” those civil servants, and the Civil Affairs officers they worked with, were often compelled to essentially administer district governments themselves.³⁸⁹ One senior USAID official was given the impression by a superior senior civilian official that “if Afghans don't show up, then Americans will show up.”³⁹⁰

“Some of these local officials didn't even know how their own government's budget worked.”

—Former USAID official

District Delivery Program

Marjah publicly demonstrated that the Afghan government was either unwilling or unable to support the stabilization effort by standing up competent government officials in the areas deemed vital to success. By early 2010, it had become clear to Ambassador Eikenberry that President Karzai did not believe in counterinsurgency and would obstruct assistance that flowed from Kabul to the districts. Therefore, Eikenberry reasoned, the only way to work at the subnational level was to steer money and programming directly to that level.³⁹¹ Another reason USAID chose to focus at the district level was that the agency believed its role was technocratic and sought to avoid political entanglements.³⁹² According to a senior USAID official, “Once you got to the provincial level, things got too political because of ties to Kabul, so we worked at the district

level.”³⁹³ Thus, the intent was to influence service delivery at the end of the chain, in a place the coalition could reasonably have an influence, rather than further up the chain where service delivery was historically log-jammed or obstructed, and where reform was far more difficult.

In order to address the dearth of Afghan government officials in the districts, USAID and IDLG developed the District Delivery Program (DDP), which was designed to fund and help IDLG recruit, train, and deploy hundreds of officials to key terrain districts. DDP was regarded as the stabilization program that would properly enable all other stabilization programs by staffing districts with officials who could sustain stabilization, and service delivery more generally.³⁹⁴ The program was intended to ensure Afghans would have access to local officials and come to appreciate the services legitimate government could provide.³⁹⁵

Stabilization vs. Governance

While programs like DDP and ASOP were technically USAID governance programs, they were also very much stabilization programs, focused on addressing insecurity in priority areas. In order to stabilize, communities implicitly needed governance structures with which they could connect, thereby extending the government’s reach.³⁹⁶

A series of cables from U.S. Embassy Kabul revealed the extent and seriousness of violence against Afghan civil servants. According to a 2009 cable, Afghan officials took great risks by working in areas that were actively contested by the insurgency. Even high troop concentrations were not sufficient to protect government officials from assassination, as demonstrated by killings of officials in central Kandahar and Helmand.³⁹⁷ The Taliban recognized that government officials, local leaders, and implementing partners’ local staff were key to the counterinsurgency strategy and ramped up their assassination campaign against these “soft” targets in 2010, killing an average of one Afghan official every day, according to one account.³⁹⁸ Local power brokers also seized the opportunity to kill their rivals under the cover of the chaos of the war and the pervasiveness of the assassination campaign.³⁹⁹

The Taliban recognized that government officials, local leaders, and implementing partners’ local staff were key to the counterinsurgency strategy and ramped up their assassination campaign against these “soft” targets in 2010, killing an average of one Afghan official every day.

The assassination campaign made recruiting and retaining officials to work for local governments in these districts exceptionally difficult. A 2010 cable,

recently declassified at SIGAR's request, demonstrates the degree of difficulty DDP faced in identifying Afghan officials who were both capable and willing to work in some of the most dangerous areas of the country, like Marjah, where DDP was piloted.⁴⁰⁰ According to Dr. Sibghatullah, the director of DDP:

After several Kandahar districts were cleared in the summer of 2010, the civil service announced more than 100 new positions spread across district governments in Panjwayi, Arghandab, Daman, and Zhari. We received only 18 applications. Then the civil service tried job fairs, which helped get people in, but only after we lowered standards even further and dropped the requirement that district governors had to have bachelor's degrees. We also had to drop informal requirements and ended up with district governors who were not from [anti-Soviet] mujahedeen groups or not local, and both presented problems for legitimacy and credibility.⁴⁰¹

Furthermore, for the civil servants who were hired, the assassinations had a chilling effect on their willingness to show up to work, particularly those whose assignment to a district office required them to leave the safety of highly guarded provincial capitals.⁴⁰² As Barna Karimi, the Deputy Minister of IDLG during the surge, recounted:

When I had disagreements with the Americans about Helmand, it was because before going to stabilize a district close to Lashkar Gah, for example, Nawa, they used to go to a further district like Garmsir and start operations there. After the military operation in Garmsir was finished, they started shouting, 'We cleared Garmsir so come here and establish the government administration.' I used to tell them that I am not coming, because I cannot travel there by the road. 'You are going there by helicopters,' I would say. 'I cannot take all my staff there by plane. How is my clerk able to go through Nawa to get there? He will be kidnapped on his way in Nawa. How are you going to prevent this?'⁴⁰³

An area deemed relatively permissive by the military, with its heavily armed convoys and vehicles designed to withstand IEDs, presented a very different risk to Afghan government officials and informal leaders, who relied on civilian vehicles and did not live on heavily guarded bases.⁴⁰⁴ As a result, the coalition often provided transportation and security for these officials, without which they would not have been able to access many parts of their territories. This limited their interactions with their constituents and highlighted the coalition's role in propping up the Afghan government.⁴⁰⁵ The fact that many of the districts prioritized for DDP were too insecure to properly host Afghan government officials suggested that these areas were not yet ripe for stabilization efforts, in general. It also called into question the sustainability of focusing on these areas, as Afghan leaders were unlikely to be able to reach these populations after the surge ended and coalition troops withdrew.

Despite DDP's hiring challenges and security constraints, pressure to make fast progress meant USAID and IDLG moved on from one district to another before the first was properly staffed. As with so many other stabilization programs, the pressure to produce resulted in an emphasis on numbers rather than programming effectiveness: in this case, the number of district offices staffed,

rather than whether these new staff were effective and services were improving as a result.⁴⁰⁶ There was a perception that the quicker the local government positions were filled, the fewer coalition forces would be killed, a rationale that was used to push the program to grow too quickly.⁴⁰⁷

While DDP faced a number of problems, it included far more coordination and cooperation with the Afghan government than other stabilization programs, which often operated without meaningful government collaboration. Governors reported that filling vacant civil service positions contributed directly to security in their districts and that the numbers of people visiting district centers increased in DDP districts.⁴⁰⁸

ISAF WAS OFTEN A SOURCE OF INSTABILITY

Uneven Adoption of Counterinsurgency

COIN was a significant departure for military forces accustomed to prioritizing the enemy's destruction, rather than protecting the population. As a result, the impact of stabilization programming was frequently nullified by the heavy hand of some military units that refused to see the population as the prize.

While the Marines were making progress clearing and holding less populous terrain in Helmand, a U.S. Army Stryker brigade was sent to clear and hold the much more densely inhabited outskirts of Kandahar City as part of President Obama's March 2009 surge.⁴⁰⁹ While some parts of the brigade implemented governance initiatives and collaborated with USAID stabilization programs, the Stryker brigade's aggressive approach made it difficult to win hearts and minds even when the fighting stopped, which it seldom did.⁴¹⁰ The unit's actions were generally so counterproductive that its members were reportedly removed from all sensitive responsibilities, including interacting with Afghans, and instead tasked with security on the Ring Road.⁴¹¹ As a result, according to one account, it wasn't until the brigade left in summer 2010 that proper COIN operations began in Kandahar.⁴¹²

Across the country, the variable degree to which each unit subscribed to and implemented COIN, in combination with one-year tours, meant that any headway a unit made could be and often was erased if its successor had a more aggressive approach.⁴¹³

Creating Enemies

The ISAF effort was itself a major source of instability in Afghanistan for a number of reasons. First, the degree to which ISAF and its Afghan government partners created "winners" and "losers" fundamentally reworked the power

Political economy is the underlying political context within which reform processes supported by donors, including through stabilization programs, are conducted. Political economy analysis (PEA) seeks to determine how power is used to manage resources and how political will enables or undermines reform.

PEA arose out of the realization that technically focused efforts to effect change have often failed in the absence of an understanding of competing interests opposed to the proposed change.

Elite capture is the usurpation—by economic and political elites—of resources meant for the population.



U.S. soldiers from the 5th Stryker Brigade destroy an abandoned compound near Highway 1 in Huta, Maiwand District, Kandahar Province on February 18, 2010. (U.S. Air Force photo by Staff Sgt. Dayton Mitchell)

structures and **political economy** of many parts of the country.⁴¹⁴ The elite capture of relationships with, and aid and contracts from, the coalition created new grievances and exacerbated old ones as some tribes and other groups benefited from the war, while others were alienated and driven toward the insurgency.⁴¹⁵ Access to the coalition was a key avenue, in many ways *the* avenue, for consolidating wealth and political power, so coalition officials often became kingmakers.⁴¹⁶ Some of the coalition's key partners were the same unsavory individuals who had been previously swept out of power, to widespread applause, by the Taliban.⁴¹⁷ These “winners” not only reaped economic benefits and ran the government for personal gain, but many also committed major crimes with impunity, including murder, creating a kind of mafia rule.⁴¹⁸

Second, pervasive corruption, driven by the flood of money from coalition contracts and assistance, reinforced patronage systems through which the Afghan government served elites at the expense of other citizens. By fueling corruption and the population's disillusionment with its government, the coalition undermined the very government it sought to legitimize and drove support for the insurgency.⁴¹⁹ A wide variety of studies surveyed by the Empirical Studies of Conflict (ESOC) project found corruption was a key—and often the most important—issue undermining support for the Afghan government and driving support for insurgents.⁴²⁰ The coalition's inattentiveness to the destabilizing ramifications of its interventions and massive inflows of money “turned low-grade corruption into high-stakes corruption” and escalated grievances about **elite capture** of government to a new level.⁴²¹ Further, corruption was not seen as a strategic threat to the stabilization effort; instead, it was seen as a problem specific to individual Afghan officials.⁴²² By failing to acknowledge and understand

the wide-ranging impact of corruption and its own role in it, the coalition may have won a series of pyrrhic victories, as decisions made in the pursuit of a short-term security agenda undermined longer-term political and governance goals.

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Finally, DOD and USAID reliance on private security contractors led to a substantial percentage of expenditures being diverted to insurgent groups.⁴²³ While there has been widespread congressional and media reporting on Pentagon logistics contractors who paid millions of dollars to insurgents for safe passage through territory they controlled, the role of USAID implementing partners, or their private security contractors, in paying “taxes” in exchange for the ability to access project sites and implement projects without facing attacks has been less well publicized, but equally problematic.⁴²⁴

CLEAR-HOLD-HOLD: STABILIZATION STALLS

By late 2010, a year after President Obama’s first surge forces had arrived in country, it became clear that it was taking far longer to clear, hold, and build key terrain districts than had been anticipated. Even where the military was successful in clearing and holding, the capacity of Afghan officials and security forces to take the baton was limited. It became increasingly evident that governance took far longer to build than territory took to clear.⁴²⁵ According to journalist Bob Woodward, as the White House was conducting its 2010 annual review of the strategy, the running joke was that ISAF was doing “clear, hold, hold, hold, hold, and hold.”⁴²⁶

As a result, revised timetables for handing security and governance off to the Afghans began to create significant tension between ISAF and the Obama administration, which was reported to have felt misled into thinking tangible progress could be made within 18 months.⁴²⁷ The timeline from “clear” to “transfer” was simply longer than the compressed surge timeline, especially as building governance required building trust, a difficult task in a country that had experienced 30 years of war. As one senior USAID official noted, “Even successful clearing operations will not be recognized by locals for six to nine months.”⁴²⁸ Civilian institutions, like a competent and legitimate civil service and judiciary, would take years longer to build than security took to achieve, and even protecting the population from insurgents and predatory government officials was significantly more difficult than the military, which was driving the strategy, expected.⁴²⁹

IN WASHINGTON, A DETERMINATION TO SHOW PROGRESS

Measuring progress in the war proved daunting, particularly in 2010, when the new strategy's annual White House review made it tempting to report progress however and whenever the agencies could. Echoing a number of other senior officials who spoke off the record, one senior U.S. official in Washington recounted:

It was impossible to create good metrics. We tried using troop numbers trained, violence levels, and control of territory, and none of it painted an accurate picture. At the end of the day, there was nothing for us to latch on to except for number of attacks, against civilians, ANDSF, and ISAF.

Still, metrics never had an impact on policy because the metrics were always manipulated for the duration of the war, especially in the 2010 review. When the metrics started, it was normal for everyone to depict low baselines to give themselves room to grow. But then the games started. We'd get the metrics from the agencies, compile them, prepare to brief the president on them, then the members of the Interagency Policy Committee would step in and edit the metrics to paint a more optimistic picture. Senior NSC officials would often try to overrule them and present the original assessment to the principals, but the principals would refuse to sign without their subordinates' edits. Then, the principals would win and the edits would be made, and then it was resubmitted to the president with bells and whistles.

But it wasn't the data the deputies and principals tried to manipulate; it was their explanations. For example, attacks are getting worse? 'That's because there are more targets for the insurgents to fire at, so more attacks are a false indicator of instability.' Then, three months later, attacks are still getting worse? 'It's because the Taliban are getting desperate, so it's actually an indicator that we're winning.'

And this went on and on for two reasons: to make everyone involved look good, and to make it look like the troops and resources were having the kind of effect where removing them would cause the country to deteriorate.⁴³⁰

Beyond the 2010 review, the difficulty of measuring progress also had larger implications, which are discussed in depth in chapter 7 of this report.

DRAWDOWN ANNOUNCED

At a NATO conference in Lisbon in November 2010, the Obama administration announced after months of deliberations with allies that most U.S. combat forces would be withdrawn from Afghanistan by December 31, 2014.⁴³¹ "We went from an end-state to an end-date," former ISAF commander General Allen observed in a SIGAR interview.⁴³² Overnight, Embassy Kabul began pushing transition and filtering every decision through the prism of preparing for the drawdown. At the center of that effort was a shift away from district-level assistance and toward what the embassy determined to be the most important Afghan government capabilities: "effective and realistic planning and budgeting" at the national, provincial, and municipal levels.⁴³³ It had become clear that district capacity was not sustainable, particularly because even provincial governments did not have the capacity or authority to properly plan or manage budgets, and the drawdown created an opportune moment to rescope stabilization.⁴³⁴

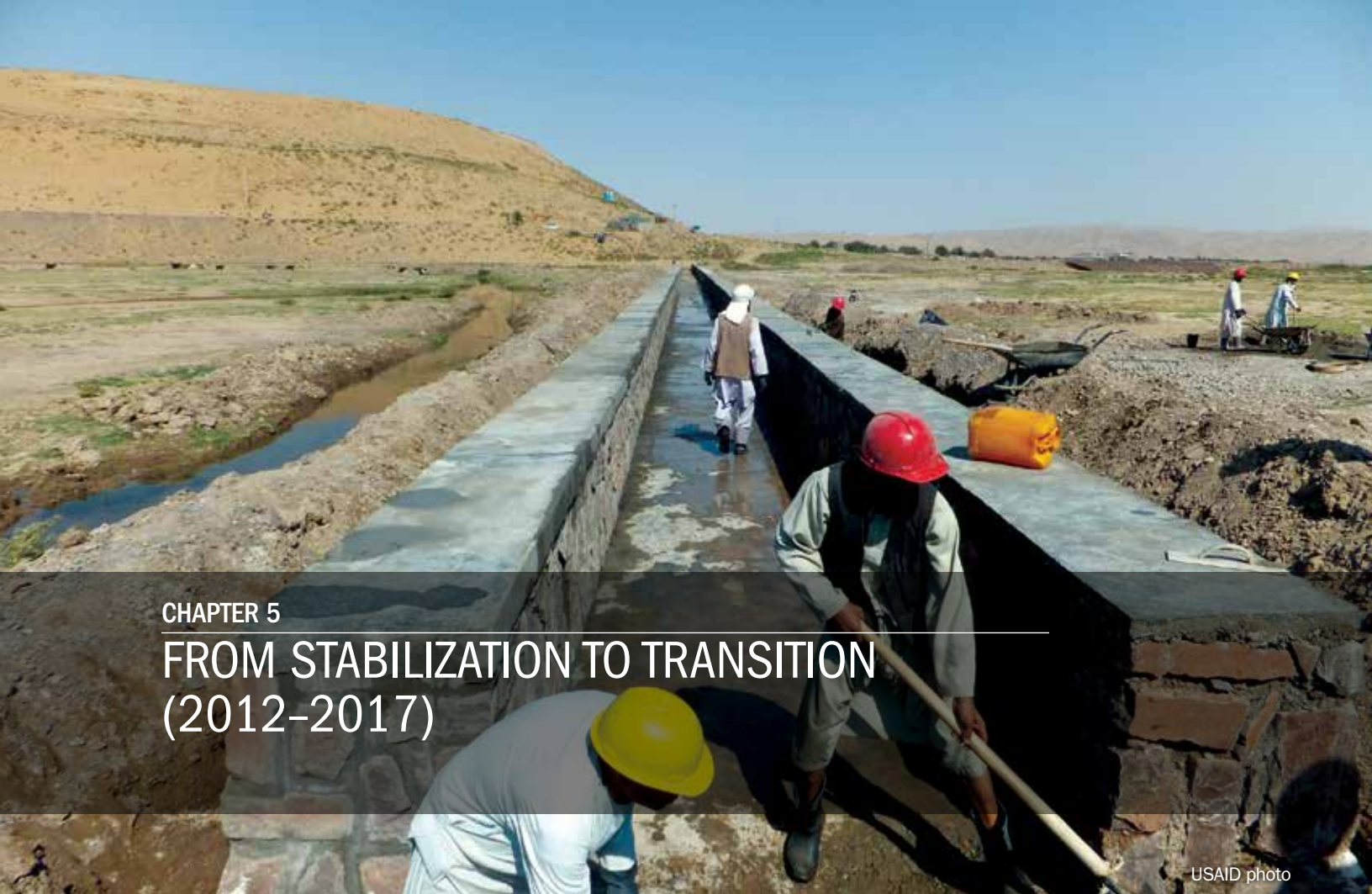
An embassy cable from late 2010 announcing the new strategy required civilian officials and programs to move away from merely *consulting* the Afghan government about project priorities through “wish list” exercises and toward actually working *through* existing government structures.⁴³⁵ In London earlier that year, international donors had pledged to increase to 50 percent the proportion of development aid provided on-budget and spent through Afghan government processes.⁴³⁶ The former director of DDP at IDLG explained how difficult it was to execute on-budget funding through government coffers, even for routine tasks, noting, “We had to get 17 different signatures from across IDLG, the Ministry of Finance, and the finance office in the province each time we needed to do simple things, like purchase equipment for a district or make a personnel change.”⁴³⁷ Aware that civilian assistance would begin tapering off immediately, State and USAID began laying the groundwork for helping the Afghan government make do with far less civilian support than they had in the recent past by focusing more on capacity building and budget reform.⁴³⁸

At the same time, USAID recognized that the work stabilization had intended to accomplish had only just begun. The agency was starting to address a number of systemic problems with stabilization programming and outlined them in the “Administrator’s Stabilization Guidance” of January 2011. This document sought to strategically focus what had been undisciplined spending over the previous two years, calling for (1) connecting interventions to sources of instability; (2) creating enduring **ink spots**, rather than moving prematurely from place to place; and (3) connecting stabilization to long-term development in preparation for the end of the surge.⁴³⁹

Only six months later, in June 2011, USAID issued its “Administrator’s Sustainability Guidance” in recognition of the coalition-wide reorientation to drawing down and the need to leave behind a government that could sustain itself. In addition to emphasizing the importance of achieving “basic levels of security and stability,” this new guidance talked more explicitly about “assisting the Afghan people to build more capable, inclusive, and pluralistic governance and society” and “enabling sustainable economic growth and human development,” hallmarks of long-term development and departures from the civ-mil integration of stabilization.⁴⁴⁰

In June 2011, President Obama announced that all surge troops would be withdrawn by the summer of 2012, the same troops that had enabled DOD and USAID to deliver stabilization programming in many of Afghanistan’s key terrain districts.⁴⁴¹ Thus, the withdrawal effectively ended the coalition’s ability to conduct intensive, bottom-up stabilization in Afghanistan’s periphery. The next day, Secretary Clinton confirmed that the civilian surge had reached its apex and that the U.S. government would “shift . . . efforts from short-term stabilization projects to longer-term sustainable development.”⁴⁴²

Ink spots refer to a concept in COIN theory that says the best way to stabilize a large area is to focus on a strategically located portion of it, stabilize that smaller area with military and civilian resources, and gradually expand that ink spot into neighboring areas, as conditions permit.



CHAPTER 5

FROM STABILIZATION TO TRANSITION (2012–2017)

USAID photo

When transition was announced, USAID’s stabilization budget in Kabul was slashed as the agency began its slow return to long-term development.⁴⁴³ While USAID Afghanistan’s stabilization budget had been slated for nearly a 50 percent increase between 2010 and 2011, USAID informed the mission in October 2010 that the budget for many portfolios, including stabilization, would soon be slashed by at least 65 percent. Thus, between FY 2010 and FY 2011, USAID’s stabilization budget in Afghanistan was reduced from \$720 million to \$256 million, a cut totaling nearly as much as the entire FY 2010 Stab-U budget of \$490 million.⁴⁴⁴

In practice, however, there was so much stabilization programming in the pipeline that it took several years to dry up, even though, according to a senior USAID official, stabilization had become a “dirty word” at the agency, associated with excessive and ineffective spending at the military’s behest.⁴⁴⁵ Concurrently, State stopped emphasizing stabilization’s counterpart, reconstruction, in 2010. A senior State official explained that there was no appetite for future large-scale reconstruction missions like Vietnam, Iraq, and Afghanistan, and “we could find no empirical reason to believe they would work well elsewhere.”⁴⁴⁶

This shift in terminology translated into a shift from the coalition delivering services directly to trying to build the capacity of Afghan government ministries and provincial administrations so they could do so. According to one civilian official, “We finally started to get it right toward the end: focusing on budgeting, linking the Afghan government to do its own projects as the drawdown approached.”⁴⁴⁷ This shift was enshrined in the March 2012 “Civil-Military Strategic Framework,” which stated, “The goal is for [the Afghan government] to use its own programs and institutions to provide essential services to the Afghan people.”⁴⁴⁸ A similar shift occurred in counterinsurgency doctrine between the release of FM 3-24, *Counterinsurgency*, in 2006 and the release of Joint Publication (JP) 3-24, *Counterinsurgency*, in November 2013. JP 3-24 added guidance that governance and service delivery capacity must align with local expectations, warning against attempts to institute Western-style government.⁴⁴⁹ Likewise, the embassy’s February 2011 governance strategy emphasized building Afghan capacity for budget execution and public financial management through on-budget funding and a focus on the ministerial, provincial, and municipal levels.⁴⁵⁰

As State and USAID were beginning to draw down in 2012, many officials at the embassy were surprised to find a handful of large and costly stabilization programs just ramping up, including Stability in Key Areas.⁴⁵¹ The Community Cohesion Initiative (CCI) and the Kandahar Food Zone (KFZ) were launched in 2012 and 2013, respectively.⁴⁵² The design of these new stabilization programs marked a shift, albeit incomplete, from trying to make the Afghan government seem more “visible, effective, and honest,” to actually working to increase its capacity.⁴⁵³

The design of these new stabilization programs marked a shift, albeit incomplete, from trying to make the Afghan government seem more “visible, effective, and honest,” to actually working to increase its capacity.

The four SIKAs programs, whose delays in coming on line had frustrated the military, finally started throughout the winter of 2011 and spring of 2012, up to a year after they had been scheduled to begin.⁴⁵⁴ The long delay meant they had to be reworked to de-emphasize stabilization in favor of transition.⁴⁵⁵ While LGCD, the predecessor to the SIKAs, involved the government in project identification in a token fashion by directing grassroots community requests to local government officials for their blessing, the central goal of the SIKAs was to build sustainable governance capacity at the district level.⁴⁵⁶ The four SIKAs each covered a different geographic area and worked through different types of community and district-level bodies, but all four programs had a

common goal of creating inclusive, Afghan-led project identification and prioritization processes.⁴⁵⁷

RESCOPING STABILIZATION AS SUBNATIONAL GOVERNANCE

During this transition period, State and USAID attempted to overhaul stabilization by making it more effective and targeted, tailored to a transition context, and responsive to previously identified problems. In some cases, new problems emerged and old ones proved resilient. Whereas agencies had trouble working together during the surge, during transition they sometimes worked explicitly at cross-purposes.

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The overhaul began with a re-imagining of stabilization when USAID and its Stab-U changed the definition of stability to be equivalent to effective subnational governance. In 2010, the District Stability Framework defined stability as “a reduction in the means and motivations for violent conflict, increased capacity to resist sudden change or deterioration, and socioeconomic predictability.”⁴⁵⁸ By June 2013, the Stab-U Performance Management Plan changed the definition to “the prevailing belief in and support for the decisions and actions of local leaders and government that affect the lives of people in a given community.”⁴⁵⁹ Notably, Stab-U’s definition focused on local governance, contradicting the clear withdrawal to the ministerial and provincial levels dictated by the embassy and U.S. Forces-Afghanistan’s (USFOR-A) March 2012 “Civil-Military Strategic Framework” and the embassy’s governance strategy.⁴⁶⁰ Thus, as soon as transition began, Stab-U programs worked against the post-2012 strategy shift toward on-budget capacity building at higher levels of government.

Continued Focus at the District Level

Despite the new policy emphasis on working at the ministerial, provincial, and municipal levels, stabilization programming continued to focus on improving capacity at, or even below, the district level. For example, CCI continued to work to link communities to their governments and informal governance structures at the local level or sub-district level, while each of the SIKAs engaged through different mechanisms with Afghan interlocutors at the sub-district, district, and provincial levels.⁴⁶¹

Stabilization programs were designed with the assumption that government officials would eventually assume responsibility for delivering the services these

programs were providing. However, under the existing Afghan government structure, the districts lacked even the most basic building blocks for service delivery, and therefore, stabilization programs were mostly building from scratch.⁴⁶² Neither district governors nor various district councils had any meaningful budget or authority with which to continue constructing small-scale infrastructure, to maintain the infrastructure that had been built with donor funds, or even to pay for basic office expenses, such as firewood for heating.⁴⁶³ According to Barna Karimi, former Deputy Minister at IDLG, the operating budget of a district governor was between \$15–20 per month.⁴⁶⁴ As a result, providing district governments a role in directing an implementing partner's service delivery increased the population's confidence in these entities in the short-run, but when the money dried up, this confidence was undermined.⁴⁶⁵ As a senior stabilization contractor observed, "The district level was not the appropriate level for these types of interventions."⁴⁶⁶

Even Provinces Lacked the Capabilities that Programs Sought to Build in Districts

The intent for districts to take over service provision was built on another assumption: District-level officials would be empowered to "reach up" for funding to provincial-level line ministry representatives, who would, in turn, connect to services through the ministries in Kabul. However, this assumption belied a fundamental lack of understanding of the Afghan budgetary process. In reality, not only did the districts lack the budgets or authority to deliver services, but this capacity and authority did not even exist at the provincial level, which meant stabilization programs operating at the district level often built a bridge to nowhere.⁴⁶⁷ Afghan budgetary priorities (even down to the choice of specific projects) are set at the central ministerial level, so pushing that authority down to the districts, or even the provinces, would necessitate a wholesale restructuring of the Afghan government—a longer-term project than the stabilization experiment allowed, if it was even possible.⁴⁶⁸

Likewise, according to a former USAID official, the main accomplishment of DDP, which was designed to build district-level budgeting and public administration capacity, was that it helped USAID understand that building financial capacity at the provincial level was a prerequisite to similar efforts at the district level.⁴⁶⁹ In fact, shortly before the program was canceled, DDP was in the midst of being refocused on the provincial level, the level at which the British in Helmand had focused their version of the program from the outset.⁴⁷⁰

Even after State and USAID recognized that targeting the district level had been premature, withdrawing those programs to the provincial level proved difficult. The coalition continued to expect stabilization programs to deliver services at the district level in order to produce tangible benefits to the population as

part of the counterinsurgency strategy. Despite the policy shift to governance, in practice the coalition continued to expect stabilization programs to deliver services and quick impact in key terrain districts. As a senior USAID official observed, “There was some shift toward governance and toward the provincial level, but the efforts at the district level were deemed essential because of the necessity to support military operations.”⁴⁷¹

“There was some shift toward governance and toward the provincial level, but the efforts at the district level were deemed essential because of the necessity to support military operations.”

—Senior USAID official

Continued Focus on Key Terrain Districts

During this time, not only did the geographic focus of programming stay at the district level, but programs remained bound to key terrain districts, which meant USAID was still forced to work in insecure areas. Stabilization programs continued to be tied to the military’s counterinsurgency strategy and the same districts—many of which were actively contested—that had been prioritized by that strategy, rather than in safer areas where they likely could have accomplished more.⁴⁷² According to a senior USAID official who started working in Afghanistan in 2012, “The military defined KTDs and where stabilization programs went. Programs were not necessarily determined by a development perspective, but rather, in large part, by military planning.”⁴⁷³ In an interview with SIGAR, a senior Afghan government official lamented that he and his colleagues had not been allowed to have input into district selection. He noted that their pleas that the SIKAs program not focus exclusively on insecure areas were ignored.⁴⁷⁴

KTDs were often too insecure for stabilization programming to succeed, according to the USAID Mission’s own 2011–2015 Performance Management Plan. The plan listed six critical assumptions about stabilization activities, three of which were routinely violated by the way KTDs were selected during this period: (1) Projects would take place in “areas with sufficient security forces to allow for effective assessment, project implementation, and space for the public to appreciate the impact of projects,” (2) “legitimate governance presence is sufficient to engage in project delivery,” and (3) “communities and stakeholders are able to report safely and accurately on the conditions of stability in their districts.”⁴⁷⁵

The KTDs were also often too insecure according to USAID’s own program designs, which called for the agency to work in more secure areas, where it projected it would have more success.⁴⁷⁶ As both the SIKAs and CCI found, their

plans to focus on more secure areas where their interventions had a greater chance of success were overruled by USAID, which remained tethered to the military's KTDs, even when those districts were too insecure or contained no local government entities with whom to partner.⁴⁷⁷ Similarly, the Community Development Program was working in areas that may have been too insecure for success.⁴⁷⁸ The final evaluation of the program found that project locations were usually places where the Afghan government had little to no presence, which was counterproductive given the program's focus on government engagement in 2012 and 2013.⁴⁷⁹ As during the surge, the KTDs where stabilization programs were focused remained too insecure for the coalition's Afghan government partners, as well. General Allen recounted to SIGAR how a proposal to insert "tiger teams" of Afghan entrepreneurs and government officials into recently cleared areas was rejected by the Afghan cabinet on the grounds that these areas were too unsafe.⁴⁸⁰

Continuing to follow the military's geographic focus areas meant that programming had to mold to the military's quickly shifting priorities. While improving perceptions of local governance and addressing sources of instability were goals that required a sustained effort, programs were expected to enter and exit districts and communities rapidly, as military priorities shifted. Analysis by State's Bureau for Conflict and Stabilization Operations found the constantly shifting designation of priority districts undermined the effectiveness of stabilization programming. Districts were deemed critical and then deprioritized and military forces withdrawn in periods as short as six months, raising expectations and then undermining the confidence of local populations.⁴⁸¹

This problem only worsened as the military drew down. Because the military clearing effort was often incomplete and local forces were incapable of sustaining any security gains, those gains were often reversed after coalition forces pulled out. Often stabilization programs that were being implemented in areas dictated by military priorities were left to complete implementation amid rapidly deteriorating security, and lost access to target communities as a result. The SIKAs sometimes found themselves working in districts where not only was there no district government to work with, but as the military surge ended, the area returned to total insurgent control.⁴⁸²

All of the DSTs and PRTs closed by the end of 2014, forcing programs that were focused at the district level, such as the SIKAs, to be managed remotely by U.S. officials and implementing partner staff in Kabul and directly run by local Afghans in the provinces.⁴⁸³ While USAID was limited in its ability to oversee programming previously, the drawdown only exacerbated these challenges by reducing access to project sites and the ability of USAID employees to conduct meetings to verify performance monitoring data.⁴⁸⁴ The fewer staff with access to a project site, the more likely it was that project monitoring data would be

manipulated, particularly in an environment where pressure to produce results and risk of corruption were high. According to SIKA evaluators, the limitations in accessing project sites seriously hampered monitoring and evaluation efforts because programs were reliant on a single, unverified source of information: local staff reporting.⁴⁸⁵ In addition, as security constraints limited the movements of U.S. staff, there were concerns about local staff capacity to effectively perform the expanded roles they were forced to assume.⁴⁸⁶ In short, the SIKAs were operating in such unstable areas that managers were unable to verify what their program was accomplishing.

Difficulty of Shifting to Afghan Lead

Contradicting the 2012 “Civil-Military Strategic Framework” and the 2011 governance strategy, USAID continued to implement projects on its own, rather than supporting the Afghan government in doing so.⁴⁸⁷ There was little political will to confine these programs to the slow, messy, and uncertain on-budget processes that were just being pioneered at the national and provincial levels. This violated the classic COIN mantra: “The host nation doing something tolerably is better than us doing it well.”⁴⁸⁸ However, it was impossible to do much, even tolerably, in the timeframes these programs had been allotted. Even attempting to do so often meant pioneering new governance structures at the district and local levels.⁴⁸⁹

While CCI and the SIKAs worked through the Afghan government to a greater extent than their predecessor programs, they still took shortcuts as pressure to quickly demonstrate progress superseded their mandate to work through their Afghan partners. In this way, the impetus for coalition personnel doing it themselves was an enduring sense that doing something was better than doing nothing.⁴⁹⁰

While burn rate pressure had subsided somewhat, personnel were still being evaluated by the amount of money they supervised or implemented. For example, one program evaluation from this period used a euphemism about “the pace” of implementation to express concern that the program was not spending enough money, while a SIKA implementing partner staff member confirmed that burn rate pressure was still a factor.⁴⁹¹ In fact, implementing partners continued to face so much pressure that they felt compelled to end run governance processes to speed up spending.

Ironically, the SIKAs, programs that were designed to foster stronger governance, sometimes minimized the role of their government partners in project design, implementation, and monitoring because these slower, capacity-building processes were dragging down the burn rate. Program managers sometimes strong-armed the government into signing documents as quickly as possible or

simply went around them when they disagreed with programming approaches.⁴⁹² Unsurprisingly, when SIKAs implementing partners marginalized their government counterparts, it caused tension with them. One program evaluation documented a number of cases in which SIKAs managers even threatened to cancel projects if the government did not comply with their demands to sign off on documentation before the officials had time to perform adequate due diligence.⁴⁹³

The fact that USAID did not shift completely from what it had done during the surge to what doctrine now called for it to do was, perhaps, unsurprising, given reports of a fundamental disconnect between the military's retention of the COIN and stabilization framework, and State and USAID's insistence that all programming be reframed through the lens of transition. A senior USAID official recalled a briefing he gave in early 2011 during which State's Assistant Chief of Mission declared stabilization to be over and forbade any references to it, while the briefer's military counterpart in southern Afghanistan refused to even recognize the term transition.⁴⁹⁴

Differing Approaches to Stabilization Continued

During this time, different programs within USAID used different theories of change, terminologies, and approaches, just as they had during the surge. According to a senior stabilization contractor, "We couldn't agree on a definition of stabilization."⁴⁹⁵ The SIKAs retained a focus on sources of instability, using a revised version of the District Stability Framework approach called the SAM, which in various documents stood for either the Stability Assessment Methods or the Stability Analysis Methodology.⁴⁹⁶ The Kandahar Food Zone used a modified version of SAM that focused both on stability and on the drivers of poppy cultivation.⁴⁹⁷ SAM was an attempt to address many of the challenges associated with DSF, including the fact that DSF was too onerous to complete. A senior USAID official explained, "If you go through all the required steps

in the DSF and don't skip anything, it would take a year to complete one cycle from start to finish."⁴⁹⁸ In light of the imminent end of support to local and district governments, euphemistically called "transition to Afghan leadership," SAM brought Afghan government officials into the process in a way that DSF had claimed to do, but had rarely actually done.⁴⁹⁹

There was a tension, however, between the mandate that the SIKAs support Afghan government processes, with their focus on a community's needs, and their use of the SAM tool, which maintained the DSF's emphasis on



A trainer explains the Stability Analysis Methodology to participants of various community development councils in Dasht-e Archi District, Kunduz Province, in January 2014. (USAID photo)

addressing sources of instability. Indeed, toward the mid-point of the program, a senior stabilization contractor described a pattern where a community would complete the SAM process, only to select projects from wish lists it had previously compiled.⁵⁰⁰

In contrast to the SIKAs' focus on the district level, the Community Cohesion Initiative, managed by USAID's Office of Transition Initiatives, remained focused at the community level.⁵⁰¹ In addition, with resources and geographic access shrinking, CCI made the concepts of "cohesion" and "resilience" central to its effort.⁵⁰² This shift stemmed from a recognition that stabilizing a district by reducing violence was so difficult that merely making the community more resilient to attacks was a more realistic objective and would reduce the possibility the Taliban could draw support from the population.⁵⁰³ This meant, while the program still sought to strengthen the legitimacy of local government officials, it had an increased focus on improving relations within and between communities and their informal leaders.⁵⁰⁴ OTI also de-emphasized its reliance on the District Stability Framework. According to a senior official from OTI, "CCI worked on needs-based issues. . . . If these projects are a mechanism to improve trust between people and their government, that's all that matters."⁵⁰⁵ (For a deeper exploration of programming according to needs-based vs. stability-based criteria, see chapter 8 of this report.)

Less Infrastructure, More "Soft" Programming Like Dispute Resolution

The immense pressure to spend more and faster during the surge had pushed implementers toward infrastructure and away from other types of programming, because only by building costly infrastructure could burn rate demands be met. However, periodically during both the surge and the 2012–2017 period, there was a move to balance the continuing focus on small infrastructure with an increased amount of "soft" programming. Soft programming is a broad category that includes community meetings, traditional dispute resolution training, and sporting events, among other types of activities. This attempt to diversify was only successful when programs could escape intense burn rate pressure, however. According to a senior USAID official, the Afghanistan Stabilization Initiative "was trying to model a new approach [in 2009], focusing on soft programming, but it was impossible to do that in the south" because the pressure to spend money was so great there.⁵⁰⁶ ASI's successor program, CCI, underwent its own shift toward a greater emphasis on soft programming in 2014.⁵⁰⁷



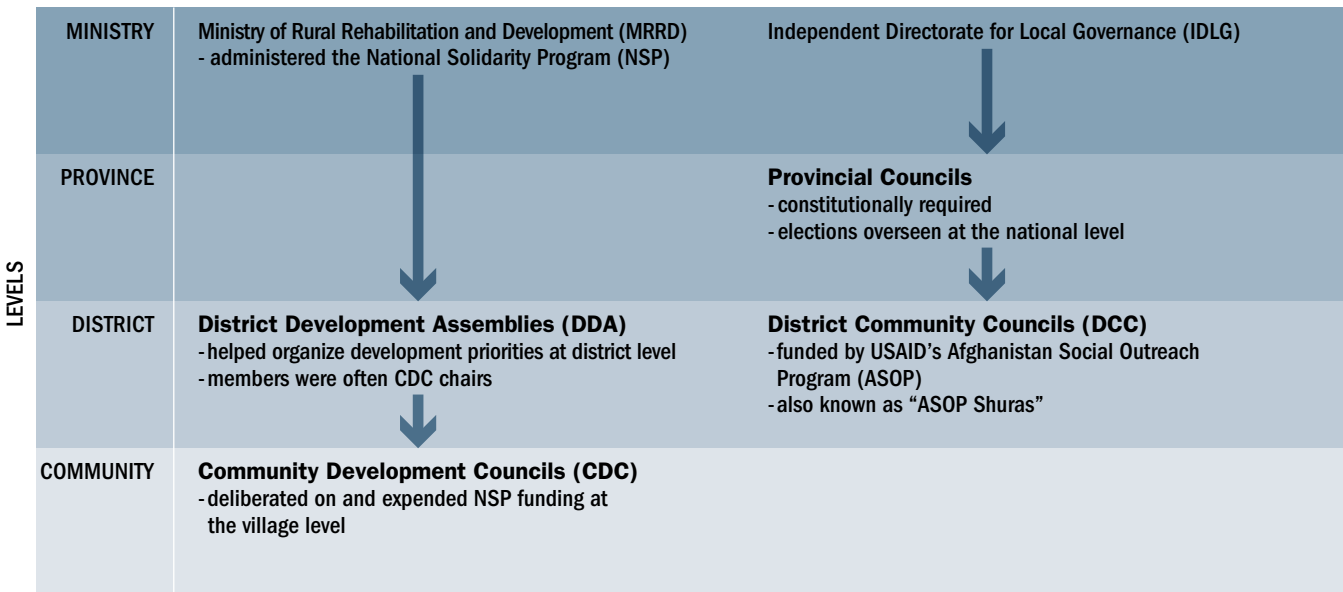
Afghan trainees at work during a CCI-funded carpet weaving training in Panjwayi District, Kandahar Province, on December 26, 2013. (USAID photo)

One prevalent type of soft programming aimed to help Afghans resolve disputes. Traditional justice was one of the few services the Taliban provided, albeit in limited areas of the country after 2001, and Taliban courts benefited from a reputation of being more efficient and less corrupt than their government-run alternatives.⁵⁰⁸ In a 2010 meta-evaluation of the agency’s historic role in counterinsurgency, USAID found that one of its key lessons learned was not to neglect the justice sector, and it recommended alternative dispute resolution, mobile courts, and other ways of speeding up legitimate grievance resolution mechanisms to compete with insurgent-provided justice.⁵⁰⁹ Programs like CCI supported traditional dispute resolution (TDR) processes and sought to establish linkages between official legal structures and traditional mechanisms. According to the final CCI report, sample activities included “providing training to TDR leaders, establishing legal resource centers, training justice support workers, and supporting case referral activities.”⁵¹⁰

The Afghanistan Social Outreach Program was entirely composed of soft programming, with significant justice and security provision components. ASOP had no infrastructure component and was instead focused on creating and building the capacity of District Community Councils (DCC). (See figure 8.) The program sponsored DCC-nominated candidates to serve as Afghan Local Police and vetted recruits for the program. (See page 49.) In addition, DCC

FIGURE 8

AFGHAN LOCAL GOVERNANCE: SHURAS AND COUNCILS



Source: AECOM, *Afghanistan Social Outreach Program (ASOP): Final Report*, pp. 3, 6; Independent Directorate of Local Governance, *Subnational Governance Policy*, Spring 2010, pp. 17, 166; SIGAR, *Stability in Key Areas (SIKA) Programs: After 16 Months and \$47 Million Spent, USAID Has Not Met Essential Program Objectives*, SIGAR 13-16-AR, July 2013, pp. 3–4.

Security Committees submitted more than 400 reports on insurgent incidents and activities, including IED placement and illegal checkpoints run by anti-government elements, to security forces operating in their districts.⁵¹¹ Among its multi-faceted efforts, ASOP facilitated the quick adjudication of small disputes in a transparent and participatory manner.⁵¹² While it is unknown how many disputes DCC members were resolving on their own before joining these councils, DCC Judiciary Subcommittees adjudicated 2,179 cases over the course of the program, including land and property disputes, violent conflicts, family and household disputes, kidnappings, and conflicts over water rights.⁵¹³

Finally, subcommittees of the community shuras formed by two of the SIKA programs also provided conflict resolution services.⁵¹⁴ Program evaluators found that SIKA-North's reconciliation jirgas were particularly effective at addressing sources of instability, including ethnic, land, and security disputes, and at working through traditional Afghan structures and incorporating those norms into government-sponsored conflict resolution processes.⁵¹⁵

Cash-for-Work Methods Contradicted State Department Guidance

Stab-U continued to march to the beat of its own drum regarding cash-for-work initiatives. In contravention of 2011 State Department guidance that cash-for-work was not, in and of itself, a rationale for programming, the 2013 Stab-U Performance Management Plan listed as one of its core goals “providing short-term employment for large numbers of people.”⁵¹⁶ State Department guidance had instructed that cash-for-work should only be used as a tool for more strategic ends because it “will not prevent young men from working for the insurgency.” Instead, State recommended that cash-for-work be used as a tool in a community-development approach to build connections between populations and their local government officials.⁵¹⁷ The Community Development Program, whose organizing rationale was to provide short-term employment to combat-age men to prevent them from joining the insurgency, was extended several times after launching in 2009 and provided more than 13 million person-days of employment across Afghanistan by the time it ended in August 2013.⁵¹⁸

Some programs were using cash-for-work in more strategic ways. The majority of the SIKA programs' activities involved a short-term employment component, but it was used to support a community engagement and governance strategy. While program evaluators did criticize the use of cash-for-work for its own



Afghan laborers on a CCI-funded project clean an irrigation canal in Kajaki District, Helmand Province, on March 29, 2014. (USAID photo)

sake, the SIKAs also used local labor to implement small-scale infrastructure projects, identified through transparent, consultative processes whose purpose was to build trust within communities, and between communities and the government.⁵¹⁹ In 2015, USAID announced its intention to provide \$50 million in funding for the Jobs for Peace program, described as “an immediate jobs initiative” to create “short-term interventions that will create economic opportunities.” However, like the SIKAs, Jobs for Peace routes most of this financing through the consultative CDC process.⁵²⁰

GOING SMALL AND LOCAL: INSPIRED BY THE NATIONAL SOLIDARITY PROGRAM

During the 2012–2017 period, the scope of stabilization programming narrowed considerably for a number of reasons. There was a growing emphasis on ensuring Afghans took the lead in implementing projects, a shift toward smaller-scale projects identified through more consultative, bottom-up community development processes, and a move away from subcontracting work toward direct implementation. These changes were all inspired, in part, by the National Solidarity Program, a widely hailed World Bank program that seemed to demonstrate the efficacy of a small, direct implementation, community development model.⁵²¹ The changes were also driven by growing concern that basic monitoring and quality assurance often proved impossible in the insecure areas in which stabilization programs were working. There was a recognition that these oversight concerns could be mitigated by focusing on smaller, directly implemented projects that were easier to monitor.

Afghanization

One factor in the move toward smaller, simpler projects was the move toward Afghan-led development. This approach, which has been referred to as Afghanization, was intended to increase the capacity of the Afghan government through on-budget support.⁵²² The 2012 “Civil-Military Strategic Framework” explained that, as “security transition proceeds, [U.S. government] assistance programs will increasingly shift from directly delivering services to providing technical assistance and building the capacity of [Afghan government] ministries and provincial governments.”⁵²³ As such, the SIKAs were required to use the MRRD-developed Kandahar Model for routing donor support through District Development Assemblies (DDA).⁵²⁴ DDAs were composed of the chairmen of the Community Development Councils created through the National Solidarity Program.⁵²⁵ (See figure 8.) The Kandahar Model emphasized (1) community participation and the use of local labor, (2) avoidance of red tape, and (3) less reliance on subcontractors to enable the quick delivery of services.⁵²⁶ An effort was made to ensure that USAID programming reinforced existing Afghan government systems, rather than creating parallel structures. For example,

the SIKa base awards explained that Afghan formal and informal government officials “will have substantial decision making authority over the activities in this contract by taking the lead with the contractor’s oversight and advice on planning, design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation.”⁵²⁷ This approach was designed to help these bodies gain experience with project conception and implementation, as well as financial management.⁵²⁸

The emphasis on hiring Afghan labor dovetailed with a push to hire laborers from the area immediately surrounding each project, particularly for unskilled jobs. Afghan officials had long objected to programs working through firms based outside the local area, and grievances had arisen in the past when projects were subcontracted to these firms. ASI also found that using local labor reduced attacks on project sites, expanded the areas in which they could work, and increased opportunities for legitimizing local leaders.⁵²⁹ In contrast, hiring outside contractors played into the hands of the insurgents by providing opportunities for them to extract payments for not disrupting projects, fueling insurgent propaganda that government leaders were skimming off the top of the contract, and ignoring an obvious opportunity to address local grievances about unemployment by ensuring laborers were hired locally.⁵³⁰

Bottom-Up Community Development

In addition to the move toward local labor, there was a move toward small-scale, community development projects. This shift began slowly during the surge, but solidified during this period. Community-driven development supports holding local elections and then providing the newly formed representative bodies with decision-making power over development funds.⁵³¹ In theory, these bodies better understand the needs and interests of the local population and ensure funds are better spent than a central government or NGO staff could. Indeed, an Afghanistan Stabilization Initiative monitoring and evaluation report found that the degree to which an activity contributed to stabilization objectives was directly correlated with the quality of the community engagement process on a given activity.⁵³² The Measuring Impact of Stabilization Initiatives (MISTI) final evaluation of CCI and a report by Tufts University came to the same conclusion: For successful stabilization, the community engagement process is at least as important as the final product or output.⁵³³

An Emphasis on Small-Scale Projects

One theory driving the move to smaller projects was that the smaller the scale, the easier it was to achieve community buy-in and ensure transparency during project identification and implementation.⁵³⁴ Programs also moved to smaller-scale projects because they took less time to implement and freed up programs to move from area to area, following the military around. Without this flexibility, the time it took to complete a project might be longer than the military could



Before and after photographs of a flood protection wall built by USAID in Ahmadabad District, Paktiya Province. (USAID photo)

provide the necessary security.⁵³⁵ In addition, there is evidence that larger activities were less likely to be successfully completed, especially in insecure areas. With SIKA-South, the failure rate for projects of above-average size was high. According to an evaluation of the program, 49 percent of these projects were “not executed” or “executed with conditions.”⁵³⁶

Quality control was also easier when projects were smaller. While the ultimate goal of stabilization programs was not to build infrastructure per se, if promised infrastructure was delayed or built poorly or not at all, it undermined the goal of improving perceptions of local governance.⁵³⁷ Even while local leaders often wished for larger projects with greater benefits to their communities, former Helmand Governor Gulab Mangal told SIGAR that smaller, more consultative projects were more effective at helping him establish the desired connection with the population.⁵³⁸

It is important to note, however, that the general trend toward smaller, simpler projects created tension between implementing partners and the communities and government officials with whom they worked because these smaller projects benefited fewer people.⁵³⁹ Implementing partners created cost ceilings for projects to keep them small. These restrictions forced implementers to unilaterally select projects from lists that had been identified through community consultation processes, rather than deferring to the community’s own prioritization. Communities grew frustrated when they spent significant time and effort on these processes, only to find that implementing partners would only follow through on projects that were under a certain dollar amount.⁵⁴⁰

Direct Implementation: Eliminating Subcontractors

One of the most significant factors driving the trend toward smaller and simpler projects was the move from subcontracting to direct implementation. This was in response to recognition that a pervasive reliance on subcontracting fed corruption, reworked power structures in areas receiving the largest aid flows, and created grievances that had pushed some communities toward the Taliban.⁵⁴¹ For example, an implementing partner would contract a project to an Afghan company, which would subcontract it to another company or

NGO, which would subcontract it to another; each subcontractor would take a substantial cut—up to 20 percent—for little or no work, according to one former senior USAID official.⁵⁴²

Multiple layers of contractors ate up a lot of funding, leaving little money left to actually do something to benefit the community.⁵⁴³ Subcontractor overhead, in combination with sky-high security costs and standard implementing partner costs, could eat up as much as 75 percent of the budget for some stabilization programs, according to a senior USAID official and a senior MRRD official.⁵⁴⁴ In addition, prices were driven up when different bidders on subcontracted projects conspired to fix them at above-market rates and when well-connected companies captured the market.⁵⁴⁵ For example, a former translator for the Kandahar PRT used his inside knowledge of the contracting process to create a series of shell companies that competed against one another for work, crowding out the competition and then artificially inflating prices.⁵⁴⁶ Likewise, quality was undermined as contract funding was skimmed off to pay various stakeholders, reducing funding for actual implementation.⁵⁴⁷ Academic research identified similar practices in Helmand and documented the practice of “flipping” PRT contracts, or selling to another contractor, with money skimmed off each “flip.”⁵⁴⁸

Direct implementation reduced opportunities for insurgents to highlight real or perceived corruption by increasing financial transparency, improving the quality of work, and reducing cost inflation.⁵⁴⁹ USAID documented that subcontracting provided such reliable opportunities for corruption that certain corrupt officials objected to direct implementation on the grounds it would cut off the flow of their ill-gotten gains.⁵⁵⁰ The impact of corruption in contracting was especially pronounced in Kandahar, where the Karzai and Sherzai families secured a duopoly on major contracts from the international community.⁵⁵¹ In this way, these contracts reshaped the political economy of the province and displaced other tribal and *mujahedeen* leadership of the region.⁵⁵²

Under the direct implementation model, instead of hiring an Afghan company to oversee a project, the USAID implementing partner’s own staff would directly oversee the work. Like the move toward smaller projects, direct implementation was, in part, an attempt to improve program performance, both in terms of the quality of outputs and impact achieved. For example, direct implementation allowed implementing partners to have sufficient control over labor recruitment to ensure local labor was used, increasing impact by ensuring communities reaped the financial benefits of work in their areas.⁵⁵³

Direct implementation also tended to increase financial transparency on a project.⁵⁵⁴ By removing the subcontractor layer, direct implementation had the potential to bolster the impact of projects designed to increase interaction

(and eventually trust) between communities and their Afghan government representatives.⁵⁵⁵ Implementing partner staff, who understood that the point of the project was to build ties between communities and their governments, were able to use projects more directly as leverage to create connections between legitimate local authorities and the Afghan government, as opposed to subcontractors, who had no incentive to do so.⁵⁵⁶ As one USAID official noted, a subcontracted construction firm is incentivized to build as quickly and cheaply as possible and then move on to the next project.⁵⁵⁷

Implementing partners found their situational awareness was better when they adopted direct implementation than when they used subcontractors.⁵⁵⁸ Implementers working on a program with political goals required a nuanced understanding of local dynamics to determine whether and how their program was contributing to or ameliorating sources of instability. Direct implementation enabled implementing partners to learn more about their operating environments, which in turn, better equipped them to pursue their inherently political goal of improving perceptions of local governance. The Community Cohesion Initiative even commissioned third-party research to learn more about the political context of the areas in which it operated.⁵⁵⁹

Direct implementation enabled implementing partners to learn more about their operating environments, which in turn, better equipped them to pursue their inherently political goal of improving perceptions of local governance.

There were limitations as to what could be achieved through direct implementation, however. Each directly implemented project required much more implementing partner staff time than subcontracting, which necessarily limited how much a program could accomplish.⁵⁶⁰ Direct implementation also limited the complexity of the projects that could be undertaken.⁵⁶¹ These factors meant that although direct implementation might improve project performance, it might also increase the cost of programming.

Increased Vetting Requirements Led to Smaller Projects

The move to smaller projects also stemmed from the creation of a new requirement that all subcontracts that met a certain dollar threshold be reviewed by USAID's Vetting Support Unit (VSU) before they could be awarded. When the vetting requirement was created in 2011, it was relatively easy to execute as it only applied to contracts, grants, cooperative agreements, and their sub-awards of \$150,000 or more, as well as all private security contracts.⁵⁶² However, in January 2013, USAID reduced this threshold to \$25,000, dramatically expanding the number of projects affected.⁵⁶³

The months-long wait for the VSU to clear potential grantees and subcontractors incentivized programs to reduce the size of activities to avoid triggering the vetting requirement, and to award grants to government officials, who were more easily vetted than other recipients.⁵⁶⁴ Programs reported having to reject projects prioritized by community councils in favor of smaller projects that sometimes did not adequately address the identified source of instability.⁵⁶⁵ For example, flood protection walls were reduced in size until they were too short to protect the village that had asked for them.⁵⁶⁶ Vetting delays also negatively affected program responsiveness by significantly increasing the time between activity identification and completion.⁵⁶⁷ In this way, vetting requirements undermined programs' abilities to achieve their desired impact of improving perceptions of service delivery, and thus governance more broadly.⁵⁶⁸

USAID vetting was initially designed to check contracts for connections to a variety of malign actors, from insurgent groups to corrupt power brokers.⁵⁶⁹ However, as SIGAR has previously reported, the VSU stopped vetting for ties to corruption in its first year of operation, focusing instead on identifying possible contractor ties to insurgents. This decision came at a time when the U.S. government had chosen to focus on mid-to-low level corruption, rather than trying to tackle high-level corruption. The belief was that tackling high-level corruption would either require more political capital than available or be largely futile in the absence of Afghan political will.⁵⁷⁰

NSP was a Problematic Model for Stabilization

The move toward smaller-scale community development projects was also an effort to emulate what was considered to be a proven model: the National Solidarity Program, a World Bank-administered program that started in 2003. The program, which was funded by the United States and other countries, was implemented by MRRD. NSP issued grants of \$200 per family (up to \$60,000 per village) to communities to allocate toward projects that were identified by local CDCs.⁵⁷¹ As with a number of stabilization programs, NSP beneficiary communities were required to contribute labor, materials, or other services valued at more than 10 percent of the total cost of each project.⁵⁷² Much of NSP's influence stemmed from the fact that some promising initial results of the World Bank's impact evaluation of the program came out just as the first wave of stabilization programs was being designed.⁵⁷³ By 2012, later results of the World Bank study found that NSP was successful, at least temporarily, in improving perceptions of Afghan government officials at both the central and subnational levels.⁵⁷⁴

NSP was hailed by the Afghan government as the gold standard all other programs should emulate. In an interview with SIGAR, Ehsan Zia, former Minister of Rural Reconstruction and Development, observed:

ON-BUDGET EFFORTS STRUGGLED, TOO

The challenges of managing off-budget programs through implementing partners made the idea of implementing stabilization programs on budget, directly through the government, seem compelling. However, on-budget stabilization programs proved slow and cumbersome.⁵⁷⁵ The Afghan government lacked the capacity to effectively process on-budget funding, and corrupt officials created further challenges.⁵⁷⁶ As described below, two prominent stabilization programs that used on-budget funding (DDP and ASP) were canceled when government performance did not live up to donor expectations.

USAID provided on-budget assistance to the Afghan government to administer the District Delivery Program, which was overseen by IDLG.⁵⁷⁷ DDP had two goals that were difficult to reconcile: rapidly deploy Afghan civil servants to recently cleared districts and do so using on-budget processes. Other programs operated under the assumption that the only way to do something quickly was to bypass the government, and the only way to do something effectively through the government was to proceed slowly. DDP tried and failed to push through this tension.⁵⁷⁸ This conflict illustrates the disconnect between the overarching goals of the Afghan government and those of the United States and its coalition partners generally. While some Afghan officials were interested in improving long-term governance capacity, the United States and its coalition partners were focused on the shorter-term goal of stabilizing the country's most contested areas through quick-impact programming.

DDP was ultimately canceled after USAID interpreted the Afghan government's slow and nebulous financial accounting procedures as corruption. A senior governance advisor to USAID told SIGAR the agency withdrew its support for DDP after the program spent only \$2.3 million of its \$40 million budget, and in response to allegations that funds were misallocated. However, both the advisor and a USAID third-party evaluation attributed this discrepancy to the government's slower process of using hard-copy receipts to report expenditures, and concluded that no fraud or abuse of funds had taken place.⁵⁷⁹

Years earlier, the Afghanistan Stabilization Program, one of the few other programs to attempt to support subnational governance through on-budget assistance, also saw donors withdraw funds when progress proved too slow and poor management and political infighting within the government too problematic.⁵⁸⁰ The purpose of the program was to (1) extend the reach of the government of Afghanistan into the districts and provinces by building physical infrastructure, (2) enhance the capacity of local governance through the personnel reform and restructuring and staff training for provincial and district-level officials, (3) increase the legitimacy of the government through the delivery of reconstruction projects reconstruction projects, and (4) conduct administrative and financial reforms to ensure funding flowed to the subnational levels.⁵⁸¹ However, the United States, UK, and Canada reduced or completely withdrew funding from the program after a 2005 management change at the lead Afghan agency, the Ministry of Interior. Subsequently, many of ASP's functions were duplicated by new, off-budget programs, including ASOP.⁵⁸²

Because NSP was implemented by the government and it delegated authority to the people, it decreased the distance between the people and the government. Through this program, people were trusted and technical and financial support was handed to them. It created stability by bringing people together around issues at the village level. NSP was the first program of its kind in the history of Afghanistan.⁵⁸³

The U.S. government also publicly praised the program and allocated resources accordingly. According to a 2011 Senate Foreign Relations Committee Majority report on assistance to Afghanistan, NSP was the best example of a national program that strengthened local governance and the social contract between the state and citizens.⁵⁸⁴ However, by 2014 the U.S. government position on NSP had become more nuanced. In a response to a SIGAR inquiry, while continuing to argue that the program supported community-level engagement in decision making, USAID cited a lack of evidence that NSP increased stability in insecure parts of Afghanistan and stated it had ended its practice of preferencing contributions to the Afghanistan Reconstruction Trust Fund (ARTF), which financed NSP.⁵⁸⁵ By 2015, however, the agency had once again begun preferencing funding to NSP.⁵⁸⁶

NSP embodied many of the characteristics that stabilization programs were moving toward: It used a consultative community development approach on relatively small projects.⁵⁸⁷ Because of its extensive community engagement process, NSP was transparent to communities and less vulnerable (though not invulnerable) to elite capture. The small dollar values involved reduced the temptation among power brokers to co-opt community development processes.⁵⁸⁸ Because NSP was directly implemented by facilitating partners contracted by the Afghan government, it was more cost effective to implement than programs that relied on subcontractors: 72 percent of NSP funding went to community block grants and just 28 percent to implementing partner and administrative costs.⁵⁸⁹ In contrast, as much as 75 percent of funding for other stabilization programs went toward administrative costs.⁵⁹⁰

NSP was also integrated into the Afghan government, supporting the formation of CDCs at the community level and linking them to higher-level government structures through DDAs at the district level.⁵⁹¹ In addition, studies of the impact of NSP projects showed the program built its credibility with beneficiary communities as a local governance process when projects were implemented in a timely fashion.⁵⁹² This finding affirmed the post-surge emphasis on smaller and simpler, which, in turn, made it possible to implement projects faster. According to Eshan Zia, former MRRD minister, “Project delivery should take place before people forget what was promised to them by a minister, a director, or the president in their meeting with him.”⁵⁹³

The success of this model, and its endorsement by Secretary of State Clinton in December 2009, led USAID to try to incorporate that approach into its project design.⁵⁹⁴ However, in their rush to adopt the NSP model, the United States and other donors glossed over a few critical points. First, the initial two phases of NSP, which operated prior to 2013, were largely focused on more secure parts of the country.⁵⁹⁵ The influential World Bank study, whose promising early results helped shape the surge-era round of stabilization programs, excluded highly insecure southern districts “due to ongoing violent conflict.” Unsurprisingly, project impact was significantly weaker in the less-secure eastern districts covered by the NSP evaluation, so it was a problematic model for stabilization programs, which were concentrated in the country’s most-contested districts.⁵⁹⁶

Project impact was significantly weaker in the less-secure eastern districts covered by the NSP evaluation, so it was a problematic model for stabilization programs, which were concentrated in the country’s most-contested districts.

Second, part of NSP’s success was that it had a high level of Afghan ownership at the central level, unlike other stabilization programs. For example, the SIKAs were undermined by fighting between MRRD and IDLG.⁵⁹⁷ The clear advantage of this strong partnership with the Afghan government was that it was easier to make the government look effective when it was playing a more substantive role and demonstrating its own effectiveness, than when the role of the government was merely to provide a rubber stamp of approval.⁵⁹⁸

Third, the in-depth community engagement process used by NSP required significantly more time to implement than USAID had been allotted for its stabilization programs, which faced demands to demonstrate progress in months, if not weeks.⁵⁹⁹ NSP’s ideal process included between two and five community meetings over the course of up to six months before CDCs were formed, and its ideal timeframe was two and a half years between when the implementing partner made initial contact with a community and the implementation of a project.⁶⁰⁰ This lengthy process, and the buy-in it achieved, was more important in establishing the program’s legitimacy with communities than the single, small-scale infrastructure project that resulted from it.⁶⁰¹

Fourth, NSP funding was based on population and intended to be distributed equally.⁶⁰² The program operated in all 34 provinces of Afghanistan, reaching an estimated two-thirds of rural Afghans.⁶⁰³ In contrast, stabilization programs were focused on the most contested communities in the country. The fact that the benefits of stabilization programs were not distributed equitably undermined

their attempts to bolster local government legitimacy. Such legitimacy is conditioned, in part, on the perception of a fair allocation of resources.⁶⁰⁴

* * * * *

While traditional U.S. stabilization programming has been discontinued in Afghanistan, the transition process and new emphasis on governance (rather than stabilization) has led USAID to focus its subnational programming at the provincial and municipal levels. The only USAID program covered in this report that continued programming well into 2017 is the Kandahar Food Zone, which is currently scheduled to end in August 2018. KFZ's primary focus remains on promoting alternatives to poppy cultivation through the provision of infrastructure improvements, among other activities, in the districts of Panjwayi and Zhari, not stabilization, per se.⁶⁰⁵

The Afghan government, meanwhile, has ended its National Solidarity Program. NSP's successor program, the Citizens' Charter Afghanistan Project, continues NSP's mission of extending basic service delivery to communities through the same governance mechanisms and processes created by NSP, issuing small grants to communities that identify projects through a deliberative process led by informal community representatives. As with NSP, USAID funds the Citizens' Charter through contributions to the ARTF.⁶⁰⁶ Recognizing the limitations of Afghan security forces in protecting the program's beneficiaries in the country's most dangerous areas, the Citizens' Charter has declined to program in a third of Afghanistan's districts, which were deemed too insecure to cover.⁶⁰⁷



U.S. Army photo

CHAPTER 6

DOD STABILIZATION PROGRAMS

While stabilization was often framed as the civilian component of COIN, the military also spent considerable resources on stabilization programming. Especially in key terrain districts, the civilian and military roles in the hold phase of COIN overlapped, as the military could often respond faster and operate in more dangerous areas than coalition civilians could. Two programs, in particular, illustrate how the military attempted to rebuild Afghanistan from the bottom up: the Commander's Emergency Response Program and Village Stability Operations.

COMMANDER'S EMERGENCY RESPONSE PROGRAM

CERP was a funding mechanism designed to enable military commanders in Iraq to “respond to urgent humanitarian relief and reconstruction requirements within their areas of responsibility, by carrying out programs that will immediately assist the Iraqi people and support the reconstruction of Iraq.”⁶⁰⁸ It also was intended to support force protection by creating jobs, winning hearts and minds, and improving security.⁶⁰⁹ In November 2003, Congress authorized a similar program in Afghanistan.⁶¹⁰ DOD created project categories for the expenditure of funds, but gave commanders wide latitude to identify and select projects based on conditions in their area of responsibility.⁶¹¹ The broad

goal of CERP's humanitarian assistance projects before 2009 was to help ease the burden of a heavy military footprint in communities and reduce violent resistance to the coalition presence. CERP was not designed or intended as a tool to extend the reach of the government, though some of its implementers, particularly PRTs, had that explicit mission and used CERP to achieve it.⁶¹²

The initial guidance on the appropriate use of CERP funds was refined and codified in the 2005 Financial Management Regulation (FMR) for CERP, which outlined seven prohibited project types, such as entertainment and reward programs, and a broad list of 15 authorized categories, including irrigation, agriculture, electricity, transportation, and "other urgent humanitarian or reconstruction projects."⁶¹³ A September 2005 update to the FMR provided more specific guidance on the intended application of CERP funds for small-scale, urgent-need projects.⁶¹⁴

The 2005 FMR guidance divided the responsibility for CERP program oversight between the Undersecretary of Defense (Comptroller), who was responsible for program policies, procedures, and reporting to Congress; the Secretary of the Army, who was responsible for developing "detailed procedures . . . to ensure that unit commanders carry out CERP in a manner consistent with applicable laws" and regulations, including "rules for expending CERP funds through contracts and grants;" and the CENTCOM commander, who was responsible for allocating and requesting funds across commands.⁶¹⁵ Per FMR guidance, the authority for determining which projects would "immediately assist" the Afghan people was delegated to commanders at the brigade level and below.⁶¹⁶

Guidance on the use of CERP funds evolved in subsequent years as the amount of funds obligated to the program swelled. When CERP arrived in Afghanistan in 2004, its budget was \$40 million; by 2009, it was nearly 14 times larger, at over \$550 million.⁶¹⁷ The growth in CERP funding coincided with an increase in troop numbers and operations.

CERP activity in Afghanistan during the 2004–2009 timeframe was concentrated in the eastern and southeastern provinces that bordered Pakistan, the focus for U.S. efforts during that stage of the conflict.⁶¹⁸ The funds were used by PRTs, conventional military units, and special operations forces (SOF) for a wide range of projects, including transportation, education, agriculture, water, and sanitation.⁶¹⁹

CERP Becomes an Instrument of Counterinsurgency

The increase in U.S. forces during the 2009–2012 period and the advent of a modified counterinsurgency strategy affected most aspects of coalition activity in Afghanistan, and CERP was no exception. In the case of CERP, the



Afghans sit on food donations in the back of a pick-up before distributing to needy families in Nawa District, Helmand Province, in September 2010. (U.S. Marine Corps photo by Sgt. Mark Fayloga)

emphasis on engaging the Afghan population manifested itself in changes to the number, character, and location of new projects.⁶²⁰ While CERP had often been used by PRTs and other commanders for emergency humanitarian aid and reconstruction, in 2009 CERP became an instrument of the USFOR-A COIN mission to improve government legitimacy and displace Taliban influence. USFOR-A, which assumed responsibility for CERP in May 2009, sought to empower and encourage military commanders to implement CERP projects after clearing operations to demonstrate the services and benefits that would accompany a robust Afghan government presence.⁶²¹ In this way, the military came to regard the spending of money itself as a “weapon system.”⁶²² In turn, the hope was the Taliban would not be welcome to return to these targeted communities, and the government would come to be seen as legitimate and capable enough to sustain the infrastructure and services seeded by CERP.⁶²³

After 2009, the focus of CERP spending began to shift toward agriculture projects and others designed to improve local economic conditions, both of which saw an increase in the share of total obligation and project numbers.⁶²⁴ Meanwhile, the U.S. Senate was expressing concern that CERP was being used for large-scale reconstruction projects, rather than the smaller projects that it was originally designed to support. In 2011, Congress created the Afghanistan Infrastructure Fund (AIF) as a programmatic corollary to implement the larger infrastructure projects for COIN that CERP had been taking on in the absence of an alternative funding mechanism.⁶²⁵ Thus, as the AIF came online, there was a concomitant reduction in DOD’s CERP funding requests.⁶²⁶



Members of Khost PRT meet with engineers and beneficiaries on May 2, 2010, to discuss an upcoming infrastructure project. (DOD photo)

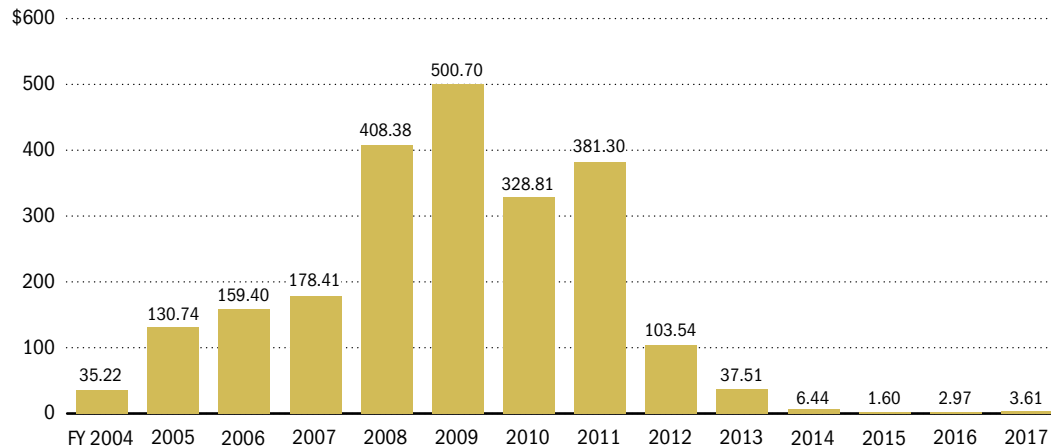
During this period there was a decrease in the average cost of projects, which could be attributed to a combination of factors, including the surge in troop levels, the emphasis on counterinsurgency activities, congressional scrutiny, establishment of the AIF, and new restrictions on projects over \$500,000.⁶²⁷ The majority of CERP projects initiated in Afghanistan throughout the course of the conflict were initiated between FY 2010 and FY 2012. At the apex of the surge in 2011, small projects of less than \$5,000 accounted for 95 percent of all CERP projects.⁶²⁸ Thus, while overall CERP disbursements declined as the surge took shape, the number of initiated projects increased.

Strategic decisions about where and how to concentrate the surge effort also drove a geographic redistribution of CERP. For example, there was a shift from areas adjacent to the border with Pakistan during the 2004–2009 period to the Taliban heartland in Kandahar and Helmand after 2009.⁶²⁹ Spending was also concentrated in areas of those districts that had larger populations, higher levels of economic development, and higher agricultural productivity.⁶³⁰ The pivot to southern Afghanistan was most dramatic in 2010 and 2011.⁶³¹ The upshot of the simultaneous shift to the south and increase in project funding was that nearly 60 percent of CERP funds obligated in Afghanistan between 2010 and 2011 were obligated for projects in Kandahar and Helmand.⁶³²

CERP ultimately supported projects in all 34 of Afghanistan's provinces; more than 90 percent of these projects cost less than \$50,000 each. The number

FIGURE 9

AFGHANISTAN CERP DISBURSEMENTS FROM FY 2004–FY 2017 (\$ MILLIONS)



Source: DOD, response to SIGAR data call, January 17, 2018.

of new CERP projects began to decline in 2012, as USFOR-A transitioned security responsibilities to the ANDSF.⁶³³ In the summer of 2013, NATO began to transition security responsibilities for the fifth and final tranche of districts to Afghan security forces, and in December 2014, the ISAF mission in Afghanistan concluded.⁶³⁴ Throughout the 2012 to 2014 period, as U.S. forces withdrew from the south and east, CERP pivoted toward Kabul and the neighboring provinces of Parwan, Logar, and Wardak, where nearly 90 percent of CERP spending took place in 2014.⁶³⁵ CERP funding continued to decrease sharply, from \$10 million in appropriations in 2015, to \$5 million in both 2016 and 2017.⁶³⁶ From 2004–2017, CERP disbursed \$2.3 billion in Afghanistan. (See figure 9.)

Implementation

Our analysis of the implementation of CERP suggests senior policymakers devoted money to a program with no overarching strategy, and without effective systems for collecting, analyzing, and interpreting data. The result was a program that spent \$2.3 billion in a profoundly underdeveloped economy with unknown effects.

Monitoring and Evaluation Were Poor

Within DOD, there were important distinctions between the concepts of measuring performance and measuring effectiveness. Measures of performance looked at task accomplishment, such as the physical quality of a newly constructed training facility for security forces, while measures of effectiveness (also called measures of effect) might look at the impact of the training facility on security. The latter was clearly more difficult to define and measure.⁶³⁷

Twice during 2009, official CERP guidance emphasized the need for improved performance metrics. In May 2009, for example, USFOR-A published *Money as a Weapon System—Afghanistan (MAAWS-A)*, which provided guidance on CERP processes and made performance metrics a requirement for all projects over \$50,000. The December 2009 update to MAAWS-A made performance metrics a requirement for all projects, regardless of dollar value.⁶³⁸ MAAWS-A put the USFOR-A J9—the civil affairs directorate—in charge of ensuring subordinate commanders and program managers developed “tangible performance metrics to measure effectiveness of projects.”⁶³⁹ The December 2009 update went one step further and made measures of effectiveness a requirement for all CERP projects, regardless of dollar value. However, the relevant section in the update did not actually provide guidance as to how to measure a project’s impact after implementation, but instead listed required considerations to justify initiating a project. For example, beforehand, implementers were required to think about and document a project’s anticipated sustainability and how it was hoped to benefit the local population, but MAAWS-A did not require or provide any guidance to implementers as to how to determine whether a project was effective after it was complete.⁶⁴⁰

A former senior USFOR-A official in charge of CERP implementation confirmed to SIGAR that reporting on project impact, as described in MAAWS-A, was not formalized:

There was no formal way of reporting CERP impact. When you request a project, you include the expected impact you think the project will have, but if we built a school, we never went back to do a nose count of the students at the school. MAAWS-A requires that we identify performance metrics up front—for example, when we are proposing a project, we have to outline what success will look like, the number of students educated per year, and other things—but it doesn’t require anything about evaluating the impact after the project is complete. Commanders at the battalion and brigade level would be the ones to ask questions about project effectiveness, especially after arriving in country when everything was unknown to them, but we at USFOR-A would never ask those questions.⁶⁴¹

Delegating impact evaluation to subordinate units with little guidance proved to be a recurring problem, which is discussed further below. However, this former official’s framing of the recurring problem highlights another important point. Counting the number of students educated during the school year is not measuring effectiveness, but rather something between performance and effectiveness, or what development professionals call outcome: the immediate effects of a project or intervention. However, USFOR-A did not build that school because education was its end goal. According to an unsigned ISAF CERP strategy draft from 2010, which provides insight into senior leaders’ thinking at the time, the goal of CERP was to “protect the population, neutralize insurgent networks, and promote effective governance that is acceptable to the Afghan people.”⁶⁴² In other words, while CERP built schools to educate children, the end

goal was winning hearts and minds; therefore, counting the number of students in school could not measure the effectiveness of CERP. A far more complex measuring stick was required, one based on, perhaps, levels of violence or Afghan perceptions of their government. The military's struggle to measure CERP's effectiveness became clear as the subject of evaluating impact received increasing attention from outside observers and even some senior commanders.

In September 2009, following congressional scrutiny of CERP, the CENTCOM commander sent a memorandum to the commanders of USFOR-A and Multi-National Force-Iraq instructing them to establish and use more refined project evaluation and validation criteria for CERP in order to “preserve the program as a key non-kinetic COIN tool.”⁶⁴³ By August 2010, ISAF Joint Command (IJC) was developing CERP guidance that emphasized, “CERP is a weapon and will be treated as one. Personnel will train and practice in its use and will conduct ‘battle damage assessments’ to determine the effects of CERP expenditures.”⁶⁴⁴ A few months later, the U.S. Army Audit Agency called for USFOR-A to develop CERP “baselines” before completing projects to enable units to clearly compare conditions before and after a project was implemented.⁶⁴⁵ The February 2011 update to MAAWS-A appears to be the first time USFOR-A documented the need to measure CERP projects’ impacts on their area of operations, which is distinct from performance metrics.⁶⁴⁶

Interviews with personnel who attempted to develop metrics revealed they struggled to devise methods to measure a project’s impact on the counterinsurgency fight.⁶⁴⁷ Often, the metrics that were developed were meant to prevent fraud, not to understand a project’s impact on COIN. For example, a former senior USFOR-A official in charge of CERP finances said:

On the larger projects, we made sure our measures of performance were good, for example, was the hospital built properly, did it have X number of doctors working in it, and other factors—but we had no idea how to measure if the hospital’s existence was reducing support for the Taliban. That was always the last 10 yards that we couldn’t run. . . . We never broke the code on impact.⁶⁴⁸



Afghan laborers move dirt and gravel up a series of platforms to the roof of a new prison in Tarin Kowt, Uruzgan Province, on February 1, 2011. (U.S. Air Force photo by 1st Lt. Matt Schroff)



Members of Khost PRT check the quality of the work done on the Hassan Khot school roof on July 3, 2010. (U.S. Air Force photo by Senior Airman Julianne M. Showalter)

Civil affairs personnel also encountered significant conceptual and practical problems when they tried to improve impact evaluation methods. A stabilization operations planner in RC-East said:

I wanted to develop metrics for measuring impact for each project, but it was so hard to know what was causing security in any particular area to improve or worsen, and we could only get about 10 percent of the data we wanted to evaluate anything. So, we decided it was too hard to focus on impact at the project level. The only metrics we ever developed were anchored in financial management: making sure people got paid and making sure things were built.⁶⁴⁹

The former senior USFOR-A official in charge of CERP implementation cited similar metrics derived from the process of implementation rather than results, such as the number of occasions when CERP implementers left their bases or the number of contacts they had with Afghan officials.⁶⁵⁰ He attributed the inadequate evaluations to staffing decisions and an institutional emphasis on checking boxes and following bureaucratic processes:

[Civil affairs] didn't have the staff to review project effectiveness because it was never a priority. We did a good job of vetting projects and making sure all the boxes were checked, but we had no infrastructure in place to assess the effectiveness of projects. We only cared about questions like, 'Does the project meet legal/ethical requirements? Did the Army Corps of Engineers and other required entities sign off on it?'⁶⁵¹

Others echoed these concerns, saying that evaluating impact was not part of the workflow, and if it had been, it would have required additional time and personnel that no one had.⁶⁵² Spending more time measuring one project's impact would have meant less time requesting and implementing new projects, which was an important criteria against which commanders and civil affairs

(CA) units were judged, as related to CERP.⁶⁵³ USFOR-A's struggle to create measures of effectiveness and implementers' lack of time to develop (much less implement) them meant that, in practice, tracking and reporting on effectiveness was often not a requirement. As one civil affairs officer noted about assessing impact, "If it's not a due-out, it won't happen. The bureaucracy has to be set up so that we are both motivated and able to evaluate impact."⁶⁵⁴

The metrics that were developed for CERP were meant to prevent fraud, not to understand a project's impact on COIN.

The March 2012 version of MAAWS-A placed more emphasis on the need to collect data and measure performance and effectiveness, both in terms of COIN effects and economic effects.⁶⁵⁵ However, it is not clear that emphasizing and staffing for improved impact evaluation would have translated into a clearer picture of project impact. Policy researchers and academics who have attempted to evaluate the impact of CERP have often returned inconclusive or conflicting results. A prime example is the body of work that uses violence as a proxy for instability. That body of research variously found:

1. There was no relationship between CERP spending and violence in Afghanistan.⁶⁵⁶
2. Small CERP projects might more effectively reduce violence than large CERP projects.⁶⁵⁷
3. CERP reduced violence in Iraq. In a later study, the same team found that aid was more likely to reduce violence when projects were small, security force presence was high, and development professionals contributed their expertise.⁶⁵⁸
4. CERP activity for projects costing less than \$50,000 was associated with reduced violence; for projects above \$50,000, CERP activity may have been associated with increased levels of violence.⁶⁵⁹
5. CERP construction activity failed to decrease levels of violence regardless of project cost.⁶⁶⁰
6. CERP increased violence in contested districts, but it tamped down violence against security forces in areas under their control. Even in government-controlled areas, more than a million dollars in CERP spending was estimated to be required for every attack prevented.⁶⁶¹
7. CERP was associated with improved security, increased intelligence collection, and decreased enemy engagements.⁶⁶²

In summary, the evidence is conflicting and inconclusive. One study noted in 2012, "In an environment with little reliable quantitative data, with numerous independent variables that make determining correlation (not to mention causality) virtually impossible, and where Western-style public opinion polling methodologies

may not be reliable, the determination of impact may have to be more art than science.”⁶⁶³ As one senior civil affairs officer said, his division staff “would regularly tell COMISAF [Commander, ISAF], ‘CERP is a terrible development tool, but it’s a great stabilization tool,’ but we never knew if it was true.”⁶⁶⁴

Data Limitations

Even if universally applicable metrics had existed, it seems likely that poor record keeping and knowledge management processes would have limited their utility. The extant data on CERP in Afghanistan is spotty, with significant gaps, omissions, and duplicates. In 2009, SIGAR found that more than half of the CERP project files it reviewed from the 2007–2009 period were incomplete.⁶⁶⁵ A 2010 review of CERP project files by the U.S. Army Audit Agency found that 92.6 percent of the records reviewed—212 of 229—were not complete, and the gaps were often important documents.⁶⁶⁶

One former senior USFOR-A official in charge of CERP finances described the state of the CERP data in the Combined Information Data Network Exchange (CIDNE) database when he arrived in Afghanistan:

Getting projects into CIDNE was a big deal and a big problem. There were 3000 incomplete projects when I came into theater, and we had no idea if they were actually completed but never closed out, or simply abandoned midway. Many were open for six months, which usually meant they were finished but never closed out, but we couldn’t know unless we put eyes on them. So, we sent taskings down for civil affairs to check every single project to get CIDNE up to date. . . . Our two teams spent most of their time cleaning and reconciling CIDNE reports. So many of the reports had been mismanaged. You’d see the same picture of a clinic posted to a hundred different clinic project reports around the country, and you’d see the same project justification word for word on a hundred different CERP reports.⁶⁶⁷

Poor documentation practices by implementers may have been caused by ignorance of appropriate data management requirements, entrenched local administrative practices, or passive resistance to red tape. PRTs, which managed a large share of CERP funds, sometimes inherited documentation procedures from their predecessors, rather than following official requirements, which created a legacy of unique data management practices.⁶⁶⁸

“You’d see the same picture of a clinic posted to a hundred different clinic project reports around the country, and you’d see the same project justification word for word on a hundred different CERP reports.”

—Former senior USFOR-A official

The Institutional Drive to “Do Something”

Many civilian and military personnel at all levels continued to believe CERP was a useful program that supported U.S. policy objectives in Afghanistan, despite a lack of formal program evaluations and a preponderance of poor quality program data. A recent account of senior civilian and military leaders' views on CERP observed that most continue to believe CERP was a valuable tool at the tactical level, particularly when used to implement small projects.⁶⁶⁹ The faith that senior leaders had in CERP was on display in their internal deliberations. In 2010, ISAF drafted CERP strategy guidance that stated, "CERP is helping to win trust, promote civil infrastructure development, and meet emergency needs of the people in Afghanistan."⁶⁷⁰

"At one point, I told my brigade that if we are going to ignore impact, then the smartest thing to do is nothing. I got crickets. 'We can't build nothing,' they said."

—Senior civil affairs officer

But senior leaders' expressions of confidence in CERP were out of step with the warnings that were coming from watchdog groups like the Government Accountability Office (GAO), SIGAR, the DOD Inspector General (DOD IG), and the Army Audit Agency that highlighted the program's unproven efficacy. One clue as to how and why the military was able to reconcile these alternate views of CERP can be found in a 2009 USFOR-A response to a SIGAR inspection report on a CERP-funded road construction project. In that case, USFOR-A said they strived "for a balance between static inaction and dynamic reconstruction efforts that move the Afghanistan people forward" and referenced an "obligation to make progress with respect to reconstruction efforts."⁶⁷¹ The implication was that although the problems with the CERP status quo might be glaring, the military was charged with meeting obligations and achieving certain effects, and those tasks required action, regardless of whether DOD's efforts could be sustained. Conditions were not ripe for success, but "static inaction" was not a solution either. One senior civil affairs officer who deployed to RC-East multiple times said, "At one point, I told my brigade that if we are going to ignore impact, then the smartest thing to do is nothing. I got crickets. 'We can't build nothing,' they said."⁶⁷²

Buying Victory

Pressure to generate results translated into an emphasis on spending CERP dollars as quickly as possible. According to General Petraeus, "What drove spending was the need to solidify gains as quickly as we could, knowing that we had a tight drawdown timeline. . . . And we wound up spending faster than we would have if we felt we had forces longer than we did."⁶⁷³ The pressure to spend CERP funds often came from senior officials who, like Petraeus, felt

political pressure to generate results and shared a belief in the power of CERP expenditures. A senior USAID official in southern Afghanistan recalled, “There was a real and pervasive belief that if you dumped money into an economy, you could save it. Those of us who said otherwise were ignored. . . . The strategy was ‘money expended equals success.’”⁶⁷⁴

“There was a real and pervasive belief that if you dumped money into an economy, you could save it. Those of us who said otherwise were ignored. . . . The strategy was ‘money expended equals success.’”

—Senior USAID official

At the brigade level and below, CERP project implementers reported that the burn rate was excessive, but their pleas to slow the spending fell on deaf ears. The senior USAID official said that infantry commanders were going outside their chain of command and urging USAID staff to help “‘turn the money off.’ They kept telling me, ‘We’re having to look for people and projects to spend it on.’”⁶⁷⁵

The difficulty of understanding the complex political and social dimensions of the environment and developing suitable metrics, combined with the pressure to generate demonstrable results, led military forces to measure things they could see, which in this case was the outflow of CERP dollars. Thus, money became the metric for implementers, such as the PRTs, who were judged on how much they spent, among other criteria.⁶⁷⁶ As a former senior USFOR-A CERP official



U.S. Air Force Tech. Sgt. Latha Caillouette, a PRT Zabul engineer, shows contractors erosion control repairs that are needed at a bridge in Shah Joy District, Zabul Province, on March 4, 2011. (U.S. Air Force photo by 1st Lt. Brian Wagner)

described, in Afghanistan, “no one in the military was ever given credit for saving money.”⁶⁷⁷

CERP may have overshadowed the Afghan government and its equivalent local development initiatives, such as the National Solidarity Program.⁶⁷⁸ Both programs typically implemented small projects, and both sought to use those projects as springboards for building relationships between the community and the government. According to a number of U.S. officials, CERP was a direct competitor to the Afghan government’s efforts, particularly NSP, which was regarded as relatively successful.⁶⁷⁹ Whether CERP overshadowed the Afghan government or not, many DOD personnel felt it was beneficial. A survey of uniformed personnel conducted by RAND suggested that 60 percent of Marines and 80 percent of special operators who had been involved with the use of CERP at the tactical or operational level believed CERP helped their mission. Even some of the 30 percent of Marines who said the program may have hindered their mission believed that it could be effective if it was paired with improved operational and strategic guidance.⁶⁸⁰

Lack of Priorities Inhibited Thoughtful Deliberation

Abundant funds, weak guidance, and pressure to spend and generate results also contributed to poor project planning and distracted from the need to assess project impacts. A senior civil affairs officer pointed out:

In a resource-restricted environment, if you want your project to be funded, it has to be rigorous and thoughtful. If the resources are infinite, there is no need to use your head or be accountable. If we don’t have to make any tradeoffs, priorities, or sacrifices, why would we think at all? If no one has to ask why, the ideas are going to be awful. And that’s what happened.⁶⁸¹

This was a significant departure from spending habits earlier in the war, when CERP budgets were leaner and thus projects were more thoughtful. Brigadier General Martin Schweitzer, who commanded U.S. forces in eastern Afghanistan from 2006 to 2007, observed, “Early on it was a very deliberate process. We assessed where we’d get the biggest bang for the buck, and if an area wasn’t ready, we didn’t spend there.”⁶⁸²

RAND’s interviews with CERP implementers indicated projects that were poorly designed for a given context contributed to what they considered to be project failures.⁶⁸³ Inadvertently building a road through local farmers’ cropland or providing motorcycles to Afghan Local Police without a maintenance plan undermined the projects’ intended effects.⁶⁸⁴

While CERP guidance provided definitions and example projects for each of the approved project categories, commanders were given flexibility to develop projects specific to their areas of operation. A 2009 report by the

U.S. Army Audit Agency revealed that some projects described as “urgent and humanitarian” in nature were in some cases large infrastructure projects, economic projects, or “quality of life” efforts that pushed the boundaries of the permissible scope of CERP funds.⁶⁸⁵

Shortage of Qualified Civil Affairs Personnel

Another significant challenge for CERP implementation was the shortage of well-trained and experienced personnel. Although civil affairs was the military’s premier specialization for stability and humanitarian operations, many CA personnel were unfamiliar with CERP and received insufficient training on its use. Implementers often failed to follow CERP processes and guidelines, such as filing legal reviews and statements of work.⁶⁸⁶

The GAO, DOD IG, and Army Audit Agency attributed some of the bureaucratic dysfunction to poor training, but there was another layer to the problem that was often overlooked by outside observers.⁶⁸⁷ According to one senior CA officer, “When I would ask RC-E CERP managers to explain the impact of a specific project being considered, I was often told, ‘It might work,’ as its justification. None of them had development backgrounds; they were only concerned with preventing waste, fraud, and abuse at the most simple level.”⁶⁸⁸ Personnel were not only ill-prepared to document and implement projects, they were also sometimes unprepared to properly conceptualize projects.

The conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan revealed a need for more personnel with special skillsets outside traditional, conventional military occupations; these skillsets included civil affairs. In recognition of the demand for units with



Afghan government officials and members of PRT Zabul meet with elders in Safidar village in Zabul Province in February 2011 to discuss the distribution of winter supplies. (U.S. Air Force photo by Staff Sgt. Brian Ferguson)

“softer” skills, DOD made the decision in 2006 to sharply increase the number of civil affairs units.⁶⁸⁹ However, the surge’s demand for civil affairs personnel outstripped supply, which was limited by training timelines; newly trained CA personnel did not finish training until 2008. In 2009, a number of units specializing in chemical warfare were converted to CA units to help further address the shortage.⁶⁹⁰

These stopgap measures and rapid scaling diluted the quality of CA personnel. Civil affairs is a sophisticated skillset that cannot be mass produced. By trying to do so, the Army degraded the quality of the CA cadre significantly, which, in turn, undermined its ability to oversee CERP. SIGAR interviews revealed concerns about the capabilities and training deficiencies observed among some CA personnel during the height of the surge, for example.⁶⁹¹ One senior CA officer with multiple tours in eastern Afghanistan described how these factors contributed to a dysfunctional personnel system that rose up to the level of senior officers:

Those of us in civil affairs, especially the reserve component, let ourselves be told what our program was in order to accommodate a rapid call-up and surge, which required us to lower our standards for officers and enlisted. We needed bodies. The tempo required us to shorten the CA training to four weeks, and it was all PowerPoint. At one point in the surge, we converted chemical companies into CA companies. So, not only did we minimize what a properly trained civil affairs operator can bring to the fight, but we also glossed over the base requirements. No judgment on our chemical brethren, but many of them were unable to branch transfer when they tried to do so at the completion of their combat tour. Frankly, as a collective whole, they were not competent.

But the real problem was at the senior officer level. We had those who were late arrivals to the CA branch and had no experience leading civil affairs teams. They were then thrust into staff positions on PRTs, brigades, and above with no true understanding of the doctrine or ability to articulate concerns from CA in the field, so they were incapable of preventing CERP from becoming a spending machine.⁶⁹²

By late 2009, the Department of the Army was taking remedial action to address skills and training shortfalls.⁶⁹³ However, by that point, CERP had already been in Afghanistan for half a decade and suffered from poor training, insufficient evaluation systems, and no real strategic direction.

No Consistent CERP Strategy

In accordance with the FMR guidance for CERP, senior leaders devolved a great deal of control over funds and decisions about how and when to implement projects to the brigade level and below. The categories of acceptable projects were broad, which provided commanders the flexibility to address the needs they perceived in their respective areas of operation, but in combination with abundant funding and pressure to spend liberally, this weak guidance resulted in a diverse project portfolio that ran the gamut, both in terms of scale and project type. Senior leaders did not provide clear, strategic guidance and left it



Using CERP funds, Afghan men rebuild markets in Now Zad District, Helmand Province, on December 17, 2009. (U.S. Marine Corps photo by Cpl. Daniel M. Moman)

up to implementers to generate effects from the bottom up. There simply was no consistent or persistent strategy to obtain the results officials hoped would flow from CERP.⁶⁹⁴

The imprecise thinking on how CERP would generate stabilizing effects seeped down to the lower levels where projects were devised and implemented. Consequently, CERP project implementers often did not share a common view of how the program would help stabilize Afghanistan, and many field grade commanders were not able to articulate how their CERP projects aligned with program guidance.⁶⁹⁵ An excerpt from a RAND report is telling:

The general officers we interviewed indicated that use of CERP was rarely part of any considered strategy. . . . Once CERP was created, the focus at the general officer level shifted to monitoring and spending of CERP funds rather than trying to nest CERP into a broader military strategy. . . . With a lack of strategic guidance for CERP, subordinate commanders at the company, battalion, and brigade level would develop their own ‘strategies’ to use CERP.⁶⁹⁶

Thus, divergent lines of thinking developed at the implementer level regarding what CERP was and how it should be employed. As a former senior USFOR-A official in charge of CERP finances observed, “Some wanted CERP to be small—just battlefield remediation with no huge projects—but others thought that we had to make a big difference because the clock was ticking and CERP was the only available funding source we had to create strategically important impacts on behalf of the government of Afghanistan, so the more money we could spend, the better, in their eyes.”⁶⁹⁷ Different perspectives between implementers over

which project characteristics were more likely to generate favorable outcomes were reportedly not isolated incidents.⁶⁹⁸

The various iterations of the MAAWS-A documents are overwhelmingly procedural and focused primarily on financial management. Through 2010, the introductory letters to the MAAWS-A were written by a colonel in the USFOR-A J8, and typically reflected the document's financial management focus. That began to change, however, in February 2011 with the introductory letter by Major General Timothy McHail, who specified that the intent of CERP was to achieve “‘focused effects’ with an emphasis to meet urgent humanitarian needs and providing maximum employment opportunities for the Afghan people.”⁶⁹⁹ The mention of a specific overarching goal for CERP, like supporting Afghan employment, was a step toward tying the program to specific objectives. The following year, a joint introductory letter to the MAAWS-A by General Allen, the ISAF commander, and Ambassador Crocker went a step further in their attempt to synchronize CERP with the Integrated Civ-Mil Campaign Plan and the ISAF Theater Campaign Plan. They wrote:

Thus far, CERP projects have been executed to support the USFOR-A Campaign Support Plan, “Support Sectors Targeted for Development,” “Promote Job Growth,” and “Advance the Economic Foundation” but not as part of a formal strategy or measured in terms of attaining strategic objectives and goals. This MAAWS-A [Standard Operating Procedure] provides the details on narrowing potential CERP projects to five categories (from 20) that are best suited to support our counterinsurgency objectives and refines the list of recommended project types within each category based on desired effects and synchronization within the Campaign Support Plan.⁷⁰⁰

The evolution of the MAAWS-A from 2011 through 2013 demonstrates that commanders in theater recognized and began to address the need for additional guidance and strategic direction for CERP. As the U.S. mission shifted to a support role in 2014 and beyond, U.S. military operations and CERP spending contracted and MAAWS-A reverted to its more procedural antecedents.

VILLAGE STABILITY OPERATIONS

VSO was a DOD program implemented by U.S. Special Operations Forces (SOF) from 2010 to 2014 that attempted to stabilize strategically located villages. A VSO guidance document from 2011 described the program as “a range of planned activities designed to stabilize a village and connect it to formal governance at the district and provincial levels.”⁷⁰¹ The desired outcome was an environment inhospitable to insurgents' influence where legitimate local leaders could provide security and services, with connection to the Afghan government.⁷⁰²

At the village level, a multifunctional team called a Village Stability Platform (VSP) consisted of up to about 50 individuals, including a 12-person SOF team and a support network of intelligence personnel, civil affairs, information

operations personnel, and communications specialists.⁷⁰³ These teams implemented a four-phase VSO process.⁷⁰⁴

VSO Phases

Human terrain generally refers to the social, cultural, political, and economic characteristics of the indigenous population.

Shape: Assess the physical and **human terrain** of an area, engage the local community, build rapport, and establish a small base of operations in or near the community. The phase is complete when the team is accepted by the community.⁷⁰⁵

Hold: Improve local security and counter insurgent intimidation by recruiting and organizing an Afghan Local Police force. The phase is complete when intimidation is eliminated and there is “local capacity” for security, governance, and development.⁷⁰⁶

Build: Connect the village to the Afghan government by creating a symbiotic relationship between an informal, traditional village council and the district government, where the government provides resources and the village provides security and extends the writ of the state. The phase is complete when there is a “clear connection” between the community and the district government.⁷⁰⁷

Expand/Transition: Replicate the success at the community level in adjacent areas, eventually covering the entire district before transferring security responsibilities to the ANDSF.⁷⁰⁸

VSP efforts to connect villages to the district and provincial governments were facilitated by SOF personnel at the district, provincial, and national levels, who, in theory, helped local Afghan officials develop functional relationships with Afghan communities and the national government in Kabul.⁷⁰⁹ In the capital, for example, the Village Stability National Coordination Center was charged with coordinating VSO efforts with the Afghan Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development to ensure national-level development resources made it down to each VSP, so communities would see the benefit of allying with the government.⁷¹⁰ The creators of VSO also envisioned that U.S. SOF teams would partner with Afghan Special Forces teams, who would eventually assume the responsibility for cultivating local forces and expanding the operation after the withdrawal of U.S. forces.⁷¹¹

Origins of VSO

Beginning in 2009, the concept of local security forces protecting their own communities gained traction within the coalition. There were several reasons for the increased interest in local defense forces, in addition to the fact that all other efforts to stem the growing insurgency had failed. These reasons included:

- **Coalition withdrawal:** The anticipated 2014 drawdown of coalition troops articulated at Lisbon in late 2010 demanded that Afghan forces assume responsibility for security, but there was not enough time to properly train and field ANDSF in sufficient numbers to protect key terrain.⁷¹²

- **Local legitimacy:** The largely non-Pashtun ANDSF who were deployed to Pashtun areas, particularly in the south, were viewed by the locals as a foreign force.⁷¹³
- **Security for Afghan partners:** Local Afghans who worked with the U.S. and Afghan governments via programs like the Afghan Social Outreach Program were vulnerable to insurgent attacks.⁷¹⁴
- **The Iraq model:** The success of the Sons of Iraq population mobilization program appeared to have marginalized al-Qaeda and created a semblance of stability.⁷¹⁵
- **Cost:** Local security forces were less expensive than uniformed ANDSF.⁷¹⁶

In October 2008, U.S. and Afghan officials had their first discussions about a local defense initiative that would come to be known as the Afghan Public Protection Program (AP3).⁷¹⁷ Four months after the initial U.S.-Afghan meeting, AP3 began operating within the Ministry of Interior (MOI) at pilot sites in four districts of Wardak Province: Chak, Jalrez, Maidan Shar, and Nerkh.⁷¹⁸ Similar to later programs in the VSO lineage, AP3 was intended to be based on locally sourced security forces who were selected from the community by a representative council of local villagers.⁷¹⁹ In this case, AP3 was initially tied to community councils that were fostered by the USAID-funded Afghan Social Outreach Program, another pilot program in Wardak.⁷²⁰

But AP3 was beset by the same challenges that plagued earlier local police efforts, including recruitment, logistics, and corrupt local commanders.⁷²¹ Further challenges were attributed, at least in part, to the program's Afghan leadership.⁷²² The general consensus among the SOF personnel in Wardak was that the MOI's involvement made implementation overly centralized and bureaucratic.⁷²³ The concept and implementation needed to be refined.

Meanwhile, at U.S. Special Operations Command (SOCOM), Brigadier General Edward Reeder was preparing to deploy to Afghanistan to take charge of the newly created Combined Forces Special Operations Component Command-Afghanistan (CFSOCC-A) in Kabul. Prior to departing SOCOM, Reeder reflected on his 2006–2007 tour as commander of the Combined Joint Special Operations Task Force-Afghanistan (CJSOTF-A), during and after which the insurgency continued to grow, despite CJSOTF-A's aggressive kill/capture missions.⁷²⁴ The failure of “direct action” to stem the insurgency led Reeder and many of his colleagues to conclude that CFSOCC-A needed to take a different approach.⁷²⁵

Reeder began by consulting members of the intelligence community, who described the root causes of seasonal fighting patterns and the ways insurgents gained traction by allying themselves with local communities who were at odds with the majority tribes and their government backers. The product of those

conversations was a new take on local security and governance, the details of which were refined by Reeder's staff.⁷²⁶ The program they created, Community Defense Initiatives (CDI), was based on historical accounts of Afghan politics and society dating back to the 19th century.⁷²⁷ It was, in essence, the first iteration of what would become the VSO model.

When Reeder arrived in country, he discovered the coalition was already employing a similar concept at the AP3 site in Wardak. In Reeder's opinion, however, that effort was not receiving the attention and support it needed to be improved and expanded. Thus, Reeder simply used AP3 to help make the case for CDI and advance the local security and stability agenda. He and his staff consulted and lobbied both the Afghan government and ISAF for support, an effort that took months to gain traction. In the interim, CFSOCC-A proceeded with CDI, but as a low-key sideline project, rather than the main effort.⁷²⁸



New ALP members line up to receive their assigned weapons during a graduation ceremony in Maiwand District, Kandahar Province, on March 16, 2013. (U.S. Army photo)

By the middle of 2009, U.S. Army Special Forces were managing a handful of CDI pilot sites in Nili (Daykundi), Achin (Nangarhar), Gereshk (Helmand), Arghandab and Khakrez (Kandahar), and parts of Paktika.⁷²⁹ Six more sites were added to areas across the south and east.⁷³⁰ These sites produced a collection of lessons that were used as a basis for refining the program concept.⁷³¹ In Daykundi, for example, the 12-man Operational Detachment Alpha (ODA) “operationalized” the concept handed down by CFSOCC-A, developing an implementation plan that foreshadowed the shape-hold-build-transition methodology emphasized by later VSO guidance.⁷³² (See page 108.)

In July 2009, General McChrystal assumed command of ISAF and USFOR-A with a mandate to overhaul the coalition's strategy and implement a counterinsurgency campaign that planners hoped would turn the tide of the conflict. With that in mind, CFSOCC-A briefed McChrystal on the latest local defense concept and won his support to integrate the SOF program into the overarching counterinsurgency strategy.⁷³³ According to Reeder, Afghanistan's CIA Chief of Station had been very supportive of CDI and was instrumental in convincing

McChrystal of the program's merits and potential.⁷³⁴ What emerged was a dual-track SOF program comprising two tasks: (1) cultivating small anti-Taliban militias at the village level (what would eventually become VSO/ALP), and (2) training the Afghan National Army Special Forces (ANASF) to eventually assume the responsibility for militia development, support, and expansion.⁷³⁵

In early 2010, CDI was renamed Local Defense Initiatives (LDI) and two months later received the enduring title of Village Stability Operations.⁷³⁶ Brigadier General Scott Miller took command of CFSOCC-A from Reeder in April of 2010 and began to ramp up VSO, with McChrystal's support.⁷³⁷

By the middle of 2010, General McChrystal was receiving encouraging reports from several VSO sites.⁷³⁸ Special Forces mentors suggested that local security forces had low rates of attrition and desertion, won many battles, created one-mile security bubbles around VSO sites, were more agile and quick to respond than their conventional counterparts, knew local terrain well, and provided quality intelligence.⁷³⁹ Based on those developments, McChrystal began advocating for a major expansion of the program.⁷⁴⁰ He was opposed by U.S. Ambassador Eikenberry and Afghan President Karzai, who both feared these local defense forces would devolve into predatory militias. Eikenberry insisted on a clear approval for the program from both Karzai and his cabinet before the effort was expanded.⁷⁴¹

After replacing McChrystal as ISAF commander in July 2010, General Petraeus also advocated for VSO and personally lobbied Karzai, who eventually agreed.⁷⁴² In August 2010, Karzai formally authorized a 10,000-man force for a period of two to five years.⁷⁴³ Many in the local defense forces were expected to transition into the ANDSF as the VSO program came to a close.⁷⁴⁴

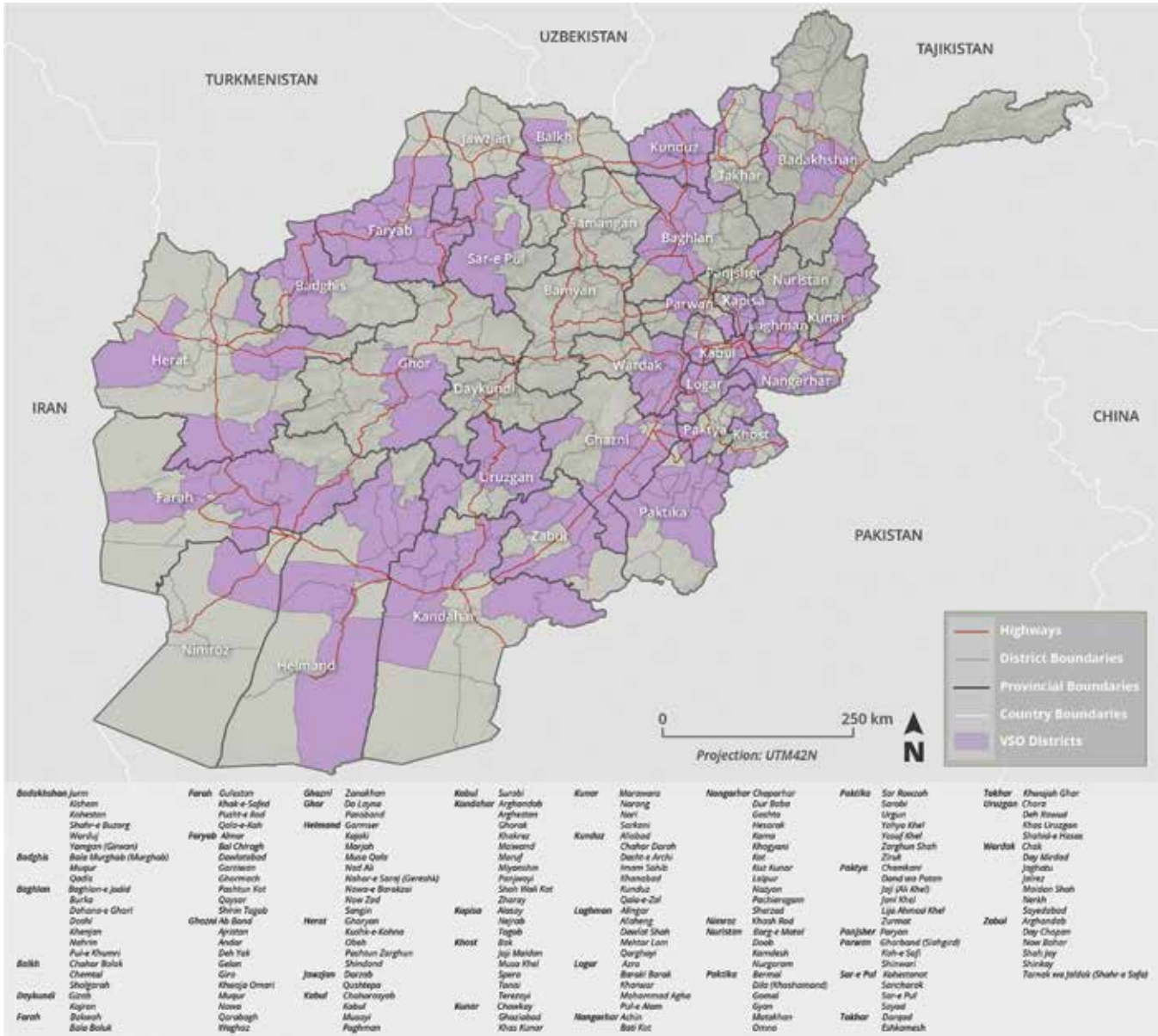
By the time it was approved, the program was already well underway, with VSPs operating at 20 locations around the country.⁷⁴⁵ As expansion got underway, however, the coalition and its Afghan partners began to deviate sharply from the original concept.

Expanding the Afghan Local Police

The perceived success of VSO and ALP during the early years of the program led top military officials to believe the ALP could be a “game changer,” filling the security vacuum as international forces withdrew.⁷⁴⁶ (See figure 10.) The rapid expansion of the program beginning in 2011 was driven by the withdrawal timeline.⁷⁴⁷ Still, according to General Allen, who oversaw the ALP expansion as COMISAF, “Of the many measures we initiated for stabilization, the ALP program was one of the most effective. The ALP stood their ground 80 percent of the time they were attacked. Indeed, the Taliban were more concerned

FIGURE 10

AFGHAN DISTRICTS WITH VILLAGE STABILITY OPERATIONS (VSO)



Source: DOD, Report on Progress Toward Security and Stability in Afghanistan, December 2012, November 2013, April 2014. Map produced by John M. Steed.

about ALP than almost any other single measure taken to protect the Afghan people.”⁷⁴⁸ Yet, many of the challenges that confronted the VSO program first appeared or worsened during this expansion phase. One of the major challenges was establishing and maintaining the legitimacy of the ALP as an extension of the Afghan government.

Absorbing Militias

Rapid ALP growth was achieved, in part, through the wholesale integration of preexisting armed groups. The Afghan government, and President Karzai in particular, seemed to view the ALP as an opportunity to draw private militias into the fold.⁷⁴⁹ A directive from the MOI released in June 2011 stated that, from the ministry's perspective, the aim of the ALP program was to absorb all prior village and district defense programs.⁷⁵⁰ The idea did have a precedent; in August 2010, the original CDI/LDI militias were subsumed into the ALP under the MOI.⁷⁵¹ While that initial round of inductees into the ALP was reasonable given that they were recruited and vetted in accordance with ALP recruitment guidelines, subsequent forces were often not properly processed, which sometimes led to a lack of legitimacy and hostile relations with the local population.⁷⁵² As a result, some Afghan officials began to express reservations about ALP feasibility, including at least one former champion of local defense programs.⁷⁵³

“Of the many measures we initiated for stabilization, the ALP program was one of the most effective. The ALP stood their ground 80 percent of the time they were attacked. Indeed, the Taliban were more concerned about ALP than almost any other single measure taken to protect the Afghan people.”

—General John Allen

In Wardak, for example, the AP3 was slated to be disbanded during FY 2011, but Provincial Governor Halim Fidai argued he needed to provide newly unemployed forces with a mission, and that he also needed them to help secure Highway 1.⁷⁵⁴ With the apparent approval of the MOI, the governor anointed the militiamen as ALP, circumventing the approval and vetting procedures by local communities, which, in theory, would have endowed them with a certain level of legitimacy.⁷⁵⁵ The former AP3 militias brought their predatory practices and lack of legitimacy to the ALP, problems that eventually compelled ISAF to demobilize 260 of them, ostensibly for noncompliance with new MOI ALP guidance published in the summer of 2011, which stipulated that ALP must be locals and properly vetted.⁷⁵⁶

Efforts to expand the ALP into other areas of Wardak failed due to recruiting problems.⁷⁵⁷ Meanwhile, Governor Fidai began to recognize that the ALP were generating popular discontent in his province. In March 2012, he wrote to President Karzai, informing him the ALP were not compatible with the population of Wardak, where the tribal structures had been decimated and even small communities were riven with factionalism. He recommended that the province's 1,600 ALP be disbanded and replaced with 1,000 uniformed police.

In private, senior U.S. military personnel and the civilian leadership in Kabul shared some of Fidai's sentiments.⁷⁵⁸

But the recommendation to curtail ALP numbers ran against the tide. There were ample reports of success as the new VSO methodology and best practices took shape, and the pressure to make progress as transition approached was significant.⁷⁵⁹ In June 2011, Afghan and coalition officials agreed to triple the target strength of the force, from 10,000 to 30,000.⁷⁶⁰ At that point, there were 6,500 ALP personnel distributed across 41 VSPs.⁷⁶¹ By March 2013, there would be nearly 22,000 ALP.⁷⁶²

Six months after the expansion of ALP was announced, Karzai called for the “disbandment” of all local and provincial militias outside of the ALP.⁷⁶³ That order also applied to three ISAF-supported local defense forces: Community-Based Security Solutions in RC-East, Critical Infrastructure Protection (CIP) in RC-North, and Interim Security for Critical Infrastructure in RC-South and RC-Southwest. Those forces were slated for complete demobilization by the end of 2012, with the option of transitioning to ALP after undergoing the MOI's recommended course of vetting.⁷⁶⁴

*Folding preexisting militias into the ALP often
created as many problems as it solved.*

Although well-intentioned, folding preexisting militias into the ALP often created as many problems as it solved. Giving government officials influence over the absorption of existing militias and the recruitment and establishment of new ALP made the process subject to the sway of strongmen. In Baghlan and Kunduz, for example, local Tajik and Uzbek power brokers reportedly hijacked the ALP selection process by marginalizing local elders—who should have been tasked with recruiting and vetting ALP—and selecting their own recruits.⁷⁶⁵ On the other hand, an embassy cable from 2013 noted that rolling the members of a CIP militia into an ALP unit in Kunduz may have resulted in a more disciplined militia and greater political stability than in an adjacent community where the CIP militia was simply disbanded and its members essentially left to their own devices.⁷⁶⁶ In other words, absorbing militias into sanctioned forces like the ALP might give the government a modicum of influence over the force, but creating ties to those militias might sully the government's reputation by signaling its tacit approval for past or future misconduct.

Governance and Legitimacy Take a Back Seat to Rapid Expansion

While the Afghan government advanced the policy of folding other militia forces into the ALP, demands from U.S. policymakers and senior military



ALP stand in formation prior to a validation shura at Ab Band District, Ghazni Province, on March 14, 2013. (U.S. Army photo by Staff Sgt. Jerry Griffis)

officials to expand the force also guided the program away from its original purpose. General Petraeus came to view VSO as an opportunity to fill the security vacuum as coalition forces withdrew.⁷⁶⁷ The overriding focus on ALP development, rather than VSO methodology, caused the implementers of VSO to bypass the political and other nonmilitary aspects of the program.⁷⁶⁸ Thus, according to Scott Mann, who was involved with early implementation of VSO, the local security force component of the originally holistic VSO concept became the program's new *raison d'être*, effectively sidelining the political and development aspects.⁷⁶⁹

Civilian resource constraints only solidified this move away from a holistic VSO process. According to Petraeus, "VSO was working initially, but as it expanded we ran out of development people from the embassy. So, we were trying to replace them with uniformed people, and they're not the professionals in that area."⁷⁷⁰ In this way, a broader initiative based on the VSO process, of which ALP was only one component, eventually became almost exclusively an ALP effort, despite the admonitions of one of the program's early patrons. As Brigadier General Miller, commander of CFSOCC-A, noted, "You can do VSO without ALP, but you can't do ALP without VSO."⁷⁷¹

Not only were governance and development de-emphasized as ALP grew, even the idea of representative governance within the ALP itself became secondary. For example, according to Colonel Bradley Moses, commander of the 3rd Special Forces Group, the rapid development of the ALP meant some ALP were not indigenous to the village or village cluster they were assigned to protect, undermining a fundamental premise of the program.⁷⁷² As one military official noted, "Both at the strategic and operational level, doing VSO/ALP right took a backseat to doing it fast."⁷⁷³

In addition to diminished community outreach and development efforts, the way ALP were trained to secure their area also shifted from the active security procedures practiced under CDI, such as patrolling and meeting with local residents, to a less adaptable and community-oriented approach based on checkpoints and static security. Using ALP for static security in areas outside of their local communities reduced community engagement and made them more vulnerable to attack.⁷⁷⁴

“Both at the strategic and operational level, doing VSO/ALP right took a backseat to doing it fast.”

—U.S. official embedded with VSO

Insufficient Numbers of U.S. Special Operations Forces

The rapid scaling of VSO/ALP outstripped the supply of U.S. SOF and supporting enablers. During the pilot phase, VSO was conducted by U.S. Army Special Forces, units with a long tradition of training indigenous forces that stretched

back to the Vietnam War. In 2010, however, General Petraeus informed CFSOCC-A that other services’ SOF personnel would participate in the VSO ramp-up.⁷⁷⁵ Navy SEALs and Marine Special Operations Command operators were brought in to supplement Army Special Forces.⁷⁷⁶

Even their combined efforts were not enough. There were reports that some SOF units were split in two to cover more VSO sites, albeit with diminished capacity.⁷⁷⁷ In 2011, an annual progress report to Congress highlighted the shortfall in SOF, stating, “The approved expansion to 30,000 ALP patrolmen will likely strain the capacity of the coalition Special Operations Forces in Afghanistan, and may require additional conventional forces in order to adequately support projected ALP growth.”⁷⁷⁸ According to Petraeus, “We didn’t have enough SOF to do VSO, so I added two infantry battalions. And we split all of the [ODA] teams in half, augmented them with a squad or more of infantry, and doubled the number of VSO sites. Again, this was a big-time race against the clock. We needed to extend security while we could, while we had the forces.”⁷⁷⁹



ALP and members of coalition SOF conduct a patrol in Shah Joy District, Zabul Province, on January 27, 2012. (U.S. Navy photo by Mass Communication Specialist 2nd Class Jon Rasmussen)

Special Operations Forces' Uneven Embrace of VSO

The execution of VSO as it was originally conceived was not a simple task. Establishing contact and building rapport required strong interpersonal and cross-cultural communications skills.⁷⁸⁰ Although U.S. SOF who served as VSO team leaders were well versed in military operations, their ability to influence Afghan communities varied.⁷⁸¹

Reports from VSO program staff suggest a disparity between the military services' aptitudes for VSO. One staff member who worked with multiple SEAL teams noted they did not do well with VSO because it was not part of their mission training or profile. They reportedly eschewed interacting with locals, let alone engaging with them as part of a deliberate political outreach campaign.⁷⁸² A second person who worked with a VSP in eastern Afghanistan staffed with SEALs said the team did not have a point of contact in the local community, nor did it have any information about the local social structure. The VSP's SEAL personnel were focused almost exclusively on kinetic operations, and there was little evidence of development activity.⁷⁸³

“This was a big-time race against the clock. We needed to extend security while we could, while we had the forces.”

—General David Petraeus

Senior military officials were aware there was a disparity between the services. General Petraeus noted, “I think it’s fair to say the Green Berets, the Army SF, had a gift for this. It was very much in line with the Foreign Internal Defense that has long been a task for Green Berets, and other SOF had emphasized that less.”⁷⁸⁴

However, Army Special Forces did not always embrace the political component of VSO, either. At a VSP in Kandahar in 2013, for example, there was reportedly no real relationship with the community.⁷⁸⁵ The Special Forces team delegated the community relations piece to support personnel, who were viewed by the team as the conduit to the community, while the team focused almost exclusively on security and monitoring the ALP.⁷⁸⁶

There are several possible explanations as to why some SOF teams engaged communities more than others. As mentioned above, a lack of familiarity with the underlying concept of VSO is one possibility. A fundamental incompatibility between the VSO mission and an organization’s culture, identity, and history is another. SOF units selected and trained primarily for direct action cannot be expected to also perform community outreach with equal facility. Likewise, SOF had a wide range of training responsibilities and selection criteria; those competing demands limited the amount of training devoted to softer skills. That



A U.S. Marine special operations team member assists with security during a construction project for an ALP checkpoint in Helmand Province on March 30, 2013. (DOD photo by Sgt. Pete Thibodeau)

is not to say that all SOF had an aversion to community engagement. SIGAR interviews with a number of enablers and advisors who supported VSOs at various locations across Afghanistan throughout the 2010–2013 time period reported they did encounter a number of SOF who made a genuine effort to meet and communicate with the local community.⁷⁸⁷

Like CERP and other stabilization programs, reliable monitoring and evaluation in VSO was a challenge, and more of an art than a science. When asked why he believed VSO was achieving the desired effects, General Petraeus said, “Blocks were turning from red to amber to green. And if you do this week after week after week, you can feel whether it’s working or not. I also visited many sites and was comfortable that, while very difficult, the concept was working.”⁷⁸⁸ At the same time, there were efforts to formally assess and improve the effectiveness of VSO: CFSOCC-A and later Special Operations Joint Task Force-Afghanistan both welcomed a team of researchers from RAND to embed at their headquarters to assess the program. RAND’s analysis included interviews with SOF who implemented VSO and Afghan public opinion data.⁷⁸⁹

Considerations of Key Terrain Superseded Community Readiness

During the ALP expansion, VSO site selection mirrored the broader COIN strategy of concentrating on key terrain. Sixty-one percent of KTDs had VSO at some point during the program’s duration. (See figures 4 and 10.) Planners also considered how the Taliban managed to seize control of Afghanistan in



SOF personnel take cover to avoid flying debris as they prepare to board a UH-60 Black Hawk helicopter during a reconnaissance mission in Kunar Province to identify the site for a future Village Stability Platform in February 2012. (U.S. Navy photo by Mass Communication Specialist 2nd Class Clayton Weiss)

the 1990s by fanning out in small bands in a clockwise progression along the Ring Road, beginning in Kandahar.⁷⁹⁰ CFSOCC-A tried to mimic that advance by expanding VSO sites in KTDs in the vicinity of the Ring Road.⁷⁹¹ The VSO site near Maidan Shar, for example, was selected because it was at a critical intersection of Route 1 and Route 2, on the doorsteps of the capital.⁷⁹²

The operational advantages of certain terrain sometimes trumped the original prerequisite for the establishment of a VSO site: a community's genuine desire to participate in the program.⁷⁹³ Even during the early stages of VSO when sites were chosen based on their perceived favorability for ALP, 60 percent experienced "serious difficulties" recruiting local police.⁷⁹⁴ The reality was, relatively few places in Afghanistan may have been suitable for VSO.⁷⁹⁵

In contrast, CDI sites were deliberately placed in areas where (1) non-local Taliban forces were trying to exert influence, and (2) the local community welcomed the support of the U.S. Special Forces.⁷⁹⁶ Prioritizing those two considerations improved the chances the site would develop a productive relationship with the community, which in turn would support CDI's security objectives.

Senior planners at CFSOCC-A headquarters at Bagram Airfield could judge the value of key terrain based on an area's geographic relationship to critical infrastructure and population centers, but the suitability of the human terrain could only be assessed by operating at the ground level and interacting with

local communities. That initial assessment phase—and the follow-on politicking required to gain entry into the community—may have been the most demanding in terms of communication and social aptitude. Planners and the teams running VSO at the village level needed socially attuned advisors.

Some Militia Commanders Co-Opted the Program

Even when the VSP staff did adhere to the principles of the VSO concept, the underlying assumptions and the broader applicability of the program were questionable. The idea of VSO was based on historical accounts of Afghan society that may not have been accurate or applicable to contemporary Afghanistan. The concept was coherent and supported by literature, but as several experts point out, “The theory was based on an outmoded set of assumptions about the capacity of tribal leaders to command the loyalties of local villagers. In practice, it was the militia commanders who held the real power.”⁷⁹⁷ Elders involved in establishing ALP forces simply could not compete with the influence of these commanders. To their credit, U.S. military forces made an effort to test the fundamentals of the program in several locations prior to scaling up, and in those areas where the right conditions did exist, the program may have achieved its intended purpose. Despite those efforts, implementation and scaling befell the same challenges that plagued other local defense antecedents, like the Afghan Public Protection Program.

Some of the worst documented abuses by militia commanders occurred in northern Afghan provinces, such as Badakhshan, Takhar, Faryab, Baghlan, and Kunduz, areas well beyond the intended geographic extent of the program under CDI.⁷⁹⁸ It was in those areas that many of the militias loyal to local commanders found their way into the ranks of the ALP.⁷⁹⁹

In late 2012, the Afghan government asked the United States to expand the ALP from 30,000 to 45,000 members.⁸⁰⁰ U.S. commanders were initially supportive, owing to the fact that the ALP was more economical than the ANDSF, but in the summer of 2013, Washington eliminated the possibility of expansion.⁸⁰¹ The task of transitioning the ALP to Afghan control would be challenging enough, even without additional growth.

Transition to Afghan Control

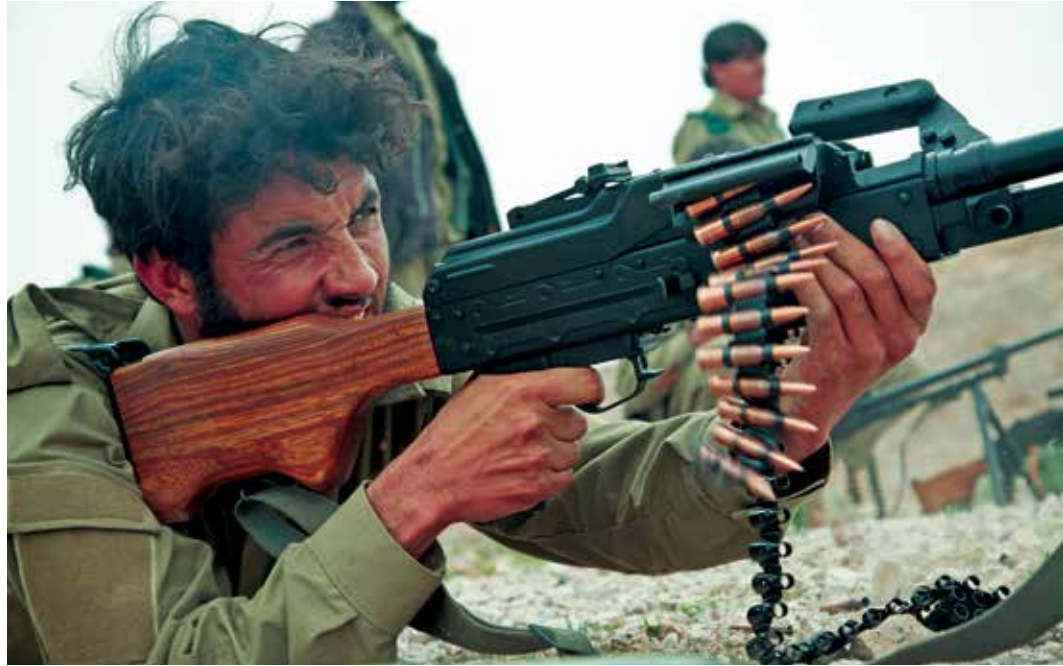
With the announcement in November 2010 that security would be transitioned to Afghan control by the end of 2014, there was enormous pressure on coalition forces to make quick progress and hand off responsibility to Afghans. Accordingly, CFSOCC-A initiated transition planning in 2010 and added a transition phase to the VSO shape-hold-build-expand model in 2011.⁸⁰² The transition of the ALP to full Afghan control was slated to begin in the summer of 2012.⁸⁰³

During the early stages of transition, ISAF called for a relatively small number of sites to be handed over to Afghans, which allowed planners to select the sites with better security, where the ALP were performing well.⁸⁰⁴ By December 2012, 21 districts had transitioned to Afghan control.⁸⁰⁵ Meanwhile, during transition, the ALP continued to expand, from 6,500 in June 2011 when the second expansion was authorized, to more than 16,000 in the summer of 2012, and 22,000 in the spring of 2013.⁸⁰⁶

At the same time the ALP were expanding, coalition support for VSO began receding from a peak strength of 80 SOF teams and two conventional infantry battalions in mid-2012.⁸⁰⁷ Although the drawdown of VSO was not necessarily tied to the drawdown of conventional brigade combat teams, in practice VSPs were often reliant on conventional forces' facilities and transportation infrastructure for logistical and medevac coverage. Without that support, some VSO sites were forced to close ahead of schedule.⁸⁰⁸ In early 2013, the combined pressure from both scheduled and forced closures left commanders no choice but to "transition" ALP units that did not meet the program's transition criteria. Subsequently, in some transitioned areas, checkpoints manned by unprepared ALP were overrun by insurgents.⁸⁰⁹ Training and mentoring programs were also curtailed in areas where VSO remained, with some ALP spending less than a year with their SOF mentors, rather than the two-year duration recommended in VSO guidance.⁸¹⁰ These necessary compromises were products of the political pressure to scale up ALP and withdraw coalition forces on precipitous timelines.

The transition process was also complicated by the low numbers of suitable Afghan commanders. The original plan—to have ANASF assume responsibility for VSO—was scrapped due to poor cooperation between MOI, which had authority over the ALP, and the Ministry of Defense, which controlled the ANA.⁸¹¹ The responsibility for appointing the leadership of ALP units then fell to local officials, who sometimes made poor choices, or based their decisions on ethnic or tribal affiliations.⁸¹² Afghans at all levels of government sometimes saw the ALP as an opportunity to develop a power base or extract resources.⁸¹³ In other cases, ALP units developed by SOF were reportedly more loyal to their U.S. mentors than they were to the Afghan government.⁸¹⁴ Some ALP units fell under the control of strongmen who may have been effective at commanding the force, but often alienated the population by resorting to draconian and arbitrary punishments for suspected insurgent sympathizers.

In addition to local leadership issues, the Afghan government proved to be unwilling or unable to support ALP units. During the transition, U.S. commanders decided to turn over responsibility for ALP logistics and supply to the MOI in the hope that this would compel the Afghans to work more diligently and effectively. The commanders were proven wrong when large



An ANP officer fires a machine gun during live-fire training conducted by Afghan National Police (ANP) officers in Helmand Province on March 26, 2013. (U.S. Marine Corps photo by Sgt. Pete Thibodeau)

numbers of ALP deserted when they received their salaries and supplies months late, or not at all. In response, the coalition resumed supply operations for certain ALP units out of fear that the whole program would unravel.⁸¹⁵

Despite the problems and dysfunction, transition continued. Remnants of VSO continued at a reduced capacity before completely closing on October 31, 2014.⁸¹⁶ While VSO ended, ALP has continued under MOI control.⁸¹⁷

Evolving Perspectives on the ALP

Most of the written record on VSO is published by organizations or individuals who likely harbor a bias toward the program. On the one hand, human rights organizations are naturally suspicious of militias, while on the other, members of the defense community have a vested interest in promoting the past performance and future potential of VSO. This dynamic makes assessing VSO particularly challenging.

In recent years, a handful of multilateral organizations and nonprofit policy research centers have weighed in on VSO/ALP with analyses that seem more evenhanded. For example, in 2014, UNAMA reported that the majority of communities with an ALP presence said the ALP improved security, particularly in areas where the militiamen were locally recruited and deployed.⁸¹⁸ The report also said the ALP were highly visible in communities, in contrast with the ANA, who generally stayed on their bases unless they were conducting operations.⁸¹⁹

According to the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission, “The ALP has had a positive performance, particularly in Marjah, Nad Ali, Nawa, Garmsir, Gereshk, Musa Qala, and Sangin Districts of Helmand Province and local officials in Kunar, Kunduz, Jowzjan, Sar-e Pul, and Nuristan have expressed their satisfaction with the role and performance of the ALP in providing security for communities.”⁸²⁰

There have also been reports of improved accountability among the ALP. In the first six months of 2014, the MOI’s ALP Monitoring and Investigations section investigated 11 allegations of abuse by ALP units, which led to seven arrests and two convictions.⁸²¹ A review of the ALP program ordered by President Ghani in June 2015 recommended 6,000 ALP members undergo additional training.⁸²² In 2015, residents of Zabul were able to get an abusive ALP commander removed and replaced with a local figure who had more popular support and improved ALP conduct.⁸²³ The same year, civilian casualties attributed to the ALP decreased nationwide, with the most persistent problems concentrated in northern Afghanistan.⁸²⁴ The downward trend in civilian casualties continued in 2016, possibly as a result of greater efforts on the part of the ALP Directorate to improve accountability.⁸²⁵

The inklings of accountability within the ALP may be cause for cautious optimism, but there was continued evidence of abuses by ALP throughout the period. UNAMA reported in 2014 that there appeared to be a certain tolerance within the MOI for abuses committed by the ALP, and documented cases of crimes by the ALP continued to trickle in to UNAMA throughout the 2014–2017 period, with an increase in incidents in 2017.⁸²⁶

* * * * *

In summary, VSO was conceived as a stabilization program that would integrate governance, development, and security at the local level. SOF would gain the support of a village cluster with development assistance, organize locally chosen villagers into an anti-Taliban militia, and connect them with the district government. In theory, the system would be self-sustaining as the district government provided development assistance and the village militias supported the government. The model was intuitive, but the program faced challenges ranging from unrealistic timelines, an aversion to community engagement by some SOF teams, communities that were not suitable for engagement, corruption within the Afghan government, and abusive Afghan militias. In concert, these problems pushed VSO toward a platform that focused entirely on local security. While some ALP units succeeded in this undertaking, a program that started as a stabilization program did not end as one. Unsurprisingly then, by 2017, according to the *New York Times*, even U.S. officials estimated security had improved in only a third of areas patrolled by the ALP.⁸²⁷



CHAPTER 7

MEASURING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF STABILIZATION

USAID photo

During the surge, progress on stabilization programs was primarily measured in two ways: first, by how much money was spent, and, second, by counting outputs, such as the number of person-days of labor hired or the number of schools rehabilitated.⁸²⁸ The hope was that hiring people and rehabilitating schools would decrease local violence by increasing faith in local governance and decreasing support for the Taliban. Yet, there were limited attempts to test whether the desired end state of increased stabilization was, in fact, resulting from the outputs.⁸²⁹ To some degree, this was the result of the tendency to focus on and invest in indicators and programs that were more easily measurable, to the exclusion of those that were not.⁸³⁰ However, it was also a reflection of the emphasis within USAID during this period on output indicators and activity-level outcomes, such as access to jobs or more productive agriculture, instead of the more abstract and meaningful concepts that the agency was moving toward, such as community outlook for the future and attitudes toward violence.⁸³¹

A spring 2011 report from the Feinstein International Center found the British in Helmand also faced similar pressure to deliver outputs largely defined as “projects started” and money committed. A UK Stabilisation Unit report identified a need for an approach to monitoring and evaluation (M&E) that focused on impacts and outcomes, particularly relating to changes in

perceptions, relationships, and behaviors of politically significant actors and groups, rather than outputs and inputs.⁸³²

Furthermore, prior to 2011, when these inadequacies began to be addressed, efforts by the U.S. military and ISAF to assess the effectiveness of military campaigns were also hampered by an overreliance on quantitative measurements, such as the number of violent incidents or schools built, and an underutilization of qualitative analysis, such as through what the military refers to as contextual assessment.⁸³³ However, aggregated, centralized, and quantitative measures, in the absence of the qualitative context necessary to shed light on their significance, often produced inaccurate or misleading findings.⁸³⁴ This emphasis on quantitative measurements was driven by the difficulty of knowing what to measure and how to measure it and a desire for standardization across different regions, with a resultant emphasis on more easily measurable indicators.

The same was true at USAID. According to the final evaluation of the four SIKA programs, the implementing partners' M&E units for those programs "essentially served as outputs indicator clearinghouses instead of as autonomous evaluation tools within the SIKA project structures." The same evaluation found that "SIKA project [implementing partners], for the most part, did not use their M&E units as vehicles for understanding programming and this was a major lost opportunity. . . . This [was] one reason why the projects succumbed to conducting low-priority interventions that were not effective countermeasures for [sources of instability]."⁸³⁵ This problem was by no means specific to the SIKAs, but rather, was driven by the U.S. government's demand for metrics, whereby implementing partners were incentivized to focus on hitting numeric output targets. For example, according to program evaluators, the M&E efforts of the Afghanistan Transition Initiative did not go beyond monitoring output completion.⁸³⁶

The September 2010 U.S. "Presidential Policy Directive on Global Development" marked a new emphasis on monitoring and evaluation at USAID and on assessing impact. The directive stated, "Our development policy and practice will be driven by the disciplined assessment of impact. Simply put, programs and policies that might make us feel good, but do not deliver results, will be phased out; programs and policies that yield tangible and sustainable outcomes will be scaled up."⁸³⁷ Yet, what may have been a clear and reasonable threshold for many of USAID's traditional sectors remained nebulous for its stabilization work, where results were far more difficult to measure.

For example, to understand how stability changed in response to stabilization programs in Afghanistan, key stakeholders needed to first agree on:

- The definition of stability (for example, the absence of violence, the absence of the Taliban, government control, government legitimacy, community cohesion, resilience)⁸³⁸
- What movement toward stability would look like (less violence against government and allied forces, less violence against or among civilians, an increase in security force coverage of an area, greater freedom of movement, greater confidence in local formal government, greater confidence in local informal government)⁸³⁹
- What metrics should be used to measure that change (number of attacks, territorial control, or perception data)⁸⁴⁰
- How, in practical terms, the change could be measured given the challenges of a war zone, where the number of variables impacting stability were numerous and overlapping, surveys were typically unreliable, and the prioritized districts were often too dangerous to ask beneficiaries questions or even make sure projects were completed⁸⁴¹

As detailed below, the difficulty of these tasks was immense and made more complicated by:

- A lack of clarity on the multitude of divergent, shifting, and unclear programmatic approaches and theories of change⁸⁴²
- Absence of a census and baseline data⁸⁴³
- Severe information gaps about the operating environment⁸⁴⁴
- Difficulty of attributing impact in a complex and fluid environment⁸⁴⁵
- Biases in perception data in an environment where violence and intimidation were rife and where respondents had incentives to manipulate results to attract more projects⁸⁴⁶
- Reliance on non-professional census takers and surveyors⁸⁴⁷
- A need to triangulate different metrics due to the limited reliability of any single data source⁸⁴⁸
- Enormous political pressure to report good news⁸⁴⁹

The Difficulty of Conducting M&E During a War

Properly discerning cause and effect in a stabilization program is dependent on being able to design quality research and collect reliable data. These were difficult tasks in most circumstances and exceptionally difficult in an armed conflict.

Particularly after 2012, M&E relied heavily on perception surveys, which posed a myriad of challenges.⁸⁵⁰ Given the limited reliability of each source of information on its own, it was important to triangulate information collected by different sources and with different degrees of accuracy, yet in practice, this does not seem to have been the norm.⁸⁵¹ In 2013, USAID described for Congress what it called its “multi-tiered monitoring” system (MTM), which was designed

to triangulate information from a variety of sources, including U.S. government staff, Afghan government officials, civil society actors, and beneficiaries. However, in 2015, the USAID Office of the Inspector General documented at length the limitations of that system as it was implemented in practice, and the USAID Afghanistan Mission admitted the system was “aspirational.”⁸⁵² In 2017, the mission released an order on performance monitoring to standardize the implementation of the MTM approach. The order established specific requirements, such as requiring Contracting Officer’s Representatives to hire third-party monitors to conduct site visits when CORs were unable to do so themselves, which was the majority of the time.⁸⁵³ The guidance also required CORs to triangulate third-party monitoring and implementing partner reporting with other sources of information, such as Afghan government officials, civil society, or other international organizations, but only once a year.⁸⁵⁴

At the same time, even if every effort had been made to collect high-quality data, there still would have been immense challenges related to data bias inherent to the environment. For example, ISAF cataloged violent events, commonly known as “significant activities” (SIGACT), which could be useful for measuring changes in levels of violence over time. In fact, SIGACT data were and remain some of the most prevalent source material for analyzing violence levels, both in government and in academia.⁸⁵⁵ Yet, ISAF only collected data on violence in the areas where it had forces to collect and verify it, making it difficult to compare these areas to those that received less attention and resources. SIGACTs also primarily measured attacks involving coalition and Afghan forces, which may or may not have reflected levels of violence affecting civilians.⁸⁵⁶ This was particularly problematic because conflict tended to follow coalition forces and implementing partners wherever they went, as insurgents hoped to undermine the security and development that accompanied coalition personnel.⁸⁵⁷ This dynamic made it difficult to know whether the insurgents would have bothered launching attacks in the area had there been fewer coalition and coalition-partner targets to draw their attention.

It is difficult to know whether the insurgents would have bothered launching attacks in the area had there been fewer coalition and coalition-partner targets to draw their attention.

Paradoxically, the programming meant to reduce violence could not have taken place without the military or private security contractors protecting USAID and its implementing partners. Rigorous data collection was difficult when the collectors—simply by being there—fundamentally altered the environment they were attempting to understand and measure, often in ways they did not intend. Overall, the U.S. government presence inevitably created multiple independent variables that complicated any observer’s ability to discern cause and effect.⁸⁵⁸

Even Monitoring Was Spotty

As noted earlier, one of the most common criticisms of stabilization M&E was that it typically measured outputs, without seeking to assess the deeper impact of programs and projects. Yet, even output measurements and the project GPS coordinates that supported them were not well tracked or vetted, which led to inaccuracy, inflation of output numbers, and even outright fraud.⁸⁵⁹ The magnitude of the problem was illustrated by the fact that USAID was not able to provide the external evaluators it hired to assess stabilization programming with reliable information about which projects were implemented in which areas of the country, nor did it require implementing partners to track spending at the village, district, provincial, or even regional level, creating a myriad of problems for data analysis.⁸⁶⁰ When SIGAR asked USAID for project data on all stabilization projects—including descriptions, locations, and funding amounts for projects—USAID responded that the stabilization project data it had was “fairly inconsistently collected and unverified. . . . We do not use that information for programmatic purposes, nor would we recommend using it for evaluative or analytic purposes since it wasn’t designed for this purpose, and due to quality concerns.”⁸⁶¹

USAID’s data quality—particularly that collected in its central Afghan Info database—was so poor that it significantly hindered M&E efforts, both by implementing partners hired by USAID to conduct M&E and by external researchers. For example, MISTI’s scope had to be expanded to enable it to make sense of poor data and to independently verify project locations, which consumed 60 percent of the program’s time at its outset and delayed its ability



A MISTI surveyor in Paghman District, Kabul Province, is taught how to take GPS coordinates for use during site interviews. (USAID photo)

to produce analysis to inform programming.⁸⁶² Other relevant data, including military geospatial data, would have been helpful, but USAID was unable to share it with MISTI.⁸⁶³ USAID has recently taken steps to improve the quality of the information in Afghan Info, for example, by cleaning up indicators and requiring CORs to be trained in verifying partner-reported data, both in 2017.⁸⁶⁴ In addition, the USAID Mission issued guidance in August 2016 concerning collection protocols for geospatial and GPS data.⁸⁶⁵ SIGAR has been unable to independently verify the degree to which these efforts have been successful in improving data quality in Afghan Info.

USAID and DOD stabilization efforts in Afghanistan were marked by poor situational awareness, a lack of reliable data, a mismatch between short project timelines and highly ambitious long-term goals, and frequent shifts in priorities.⁸⁶⁶ However, USAID and DOD analysts was also overly reliant on unverified implementing partner self-reporting, which was inclined to be biased. Just as the military faced pressure to present data in the most favorable light to show progress, so did USAID and its implementing partners.⁸⁶⁷ As challenging as the design of effective M&E approaches was in the middle of a war, resisting the political pressure to report good news was even more difficult.⁸⁶⁸

USAID and DOD stabilization efforts in Afghanistan were marked by poor situational awareness, a lack of reliable data, a mismatch between short project timelines and highly ambitious long-term goals, and frequent shifts in priorities.

It is not surprising that this high-pressure, low-accountability environment was rife with fraudulent reporting. One former senior USAID official who worked in RC-South recounted how a clandestine business in Kandahar would, for a fee, provide contractors with generic photographs of projects customized with fraudulent geo-tags embedded in the digital photos, to help contractors defraud USAID.⁸⁶⁹ Similarly, a single stabilization program fired 34 staff based on the results of fraud and corruption investigations, including for falsifying monitoring and site visit reports.⁸⁷⁰

More Comprehensive Approaches to M&E

USAID M&E systems did improve over time, however. They were stronger in the 2012–2017 period than during the surge, and were most robust in the latter half of that period. Moving beyond outputs, USAID shifted its M&E focus toward increasingly complex, abstract, and meaningful (but more difficult to measure) concepts.⁸⁷¹ USAID got better at monitoring and evaluation, in part, because of an increasing push to demonstrate a return on the enormous stabilization investment and ensure accountability for taxpayer funds.



A MISTI surveyor interviews an elder in Helmand Province in late 2013. (USAID photo)

Recognizing that internal reporting from USAID programs was unreliable and rarely moved beyond output monitoring, the USAID mission turned to outside contractors to evaluate the Stabilization Unit's programs. However, these efforts were initially poorly coordinated. By 2010, Stab-U was overseeing \$465 million in programming, with the assistance of three different contractors running three different performance evaluations, each focused on a single program in isolation.⁸⁷²

Meanwhile, there was noticeable momentum building in the United States toward developing the necessary toolkits to properly measure progress at the strategic level. A number of U.S. government and NGO stakeholders developed the Measuring Progress in Conflict Environments framework “to provide indications of trends toward the achievement of stabilization goals over time.”⁸⁷³

Similarly, USAID and others initiated a number of efforts to more comprehensively assess stabilization gains as part of an effort to incorporate lessons learned from the first generation of stabilization programs into the second round.⁸⁷⁴ RC-East came up with an M&E system based on the District Stability Framework that was dominant there, RC-South developed its own approach, and the British in Helmand created a third.⁸⁷⁵ A fourth program, MISTI, an umbrella evaluation program covering 10 different individual programs, was the U.S. government's premier effort to assess the effectiveness of stabilization.⁸⁷⁶ All of these were pioneering efforts in uncharted territory. In the words of the U.S. government's 2011–2015 interagency PMP, “The main

similarity between all of these [stabilization] programs, especially the ones that attempt to quantify higher-level stability impacts, is that the measurement techniques and metrics are untested and experimental.”⁸⁷⁷

MISTI, which exclusively assessed USAID programs, collected quantitative results from almost 200,000 individual interviews conducted over a 27-month period, as well as qualitative research from in-depth evaluations of individual stabilization programs.⁸⁷⁸ To allow for comparisons between communities, overall stability and resilience indices were created using survey data, as well as observations about tangible changes in the operating environment, such as which actors were present in a village and the frequency of violent incidents in the vicinity of a village.⁸⁷⁹ This mixed methods approach was common across assessment approaches of this period.⁸⁸⁰

MISTI sought to use perception data to measure stability and resilience by deconstructing complex underlying concepts, such as community cohesion.⁸⁸¹ USAID sought to use MISTI to move beyond outputs, such as measuring how many people were employed and how many retaining walls were built, to measuring impact, like how these projects increased trust in and support for the Afghan government.⁸⁸² The assumption was that once perceptions changed, behaviors would change soon after, leading the population to openly support the Afghan government. It was further assumed that this groundswell of support would enable the newly legitimized government take control of the country.

MISTI’s methodological approach has been criticized in a number of ways by USAID and others, an exploration of which can be found in appendix B. It was, however, notably rare for a stabilization evaluation to be conducted by a government in such a public and transparent manner. In fact, an academic survey of 19 studies concerning the relationship between aid and violence found that only one was initiated and conducted by a donor nation.⁸⁸³

PROGRAM FLEXIBILITY IS KEY

MISTI provided useful lessons for future stabilization efforts, many of which were validated by other studies on the efficacy of stabilization. One of these key findings was that programmatic flexibility was critical to the effectiveness of stabilization programming.

The Importance of Iterative Learning

M&E is not useful if programs are unable to feed results back into both existing and new programs in real time. Stabilization programs need sufficient flexibility to adapt both to lessons learned and the shifting operating environment. This level of flexibility was rare, however. Lessons from M&E can only inform

existing programs if there is a well-established system for identifying and incorporating them. While both internal and external M&E systems have a role to play, the internal structure is the first line of defense against inappropriate or ineffective programming.⁸⁸⁴

While M&E's iterative learning process can take time, USAID was constrained by its three to five-year planning horizon.⁸⁸⁵ In a fast-paced, violent environment, the lag between design and implementation meant that programs started to become obsolete before they were initiated and were near completion by the time any lessons could be learned.⁸⁸⁶

Furthermore, in a 2017 meta-analysis of 89 studies of stabilization and development programming in Afghanistan, the Empirical Studies of Conflict project demonstrated that, as a result of these constraints, even when best practices and lessons were identified, they were rarely implemented.⁸⁸⁷ The 2014 Stab-U Performance Management Plan came to the same conclusion, noting that internal M&E opportunities were being missed and there was “little evidence any of the Stab-U [implementing partners were] consistently considering lessons learned . . . from implementation experience.”⁸⁸⁸

Former Zabul provincial governor Ashraf Nasiri summarized the problem succinctly, stating, “There should have been an assessment at the end of each one of these programs, and the shortcomings should have been removed in the next programs. Unfortunately, this didn't happen.”⁸⁸⁹ In 2016, USAID updated its evaluation policy, and, in accordance with that policy, USAID's Afghanistan Mission now requires post-evaluation action plans to ensure that recommended follow-up actions are identified and implemented.⁸⁹⁰ Nevertheless, significant hurdles remain to learning from programming and incorporating these lessons into subsequent programs, particularly in places like Afghanistan.⁸⁹¹ As recently as 2016, the agency acknowledged it still struggled to achieve accountability for programming in the most challenging and non-permissive environments in which it works.⁸⁹²

The Virtues of Flexibility

There is evidence that where stabilization programs had sufficient flexibility, it paid off in programmatic effectiveness. Beyond Afghanistan, former USAID Administrator Natsios has argued that USAID is particularly risk averse because of its lack of political support in Washington. He observed that “good development practice requires experimentation, risk taking, and innovation,” but there is little room for any of those attributes in the modern bureaucracy of many donors, including USAID and the World Bank.⁸⁹³ Such flexibility is important during conflict, when operating environments are especially fluid and unpredictable.⁸⁹⁴ Indeed, a 2010 report by the UK Stabilisation Unit identified

one of its key take-aways as the need for “speed, flexibility, and adaptability” in stabilization programming.⁸⁹⁵ Programmatic flexibility ideally includes the ability to quickly shift funding between programs or to descope or add new types of activities or move activities to different geographic areas within a program.⁸⁹⁶

Flexibility, for example, was instrumental in enabling the Community Cohesion Initiative to quickly tackle a national-level source of instability by mobilizing international election observers to audit the presidential vote count in 2014. While stabilization efforts typically took place at the community or district level, and to a lesser degree at the provincial level, CCI was able to fill a gap in the international community’s response to the election crisis and assist the larger international effort to legitimize the national government.⁸⁹⁷ CCI’s comparative advantage over other donor-funded programs was its ability to rapidly stand up a new type of activity.

It was critical to accept a certain degree of risk and failure as the cost of figuring out what worked.

The CCI final performance evaluation also found that the program began to remove “some of the inertia surrounding the focus on community infrastructure activities” in stabilization programming, suggesting that stabilization programming should address national-level sources of instability when they are the most salient.⁸⁹⁸ In other words, programmatic flexibility enabled CCI to break out of the narrow silo that came to define it and other stabilization programs: local-level programming largely focused on the construction of simple infrastructure. Such limitations prevented most stabilization programs from addressing sources of instability stemming from higher-level political dynamics.

As articulated in joint military doctrine, “instability is a symptom of a political crisis rooted in how political power is distributed and wielded, and by whom. To help resolve the situation, stabilization efforts seek to reshape the relationships with the indigenous populations and institutions, the different communities that make up the [host-nation] populace, and elites competing for power.”⁸⁹⁹ Stabilization programs alone were unable to start to change political dynamics by working at the local level and could not effect a political solution or single-handedly impart legitimacy on the government of Afghanistan; however, they might contribute to such goals when allowed to do work that falls outside the constraints of local-level community development.

According to a senior USAID official, with such an experimental approach, it was critical to accept a certain degree of risk and failure as the cost of figuring out what worked.⁹⁰⁰ However, this flexibility required a greater investment



Elders gather at the district office of the Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation, and Livestock for a USAID-funded open house with district officials in Shamal District, Khost Province, in late 2013. (USAID/OTI photo)

in USAID personnel to oversee and manage this risk taking. Another USAID official observed that the Office of Transition Initiatives was frequently criticized for having so many personnel overseeing its programs. Yet, the same official observed that it was precisely those high staffing levels and programmatic engagement by CCI's oversight personnel that enabled USAID to sign off on necessary programmatic shifts.⁹⁰¹

Still, there is a delicate balance between being “fast and flexible” and switching strategy so often there is insufficient time to test each approach. Effective programs are rarely created perfectly or are ideally suited to their environment at inception; they evolve and generally improve over time.⁹⁰² At their best, they use a strong feedback loop to continually incorporate lessons from M&E into programming; they learn by doing.⁹⁰³ Yet, when the direction of programming is switched too frequently or pressure to implement quickly is great, they do not have time to improve and learn from their mistakes.⁹⁰⁴ It is a difficult balance to strike. According to the program's evaluators, CCI, the same program credited with skilled adaptation, would have been more effective if it had stuck with one approach for several programming cycles before pivoting.⁹⁰⁵

DID STABILIZATION WORK?

The evidence concerning the effectiveness of USAID stabilization programming in Afghanistan from 2002–2017 is inconclusive and contradictory. Some research found the programming was stabilizing, some found no impact, and other research found it was, in fact, destabilizing.⁹⁰⁶ What is clear, however, is that even at its most successful, stabilization was incremental, rather than transformative. The impact of discrete stabilization interventions was generally short-lived. However, a somewhat more sustained impact was achieved through repeated and geographically concentrated (or “clustered”) stabilization

interventions. Stabilization was more effective in areas where the government had a degree of control, and it was actually destabilizing in insurgent-controlled areas. It was also more successful when implementers undertook fewer activities with a higher degree of oversight, flexibility, and staffing; doing stabilization well was labor intensive for the donor and implementing partners.

Stabilization Efforts were Sometimes Destabilizing

MISTI determined that the stabilization programs it evaluated between 2012 and 2014 (SIKA, CCI, and KFZ) generally did not help stabilize target areas and occasionally made them worse. Specifically, during a portion of the time period studied, it found that villages that received at least one stabilization project showed a greater drop in stability than did control villages.⁹⁰⁷ Explanations for the results vary. As SIGAR previously noted, USAID and MISTI cited external factors, such as general insecurity and political instability, to explain the drop in stability indicators at the time. However, these external changes should have affected all villages studied, both control villages and those that received interventions, not just those that received USAID stability assistance.⁹⁰⁸ A more likely explanation is that many stabilization projects attracted insurgent attention, and security forces were often unable to deter or disrupt attacks.

However, before the stability index dropped in villages that received a project, there was an initial increase in stability in the same villages, as compared to the control, between spring 2012 and spring 2014.⁹⁰⁹ Therefore, the more plausible explanation, which MISTI proposes, was that as programs launched in these areas, expectations were raised, but they were subsequently undermined by an erosion of confidence in the Afghan government, which were only compounded by implementation challenges.⁹¹⁰ For example, SIKA projects prioritized by the community through the SAM process were often not implemented, while lesser priorities were chosen instead due to risk aversion by implementing partners, budget constraints, and late program funding disbursements.⁹¹¹

Government Control is a Prerequisite

One factor that seems to influence whether stabilization programming is effective is the degree of government control of an area. A baseline of control seems to be necessary for success or to make an area ripe for stabilization programming.⁹¹² In fact, MISTI concluded that stabilization programming actually led to an increase in support for the Taliban in 13 of the 72 villages that were Taliban controlled, had no government or coalition presence, but still received a USAID stabilization project during the period studied.⁹¹³

Similarly, a systemic review of 19 studies of the relationship between aid and violence found that foreign aid expended in highly insecure areas was more likely to result in increased violence than aid expended in areas with greater

government control.⁹¹⁴ According to a 2012 study of NSP, the program improved Afghans' perceptions of the government and their own economic wellbeing, and it reduced violence, but only in areas where pre-intervention levels of violence were "moderate."⁹¹⁵ Thus, there is a threshold of violence beyond which stabilization programming is not only unlikely to succeed, but is destabilizing.

There is a threshold of violence beyond which stabilization programming is not only unlikely to succeed, but is destabilizing.

Stabilization's Impact was Transitory, Not Transformative

The positive impact of stabilization programming faded relatively quickly and that progress was, at best, incremental and transitory, rather than transformative.⁹¹⁶ In the words of one academic paper, "The 'hearts and minds' which may have been won in spring may be lost in fall already."⁹¹⁷ Likewise, ESOC found that stabilization programs "that have been 'successful' may have short-term positive impacts, but they do not appear to generate large shifts in security, attitudes, or capacity."⁹¹⁸ The fact that stabilization programs did not demonstrate particularly lasting effects should not invalidate their utility, however. In fact, they were designed to be catalytic stopgap measures, rather than systemically transformative of the communities in which they operated, particularly over the course of a typical program length of two to four years.

Progress toward stabilization is slow and messy. At best, it results in small gains that require constant reinforcement to avoid reversals.⁹¹⁹ Given the unrealistic timeline of the surge, in both troops and USAID programming, there was no time for the progress achieved by stabilization programs to be reinforced such



USAID road construction efforts along the Khost-Gardez road in March 2010. (USAID photo)

that it could be sustained. The timeline erroneously assumed that quick security gains would be matched by equally quick stabilization and governance gains.⁹²⁰ The latter failed to materialize before security forces withdrew and instability returned to many of the areas where stabilization programs were working. In areas that showed improvement, there was little follow-on programming in place to pick up where stabilization left off to maintain the momentum.⁹²¹ Without adequate security, the stabilization process stopped in its tracks and any hard-won progress disappeared.⁹²² In fact, not only did longer-term development programs often not follow stabilization programming, at least not at anywhere near the same scale, but even stabilization programming prematurely hopped around the map, rather than building gradually upon its successes.⁹²³ In any case, given the timeline and the decision to prioritize the most dangerous districts, few Afghan communities stabilized enough to demonstrate if these temporary gains could be leveraged into the next phase of long-term development.

Community Cohesion is an Easier Objective than Stabilization

MISTI's findings suggest that building community cohesion and informal governance may have been easier than improving perceptions of formal governance. MISTI measured community cohesion by assessing social capital and perceptions of local informal leaders.⁹²⁴ The theory behind CCI, which was designed to build community cohesion, also referred to as resiliency, was that building interpersonal trust at the lowest level, between and within communities, was necessary to prevent them from being exploited by insurgents.⁹²⁵ This focus on community cohesion, as opposed to improving perceptions of the government, was an attempt to achieve stabilization without necessarily relying on the reputation of the Afghan government, which CCI recognized to be "fragile and unable to deliver good governance [and] basic services to the majority of the population."⁹²⁶ Working with informal leaders also provided stabilization programs an alternative partner if local government representatives were corrupt or had ties to the insurgency. Such officials presented challenges with ASI, and indeed, likely all programs whose core operating model was built around extending the reach of government.⁹²⁷

In contrast, stabilization programs actually built more connectivity between and within communities than between communities and formal government. For example, MISTI found that stabilization interventions were most effective for increasing community cohesion, social capital, and local (informal) leader performance between fall 2013 and fall 2014, during which time national-level political uncertainty undermined perceptions of formal government.⁹²⁸ Likewise, MISTI found the SIKA programs did not, generally, improve stability or governance in target districts. However, they did result in an improvement in perceptions of community cohesion and resilience, as well as improved

perceptions of informal leaders.⁹²⁹ There is also some evidence that NSP increased interpersonal trust among male residents of target villages.⁹³⁰ Together this suggests that perceptions of higher-level formal governance structures might be more closely tied to the government's broader legitimacy, and when these were compromised, supporting community-level social trust and local leader legitimacy might be a more realistic goal.

Stabilization programs actually built more connectivity between and within communities than between communities and formal government.

Central Importance of Clustering

MISTI found, and other studies confirmed, that clustering projects improved the likelihood that stabilization gains would be enduring. Research has also shown that, while the impact of stabilization programming was questionable after a single project, positive results started to emerge when projects were clustered both geographically and temporally. This is known as a “dosage response” effect.⁹³¹ The theory is that each small project contributes incrementally to achieving the desired program outcome, and layering them on top of one another in an area increases the magnitude of project impacts and improves the prospect that these gains will be sustained over a relatively longer period of time.⁹³² Clustering also creates the impression that the community is being continuously served as part of an ongoing relationship with the government.



PRT Khost civil affairs officer walks the grounds of the Wazyan boys' school to inspect the plot of land designated for the new school house in July 2010. (U.S. Air Force photo by Senior Airman Julianne M. Showalter)

MISTI showed that the clustering of USAID projects magnified their impact, as did clustering of mixed USAID and NSP projects.⁹³³ Areas benefiting from multiple stabilization projects also reported increased community cohesion and satisfaction with government with each additional activity.⁹³⁴

Likewise, during the last period MISTI surveyed in 2014, it was only when both stabilization programming and NSP programming were conducted in the same area that a significant reduction in support for the Taliban was observed.⁹³⁵ During this time period, villages receiving both types of programming demonstrated an increase in stability, according to MISTI's metrics, while villages receiving just one or the other did not.⁹³⁶ A study on the impact of NSP found that multiple rounds of funding had to flow through a CDC before its impact expanded from increasing the legitimacy of village-level informal governance to increasing the legitimacy of formal government structures.⁹³⁷ Academic research on stabilization programming also supports this dosage effect, concluding that government legitimacy has to “constantly be earned in a continuous process of interaction.”⁹³⁸

It is difficult to imagine how one small project, implemented by a foreign entity with donor funding, could substantively change a community's perceptions of its government.

However, such clustering was rare. Stabilization activities were so often conducted in isolation that MISTI had a hard time finding villages that received multiple, consecutive projects. In fact, in only a third of the villages surveyed were projects taking place beyond a single six-month interval.⁹³⁹ Given that individual stabilization projects tended to have short timelines, lasting an average of three to six months, one-off projects were more common than sustained stabilization programming.⁹⁴⁰ In the SIKAs, the majority of communities received just one small project, such as a short gravel road, a culvert, or a school boundary wall.⁹⁴¹ The fact that one-off projects were the norm, rather than the exception, sheds light on why MISTI found weak and internally inconsistent impacts on stabilization, and likely why other studies also found inconclusive results. It is difficult to imagine how one small project, implemented by a foreign entity with donor funding, could substantively change a community's perceptions of its government's service delivery.⁹⁴² As a result, clustering more projects to increase impact was one of MISTI's core recommendations.⁹⁴³

Doing Less, But Better

Research also validated the argument that implementing smaller projects helped programs avoid some of the common pitfalls of working in the midst

of a counterinsurgency. Avoiding these pitfalls of stabilization—elite capture, corruption, exacerbated rivalries, and insurgent sabotage—while still providing tangible benefits to communities was easier on a smaller scale.⁹⁴⁴ According to a 2010 Embassy Kabul cable on best practices in stabilization programming, it was also easier to ensure community buy-in and ownership of small-scale infrastructure projects than it was for large ones.⁹⁴⁵ As the 2017 ESOC study found, “A number of studies, as well as evidence from NSP, CERP, and LGCD, highlight the possibility that smaller projects can be targeted at important, specific gaps and are less likely to be targeted for violence or fuel instability by disrupting local political status quos.”⁹⁴⁶ ESOC further argued that small size is “the most important program feature that could enable success” and recommended future stabilization efforts focus on “modest programs” and have “bounded expectations on the size and duration of impact” that those programs can achieve.⁹⁴⁷ Similarly, some academic research has shown that smaller-scale CERP projects were more effective at reducing violence than larger-scale ones.⁹⁴⁸

Additional academic research has shown that superficial measures of aid, such as the sheer amount of money spent or outputs produced, were not correlated with impact. What did determine whether projects achieved their desired impact was whether the community perceived a project to be useful. Communities were more likely to perceive projects to be useful when the project was implemented through a participatory process, suggesting that the additional time and resources required to do so were worth the effort.⁹⁴⁹

Not only were projects more effective when implementers were not stretched thin, but the overall effort was also more successful. More was accomplished in the aggregate by doing less, but doing it better. In the words of MISTI’s final evaluation of the SIKAs, “Sometimes it is better to get it right in a few places than try to get it right in a hundred places.”⁹⁵⁰ Rapid aid expenditures spread across too many projects resulted in counterproductive effects, including exacerbating corruption, creating grievances and rivalries from inequitable aid distribution, and the capture of aid money by insurgent groups and other anti-government actors, such as warlords.⁹⁵¹

In summary, even if prioritizing direct implementation, scoping projects smaller, taking the time to understand the complex political terrain, and engaging in time-consuming community engagement processes limited the amount of programming that could be done, it was more effective in terms of impact achieved to implement fewer projects, with greater oversight.



CHAPTER 8

ANALYTICAL REVIEW OF STABILIZATION

U.S. Marine Corps photo

While the narrative and challenges of the Afghanistan stabilization effort have been described in detail, the section below explores the broader implications and impacts of these challenges, including how the strategy hindered efforts on the ground, how coalition assumptions about the best way to legitimize the Afghan government ran aground, how programming tools and approaches themselves hurt implementation, and how prioritizing the most dangerous districts often forced stabilization programs to be implemented prematurely and poorly.

THE STRATEGIC IMPACT OF COMPRESSED TIMELINES

As this section and much of this report demonstrates, there was a significant misalignment between the 2009 stabilization strategy and the timeline set forth to achieve it. As a result, the president and his advisors set in motion a series of events and institutional motivations that ensured the stabilization strategy would not succeed: first with the rapid surge and then the rapid transition. Under immense pressure to show progress in only 18 months—and then transition three years later—State, USAID, and DOD were overwhelmed as they confronted a list of potentially crippling compromises they knew to be necessary under the timeline. Worse, the narrowness of the surge and transition

windows had a profound impact on countless downstream decisions regarding planning, staffing, and programming.

Timelines Hurt Planning

Building local institutions, changing civilian perceptions, and buttressing a government's legitimacy are political undertakings and should be implemented with instruments and timelines suited to these tasks.⁹⁵² Yet during the 2009 strategy reviews, the discussion revolved around military options and considerations, with the civilian-led components regarded mostly as subordinate. As NSC senior coordinator Lute observed, "The only professional group that does real strategy is the military," so generally at the NSC, there was "a heavy burden on the military for strategy development . . . and an underappreciation of policy, diplomacy, and development. These were all considered secondary to the primacy of military ways."⁹⁵³

Subsequently, given the military's role in framing the debate in Washington, it was only logical they were better positioned to set the terms for operationalizing the strategy in Kabul, even as the civilian considerations of stabilization took shape. One military planner in Kabul noted, "Despite the explicit civ-mil approach, everyone knew the military was in the lead."⁹⁵⁴ Yet, the military cannot do faster what it was not designed to do to begin with, and the urgency both masked that fact and could not compensate for it.

The military cannot do faster what it was not designed to do to begin with, and the urgency both masked that fact and could not compensate for it.

Civilian and military officials had to revise the draft campaign plan in the summer of 2009 when it became clear that conditions-based end states would require too much time to achieve. According to the same military planner in Kabul:

We were told by State in DC to move away from three- to five- to ten-year objectives and use nearer-term objectives, which took a lot of work because, what could be achieved in this environment in one to three years? Most of our objectives would take time, so we had to identify different objectives that could be accomplished in the near-term.⁹⁵⁵

Similarly, only a year later, the timeline had taken on a life of its own, such that progress or lack of progress on those campaign objectives did not inform the president's decision to end the surge and transition to Afghan control. "None of that mattered," said one senior U.S. official with knowledge of the deliberations. "We were drawing down, no matter what."⁹⁵⁶ In turn, as General Allen noted, the premature move to begin to transition in 2011 meant any meaningful effort to clear, hold, and build rural Afghanistan ground to a halt:



U.S. Secretary of Defense Gates meets with General McChrystal and other ISAF members in Kabul on March 8, 2010. (DOD photo by Cherie Cullen)

I had to close over 800 bases, send back 33,000 surge troops, transition the main NATO and U.S. force component to accomplish an ‘advise and assist’ mission, push ANDSF into the lead for combat operations, and somewhere in there I also had to figure out how to get stabilization just right. We had to use our logistics pipeline to close bases and send troops and equipment home, which functioned in direct competition with my operational sustainment requirements. So, our ability to conduct combat operations suffered across the board. Stabilization requires time to measure and adapt, and we lost all that. It was all pulled out from under us. We went from an end state to an end date.⁹⁵⁷

As former SRAP senior advisor Vali Nasr noted, “It is arguable that we should never have embraced COIN, but once we did, we should not have ditched it so quickly.”⁹⁵⁸ The short surge and hasty transition were driven by factors unrelated to conditions on the ground, which meant that Afghan officials were no more ready to rapidly build up subnational governance capacity by 2011 than they were to take control of the country by 2014.

*“Stabilization requires time to measure and adapt,
and we lost all that. It was all pulled out from under us.
We went from an end state to an end date.”*

—General John Allen

Timelines Hurt Staffing

Lacking the military’s “float” that gives the armed forces 10 percent extra personnel to ensure continuous readiness, State and USAID faced enormous

difficulty trying to hire nearly 1,000 civilians to fill positions at Embassy Kabul, regional platforms, PRTs, and DSTs to make the most of the short surge in resources.⁹⁵⁹ Even the military's float did not allow it to meet the demand as it struggled to mobilize and train the necessary civil affairs units to staff PRTs and embed with conventional and special operations forces. Likewise, U.S. Army Special Forces struggled to find enough Green Berets to staff all of its Village Stability Platforms. Even harder than finding available civilians and troops on this timetable was finding qualified and experienced candidates. Ramping up this quickly limited both the quality of the personnel hired and the training they received before deploying. Equally important, moving at such speed also meant taking numerous shortcuts with staffing for Afghan civil servants to account for the high demand and minimal supply of qualified Afghans willing to work in the most violent areas of the country.⁹⁶⁰

Timelines Hurt Programming

As civilians and military officers prepared for the end of the surge and then transition, programming quality was often sacrificed in the interest of expediency. For example, CERP was a "spending machine" that injected as much money into the economy as possible, with little attention paid to impact; burn rate became a proxy for success in USAID programming too, particularly during the surge. As Halim Fidai, governor of Wardak and Logar Provinces, observed, "Normally the clear phase took a month, but the hold and build parts were not possible in months, they needed years. But the clear, hold, and build approach didn't provide years. It demanded results in months."⁹⁶¹ In other words, as one U.S. official noted, "Given our desire to ramp up quickly and leave quickly, there was no reasonable threshold we could reach where we could leave behind good governance."⁹⁶²

THEORIES OF CHANGE: HOW THE RUBBER HIT THE ROAD

In development circles, a theory of change is the articulation of a program's intended impact, as well as a chain of steps, expectations, and underlying assumptions that will enable that program to have its intended impact. As USAID suggests, it "articulates a set of beliefs about how and why change happens," and it should be "plausible, achievable, and testable."⁹⁶³ The primary elements of stabilization's overarching theory of change have been outlined already, but their implications and complications will be explored in depth below.

Economic Opportunity

A central premise of many USAID and DOD stabilization programs is that insecurity is directly linked to poverty, and that Afghans who benefit from "social and economic assistance and income-generation opportunities" are



The Abbas Qala Community Development Council used a USAID grant to clear a deep karez (irrigation canal) in Baraki Barak District, Logar Province. Members of three local communities served by the karez terraced one wall and then formed a shovel brigade to move debris from the bottom to the top in November 2013. (Photo by Ahmad Salarzai)

less likely to join or support the insurgency.⁹⁶⁴ CERP provided grants to build infrastructure, in part, to employ Afghans during the construction and to grow small businesses. USAID likewise used cash-for-work (CFW) for everything from building schools to cleaning irrigation canals. The paid labor was not simply a perk for the effort; it was often the driving rationale for the programming. The premise of CFW was to “put Afghans to work” and to “improve per capita income via development projects” in the hopes it would generate enough local spending and investment to create genuine and self-sustaining economic growth, which would, in turn, make joining the insurgency less appealing.⁹⁶⁵ As a more immediate goal, CFW also presumed that temporary employment would reduce the pool of fighting-age men available to support the insurgency.⁹⁶⁶

In practice, however, the results of CFW were often poor. USAID’s third-party evaluators concluded CFW failed to create self-sustaining growth, likely because it distorted local economies, increased support for the Taliban in areas they controlled, created aid dependencies, exacerbated local conflict, and paid communities to do what they traditionally did for free.⁹⁶⁷ Still, particularly in central Helmand, where unemployment reportedly disappeared overnight, there were reports that insurgents were being put to work among the thousands of CFW laborers.⁹⁶⁸ As Marc Chretien, a political advisor to the Marines, noted, “In Helmand, anywhere between 3–5 percent of those laborers came up hot on



U.S. Marine Corps Lance Cpl. Brock Wilki, 1st Battalion, 5th Marine Regiment, scans the iris of an Afghan man at an ANP checkpoint in Nawa District, Helmand Province, on September 25, 2009, in order to register him in BATS-HIIDE. (U.S. Marine Corps photo by Lance Cpl. Jeremy Harris)

BATS-HIIDE,” the biometrics database of known insurgents.⁹⁶⁹ Thus, the Marines knew for certain that a significant number of the men who were working as laborers had previously left forensic evidence (such as fingerprints or DNA) on explosives, weapons, or crime scenes, indicating that CFW in central Helmand was meeting the immediate intent of pulling some fighters off the battlefield, at least during the day.

While CFW was sometimes regarded as ineffective, the relative success in temporarily stabilizing areas like central Helmand made it difficult to discern the various causes of this success, with CFW perhaps being one among them. Tooryalai Wesa, the former governor of Kandahar, said, “If people have work, they will not want to get into trouble. . . . Instability happens because of unemployment.”⁹⁷⁰ In that context, CFW’s various liabilities, which were recognized by some on the ground at the time, were often viewed as the cost of doing business.

Other practitioners believed CFW’s shortcomings were not inherent to CFW, but rather tethered to the way it was employed. One stabilization contractor who worked extensively in the east believed CFW was a “critical tool when used to support the engagement process between the community and local governance.”⁹⁷¹ Echoing a 2011 embassy cable, CFW was more effective when

used as a means to an end, rather than an end unto itself, as was often the case, particularly in the south.⁹⁷²

More broadly, however, our literature review of multiple protracted conflicts, including Afghanistan, suggests there is little empirical evidence to date of a correlation between local employment and a reduction in violence or support for political violence, undermining the central premise of this theory of change.⁹⁷³ It is worth noting that many of these studies looked strictly at employment and did not distinguish between employment creation for its own sake and employment creation in the context of a larger effort to achieve other goals, like extending the government's reach. As noted, when CFW was a means to an end beyond mere employment, it tended to be more effective in bringing communities and governments together, and the literature rarely distinguishes between holistic and narrow approaches to employment creation.

Extending the Reach of Government

The application of COIN doctrine dictated that the Afghan government needed to be viewed by the local population as legitimate.⁹⁷⁴ As a result, the coalition hoped to extend the government's reach to facilitate service delivery and therefore increase the government's legitimacy.⁹⁷⁵ In the near term, this would encourage the population to report insurgent activity, and in the longer term, it would solidify a permanent, mutually reinforcing relationship with the government. Extending the government's reach became the most prominent theory of change driving stabilization in practice; however, this theory assumed the Afghan government simply lacked the necessary capacity, and that more capacity in remote areas would naturally lead these communities to expel the Taliban and ally with the government. Yet, disillusionment with formal governance was often based not on the government's absence, but rather on its behavior when present, and stabilization tended to exacerbate this dynamic.⁹⁷⁶ Moreover, despite a widespread belief that an area's physical remoteness made its population more likely to support the Taliban, no such connection has been shown to exist.⁹⁷⁷

Disillusionment with formal governance was often based not on the government's absence, but rather on its behavior when present, and stabilization tended to exacerbate this dynamic.

Service Delivery

An implicit assumption behind the idea of extending the reach of the government was that it would give more Afghans access to government services, which would increase the government's legitimacy. As Barna Karimi, the former Deputy Minister at IDLG observed, "The government's legitimacy is not just

from ballot boxes, it is from services. If there are no services, then how is the government going to be legitimate?”⁹⁷⁸

Stabilization programming, then, was intended to jump-start that government service delivery to visibly demonstrate the presence, power, and benevolence of the government, thereby making government officials the legitimate source of local governance and marginalizing insurgents competing for the population’s allegiance. In other words, the coalition believed it had to help the government out-govern the Taliban.

Yet, Afghans did not live in a free market of ideas where insurgents and counterinsurgents competed for the allegiance of the population and respected their choices. As detailed below, while the Taliban provided limited services in pockets of the country, they primarily secured the population’s support through simple coercion—forced cooperation under threat of death.⁹⁷⁹ In the latter case, stabilization had less to offer a community that already despised the Taliban and would gladly expel them if they could safely do so. As academic research and multiple senior Afghan and U.S. officials observed, many Afghans in contested territory preferred the government but were not willing to stand up to the Taliban until they were confident the government could protect them from retaliation.⁹⁸⁰ Those hearts and minds did not need to be won; those people simply needed help removing the boot from their throats.⁹⁸¹

Many Afghans in contested territory preferred the government but were not willing to stand up to the Taliban until they were confident the government could protect them from retaliation.

The coalition’s service delivery model assumed that wherever the population tolerated the Taliban, they did so because of the services the Taliban provided, rather than fear. Given that this was often not the case, earning the population’s support could have sometimes simply been a matter of the government providing fewer services, but to a higher standard. Specifically, in some cases, to out-perform the Taliban, the government only needed to provide reliable security and decline to prey on the population. Alternatively, in cases where the Taliban actually went beyond coercion and earned the population’s support with limited services, usually in areas they controlled or influenced, stabilization had a more important role to play in filling this service void after clearing, to ensure programming competed on the explicit terms of each community.⁹⁸²

That stabilization’s role would vary depending on the nature of the Taliban’s local support appears not to have been a consideration in stabilization’s theory

of change. After all, if reliable and non-predatory security was all that some communities needed to keep the Taliban out indefinitely, stabilization should not be necessary there at all, yet it was implemented consistently after clearing, wherever resources permitted. Granted, as explored below, tools like the DSF recognized that sources of instability were community-specific; however, DSF also assumed that addressing all of those sources was in the power of stabilization programming. Yet, in environments where the absence of reliable and non-predatory security was the primary source of instability, stabilization programming was unlikely to “move the needle” and might be unnecessary.⁹⁸³ In fact, most practitioners we spoke to believed stabilization rarely brought communities closer to stability than merely providing reliable and non-predatory security would have.

More broadly, while the service delivery model is intuitive, a five-year study on the relationship between service delivery and state legitimacy in eight conflict-affected countries found this relationship was much less linear than the state-building effort in Afghanistan assumed. The study found there was no clear relationship between improvements in people’s access to or satisfaction with services and improvements in their perceptions of government.⁹⁸⁴

Furthermore, in Afghanistan specifically, the literature suggests legitimacy is not historically related to service delivery, in part because the social contract between governments and their populations is typically tethered to an exchange—taxes for services—that is wholly absent in Afghanistan.⁹⁸⁵ Any services Afghans receive are mostly free, so the services bestow little legitimacy on the government.

As scholar Astri Suhrke notes, even the idea that service delivery could legitimize the government is foreign to Afghan political traditions. Legitimacy in Afghanistan is historically anchored in the government’s ability to harness Islam and nationalism, often rallying the country around an external threat. In contrast, the promise of service delivery as a legitimizing force requires tangible and visible results in ways that employing Islam and nationalism do not, as the latter are “ideational” and thus easier for a government to sell and deliver to the population.⁹⁸⁶ As former MRRD Deputy Minister Tariq Esmati noted, moving toward a democracy after the U.S. invasion only amplified the public’s service expectations and highlighted the government’s shortcomings in this area.⁹⁸⁷ In fact, when the promise of improved services raised expectations and failed to materialize, Afghans who saw more of their government through stabilization projects actually developed less favorable impressions of it, perhaps a worse outcome than if the government had not reached into their lives at all.⁹⁸⁸

While the literature highlights a tenuous relationship between services and government legitimacy, the highly consultative NSP did increase the government's favorability and legitimacy through the delivery of services, if only temporarily. From a stabilization perspective, therefore, in areas where services beyond security are necessary to stabilize the community, a fundamental issue is identifying the precise services necessary to win over a particular contested population, which is discussed in detail below.

When the promise of improved services raised expectations and failed to materialize, Afghans who saw more of their government through stabilization projects actually developed less favorable impressions of it.

Local Officials Accountable to Kabul, Not to Constituents

On paper, the Afghan government is among the most centralized in the world. District and provincial administrations are appointed by the central government, which means they are accountable upward to Kabul, rather than downward to the people they serve.⁹⁸⁹ As a result, failing to serve the population does not necessarily result in local officials being kicked out of office, as would be the case if they were regularly up for reelection by their constituents. Instead, as long as they maintain the support of IDLG and the Office of the President, they need not worry about serving the interests of their communities. In theory, poor performers would be replaced by IDLG because poor performance is typically cause for dismissal; yet, in a country as notoriously corrupt as Afghanistan, positions are regularly purchased and the criteria for obtaining and losing employment often has little to do with performance.⁹⁹⁰ Thus, in addition to the other challenges the stabilization effort faced, the coalition was at an automatic disadvantage as it tried to legitimize local administrations that had little structural incentive to serve the population effectively.⁹⁹¹

Karzai Obstructed Efforts to Bolster Subnational Governance

Just as the Afghan government was not structured to support accountable constituent services, it was also unwilling to work against that structure to support the COIN and stabilization mission.⁹⁹² First, President Karzai was not invested in building up the country's formal subnational governance structures because he believed Afghanistan's instability was borne from Pakistani interference, not poor or predatory governance at home.⁹⁹³ He thus fundamentally disagreed with the entire premise of the U.S. stabilization mission and acted accordingly. The fact that it took six months to persuade Karzai of the merits of Operation Moshtarak in Marjah, and that IDLG only sent one official to staff the "government-in-a-box" there, exemplifies how U.S. stabilization efforts as a priority were either ignored or obstructed by the central government.⁹⁹⁴

As Ehsan Zia, former Minister for Rural Rehabilitation and Development, observed, “Karzai was not serious at all about building local governance.”⁹⁹⁵

Second, building subnational governance institutions created competition for Karzai’s informal networks of power brokers across the country, whose power was directly threatened by nascent formal subnational governance institutions.⁹⁹⁶ So, Karzai ensured formal local governance was subordinate to his own informal networks of allies.⁹⁹⁷ Granted, in a country where allegiance is often determined by patronage and personality, Karzai’s actions may have been vital to maintaining the political stability of the national government and preventing additional communal fissures in the provinces. As one U.S. official noted, “Relying on formal governance was not an effective way for Karzai to prevent the government from fracturing because it is far harder to control formal governance. So, to ensure that formal government officials were not disruptive of this balance, he often installed substandard officials because it was their loyalty or role in some bigger political relationship that mattered to him.”⁹⁹⁸

“Karzai was not serious at all about building local governance.”

—Ehsan Zia, former Minister for Rural Rehabilitation and Development

No matter its relative merits, Karzai’s undertaking was wholly at odds with any effort to institutionalize subnational governance. In one well-known example, President Karzai visited Helmand in January 2010, at the height of the surge, to highlight the province’s stabilization. Rather than praise and legitimize



Helmand Governor Gulab Mangal receives President Karzai on January 2, 2010, at a public gathering in Helmand to discuss security and development in the province. (DOD photo)

Helmand's diligent governor, Gulab Mangal, who was sitting next to him, Karzai gave credit for local progress to Sher Mohammed Akhunzada, a former Helmand governor, warlord, and Karzai loyalist who was removed from office in 2005 after nearly 20,000 pounds of opium were found in his house.⁹⁹⁹ Other senior Afghan officials were similarly hostile to “downstream” coalition efforts to build local governance because they felt these efforts undermined their informal influence networks.¹⁰⁰⁰ Predictably, these reservations by senior officials in Kabul stymied efforts to extend the reach of government and reinforced the power of personalities, rather than institutions.

The Coalition Inadvertently Supported Predatory Officials

Throughout the last century, Afghans have seen widely varying levels of formal government in their lives. In contrast, informal governance and dispute resolution mechanisms have been more consistent and prevalent at the local level.¹⁰⁰¹ The literature is quick to note that many rural Afghans (particularly those in the heavily Pashtun areas prioritized for COIN's clear-hold-build process) often did not want the reach of formal government to be extended because it was traditionally foreign to them.¹⁰⁰² Yet, among the more than 100 U.S., British, and Afghan practitioners we spoke to—from ambassadors, generals, and senior USAID officials to governors, civil affairs officers, stabilization program managers, and implementing partners—not one had ever heard Afghans say they did not want more government in their lives.

What many did imply, however, was that if presented with the choice between no government and predatory, corrupt, and incompetent government, Afghans, like most people, would certainly opt for no government, and that was often the choice they faced.¹⁰⁰³ As scholar Vanda Felbab-Brown noted, “Everyone craves good governance, and Afghans want democracy, or at least pluralism and accountability. However, if democracy delivers abusive, predatory, and capricious governance, then even predictable brutality may be better.”¹⁰⁰⁴

“Everyone craves good governance, and Afghans want democracy, or at least pluralism and accountability. However, if democracy delivers abusive, predatory, and capricious governance, then even predictable brutality may be better.”

—Vanda Felbab-Brown, Senior Fellow at Brookings

This distinction pointed to a significant challenge for extending the government's reach: Because it moved as fast as it did, the coalition had little choice but to support many government officials who were predatory, corrupt, or incompetent. As practitioners noted, the irony was painful. The effort to legitimize the government was undermined when the very Afghans brought

in to lead the effort themselves became sources of instability as repellent as (if not more repellent than) the Taliban.¹⁰⁰⁵ As former IDLG Deputy Minister Farid Mamundzai observed, “Stability programs didn’t address these causes of instability” and sometimes “enabled them.”¹⁰⁰⁶

In fact, because stabilization programming was meant to be public and involve deliberations among community elders and local officials, these deliberations were unlikely to identify those very officials as local sources of instability. After all, few elders participating in a stabilization working group would publicly accuse their own local officials of malfeasance.¹⁰⁰⁷ As a result, the stabilization process often inadvertently introduced or legitimized sources of instability and then immunized those sources from being identified and extricated.

The Scope was Too Ambitious and Missed Opportunities to Focus on Dispute Resolution

In part because of the assumption that COIN and stabilization in Iraq could be replicated in Afghanistan, the idea of extending the reach of the government was not properly tailored to Afghanistan.¹⁰⁰⁸ Specifically, the implicit value proposition explaining why Afghans should trust their government more than the Taliban had little to do with the Afghan context and more to do with what the coalition was well-positioned to try to build.

The primary services the Taliban had occasionally provided since 2001 were physical security and sporadic dispute resolution—neither of which, as IDLG’s Barna Karimi noted, required a development budget or technical skill.¹⁰⁰⁹ The Taliban mostly opted to forsake services entirely and secured the support of the population through predation and coercion.¹⁰¹⁰ Yet, it was widely assumed that to compete with the Taliban for the allegiance of the population, Afghans would need access to high-quality government services pushed down from most ministries.¹⁰¹¹

In contrast, after decades of war, the ease of the Taliban’s rise to power and resilience since 2001 suggested that the specific services the Taliban occasionally provided—security and dispute resolution—were sufficient for many Afghans to grant them legitimacy in areas where those services were available.¹⁰¹² Afghan minister and governor of Laghman, Paktika, and Helmand Provinces Gulab Mangal observed:

I have seen cases where people have spent five to six years for a small issue in the government courts. A small issue like that gets solved by the Taliban in one day. I don’t believe the Taliban were just and provided real justice, but the thing is that people want results. In many cases, people will say that I want my case solved even if I don’t win. I don’t want to spend money on my case for five years and spend double or triple the amount of the property that I am contesting. . . . So, if we had focused all our effort only on security and justice, it would have been better.¹⁰¹³



A CERP-funded appellate courthouse in Mehtarlam, Laghman Province, on June 4, 2013. (DOD photo by Spc. Hilda Clayton)

However, instead of using the Taliban offerings as a baseline for the government’s own value proposition, the coalition tried to build soaring institutions that the Afghan government was unprepared to manage or sustain. “We did what we know how to do, not what needed to be done,” said former SRAP senior advisor Barnett Rubin. “We build bureaucracies, so that’s what we did.”¹⁰¹⁴

“We did what we know how to do, not what needed to be done. . . . We build bureaucracies, so that’s what we did.”

—Barnett Rubin, former SRAP advisor

Even within dispute resolution, the U.S. government chose to focus on formal rule of law, rather than informal rule of law, also called traditional dispute resolution (TDR). TDR in Afghanistan employs a varying mixture of traditional, community-specific norms, and Islamic legal principles, or *sharia*.¹⁰¹⁵ As early as 2007, international legal experts highlighted the coalition’s inattention to informal justice, even though an estimated 80–90 percent of Afghan disputes are handled through TDR, and many Afghans have more faith in it than in formal dispute resolution.¹⁰¹⁶

The TDR system predates the Taliban, which simply administers a harsh form of sharia-based TDR in the areas it controls and influences, and forbids the use

of state-run justice systems.¹⁰¹⁷ Even with popular and respected Taliban judges, the process and results can be abusive or inequitable.¹⁰¹⁸ However, according to former IDLG Deputy Minister Farid Mamundzai, “The rules of justice the Taliban follow are already understood in the society, which makes it easy for people to accept,” allowing the Taliban to secure legitimacy by providing an important service that “already existed at the local level.”¹⁰¹⁹ In other words, not only was TDR more familiar and acceptable, but the Taliban demonstrated the value of using TDR as a politically legitimizing force.

However, according to a former senior USAID official, “We dismissed the traditional justice system because we thought it didn’t have any relevance for what we wanted to see in today’s Afghanistan. We wanted to give them something they had never had before.”¹⁰²⁰ Furthermore, supporting TDR would have posed other challenges. As Barnett Rubin noted, “Trying to compete with the Taliban’s successful dispute resolution would have meant allowing sharia, and that’s not something we could politically do.”¹⁰²¹

“We dismissed the traditional justice system because we thought it didn’t have any relevance for what we wanted to see in today’s Afghanistan. We wanted to give them something they had never had before.”

—Former senior USAID official

The U.S. government spent more than \$1 billion on rule of law programming in Afghanistan between 2003 and 2015, of which less than \$100 million (approximately 10 percent) was spent on enhancing informal rule of law.¹⁰²² State’s 2009 rule of law strategy—the only one it drafted—recognized the importance of TDR to Afghans, even calling it a “pillar” of the coalition’s effort; however, the balance between funding for formal and informal rule of law programming did not seem to reflect this recognition.¹⁰²³ Worse, the kind of dispute resolution promoted by formal rule of law programming was not only considered corrupt, but also foreign to most rural Afghans. As Dr. Sibghatullah, the director of the District Delivery Program, noted:

For the first year after Marjah was cleared, formal judiciary officials only heard five cases because no one was used to it. Locals would tell us, ‘We’ve never seen this and need to see if it works.’ They also didn’t think it was practical because of the slow appeals process. Some believed locals were not using it because of Taliban intimidation, but they were still going to the district governor for dispute resolution, so they couldn’t have been afraid. And when the district governor would refer them to formal judiciary officials and the huqooq [mediator], whose job it was to address those grievances, locals never followed up with them.¹⁰²⁴

Of the rule of law funding devoted to informal justice, approximately \$40 million was spent on USAID’s “Rule of Law Stabilization Program-Informal Component”

(RLS-I) from 2010 to 2014.¹⁰²⁵ According to State’s 2009 rule of law strategy, informal rule of law efforts would “provide security and space for traditional justice mechanisms to reemerge organically in areas cleared of the Taliban.”¹⁰²⁶ RLS-I operated in 48 districts and sub-districts, among them 23 key terrain districts, and like many stabilization programs, it was most successful in areas “where elders have some level of education, implementation is not threatened by insecurity, and where there is a district government that is at least partially functioning.”¹⁰²⁷

While results were mixed, RLS-I was at least built on foundations more appropriate to its Afghan context.¹⁰²⁸ For example, according to a program fact sheet, “through a series of trainings and outreach tools, [RLS-I] introduces principles of sharia law to TDR stakeholders to reduce the likelihood of TDR decisions violating the rights of Afghans.”¹⁰²⁹ Despite the sensitivity of promoting non-Western rule of law principles and the coalition’s general reluctance to do so, USAID actually tried to make TDR more aligned with sharia because the agency recognized that doing so in this case would make TDR more democratic, less violent, and actually help communities resist Taliban interference.

Similarly, while not a rule of law program, ASOP’s successes in resolving disputes through traditional means actually decreased the work load of formal judiciary officials, who were regarded as unable to meet the demand.¹⁰³⁰

RLS-I and ASOP showed that the U.S. government was capable of promoting sharia in principle, as well as extending the government’s reach through a tailored stabilization approach that Afghans could find familiar, legitimate, and effective—a model that pointed to the importance of developing fewer institutions, better.

Regardless of the mechanisms and details, connecting people in unstable environments to legitimate and competent government officials, institutions, and services (including security) is important for effective stabilization. As one senior USAID official noted, “We can’t build a country by addressing thousands of local grievances ourselves.”¹⁰³¹ Even building and sustaining the kind of informal rule of law that helps legitimize the Afghan government requires extending the government’s reach to a certain degree. At the very least, extending the reach has to be a part of the solution, as there has to be a capable government to hand everything off to when the effort scales down.

IMPLEMENTATION

The coalition faced a number of challenges specific to the nuts and bolts of implementing stabilization programming that deserve special attention.

The Tools Were Too Complicated

Analytical tools like the District Stability Framework were important for helping military and development professionals identify and program against local sources of instability. Unfortunately, the tools were so complicated that even the most skilled users needed several days of training to use them.¹⁰³² It took USAID's Office of Transition Initiatives a full year to help its Afghan staff understand the concept of "sources of instability" because for years they had been trained to address community needs and wish lists instead.¹⁰³³ Predictably, then, Afghan elders and district officials were often overwhelmed by the terminology, concepts, and processes.¹⁰³⁴

To its credit, USAID recognized these challenges and modified the DSF for the second round of stabilization programs after 2012, dubbing the new version the Stability Analysis Methodology (also called Stability Assessment Method). Unfortunately, SAM users often experienced similar problems.¹⁰³⁵

Reverse Engineering

Perhaps one effect of the confusion behind DSF and SAM was its misapplication by Afghans in stability working groups. Specifically, DSF and SAM sought to identify projects through the prism of what would make a particular community more or less stable. Yet, there were consistent examples of Afghans and implementers who "reverse engineered" this process. Instead of identifying the source of instability and collectively working toward the appropriate intervention to address that SOI, many participants would first identify whatever project they wanted or needed and surreptitiously devise a plausible SOI that could be superficially linked to that desired project to ensure it would be funded.¹⁰³⁶



An elder talking about sources of instability at a Stability Analysis Methodology training session in Baghlani Jadid District, Baghlan Province, in March 2014. (USAID photo)

Addressing Needs vs. Sources of Instability

While some practitioners believed that reverse engineering would be less of a problem had USAID and its partner staff been better trained and qualified, the reverse engineering issue was only one of many with DSF and SAM that points to a larger question as to whether it would have been better to program according to need, rather than according to the stability criteria favored by USAID.¹⁰³⁷ The Afghan elders who reverse engineered tools like DSF and SAM were actually trying to program by need because (for any number of reasons) they did not value projects that attempted to address instability. According

to former SRAP senior advisor Barnett Rubin, “Afghans knew this influx of funds wouldn’t last, and they wanted to make the best of the windfall without endangering themselves.”¹⁰³⁸

Other practitioners believed that reverse engineering was caused by a disconnect between the diagnosis and the available remedies; that is, the sources of instability identified by the DSF and SAM were typically systemic (e.g., corruption and impunity) and not fixable in the near-term. USAID evaluations likewise expressed doubt that the small projects typical of stabilization could address these larger problems.¹⁰³⁹ As former Deputy Minister at IDLG Farid Mamundzai observed, while stabilization projects “positively impacted the local economy and [provided] a sense of hope. . . [they] couldn’t address root causes of instability.”¹⁰⁴⁰ If used properly, these tools should have pointed to the type of long-term interventions for which the coalition did not have the time or mandate. Indeed, Afghan officials and elders typically preferred long-term programs and projects that they believed were more likely to have an enduring impact on sources of instability than an abundance of small projects.¹⁰⁴¹

Without long-term solutions on the menu, Afghans played the game and often identified “systemic problems” they claimed could be addressed with a retainer wall or cash-for-work. USAID and its partners were not in a position to object because all parties wanted immediate impact.¹⁰⁴² So, interventions remained mostly socioeconomic in nature and addressed issues such as “unemployment, illiteracy, lack of social services, and inadequate infrastructure,” rather than the political, factional, ethnic, tribal, and communal conflicts that usually drove instability.¹⁰⁴³ With modifications, the DSF or some version of it could have addressed some of these more complicated sources of instability; priorities for quick impact simply precluded it from doing so.

Lack of Government Reach Often Not a Source of Instability

If extending the reach of the government was the main premise of stabilization, then needs-based programming would seem to be the logical solution, as it would connect communities to multiple levels of local governance in a far simpler way. If reach is the primary issue, it would have made more sense to simply meet the people’s needs with more NSP-like programs and show Afghans the benefit of working with the government, thus meeting the COIN criteria of legitimizing the government and weakening the insurgency.¹⁰⁴⁴

After all, NSP improved the government’s legitimacy, and even temporarily improved local perceptions of the government, in proportion to visits by local officials and security forces.¹⁰⁴⁵ As one USAID evaluation noted, “Considering that the SOI may be the poor response of the government to the desires of the



CCI-funded road construction in Sarkani District, Kunar Province, during summer 2013. (USAID photo)

community (regardless of what those are), acting on requests is itself addressing a source of instability.”¹⁰⁴⁶

It turned out, however, that despite claims at State and USAID, lack of reach was often not the source of instability.¹⁰⁴⁷ Rural Afghanistan is immeasurably diverse, so the Taliban’s value proposition in one village cluster might be completely different from its approach in a nearby cluster, and the government’s approach to address those sources of instability would need to be tailored accordingly.¹⁰⁴⁸ To drive the Taliban out, some communities might need more officials and services, others fewer, and others still might simply need physical security.¹⁰⁴⁹ Particularly in the south, there was a frequent assumption (likely due to the operational tempo) that merely extending the reach would be sufficient to stabilize these communities, and that was often untrue, particularly when the government officials were predatory, corrupt, or incompetent.¹⁰⁵⁰ Because lack of reach was not the primary SOI, focusing on extending reach alone was insufficient.¹⁰⁵¹

Fortunately, despite having identified lack of reach as a unifying nationwide source of instability that overtly drove most stabilization programs, USAID in practice also recognized that there was actually no single nationwide source of instability and created the DSF and SAM to analyze local grievances and tailor

local solutions. While there was some tension between the two ideas—that there was and was not a primary source of instability—some practitioners reconciled them by claiming that extending the reach was only part of the means (and certainly not the ends) of achieving stability, and that making officials and services available at the local level made it possible for unrelated SOIs to be properly addressed.¹⁰⁵²

To that end, the DSF and SAM were in a position to help identify precisely what kind of reach was necessary at the local level, but instead, according to several current and former USAID officials, the coalition would often “blindly” bring in more officials and services from the ministries.¹⁰⁵³ As Governor of Kunduz, Wardak, Khost, and Laghman Provinces Jabar Naimee observed, “In the majority of districts, we never even heard the real problems of the people. We made assumptions, conducted military operations, brought in government staff, and assumed it would lead to security and stability.”¹⁰⁵⁴

“In the majority of districts, we never even heard the real problems of the people. We made assumptions, conducted military operations, brought in government staff, and assumed it would lead to security and stability.”

—Governor Jabar Naimee

In the end, given the pressure to spend and the difficulty of using the various tools, many programmers opted not to use the tools and instead simply used pre-existing community wish lists, helped “poor people,” did projects for the sake of doing projects, programmed with their “gut,” or were satisfied if the project merely improved trust between the community and the government.¹⁰⁵⁵ According to one former USAID official who trained hundreds of USAID and military officials in the field, few in either group were able to identify the reason the Taliban were accepted or tolerated in any given community, “even though that’s the very question that should drive all stabilization programming.”¹⁰⁵⁶ So while diagnostic tools like DSF and SAM were necessary, they were often not used, or used poorly.¹⁰⁵⁷

Top-Down Solutions Were Distractions

Just as often, the various diagnostic tools were bypassed from above. As strategic documents often do, the Riedel review, the 2009 campaign plan, and SRAP’s Af-Pak Regional Stabilization Strategy diagnosed a number of national-level SOIs to help the mission focus. Yet, these priorities also forced programming to address these “flavors of the month,” which often took precedence over the local SOIs identified through the DSF or SAM.¹⁰⁵⁸ These top-down prescriptions, while tempting for nationwide messaging and priorities,



Computer training for women in Mandozai District, Khost Province, in April 2015. (USAID photo)

contradicted the entire premise of stabilization—that every Afghan community is different and that programming had to be tailored accordingly. So, while the top-down prescription of extending the government’s reach could at least be treated as an instrument in tailoring local SOIs, these “flavors of the month” could not, as they left little room for local deliberations.

For example, the Riedel review repeatedly emphasized the importance of developing the agricultural sector as an “essential first step to undercutting the appeal of al-Qaeda and its allies.”¹⁰⁵⁹ In turn, by the summer of 2009, the Integrated Civ-Mil Campaign Plan framed “agriculture opportunity and market access” as one of its “transformative effects,” and SRAP Holbrooke likewise prioritized agriculture as a solution to stabilize the south.¹⁰⁶⁰ According to Holbrooke’s senior advisor, Vali Nasr, Holbrooke “became a veritable spokesman for Afghanistan’s pomegranate farmer.”¹⁰⁶¹ In December 2009, Secretary Clinton wrote in an agency-wide cable that “our top reconstruction priority is implementing a civilian-military agriculture redevelopment strategy to restore Afghanistan’s once vibrant agriculture sector. This will help sap the insurgency of fighters and of income from poppy cultivation.”¹⁰⁶² As a result, implementers had to work agriculture into much of their programming, even if the local source of instability had little to do with agriculture.¹⁰⁶³

Shortly thereafter, after being prominently featured in the updated 2010 Regional Stabilization Strategy, gender and women’s rights became a central theme in

stabilization.¹⁰⁶⁴ For a time, many stabilization projects and interventions had to either have gender components or sometimes explicitly center on gender, regardless of the SOI and even though USAID that same year was explicit that stabilization programming would not be gender-focused.¹⁰⁶⁵ The 2010 strategy noted the importance of tailoring solutions to local settings, even as it articulated top-down prescriptions to override them.¹⁰⁶⁶ As one former USAID official noted, from a development perspective, such top-down prescriptions made sense, but stabilization is inherently bottom-up and is supposed to account for variance on the ground.¹⁰⁶⁷ Forcing these prescriptions onto stabilization programming was thus counterproductive, both in theory and in practice.

Zero Sum: Building Capacity vs. Implementing Projects

Even setting aside the freedom of implementers to tailor local solutions to local problems, programmers consistently faced an enduring dilemma: whether to concentrate on project implementation, which focused on immediate visible progress, or capacity building, which focused on sustainable long-term progress. Each was seen as vital to the mission, but with deadlines continuously bearing down, the two were often mutually exclusive.¹⁰⁶⁸ As noted earlier, stabilization programs evolved to focus far more on building capacity from 2012 through 2017, with the SAM focusing more heavily on ensuring Afghan participation.

By focusing on building capacity, programmers assumed Afghan officials would be better positioned to provide services at some future time. However, with a steep learning curve, it also meant projects took far longer to implement. In contrast, when the coalition focused on completing projects, Afghans saw impact more quickly, but without knowledgeable Afghan officials to carry those projects and services forward, the efforts were ad hoc and often unsustainable.¹⁰⁶⁹ Throughout, under pressure to ensure services were delivered to Afghans, the coalition undermined the very government it was trying to build, even as it often made the “right” decisions. For example, according to Marc Chretien, a political advisor to the Marines in Helmand, the following occurred one week into the clearing of Marjah in early 2010:

There was a pocket of civilians isolated and trapped nearby because of the fighting and they needed humanitarian aid. The Brits wanted the Ministry of Refugees to handle it, but it was clear the government would take several weeks to deliver the aid to the displaced community, so the Marines went ahead and delivered the aid by air the next day.¹⁰⁷⁰

It was inevitable that USAID and the military would attempt creative shortcuts to simultaneously build capacity and quickly implement projects. For example, one stabilization contractor noted:

Rather than build capacity, we sought it out. We went in and picked winners. We said, ‘This guy is bright’ or ‘That guy is easy to work with,’ regardless of whether his role was suited to that specific task or process. We weren’t building capacity; we were playing favorites to accommodate program priorities.¹⁰⁷¹



Production agriculture specialists from the Iowa National Guard's 734th Agribusiness Development Team (ADT) till the ground inside the greenhouse at the Chowkay Demonstration Farm in Chowkay District, Kunar Province, on December 5, 2010. (U.S. Air Force photo by Capt. Peter Shinn)

In a broader sense, local Afghan officials valued programs like CERP and vehicles like PRTs because “they wouldn’t have the same influence or money if the PRTs went away, but we were blocking normal governance by being there,” said retired Major General Karl McQuillan, former Deputy Commanding General for eastern Afghanistan.¹⁰⁷² As one USAID official noted, “The Afghan government had no motive to create their own budget process because the spigot was turned on full force.”¹⁰⁷³ More than preventing good governance from emerging, the coalition sometimes undermined existing and relatively successful government programs like NSP by inundating communities with CERP.¹⁰⁷⁴ Likewise, some USAID programs also undermined governance processes by distributing massive amounts of aid without substantive community engagement processes. AVIPA handed out enough tractors, water pumps, seed, and fertilizer to distort local economies and made no effort to work through local governance systems.¹⁰⁷⁵ Ultimately, a community was unlikely to grant more legitimacy to its government or thoughtfully deliberate as a community about its NSP grant if the coalition offered them far more money, jobs, and infrastructure through CERP or AVIPA.

“The Afghan government had no motive to create their own budget process because the spigot was turned on full force.”

—USAID official

PRIORITIZING THE MOST DANGEROUS AREAS MADE STABILIZATION LESS EFFECTIVE

Until 2009, to the extent USAID attempted to stabilize Afghanistan, it did so with limited stabilization programs in the south and east, as well as a broader effort to expand already existing bubbles of stability, for example, in the larger cities and many of the provincial capitals.¹⁰⁷⁶ From 2005 through 2008, the embassy shifted from a war footing to normalized embassy operations, which meant that its development and stabilization portfolios focused on more secure areas.¹⁰⁷⁷

By 2009, most analysts agreed that these efforts were failing. The March 2009 Riedel review clearly articulated the urgency of clearing, holding, and building the least secure areas of the south and the east as a way of permanently displacing al-Qaeda and the Taliban from those areas.¹⁰⁷⁸ Later that summer, the campaign plan claimed that “securing the most unstable provinces will have a cascading impact on the rest of the country,” and General McChrystal’s August 2009 assessment agreed that “ISAF will initially focus on critical high-population areas that are contested or controlled by insurgents.”¹⁰⁷⁹ Within months, 30,000 more troops and hundreds of civilians had been ordered to deploy to meet this strategic intent in the newly created key terrain districts that were seen as islands of vulnerability or Taliban support in strategic areas of the south and east with limited or no government presence. Yet, while an aggressive campaign in the Taliban’s heartland could be justified militarily, as shown below, prioritizing the most dangerous areas of the country haunted the stabilization effort.¹⁰⁸⁰

Rewarding Instability and Penalizing Peace

By clearing, holding, and building areas where the Taliban presence and support base was strongest, the coalition rewarded unstable districts at the expense of stable or semi-stable ones, even after transition began.¹⁰⁸¹ As a senior USAID official recalled, “Governors in the north and the west would come to Kabul and ask us, ‘What do we have to do to get some love—blow something up?’” As a result, a backwards incentive structure developed, whereby communities could only receive stabilization projects by supporting or otherwise enabling the Taliban so the communities could then be “turned” with aid projects.¹⁰⁸² Another senior USAID official noted, “Why not make an example of stable areas to make others envious? . . . Instead, we built schools in areas that are too dangerous for kids to leave the house.”¹⁰⁸³

More broadly, for a government to provide services and resources to only some of its citizens was already “textbook poor governance;” it was inequitable and viewed by many Afghans as a form of corruption and an affront to Islamic values.¹⁰⁸⁴ At the same time, however, stabilization programming had to apply a triage system: resources were limited and some areas needed to be prioritized. By their very



Men wheel out a bag of fertilizer at a USAID event on April 9, 2010, in Arghandab District, Kandahar Province. (USAID photo)

nature, stabilization programs must take place in areas suffering from some insecurity, so such imbalances will often be present in stabilization missions.

“You can’t buy love; you can only incentivize good behavior after the fact.”

—Major General Karl McQuillan

Yet, ignoring peaceful communities was less problematic than the way targeted communities were rewarded for being unstable. Instead of inviting the behavior the coalition and government sought and then rewarding it when that behavior manifested itself, the reward of projects was offered for free in the hope of generating the desired behavior. As one U.S. official noted, “Giving things away doesn’t work. Stabilization should always be quid pro quo.”¹⁰⁸⁵ The frequent absence of such an explicit exchange meant Afghans did not own the process, nor were they motivated to own it.¹⁰⁸⁶ As a result, vulnerable communities that either did not want or were otherwise not ready for stabilization received the services anyway in the hope that it would naturally lead them to embrace the government and expel the Taliban. Echoing numerous senior Afghan officials, retired Major General McQuillan noted, “You can’t buy love; you can only incentivize good behavior after the fact.”¹⁰⁸⁷ In other words, the intended change in behavior was often an expectation or hope, rather than what it should have been: a precondition for projects.

For the coalition to have credibility in such a proposed trade, however, the Afghans who were being pressured to denounce and mobilize against the Taliban needed to see “beacons on the hill,” examples of nearby districts and contested communities that had been rewarded after siding with the government. That way, every success would yield others in neighboring areas as the ink spot of improved governance and security spread from one community to the next.¹⁰⁸⁸ Yet, those beacons of success were rare, given the priority to target some of the most dangerous areas of the country first and the immense difficulty in turning each of them.¹⁰⁸⁹ So, rather than tackle the hardest districts first and use the momentum to stabilize less challenging districts, as the coalition had intended, this prioritization simply meant that less was accomplished as the coalition was increasingly bogged down.¹⁰⁹⁰

Even Securing the Population was Difficult

By targeting the most insecure areas first, the coalition made it difficult to showcase the full clear-hold-build cycle, as insecurity kept much of the coalition perpetually stuck in the clearing and holding phases.¹⁰⁹¹ In fact, according to some practitioners, discussions never even evolved to the last phase of building.¹⁰⁹² As COIN advocates fully recognize, and as was particularly true in Afghanistan, physical security is the bedrock of stability.¹⁰⁹³ Bob Crowley, the senior governance and development advisor to the ISAF commander, noted, “Unless the population is convinced the government will support and protect them indefinitely, counterinsurgency and stabilization won’t work.”¹⁰⁹⁴ Yet, the targeted areas were so dangerous they needed to be cleared and re-cleared again and again, akin to “mowing the grass.”¹⁰⁹⁵ For example, one former DOD advisor recounted the cycle this way:

ISAF would move into a valley with ANDSF in tow, clear the area, and set up an ISAF/ANDSF patrol base, if the forces were available, so stabilization could begin. But, when it came time to clear a neighboring valley a few weeks later, the forces from that first patrol base would often be withdrawn to help, leaving behind a skeleton crew that couldn’t patrol the newly cleared valley. The Taliban would then re-infiltrate the valley, and stabilization projects would be put on hold until the area could be re-cleared and the trust-building process would begin again. And when we finally returned, it was obviously harder to convince the Afghans in that valley that we’d stick around, and they’d be right not to trust us. We couldn’t protect them.¹⁰⁹⁶

Other times, ANDSF would be available to hold while ISAF pushed on to the next valley, but would be unwilling to do so without ISAF collocated to protect them.¹⁰⁹⁷ Thus, rather than connecting increasingly stabilized ink spots, creating new ink spots often meant removing old ones.¹⁰⁹⁸ After all, these communities were relatively easy to infiltrate; there were no walls or fences protecting them, and only those who benefited from VSO even saw their Afghan protectors every day. The rest saw ANDSF patrols once or twice a week at best, and the Taliban exerted control in the area the rest of the time.¹⁰⁹⁹



U.S. Marines with Bravo Company, 1st Battalion, 5th Marine Regiment, conduct a security patrol in Nawa District, Helmand Province, on August 7, 2009. (U.S. Marine Corps photo by Cpl. Artur Shvartsberg)

“Unless the population is convinced the government will support and protect them indefinitely, counterinsurgency and stabilization won’t work.”

—Bob Crowley, senior governance and development advisor to the ISAF commander

As candidates for stabilization, districts that endured this dance season after season (sometimes year after year) rarely developed a new sense of normalcy and government protection, and the trust required to change the local calculus and behavior in favor of the government did not materialize.¹¹⁰⁰ Worse, according to former Minister for Rural Rehabilitation and Development Wais Barmak, after the drawdown, the situation deteriorated dramatically as “the Taliban started to infiltrate back into those areas and district governors were often limited to the office building of the district center.”¹¹⁰¹

Programming in an Information Vacuum

Collecting information about Afghan communities—their rivalries, histories, and leaders—was extremely difficult, even in the best of circumstances. As one member of General McChrystal’s initial assessment team noted, effectively implementing a counterinsurgency and stabilization effort required “a level of local knowledge that I don’t have about my hometown,” a standard that was often impossible for foreigners to meet.¹¹⁰² The United States and its coalition

partners were overly reliant on local leaders for intelligence and insight, which left stabilization programmers vulnerable to manipulation by these same leaders.¹¹⁰³ Basing decisions on poor or inadequate information was inevitable. As one civ-mil planner observed:

We were played all the time by the Afghans. If you didn't understand what had come before, rolling in with some help wasn't going to do very much. Clear, hold, and build doesn't work if you don't have an underlying political understanding and a grasp of the human terrain.¹¹⁰⁴

The challenge was made far harder by the lack of security, which meant that civil affairs, stabilization programmers, and implementing partners often operated in information vacuums.¹¹⁰⁵ Every soldier, diplomat, and practitioner we spoke with had stories of unintended consequences driven by poor information and the coalition's limited access to KTDs. The coalition often unknowingly implemented projects that supported one local power broker, faction, tribe, or ethnic group over another, which aggravated local conflict and gave disaffected communities a reason to start or continue supporting the Taliban. In one example in Kunar, civil affairs used CERP to dig a well for one village, but not its neighbor, and unintentionally reinvigorated a 400-year dispute over a bride-napping.¹¹⁰⁶



Human Terrain Team social scientist Kathleen Reedy discusses challenges and business opportunities for women at a shura in Jaji Maidan District, Khost Province, on February 10, 2011. (U.S. Army photo by Spc. Tobey White)

Information vacuums led not only to programming decisions that drove fence-sitters to support the Taliban, but sometimes even benefited the Taliban directly. According to a stabilization contractor, “There was one SIKA-East project that program staff were particularly proud of because it was done in such a dangerous location, but we found out accidentally that it was only implemented there because the Taliban shadow governor wanted it there.”¹¹⁰⁷

Well aware of the challenges at the time, the military fielded Human Terrain Teams (HTT) staffed with civilian social scientists to embed with military commanders, mostly at the brigade and regiment level, to help the military understand the grievances of and relationships between the populations in which they operated.¹¹⁰⁸ First deployed to Iraq and then Afghanistan, the success of these teams varied considerably depending on their composition and the relationships they built with their respective military commanders and staffs.¹¹⁰⁹

The handful of studies on HTTs largely agree most military commanders valued the HTTs embedded with their units, but the program was controversial, poorly managed, and faced many of the personnel issues that troubled the civilian agencies.¹¹¹⁰ Few disagreed, however, that there was a dire need for resources to help U.S. government agencies and military units better understand the communities whose hearts and minds they were intent on winning, lest they waste money or even create and exacerbate the very problems they were hoping to help the Afghan government address.¹¹¹¹

In an environment rife with local conflict, reliable information was often elusive. However, by prioritizing highly insecure areas, and by moving so quickly to stabilize them, the coalition significantly worsened its prospects of understanding the local environment and leveraging that understanding to stabilize communities.

Dearth of Willing and Qualified Afghan Government Officials

The lack of security in priority areas made it far less likely that qualified Afghan government officials would sign up to work in these districts.¹¹¹² The absence of qualified (or any) officials highlighted that successful stabilization depends on the existence of some local governance already in place.¹¹¹³ Without qualified local civil servants, the government cannot build legitimacy, capacity, or sustainable momentum. In fact, to be effective during stabilization, these civil servants need to already have been in place long enough to know their constituents' concerns and grievances. USAID quickly recognized this, which is why the District Delivery Program was intent on recruiting and fielding more Afghan officials to deliver and sustain the services provided through other stabilization programs. Yet, prioritizing the most dangerous areas meant that the required history of local governance could not be established before stabilization programming ramped up.¹¹¹⁴ With little time available for security to improve, governance and stabilization programming were often attempted simultaneously.¹¹¹⁵

In 2010, one brigade in Zabul filled the void by using CERP to hire advisors, or unofficial district governors, for almost every district in the province. According to an officer on the brigade staff at the time:

Some of the districts had no governors, and the rest had governors who refused to leave [the provincial capital of] Qalat. We only had three U.S. companies to devote to clearing most of the province, so we had no choice but to bypass clear and go straight to hold and build. So, we used CERP to hire an advisor for every district who worked with elders to determine project priorities, which we then used to target CERP projects. The advisors were born and raised in the district, unlike the district governors who were viewed as outsiders to local tribes. The tribal elders appointed the advisors, who we then hired. They did exactly what district governors were supposed to do because the governors refused to.¹¹¹⁶



Shah Joy District Governor Abdul Qayum speaks to elders about security and elections during a shura near Forward Operating Base Bullard in Shah Joy District, Zabul Province, on September 5, 2010. (U.S. Air Force photo by Senior Airman Nathanael Callon)

There was not sufficient security to extend the government’s reach, so this brigade hoped that well-conceived CERP projects would create the necessary security and demand for governance such that the district governors would feel comfortable taking over governance when they could. Yet, in the meantime, from their perspective, progress was too critical to wait for that to happen, and the area was too dangerous to expect it to happen any time soon.

Even the most senior U.S. civilian officials in Kabul had the impression that Americans were expected to assume Afghan government functions in KTDs where Afghans were unavailable or unwilling to do so.¹¹¹⁷ Although the quality of civil servants would likely be an issue anywhere in Afghanistan given that “growth rates of organic government . . . are sociologically constrained,” as Ambassador Eikenberry noted, this problem was compounded by the decision to prioritize the most dangerous areas first.¹¹¹⁸

Programming was Ineffective in Highly Insecure Areas

KTDs, particularly in the south, were so dangerous that stabilization implementing partners were often unable to implement programs effectively or complete projects accountably.¹¹¹⁹ As one former senior USAID official recounted:

The military asked us to build a 38-kilometer road in Arghandab, Kandahar, and five kilometers in, our implementing partner told us it’s not safe enough to go further. The military asked why we stopped, so we all flew out there



A village elder talks with an ANA commando during a mission in search of insurgent weapons caches in Alahsang village, Wardak Province, on March 6, 2012. (U.S. Navy photo by Mass Communication Specialist 3rd Class Sebastian McCormack)

to take a look, and it was so insecure that our landing zone was under fire and we had to turn back. Think about that. We were supposed to build roads in an area so dangerous that armed U.S. military helicopters could not even land nearby.¹¹²⁰

According to USAID's own internal guidance, a certain baseline of security was required before holding could begin to take place, and attempts to implement prior to that point were ineffective. As noted in the U.S. government's 2011–2015 interagency Performance Management Plan:

While a high level of insecurity is assumed in the areas where most stabilization partners will be operating, there must be some basic level of security in order to allow project staff to operate, quality assessments to be performed, high-quality, successful projects to be implemented, and results to be felt by the community. Without basic security, programs may exacerbate instability and provide resources for [anti-government elements].¹¹²¹

Similarly, an evaluation of the Afghanistan Stabilization Initiative found that small-scale infrastructure activities implemented in areas that were still in the clear phase failed to achieve much, but the same approach bore fruit in areas where community leaders felt secure enough to associate with the government.¹¹²²

By 2013, a USAID lessons learned report went one step further and suggested that stabilization projects should not take place until the build phase of COIN.¹¹²³ Yet, as noted above, it was difficult to hold—much less build—areas that were not patrolled regularly by competent security forces. In any Afghan community

that received such limited government protection, few residents would risk reporting, denouncing, or mobilizing against the Taliban, and it strains credulity to think that providing them a small infrastructure project could overcome this challenge.¹¹²⁴ As one USAID official observed:

In Wardak, we were doing all the right things and our projects were very well-received. Locals were happy they could use our roads to take their goods more easily to market, thrilled to have more jobs from the infrastructure projects and more prosperity from the improved value chains, but they were still terrified for their lives. They were perpetually concerned about security. They didn't feel like their government could protect them, and we couldn't change that no matter how much we built, how many people we employed, or how much they liked us for it.¹¹²⁵

Notably, Wardak comprised some of the more secure districts the coalition tried to clear, hold, and build. Yet, while KTDs in places like Wardak were permissive enough to physically complete projects, they remained too unstable for those projects to have the larger intended impact on behavior.

Many communities were so dangerous that elders and government officials would not even participate in stability working groups or agree to accept projects for fear of retribution and, on at least one occasion, elders felt obliged to request permission from the Taliban's Peshawar shura before allowing stabilization projects to be implemented, clearly defeating the purpose.¹¹²⁶ In northern Helmand, almost half of CCI projects attempted were not completed because, according to local staff, the Taliban did not allow the remainder to proceed.¹¹²⁷ In other places, including Kandahar City—where troops



Tailoring training in a bazaar in Kajaki District, Helmand Province, in 2014. (USAID photo)

were densely concentrated and aid abundant—projects, implementers, and participating communities were formally taxed by the Taliban and killed for failure to pay.¹¹²⁸ Others faced violent retribution or assassination for simply participating in the programs.¹¹²⁹

The Primacy of Security and Control

One important indicator of security is physical control of the terrain. In areas where security forces had enough control to move freely, they were in a better position to protect the population and civil servants were in a better position to provide services. One systemic review of 19 studies of the relationship between aid and violence during the period 2001–2016 found that “front-line aid,” which was spent in highly insecure regions with the strong presence of anti-government forces, was “more likely to exacerbate violence than to dampen violence.” Specifically, the review found that both CERP and community-driven development projects appeared to have violence-reducing effects only when the environment was reasonably secure.¹¹³⁰

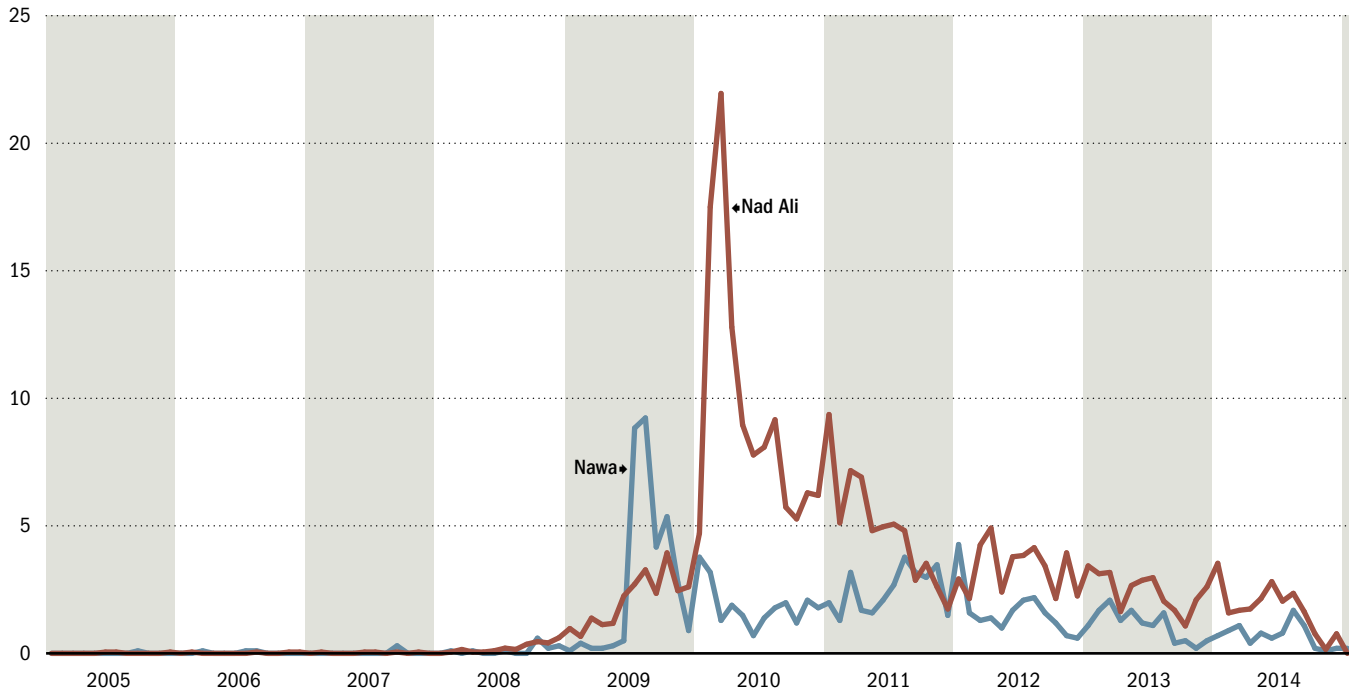
While greater force levels did not always mean increased control (particularly if the forces were predatory), in central Helmand, force levels seemed to play an important role and may have contributed to a significant decline in violence. As highlighted throughout this report, reductions in violence did not automatically translate into stability, especially if there was a governance void after clearing; however, reducing violence was a prerequisite to stability.

Figure 11 depicts levels of violence in two districts in central Helmand: Nawa, which was cleared in the summer of 2009, and Nad Ali, whose large sub-district Marjah was cleared in early 2010.¹¹³¹ These two districts, among several others in central Helmand, saw a significant increase in combat events during their respective clearing phases and a rapid drop in combat events as stabilization ramped up. As violence diminished, stabilization projects commenced, some communities that were originally too afraid to participate in them changed their minds, clinics and schools opened, the police became more efficient and professional, shura attendance spiked, some government officials who had refused to leave the provincial capital took up their posts at the district level, internally displaced persons began returning, bazaars were reopened and thrived, Marines often walked unencumbered throughout the districts, and communities offered their sons as recruits for Afghan security forces.¹¹³² These districts, in other words, while certainly not stable, nonetheless seemed to be stabilizing.

In fact, not only did central Helmand appear to gradually stabilize according to coalition officials on the ground, but efforts there had a unique residual effect as well. While never an oasis of peace and security, in terms of control, Helmand was the province that held on the longest after the drawdown. As multiple senior

FIGURE 11

MONTHLY COMBAT EVENTS IN NAWA AND NAD ALI DISTRICTS, HELMAND PROVINCE, 2005–2014 (PER 10,000 POPULATION)



Source: Empirical Studies of Conflict Project (ESOC) analysis, data from Andrew C. Shaver and Austin L. Wright, "Data on Combatant Activity During Afghanistan War Advance Scientific Investigation of Insurgency," Technical Report, 2017.

ISAF officials confirmed, not until early 2015 (nearly three years after Helmand's drawdown began) did the government begin to lose control of cleared areas, long after other cleared KTDs destabilized as a result of the drawdown.¹¹³³

"If you really want to win hearts and minds, give Afghans security."

—Andrew Wilder, Vice President of Asia Programs at USIP

There is insufficient evidence to discern precisely why central Helmand saw this improvement or why it generally held for several years; as discussed earlier, the variables were multiple and complex. Yet, this dynamic may point to the one ingredient that central Helmand had that no other area did, not even Kandahar: a saturation of coalition forces covering an area with a relatively small population.¹¹³⁴ The Marines were able to stabilize much of central Helmand through their sheer force of presence, and they demonstrated that reliable physical security is paramount. As Afghanistan expert Andrew Wilder observed, "If you really want to win hearts and minds, give Afghans security."¹¹³⁵

In fact, according to Marc Chretien, political advisor to the Marines in Helmand and then to the ISAF commander in Kabul, “Security and stability existed wherever the Marines had a continuous footprint.”¹¹³⁶ The Marines had a remarkable footprint indeed: more than 20,000 Marines were operating in Helmand at the height of the surge in 2010.¹¹³⁷ In fact, Nawa and Marjah appear to have been among the few areas of the country to receive enough troops over a prolonged period to reach the minimum ratio of one counterinsurgent for every 50 civilians prescribed in COIN doctrine.¹¹³⁸ Marjah actually doubled that ratio with two Marine battalions through the summer of 2011, 15 months after the area was cleared, but both Marjah and Nawa at least maintained the ratio through the summer of 2012.¹¹³⁹ For almost three years after, even as the Marines drew down, Marjah and the surrounding areas in central Helmand continued to benefit from relatively saturated Afghan force levels because, Chretien added, “the operation in Marjah made it a public relations focal point.”¹¹⁴⁰

It is impossible to say if Marjah and Nawa were, for any number of reasons, already predisposed to stabilization in ways that other districts, particularly those in northern Helmand, were not. Most Nawa residents, for example, were from the same tribe, which precluded the kind of rivalries that often plagued stabilization efforts elsewhere.¹¹⁴¹ Furthermore, Helmand’s north was equally saturated with troops, yet violence levels there continued increasing for years after clearing began. However, the example of central Helmand simply highlights that a saturation of forces contributed to their temporary stabilization and was a necessary but not sufficient condition.

It is important to note that despite the positive effects of force saturation, all of Helmand eventually deteriorated and the province is now among the most clearly Taliban-controlled provinces in the country.¹¹⁴² While force saturation appeared to provide some breathing room in central Helmand, no amount of troops could compensate for the lack of popular legitimacy and poor capacity of Afghan civil servants and security forces in the longer term, and the quick drawdown in the country’s most dangerous districts created a void that allowed insurgents to take control.

Marawara District, Kunar Province

While force saturation contributed to successful stabilization in some areas, notably in Helmand Province, in other cases stabilization required close collaboration of capable individuals, including coalition civilian and military officials, as well as Afghan elders, civil servants, and local military leadership. Marawara District was an example of this collaboration.

For a case study of Marawara’s successful stabilization and progression through the clear-hold-build cycle, see appendix A.



CHAPTER 9 FINDINGS

U.S. Marine Corps photo

Our study of the U.S. experience with stabilization in Afghanistan finds:

- 1. The U.S. government greatly overestimated its ability to build and reform government institutions in Afghanistan as part of its stabilization strategy.**

During the 2009 Afghanistan strategy reviews—and after considerable internal disagreements among the key players—President Obama and his civilian and military advisors collectively set in motion a series of events that fostered unrealistic expectations of what could be achieved in a few years and ensured the U.S. government’s stabilization strategy would not succeed, first with the rapid surge and then the rapid transition.

The president and his advisors relied on poor comparisons between the success seen in Iraq at the time and what they hoped to accomplish in Afghanistan. They focused on troop numbers and their geographic priorities and mostly omitted concerns about the Afghan government’s capacity and performance. Further, the scope of the strategies under consideration was not revised when the president shortened the surge timeline from an estimated 10 years to 18 months. As a result, the U.S. government settled

on a strategy far more ambitious than it originally anticipated and poorly suited to the time allotted to achieve it.

On the ground, closing the surge window so soon after opening it—and then opening an equally narrow window to transition to Afghan control—gave many of the people implementing the strategy the impression that “the mission wasn’t to win but rather to get in and out as quickly as possible.”¹¹⁴³ Worse, the narrowness of the surge and transition windows had a profound and harmful impact on countless downstream decisions regarding planning, staffing, and programming.

Ultimately, the demand for fast progress meant the country had not stabilized when transition began in the summer of 2011, and Afghans were unprepared to take the reins when transition finished in December 2014.

2. The stabilization strategy and the programs used to achieve it were not properly tailored to the Afghan context.

To compete with the insurgents, the U.S. government assumed the Afghan government would need to out-govern the Taliban and provide services that went well beyond what the Taliban had offered. USAID and DOD programs sought to enable the Afghan government to provide health clinics, schools, retainer and flood walls, agriculture training and seed distribution, and countless other projects the Taliban had not offered. In contrast, the Taliban’s sporadic legitimacy was anchored in its provision of only two services: security and dispute resolution. Rather than using those two services as a model for its own set of service offerings, the coalition pursued a strategy to help the Afghan government push down high-quality services from most ministries. The ambitious nature of the strategy meant that in most key terrain districts, the coalition helped the government do everything poorly, rather than a few important things well.

3. The large sums of stabilization dollars the United States devoted to Afghanistan in search of quick gains often exacerbated conflicts, enabled corruption, and bolstered support for insurgents.

Under pressure to make fast progress, money spent was often regarded as an indicator of success. The difficulty of discerning program impact only compounded the problem and made it tempting to use money as a proxy for effect. Yet, the sums were far more than Afghanistan could absorb, which fueled corruption. Indeed, moving at high speed, the coalition often exacerbated the very problems it hoped to mitigate. Power brokers with access to coalition projects became kings with patronage to sell, and

stabilization projects created or reinvigorated conflicts between and among communities. In turn, Afghans who were marginalized in this competition for access and resources found natural allies in the Taliban, who used that support to divide and conquer communities the coalition was keen to win over.

- 4. Because the coalition prioritized the most dangerous districts first, it continuously struggled to clear them of insurgents. As a result, the coalition couldn't make sufficient progress to convince Afghans in those or other districts that the government could protect them if they openly turned against the insurgents.**

Most of the coalition's key terrain districts proved so dangerous they had to be constantly cleared, which meant that many of the stabilization programs designed to jump-start local governance and development were implemented prematurely and in communities ill-suited to host them. Coalition stakeholders at every level recognized in principle that physical security was a prerequisite for stabilization, yet in practice, stabilization still usually took place in chronically insecure environments. As a result, Afghans were often too afraid to serve in local government, Afghan civilians had little faith their districts would remain in government hands when the coalition eventually withdrew, implementing partners struggled to implement projects amid the violence, and U.S. government agencies were unable to adequately monitor and evaluate the projects that were implemented. So, rather than tackle the hardest districts first and use the momentum to stabilize less challenging districts, as the coalition had intended, this prioritization simply meant that less was accomplished overall as the coalition was increasingly bogged down.

- 5. Efforts by U.S. agencies to monitor and evaluate stabilization programs were generally poor.**

While poor security made it difficult to monitor and evaluate stabilization programs, the U.S. government had not put the necessary effort or thought into how best to do so, even in areas that were more accessible. Agencies typically used the amount of infrastructure built and the number of civilians employed or trained as indicators of progress. Analyzing these outputs was a poor metric for understanding whether Afghans' support for the government was increasing and their support for the insurgency was decreasing. The United States implemented stabilization programs in Afghanistan from 2002–2017, yet only in 2012 did USAID begin to take a more thoughtful approach to measuring impact for stabilization programs, and DOD never did.

6. Successes in stabilizing Afghan districts rarely lasted longer than the physical presence of coalition troops and civilians.

Afghan forces and civil servants were generally unwilling, unprepared, or unable to carry forward the momentum created by coalition forces and civilians, particularly on the unrealistic timeline defined by the coalition. By the time all key terrain districts had transitioned in 2014, the services and protection Afghan forces and civil servants were in a position to provide could not compete with the threats of a resurgent Taliban. Baseline capacity for Afghan institutions was so low that they could not become self-sufficient on the stabilization strategy's timelines, particularly in the most dangerous districts in the country. Similarly, because stabilization was only a stopgap measure, gains were lost when little follow-on programming was implemented as the coalition withdrew.

7. Stabilization was most successful in areas that were clearly under the physical control of government security forces, had a modicum of local governance in place prior to programming, were supported by coalition forces and civilians who recognized the value of close cooperation, and were continuously engaged by their government as programming ramped up.

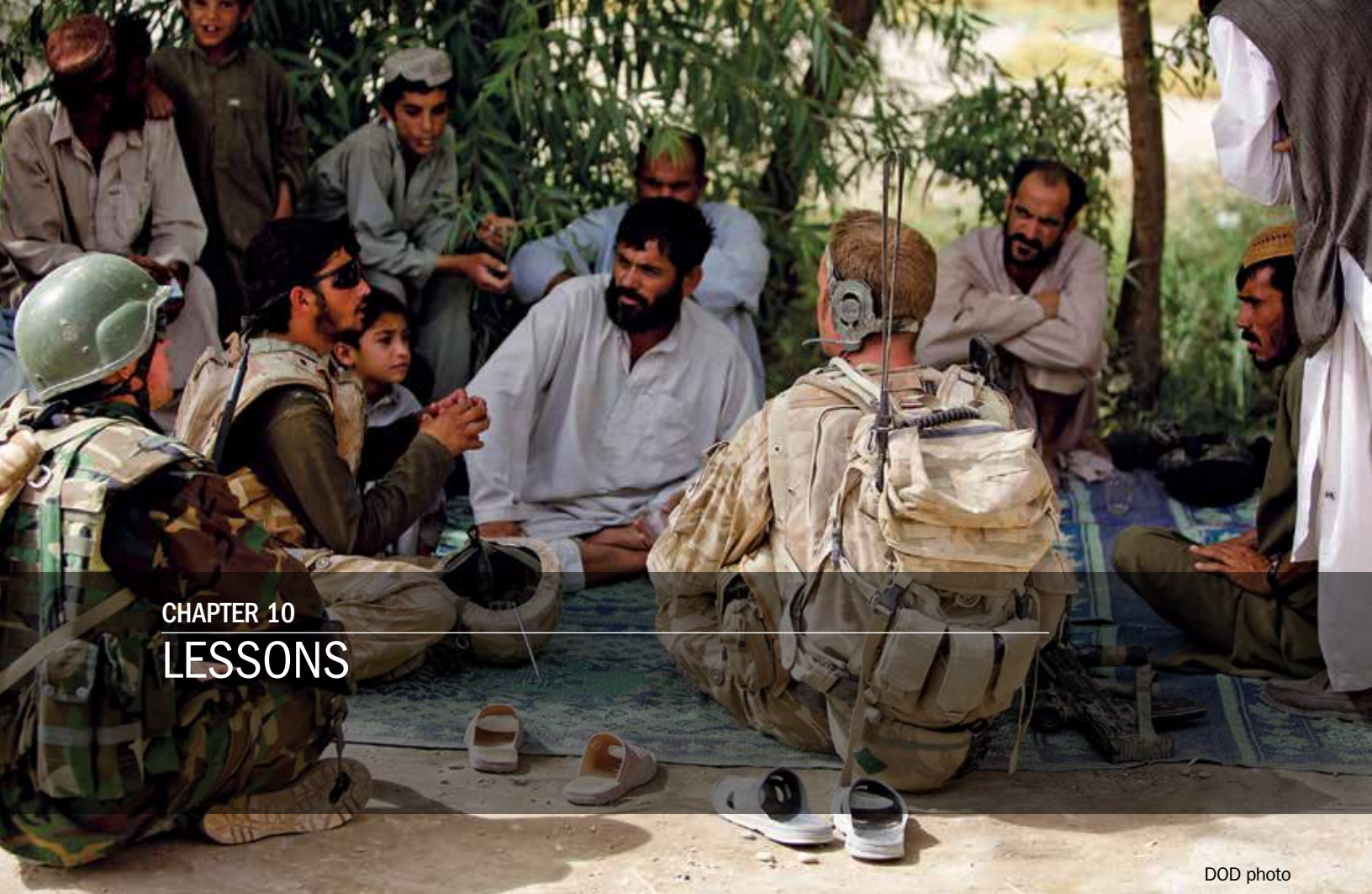
Successful stabilization projects generally occurred in areas that met four conditions prior to the projects' beginning. First, physical security had to be sufficient to allow Afghans to feel comfortable openly aligning with the government if they wanted. Reliable and non-predatory security was the most important factor in winning hearts and minds, and stabilization activities were wasteful and detrimental without it in place.

Second, the building blocks for rudimentary governance needed to be in place to give Afghans some form of local representation prior to the commencement of stabilization projects. In cases where stabilization projects succeeded, some form of governance, for example, a district shura or governor, helped facilitate projects based on their ability to advocate for the community.

Third, Afghan and coalition forces and civilians had to recognize the value of methodically working and planning together to jump-start service delivery.

Fourth, the government's engagement had to be continuous and focused on process, not product. Stabilization efforts were more likely to succeed when projects were clustered together, even when doing so meant directly

impacting fewer Afghans. In fact, more was often accomplished in the aggregate by doing less, but doing it better, for example, by focusing on fewer communities, but staying in them longer. The number and dollar value of projects implemented far exceeded the coalition's ability to monitor and evaluate them, which meant opportunities for corruption and elite capture abounded, making many of those projects more harmful than helpful. The most important value that stabilization brought targeted communities was often in the process of connecting them to informal and formal governance structures, not in the projects' tangible end result. It was this relationship, not its outputs, which proved decisive.



CHAPTER 10 LESSONS

DOD photo

Afghanistan was likely among the most difficult environments for a large-scale stabilization mission given the constraints discussed at length in this report. The challenges made it difficult to discern whether and how the problems seen in Afghanistan were specific to the environment or systemic to stabilization.

In fact, the poor results of this particular stabilization mission make it tempting to conclude that stabilization should not be conducted in the future at all. However, in any area that has been cleared, the absence of reliable alternatives to stabilization means that rather than discourage the use of stabilization writ large, the best course of action may be to help the U.S. government (1) balance the importance of any given stabilization mission with a realistic understanding of the level of effort required and what is achievable and (2) improve its ability to prepare for, design, execute, monitor, and evaluate stabilization missions when it elects to undertake them.

Given the substantial recent increase in investment in stabilization efforts in Syria and Iraq, realistic assessments that align the ends, ways, and means of prospective and ongoing stabilization efforts are critical.

Moreover, given that stabilization was occasionally effective in Afghanistan, we believe it may be more effective in other countries if the lessons below are learned and applied in future stabilization missions.

1. Even under the best circumstances, stabilization takes time. Without the patience and political will for a planned and prolonged effort, large-scale stabilization missions are likely to fail.

For future large-scale stabilization missions, the U.S. government should set reasonable expectations for what can be accomplished. Unless the expected timeframe exceeds 10 years and includes meaningful programs and investments following the shorter-term stabilization component, such a mission will likely be ineffective. In contrast, with the compressed one to three-year timelines seen in Afghanistan, programs will be forced to compromise quality as they ramp up and finish too quickly, and the population will not trust the staying power of the government's improved services and legitimacy. Without the patience and political will for a planned and prolonged effort, large-scale stabilization missions are likely to fail, and may fail regardless, given the number and complexity of stars that must align to ensure success.

2. Most U.S. government capabilities and institutions necessary in a large-scale stabilization mission should be established and maintained between contingencies if they are to be effective when they matter most.

As occurred after the Vietnam War, there is now a tendency to believe the U.S. government should not and will not conduct large-scale stabilization missions in the future.¹¹⁴⁴ However, there is little reason to believe this mission fatigue is permanent, as there will likely be times in the future when insurgent control or influence over a particular area or population is deemed an imminent threat to U.S. interests, and it may not be possible to rely on partner forces and civil servants to clear, hold, and build the area. To ensure the U.S. government is better prepared for such a scenario, the capabilities, institutions, and cultural orientation toward counterinsurgency and stabilization that was built through trial by fire over the last 17 years should be maintained and honed, as they are likely to be critical in the future. Cultivating these capabilities and institutions, even if at a reduced scale, will also be invaluable for smaller-scale stabilization efforts, which are nonetheless costly and demand attention, as emphasized in the interagency Stabilization Assistance Review.¹¹⁴⁵

3. Having qualified and experienced personnel in the right positions at the right times is vital to stabilization's success.

Every organization and agency that worked on stabilization in Afghanistan—from civil affairs and SOF to State and USAID—suffered from personnel and programming deficits borne from rapid scaling, short tours, and the pressure to make quick progress. No organization was prepared to ramp up quickly and it showed across the board. Given the nature of most contingency scenarios, rapid scaling may be unavoidable, so properly identifying and preparing the appropriate personnel ahead of time is paramount.

4. Increased funding alone cannot compensate for stabilization's inherent challenges, and believing that it will can exacerbate those challenges.

Unrestricted funding can exacerbate local conflicts, drive corruption, and distort local economies, particularly if compressed timelines are driving spending. The stabilization effort in Afghanistan was derailed as money spent became the metric of success and programming drove wedges between communities—and between communities and the government—rather than between insurgents and the population.

5. Physical security is the bedrock of stabilization.

As noted in the recent Stabilization Assistance Review, stabilization is most likely to be successful where there is basic security for implementing partners and local stakeholders on the ground.¹¹⁴⁶ In fact, stabilization programs are likely to fail if implemented in areas under incessant attack or insurgent control. Host-nation civil servants will be unlikely to volunteer, reliable information about the population will be elusive, progress necessary to build momentum will take far longer to achieve, and the population will be slower to trust that any gains will endure. Further, in these areas, implementing partners will have less oversight, limited freedom of movement, and reduced capacity to implement quality projects.

6. The presence of local governance is a precondition for effective stabilization programming.

Attempting to simultaneously stabilize an area and build local governance structures is unlikely to be effective. Some semblance and history of local governance must be in place before an area can be stabilized with robust programming. Supporting pre-existing informal governance structures (or rebuilding them) may be preferable to building formal government,

which is both costly and often culturally unfamiliar. Either way, ensuring target communities have competent, accountable, and sustainable local governance is important for effective stabilization programming.

7. Stabilizing communities requires a tailored approach.

In poorly governed areas, top-down efforts that attempt to stabilize diverse communities are not effective. While this was recognized in theory and led to the creation of the District Stability Framework, too often locally tailored approaches were forced aside to accommodate changing priorities, such as agriculture or gender, which were imposed on stabilization programmers at the expense of addressing diverse local sources of instability. Tools like the DSF and SAM can serve as springboards for future methodologies that prioritize community-based and tailored approaches to stabilization, once their known shortcomings are addressed.

8. Stabilization efforts must be rigorously monitored and evaluated.

No matter the logistical or political obstacles, impact is the most important criterion against which a project or program's success should be judged. Unless a stabilization mission is just starting, no other metric—money spent, number of projects, people employed—should be used in determining the success or failure of a stabilization program. Even evaluating a program for outcomes is unlikely to provide a sufficient basis for determining success or failure. While the high number of variables in stabilization environments makes it difficult to discern cause and effect, programming should not take place in areas where it is impossible to monitor and evaluate it. From the beginning of the mission, every agency involved in stabilization should be planning to prioritize and discern program impact, and they should dedicate more staff to oversee M&E efforts. USAID eventually made a concerted and pioneering effort with MISTI, but DOD struggled to develop measures of effectiveness for CERP and VSO.

9. Successfully conceiving and implementing a stabilization strategy requires extensive local knowledge of the host-nation government and population.

The U.S. government either did not know enough about the Afghan government and population or paid insufficient attention to them during the strategy reviews. The sense of success in Iraq by 2009 lulled the U.S. government into believing the governance challenges in Afghanistan were

equivalent; they were not. This disconnect made programs overly ambitious and set up to fail in the timelines provided.

On the ground in Afghanistan, DOD, State, and USAID implemented programs without sufficient knowledge of local institutions, sociopolitical dynamics, and government structures, which often exacerbated local conflicts, empowered insurgents, and created unnecessary enmity between the population, government, and coalition.

10. Winning hearts and minds requires a close examination of what has won and lost the hearts and minds of that particular population in the recent past.

The kinds of services the U.S. government sought to help the Afghan government deliver were unnecessarily ambitious and not tailored to the environment. While improvements in the delivery of healthcare, formal rule of law, education, and agriculture services likely helped many Afghans, the coalition and the Afghan government aimed to provide Afghans in contested areas an array of high-quality services that went well beyond what the Taliban had provided and required a level of capacity and legitimacy far beyond what the government could offer, particularly in the time allotted.



CHAPTER 11

CONCLUSIONS

DOD photo

Between 2001 and 2017, U.S. government efforts to stabilize insecure and contested areas in Afghanistan mostly failed.

At the policy level, the U.S. government overestimated its ability to build and reform government institutions in Afghanistan as part of the stabilization strategy. During the 2009 Afghanistan strategy reviews—and after considerable internal disagreements among the key players—President Obama and his civilian and military advisors collectively set in motion a series of events that fostered unrealistic expectations of what could be achieved in a few years and ensured the U.S. government’s stabilization strategy would not succeed, first with the rapid surge and then the rapid transition. Under immense pressure to quickly stabilize insecure districts, U.S. government agencies spent far too much money, far too quickly, and in a country woefully unprepared to absorb it. Money spent was often the metric of success. As a result, programming often exacerbated conflicts, enabled corruption, and bolstered support for insurgents.

Every organization and agency that worked on stabilization in Afghanistan—from civil affairs and SOF to State and USAID—suffered from personnel and programming deficits borne from rapid scaling, short tours, and the pressure to make quick progress. Even harder than finding available civilians and troops

on this timetable was finding qualified and experienced candidates who were trained and equipped to understand local political economies and navigate them accordingly. No organization was prepared for these challenges, and it showed across the board.

Stabilization is an inherently political undertaking, yet given the size and resources of DOD, the military consistently determined priorities on the ground and chose to focus on the most insecure districts first. These areas often remained perpetually insecure and had to be cleared of insurgents again and again. Civilian agencies, particularly USAID, were compelled to program in these fiercely contested areas that were not ready for stabilization programming.

Because the coalition focused on the most insecure areas and rarely provided an enduring sense of security after clearing them, Afghans were often too afraid to serve in local government, Afghan civilians had little faith their districts would remain in government hands when the coalition eventually withdrew, implementing partners struggled to implement projects amid the violence, coalition forces and civilians had very limited access to and understanding of prioritized communities, and U.S. government agencies were unable to adequately monitor and evaluate the projects that were implemented.

As a result, power brokers and predatory government officials with access to coalition projects became kings with patronage to sell, and stabilization projects sometimes created or reinvigorated conflicts between and among communities. In turn, Afghans who were marginalized in this competition for access and resources found natural allies in the Taliban, who used that support to divide and conquer communities the coalition was keen to win over.

Combined, these factors meant that by the time all key terrain districts had transitioned in 2014, the services and protection Afghan forces and civil servants were in a position to provide often could not compete with the threats of a resurgent Taliban as the insurgents filled the void in newly vacated territory.



White House photo

CHAPTER 12

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations drawn from the U.S. stabilization experience in Afghanistan may help increase the likelihood of success in future stabilization missions. Some of these recommendations require substantial effort. However, given the inherent difficulty of stabilization missions, without the political will and technical investment necessary to implement the reforms outlined below, in our view large-scale stabilization missions should not be conducted.

EXECUTIVE BRANCH

- 1. State should take the lead in laying out a robust whole-of-government stabilization strategy, USAID should be the lead implementer, and DOD should support their efforts.**

For various reasons, DOD in practice made the most consequential strategic decisions regarding the implementation of the president's 2009 stabilization strategy. However, building local institutions, changing civilian perceptions, and buttressing a government's legitimacy are political undertakings and should be implemented with instruments suited to these tasks. In 2018,

State, USAID, and DOD all endorsed this recommendation in the U.S. government's Stabilization Assistance Review.¹¹⁴⁷

With good reason, the National Security Council has institutionalized a Fragile States and Stabilization Policy Coordination Committee to oversee U.S. national security policy in priority conflict-affected areas. If the NSC, supported by this committee, instructs the agencies to pursue a large-scale stabilization mission, State's broader strategy should assume a timeline of 10–15 years or longer, and explicitly outline how shorter-term stabilization efforts in targeted areas will gradually transition to longer-term development and host-nation control, according to realistic benchmarks defined by host-nation capacity and conditions on the ground. The stabilization component of the strategy should be integrated into larger political objectives, with the understanding that stabilization is not transformative, but rather a catalyst that will burn out if subsequent vital investments in governance and development are not integrated into the larger strategy and applied in prioritized areas.

If implemented, this recommendation would ensure the ends, ways, and means of the stabilization effort are properly calibrated with one another and are built on a political rather than military foundation.

2. DOD and USAID should update COIN and stabilization doctrine and best practices to stagger stabilization's various phases, with the provision of reliable and continuous physical security serving as the critical foundation. SIGAR suggests the following blueprint as a model.

Most communities accustomed to insurgent rule are not ready for stabilization projects immediately after clearing. They need the space to evaluate their new security forces and governance structures before they can commit themselves, so establishing security, building governance structures, and ramping up stabilization projects should not happen simultaneously. Using Afghanistan as an example, a more methodical approach for other environments would be as follows:

- An area is cleared of insurgents. Humanitarian aid is distributed and condolence and compensation payments are made, as necessary. DOD, State, and USAID personnel take the time to understand local relationships, rivalries, and sources of instability. With those insights, officials can (1) better identify the precise reasons the insurgents were tolerated in that community in the first place and (2) begin planning to deliver a combination of security and social services customized to

that community, using its previous relationship with the insurgents as a guide.

- Simultaneously, pre-existing informal governance structures are identified and evaluated to ascertain their legitimacy. In their absence, stabilization programs like the Afghanistan Social Outreach Program should be used to establish those structures and begin resolving community disputes, as necessary. If formal local governance is requested by these informal representatives, programs like the District Delivery Program should make government officials available. All other stabilization programming designed to connect the population to its government should not begin until two conditions are met: (1) the entire community has steady and legitimate formal and/or informal representation, and (2) a thorough examination of the community's interests and vulnerabilities has been completed.
- Programs like Village Stability Operations should be considered at this stage to ensure the community continues to have sufficient and regular physical security so stabilization programming can progress.
- The community is told that stabilization projects will only begin after it has demonstrated its support for the government by reporting IEDs, joining local or national police forces, publicly denouncing insurgent groups, and working with their informal and formal governance representatives to address community grievances. If they are not ready to do those things, then they need more time to trust the government's staying power, and they are neither suited nor ready for projects, despite what they may say. Implementers must be afforded the space to say when communities are not ready for stabilization.
- Subsequently, if the stabilization cycle is successful, the stories should be broadcast and leveraged in nearby areas on the cusp of being cleared, illustrating to neighboring communities what they can expect if they help keep the insurgents out once security forces clear their communities. More basic stabilization programs like ASOP and DDP are offered, as needed, on the heels of clearing operations, but robust programming, like infrastructure and training, must be earned by the community during these early stages as they increasingly expel the insurgents and support the government. Without reliable security, there can be no rudimentary governance; without rudimentary governance, there should be no stabilization projects.

- In practice, this will likely mean that the transition from “clear” to “hold” will take longer, but doing so will give the community time to adjust to a new normal as a permanent sense of physical security and legitimate governance takes root. This conditional approach is slow, as it requires a step-by-step progression that is difficult to compress; however, it will create momentum for enduring change and clear a path for rudimentary governance so that each stage properly builds on the last.
- This sequence should and will have an impact on the criteria for selecting areas for clear-hold-build and will likely encourage stabilization planners to prioritize areas that are not as insecure as Afghanistan’s key terrain districts, but still insecure enough to merit clear-hold-build. If an area is not physically secure by civilian standards, expanding the aperture to focus on building rudimentary governance and stabilization projects is wasteful, often counterproductive, and should not be attempted.

In many ways, the process described above somewhat resembles what was philosophically intended with stabilization in Afghanistan, but the strategic and tactical timeframes made it impossible to take the time to stabilize Afghan communities with the patience, priorities, and conditional sequencing outlined above.

There are two circumstances under which stabilization programming can be expedited immediately after clearing: when host-nation security forces are capable and benevolent enough that they are successfully leading on clearing operations, and when the new local governance structures are already familiar to the community. Such conditions would obviously not apply to areas that have not had continuous security or formal governance in years, if ever.

3. DOD should develop measures of effectiveness for any CERP-like program in the future.¹¹⁴⁸

CERP, or any successor program, should incorporate measures of effectiveness into its monitoring and evaluation processes, and civil affairs personnel should be trained on these processes. DOD should modify CIDNE, the database used to track CERP projects, so that civil affairs officers are required to conduct a baseline assessment that justifies every CERP project, as well as an assessment of the project’s effectiveness after project completion and before the project can be formally closed. DOD should develop criteria for every CERP project to assess its impact;

this impact assessment should be the sole criterion for judging whether a project is successful, even if this means fewer projects are implemented.

4. USAID should prioritize the collection of accurate and reliable data for its stabilization projects.

Given the number of variables, how quickly they can change, and the biases inherent in data collection efforts, evaluating stabilization programming is difficult. These problems should not be magnified further with inaccurate or spotty data. USAID should develop and triangulate baseline indicators for targeted areas before stabilization programming begins, and then to carefully track project spending at the community level with accurate GPS coordinates for every project, which USAID should hold in a centralized database. No matter how stability and its indicators are defined, understanding impact or even outcomes is far harder without properly and systematically comparing targeted areas before and after interventions, and ideally, comparing targeted and untargeted areas. Equally important, this process cannot be done without dedicating the necessary staff to design the research and collect the data. In short, understanding impact should build upon MISTI's trailblazing efforts.

5. DOD and USAID should prioritize developing and retaining human terrain analytical expertise that would allow a more nuanced understanding of local communities.

Stabilization requires detailed information about what are often poorly or rarely studied communities and social groups. This type of information is difficult to collect and analyze, and the process requires a special skillset. In addition to qualitative research, among the many intangible skills involved are an ability to read social cues, to ask penetrating questions without being intrusive, and to understand what makes a community tick, all within a very short period of time. While localized subject matter expertise is very important, given that the locations of future contingency operations are difficult to identify years in advance, it is more important to recruit, build, and retain these adaptable, generalized skills than it is to build country-specific subject matter expertise.¹¹⁴⁹ For example:

- **DOD should establish a cadre of sociopolitical enablers for SOF units participating in VSO-like endeavors.** U.S. SOF personnel assigned to Village Stability Operations needed an intimate understanding of local socio-political conditions and well-developed cross-cultural communication skills. The ability to gather and analyze this information and effectively influence members of the local

community required a unique combination of personality and training. The selection process for U.S. SOF personnel is already extremely rigorous, and adding additional requirements would narrow the field of candidates and extend the training pipeline. Instead, civilian or military personnel who have been carefully selected and trained for the role should be integrated as enablers into every stage of VSO-like endeavors. Each enabler's mission will be to gather, analyze, and present sociopolitical information to the Village Stability Platform commander, help the VSO team build effective relationships with the local community, and help discern the appropriate ways to connect the community to local governance and government structures. The selection criteria for these personnel should include experience working in developing countries, advanced training in research methods, and a psychological evaluation. Furthermore, these enabling personnel should be integrated into the SOF training cycle to institutionalize them and ensure prospective teams appreciate and understand how to use them.

While the above example is specific to U.S. SOF, U.S. conventional forces and USAID should adopt similarly tailored efforts and determine whether and how the need for such expertise can be met with additional training for existing personnel in existing structures (for example, civil affairs); existing personnel housed and cultivated in new structures (for example, the AFPAK Hands program); external personnel hired into existing or new structures (for example, the Human Terrain System); or some combination.¹¹⁵⁰ Regardless, under whatever structures and mechanisms are appropriate, identifying, recruiting, and preparing those personnel for advanced analysis of political economies and human terrain must be done between contingencies, and the role of these individuals should be institutionalized.

6. DOD should ensure it has a sufficient number and mix of civil affairs personnel with the right training and aptitude for the next stabilization mission.

In recent years, the number of active duty civil affairs personnel has been decreasing. Currently, there is one active duty civil affairs brigade assigned to U.S. Army Special Operations Command, much as there was before the surge—but the active duty civil affairs brigade headquarters and its five battalions that were stood up during the surge to support conventional forces have been reduced to a single battalion in recent years. The future of any CERP-like program and its thoughtful implementation should rest in the hands of properly trained and supported civil affairs personnel who are in the best position to prioritize and measure impact. Maintaining a well-resourced, active duty civil affairs brigade that regularly partners

with conventional forces and civilian partner organizations is vital to the military's preparedness for future stabilization missions, both large and small.

7. State and USAID should designate a new civilian response corps of active and standby civilian specialists who can staff stabilization missions.

Recruiting, training, and deploying the required civilian personnel for large-scale stabilization missions is difficult, particularly with short time-horizons. Most contingencies will need to ramp up quickly with experienced civilian personnel who can build coalitions and understand diverse communities. Processes and structures need to be in place to ensure the quality of personnel does not suffer simply because of the urgency of the task at hand. As noted on pages 54–55, previous efforts to meet this objective were costly and hindered by political infighting, among other obstacles. Furthermore, justifying large expenditures today for an unknown future contingency is difficult. However, as highlighted in the U.S. government's 2018 Stabilization Assistance Review, with only modest investments ahead of time, the U.S. government can maximize available expertise and position itself to make significant strides from the beginning of a contingency, when the most important decisions are considered and made.¹¹⁵¹ Between contingencies, the modified civilian response corps outlined below could cost as little as \$2 million per year, compared to tens of millions of dollars annually for the previous iteration of the CRC.

At a minimum, a civilian response corps should have these three components, which have been modified to account for the challenges faced by earlier efforts.

- **An active corps of government professionals who focus on stabilization.** State's Bureau of Conflict and Stabilization Operations and USAID's Office of Transition Initiatives staff should serve as the active component of a civilian response corps, deployable within a week. In these two offices, the U.S. government already has scores of U.S.-based employees with medical and security clearances and the competencies to provide stabilization expertise in the first civilian wave of a contingency. In such an event, the Secretary of State should appoint someone at the under-secretary level to lead the combined active component, whose team would make decisions on priorities for the deployments of this active corps. In contrast to previous efforts, participation in this active corps would be limited to State and USAID,

which have the expertise and equities to justify their role. Notably, there would be minimal cost associated with this active component.

- **A standby corps of government professionals with broader but relevant stabilization experience.** If the contingency is large or many of the active corps members cannot be withdrawn from their current assignments, members of the standby corps should be activated. These officials would be pulled from the cleared-personnel pools at State and USAID, have knowledge of and experience working in conflict-affected environments, and be deployable within 90 days. The target number should be 300–500 people with diverse skillsets, including contract management, program management, and political engagement.¹¹⁵² Signing up and deploying should be regarded, particularly by managers, as the kind of professional development that currently exists with detailees, secondees, and those on temporary duty assignments across State and USAID: an opportunity that would add value to host agencies and departments upon the official’s return. State and USAID staff should be encouraged to participate with career-enhancing benefits and financial incentives. If activated to deploy, participants in the standby corps would be compelled to do so. Agencies and departments that lose staff to fill contingency civilian slots would be compensated for temporary backfills, under the assumption that supplemental congressional funding would be forthcoming in a contingency operation. This standby corps would not necessarily include the CSO and OTI bullpens of stabilization and transition advisors, as the nature of their employment and regular deployments is voluntary.
- **A database of former State and USAID employees and other civilians with relevant experience.** Depending on the size and nature of future contingencies, it is possible that the active and standby components would be insufficient in number of personnel or diversity of skillsets. In that case, it may be necessary to hire another wave of temporary employees, such as the “3161s” at State and the “Foreign Service Limiteds” and “Personal Services Contractors” at USAID. To prepare for such a situation, State and USAID should maintain profiles and contact information for their junior-, mid-, and executive-level professionals as they leave government service, in order to easily invite them back in the event of a contingency. State and USAID currently have an authority and a mechanism for hiring recently retired personnel for 180 days per year, a process called “When Actually Employed”—but outside the context of retirement, no equivalent system exists for other employees once they leave government service. Having an easy way to locate, recruit, and hire qualified individuals in the event of a

contingency would allow State and USAID to avoid much of the chaos of the civilian surge in 2010, at minimal cost. This database should also be open to civilians without government experience but still relevant stabilization experience to ensure all capabilities and skillsets are available in this database.

LEGISLATIVE BRANCH

Congress has an important role to play in overseeing agency-specific reforms to stabilization.¹¹⁵³ To that end, Congress should consider providing adequate resources to ensure executive branch agencies implement the reforms laid out above. Specifically, Congress should consider:

1. **Funding a modified civilian response corps.**

In 2005, U.S. civilian agencies established a civilian response corps, which Congress authorized in 2008.¹¹⁵⁴ As discussed on pages 54–55, however, by 2011 the CRC had lost the political and financial support necessary to continue, and its host, the Coordinator for Reconstruction and Stabilization, became State’s Bureau for Conflict and Stabilization Operations. The CRC was discontinued, which inhibited the U.S. government’s effort to organize and deploy civilian stabilization experts from multiple civilian agencies.

SIGAR recommends Congress revive the CRC, with the necessary modifications outlined in the executive branch recommendations above. Doing so would ensure this important mechanism is fiscally sustainable and positions civilian expertise where and when it is most needed for future stabilization missions.

Specifically, Congress should provide State and USAID funding to pay the financial incentives for members of the standby component to enlist between contingencies, to pay for backfills when members of the standby corps are activated during contingencies, and to pay State to build and manage a regularly updated database of former State and USAID employees with relevant experience in conflict-affected environments.

2. **Requiring State, the designated lead on stabilization, to develop and implement a stabilization strategy within a broader campaign strategy and in coordination with USAID and DOD.**

At the outset of a contingency operation to stabilize a country or region, Congress should require State to take the lead in developing and implementing an overall strategy with at least a 10–15 year plan

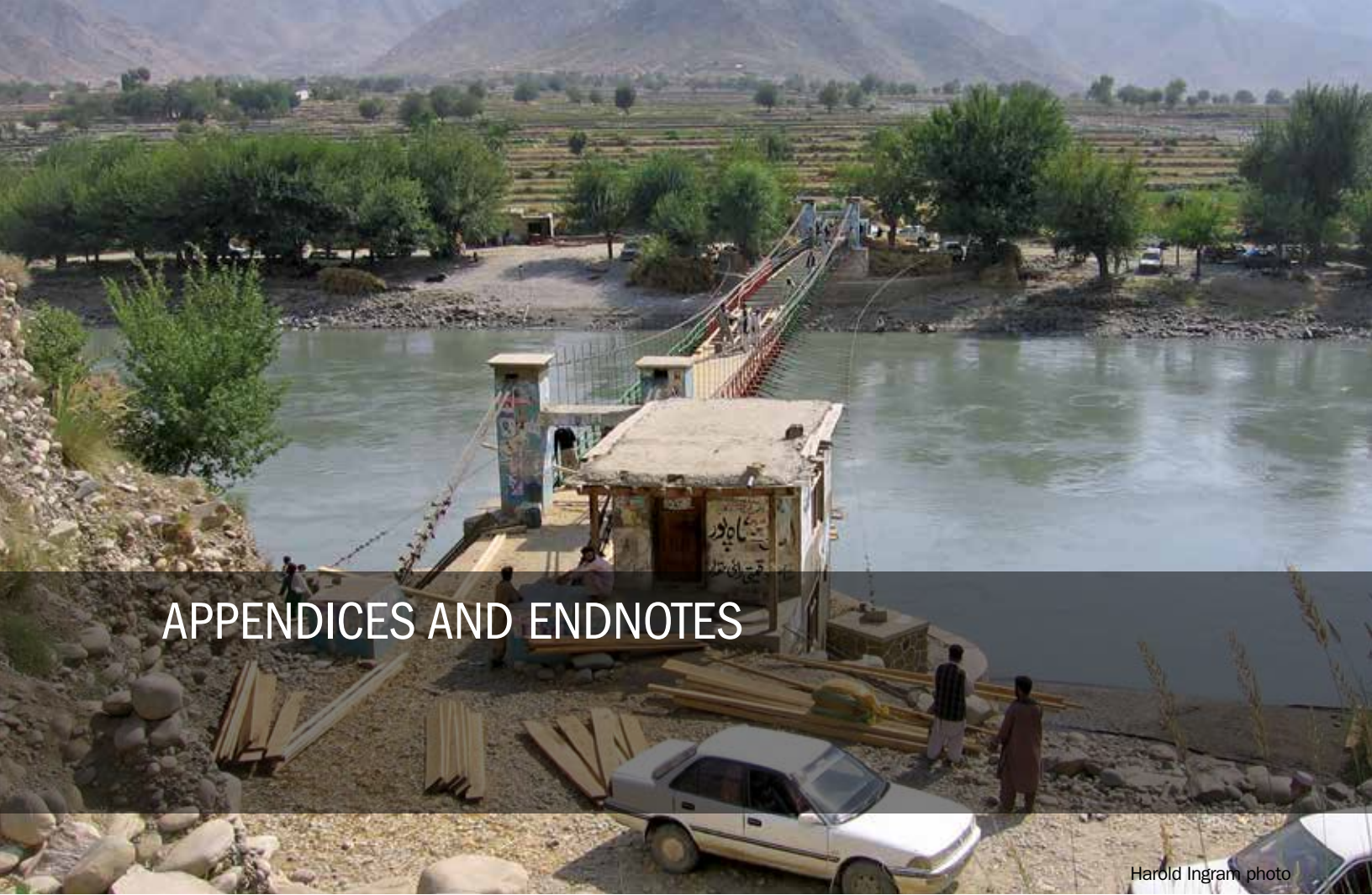
that outlines its specific stabilization components, including geographic priorities, benchmarks, how the various stabilization and development programming phases will be sequenced, and under what specific conditions control of territory will be transitioned to the host nation. Congress should require State to report regularly on the status of the strategy's implementation.

3. Requiring USAID, the designated lead on implementation, to develop and implement an M&E plan in coordination with State and DOD.

Shortly after State has written its stabilization strategy, USAID should write and provide to Congress a robust data collection and monitoring and evaluation plan outlining how the agency will determine whether stabilization programs are pushing cleared territory closer toward the benchmarks outlined in the strategy, and in ways that improve upon the problems outlined in this report. Congress should require USAID to report regularly on the status of the plan's implementation.

4. Focusing its oversight on stabilization outcomes.

Congress should use its oversight authority to scrutinize how U.S. funds are being spent and to what effect. Representing U.S. taxpayers, Congress sets the tone for a contingency operation's expected return on investment. If Congress focuses on outcomes, the agencies will have an incentive to do the same. Specifically, in order to focus on outcomes, Congress should inquire about the agencies' progress on implementing this report's executive branch recommended reforms, both before and during a contingency.



APPENDICES AND ENDNOTES

APPENDIX A: CASE STUDY: MARAWARA DISTRICT, KUNAR PROVINCE

The stabilization effort in the Marawara District of Kunar Province in 2010 and 2011 demonstrated that remarkable progress was possible when a number of factors coalesced. These factors included:

1. Capable individuals in key roles, including the coalition forces' commander, PRT leadership, State and USAID representatives, Afghan local government officials, local informal leaders, ANDSF leadership, and USAID implementing partners.
2. A willingness and commitment from these actors to work together in very close collaboration.
3. Force saturation that provided sufficient security to the population to enable them to safely cooperate with the Afghan government and coalition.

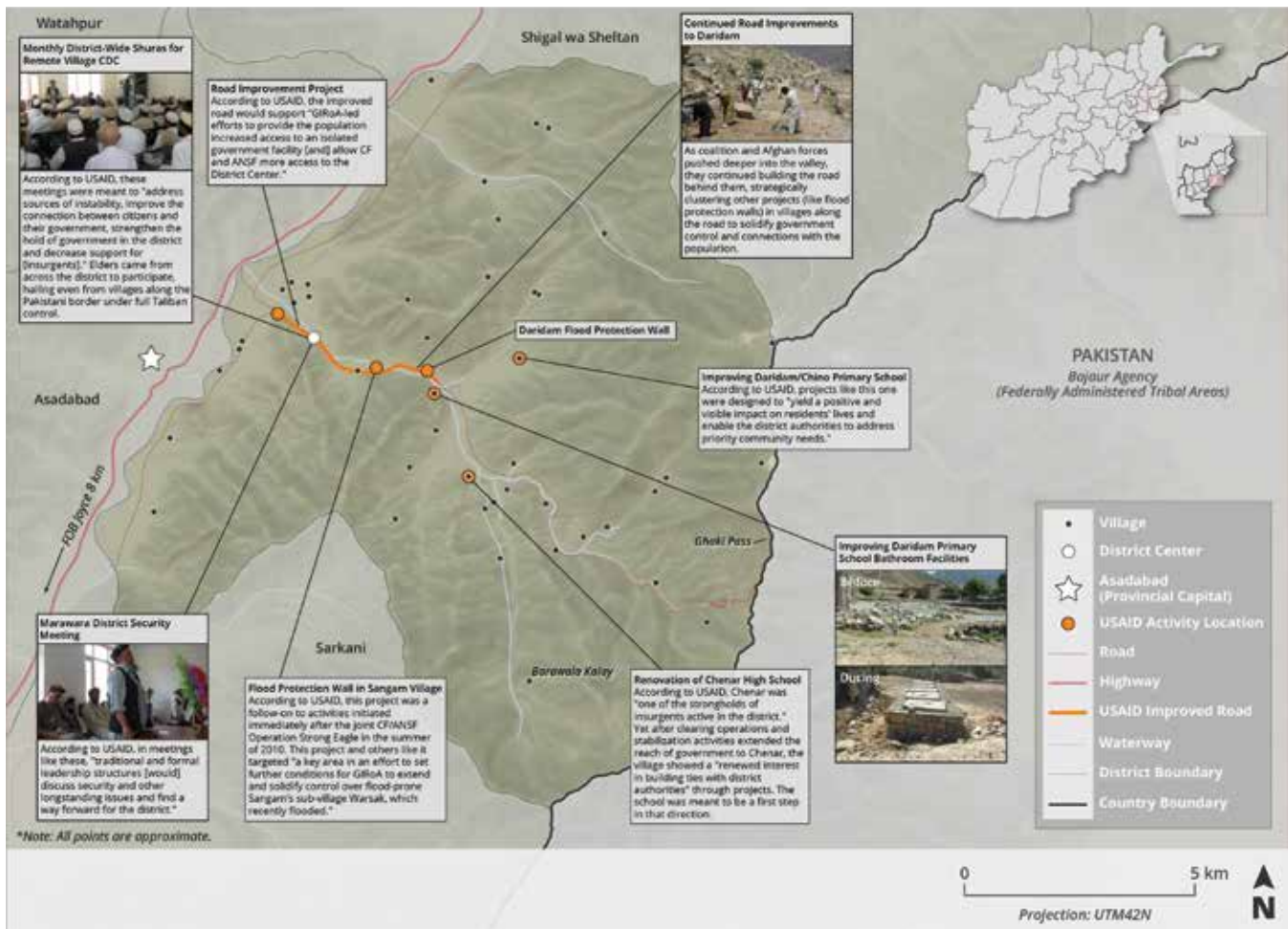
The convergence of these factors was rare. In addition, as this Marawara case study illustrates, even in the best cases, gains were rarely sustained over time as coalition resources were withdrawn or priority districts shifted due to the coalition’s condensed timeline.

Prior to Clearing

While not a key terrain district, the coalition deemed Marawara essential to controlling Kunar Province because it was a safe haven and insurgent staging area for operations against Asadabad, the provincial capital, which was, in turn, a key gateway to Kabul through the road to Jalalabad.¹¹⁵⁵ During the anti-Soviet jihad, the mujahedeen had proven the strategic importance of Marawara, as it served as a key point of entry from Pakistan for insurgents coming through the

FIGURE 12

USAID PROJECTS, MARAWARA DISTRICT, KUNAR PROVINCE, AFGHANISTAN



Source: USAID/OTI, "OTI Post-Clearing Activities, Marawara District, Kunar Province," November 2010. Map produced by John M. Steed.

Ghaki Pass.¹¹⁵⁶ (See figure 12.) Insurgent control of the district was so complete in the summer of 2010 that the district governor was unable to travel outside the district center and, after months of trying to program there, USAID's only implementing partner in the area had been forced to terminate the majority of its projects due to poor security. NSP had been able to stand up Community Development Councils and functioning District Development Assemblies (DDA), but they, too, encountered difficulty in implementing projects in the area.¹¹⁵⁷ Even coalition forces were constrained in their movements because of the intensity of the IED threat and the limited number of armored vehicles at their disposal. In contrast, the Taliban had complete freedom of movement throughout the district and coerced the population into submission by killing or confiscating the property of civilians caught cooperating with local government, Afghan forces, or the coalition. The Taliban also collected taxes in the district and provided limited dispute resolution in the district's most remote villages.¹¹⁵⁸

A Full-Spectrum Strategy: Afghan and Coalition Civ-Mil Cooperation

The success of the stabilization effort in Marawara was a product of the quality and dedication of the Afghan and coalition team and the seamless way they worked together. David Kilcullen described the type of close partnership that distinguished the Marawara effort as a "full-spectrum strategy."¹¹⁵⁹ A full-spectrum strategy is built on a central political goal shared by civilian and military actors from both the host nation and coalition, in pursuit of which all the kinetic and non-kinetic tools at their disposal are deployed.¹¹⁶⁰

Devising and implementing this shared strategy was only possible because the coalition had a team of unusually strong, credible Afghan partners: the district governor; the head of the DDA, which had been previously established by NSP; and the local Afghan Border Police commander.¹¹⁶¹ District Governor Pasha Gul had credibility with the population because he had been a mujahedeen commander in the area during the jihad, while the DDA and its head, Haji Sharif, also enjoyed popular legitimacy.¹¹⁶² These two leaders organized and jointly chaired monthly shura meetings with the community with no foreigners in attendance, allowing the shura to gain acceptance as a truly local mechanism.¹¹⁶³

The strength of the shared strategy was also the product of the coalition team, the trust they built among themselves and with their local partners, and their commitment to a joint approach. According to a senior stabilization contractor who worked in Marawara:

The most important thing that we were able to achieve in Marawara was the incredible cooperation between DAI [Development Alternatives Incorporated, the implementing partner], USAID's Office of Transition Initiatives, and the military. That level of trust and cooperation really enabled us to do what we needed to do. We truly operated as one team and were able to develop a lot of trust with our local staff and with local authorities, as well.¹¹⁶⁴

Unlike in other areas, where coalition forces' uneven embrace of population-centric warfare and civilian stabilization efforts undermined mission continuity and success, Colonel Joel Vowell, commander of the 2-327th Infantry Battalion that covered southern Kunar in 2010–2011, saw his USAID and State counterparts as central to his mission. As he told SIGAR, “We would have been behind without USAID. They were instrumental in getting contracts set ahead of the military operation, to get a convoy of stuff ready to go in from Asadabad. . . . They brought to the table knowledge of the human terrain and knowledge of stability operations, and they had the capacity to reach back to the PRT. The infantry just doesn't have that.”¹¹⁶⁵ USAID staff had been working in Marawara prior to the arrival of the 2-327th, which positioned them to be repositories of local knowledge.¹¹⁶⁶

Clearing Effort: Operation Strong Eagle

Coalition and Afghan forces recognized they would have to bring the fight to the insurgents in Marawara in order to establish sufficient security to allow the population to cooperate with the government. To this end they planned Operation Strong Eagle to clear the western half of Marawara District, integrating their Afghan and coalition civilian counterparts into the planning process from the outset. Afghan officials played a central role in planning the assault, and Afghan army, police, and border forces constituted about 60 percent of the attacking force.¹¹⁶⁷ The operation, which was the battalion's largest since the Vietnam War, began on June 28, 2010, and lasted 30 days, resulting in the deaths of two U.S. soldiers and an estimated 150 insurgents.¹¹⁶⁸



A member of the Iowa National Guard's ADT speaks with Afghan children and their grandfather during a veterinary outreach sustainment program in Marawara District, Kunar Province, on October 24, 2010. (U.S. Air Force photo by Capt. Peter Shinn)

A report from the Afghanistan Stabilization Initiative, the main USAID OTI program working in the province at the time, characterized the partnership between the military and USAID in Marawara as unusually close.¹¹⁶⁹ As a result, USAID, in coordination with the provincial and district governors, was able to plan a series of projects prior to the operation that were implemented about 10 days after clearing, remarkable speed for USAID.¹¹⁷⁰ This high degree of coordination also enabled USAID to sequence and deconflict its projects with those of CERP.¹¹⁷¹

Expanding the Ink Spot of Government Control and Security

After the operation, the military, USAID, and Afghan leaders and forces continued to work together closely to expand the bubble of security and government reach east along Marawara 1, the road stretching from the district center to the Pakistan border. USAID's implementing partner, DAI, worked closely with the district governor and the military to improve the road, which until then had been a "goat trail," a standard type of footpath in rural Afghanistan not suited to vehicle traffic.¹¹⁷² The road improvement project moved eastward gradually, and each stage was closely coordinated with community members through the DDAs. Rather than simply paving this secondary road, USAID leveled and re-graveled it using local methods, maximizing its ability to employ local laborers and minimizing future maintenance costs. The governor and the DDA worked with local communities and USAID to identify additional projects that were implemented alongside



A horticulturist from the California Army National Guard's ADT gathers a soil sample from a field alongside the main road in Marawara District, Kunar Province, on November 23, 2009. (U.S. Air Force photo by Tech. Sgt. Brian Boisvert)

each new segment of road improvement, including flood protection and school boundary walls. Rather than sprinkle projects throughout the target area, as was common elsewhere, projects were strategically chosen to physically and contiguously push out the governance ink spot from the most secure area immediately surrounding the district center to the least secure outlying regions of the district.¹¹⁷³ (See figure 12.)

Meanwhile, after the clearing operation was complete, the 2-327th partnered its patrols with the Afghan National Army and Afghan Border Police to steadily expand their perimeter of control. The Border Police began conducting independent patrols, as well; however, these were contingent upon the coalition's ability to provide quick response support.¹¹⁷⁴

The power of this coordinated approach, sequenced to follow a major clearing operation, was illustrated by the fact that USAID had attempted the same road improvement project a year earlier at the request of residents, but had been forced to abandon the effort due to insecurity.¹¹⁷⁵ The second time the project was attempted, USAID was able to improve the road, even into communities, like Chenar, where elders had publicly proclaimed their allegiance to the Taliban prior to Operation Strong Eagle.¹¹⁷⁶ (See figure 12.) After the operation carved out sufficient security to enable residents to cooperate, the road project was able to proceed. It was especially impressive that the community was able to provide security for the machine operator, an outsider from Asadabad.¹¹⁷⁷

Additional indicators demonstrated the district was stabilizing as the newfound security spread roughly halfway up the valley and created space for the local government to reach the people. The district governor's freedom of movement expanded significantly as elders provided protection to enable him to travel to their communities, and, simultaneously, people began traveling to the district center from increasingly distant and previously insurgent-controlled areas.¹¹⁷⁸ Colonel Vowell recalled that petitioners started coming from areas as far as Barawala Kalay, the hometown of Taliban warlord Qari Ziaur Rahman, to seek assistance at the district center.¹¹⁷⁹ (See figure 12.) The district's newfound security soon attracted more risk-averse development actors, such as the UN Development Program (UNDP).¹¹⁸⁰

Effective Community Engagement

Another key element of the success in Marawara was the intensive community engagement process that preceded reconstruction projects. USAID focused on projects NSP had already identified, but had not been able to implement. These projects were vetted through community shuras to ensure they were still priorities, and were supervised by a local project manager who was vetted by the community, the district governor, and the DDA. Because the



With the financial support of CCI, the governor of Marawara District hosts a community cohesion jirga in Marawara District, Kunar Province, in September 2012. (USAID/OTI photo)

governor and assembly leader led the community engagement process, their credibility and authority were bolstered as they resolved the disputes that arose from the implementation process.¹¹⁸¹ The transparency of this process repaired relationships and created trust within the communities in which the program worked. Respondents to an M&E study conducted by USAID credited local elders and DDA representatives with bringing the people of Marawara closer to their government.¹¹⁸² One of these shuras further demonstrated its influence and credibility by negotiating the release of Afghan hostages taken by insurgents.¹¹⁸³

USAID's success in Marawara also stemmed from the fact that the program followed a number of the stabilization best practices highlighted in this report. First, the program conditioned its projects on communities providing security for work sites.¹¹⁸⁴ Community buy-in did not prevent the Taliban from trying to stop projects. Instead, it allowed the community, through its local and district elders, to present a united front to resist regular Taliban attempts to force work on USAID projects to stop. Whereas one such Taliban visit would have typically forced a project to shut down, the Taliban in this case backed down again and again, presumably because opposing development projects was making insurgents too unpopular.¹¹⁸⁵ Both academic studies and SIGAR's interviews with Afghan government and coalition officials noted that conditioning stabilization programming upon tangible community cooperation is essential to the effectiveness of those projects.¹¹⁸⁶

Second, USAID employed a direct implementation approach, procured construction materials locally, and worked closely with the district assembly to identify local laborers in each area where it worked.¹¹⁸⁷ The program saturated the area with short-term employment opportunities, clustering multiple grants together. USAID's implementing partner worked very closely with the DDA, district governor, and local shura in each area to ensure the equitable distribution of these jobs, avoiding the sense of inequality and preferential treatment of certain communities that was often the result of one-off projects.¹¹⁸⁸ USAID also took great care to identify truly local program staff, ensuring they were vetted by the DDA and district governor before hiring. Notably, the program prioritized local roots over qualifications more commonly emphasized by the international community. For example, none of USAID's staff in Marawara spoke English, nor had any of them previously worked for USAID programs. A USAID contractor interviewed by SIGAR credited the program's ability to work in remote areas near the Ghaki Pass to the credibility of the program's local staff.¹¹⁸⁹

The Challenge of Sustaining a Persistent Presence

The close proximity of the 2-327th headquarters at FOB Joyce (Sarkani District) to Marawara district center, only five miles away, and air support and artillery out of Asadabad, was a critical factor in the coalition's ability to secure the population.¹¹⁹⁰ In addition, according to Colonel Vowell, the overwhelming victory by coalition and Afghan forces during the clearing operation brought peace



Ribbon-cutting ceremony for the CCI-funded rehabilitation of the Lahor Dag Boys' School in Marawara District, Kunar Province, in May 2013. (USAID photo)

to the area for six months, having damaged the reputation of the local Taliban commander. This victory, in combination with other engagements in the area that consumed enemy attention and resources, enabled coalition forces to hold the area through patrols in support of Afghan bases in Marawara District. During the 2-327th's tour, Afghan security force concentration in the area also grew.¹¹⁹¹

However, this approach only succeeded for a few months. By the spring of 2011, the insurgency had had time to rebuild its strength, and the 2-327th launched another large-scale assault on insurgent forces, called Operation Strong Eagle III. Recognizing that most of the insurgents were coming from eastern Marawara, an area that previous clearing operations had not targeted, Strong Eagle III focused on the east.¹¹⁹²

The 2-327th was stretched thin during Strong Eagle III. For its clearing operations in Marawara, the battalion was only able to allocate a large contingent by seriously economizing on troop levels elsewhere in its area of operations. During Marawara clearing operations, a skeleton crew protected the battalion's bases and all non-Marawara operations came to a stop. Operation Strong Eagle III succeeded in its goal of suppressing the insurgent threat sufficiently to buy significant time and space in Marawara, enabling the 2-327th to focus on other districts.¹¹⁹³

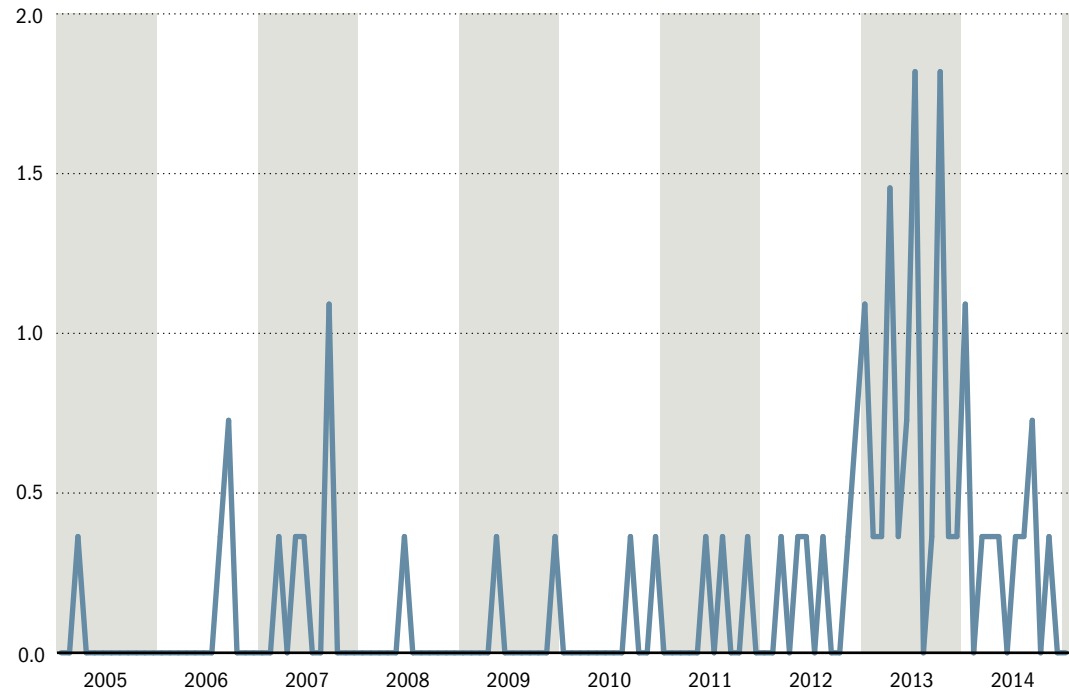
The scale of this investment in troop strength and USAID staff time and money was not sustained, however. By early 2012, coalition forces had pulled out of Marawara.¹¹⁹⁴ According to an implementing partner staff member who worked on the Afghanistan Stabilization Initiative in Marawara during this period and then, later, on SIKA-East, USAID told the SIKA-East team during start-up in spring 2012 that Kunar was no longer a priority, and therefore, USAID's new flagship stabilization program would not work there.¹¹⁹⁵ The Community Cohesion Initiative, OTI's follow-on program to ASI which ran from 2012 to 2015, did operate in the area.¹¹⁹⁶

As coalition forces and civilians began drawing down across the country in late 2011 and early 2012, strategic interest and investment in Marawara declined as well.¹¹⁹⁷ By December 2012, the 2-327th had returned to FOB Joyce in Kunar as part of a security force assistance brigade, but it was now responsible for the entire province, making it harder to build off Marawara's gains, even if there had been an interest in doing so.¹¹⁹⁸ Violence, as measured by combat events, spiked in late 2012 immediately after the U.S. military withdrew resources from Marawara, and continued worsening throughout 2013.¹¹⁹⁹ (See figure 13.)

The story of Marawara captures a broad lesson from the stabilization effort: Many different pieces had to come together at the same time for success. Even

FIGURE 13

MONTHLY COMBAT EVENTS IN MARAWARA DISTRICT, KUNAR PROVINCE, 2005–2014 (PER 10,000 POPULATION)



Source: Empirical Studies of Conflict Project (ESOC) analysis, data from Andrew C. Shaver and Austin L. Wright, "Data on Combatant Activity During Afghanistan War Advance Scientific Investigation of Insurgency," Technical Report, 2017.

where they did, as in Marawara in 2010 and 2011, the scale of the required investment was difficult to sustain. The military's role in setting and changing priorities on behalf of the combined civ-mil coalition effort, and the extremely short timeframe in which the surge strategy required they do so, meant the coalition saw its gains threatened each time coalition forces disengaged from an area.¹²⁰⁰ Until an area could be secured by Afghans on their own, the sustained presence of the coalition was a prerequisite for stabilization: The sustained presence of implementing partners would not in itself have been sufficient. Even where USAID stabilization programs continued to operate after coalition forces pulled out—as the Community Cohesion Initiative did in Kunar, led on the ground by Afghan staff—they were not able to sustain the security advances in the area, much less achieve stabilization on their own.

programs, which attempted to make it seem as though the Afghan government was responsible for their work, ACAP's assistance was branded "from the American people." However, according to the results of a beneficiary survey, the Afghan population rarely knew the assistance was from the United States. In insecure environments, ACAP staff determined for themselves whether it was safe to tell Afghan communities where the assistance came from, but generally, communities did not associate the aid as being "from the American people."¹²⁰⁵

Afghan Civilian Assistance Program II (ACAP II)

Years of Operation:	ACAP II was a follow-on program to ACAP. It provided humanitarian relief to victims of the conflict between ISAF and insurgent forces and was designed to
2011-2015	have a stabilizing effect on communities. ¹²⁰⁶ The program emphasized support
Amount Disbursed:	for women's social and economic participation, particularly in cases where
\$52.4 million	families had lost a male head of household who had been the primary bread-
Implementing Partner:	winner. ¹²⁰⁷ The program operated in 29 provinces and delivered immediate
International Relief	assistance to 41,141 individuals in 7,444 families, including 8,299 women. ¹²⁰⁸
and Development	Families that suffered from more severe losses were also eligible for tailored
Fund (IRD)	livelihood assistance; 14,653 individuals in 2,209 families (including 2,320
	women) received this assistance. ¹²⁰⁹ Unlike its predecessor, ACAP II delivered
	medical assistance to individuals and families; 649 individuals and 585 families
	received medical aid. ¹²¹⁰ Overall, four types of assistance were provided by
	ACAP II: immediate assistance of food and non-food items; medical assistance
	and referrals to medical facilities for physical and non-physical injuries;
	supplementary immediate assistance to replace damaged infrastructure,
	household items, or other property losses; and tailored assistance, such as
	materials or training to start a small business, valued between \$4,000 and
	\$7,000. ¹²¹¹

Note: Numbers have been rounded.

Source: SIGAR analysis of data provided by USAID in response to SIGAR data call, January 18, 2018.

ACAP II's goals were to provide appropriate assistance, improve assistance delivery through coordinated processes, and improve local governance participation in the relief process. ACAP II also implemented a psychosocial assistance component to address mental trauma experienced by recipient families. Seventy-two community counselors received training and subsequently provided assistance to 408 families through 3,170 counseling sessions.¹²¹² ACAP II partnered with various ministries to better tailor assistance packages for families and women, and the program also worked closely with PRTs and the UN to identify incidents reported by potential beneficiaries. It relied heavily on ISAF to verify claims were legitimate, but also relied on local actors, such as Community Development Councils, shuras, and district governors, to ensure assistance packages were delivered to authentic beneficiaries.¹²¹³

Afghanistan Social Outreach Program (ASOP)

ASOP was designed to assist the Afghan government in establishing District Community Councils to act as interim governing bodies until constitutionally mandated elections could take place.¹²¹⁴ Each council was democratically elected using the Afghan jirga process, in which several hundred leaders met to elect 35–50 representatives.¹²¹⁵ ASOP's premise was to “strengthen and reactivate” traditional governance structures that could address and resolve local problems, convey local grievances to the Independent Directorate of Local Governance, connect local populations with district governors, and later, assist in the delivery of government services. The implicit stabilization strategy was that DCCs would build trust and confidence in the Afghan government and, in doing so, inhibit the ability of the insurgency to assert its authority.

The program's focus was on the more insecure districts in the south and east.¹²¹⁶ A pilot phase was launched in 2008 that created eight DCCs; the success of the initial program prompted USAID to expand it to 131 DCCs in 24 provinces by 2012.¹²¹⁷ DCCs consisted of three core committees: (1) judiciary, (2) development and governance, and (3) peace and security. DCC judiciary committees adjudicated more than 2,000 cases over the course of the program, while security committees submitted more than 400 reports on insurgent activities to Afghan security agencies in their districts.¹²¹⁸ ASOP staff trained DCC members, provided material support, paid them stipends, and educated other representative bodies about the program.¹²¹⁹ At the recommendation of ISAF, which was eager to legitimize the Afghan Local Police force, ASOP councils took on an integral role in supporting that program.¹²²⁰ DCC members nominated ALP candidates and vetted its recruits. By the end of the ASOP program, it worked in some of the country's most remote and least secure districts to mobilize community support for ALP.¹²²¹ As coalition troops drew down and could no longer provide transport to ASOP, the program's ability to work in these areas was diminished.¹²²²

Afghanistan Stabilization Initiative (ASI)

As a USAID Office of Transition Initiatives program, ASI was designed to (1) improve perceptions of the legitimacy of the Afghan government, (2) recreate linkages between the Afghan government, informal governance structures, and local communities, and (3) leverage communities' ability to withstand and respond to crises in order to address sources of instability. The program did so through small, community-driven activities in support of the clear and hold phases of the military's COIN efforts.¹²²³ Many of these activities focused on enhancing perceptions of the district government through small-scale interventions, such as infrastructure construction or repair, short-term training and capacity building, and using communications campaigns to increase awareness of the government's work.¹²²⁴

Years of Operation:
2009–2012
Amount Disbursed:
\$34.5 million
Implementing Partner:
AECOM Technology
Corporation

Note: Numbers have been rounded.

Source: SIGAR analysis of data provided by USAID in response to SIGAR data call, January 18, 2018.

Years of Operation:
2009–2012
Amount Disbursed:
\$45.5 million
Implementing Partner:
Development
Alternatives, Inc.
(DAI), Chemonics
International

Note: Numbers have been rounded.

Source: USAID, response to SIGAR data call, June 22, 2017.

The program was implemented in two regions. ASI-East (ASI-E) operated in the seven provinces of Nangarhar, Kunar, Paktika, Wardak, Uruzgan, Ghazni, and Khost, and ASI-South (ASI-S) operated in Helmand and Kandahar Provinces.¹²²⁵ The program differed somewhat between the two regions. For example, in 2010, ASI-E worked closely with USAID and the Counterinsurgency Training Center in Kabul to create and pioneer the implementation of the DSF. The methodology was adopted by ASI-S starting in 2011.¹²²⁶ ASI-E used a sequenced approach to programming, starting by building relationships and initiating dialogue with key stakeholders to identify drivers of instability.¹²²⁷ The program supported the establishment of community councils to facilitate dialogue between the community and with the Afghan government; it then worked through these councils to identify and implement infrastructure projects.¹²²⁸

At the beginning of the program, ASI-S often implemented projects soon after clearing, and programming attempted to connect citizens to their government through projects that repaired damaged infrastructure.¹²²⁹ Because of the pressure to make these repairs quickly, initial ASI-S projects were often driven by military commanders and their U.S. government civilian counterparts, without thorough community engagement.¹²³⁰ Prior to 2011, there was resistance to implementing the DSF because the consultative process was inconsistent with the intense burn-rate pressure.¹²³¹ By 2011, however, the program adopted DSF and shifted to a more Afghan-led process involving local leaders and communities in the project identification and implementation processes, including using local labor and materials.¹²³² In the final year of the program, it also provided support to Village Stability Operations in isolated rural districts. USAID did not require community contributions on every ASI grant under contract, but implementing partners were required to obtain them whenever possible.¹²³³

Afghanistan Stabilization Program (ASP)

Years of Operation:	ASP was an on-budget, Afghan government-driven initiative carried out by an interministerial task force and funded by international donors, including
2004–2008	
Amount Disbursed:	USAID, the Netherlands, Canada, UK, Japan, and UNAMA, to extend the
\$14.2 million	Afghan government’s reach at the district and provincial level. Specifically, the
(U.S. contribution)	program hoped to reverse the deteriorating security situation through visible
Implementing Partner:	benefits to the population and improve its perceptions of the government’s
Not applicable	legitimacy. ¹²³⁴ A project management unit was established within the Afghan
(on-budget program)	government to oversee program implementation, as was a provincial stability
	fund that was originally intended to provide \$2.5 million to each province for
	administrative reform and reconstruction projects. ¹²³⁵ UNAMA also funded
	six pilot programs in six districts: Mohammad Agha District (Logar Province),
	Muqar (Ghazni), Nahrin (Baghlan), Ghurband (Parwan), Sayad Karam (Paktiya),
	and Yakawolang (Bamyan). ¹²³⁶

Note: Numbers have been rounded.

Source: SIGAR analysis of data provided by USAID in response to SIGAR data call, January 18, 2018.

To expand the program beyond this pilot, President Karzai instructed ASP to randomly select three to four districts in each province for project implementation in order to fairly distribute the development aid across Afghanistan.¹²³⁷ Once expanded, the program hoped to extend the reach of the government into the districts and provinces by building physical infrastructure to enhance the capacity of local governance; through the personnel reform, restructuring, and staff training for provincial and district-level officials; and increasing interactions between communities and their representatives through reconstruction projects.¹²³⁸ Often the capacity of the district government was so weak at the outset of the program that its first priority was to construct a physical district center building and provide basic services, such as telecommunications and electrification.¹²³⁹ However, the program, which was unrealistically ambitious in scope, lost much of its funding after management changes in 2005 and was eventually folded into the operating expenditures of IDLG.¹²⁴⁰

Afghanistan Transition Initiative (ATI)

ATI was one of the first stabilization programs in Afghanistan and was OTI's first large-scale program, with a budget approximately ten times the size of the office's previous average.¹²⁴¹ It launched in October 2001, beginning postwar planning from Pakistan before the ouster of the Taliban from power was even complete.¹²⁴² One of the program's first focus areas was providing support to the 2001 loya jirga and the Bonn political process that came out of it.¹²⁴³ The program's main goals were to increase the government's responsiveness to citizens' needs, increase citizen awareness of and participation in democratic processes, and increase the capacity of the Afghan media.¹²⁴⁴ It programmed over 700 activities in all 34 provinces of the country, primarily through community infrastructure activities.¹²⁴⁵ However, ATI also implemented other types of programming, such as (1) providing funding to major privately held independent media outlets, (2) infrastructure and logistics support to the central government, (3) civic education relating to the new constitution, and (4) voter registration for the presidential election.¹²⁴⁶

ATI encountered some of the same lack of communications and connectivity between the local and central levels of the Afghan government that would plague later programs.¹²⁴⁷ The program found that communication and decision making between the central and local governments went only one way: down, not up.¹²⁴⁸ For example, an Afghan interviewed for the final project evaluation described efforts to connect the population to its government: "Communities ask for a project, local government authorities approve it, central government rejects it because it isn't a priority, the message is relayed back to the community, and the community asks why."¹²⁴⁹ ATI's struggles with quality control also foreshadowed problems on subsequent stabilization programs that

Years of Operation:
2002–2005

Amount Dispersed:
\$20.5 million

Implementing Partner:
IOM, Internews,
Voice of America, UN
Development Program,
and Ronco.

Note: Numbers have been rounded. USAID disbursement data does not account for ATI's expenditures in 2002. For example, Social Impact's final program evaluation claims \$46.6 million was disbursed. This was not reflected in USAID's disbursement data.

Source: SIGAR analysis of data provided by USAID in response to SIGAR data call, January 18, 2018; USAID, "USAID Field Report Afghanistan," June 30, 2005; Social Impact, Inc., *USAID/OTI Afghanistan Program: Final Evaluation*, August 15, 2005, p. 14.

threatened to damage the reputation of the very government these projects were meant to bolster.¹²⁵⁰ This was, at least in part, because staffing levels were insufficient and M&E efforts were not able to do anything more than monitor activity completion.¹²⁵¹

Afghanistan Vouchers for Increased Production in Agriculture (AVIPA) and AVIPA Plus

Years of Operation:	AVIPA was a food security and agricultural assistance program created as part of the emergency response to a food crisis brought on by drought and a rise in
2008-2011	global wheat prices during the 2007 and 2008 crop seasons. AVIPA was designed
Amount Disbursed:	to provide accessible and affordable agricultural inputs—wheat seed and
\$469.5million	fertilizer—to drought-affected subsistence farmers to promote the immediate
Implementing Partner:	production of wheat for the fall/winter 2008 and spring 2009 crop seasons. ¹²⁵²
IRD, CARE	The program, which originally covered 18 provinces, ultimately distributed
International,	10,374 metric tons of wheat seed and 32,813 metric tons of fertilizer across 32
Danish Committee	provinces. ¹²⁵³ In 2009, USAID extended the program by one year, renamed it
for AID to Afghan	AVIPA Plus, and dramatically increased its scope and scale. USAID extended
Refugees (DACAAR),	it again in 2010. ¹²⁵⁴ As part of a programmatic expansion and overhaul, USAID
Coordination of	awarded the program an additional \$300 million in funding, \$250 million of
Humanitarian	which was allocated to support COIN operations in Kandahar and Helmand
Assistance (CHA)	Provinces. ¹²⁵⁵ The remaining \$50 million was allocated to continue operations in
	the rest of the country, where the program retained its focus on food security.

Note: Numbers have been rounded.

Source: SIGAR analysis of data provided by USAID in response to SIGAR data call, January 18, 2018.

With the 2010 expansion, USAID added stabilization tools to help extend the reach of the Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation, and Livestock, empower local communities to take an active role in their agricultural development, create income generation, and attempt to put an “Afghan face” on projects.¹²⁵⁶ However, within Kandahar and Helmand Provinces, AVIPA Plus operated in highly unstable environments, where the program used agriculture as a means to improve stability in KTDs in coordination with ISAF. Initiatives included cash-for-work projects, small infrastructure projects, small grants, agricultural vouchers, and agricultural training and capacity building.¹²⁵⁷ Surveys determined the program created an agricultural and economic impact, but that ongoing instability was tethered more to conflict over local power struggles than to agricultural and economic well-being.¹²⁵⁸

Community Cohesion Initiative (CCI)

USAID OTI developed CCI, among other programs, to link local partners to larger U.S. foreign policy objectives during short-term political transitions.¹²⁵⁹ The program sought to “increase resilience in areas vulnerable to insurgent exploitation,” strengthen community capacities to promote peaceful transitions, and support peaceful electoral processes.¹²⁶⁰ The program worked in select communities across the entire country.¹²⁶¹ When CCI began, it focused on local-level programming aimed at strengthening customary governance structures, the Afghan government, and ties between and among local communities through the issuance of small-scale grants.¹²⁶² Retaining its work at the community level, the program evolved in 2013, adding new national-level objectives of promoting peaceful elections and countering violent extremism.¹²⁶³

Years of Operation:
2012–2015

Amount Disbursed:
\$40.7 million

Implementing Partner:
Creative Associates
International, IOM,
USIP

Note: Numbers have been rounded.

Source: SIGAR analysis of data provided by USAID in response to SIGAR data call, January 18, 2018.

CCI’s wide-ranging activities included strategic communications support to Afghan government entities, rehabilitating school facilities and improving safety by building boundary walls, and support to civil society groups to conduct dispute resolution in conjunction with religious scholars.¹²⁶⁴ Grantees included local government entities and provincial ministry officials, as well as local community groups, associations, and civil society organizations.¹²⁶⁵

CCI conducted a nationwide campaign in advance of the 2014 elections to encourage voter turnout and explain peaceful democratic elections to communities that otherwise had limited understanding of the process. The campaign used pamphlets and radio and television advertising to spread its messages.¹²⁶⁶ During the 2014 presidential election, CCI’s Peaceful Election Advocacy Campaign helped ease tensions generated by perceptions of election fraud and quickly mobilized 40 international experts to monitor the second round of voting. According to a third-party evaluation, CCI became a crucial short-term intervention that helped to avert a potential civil war.¹²⁶⁷

CCI hired a third-party contractor in 2013 to serve as an independent monitoring unit, providing OTI with important information about CCI’s activities after the troop drawdown in 2014 meant USAID lost access to information it had previously obtained from the military.¹²⁶⁸

Community Development Program (CDP)

Years of Operation:	CDP was a cash-for-work program that implemented small infrastructure projects designed to productively engage combat-age men in order to prevent them from joining the insurgency. ¹²⁶⁹ Different implementing partners operated in different parts of the country; CDP covered 19 provinces in the south and east, nine provinces in the north, and several districts in and around Kabul. ¹²⁷⁰
2009–2013	
Amount Disbursed:	
\$404.8 million	
Implementing Partners:	CDP was implemented over five phases, and in 2010, the program adopted stabilization objectives and shifted away from working in urban areas and into rural, underserved, insecure ones. ¹²⁷¹ Like other USAID programs that were initiated before the surge, CDP was rescoped to become a stabilization program as the ISAF strategy shifted and USAID’s Stabilization Unit was stood up. CDP was originally designed to be a very different program; its original name was “Food Insecurity Response to Urban Populations.” When the program was redesigned in September 2010, it retained its mission to provide a short-term cash injection to at-risk communities, while redefining the “risk” from urban food insecurity to the risk of men in rural areas joining the insurgency. ¹²⁷²
Central Asian Development Group (CADG), Mercy Corps, CARE International	

Note: Numbers have been rounded.

Source: SIGAR analysis of data provided by USAID in response to SIGAR data call, January 18, 2018.

Districts were chosen at ISAF’s request and with community and government involvement to reflect local priorities. Initiatives included short-term employment with local laborers, labor-intensive community infrastructure projects in coordination with the Afghan government, and direct implementation projects with limited use of subcontracting.¹²⁷³ The program implemented 3,550 projects, with typical projects lasting 30–90 days, and generated 13.3 million days of employment.¹²⁷⁴ The program’s speed, flexibility, and simple, short-term employment allowed it to work in particularly insecure and poorly governed areas, both before and directly after clearing operations occurred.¹²⁷⁵

Community Based Stabilization Grants (CBSG)

Years of Operation:	CBSG aimed to use community development principles to hold communities in the north, west, and central regions of the country once clearing operations had ended. ¹²⁷⁶ CBSG directly provided small grants of up to \$25,000 to communities in underserved and insecure areas. ¹²⁷⁷ In its second year, the program shifted from a needs-based approach that had been closely coordinated with MRRD to a more explicit focus on sources of instability in areas prioritized by the military’s COIN effort. ¹²⁷⁸ CBSG found that as insurgents sought to increase their influence in the north, they began recruiting non-Pashtun groups and promoting their cause as an ethnically inclusive war of national liberation, rather than simply a Pashtun movement. CBSG worked to counter this narrative. ¹²⁷⁹
2010–2012	
Amount Disbursed:	
\$35.2 million	
Implementing Partner:	By 2011, CBSG’s strategy shifted to support the COIN effort and focused on KTDs within the northern and western parts of the country (such as districts in Kunduz and Baghlan), and ceased its earlier work in the safer parts of the north and west (such as Panjshir, Badakhshan, and Bamyan). ¹²⁸⁰ In line
Creative Associates International, Afghan Development Association (ADA), Coordination of Humanitarian Assistance (CHA), Coordination of Afghan Relief	

Note: Numbers have been rounded.

Source: SIGAR analysis of data provided by USAID in response to SIGAR data call, January 18, 2018.

with COIN, a significant number of grants were provided to support Village Stability Operations.¹²⁸¹

Under CBSG, communities identified and implemented their own projects, assisting with 500 grants and 30,000 days of employment. Community contributions, both in-kind and cash, totaled over \$2 million over the life of the project.¹²⁸² Local Afghan government offices and officials provided technical expertise and guidance, which was designed to bring about greater connection between the community and the government.¹²⁸³ Grant projects included, among other things, graveling roads, building school boundary walls, weaving and embroidery training for women, and women’s hygiene awareness clinics.¹²⁸⁴

District Delivery Program (DDP)

DDP was designed to rapidly deploy civilian Afghan government personnel to recently cleared KTDs to extend the Afghan government’s reach as a legitimate alternative to the Taliban. DDP’s longer-term goal was to strengthen the capacity of the government by funneling funds through its bureaucracy as an on-budget program.¹²⁸⁵ The program was primarily funded by USAID, but was also funded in Helmand by the British government and in Kapisa by the French government; all funds were implemented through the Afghan government’s IDLG and numerous ministries.¹²⁸⁶

Years of Operation:
2010–2013
Amount Disbursed:
\$2.3 million
Implementing Partner:
Not applicable
(on-budget program)

Note: Numbers have been rounded.

Source: SIGAR analysis of data provided by USAID in response to SIGAR data call, January 18, 2018.

The program consisted of three funding streams: the first funded salaries for the IDLG officials charged with running the program, as well as salary supplements for government offices working in DDP-eligible districts; the second facilitated service delivery in the first year of the program; and the third stream was meant to enable district officials to work closely with military commanders to use CERP funds for infrastructure projects and the delivery of basic services.¹²⁸⁷

Unlike most stabilization programs, USAID funded DDP directly through the Afghan government, rather than hiring an implementing partner. In order to oversee the use of these funds, a coordinating body, called the District Delivery Working Group, was created. The process for funding and strengthening the Afghan government and increasing service delivery started with budgeting and transferring the allocated funds to each district through IDLG. These funds were to provide the necessary tools and resources for line ministries to effectively deliver services to each district.¹²⁸⁸ The program was intended to deliver a set of basic services in education, agriculture, and justice, inspired by Afghanistan’s Basic Package of Health Service, initiated in 2003, under which available services are calibrated by the number of people in a given area. For example, for every 15,000–30,000 people, the goal is to have 1 basic health center.¹²⁸⁹ Finally, DDP was meant to fill vacant government positions, or *tashkils*, with civil servants.¹²⁹⁰

Only \$2.3 million of DDP's \$40 million budget was disbursed before program funding was discontinued due to concerns funds had been misallocated—fears that were ultimately proven unfounded.¹²⁹¹ Of the 83 KTDs in which the program was intended to operate, 38 districts were assessed in preparation for the disbursement of funding before the program was shut down. Of those, implementation plans were drafted for 27, and only 19 ultimately received funding: 13 from USAID and six (in Helmand) from the UK.¹²⁹² For a detailed review of DDP, see page 60.

Kandahar Food Zone (KFZ)

Years of Operation:	KFZ is an ongoing program that attempts to strengthen the resilience of
2013–Present	Kandahar's communities to better withstand economic challenges and
Amount Disbursed:	address the root causes of poppy cultivation. ¹²⁹³ KFZ, which began as a two-
\$40.3 million	year program, was later expanded to five years and was part of a broader
(program ongoing)	counternarcotics and stabilization effort. KFZ represents one pillar in a four-
Implementing Partner:	pillar Ministry of Counter Narcotics (MCN) strategy funded by USAID and
IRD, Development	designed by the Afghan government to reduce poppy cultivation and increase
Transformations, Lapis	the legitimacy of subnational governance. The other three pillars, which are
Communications	funded by State's Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement
	Affairs, include governor-led poppy eradication, demand reduction, and strategic
	communications. ¹²⁹⁴ The program worked in seven Kandahar districts in its first
	two years: Panjwayi, Maiwand, Zhari, Kandahar City, Arghistan, Shah Wali Kot,
	and Spin Boldak. However, because of budget limitations starting in year three,
	its focus was narrowed to the districts of Panjwayi and Zhari. ¹²⁹⁵

Note: Numbers have been rounded.

Source: SIGAR analysis of data provided by USAID in response to SIGAR data call, January 18, 2018.

KFZ has two main components: the first is aimed at capacity building in the MCN's Alternative Livelihoods Directorate and at the Kandahar Directorate of Counternarcotics office, and the second is to provide alternative livelihoods and community infrastructure to increase licit economic activities.¹²⁹⁶ KFZ uses a modified version of the SAM tool to identify and program against the factors that are drivers of poppy cultivation and instability.¹²⁹⁷ Thus, KFZ was part counternarcotics program and part stabilization program, with the assumption that stabilizing communities in these areas was often inextricably tied to enabling them to grow alternative crops.

KFZ introduced the idea of a social contract through which communities pledge to cease poppy cultivation in exchange for irrigation projects.¹²⁹⁸ The contract is signed between the community, the MCN, provincial governor, and district governor with the understanding the Afghan government will monitor the community's compliance with the contract.¹²⁹⁹ As part of its goal of encouraging farmers to produce licit crops as alternatives to opium, KFZ supports infrastructure projects and capacity building to increase access to and the economic viability of these alternative crops, such as grapes.¹³⁰⁰

For example, the program has supported the rehabilitation of vineyards, the expansion of existing orchards, and the establishment of new orchards. Additionally, KFZ has supported the rehabilitation and extension of irrigation canals—mainly in Panjwayi and Zhari—where improved irrigation systems are more likely to persuade farmers to cultivate licit crops.¹³⁰¹ Other KFZ projects include providing agricultural training to beneficiaries, promoting off-season horticulture crop production, marketing high-value crops, and developing agrribusinesses.¹³⁰²

Local Governance and Community Development (LGCD)

LGCD was “enormous in scope and coverage, expensive, complicated, and diverse.”¹³⁰³ Spanning almost five years and operating in all of the country’s 34 provinces, LGCD was described by USAID as “its flagship stability project,” which substantially evolved with the U.S. stabilization effort.¹³⁰⁴ As one of the first stabilization programs, LGCD was “experimental.”¹³⁰⁵ Originally scheduled to end in 2009, the program was, instead, extended by two years and USAID almost tripled its budget from \$150 million to \$400 million.¹³⁰⁶ This expansion was driven by an increasing emphasis on the program’s role in supporting the counterinsurgency effort and the civilian surge.¹³⁰⁷ The program aimed to strengthen local governance, promote community development (CD), implement local stability initiatives (LSI), and provide support to PRTs.¹³⁰⁸ A significant portion of the program’s resources was allocated to CD (47 percent) and LSI (24 percent).¹³⁰⁹

Implementing partners advanced and adapted LGCD’s programming initiatives over time. From 2006–2008, programming focused on quick impact projects. There was a brief focus from 2008–2009 on improved governance, mainly at the provincial level, where LGCD initiatives were designed to equip, train, and assist governors, ministry offices, and Provincial Development Councils (interagency Afghan forums that prioritized projects).¹³¹⁰ The program’s governance component was ultimately removed in 2009, and the shift toward stabilization and COIN operations emphasized the implementation of LSI and CD.¹³¹¹ Starting in 2009, LGCD shifted to projects that could be implemented in shorter time frames as part of a broader programmatic shift to quicker, simpler projects.¹³¹² However, the program did evolve over time to better incorporate Afghan government officials in programming. Toward the end, communities were required to submit project requests through their government representatives.¹³¹³

When integrated with COIN, LGCD worked during, and even prior to, clearing operations.¹³¹⁴ LGCD sought to help communities advance along the stabilization spectrum such that they progressed from its quick impact projects, or LSI, designed for the clear and immediate post-clear phase, to the hold phase when LGCD would initiate CD projects. CD programming made projects

Years of Operation:

2006–2011

Amount Disbursed:

\$376.1 million

Implementing Partners:

DAI, Associates in Rural Development (ARD)

Note: Numbers have been rounded.

Source: SIGAR analysis of data provided by USAID in response to SIGAR data call, January 18, 2018.

conditional upon communities demonstrating their support for projects through contributions such as the provision of security to work sites, unskilled labor, or local materials.¹³¹⁵ Issues arose due to a lack of reliable price information and difficulties measuring these in-kind contributions' dollar value, forcing LGCD to drop the requirement in 2009.¹³¹⁶ For CD projects, LGCD initially required that all communities make contributions of at least 10 percent of the total value of the grant, in an effort to ensure community buy-in and ownership of projects.¹³¹⁷ However, accurately estimating the value of the community contributions proved challenging. Therefore, while community contributions continued to be required, the monetary benchmark was dropped.¹³¹⁸ Implementation and progression became increasingly unrealistic, as LSI quick impact projects rarely progressed to longer-term CD programming.¹³¹⁹

Overall, LGCD was hindered because programming started late, stabilization was poorly defined, and the program's goals were unrealistic. As SIGAR auditors and other analyses of LGCD pointed out, LGCD's achievements were mixed, at best.¹³²⁰ The SIKAs were follow-on programs to LGCD, but overall the SIKAs placed a greater emphasis on the role of local Afghan government entities in the selection and implementation of projects.¹³²¹

Measuring Impacts of Stabilization Initiatives (MISTI)

Years of Operation:	MISTI was a USAID monitoring and evaluation program with two main components: (1) the conduct of independent mid-term and final performance
2012-2015	evaluations of eight programs, and (2) the collection, synthesis, and analysis of
Budget:	data in order to assess stability trends down to the sub-district level, combining
\$19.3 million	existing civilian and military data with surveys on Afghan perceptions of
Implementing Partner:	security. ¹³²² Specifically, under its second line of effort, MISTI conducted 190,264
Management	interviews in more than 5,000 villages across 130 districts in 23 provinces
Systems International	in order to assess the overall stabilization impact of three programs: CCI,
(MSI), Afghan Youth	the SIKAs, and KFZ. ¹³²³ It also assessed the impact of implementing USAID
Consulting, Afghan	programming in the same areas as the National Solidarity Program. ¹³²⁴ MISTI
Center for Socio-	conducted an initial baseline survey in 2012 followed by four subsequent
Economic Research	surveys over a 27-month period, the fifth of which was conducted in 2014. ¹³²⁵
<small>Note: Numbers have been rounded.</small>	The program also attempted to measure village-level perceptions of the Afghan
<small>Source: SIGAR analysis of data provided by USAID in response to SIGAR data call, January 18, 2018.</small>	government compared to the Taliban. The program was innovative, ambitious, and designed to “contribute to the body of knowledge on lessons learned and measuring stabilization impacts and trends.” ¹³²⁶ For more information on MISTI's findings, see page 130.

Methodology

MISTI was a quasi-experimental approach to stabilization monitoring at the village level, and the largest trends analysis and stabilization impact evaluation the U.S. government has ever undertaken.¹³²⁷ MISTI built two primary indices to

measure stability and resilience. Stability was an aggregate measure of whether participatory local development projects succeeded in improving perceptions of good governance and effective service delivery, “thereby improving citizens’ lives and addressing local grievances that might otherwise contribute to support for [armed opposition groups].”¹³²⁸ Stability was measured using three sub-indices, all based on perceptions: quality of life, government capacity, and local governance. MISTI also measured community resilience (i.e., how well local leaders could mobilize their communities to solve local problems with or without formal government support).¹³²⁹ Because USAID did not program in villages randomly, MISTI’s effort to track changes in treatment and control villages required it to identify control villages whose key characteristics matched the pre-selected treatment villages, using a quasi-experimental method of analysis.¹³³⁰

Challenges

Despite the rigorous attempt MISTI evaluators made to adequately survey and measure the impacts of USAID stabilization programming, the effort faced serious constraints. For example, peer reviewers have noted that the programs MISTI evaluated lacked articulated theories of change, which created challenges for the assessment of outcomes.¹³³¹ One of the biggest challenges MISTI faced was a lack of accurate data about USAID programming. According to RAND’s peer review of the program’s methodology, because USAID data was so limited, MISTI was unable to track the multitude of overlapping development and stabilization programs that had taken place in any given area. The absence of this information made it impossible for MISTI to take into account how an area’s experience with historical programming may have impacted the perceived effectiveness of the programs it was supposed to evaluate.¹³³² Measuring program impact was also difficult because MISTI’s design required it to match treatment villages with a nearly identical control village, but this proved to be “nearly impossible” due to data limitations.¹³³³ These factors hindered MISTI’s effort to discern the signal from the noise, which may have contributed to the fact that perception data of stabilization generally remained flat from the baseline to the final survey.¹³³⁴

Further, both USAID and the RAND reviewers have argued that the proxy MISTI used for ascertaining support for the Taliban was unreliable. MISTI asked survey respondents whether they supported a non-controversial policy presented to them as endorsed either by the Taliban, the Afghan government, or no one at all. Respondents were assessed to support the Taliban if they expressed support for the policy that was “endorsed” by the group.¹³³⁵ If, as RAND argues, this methodology was unreliable, then MISTI’s resulting finding that stabilization programming in a small number of Taliban-controlled areas increased support for the group may not be credible.¹³³⁶

PRT Quick Impact Projects (QIP)

Years of Operation:	USAID’s partnership with PRTs began in 2003 through the PRT QIP program.
2003–2007	The purpose was to provide USAID officers working in PRTs with the resources
Amount Disbursed:	needed to implement projects, 90 percent of which cost less than \$350,000
\$86.9 million	each. ¹³³⁷ USAID’s Field Program Officers selected these projects in coordination
Implementing Partner:	with the military and local Afghan leaders. ¹³³⁸ QIP were intended to connect
IOM, UN Office for Project Services	and increase confidence between communities and the district, provincial, and central government and to deliver “peace dividends” that would demonstrate the possibility of future political and economic progress. ¹³³⁹ QIP sought to ensure local buy-in through a variety of measures, such as purchasing materials and hiring labor locally and requiring communities to provide security for projects. ¹³⁴⁰ PRTs also used funding from CERP, which generally funded projects costing less than \$25,000, while QIP funded larger, more expensive, and more complex projects. For example, CERP funds were used for small-scale projects, such as providing latrines for schools or generators for hospitals, while QIP projects funded the rehabilitation of local roads, bridges, and government buildings. ¹³⁴¹ In addition to infrastructure, QIP funds were used to support government capacity building, job placement, microfinance efforts, gender-related activities, and media projects. ¹³⁴²

Note: Numbers have been rounded.

Source: SIGAR analysis of data provided by USAID in response to SIGAR data call, January 18, 2018.

Rule of Law Stabilization–Informal Component (RLS-I)

Years of Operation:	RLS-I aimed to strengthen traditional forms of conflict resolution, support the linkages between the informal and formal justice sectors, and facilitate the resolution of long-term destabilizing conflicts. ¹³⁴³ RLS-I focused on building and improving traditional dispute resolution mechanisms and connecting those mechanisms to formal government. ¹³⁴⁴ The program was designed to be Afghan-led, Afghan-owned, and Afghan-sustained through grassroots initiatives that used Afghan and sharia law experts to train informal leaders and broaden communication among TDR facilitators. ¹³⁴⁵
2010–2014	
Amount Disbursed:	
\$39.9 million	
Implementing Partner:	
Checchi and Company Consulting, Inc.	

Note: Numbers have been rounded.

Source: SIGAR analysis of data provided by USAID in response to SIGAR data call, January 18, 2018.

Network meetings and discussions among informal leaders who were charged with conducting TDR at the local level provided forums for collaboration and the identification of challenges faced by local informal justice systems.¹³⁴⁶ Topics covered at these meetings included issues surrounding *baad* (the practice of giving a girl in marriage to settle a debt) and dispute prevention for local communities.¹³⁴⁷ In these working groups, district officials, formal justice sector actors, and respected elders participated in discussions and legal training to clarify their different and complementary roles in the justice sector.¹³⁴⁸

Gender mainstreaming was also a large focus of the program; women were introduced into the conflict resolution and justice process at the village level through group gatherings known as *spinarsy* groups. Each group consisted of 15–25 women, whom the program trained in dispute resolution skills and ways

to address family conflicts. The program then attempted to foster cooperation between the spinsary groups and their male counterparts.¹³⁴⁹ RLS-I also sought to improve legal literacy, including through radio and television programming, and by targeting local mediators at the village and district levels.¹³⁵⁰ By close-out, the program had trained 20,000 individuals, 40 percent of whom were women, and facilitated the registration of roughly 700 TDR decisions with district courts and officials across 48 districts and sub-districts.¹³⁵¹

Stability in Key Areas (SIKA)

The four SIKA programs aimed to address poor development and governance at the district level, connect districts with their provincial governments, and increase the population's confidence in and support for the Afghan government generally.¹³⁵² The program also aimed to help local government officials become more sensitive to local grievances in their area and to identify and address key sources of instability.¹³⁵³ The program was designed to be Afghan-led and Afghan-owned; each SIKA program worked closely with the Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development and the Independent Directorate of Local Governance, following stabilization guidelines established by the Afghan government.¹³⁵⁴

The SIKA programs taken together were a vast programmatic undertaking, divided into four areas of operation in the west, east, north, and south; each program had different implementation processes, methods of identifying SOIs, and challenges. In total, the SIKAs operated in 17 provinces and implemented community-identified infrastructure projects in cooperation with the government, such as construction or repair of culverts, irrigation systems, potable water systems, schools, clinics, and other public buildings.¹³⁵⁵ The program also undertook soft projects, such as training and cultural events.

SIKA involved a significant degree of capacity building for Afghan government officials and offices; this included helping to formalize district government procedures for specific tasks, including obtaining a national identity card and supporting quarterly meetings between provincial and district governors.¹³⁵⁶ The programs also focused on improving the communications and outreach capacity of district governments, which included using TV and radio to promote district government services and establishing hotlines to enable community members to contact their representatives.¹³⁵⁷ SIKA also organized service provider fairs and catalogs to advertise government services to communities.¹³⁵⁸ The SIKAs used a revised version of the District Stability Framework called SAM, and according to the terms of their contracts, were required to follow the guidelines of the MRRD-developed Kandahar Model that involved decentralized procurement and financial procedures, coupled with community contracting.¹³⁵⁹ The SIKAs used a slow and highly consultative grant identification process with communities,

Years of Operation:
2011–2015
Amount Disbursed:
\$308.7 million
Implementing Partner:
AECOM Technology, DAI

Note: Numbers have been rounded.

Source: SIGAR analysis of data provided by USAID in response to SIGAR data call, January 18, 2018.

local leaders, and official Afghan entities that distinguished it from other stabilization programs.¹³⁶⁰

Strategic Provincial Roads-Southern and Eastern Afghanistan (SPR-SEA)

Years of Operation:	SPR-SEA had three main objectives: (1) rehabilitate roads in key areas,
2007-2012	(2) contribute to stabilization by connecting communities and engaging them
Amount Disbursed:	in the rehabilitation process, and (3) increase the capacity for Afghan firms to
\$313.5 million	build and maintain roads. ¹³⁶¹ The program operated in eight provinces in the
Implementing Partner:	southern and eastern regions of the country: Ghazni, Khost, Kunar, Nangarhar,
IOM, UN Office for Project Services	Paktika, Paktiya, Helmand, and Kandahar. ¹³⁶² SPR-SEA's community engagement component was designed to support the development of a security buffer around the roadway, resulting from the goodwill of local communities. To help build this goodwill, the program gave out grants designed to reduce opposition to road construction by mitigating the negative impact on communities, for example, by supporting the establishment of new businesses and creating jobs. ¹³⁶³ Toward the end of SPR-SEA, it piloted what it called the "Rural Roads Program," which used local labor in a cash-for-work model to build roads by hand with the limited help of equipment, when necessary. ¹³⁶⁴ Unlike many of the other stabilization programs which focused on small-scale activities, some of the projects SPR-SEA was tasked with were major undertakings. For example, one road was 60 kilometers long and included two major bridges. ¹³⁶⁵

Note: Numbers have been rounded.

Source: SIGAR analysis of data provided by USAID in response to SIGAR data call, January 18, 2018.

The program, which was designed and initiated before a significant decline in security across the country, was initially intended to work only in areas that were secure.¹³⁶⁶ However, it eventually worked even prior to clearing operations, in some instances facing attacks that resulted in the deaths of over 100 Afghan contractors and the injury of over 200 more. These attacks were intended to impede or halt construction, and they often did.¹³⁶⁷ Of the originally planned 1,500 to 2,000 kilometers of all-weather gravel roads, only 160 kilometers were completed and 300 more were partially constructed.¹³⁶⁸ As a result, in 2010 USAID scaled back the program and ended it a year later.¹³⁶⁹ Overall, 38 percent of its allocated funds went to administration, 54 percent to program activities, and 7 percent to capacity building.¹³⁷⁰

APPENDIX C: METHODOLOGY

SIGAR conducts its lessons learned program under the authority of Public Law 110-181 and the Inspector General Act of 1978, as amended, and in accordance with the Council of the Inspectors General on Integrity and Efficiency's *Quality Standards for Inspection and Evaluation* (commonly referred to as the Blue Book). These standards require that we carry out our work with integrity, objectivity, and independence, and provide information that is factually accurate and reliable. SIGAR's lessons learned reports are broad in scope and based on a wide range of source material. To achieve the goal of high quality and to help ensure our reports are factually accurate and reliable, the reports are subject to extensive review by subject matter experts and relevant U.S. government agencies.

The *Stabilization* research team drew upon a wide array of sources. Much of the team's documentary research focused on publicly available material, including reports by USAID, State, DOD, and coalition partner nations, as well as congressional testimony from government officials. These official sources were complemented by hundreds of nongovernmental sources, including books, think tank reports, journal articles, press reports, academic studies, and analytical reports by international and advocacy organizations.

The research team also benefited from SIGAR's access to material that is not publicly available, including thousands of documents provided by U.S. government agencies. State provided more than 4,000 cables—eight of which were declassified at SIGAR's request—as well as internal memos and briefings, strategy documents, analytical reports, and civ-mil planning and programmatic documents. USAID provided stabilization program reporting, program evaluations, fact sheets, conference notes, program management plans, methodology documents, work plans, lessons learned and best practice reports, and program funding data. DOD provided district narrative assessments, survey data, and planning and programming documents on CERP and VSO. The research team also received internal, analytical, and lessons learned documents from the UK and German governments on their stabilization efforts in Afghanistan. A body of classified material, including some U.S. embassy cables and intelligence reports, provided helpful context; however, as an unclassified document, this report makes no use of that material. Finally, the team also drew from SIGAR's own work, embodied in its quarterly reports to Congress, audits, and special project reports.

While the documentary evidence tells a story, it cannot substitute for the experience, knowledge, and wisdom of people who participated in the Afghanistan stabilization effort. Therefore, the research team interviewed more than 100 individuals with direct knowledge of U.S. efforts to stabilize cleared or contested territory. Interviews were conducted with U.S. and international experts from academia, think tanks, NGOs, and government entities; current and former U.S. civilian and military officials who deployed to Afghanistan; current and former officials who oversaw key components of the stabilization effort from Washington; contractors who worked for USAID implementing partners on the ground; and other personnel from State, USAID, and DOD. The team also interviewed 20 Afghan government officials, including current and former ministers, deputy ministers, provincial governors, and stabilization program managers.

Interviews provided valuable insights into the rationale behind decisions, the debates within and between agencies, and the frustrations that spanned the years, but often remained unwritten. Due in part to the politically sensitive nature of stabilization efforts, a majority of the interviewees wished to remain anonymous. For those still working in government, confidentiality was particularly important. Therefore, to preserve anonymity, our interviews often cite, for example, a “former senior U.S. official,” a “USAID official,” or a “stabilization contractor.” We conducted our interviews during research trips to Afghanistan, the UK, Germany, throughout the United States, and in visits to U.S. government departments and agencies in Washington.

The report underwent an extensive process of peer review. We sought and received feedback on the draft report from nine subject matter experts, each with significant stabilization experience in Afghanistan. These reviewers provided thoughtful, detailed comments on the report, which we incorporated, as possible.

Over the course of this study, the team routinely engaged with officials at USAID, State, and DOD to familiarize them with our preliminary findings, lessons, and recommendations and to solicit formal and informal feedback to improve our understanding of the key issues, as viewed by each agency, particularly in light of the interagency Stabilization Assistance Review, to which SIGAR contributed. USAID, State, and DOD were then given an opportunity to formally review and comment on the final draft of this lessons learned report, after which we met with agency representatives to receive their feedback firsthand. Although we incorporated agencies’ comments where appropriate, the analysis, conclusions, and recommendations of this report remain SIGAR’s own.

APPENDIX D: ABBREVIATIONS

Acronym	Definition
ACAP	Afghan Civilian Assistance Program
ADZ	Afghan Development Zone
AIF	Afghanistan Infrastructure Fund
ALP	Afghan Local Police
ANASF	Afghan National Army Special Forces
ANDSF	Afghan National Defense and Security Forces
ANP	Afghan National Police
AP3	Afghan Public Protection Program
ASI	Afghanistan Stabilization Initiative
ASOP	Afghanistan Social Outreach Program
ASP	Afghanistan Stabilization Program
ARTF	Afghanistan Reconstruction Trust Fund
ATI	Afghanistan Transition Initiative
AVIPA	Afghanistan Vouchers for Increased Production in Agriculture
CA	Civil Affairs
CBSG	Community Based Stabilization Grants
CCI	Community Cohesion Initiative
CD	Community Development
CDI	Community Defense Initiatives
CDP	Community Development Program
CENTCOM	U.S. Central Command
CERP	Commander's Emergency Response Program
CFSOCC-A	Combined Forces Special Operations Component Command-Afghanistan
CFW	Cash for Work
CIDNE	Combined Information Data Network Exchange
CIP	Critical Infrastructure Protection
CIVCAS	Civilian Casualty
CJSOTF-A	Combined Joint Special Operations Task Force-Afghanistan
COIN	Counterinsurgency
COR	Contracting Officer's Representative
CRC	Civilian Response Corps
CSO	State's Bureau for Conflict and Stabilization Operations
DAI	Development Alternatives Incorporated
DCC	District Community Council
DDA	District Development Assembly

Acronym	Definition
DDP	District Delivery Program
DOD	Department of Defense
DOD IG	Department of Defense Inspector General
DSF	District Stability Framework
DST	District Support Team
ESOC	Empirical Studies of Conflict
FM	Field Manual
FMR	Financial Management Regulation
GAO	Government Accountability Office
HTT	Human Terrain Team
ICMCP	Integrated Civilian-Military Campaign Plan
IDLG	Independent Directorate of Local Governance
IED	Improvised Explosive Device
IOM	International Organization for Migration
IJC	ISAF Joint Command
ISAF	International Security Assistance Force
JP	Joint Publication
KFZ	Kandahar Food Zone
KTD	Key Terrain District
LDI	Local Defense Initiatives
LGCD	Local Governance and Community Development
LSI	Local Stability Initiatives
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
MAAWS-A	Money as a Weapon System-Afghanistan
MCN	Ministry of Counter Narcotics
MISTI	Measuring Impact of Stabilization Initiatives
MRRD	Ministry for Rural Rehabilitation and Development
NSC	National Security Council
NSP	National Solidarity Program
NSPD	National Security Presidential Directive
ODA	Operational Detachment Alpha
OIG	Office of the Inspector General
OTI	USAID's Office of Transition Initiatives
PAG	Policy Action Group
PKSOI	U.S. Army Peacekeeping and Stability Operations Institute
PM	Project Manager
PMP	Performance Management Plan

SPECIAL INSPECTOR GENERAL FOR AFGHANISTAN RECONSTRUCTION

Acronym	Definition
PRT	Provincial Reconstruction Team
PSC	Private Security Contractor
QIP	Quick Impact Project
RC	Regional Command
RLS-I	Rule of Law Stabilization Program- Informal Component
RSSA	Regional South Stabilization Approach
S&R	Stabilization and Reconstruction
S/CRS	State Department's Coordinator for Reconstruction and Stabilization
SIGACT	Significant Activity
SIKA	Stability in Key Areas
SOCOM	U.S. Special Operations Command
SOF	Special Operations Forces
SOI	Source of Instability
SPR-SEA	Strategic Provincial Roads-Southern and Eastern Afghanistan

Acronym	Definition
SRAP	Special Representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan
Stab-U	USAID's Stabilization Unit
TDR	Traditional Dispute Resolution
TFBSO	Task Force for Business and Stability Operations
UNAMA	UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan
UNDP	UN Development Program
USAID	U.S. Agency for International Development
USDA	U.S. Department of Agriculture
USFOR-A	U.S. Forces-Afghanistan
USIP	United States Institute of Peace
VSO	Village Stability Operations
VSP	Village Stability Platform
VSU	Vetting Support Unit

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181. Chandrasekaran, *Little America*, pp. 125–126. Doug Lute also offered the president an equally sobering prediction about the difficulty of handing any initial success off to the Afghans. Coll, *Directorate S*, p. 395.
182. Coll, *Directorate S*, p. 404.
183. Douglas Lute, SIGAR interview, February 20, 2015. According to former acting SRAP Laurel Miller, the Obama administration had a "tendency to boil down the whole question of strategy in Afghanistan to how many troops we have in the country. But it's pretty hard to get away from that fundamental question." Susan Glasser, "The Trump White House's War Within," *Politico*, July 24, 2017.
184. Kaplan, *The Insurgents*, p. 311.
185. Kornblut, Wilson, and DeYoung, "During marathon review of Afghanistan strategy."
186. Woodward, *Obama's Wars*, pp. 186–188.
187. Kaplan, *The Insurgents*, p. 312.
188. Woodward, *Obama's Wars*, pp. 202, 259.
189. "[The military] made no secret of their view that without the vast ground force recommended by Gen. McChrystal, the Afghan mission could end in failure and a return to power of the Taliban." Alex Spillius, "White House angry at General Stanley McChrystal speech on Afghanistan," *The Telegraph*, October 5, 2009.
190. Senior USAID official, SIGAR interview, August 15, 2016.
191. Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), "Iraq People and Economy," *CIA World Factbook*, 2009; CIA, "Afghanistan People and Economy," *CIA World Factbook*, 2009.
192. World Bank, "World Development Indicators," 2009.
193. World Bank, "World Development Health Indicators," 2009.
194. CIA, "Afghanistan People and Economy;" CIA, "Iraq People and Economy."
195. U.S. Embassy Kabul and ISAF/USFOR-A, "U.S. Embassy and ISAF/USFOR-A Integrated Civilian-Military Afghanistan Communication Plan," March 26, 2010, p. 12; CIA, "Afghanistan People and Economy."
196. World Bank, "World Development Indicators," 2009.
197. For more information on the impact of illiteracy among Afghan security forces, see SIGAR, *Reconstructing the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces: Lessons from the U.S. Experience in Afghanistan*, SIGAR 17-62-LL, September 2017, pp. 142–147.
198. Rick Nelson and Maren Leed, *Iraq vs. Afghanistan - A Surge is Not a Surge Is Not a Surge*, CSIS, 2009.
199. Nelson and Leed, *Iraq vs. Afghanistan*; Colonel Gian Gentile, *Wrong Turn: America's Deadly Embrace of Counterinsurgency* (New Press, 2013), pp. 89–96; Austin Long, "The Anbar Awakening," *Survival*, vol. 50, no. 2, pp. 77–78.
200. In an interview with SIGAR, David Petraeus, one of the chief architects of the surge, said the differences between Afghanistan and Iraq were understood at the time. "There are many differences between Iraq and Afghanistan and I laid those out ahead of time: history of central government, literacy, government revenue, terrain, nature of society, infrastructure, enemy headquarters locations (inside Iraq, outside Afghanistan), rule of law, and ability to pressure the insurgent leaders. If the enemy has sanctuary you can't compel that enemy. And I told Congress that we wouldn't be able to flip Afghanistan the way we flipped

- Iraq. I knew it was going to be a longer process.” Petraeus, SIGAR interview, August 16, 2017.
201. On September 4, Petraeus gave an interview to the *Washington Post*, in which he disparaged the counterterrorism approach under consideration by the White House and embraced “a fully resourced, comprehensive counterinsurgency campaign.” Michael Gerson, “In Afghanistan, No Choice But to Try,” *Washington Post*, September 4, 2009. On September 21, a leaked copy of McChrystal’s *Initial Assessment* appeared in the *Washington Post* under the headline “More Forces or ‘Mission Failure.’” On October 1, McChrystal delivered a speech at a think tank in London, which was interpreted as a public appeal for more troops. In that speech, McChrystal rejected the counterterrorism option favored by Vice President Biden. Bob Woodward, “McChrystal: More Forces or ‘Mission Failure,’” *Washington Post*, September 21, 2009; Spillius, “White House angry at General Stanley McChrystal speech on Afghanistan;” Woodward, *Obama’s Wars*, pp. 266–267.
202. Kaplan, *The Insurgents*, p. 311.
203. Kornblut, Wilson, and DeYoung, “During marathon review of Afghanistan strategy;” Woodward, *Obama’s Wars*, p. 253.
204. For example, Peter Orszag, the director of Office Management and Budget, wrote a memo describing the \$889 billion estimated cost of McChrystal’s plan over a 10-year period—a cost and timeline that Obama rejected during deliberations, reportedly saying, “I’m not doing 10 years. I’m not doing a long-term nation-building effort. I’m not spending a trillion dollars on this. . . . That’s not in the national interest.” Woodward, *Obama’s Wars*, p. 251.
205. Woodward, *Obama’s Wars*, p. 253.
206. The first alternative, which included 85,000 troops, was considered unrealistic. The second alternative, which entailed sending 20,000 troops with a training mission was, according to the military, insufficient to accomplish the mission (i.e., deny the Taliban the ability to overthrow the Afghan state). What remained were two very similar options: one involved 40,000 U.S. forces, the other 30,000–35,000 troops. Woodward, *Obama’s Wars*, pp. 273, 275, 279.
207. Petraeus, SIGAR interview, August 16, 2017.
208. Senior U.S. official, SIGAR interview, September 16, 2016.
209. Landler, “The Afghan War and the Evolution of Obama;” Woodward, *Obama’s Wars*, p. 279.
210. Kaplan, *The Insurgents*, pp. 316–317.
211. Kaplan, *The Insurgents*, p. 317.
212. Kornblut, Wilson, and DeYoung, “During marathon review of Afghanistan strategy;” Woodward, *Obama’s Wars*, pp. 326–328.
213. Woodward, *Obama’s Wars*, pp. 251–252, 271.
214. Coll, *Directorate S*, p. 407.
215. Obama, “Statement on United States Troop Levels in Afghanistan,” December 1, 2009.
216. Senior U.S. official, SIGAR interview, September 16, 2016.
217. Petraeus, SIGAR interview, August 16, 2017; senior U.S. official, SIGAR interview, September 16, 2016. Bob Woodward documents extensive discussions about a surge lasting 18–24 months during NSC meetings on November 11 and 23, weeks before the strategy was announced, which would have given principals plenty of time to raise red flags about the dangers of such a compressed timeline. Woodward, *Obama’s Wars*, pp. 271, 278, 291, 294–295, 297. In contrast, accounts by journalist Steve Coll, a senior civilian official interviewed by SIGAR, and Stanley McChrystal all agree with General Petraeus that the first mention of a time-constrained strategy in any gathering of principals was on November 29, two days before the West Point speech, when the president presented his terms sheet. However, McChrystal also says that Secretary Gates had asked him “earlier” what he thought about the idea, although he does not specify if that conversation occurred earlier that same day, or days or weeks before the conversation with President Obama. In any case, McChrystal wrote, “I judged that the combination of our ability to expand secured areas over the next 18 months, and to increase Afghan security force capacity during that period, could allow us to reduce the force size with acceptable risk. If I’d felt like the decision to set a withdrawal date would have been fatal to the success of our mission, I’d have said so.” McChrystal, *My Share of the Task*, p. 357; Coll, *Directorate S*, p. 408.
218. Petraeus, SIGAR interview, August 16, 2017.
219. Petraeus, SIGAR interview, August 16, 2017; Kaplan, *The Insurgents*, p. 318.
220. Barnett Rubin, SIGAR interview, February 17, 2017.
221. State, *Afghanistan and Pakistan Regional Stabilization Strategy*, Office of the Special Representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan, December 2009, p. 7.
222. State, *Afghanistan and Pakistan Regional Stabilization Strategy*, December 2009.
223. USAID official, SIGAR interview, October 7, 2016.
224. Paul Fishstein and Andrew Wilder, *Winning Hearts and Minds? Examining the Relationship between Aid and Security in Afghanistan*, Feinstein International Center, Tufts University, January 2012, p. 26; Robert M. Gates, statement before the Senate Committee on Armed Services, hearing on “Department of Defense Authorization for Appropriations for Fiscal Year 2008,” February 6, 2007, p. 9.
225. U.S. Mission to Afghanistan, *U.S. Foreign Assistance for Afghanistan*, annex VII, pp. 7–8; Karl Eikenberry, “The Limits of Counterinsurgency Doctrine in Afghanistan: the Other Side of COIN,” *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 92, no. 5 (2013), pp. 66–67; Chandrasekaran, *Little America*, pp. 117–118.

226. Former USAID official, SIGAR interview, October 18, 2016.
227. USAID stabilization contractor, SIGAR interview, September 27, 2016. For example, prior to clearing key terrain districts like Musa Qala in Helmand and Zhari in Kandahar, the Taliban were in firm control. They levied taxes, imposed conscription on the local population, limited women's movements, made local radio broadcasts, required licenses for tasks such as irrigation system repair, and relied on shadow courts and checkpoints. Perhaps most importantly, the Taliban provided security to the local population, protecting them from predation by Afghan security forces and other power brokers, and they were perceived as less corrupt than the Afghan government. Displacing them required heavy initial force, followed by stabilization efforts to ease the population into a new order. See Thomas Donnelly and Gary Schmitt, "Musa Qala: Adapting to the Realities of Modern Counterinsurgency," *Small Wars Journal*, September 5, 2008, electronic pp. 4–5, 8; U.S. Embassy Kabul, "Musa Qala Reconstruction Update Planning," Kabul 000018 cable, January 2, 2008; Jason Motlagh, "The Afghan War: Why the Kandahar Campaign Matters," *Time*, October 18, 2010; Carl Forsberg, *The Taliban's Campaign for Kandahar*, Institute for the Study of War, December 2009, pp. 15–16, 30, 32–35.
228. Civ-mil planner at Embassy Kabul, SIGAR interview, November 4, 2016; senior State Department official, SIGAR interview, January 24, 2017; State, "Reflections on Afghanistan: Lessons for Future Conflict and Stabilization Operations," CSO analysis, p. 7. S/CRS has since become State's Bureau for Conflict and Stabilization Operations (CSO). Nina M. Serafino, *Peacekeeping/Stabilization and Conflict Transitions: Background and Congressional Action on the Civilian Response/ Reserve Corps and other Civilian Stabilization and Reconstruction Capabilities*, CRS, October 2, 2012, electronic p. 2.
229. State, "Reflections on Afghanistan: Lessons for Future Conflict and Stabilization Operations," p. 7; U.S. Embassy Kabul, "Scenesetter for CODEL McConnell," Kabul 000803 cable, April 1, 2009.
230. Civ-mil planner at Embassy Kabul, SIGAR interview, November 4, 2016; State, "Reflections on Afghanistan: Lessons for Future Conflict and Stabilization Operations," pp. 6–7.
231. U.S. Embassy Kabul, "Beyond 421 - Civilian Staffing Requirements for Afghanistan," Kabul 001762 cable, July 6, 2009; Ariella Viehe, Jasmine Afshar, and Tamana Heela, *Rethinking the Civilian Surge: Lessons from the Provincial Reconstruction Teams in Afghanistan*, Center for American Progress, December 2015, pp. 5–6.
232. Embassy Kabul and USFOR-A, *Integrated Civilian-Military Campaign Plan*, August 10, 2009, p. 29; The White House, *White Paper of the Interagency Policy Group's Report on U.S. Policy toward Afghanistan and Pakistan*, March 27, 2009; military planner, SIGAR interview, November 3, 2016; U.S. Embassy Kabul, "Scenesetter for CODEL McConnell," Kabul 000803 cable, April 1, 2009.
233. Embassy Kabul and USFOR-A, *Integrated Civilian-Military Campaign Plan*, pp. v-vi, 5, 16, 21, 23.
234. U.S. Embassy Kabul, "Afghanistan Scenesetter for CODEL Inouye," Kabul 003177 cable, October 08, 2009; SIGAR, *U.S. Civilian Uplift in Afghanistan is Progressing but Some Key Issues Merit Further Examination as Implementation Continues*, SIGAR 11-2-AR, October 26, 2010, p. ii; USAID, *Lessons Learned: USAID Perspectives*, pp. 7, 10; GAO, *Afghanistan: Improvements Needed to Strengthen Management of U.S. Civilian Presence*, GAO-12-285, Feb. 27, 2012, p. 11.
235. Ball, Emmott, Greenwood, Murshed and Uribe, *International Lessons from Integrated Approaches in Afghanistan, Part II*, p. 38; Foreign and Commonwealth Office and Wilton Park, *Capturing the Lessons from the Helmand Provincial Reconstruction Team*, December 3–5, 2014, pp. 9–10.
236. *Civilian Strategy for Afghanistan: A Status Report in Advance of the London Conference, Hearing Before the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations*, 111th Cong., pp. 51–52 (January 21, 2010) (statement of Richard Holbrooke, U.S. Special Representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan).
237. U.S. Mission to Afghanistan, *U.S. Foreign Assistance for Afghanistan*, annex VII, pp. 11–13.
238. U.S. Embassy Kabul, "Beyond 421 - Civilian Staffing Requirements for Afghanistan," Kabul 001762 cable, July 6, 2009; Ambassador Karl Eikenberry, testimony before the Senate Foreign Affairs Committee, hearing on "The New Afghanistan Strategy: The View from the Ground," December 9, 2009, p. 14; U.S. Embassy Kabul, "Key GIROA Ministers Plan Sub-National Governance Interventions in South and East," Kabul 002270 cable, August 7, 2009; U. S. Embassy Kabul, "Afghanistan: Fine Tuning Civ-Mil Coordination Through National Level Working Groups," Kabul 003908 cable, December 7, 2009; State, "Winning in Afghanistan: A Message from Ambassador Eikenberry," November 8, 2009, p. 3.
239. Civ-mil planner at Embassy Kabul, SIGAR interview, November 4, 2016.
240. State, "Reflections on Afghanistan: Lessons for Future Conflict and Stabilization Operations," p. 2.
241. U.S. Embassy Kabul, "Key GIROA Ministers Plan Sub-National Governance Interventions in South and East," Kabul 002270 cable, August 7, 2009.
242. Stephanie Kinney, "Interview of a USAID Official in PRT Office," USIP and Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training, September 11 and 18, 2009, p. 16.

243. Kinney, "Interview of a USAID Official in PRT Office," p. 16; U.S. Embassy Kabul, "Afghan Ministries Organize for Post-Conflict District Level Assistance," Kabul 002383 cable, August 16, 2009.
244. Dennis J. Cahill, "The Civilian Uplift and Unified Action: Organizing for Stability Operations in Regional Command-East," *PRISM*, vol. 3, no. 2, p. 132; senior USAID official, SIGAR interview, November 18, 2016; McChrystal, *Commander's Initial Assessment*, August 30, 2009, chapter 2, pp. 19–20; USAID stabilization contractor, SIGAR interview, September 27, 2016.
245. MSI, *USAID Stabilization Unit Afghanistan: Performance Management Plan FY 2012–2015*, June 18, 2013, p. 5.
246. McChrystal, *Commander's Initial Assessment*, August 30, 2009, chapter 2, p. 20; DOD, *Report on Progress Toward Security and Stability in Afghanistan*, April 2010, p. 6; senior USAID official, SIGAR interview, November 23, 2016. The diversity of KTDs, from urban centers to sparsely populated districts, leaves ample room for disagreement about the criteria applied when choosing them. While most U.S. government sources point to population centers controlled or contested by the Taliban as the most important criteria, some sources indicate other factors, including proximity to key infrastructure, centers of economic productivity, and commerce routes. For example, most of the Ring Road in the south and east was prioritized as key terrain by McChrystal for these latter reasons, which are less often mentioned in government documents. See McChrystal, *My Share of the Task*, p. 331.
247. U.S. Embassy Kabul, "Afghan Ministries Organize for Post-Conflict District Level Assistance," Kabul 2383, August 16, 2009; U.S. Embassy Kabul, "Key GIROA Ministers Plan Sub-National Governance Interventions in South and East," Kabul 002270 cable, August 7, 2009.
248. Embassy Kabul and USFOR-A, *Integrated Civilian-Military Campaign Plan*, 2009, pp. 3, 18; Eikenberry, testimony before the Senate Foreign Affairs Committee, December 9, 2009, pp. 9–10.
249. USAID, "Stability in Key Areas (SIKA) West, RFP 306-10-0034, Amendment No. 01," awarded to AECOM, December 9, 2010, p. 5.
250. Eikenberry, testimony before the Senate Foreign Affairs Committee, December 9, 2009, pp. 9, 10; State, *Afghanistan and Pakistan Regional Stabilization Strategy*, 2009, p. 3; Frances Z. Brown, *Rethinking Afghan Local Governance Aid After Transition*, USIP, August 2014, pp. 2–3; Cahill, "The Civilian Uplift and Unified Action: Organizing for Stability Operations in Regional Command-East," p. 132. "District Support Teams (DST): The DST is a combined civilian and military action group which is responsible for integrating the activities of all elements in an assigned district. The DST is comprised of all USG civilian elements plus ISAF and OEF military forces operating in the district. The team is led by the USG civilian lead, the commanders of the primary military elements, and the ANSF mentor and partner team. The district level is primarily execution focused; however, it is responsible for jointly formulating a civ-mil plan for district support, assessing progress and stability in the area, allocating resources jointly, raising key issues to the provincial level as required, and engaging key international community and GIROA partners." Embassy Kabul and USFOR-A, *Integrated Civilian-Military Campaign Plan*, 2009, p. 30.
251. International Relief and Development (IRD), *Afghanistan Vouchers for Increased Production (AVIPA) Plus Annual Report FY 2010, October 1, 2009 - September 30, 2010*, prepared under contract for USAID, December 31, 2010, p. ii; SIGAR, *USAID Spent Almost \$400 Million on an Afghan Stabilization Project Despite Uncertain Results, But Has Taken Steps to Better Assess Similar Efforts*, SIGAR 12-8-AR, April 25, 2012, p. 3; MSI, *Community Development Program: Final Performance Evaluation*, prepared under contract for USAID, February 12, 2014, p. 8. Community Based Stabilization Grants was also realigned geographically for similar reasons as the others, but not until 2011. Creative Associates International, *Community Based Stabilization Grants: Final Report*, prepared under contract for USAID, July 2012, pp. 5, 8. FIRUP changed its name to the Community Development Program in September 2010. MSI, *Community Development Program: Final Performance Evaluation*, p. 4.
252. IRD, *AVIPA Plus Annual Report FY 2010*, p. ii; USAID Office of Inspector General, *Audit of USAID/Afghanistan's Afghanistan Vouchers for Increased Productive Agriculture (AVIPA) Program*, Audit Report No. 5-306-10-008-P, April 20, 2010, pp. 3–4; senior USAID official, SIGAR interview, November 23, 2016.
253. USAID, *Lessons Learned: USAID Perspectives*, p. 10; USAID, "Approval of the Concept Paper for the Third Party Monitoring and Evaluation IQC," memorandum to Mission Director, September 20, 2010, p. 1; senior USAID official, SIGAR interview, November 10, 2016; U.S. Mission to Afghanistan, *U.S. Foreign Assistance for Afghanistan*, annex VII, p. 6.
254. Senior USAID official, SIGAR interview, November 23, 2016.
255. USAID, "USAID Afghanistan: Our Work."
256. U.S. Mission to Afghanistan, *U.S. Foreign Assistance for Afghanistan*, annex VII, p. 3.
257. Brown, *Rethinking Afghan Local Governance Aid After Transition*, pp. 12–13.
258. USAID stabilization official, SIGAR interview, September 9, 2016. Programs did not always have explicit theories of change. In its desk review of stabilization resources, MISTI pointed out that this caused problems not just for evaluators assessing program effectiveness, but also for implementers responsible for selecting activities under each program. When a program's theory of change is unclear, it becomes unclear

- what interventions it should sponsor or how their effectiveness should be measured. MSI, *MISTI Task I: Desk Review of Stabilization Resources and References*, prepared under contract for USAID, July 11, 2012, p. 11.
259. U.S. Mission to Afghanistan, *U.S. Foreign Assistance for Afghanistan*, annex VII, p. 5; Social Impact, *Final Performance Evaluation of USAID/OTI Community Cohesion Initiative in Afghanistan*, prepared under contract for USAID, February 2016, p. 9.
260. IRD, *Afghanistan Vouchers for Increased Production in Agriculture (AVIPA) Plus Final Report, September 1, 2008 – November 15, 2011*, prepared under contract for USAID, pp. 35–36; MSI, *Community Development Program: Final Performance Evaluation*, p. 4; U.S. Mission to Afghanistan, *U.S. Foreign Assistance for Afghanistan*, annex VII, p. 5.
261. Checchi and Co., *Final Report: ACAP Final Evaluation*, prepared under contract for USAID, January 13–March 12, 2011, pp. 4, 150.
262. U.S. Mission to Afghanistan, *U.S. Foreign Assistance for Afghanistan*, annex VII, p. 8; MSI, *Stability in Key Areas (SIKA) Program Final Performance Evaluation*, prepared under contract for USAID, September 2015, pp. 5, 24.
263. IRD, *AVIPA Plus Final Report*, pp. 2–3.
264. USAID, “Glossary of ADS Terms,” Partial Revision April 30, 2014, p. 28.
265. Robert D. Lamb and Brooke Shawn, *Political Governance and Strategy in Afghanistan*, Center for Strategic and International Studies, April 2012, p. 28.
266. MSI, *MISTI Task 1: Desk Review of Stabilization Resources and References*, prepared under contract for USAID, July 11, 2012, pp. 6, 9, 14; Counterinsurgency Training Center-Afghanistan (CTC) and USAID, *District Stability Framework*, p. 87.
267. MSI, *Community Outreach and Engagement for Stabilization Activity Planning and Implementation: an Evaluation of Best Practices—Analytical Report*, prepared under contract for USAID, May 29, 2013, p. 2.
268. CTC and USAID, *District Stability Framework*, p. 21; MSI, *Community Outreach and Engagement*, p. 11.
269. USAID, *Tactical Conflict Assessment and Planning Framework (TCAPF)*, August 27, 2009, p. 4; CTC and USAID, *District Stability Framework*, pp. 118, 122; MSI, *Community Outreach and Engagement*, p. 2.
270. CTC and USAID, *District Stability Framework*, p. 88; MSI, *Community Outreach and Engagement*, pp. 14–15.
271. CTC and USAID, *District Stability Framework*, p. 166; DAI, “Annual Report -Year Two: Afghanistan Stabilization Initiative (East),” July 2011, prepared under contract for USAID, p. 5.
272. USAID stabilization official, SIGAR interview, September 9, 2016; senior USAID official, SIGAR interview, October 24, 2016; former USAID official, SIGAR interview, June 1, 2017; Chemonics International Inc., *Afghanistan Stabilization Initiative – South: Final Report*, August 3, 2012, prepared under contract for USAID, pp. 6–7, 21; USAID officials, SIGAR interview, September 18, 2011.
273. Senior USAID official, SIGAR interview, August 15, 2016. According to a USAID desk review, RSSA was “a unified framework that is used to analyze where that particular district is on a stability continuum from unstable to stable. It relies on a matrix that demonstrates the characteristics of a district at each phase of the shape, clear, hold, and build continuum. These characteristics translate into the objectives against which civilian and military actors focus their efforts. For example, if a district is in the clear phase and one of the characteristics of the hold phase is that a legitimate local decision-making body is constituted, then stabilization efforts will focus on the objective of supporting the establishment of that local decision-making body.” MSI, *MISTI Task 1: Desk Review of Stabilization Resources and References*, p. 15.
274. The Local Stability Initiatives component of LGCD often consisted of cash-for-work programming and was concentrated in remote and insecure areas. Program documentation describes a remarkably short timeframe for implementation of just one to three weeks, hardly enough time for substantive consultation with local populations or leaders. Checchi and Co., *Final Report: Local Governance and Community Development Program (LGCD) Evaluation*, January 2009, pp. 28–29. ASI-E created a guide to leveraging short-term employment to advance stabilization goals and to address sources of instability. This guide covers direct implementation of projects using local labor, and documents how such an approach can enable the program to work in less secure areas while minimizing the risk of corruption or protection payments to insurgent groups. DAI, “Use of Politically Leveraged Short-Term Employment Projects for Stabilization of Insurgent Controlled Areas,” n.d, internal program document, pp. 1–3.
275. DAI, *Local Governance and Community Development: Final Report*, prepared under contract for USAID, August 2011, p. xii.
276. Former USAID official, SIGAR interview, June 1, 2017.
277. IRD, *AVIPA Plus Final Report*, p. viii; MSI, *Community Development Program: Final Performance Evaluation*, p. 4; Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, testimony before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Washington, DC, hearing on “Afghanistan: Assessing the Road Ahead,” December 3, 2009, electronic pp. 4–5.
278. U.S. Embassy Kabul, “Using Cash for Work to Support Stabilization and Governance Objectives in Southern Afghanistan,” Kabul 000666 cable, February 3, 2011; field director for an implementing partner, SIGAR interview, May 9, 2017.

279. Checchi and Co., *Final Report Local Governance and Community Development Program (LGCD) Evaluation*, January 2009, p. 25; MSI, *Community Development Program: Final Performance Evaluation*, pp. 5–6.
280. MSI, *Community Development Program: Final Performance Evaluation*, pp. 5–6, 13; Rohullah Niazi, SIGAR interview, December 12, 2016; DAI, *Local Governance and Community Development: Final Report*, August 2011, pp. 3–4; Checchi and Co., *Local Governance and Community Development Program (LGCD) Evaluation*, January 2009, pp. 24–25, 28.
281. MSI, *Community Development Program: Final Performance Evaluation*, p. 17. The use of these cash-for-work activities was extensive. Cash-for-work projects registered 37,040 people for work across the country in just one month in March 2010. U.S. Embassy Kabul, “March 2010 Update on Governance and Development Efforts in Afghanistan,” Kabul 001288 cable (declassified by State on April 28, 2017, at SIGAR’s request), April 13, 2010.
282. Chandrasekaran, *Little America*, p. 191.
283. Chandrasekaran, *Little America*, p. 194.
284. Chandrasekaran, *Little America*, pp. 37–39, 71–74; U.S. Embassy Kabul, “Scenesetter for CODEL McConnell,” Kabul 000803 cable, April 1, 2009; Flynn, Pottinger, and Batchelor, *Fixing Intel*, p. 13.
285. Senior USAID official, SIGAR interview, December 4, 2016; Viehe, Afshar, and Heela, *Rethinking the Civilian Surge*, p. 9; State, “Winning in Afghanistan: A Message from Ambassador Eikenberry,” p. 3.
286. Senior USAID official, SIGAR interview, November 8, 2016; Crowley, SIGAR interview, August 3, 2016; senior USAID official, SIGAR interview, November 10, 2016; military planner, SIGAR interview, November 3, 2016.
287. State, “Winning in Afghanistan: A Message from Ambassador Eikenberry,” p. 3.
288. Viehe, Afshar, and Heela, *Rethinking the Civilian Surge*, p. 73; Brown, *The U.S. Surge and Afghan Local Governance*, p. 14; senior USAID official, SIGAR interview, August 15, 2016; civ-mil planner at Embassy Kabul, SIGAR interview, November 4, 2016.
289. Senior USAID official, SIGAR interview, November 10, 2016. There were also positive examples of civilian-military relationships and successful joint planning, such as on the Uruzgan PRT. However, as SIGAR has previously noted, these were contingent upon individual personalities, rather than formal structures. SIGAR, *U.S. Civilian Uplift in Afghanistan is Progressing*, SIGAR 11-2-AR, p. 14.
290. Senior USAID official, SIGAR interview, November 23, 2016.
291. Former senior USAID official, SIGAR interview, February 2, 2017; military planner, SIGAR interview, November 3, 2016.
292. Civ-mil planner at Embassy Kabul, SIGAR interview, November 4, 2016; senior USAID official, SIGAR interview, August 15, 2016.
293. Andersen, Louise Riss, *Afghanistan Lessons Identified: 2001–2014, International Lessons from Integrated Approaches in Afghanistan, Part I*, Danish Institute for International Studies, 2016, p. 66; former USAID official, SIGAR interview, June 1, 2017.
294. SIGAR and United States Institute of Peace, *Lessons from the Coalition: International Experiences from the Afghanistan Reconstruction*, Conference Report, April 19–20, 2016, p. 5; Viehe, Afshar, and Heela, *Rethinking the Civilian Surge*, p. 5.
295. Stuart Gordon, *Winning Hearts and Minds? Examining the Relationship between Aid and Security in Afghanistan’s Helmand Province*, Feinstein International Center, 2011, p. 35; senior USAID official, SIGAR interview, November 10, 2016.
296. USAID official, SIGAR interview, December 21, 2016.
297. Gordon, *Winning Hearts and Minds in Helmand*, Feinstein International Center, April 2011, pp. 35–36; Suhrke, *When More Is Less*, p. 104.
298. William Hammink, *USAID in Afghanistan: Challenges and Successes*, USIP, December 2017, pp. 9–10; senior USAID official, SIGAR interview, November 18, 2016.
299. Senior USAID official, SIGAR interview, August 15, 2016.
300. Senior USAID official, SIGAR interview, October 24, 2016; senior USAID official, SIGAR interview, November 10, 2016.
301. Mark Moyar, *Development in Afghanistan’s Counterinsurgency: A New Guide*, ORBIS, March 2011, p. 16.
302. Senior USAID official, SIGAR interview, November 10, 2016.
303. Senior USAID official, SIGAR interview, October 24, 2016; senior USAID official, SIGAR interview, November 10, 2016; Brown, *The U.S. Surge and Afghan Local Governance*, p. 14.
304. USAID, *Lessons Learned: USAID Perspectives*, p. 12; Stabilization operations planner for RC-East, SIGAR interview, July 11, 2016.
305. Stabilization operations planner for RC-East, SIGAR interview, July 11, 2016.
306. USAID stabilization contractor, SIGAR interview, September 27, 2016. Other sources contradict the idea that even entry criteria were well-defined and/or used in practice on ASI. A military report from Arghandab District in Kandahar in 2010 explains that OTI was willing to have ASI enter the district before the conditions set by other implementing partners had been met. These conditions were: sufficient security to allow freedom of movement for their local staff, the presence of a representative shura, and placing the Afghan government in the lead in planning and decisions as to which projects were implemented. Colonel Harry D. Tunnell, IV,

- Memorandum, "Task Force Stryker Governance, Reconstruction, and Development: The First Six Months in Southern Afghanistan," January 22, 2010, p. 5. In fact a January 2010 draft of ASI entry criteria set a significantly lower, standard for "sufficient security," including, among other criteria: "1) is there support by the military to operate in the area, and 2) will there be sustained access to the District Center? District Governor? Or other key Afghan leaders?" USAID, "Criteria for Engagement," internal program document, January 2010. Along the same lines, a 2012 monitoring and evaluation report of ASI calls into question whether OTI's entry criteria were well defined or understood in the first place, recommending that entry and exit criteria for each area be well defined before entry and exit decisions are made. Altai Consulting, *Afghanistan Stabilization Initiative Third Party Evaluation and Strategic Support: Final Report*, June 2012, p. 33.
307. AECOM, *Afghanistan Social Outreach Program (ASOP): Final Report*, prepared under contract for USAID, January 2012, p. 1.
308. AECOM, *Afghanistan Social Outreach Program (ASOP): Final Report*, p. 5.
309. AECOM, *Afghanistan Social Outreach Program (ASOP): Final Report*, pp. 3–4, 6.
310. AECOM, *Afghanistan Social Outreach Program (ASOP): Final Report*, pp. 5, 30–31.
311. AECOM, *Afghanistan Social Outreach Program (ASOP): Final Report*, p. 5.
312. U.S. Embassy Kabul, "Update on Attacks Against Implementing Partners and Other Civilians and Steps Being Taken," Kabul 003482 cable, August 6, 2010.
313. USAID Office of Inspector General, *Review of Security Costs Charged to USAID Projects in Afghanistan*, Memorandum to USAID Afghanistan, Review Report No. 5-306-10-002-S, September 29, 2010, p. 2.
314. U.S. Senate Committee on Armed Services, *Inquiry into the Role and Oversight of Private Security Contractors in Afghanistan*, September 28, 2010, pp. i, vi; Committee on Oversight and Government Reform Subcommittee on National Security and Foreign Affairs, *Warlord, Inc.: Extortion and Corruption Along the U.S. Supply Chain in Afghanistan*, June 2010, pp. 2–3.
315. DAI, *Preliminary Impact Assessment of ASI-East in Four Districts in Eastern Afghanistan: Summary of Results from Khogyani, Marawara, Sayadabad, and Urgan Districts*, prepared under contract for USAID, February 2012, p. 66.
316. SIGAR, *U.S. Civilian Uplift in Afghanistan is Progressing*, SIGAR 11-2-AR, pp. 10, 11; Viehe, Afshar, and Heela, *Rethinking the Civilian Surge*, p. 43; Erickson et al., *Lessons from the U.S. Civilian Surge in Afghanistan, 2009–2014*, Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs, January 2016, p. 18; senior USAID official, SIGAR interview, November 23, 2016. This challenge is not limited to Afghanistan. A recent review by the USAID Inspector General found that more than three-quarters of USAID staff surveyed about their work in Arab Spring countries reported that security and travel restrictions made monitoring their projects more difficult. USAID Office of Inspector General, *Survey of USAID's Arab Spring Challenges in Egypt, Tunisia, Libya, and Yemen*, Survey Report No. 8-100-15-001-S, April 30, 2015, p. 2.
317. USAID Office of Inspector General, *Review of Security Costs Charged to USAID Projects in Afghanistan*, p. 4.
318. *A Foreign Affairs Budget for the Future: Fixing the Crisis in Diplomatic Readiness: Resources of U.S. Foreign Engagement*, American Academy of Diplomacy and the Henry L. Stimson Center, October 2008, p. 3; CRS, *Building an Interagency Cadre of National Security Professionals: Proposals, Recent Experience, and Issues for Congress*, July 8, 2008, p. 5; Erickson et al., *Lessons from the U.S. Civilian Surge in Afghanistan*, p. 7.
319. Erickson et al., *Lessons from the U.S. Civilian Surge in Afghanistan*, pp. 6, 12.
320. GAO, *Afghanistan: Improvements Needed to Strengthen Management of U.S. Civilian Presence*, GAO-12-285, p. 11.
321. William Hammink, *USAID in Afghanistan: Challenges and Successes*, p. 9.
322. Erickson et al., *Lessons from the U.S. Civilian Surge in Afghanistan*, pp. 13–14.
323. USAID official, SIGAR interview, October 7, 2016.
324. USAID stabilization official, SIGAR interview, October 7, 2016.
325. John Acree, "Stabilization Success in Afghanistan: The Challenges Within," *PRISM*, vol. 4, no. 1, pp. 109–110.
326. Stephanie Kinney, "Interview of a USAID Official in PRT Office," USIP and Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training, September 11 and 18, 2009, p. 17.
327. USAID official, SIGAR interview, December 21, 2016; SIGAR, *U.S. Civilian Uplift in Afghanistan is Progressing*, SIGAR 11-2-AR, p. 15.
328. Erickson et al., *Lessons from the U.S. Civilian Surge in Afghanistan*, pp. 13–14.
329. Todd Greentree, "Bureaucracy Does its Thing," *Journal of Strategic Studies*, vol. 36, no. 3 (2013), p. 342.
330. The majority of the people interviewed for the report were direct-hire State and USAID officials. Viehe, Afshar, and Heela, *Rethinking the Civilian Surge*, pp. 49, 55, 65.
331. Viehe, Afshar, and Heela, *Rethinking the Civilian Surge*, p. 49.
332. USAID official, SIGAR interview, December 21, 2016; Erickson et al., *Lessons from the U.S. Civilian Surge in Afghanistan*, p. 20.

333. UK Stabilisation Unit, *Lessons on Lessons: Why We Haven't Learned Anything New for 68 Years*, 2014, p. 3.
334. Erickson et al., *Lessons from the U.S. Civilian Surge in Afghanistan*, pp. 19–20; Viehe, Afshar, and Heela, *Rethinking the Civilian Surge*, p. 37. The problems created by short tours and frequent staff turnover were not unique to U.S. personnel. Both Danish and British reviews of lessons learned in Afghanistan have noted the same problem. Ball, Emmott, Greenwood, Murshed and Uribe, *International Lessons from Integrated Approaches in Afghanistan, Part II*, 2016, p. 55; UK Stabilisation Unit, *Lessons on Lessons*, p. 3.
335. Bob Crowley, SIGAR interview, August 3, 2016; SIGAR, *U.S. Civilian Uplift in Afghanistan is Progressing*, SIGAR 11-2-AR, p. 13.
336. USAID stabilization official, SIGAR interview, October 7, 2016.
337. Civ-mil planner at Embassy Kabul, SIGAR interview, November 4, 2016.
338. Senior USAID official, SIGAR interview, December 4, 2016; U.S. Embassy Kabul, “New Approach to the Delivery of U.S. Assistance to Afghanistan in Support of the President’s Strategy,” Kabul 001776 cable, July 8, 2009; SIGAR, *U.S. Civilian Uplift in Afghanistan is Progressing*, SIGAR 11-2-AR, pp. 14–15; USAID, “Stability in Key Areas (SIKA) West, RFP 306-10-0034, Amendment No. 01,” p. 5.
339. U.S. Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, *Evaluating U.S. Foreign Assistance to Afghanistan: A Majority Staff Report*, June 8, 2011, p. 16.
340. Commission on Wartime Contracting in Iraq and Afghanistan, *Transforming Wartime Contracting: Controlling Costs, Reducing Risks*, August 2011, p. 20.
341. USAID, *Lessons Learned: USAID Perspectives*, p. 11.
342. The three main mechanisms employed by USAID to hire implementing partners are contracts, cooperative agreements, and grants. These mechanisms are distinguished primarily by the amount of control or “involvement” that USAID exerts over their implementation after an award is made. In USAID’s own words, it “exercises a higher level of control over the partner” on a contract, “is substantially involved with the recipient” on a cooperative agreement, and “does not need substantial involvement” with a grant. The specific details of each award further determine USAID’s involvement in each program, in addition to the myriad of relevant federal regulations, primarily in the ADS, AIDAR, and FAR. USAID, “Grant and Contract Process,” last updated April 12, 2017, USAID website.
343. Viehe, Afshar, and Heela, *Rethinking the Civilian Surge*, p. 22.
344. Acree, “Stabilization Success in Afghanistan: The Challenges Within,” p. 104.
345. Viehe, Afshar, and Heela, *Rethinking the Civilian Surge*, pp. 18, 46–47; SIGAR, *U.S. Civilian Uplift in Afghanistan is Progressing*, SIGAR 11-2-AR, p. 14. The same was true at lower levels of organization. For example, there was often only one USAID representative assigned to a military unit at the district level. USAID stabilization contractor, SIGAR interview, September 27, 2016. According to a report by the Center for American Progress, a typical ratio was 4 civilians to 84 military personnel on PRTs. Viehe, Afshar, Heela, *Rethinking the Civilian Surge*, p. 5.
346. U.S. Embassy Kabul, “Beyond 421-Civilian Staffing Requirements for Afghanistan,” Kabul 001762 cable, July 6, 2009; SIGAR, *U.S. Civilian Uplift in Afghanistan is Progressing*, SIGAR 11-2-AR, pp. 3–4. Each senior civilian had a substantial number of staff at the regional platform level, or approximately 10–30. However, this number paled in comparison to the staff at the military regional command. DOD, Report on Progress Toward Security and Stability in Afghanistan, November 2010, p. 20.
347. Erickson et al., *Lessons from the U.S. Civilian Surge in Afghanistan, 2009–2014*, p. 19; Greentree, “Bureaucracy Does its Thing,” pp. 342–343.
348. Former USAID official, SIGAR interview, June 1, 2017. For a further exploration of the collocation and resulting partnership of the PRT and provincial officials, the collocation and natural partnership of the regional command and regional platform, and the power struggle between the two levels, see House of Commons Defence Committee, Operations in Afghanistan: Fourth Report of Session 2010–2012, Vol. 1, electronic pp. 96–97.
349. Senior USAID official, SIGAR interview, November 18, 2016.
350. Senior USAID official, SIGAR interview, December 4, 2016.
351. The White House, *National Security Presidential Directive/NSPD-44*, December 7, 2005, p. 4.
352. U.S. Department of State and Broadcasting Board of Governors Office of Inspector General, *Inspection of the Bureau of Conflict and Stabilization Operations*, ISP-I-14-06, March 2014, p. 2; State, “Civilian Response Operations,” July 14, 2008, retrieved from the State Department website archive.
353. The eight participating agencies were USAID, DOD, Department of Homeland Security, Department of Health and Human Services, Department of the Treasury, Department of Justice, Department of Commerce, and the Department of Agriculture. USAID, *Building the Civilian Response Corps (CRC)*, n.d., p. 3.
354. John E. Herbst, “Stabilization and Reconstruction Operations: Learning from the Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) Experience,” testimony before the House Armed Services Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations, October 30, 2007, pp. 5–6. USAID,

- Building the Civilian Response Corps (CRC)*, p. 5.
355. Michael Miklaucic, SIGAR interview, February 1, 2017. For more information on the military reserve, see the Uniformed Services Employment and Reemployment Rights Act, Pub. L. No. 103-353 (1994).
356. Miklaucic, SIGAR interview, February 1, 2017; senior State Department official, SIGAR interview, February 1, 2017.
357. Senior State Department official, SIGAR interview, February 1, 2017.
358. Miklaucic, SIGAR interview, February 1, 2017; senior State Department official, SIGAR interview, February 1, 2017.
359. State Department official, SIGAR interview, January 12, 2017; senior State Department official, SIGAR interview, February 1, 2017.
360. U.S. Department of State and Broadcasting Board of Governors Office of Inspector General, *Inspection of the Bureau of Conflict and Stabilization Operations*, ISP-I-14-06, March 2014, p. 5; USAID Office of Inspector General, *Survey of USAID's Office of Transition Initiatives*, Memorandum to Acting Director, DCHA/OTI, October 13, 2006, p. 1.
361. SIGAR analysis of data provided by USAID in response to SIGAR data call, January 18, 2018.
362. Acree, "Stabilization Success in Afghanistan: The Challenges Within," p. 108; senior USAID official, SIGAR interview, November 10, 2016; USAID official, SIGAR interview, October 7, 2016; senior USAID official, SIGAR interview, August 15, 2016.
363. Senior USAID official, SIGAR interview, August 15, 2016; Gordon, *Winning Hearts and Minds in Helmand*, 2011, p. 35.
364. USAID stabilization official, SIGAR interview, October 7, 2016.
365. Senior USAID official, SIGAR interview, August 15, 2016.
366. Senior USAID official, SIGAR interview, November 10, 2016.
367. Senior USAID official, SIGAR interview, August 15, 2016; SIGAR, *Quarterly Report to the United States Congress*, April 30, 2014, p. 5; Joint Staff, Joint and Coalition Operational Analysis (JCOA), *Operationalizing Counter/ Anti-Corruption Study*, February 28, 2014, pp. 1, 12.
368. Acree, "Stabilization Success in Afghanistan: The Challenges Within," p. 102.
369. Senior USAID official, SIGAR interview, December 4, 2016.
370. Chandrasekaran, *Little America*, p. 109.
371. Senior USAID official, SIGAR interview, November 23, 2016; Rajiv Chandrasekaran, "U.S. Military Dismayed by Delays in 3 Key Development Projects in Afghanistan," *Washington Post*, April 28, 2011. \$10 million of this AVIPA money was spent in a single district in Helmand over just four to five months. U.S. Embassy Kabul, "The Fight for Marjah is Just Beginning," Kabul 000763 cable (declassified by State on April 28, 2017, at SIGAR's request), March 3, 2010.
372. The White House, *White Paper of the Interagency Policy Group's Report on U.S. Policy toward Afghanistan and Pakistan*, March 27, 2009, p. 2; USAID stabilization official, SIGAR interview, October 7, 2016.
373. USAID official, SIGAR interview, October 7, 2016.
374. U.S. Embassy Kabul, "Alikozai Tribal Elders Meet with Ambassador Crocker, Seek Further U.S. Support for Kandahar," Kabul 000989 cable, May 4, 2012.
375. Senior USAID official, SIGAR interview, October 24, 2016.
376. Regional Command East (RC-E), *Stability Operations Reference Book*, March 31, 2010, p. 10; Fishstein and Wilder, *Winning Hearts and Minds*, p. 5. Academic research conducted across eight conflict-affected countries found that when using service delivery to improve perceptions of governance, more important than *what* is delivered is that the services be delivered through a consultative process with local communities. G. Sturge, R. Mallett, J. Hagen-Zanker, and R. Slater, *Tracking livelihoods, service delivery and governance: panel survey findings*, Secure Livelihoods Research Consortium, June 2017, pp. i, ix.
377. Social Impact, *Final Performance Evaluation of USAID/OTI Community Cohesion Initiative in Afghanistan*, p. 18; Checchi and Co., *Final Report Local Governance and Community Development Program (LGCD) Evaluation*, January 2009, p. 10.
378. RC-E, *Stability Operations Reference Book*, p. 10.
379. Brown, *The U.S. Surge and Afghan Local Governance*, pp. 6–7.
380. Brown, *The U.S. Surge and Afghan Local Governance*, p. 6.
381. Dexter Filkins, "Afghan Offensive Is New War Model," *New York Times*, February 12, 2010.
382. Chandrasekaran, *Little America*, p. 138. Marjah has since become a proper district in central Helmand Province.
383. Kaplan, *The Insurgents*, p. 330.
384. Jeffrey Dressler, *Counterinsurgency in Helmand: Progress and Remaining Challenges*, Institute for the Study of War, January 2011, pp. 10–12.
385. Senior USAID official, SIGAR interview, November 23, 2016; Embassy Kabul and USFOR-A, *Integrated Civilian-Military Campaign Plan*, 2009, p. 22; Chandrasekaran, *Little America*, p. 124; Kaplan, *The Insurgents*, p. 331.
386. Kaplan, *The Insurgents*, pp. 330–331; Dexter Filkins, "Afghan Offensive Is New War Model," *New York Times*, February 12, 2010.
387. Chandrasekaran, *Little America*, p. 143; Brown, *The U.S. Surge and Afghan Local Governance*, p. 6; Kaplan, *The Insurgents*, pp. 331–332.

388. Former USAID official, SIGAR interview, November 15, 2016.
389. Senior USAID official, SIGAR interview, November 23, 2016; senior USAID official, SIGAR interview, November 18, 2016.
390. Senior USAID official, SIGAR interview, November 23, 2016.
391. Chandrasekaran, *Little America*, pp. 164–166; Coll, *Directorate S*, pp. 397, 491.
392. Senior USAID official, SIGAR interview, November 10, 2016; Brown, *The U.S. Surge and Afghan Local Governance*, p. 14. The British intervention in Helmand has been similarly criticized. Stuart Gordon's study has this to say about DFID's role in Helmand: "It is possible to criticize the . . . nature of the DFID Afghanistan program as essentially too technocratic and apolitical. . . . The absence of an effective strategic conflict analysis that cast light on the distorting effects of the political economy of conflict, particularly within Afghanistan's Pashtun provinces, reduced the imperative to focus more on issues of political legitimacy and governance at the sub-national level." Gordon, *Winning Hearts and Minds in Helmand*, pp. 34–35.
393. Senior USAID official, SIGAR interview, November 10, 2016.
394. Senior USAID official, SIGAR interview, November 23, 2016.
395. Adam Smith International, *Diagnostic of the District Delivery Program*, November 3, 2010, p. 6.
396. Adam Smith International, *Diagnostic of the District Delivery Program*, p. 6; AECOM, *Afghanistan Social Outreach Program (ASOP): Final Report*, pp. 1, 3, 7.
397. U.S. Embassy Kabul, "Nawa: Assassinations Cast a Pall Over Recent Gains," Kabul 003727 cable (declassified by State on April 28, 2017, at SIGAR's request), November 18, 2009; Rod Nordland, "Taliban Aim at Officials in a Wave of Killings," *New York Times*, June 10, 2010, p. 5; Dawood Azami, "Kandahar: Assassination capital of Afghanistan," *BBC World Service*, October 29, 2012, p. 5.
398. Rod Nordland, "Taliban Aim at Officials in a Wave of Killings," *New York Times*, June 10, 2010; Michael Hastings, "King David's War," *Rolling Stone*, February 2, 2011, p. 11.
399. Azami, "Kandahar: Assassination capital of Afghanistan," p. 4; U.S. Embassy Kabul, "Afghanistan: The Challenge of Sub-National Governance, Part 2: Provincial and District Level Constraints," Kabul 002279 cable, June 10, 2010.
400. U.S. Embassy Kabul, "March 2010 Update on Governance and Development Efforts in Afghanistan," Kabul 001288 cable (declassified by State on April 28, 2017, at SIGAR's request), April 13, 2010.
401. Sibghatullah, SIGAR interview, December 5, 2016.
402. U.S. Embassy Kabul, "Afghanistan: The Challenge of Sub-National Governance, Part 2: Provincial and District Level Constraints," Kabul 002279 cable, June 10, 2010; Ghulam Haider, SIGAR interview, January 26, 2017.
403. Barna Karimi, SIGAR interview, January 16, 2017.
404. U.S. Embassy Kabul, "Afghanistan: The Challenge of Sub-National Governance, Part 2," Kabul 002279 cable; Miakhel, SIGAR interview, February 7, 2017; senior USAID official, SIGAR interview, November 23, 2016; former USAID official, SIGAR interview, June 1, 2017.
405. Brown, *The U.S. Surge and Afghan Local Governance*, p. 6.
406. Former USAID official, SIGAR interview, November 15, 2016; Checchi and Co., *Performance Evaluation: District Delivery Program (DDP)*, prepared under contract for USAID, April 9, 2012, pp. 13, 21.
407. Former USAID official, SIGAR interview, November 15, 2016.
408. Checchi and Co., *Performance Evaluation: District Delivery Program (DDP)*, pp. 18, 23.
409. Carl Forsberg, *Counterinsurgency in Kandahar: Evaluating the 2010 Hamkari Campaign*, Institute for the Study of War, December 2010, pp. 13, 17, 36, 38.
410. Task Force Stryker, *Interim Report-The First Six Months: Governance, Reconstruction, and Development*, January 1, 2010, pp. 2–3, 12; Colonel Harry D. Tunnell IV, Memorandum, *Task Force Stryker Governance, Reconstruction, and Development: The First Six Months in Southern Afghanistan*, January 22, 2010, pp. 2, 4, 7; Chandrasekaran, *Little America*, pp. 153–155, 157–159; USAID official, SIGAR interview, November 15, 2017; Chretien, SIGAR interview, July 22, 2016.
411. Chretien, SIGAR interview, July 22, 2016.
412. Chandrasekaran, *Little America*, p. 161.
413. Crowley, SIGAR interview, August 3, 2016; former USAID official, SIGAR interview, October 18, 2016; senior USAID official, SIGAR interview, October 24, 2016.
414. Carl Forsberg, *Politics and Power in Kandahar*, Institute for the Study of War, April 2010, p. 27; Gordon, *Winning Hearts and Minds in Helmand*, pp. 3–4; Matthieu Aikins, "Last Stand in Kandahar," *The Walrus*, pp. 11, 16; U.S. Embassy Kabul, "Alikozai Tribal Elders Meet with Ambassador Crocker," Kabul 000989 cable; Schadlow, *War and the Art of Governance*, p. 227.
415. U.S. Embassy Kabul, "Alikozai Tribal Elders Meet with Ambassador Crocker," Kabul 000989 cable; Andrew Wilder and Stuart Gordon, "Money Can't Buy America Love," *Foreign Policy*, December 1, 2009; Fishstein and Wilder, *Winning Hearts and Minds*, pp. 29–30.
416. Gordon, *Winning Hearts and Minds in Helmand*, p. 6; DAI, *Preliminary Impact Assessment of ASI-East in Four Districts in Eastern Afghanistan*, p. 84.
417. Fishstein and Wilder, *Winning Hearts and Minds*, p. 30.

418. Forsberg, *Politics and Power in Kandahar*, April 2010, p. 22; Fishstein and Wilder, *Winning Hearts and Minds*, p. 30. According to Anand Gopal, in one well-known example in Kandahar's Maiwand District, ISAF was duped into killing what turned out to be allies of the government and coalition, alienating the two largest tribes in the area. Anand Gopal, *No Good Men Among the Living: America, the Taliban, and the War Through Afghan Eyes* (New York, NY: Metropolitan Books), pp. 103–107, 110–115.
419. Fishstein and Wilder, *Winning Hearts and Minds*, p. 3; Forsberg, *Politics and Power in Kandahar*, p. 6; SIGAR, *Corruption in Conflict: Lessons from the U.S. Experience in Afghanistan*, SIGAR 16-58-LL, September 2016, p. 11; Wilder and Gordon, "Money Can't Buy America Love." This problem is in no way unique to Afghanistan. The Special Inspector General for Iraq Reconstruction (SIGIR) found that that country's "institutions of government were undermined by the widespread association of political elites with corrupt activities." SIGIR, *Hard Lessons: The Iraq Reconstruction Experience*, February 2, 2009, p. 211.
420. Radha Iyengar, Jacob Shapiro, and Stephen Hegarty, *Lessons Learned from Stabilization Initiatives in Afghanistan: A Systematic Review of Existing Research*, RAND working paper, July 2017, p. 28. Another study conducted by Tufts University's Feinstein International Center found that while respondents did report some short-term benefits of aid projects, "not only were projects not winning people over to the government side, but perceptions of the misuse and abuse of aid resources were in many cases fueling the growing distrust of the government, creating enemies, or at least generating skepticism regarding the role of the government and aid agencies." Fishstein and Wilder, *Winning Hearts and Minds*, p. 3. Finally a report by the U.S. military found that "corruption directly threatens the validity and legitimacy of the Afghan state." JCOA, *Operationalizing Counter/Anti-Corruption Study*, p. 1.
421. Lamb and Shawn, *Political Governance and Strategy in Afghanistan*, p. 28; UN Office on Drugs and Crime, *Corruption in Afghanistan: Bribery as Reported by the Victims*, January 2010, p. 4.
422. Andersen, *Afghanistan Lessons Identified: 2001–2014, Part I*, p. 36.
423. U.S. Senate Committee on Armed Services, *Inquiry into the Role and Oversight of Private Security Contractors in Afghanistan*, September 28, 2010, p. i; senior USAID official, SIGAR interview, August 15, 2016.
424. Former USAID official, SIGAR interview, June 1, 2017; DAI, *Preliminary Impact Assessment of ASI-East in Four Districts in Eastern Afghanistan*, p. 66; Aram Roston, "How the U.S. Funds the Taliban," *Nation*, November 11, 2009, p. 12; Committee on Oversight and Government Reform Subcommittee on National Security and Foreign Affairs, *Warlord, Inc.*, p. 37–39; USAID Office of Inspector General, *Review of Security Costs Charged to USAID Projects in Afghanistan*, p. 4; Lamb and Shawn, *Political Governance and Strategy in Afghanistan*, p. 28.
425. Brown, *The U.S. Surge and Afghan Local Governance*, p. 2. A Danish government-funded report on lessons learned in Afghanistan came to the same conclusion: "The idea that the civilian development organisations could somehow be flown in to build and hold areas that the military had cleared was fundamentally flawed and disregarded the fact that aid organisations work in a process-related manner with local ownership and capacity building." Andersen, *Afghanistan: Lessons Identified 2001–2014, Part I*, p. 66.
426. Woodward, *Obama's Wars*, p. 349.
427. Woodward, *Obama's Wars*, pp. 348–349, 358–361.
428. Senior USAID official, SIGAR interview, November 18, 2016.
429. Eikenberry, "The Limits of Counterinsurgency Doctrine in Afghanistan," pp. 61, 64.
430. Senior U.S. official, SIGAR interview, September 16, 2016. For a similar account of these turf wars between NSC staff and the agencies involved, see Coll, *Directorate S*, pp. 510–512.
431. "Lisbon Summit Declaration," NATO, November 20, 2010; Peter Baker and Rod Norland, "U.S. Plan Envisions Path to Ending Afghan Combat," *New York Times*, November 14, 2010.
432. Allen, SIGAR interview, November 2, 2016.
433. U.S. Embassy Kabul, "Update on Our New Governance Orientation: Progress Achieved and Next Steps," Kabul 002674 cable, May 7, 2011.
434. U.S. Embassy Kabul, "Implementing a New Governance Orientation," Kabul 000742 cable, February 8, 2011; former USAID official, SIGAR interview, November 15, 2016.
435. U.S. Embassy Kabul, "Refining our Governance Orientation in Light of Transition: Strengthening Afghan Capacity to Spend Resources Effectively and Accountably Through Existing Systems and Institutions, at Three Key Levels of Government," Kabul 004017 cable, December 16, 2010.
436. "Afghanistan: The London Conference: Afghan Leadership, Regional Cooperation, International Partnership," communiqué of the London Conference, January 28, 2010, p. 5.
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438. U.S. Embassy Kabul, "Placing Governance and Development on a Sustainable Footing," Kabul 001555 cable, May 8, 2011; former USAID official, SIGAR interview, November 15, 2016.
439. Rajiv Shah, *Administrator's Stabilization Guidance*, memorandum, January 2011, pp. 1–3.
440. USAID, *Administrator's Sustainability Guidance for USAID in Afghanistan*, June 2011, p. 1.

441. White House Office of the Press Secretary, "Remarks by the President on the Way Forward in Afghanistan," June 22, 2011, p. 2.
442. Secretary Hillary Clinton, testimony before the Senate Foreign Relations, hearing on "Evaluating Goals and Progress in Afghanistan and Pakistan," June 23, 2011, p. 3.
443. Acree, "Stabilization Success in Afghanistan: The Challenges Within," pp. 116–117; senior USAID official, SIGAR interview, November 10, 2016.
444. Acree, "Stabilization Success in Afghanistan: The Challenges Within," pp. 102–103.
445. Senior USAID official, SIGAR interview, December 4, 2016.
446. Senior State Department official, email to SIGAR, February 7, 2017.
447. Viehe, Afshar, and Heela, *Rethinking the Civilian Surge*, p. 30.
448. U.S. Embassy Kabul and USFOR-A, *Civil-Military Strategy Framework*, March 2012, p. 4.
449. Robert D. Lamb and Brooke Shawn, "Is the Revised COIN Manual Backed by Political Will?" CSIS, February 6, 2014.
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451. Senior USAID official, SIGAR interview, November 10, 2016.
452. USAID, "Kandahar Food Zone," awarded to IRD, July 13, 2013, Cooperative Agreement No. AID-306-A-13-00008; *Social Impact, Final Performance Evaluation of USAID/ OTI Community Cohesion Initiative in Afghanistan*, p. ii.
453. Brown, *The U.S. Surge and Afghan Local Governance*, p. 7. The U.S. government's goal circa 2010 had been much more limited: to create the appearance of "visible, effective, and honest governance," by implementing projects to fill the gap left by the Afghan government. U.S. Embassy Kabul, "Afghanistan Scenestetter for CODEL Inouye," Kabul 003177 cable, October 8, 2009.
454. Chandrasekaran, "U.S. Military Dismayed by Delays in 3 Key Development Projects in Afghanistan;" USAID, "Stability in Key Areas (SIKA) West," awarded to AECOM International Development, Contract No. AID-306-C-12-00004, January 29, 2012; USAID, "Stability in Key Areas (SIKA) East," awarded to AECOM International Development, Contract No. AID-306-C-12-00002, December 7, 2011; USAID, "Stability in Key Areas (SIKA) North," awarded to Development Alternatives, Inc., Contract No. AID-306-C-12-00003, March 14, 2012; USAID, "Stability in Key Areas (SIKA) South," awarded to AECOM International Development, Contract No. AID-307-C-12-00005, April 10, 2012.
455. Senior USAID official, SIGAR interview, December 4, 2016; MSI, *Stability in Key Areas (SIKA) Program Final Performance Evaluation*, p. 36.
456. MSI, *Stability in Key Areas (SIKA) Program Final Performance Evaluation*, p. 1; DAI, *Local Governance and Community Development: Final Report*, August 2011, p. xii; stabilization implementing partner deputy chief of party, SIGAR interview, August 30, 2016. To a more limited degree, the SIKAs were also designed to link the district to the provincial level. For example the SIKA-W contract contains the following language: "SIKA-West should focus on institutional development of District Entities in the long term while helping Provincial governments, especially relevant line departments such as the Department of Rural Rehabilitation and Development (RRD) and other key provincial line departments deliver specific outcomes in the short term to support them." USAID, "Stability in Key Areas (SIKA) West," p. 15.
457. MSI, *Stability in Key Areas (SIKA) Program Final Performance Evaluation*, pp. 7–9, 20, 27.
458. CTC and USAID, *District Stability Framework*, p. 5; SIGAR, *USAID Spent Almost \$400 Million*, SIGAR 12-8-AR, p. 8.
459. MSI, *USAID Stabilization Unit Afghanistan Performance Management Plan*, FY 2012–2015, June 18, 2013, p. 1.
460. U.S. Embassy Kabul and USFOR-A, *Civil-Military Strategic Framework*, March 2012, p. 4; U.S. Embassy Kabul, "Implementing a New Governance Orientation," Kabul 000742 cable, February 8, 2011.
461. MSI, *Community Outreach and Engagement*, pp. 5, 18–19.
462. Stabilization implementing partner deputy chief of party, SIGAR interview, August 30, 2016; Karl McQuillan, SIGAR interview, July 21, 2016.
463. McQuillan, SIGAR interview, July 21, 2016; U.S. Embassy Kabul, "Lessons Learned from District Delivery Program Assessments," Kabul 001420 cable, April 10, 2010; Brown, *The U.S. Surge and Afghan Local Governance*, p. 7.
464. Karimi, SIGAR interview, January 16, 2017.
465. Brown, *The U.S. Surge and Afghan Local Governance*, p. 7; Brown, *Rethinking Afghan Local Governance Aid After Transition*, pp. 5–7.
466. Stabilization implementing partner deputy chief of party, SIGAR interview, August 30, 2016.
467. Brown, *The U.S. Surge and Afghan Local Governance*, p. 7; Checchi and Co., *Final Report Local Governance and Community Development Program (LGCD) Evaluation*, January 2009, p. 15.
468. Brown, *The U.S. Surge and Afghan Local Governance*, pp. 7–8. Under the broader umbrella of subnational governance reform, USAID and other actors have supported a number of programs dating back more than a decade to increase the role of the provinces in budgeting. Aarya Nijat et al., *Subnational Governance in Afghanistan*, AREU, July 2016, p. 2; The Asia Foundation, *An Assessment of Sub-National Governance in Afghanistan*, April 2007, p. 43. That such efforts were ongoing as recently as 2017 demonstrates they have yet to achieve their goals. Haidarshah Omid, "Provincial Budget

- Policy Rolled Out in Four Ministries,” *Tolo News*, April 18, 2017.
469. Former USAID official, SIGAR interview, November 15, 2016. In fact, program evaluations for ATI in 2005 and LGCD in 2009 had already come to the same conclusion about the need to focus first on building functionality at the provincial level. Social Impact, Inc., *USAID/OTI Afghanistan Program: Final Evaluation*, August 15, 2005, p. 25; Checchi and Co., *Final Report Local Governance and Community Development Program (LGCD) Evaluation*, January 2009, p. 15.
470. Checchi and Co., *Performance Evaluation: District Delivery Program (DDP)*, p. 12; U.S. Embassy Kabul, “Update on Our New Governance Orientation: Progress Achieved and Next Steps,” Kabul 002674 cable, May 7, 2011; USAID suspended spending on DDP in March 2012 before cancelling the program altogether. Adam Smith International, *Diagnostic of the District Delivery Program*, p. 1; Tamas, SIGAR interview, July 13, 2016.
471. Senior USAID official, SIGAR interview, December 4, 2016.
472. Social Impact, *Final Performance Evaluation of USAID/OTI Community Cohesion Initiative in Afghanistan*, p. 6; MSI, *Stability in Key Areas (SIKA) Program Final Performance Evaluation*, p. 2.
473. Senior USAID official, SIGAR interview, December 4, 2016.
474. Gulla Jan Ahmadzai, SIGAR interview, February 15, 2017.
475. U.S. Mission to Afghanistan, *U.S. Foreign Assistance for Afghanistan*, annex VII, pp. 9–10.
476. MSI, *Stability in Key Areas (SIKA) Program Final Performance Evaluation*, p. 2; USAID stabilization official, SIGAR interview, September 9, 2016.
477. Caerius Associates, *The Stability Analysis Methodology in Afghanistan: an Evaluation of Best Practices & a Recommended Method—Analytical Report*, prepared under contract for USAID, October 6, 2013, p. 15; MSI, *Stability in Key Areas (SIKA) Program Final Performance Evaluation*, p. 2; Social Impact, *Final Performance Evaluation of USAID/OTI Community Cohesion Initiative in Afghanistan*, p. vi.
478. MSI, *USAID Stabilization Unit Afghanistan Performance Management Plan Update, FY 2012–2015*, May 2014, MISTI, p. 16.
479. MSI, *Community Development Program: Final Performance Evaluation*, pp. 1, 23.
480. Allen, SIGAR interview, November 2, 2016.
481. State, “Reflections on Afghanistan: Lessons for Future Conflict and Stabilization Operations,” p. 2.
482. MSI, *Stability in Key Areas (SIKA) Program Final Performance Evaluation*, p. 2.
483. CRS, Afghanistan: Post-Taliban Governance, Security, and U.S. Policy,” RL30588, December 17, 2017, p. 35; Viehe, Afshar, and Heela, *Rethinking the Civilian Surge*, p. 8; U.S. Embassy Kabul and USFOR-A, *Civil-Military Strategic Framework, Revision 2*, August 2013, p. 4; SIGAR and USIP, *Report on International Symposium on Monitoring and Management in Insecure Environments: Applying Best Practices to Afghanistan*, June 18, 2014, p. 7. For example, the implementing partner expatriates managing SIKAs South were relocated to Kabul from Kandahar halfway into the contract due to deteriorating security there. MSI, *Stability in Key Areas (SIKA) Program Final Performance Evaluation*, p. 7. In one CDP case, it was unclear to program evaluators whether site visits to certain projects were taking place at all. MSI, *Community Development Program: Final Performance Evaluation*, p. 23.
484. U.S. Mission to Afghanistan, *U.S. Foreign Assistance for Afghanistan*, annex VII, p. 10; USAID, *Afghanistan: Performance Management Plan, Afghanistan Implementation Plan for Transition 2015–2018*, August 24, 2015, p. 26.
485. MSI, *Stability in Key Areas (SIKA) Program Final Performance Evaluation*, p. 2.
486. U.S. Mission to Afghanistan, *U.S. Foreign Assistance for Afghanistan*, annex VII, p. 10; MSI, *USAID Stabilization Unit Afghanistan Performance Management Plan, FY 2012–2015*, June 18, 2013, p. 10.
487. U.S. Embassy Kabul and USFOR-A, *Civil-Military Strategic Framework*, March 2012, p. 4; U.S. Embassy Kabul, “Implementing a New Governance Orientation,” Kabul 000742 cable, February 8, 2011.
488. *FM 3-24, Counterinsurgency*, 2006, chapter 1, p. 27.
489. The SIKAs contracts instructed the programs to work through “District Entities,” listing CDCs, DDAs, and ASOP DCCs as potential partners, but left it up to each implementing partner to determine which of these to engage with. See, for example, USAID, “Stability in Key Areas (SIKA) East,” pp. 15, 19. As a result, each program approached these partnerships differently. They also left it up to the implementing partners to determine what processes they would use to engage these entities, calling for the programs to “work within the already established frameworks of the District Entities to build GIROA capacity” and instructing them that their work should “not result in parallel institutions or processes.” Nevertheless, the implementing partners found the existing structures were not suitable for all of their needs and created new structures. For example, SIKAs-East added additional stakeholders to the DDAs, creating what it called the DDA+. MSI, *Stability in Key Areas (SIKA)-East Mid-Term Performance Evaluation*, prepared under contract for USAID, November 2014, pp. 32, 38. Similarly, CCI created project shuras, cohesion jirgas, and project oversight committees as means of engaging with communities. Social Impact, *Final Performance Evaluation of USAID/OTI Community Cohesion Initiative*

- in Afghanistan*, prepared under contract for USAID, May 15, 2014, p. 9.
490. USAID stabilization official, SIGAR interview, October 7, 2016.
491. MSI, *Community Cohesion Initiative: Mid-term Evaluation Report*, p. 15; Niazi, SIGAR interview, December 12, 2016.
492. MSI, *Stability in Key Areas (SIKA) Program Final Performance Evaluation*, September 2015, p. 27; Frances Z. Brown, email to SIGAR, November 8, 2017. Sometimes disregarding the wishes of the Afghan government had disastrous results, such as when all of the 69 tractors purchased by AVIPA and distributed in Kandahar against the wishes of the provincial governor went missing. SIGAR, Alert 13-2, June 27, 2013, p. 3; Wesa, SIGAR interview, January 7, 2017.
493. MSI, *Stability in Key Areas (SIKA) Program Final Performance Evaluation*, p. 27.
494. According to John Acree, "As the RC-S [civilian platform] representative began his presentation entitled 'Region Stabilization Approach: Supporting Civilian Stabilization Resources Spring and Summer 2011,' the Assistant Chief of Mission abruptly interrupted the presenter, thanked him for his hard work, and summarily stopped the discussion regarding the RC-S stabilization plan. The ambassador then stated to the audience that stabilization was finished and that we were now working toward transition. After the conference, the RC-S presenter expressed his astonishment at this news, adding that his commander refused to recognize or even utter the term *transition*." Acree, "Stabilization Success in Afghanistan: The Challenges Within," p. 114.
495. Stabilization implementing partner chief of party, SIGAR interview, August 15, 2016.
496. Caerus Associates, *The Stability Analysis Methodology in Afghanistan*, pp. 4–5; MSI, *USAID Stabilization Unit Afghanistan Performance Management Plan Update, FY 2012–2015*, May 2014, p. 19.
497. MSI, *Kandahar Food Zone: Mid-Term Performance Evaluation*, prepared under contract for USAID, March 2015, p. 7.
498. Senior USAID official, SIGAR interview, November 10, 2016.
499. Former USAID official, SIGAR interview, June 1, 2017; Caerus Associates, *The Stability Analysis Methodology in Afghanistan*, p. 23; USAID stabilization official, SIGAR interview, September 9, 2016. NATO had agreed that the transition to Afghan leadership would be complete by 2014 at its 2010 summit in Lisbon. CRS, *Afghanistan: Post-Taliban Governance, Security, and U.S. Policy*, RL30588, December 17, 2017, p. 26.
500. Stabilization implementing partner deputy chief of party, SIGAR interview, August 30, 2016.
501. Social Impact, *Final Performance Evaluation of USAID/OTI Community Cohesion Initiative in Afghanistan*, p. iii.
502. Resilience was defined by CCI as "the capabilities of groups or communities to cope with internal or external stresses and disturbances as a result of social, political and environmental change." CCI defined cohesion as a community's "ability to resolve issues, determine and pursue common goals, and communicate effectively within the community and with various government entities." Social Impact, *Final Performance Evaluation of USAID/OTI Community Cohesion Initiative in Afghanistan*, pp. 11, 42.
503. USAID stabilization official, SIGAR interview, September 9, 2016.
504. USAID, *Community Cohesion Initiative: Final Report*, 2015, p. 3.
505. USAID official, SIGAR interview, August 12, 2016.
506. Senior USAID official, SIGAR interview, October 24, 2016.
507. Social Impact, *Final Performance Evaluation of USAID/OTI Community Cohesion Initiative in Afghanistan*, p. 14.
508. Forbes, "The Significance of Taliban Shari'a Courts in Afghanistan," *CTC Sentinel*, vol. 6, no. 5, May 2013, pp. 14–15; Frank Ledwidge, "Justice and Counter-Insurgency in Afghanistan: a Missing Link," *RUSI Journal*, vol. 154, no. 1, March 26, 2009, pp. 6–7; Gordon, *Winning Hearts and Minds in Helmand*, p. 46; Hedayatullah Babakarkheil, SIGAR interview, December 29, 2016.
509. USAID, *Counter-Insurgency Programming: A Meta Evaluation*, May 2010, p. 39.
510. USAID, *Community Cohesion Initiative: Final Report*, p. 8.
511. AECOM, *Afghanistan Social Outreach Program (ASOP): Final Report*, pp. 3–4, 7, 22.
512. Gulab Mangal, SIGAR interview, March 3, 2017; Babakarkheil, SIGAR interview, December 29, 2016.
513. AECOM, *Afghanistan Social Outreach Program (ASOP): Final Report*, pp. 4, 6, 22.
514. MSI, *Stability in Key Areas (SIKA) Program Final Performance Evaluation*, p. 20.
515. MSI, *Stability in Key Areas - North: Mid-Term Performance Evaluation*, prepared under contract for USAID, July 17, 2014, pp. 3, 34.
516. MSI, *USAID Stabilization Unit Afghanistan: Performance Management Plan, Fiscal Years 2012–2015*, USAID, June 18, 2013, p. 5. A performance management plan is "a roadmap for monitoring, evaluation, and learning from program performance." USAID, "PMP – Performance Management Plan," USAID Project Starter website.
517. U.S. Embassy Kabul, "Using Cash for Work to Support Stabilization and Governance Objectives in Southern Afghanistan," Kabul 000666 cable, February 3, 2011.
518. MSI, *Community Development Program: Final Performance Evaluation*, pp. 2, 4; USAID, "Factsheet: Community Development Project," December 2012.
519. AECOM, *Stability in Key Areas (SIKA) East Final Report*, prepared under contract for

- USAID, 2015, pp. ix, 5, 14; MSI, *Stability in Key Areas (SIKA) North Midterm Performance Evaluation*, prepared under contract for USAID, July 17, 2014, pp. 6, 18.
520. Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan and Government of the United States of America, "Memorandum of Understanding: Supporting the Jobs for Peace Process," December 17, 2015, pp. 1–2.
521. Andersen, *Afghanistan Lessons Identified: 2001–2014*, Part I, p. 45.
522. Charles Johnson, Jr., testimony before the Senate Subcommittee on State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs, Committee on Appropriations, hearing on "Afghanistan Development: USAID Continues to Face Challenges in Managing and Overseeing U.S. Development Assistance Programs," GAO-10-932T, p. 8.
523. U.S. Embassy Kabul and USFOR-A, *Civil-Military Strategy Framework*, March 2012, p. 4.
524. SIGAR, *Stability in Key Areas (SIKA) Programs: After 16 Months and \$47 Million Spent, USAID Had Not Met Essential Program Objectives*, SIGAR 13-16-AR, July 2013, p. 3. Despite the requirement that the SIKAs all use the Kandahar Model, in reality their adoption of it was mixed. Rather than working through the existing DDA structure, each of the SIKAs took a different approach to working with the Afghan government, including working with an expanded version of the DDA, referred to as the DDA+. SIGAR, *Stability in Key Areas (SIKA) Programs: After 16 Months and \$47 Million Spent, USAID Had Not Met Essential Program Objectives*, SIGAR 13-16-AR, July 2013, p. 10; MSI, *Stability in Key Areas (SIKA)-East: Mid-Term Evaluation*, prepared under contract with USAID, November 2014, pp. 25, 32, 38. Further, CCI, which was not contractually required to use the Kandahar Model, used aspects of it, such as direct implementation. USAID, *Community Cohesion Initiative: Annual Report, October 2013–September 2014*, prepared under contract for USAID, p. 9.
525. Michael Shurkin, *Subnational Governance in Afghanistan*, RAND National Defense Institute, p. 11; Andrew Beath, Fontini Christia, and Ruben Enikolopov, "The National Solidarity Programme: Assessing the Effects of Community-Driven Development in Afghanistan," *International Peacekeeping*, August 6, 2015, p. 302.
526. SIGAR, *Stability in Key Areas (SIKA) Programs*, SIGAR 13-16-AR, p. 3; MSI, *Stability in Key Areas-West: Mid-Term Evaluation*, prepared under contract for USAID, March 28, 2014, pp. 19–20.
527. USAID, "Stability in Key Areas (SIKA) North," awarded to DAI, AID-306-C-12-00003, March 14, 2012, p. 16; USAID, "Stability in Key Areas (SIKA) West," p. 14; USAID, "Stability in Key Areas (SIKA) East," p. 18; USAID, "Stability in Key Areas (SIKA) South," pp. 18–19.
528. SIGAR, *Stability in Key Areas (SIKA) Programs*, SIGAR 13-16-AR, p. ii.
529. U.S. Embassy Kabul, "Governor Wesa Updated on Kandahar Food Zone Planning," Kabul 000878 cable, March 4, 2013; DAI, *Final Report Afghanistan Stabilization Initiative–East (ASI-EAST)*, prepared under contract for USAID, September 2012, p. 30; DAI, "Use of Politically Leveraged Short-Term Employment Projects," p. 3; Tooryalai Wesa, SIGAR interview, January 7, 2017.
530. DAI, "Use of Politically Leveraged Short-Term Employment Projects," pp. 3–5.
531. Hans P. Binswanger-Mkhize, Jacomina P. de Regt, Stephen Spector, *Local and Community Driven Development: Moving to Scale in Theory and Practice*, World Bank, 2010, pp. 11, 14, 32, 48, 218.
532. DAI, *Preliminary Impact Assessment of ASI-East in Four Districts in Eastern Afghanistan*, pp. 27–28.
533. Gordon, *Winning Hearts and Minds in Helmand*, p. 53; SIGAR, *Stability in Key Areas (SIKA) Programs*, SIGAR 13-16-AR, p. 10; Social Impact, *Final Performance Evaluation of USAID/OTI Community Cohesion Initiative in Afghanistan*, pp. vii, 30.
534. U.S. Embassy Kabul, "Using Cash for Work to Support Stabilization and Governance Objectives in Southern Afghanistan," Kabul 000666 cable, February 3, 2011.
535. DAI, *Preliminary Impact Assessment of ASI-East in Four Districts in Eastern Afghanistan*, p. 18.
536. MSI, *Stability in Key Areas (SIKA) Program Final Performance Evaluation*, p. 31.
537. MSI, *MISTI Stabilization Trends and Impact Evaluation Survey, Analytical Report, Wave 5: September 28–November 3, 2014*, prepared under contract for USAID, Apr. 28, 2015, pp. 325–326.
538. Mangal, SIGAR interview, March 3, 2017.
539. Ashraf Nasiri, SIGAR interview, December 11, 2016.
540. MSI, *MISTI Stabilization Trends and Impact Evaluation Survey, Analytical Report, Wave 5*, pp. 326; MSI, *Stability in Key Areas (SIKA) Program Final Performance Evaluation*, pp. 4–5.
541. DAI, "Use of Politically Leveraged Short-Term Employment Projects," pp. 2–3; Forsberg, *Politics and Power in Kandahar*, pp. 7, 27; U.S. Embassy Kabul, "Alikozai Tribal Elders Meet with Ambassador Crocker," Kabul 000989 cable.
542. SIGAR, *Corruption in Conflict*, pp. 19–20; senior USAID official, December 11, 2015; Lamb and Shawn, *Political Governance and Strategy in Afghanistan*, p. 28; Mangal, SIGAR interview, March 3, 2017; Wesa, SIGAR interview, January 7, 2017.
543. Lamb and Shawn, *Political Governance and Strategy in Afghanistan*, p. 28.
544. Senior USAID official, SIGAR interview, June 28, 2016; Haider, SIGAR interview, January 26, 2017.

545. Gordon, *Winning Hearts and Minds in Helmand*, p. 5.
546. Wesa, SIGAR interview, January 7, 2017; former USAID official, SIGAR interview, June 1, 2017.
547. Mangal, SIGAR interview, March 3, 2017.
548. Gordon, *Winning Hearts and Minds in Helmand*, pp. 44–45.
549. DAI, “Use of Politically Leveraged Short-Term Employment Projects,” pp. 1–4.
550. MSI, *Community Development Program: Final Performance Evaluation*, p. 15.
551. Forsberg, *Politics and Power in Kandahar*, p. 27.
552. Saad Mustafa, Tobias Bock, and Mark Pyman, “Fighting Corruption in Conflict Areas,” in *Effective Civil-Military Interaction in Peace Operations: Theory and Practice*, edited by Gerard Lucius and Sebastian Rietjens, (The Hague: Springer, 2016), p. 211; Jean-Christophe Boucher and Kim Richard Nossal, *The Politics of War: Canada’s Afghanistan Mission, 2001–2014* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2017), p. 34.
553. U.S. Embassy Kabul, “Using Cash for Work,” Kabul 000666 cable; MSI, *Community Development Program: Final Performance Evaluation*, p. 3.
554. DAI, “Use of Politically Leveraged Short-Term Employment Projects,” p. 3.
555. MSI, *Community Development Program: Final Performance Evaluation*, p. 3.
556. Former USAID official, SIGAR interview, June 1, 2017; DAI, *Final Report Afghanistan Stabilization Initiative – East (ASI-EAST)*, p. 43; DAI, “Use of Politically Leveraged Short-Term Employment Projects,” p. 4.
557. Senior USAID official, December 11, 2015.
558. DAI, *Preliminary Impact Assessment of ASI-East in Four Districts in Eastern Afghanistan*, p. 24.
559. USAID, *Community Cohesion Initiative: Annual Report October 2013–September 2014*, p. 1; USAID, *Community Cohesion Initiative: Final Report*, p. 11; MSI, *Community Outreach and Engagement*, p. 5.
560. Former USAID official, SIGAR interview, June 1, 2017; DAI, *Local Governance and Community Development: Final Report*, August 2011, p. 77.
561. SIGAR, *Stability in Key Areas (SIKA) Programs*, SIGAR 13-16-AR, p. 9.
562. SIGAR, *Corruption in Conflict*, p. 66.
563. SIGAR, *Contracting with the Enemy*, SIGAR 13-14-AR, p. 3.
564. Social Impact, *Final Performance Evaluation of USAID/OTI Community Cohesion Initiative in Afghanistan*, p. 13; MSI, *Stability in Key Areas (SIKA) Program Final Performance Evaluation*, p. 5; senior OTI official, SIGAR interview, August 12, 2016.
565. MSI, *Stability in Key Areas (SIKA) Program Final Performance Evaluation*, pp. 4–5.
566. MSI, *Stability in Key Areas (SIKA) Program Final Performance Evaluation*, pp. 27–28.
567. Social Impact, *Final Performance Evaluation of USAID/OTI Community Cohesion Initiative in Afghanistan*, p. 13; MSI, *Stability in Key Areas - West: Mid-Term Evaluation*, p. 26; Safiullah Baran, SIGAR interview, February 18, 2017.
568. MSI, *MISTI Stabilization Trends and Impact Evaluation Survey, Analytical Report, Wave 5*, p. 8; MSI, *Stability in Key Areas-North: Mid-Term Performance Evaluation*, p. 29.
569. GAO, *Afghanistan: U.S. Efforts to Vet Non-U.S. Vendors Need Improvement*, GAO-11-355, June 2011, p. 20.
570. SIGAR, *Corruption in Conflict*, p. 67.
571. U.S. Embassy Kabul, “Assessing the Role of the National Solidarity Program in USG Strategy,” Kabul 008380 cable, December 5, 2011; Andrew Beath, Fontini Christia, and Ruben Enikolopov, *Randomized Impact Evaluation of Afghanistan’s National Solidarity Programme*, World Bank, 2013, p. 2.
572. U.S. Embassy Kabul, “Assessing the Role of the National Solidarity Program in USG Strategy,” Kabul 008380 cable, December 5, 2011. The rationale for community ownership, in the words of the ASI-E final report, was that “communities that feel a sense of ownership for an activity will protect it from threats, will implement it according to plan, and will see the benefits of engaging with the moderate leadership that facilitates the activity.” DAI, *Final Report Afghanistan Stabilization Initiative–East: June 2009–September 2012*, prepared under contract for USAID, September 2012, p. 43. The central importance of community ownership of projects was a key finding of OTI’s survey of lessons learned from its work in counterinsurgency environments across the globe. USAID, *Counter-Insurgency Programming: A Meta Evaluation*, May 2010, p. 38.
573. For example, the study, the results of which were shared with U.S. officials before it was published, found that it increased the number of villages with functioning village councils and improved perceptions of a wide range of government figures. Andrew Beath, Fontini Christia, and Ruben Enikolopov, and Shahim Ahmad Kabuli, *Randomized Impact Evaluation of Phase II of Afghanistan’s National Solidarity Programme (NSP): Estimates of Interim Program Impact from First Follow-Up Survey*, World Bank, July 8, 2010, p. v.
574. Andrew Beath, Fontini Christia, and Ruben Enikolopov, *Winning Hearts and Minds Through Development?*, World Bank, July 2012, p. 3.
575. Adam Smith International, *Diagnostic of the District Delivery Program*, pp. 6–7.
576. Vanda Felbab-Brown, “Slip-Sliding on a Yellow Brick Road: Stabilization Efforts in Afghanistan,” *Stability: International Journal of Security and Development*, vol. 1, no. 1 (2012), p. 12.
577. Adam Smith International, *Diagnostic of the District Delivery Program*, p. 9. Checchi and Co., *Performance Evaluation: District Delivery Program (DDP)*, p. 1.

578. Adam Smith International, *Diagnostic of the District Delivery Program*, pp. 6, 10, 17.
579. Tamas, SIGAR interview, July 13, 2016; Checchi and Co., *Performance Evaluation: District Delivery Program (DDP)*, pp. 15–17.
580. Asia Foundation, *An Assessment of Sub-National Governance in Afghanistan*, p. 6; Miakhel, SIGAR interview, February 7, 2017; Massoom, SIGAR interview, March 10, 2017.
581. USAID, *Afghanistan Stabilization Program Scope of Work*, pp. 3–5.
582. Shah Mahmood Miakhel, “A Brief Overview of the Afghanistan Stabilization Program: A National Program to Improve Security and Governance,” *Afghanistan Analysts Network (AAN)*, July 9, 2012, pp. 3, 4.
583. Ehsan Zia, SIGAR interview, January 30, 2017.
584. Senate Committee on Foreign Relations Majority Staff, *Evaluating U.S. Foreign Assistance to Afghanistan*, S.Prt. 112-21, June 8, 2011, p. 26.
585. USAID, response to SIGAR data call, January 14, 2014, p. 28; SIGAR, *Quarterly Report*, January 30, 2014, p. 124. The U.S. government had set aside as much as 47% of its overall contribution to ARTF for NSP as recently as 2012. This was almost the entirety of the amount that it could prefer. In addition, when SIGAR asked USAID to provide an assessment of NSP’s High Risk Strategy, which was meant to allow the NSP operating model to be adjusted for contested environments, USAID responded that that information was not available. USAID, response to SIGAR data call, December 30, 2013 and January 7, 2014; SIGAR, *Quarterly Report*, January 30, 2014, p. 118; World Bank officials, SIGAR interview, May 22, 2010.
586. USAID Office of the Inspector General, “USAID Planning and Monitoring Gaps Weaken Accountability for Results Through the Afghanistan Reconstruction Trust Fund,” *Audit Report 8-306-17-004-9*, p. 11.
587. Beath, Christia, and Enikolopov, *Randomized Impact Evaluation of Afghanistan’s National Solidarity Programme*, 2013, p. 3.
588. Fishstein and Wilder, *Winning Hearts and Minds*, p. 52.
589. SIGAR, *Afghanistan’s National Solidarity Program*, SIGAR 11-8-AR, p. 7.
590. Senior USAID official, SIGAR interview, June 28, 2016; Haider, SIGAR interview, January 26, 2017. While USAID uses the term implementing partner, NSP used the term facilitating partner for the same concept.
591. Ahmed Humayun, Andrew Exum, and John Nagl, *A Pathway to Success in Afghanistan: The National Solidarity Program*, Center for New American Security (CNAS), March 2009, p. 3; Beath, Christia, and Enikolopov, *Randomized Impact Evaluation of Afghanistan’s National Solidarity Programme*, 2013, p. 2.
592. Hamish Nixon, *Subnational State-building in Afghanistan*, AREU, April 2008, p. 52.
593. Ehsan Zia, SIGAR interview, January 30, 2017.
594. Brown, *The U.S. Surge and Afghan Local Governance*, p. 6; State, “The President’s Announcement on the Way Forward in Afghanistan and Pakistan,” State 122731 cable, December 1, 2009.
595. U.S. Embassy Kabul, “Assessing the Role of the National Solidarity Program in USG Strategy,” Kabul 008380 cable, December 5, 2011. Many of the CDCs that had been established in the heavily contested provinces of Kandahar and Helmand fell into disuse as the security situation deteriorated. State Department official, SIGAR interview, May 23, 2010.
596. Beath, Christia, and Enikolopov, “The National Solidarity Programme,” p. 306; Beath, Christia, and Enikolopov, *Winning Hearts and Minds Through Development*, pp. 2, 9. More broadly, evaluations of CDD efforts in many countries have highlighted its mixed or poor results in insecure environments. See, for example, Elizabeth King, “A Critical Review of Community-Driven Development Programmes in Conflict-Affected Contexts,” *International Rescue Committee and UKAID*, March 2013.
597. Ball et al., *Afghanistan Lessons Identified: 2001–2014, Part II*, p. 42; MSI, *Stability in Key Areas (SIKA) Program Final Performance Evaluation*, p. 40.
598. Ehsan Zia, SIGAR interview, January 30, 2017. A third-party evaluator found that LGCD was much more effective during the Hamkari campaign in Kandahar at the end of the program when it required communities to directly petition their government representatives to request projects. DAI, *Local Governance and Community Development: Final Report*, August 2011, p. xiv.
599. Brown, *The U.S. Surge and Afghan Local Governance*, p. 7.
600. Nixon, *Subnational State-building in Afghanistan*, p. 38; Brown, *The U.S. Surge and Afghan Local Governance*, p. 6. It is important to note that NSP also had to carve out flexibility in its approach to enable implementation in less secure areas, where NSP implementing partner staff was limited. This flexibility included more rapid project identification, approval, and grant disbursement. World Bank, “Annex G—Implementation in Insecure Areas,” 2009, pp. 1–2.
601. Brown, *The U.S. Surge and Afghan Local Governance*, p. 7.
602. Caerus Associates, *The Stability Analysis Methodology in Afghanistan*, p. 26; Beath, Christia, and Enikolopov, *Randomized Impact Evaluation of Afghanistan’s National Solidarity Programme*, 2013, p. viii.
603. World Bank, “Afghanistan’s National Solidarity Program: Overview and Challenges,” World Bank website, accessed on May 31, 2017.
604. Caerus Associates, *The Stability Analysis Methodology in Afghanistan*, p. 26; MSI, *Stability in Key Areas (SIKA) Program Final Performance Evaluation*, p. 45; USAID stabiliza-

- tion contractor, SIGAR interview, September 27, 2016.
605. IRD, *KFZ Annual Report: Quarterly Report July 1–September 2015*, prepared under contract for USAID, September 23, 2015, p. 9; USAID, “Kandahar Food Zone Program (KFZ),” USAID website, accessed on March 17, 2018.
606. In 2017, USAID was the largest donor to the World Bank’s Afghanistan Reconstruction Trust Fund, which funds the Citizens’ Charter. USAID, “Afghanistan Complex Emergency: Fact Sheet #4 Fiscal Year (FY) 2017,” September 30, 2017, p. 5. Like NSP, the Citizens’ Charter is not explicitly a stabilization program, but it has similar goals of strengthening service delivery as a means of improving the legitimacy of the Afghan government. World Bank, “Request for Expressions of Interest for Consultancy as Facilitating Partners Under the Citizens’ Charter Afghanistan Project,” July 2016, p. 1.
607. World Bank, “Project Appraisal Document for the Citizens’ Charter Afghanistan Project,” October 6, 2016, p. 14.
608. Mark S. Martins, “The Commander’s Emergency Response Program,” *Joint Forces Quarterly, Issue 37*, Second Quarter (2005), p. 47.
609. Martins, “The Commander’s Emergency Response Program,” p. 49; Egel et al., *Investing in the Fight: Assessing the use of the Commander’s Emergency Response Program in Afghanistan*, RAND Corporation, 2016, pp. 48–49.
610. Emergency Supplemental Appropriations Act for Defense and for the Reconstruction of Iraq and Afghanistan, 2004, Pub. L. No. 108-106, § 1110 (2003).
611. DOD, *DOD Financial Management Regulation: Commander’s Emergency Response Program*, April 2005, chapter 27, pp. 3–5.
612. Perito, *The U.S. Experience with Provincial Reconstruction Teams in Afghanistan*, p. 2.
613. The full list of permissible projects in the FMR mirrored the categories found in earlier guidance: (1) water and sanitation, (2) food production and distribution, (3) agriculture, (4) electricity, (5) healthcare, (6) education, (7) telecommunications, (8) economic, financial, and management improvements, (9) transportation, (10) rule of law and governance, (11) irrigation, (12) civic cleanup activities, (13) civic support vehicles, (14) repair of civic and cultural facilities, and (15) “other urgent humanitarian or reconstruction projects.” DOD, *DOD Financial Management Regulation: Commander’s Emergency Response Program*, April 2005, chapter 27, pp. 3–5.
614. DOD, *DOD Financial Management Regulation: Commander’s Emergency Response Program*, September 2005, chapter 27, p. 5.
615. DOD, *DOD Financial Management Regulation: Commander’s Emergency Response Program*, September 2005, chapter 27, p. 4.
616. The inherent flexibility of CERP and the authority of local commanders was reflected in the 2009 FMR, which stipulated that CERP was “designed to enable local commanders in Iraq and Afghanistan to respond to urgent humanitarian relief and reconstruction requirements within their areas of responsibility by carrying out programs that will immediately assist the indigenous population. As used here, reconstruction does not limit efforts to restore previous conditions/structure in Afghanistan. Also, as used here, urgent is defined as any chronic or acute inadequacy of an essential good or service that, in the judgment of a local commander, calls for immediate action.” DOD, *DOD Financial Management Regulation: Commander’s Emergency Response Program*, January 2009, chapter 27, p. 4.
617. U.S. Army Audit Agency, *Commander’s Emergency Response Program*, November 16, 2010, p. 4; SIGAR, *Quarterly Report*, October 30, 2017, p. 225.
618. Egel et al., *Investing in the Fight*, pp. 82–84.
619. DOD, *DOD Financial Management Regulation: Commander’s Emergency Response Program*, January 2009, chapter 27, pp. 5–6.
620. The number of CERP projects increased during the surge, with 77 percent of projects in Afghanistan implemented in the FY 2010 to FY 2013 timeframe. Although broadly similar before and after the surge, there were also changes in the relative number of projects and obligations within CERP categories in the post-2009 period, with increases in the number of agriculture projects and compensation payments for battle damage, and decreases in education, healthcare, rule of law and governance, and “urgent humanitarian or reconstruction” projects. There was also a shift in CERP projects and spending from eastern Afghanistan to southern Afghanistan, particularly in FY 2010 to FY 2011. Egel et al., *Investing in the Fight*, pp. 81–84, 87.
621. SIGAR, *Increased Visibility, Monitoring, and Planning Needed for Commander’s Emergency Response Program in Afghanistan*, SIGAR 09-5-AR, September 9, 2009, p. i; U.S. Embassy Kabul and USFOR-A, *Integrated Civilian-Military Campaign Plan*, 2009, p. 7; former senior USFOR-A official, SIGAR interview, June 30, 2016.
622. An ISAF strategy document states, “By using CERP funding appropriately we . . . neutralize insurgent networks.” That view of CERP as an offensive tool was also reflected in the title of the CERP guidance document “Money as a Weapon System.” ISAF Joint Command (IJC), *CERP Strategy in Afghanistan (DRAFT)*, August 29, 2010, p. 2; USFOR-A, *Money as a Weapon System—Afghanistan (MAAWS-A)*, December 2009.
623. As ISAF’s draft CERP strategy states, “Our every action must help secure, mobilize, and support the Afghan people and their government to defeat the insurgency and establish effective governance and development.” IJC, *CERP Strategy in Afghanistan (DRAFT)*, p. 2.

624. Egel et al., *Investing in the Fight*, pp. 87–88.
625. National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2011, Pub. L. No. 111-383, § 1217 (2011); SIGAR, *Fiscal Year 2011 Afghanistan Infrastructure Fund Projects Are behind Schedule and Lack Adequate Sustainment Plans*, SIGAR 12-12-AR, July 30, 2012, p. 1.
626. Egel et al., *Investing in the Fight*, p. 37.
627. In January 2009, the FMR was amended to restrict the use of “bulk CERP” for large-scale projects. Projects in Afghanistan over \$2 million required CENTCOM approval. The FMR noted that “small-scale” projects were those costing less than \$500,000, and that not many projects should cost more than that. The increasing emphasis on smaller-scale projects stretches back to at least 2005 when Congress set clearer guidelines on project size. DOD, *Financial Management Regulation DOD 7000.14-R*, January 2009, chapter 27, p. 4; Egel et al., *Investing in the Fight*, pp. 26–27.
628. Egel et al., *Investing in the Fight*, pp. 88–89.
629. Egel et al., *Investing in the Fight*, p. 84.
630. Egel et al., *Investing in the Fight*, p. 82.
631. Egel et al., *Investing in the Fight*, p. 84.
632. SIGAR analysis of CERP data from DOD, Office of Undersecretary of Defense for Policy (OUSD-P), in response to SIGAR data calls, January 2014, April 2014, July 2015, and October 2017.
633. SIGAR analysis of CERP data from OUSD-P, in response to SIGAR data calls, January 2014, April 2014, July 2015, and October 2017.
634. The end of the ISAF mission in Afghanistan in December 2014 also marked the start of the NATO-led Resolute Support mission. DOD, *Report on Progress Toward Security and Stability in Afghanistan*, November 2013, p. 5, 21; “Afghanistan’s security forces take over from NATO,” *The Guardian*, June 18, 2013; NATO, “Transition ceremony kicks off Resolute Support Mission,” NATO website, December 28, 2014.
635. Egel et al., *Investing in the Fight*, p. 84.
636. Consolidated and Further Continuing Appropriations Act, 2015, electronic p. 169; Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2016, electronic p. 151; Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2017, electronic p. 154. For annual CERP appropriations, see SIGAR, *Quarterly Report*, October 30, 2017, pp. 254–255.
637. *FM 3-07, Stability Operations*, 2008, chapter 4, p. 13.
638. USFOR-A, *Money as a Weapon System—Afghanistan (MAAWS-A)*, May 2009, p. 106; USFOR-A, *Money as a Weapon System—Afghanistan (MAAWS-A)*, December 2009, p. 92.
639. USFOR-A, *Money as a Weapon System—Afghanistan (MAAWS-A)*, December 2009, p. 4. Even this limited guidance on developing and implementing measures of effectiveness was removed in the 2011 MAAWS-A. Moreover, this language confused the concepts of measures of performance as distinct from measures of effectiveness.
640. USFOR-A, *Money as a Weapon System—Afghanistan (MAAWS-A)*, December 2009, pp. 4, 92–94.
641. Former senior USFOR-A official, SIGAR interview, July 18, 2016.
642. IJC, “CERP Strategy in Afghanistan (DRAFT),” August 29, 2010, p. 2.
643. U.S. Army Audit Agency, *Commander’s Emergency Response Program*, p. 7.
644. IJC, “CERP Strategy in Afghanistan (DRAFT),” August 29, 2010, p. 1.
645. U.S. Army Audit Agency, *Commander’s Emergency Response Program*, pp. 10–11.
646. USFOR-A, *Money as a Weapon System—Afghanistan (MAAWS-A)*, February 2011, pp. 71–72.
647. Stabilization operations planner for RC-East, SIGAR interview, July 11, 2016; former senior USFOR-A official, SIGAR interview, June 30, 2016.
648. Former senior USFOR-A official, SIGAR interview, June 30, 2016.
649. Stabilization operations planner for RC-East, SIGAR interview, July 11, 2016.
650. Former senior USFOR-A official, SIGAR interview, July 18, 2016.
651. Former senior USFOR-A official, SIGAR interview, July 18, 2016.
652. Civil affairs officer in eastern Afghanistan, SIGAR interview, June 27, 2016. The U.S. Army Audit Agency was also told in interviews that the development of baselines and improved impact evaluations would have required additional staff. Regardless, the agency recommended developing baselines for literacy, insurgent activity, and perceptions of the Afghan government. Each of those is a major undertaking, even in a peacetime scenario. U.S. Army Audit Agency, *Commander’s Emergency Response Program*, pp. 7, 11.
653. Civil affairs officer in eastern Afghanistan, SIGAR interview, June 27, 2016; former senior USFOR-A official, SIGAR interview, June 30, 2016.
654. Civil affairs officer in eastern Afghanistan, SIGAR interview, June 27, 2016.
655. USFOR-A, *Money as a Weapon System—Afghanistan (MAAWS-A)*, March 2012, pp. 120–121.
656. Travers Child, “Hearts and Minds Cannot Be Bought: Ineffective Reconstruction in Afghanistan,” *The Economics of Peace and Security Journal*, vol. 9, no. 2 (2014), pp. 43–49.
657. Tiffany Chou, “Does Development Assistance Reduce Violence? Evidence from Afghanistan,” *The Economics of Peace and Security Journal*, vol. 7, no. (2012), p. 5.
658. Berman et al., “Can Hearts and Minds Be Bought: The Economics of Counterinsurgency in Iraq,” *Journal of Political Economy*, electronic pp. 1, 4–5; Eli Berman, Joseph Felner, Jacob Shapiro, and Erin Troland, “Modest, Secure, and Informed: Successful Development in Conflict

- Zones,” National Bureau of Economic Research working paper 18674, 2013.
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660. Ryan J. Novotny, *The “Road” to Success: Importance of Construction on Reconstruction in Conflict-Affected States*, Naval Postgraduate School, 2011.
661. Renard Sexton, “Aid as a Tool against Insurgency,” *American Political Science Review*, vol. 10, no. 4 (2016), pp. 731-749.
662. Egel et al., *Investing in the Fight: Assessing the use of the Commander’s Emergency Response Program in Afghanistan*, pp. 201-202.
663. Fishstein and Wilder, *Winning Hearts and Minds*, p. 6.
664. Stabilization operations planner for RC-East, SIGAR interview, July 11, 2016.
665. SIGAR, *Increased Visibility, Monitoring, and Planning Needed for Commander’s Emergency Response Program*, SIGAR 09-5-AR, p. 3.
666. U.S. Army Audit Agency, *Commander’s Emergency Response Program*, p. 13.
667. Former senior USFOR-A official, SIGAR interview, June 30, 2016.
668. U.S. Army Audit Agency, *Commander’s Emergency Response Program*, pp. 13-14.
669. Egel et al., *Investing in the Fight*, pp. 46-47, 56.
670. IJC, *CERP Strategy in Afghanistan (DRAFT)*, August 29, 2010, p. 2.
671. SIGAR, *Afghanistan’s Road Infrastructure: Sustainment Challenges and Lack of Repairs Put U.S. Investment at Risk*, SIGAR 17-11-AR, October 2016, p. iii.
672. Senior civil affairs officer, SIGAR interview, July 12, 2016.
673. Petraeus, SIGAR interview, August 16, 2017.
674. Senior USAID official, SIGAR interview, August 15, 2016.
675. Senior USAID official, SIGAR interview, August 15, 2016.
676. Former senior USFOR-A official, SIGAR interview, July 18, 2016; senior civil affairs officer, SIGAR interview, July 12, 2016; civil affairs officer, SIGAR interview, January 8, 2015.
677. Former senior USFOR-A official, SIGAR interview, July 18, 2016.
678. Senior USAID official, SIGAR interview, August 15, 2016. As one informant said, “The whole premise of building up confidence in the Afghan government by tying them to CERP projects was difficult because they all knew where the money was coming from.” Former senior USFOR-A official, SIGAR interview, June 30, 2016.
679. McQuillan, SIGAR interview, July 21, 2016; USAID official, SIGAR interview, August 12, 2016; senior USAID official, SIGAR interview, August 15, 2016; Nagl, Exum, and Humayun, *A Pathway to Success in Afghanistan*; Beath, Christia, and Enikolopov, *Winning Hearts and Minds Through Development*, July 2012.
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682. Martin Schweitzer, SIGAR interview, September 19, 2017; senior civil affairs officer, SIGAR interview, July 12, 2016.
683. Egel et al., *Investing in the Fight*, p. 146.
684. Egel et al., *Investing in the Fight*, p. 146-147.
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689. DOD, “Quadrennial Defense Review Report,” February 6, 2006, pp. 5, 45; Samuel Simpson, “Restructuring Civil Affairs for Persistent Engagement,” School of Advanced Military Studies, U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, 2010, p. 19; Dennis J. Cahill, SIGAR interview, March 8, 2017.
690. Cahill, SIGAR interview, March 8, 2017.
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694. Egel et al., *Investing in the Fight*, pp. 57-58.
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696. Egel et al., *Investing in the Fight*, pp. 56-57.
697. Former senior USFOR-A official, SIGAR interview, June 30, 2016.
698. Egel et al., *Investing in the Fight*, p. 71.
699. USFOR-A, *Money as a Weapon System—Afghanistan (MAAWS-A)*, February 2011, p. 2.
700. USFOR-A, *Money as a Weapon System—Afghanistan (MAAWS-A)*, March 2012, p. iii.
701. Combined Joint Special Operations Task Force—Afghanistan (CJSOTF-A), *Village Stability Operations and Afghan Local Police: Bottom-Up Counterinsurgency*, April 1, 2011, p. 7.
702. CJSOTF-A, *Village Stability Operations and Afghan Local Police*, pp. 7-8; CFSOCC-A VSO briefing on June 11, 2010, cited in Rebecca Zimmerman et al., *If You’ve Seen One VSP, You’ve Seen One VSP: Understanding Best Practices in Village Stability Operations*,

- Commander's Initiatives Group, CFSOCC-A, 2010, p. 20.
703. Former CFSOCC-A official, SIGAR interview, August 15, 2016; CJSOTF-A, *Village Stability Operations and Afghan Local Police: Bottom-Up Counterinsurgency*, pp. 62, 68
704. CJSOTF-A, *Village Stability Operations and Afghan Local Police*, p. 11.
705. CJSOTF-A, *Village Stability Operations and Afghan Local Police*, p. 11.
706. CJSOTF-A, *Village Stability Operations and Afghan Local Police*, p. 14.
707. CJSOTF-A, *Village Stability Operations and Afghan Local Police*, p. 16.
708. CJSOTF-A, *Village Stability Operations and Afghan Local Police*, p. 21.
709. Donald Bolduc, "The Future of Afghanistan," *Special Warfare*, vol. 24, no. 4 (2011), pp. 24, 26; former CFSOCC-A official, SIGAR interview, August 3, 2016. District Augmentation Teams (DAT) were one- to three-man teams established at the district level. They were meant to assist the VSPs with governance and development support. The personnel on DATs were either SOF personnel or Af-Pak Hands. Provincial Augmentation Teams (PAT) were one- to three-man teams at the provincial level who provided governance and development support to the DATs and SOF teams. They were often collocated with conventional units. Not every province with a VSO had a PAT. The VSNCC [Village Stability National Coordination Center] was a group of 15–20 SOF and civil affairs personnel commanded by a colonel that liaised with ISAF and Afghan ministries. "Village Stability Operations in Afghanistan," *SOF News*, August 21, 2016; former CFSOCC-A official, SIGAR interview, August 15, 2016.
710. Former CFSOCC-A official, SIGAR interview, August 15, 2016.
711. The Center for Naval Analyses reported in 2014 that ANA leadership did not want to support the ALP: "Interviewees in theater told us that the Chief of the ANA General Staff does not want the ANASF to be formally associated with the ALP program, in part due to the ALP's past record of human rights abuses. Therefore, it does not appear that the government of Afghanistan intends for the ANASF to continue raising ALP after 2014." Jonathan Schroden et al., *Independent Assessment of the Afghan National Security Forces*, Center for Naval Analyses, January 24, 2014, p. 138; JCOA, *Village Stability Operations and Afghan Local Police: A Case Study*, 2012, p. 9; Bolduc, "The Future of Afghanistan," pp. 24, 28.
712. JCOA, *Village Stability Operations and Afghan Local Police*, p. 6; Seth Jones, "Community Defense in Afghanistan," *Joint Forces Quarterly*, vol. 57, no. 2 (2010), p. 10.
713. Although the total number of Pashtuns in the ANDSF met "minimal" requirements, recruiting in the Pashtun heartland in southern Afghanistan was a significant challenge. In 2010, only 3 percent of ANA recruits came from the southern provinces. "ANSF Monthly Progress Report," CSTC-A, November 15, 2010, pp. 7–8. Austin Long and Andrew Radin, "Enlisting Islam for an Effective Afghan Police," *Survival: Global Politics and Strategy*, vol. 54, no. 2 (2012), p. 120.
714. Col. Bradley Moses, SIGAR interview, October 6, 2016. Evidence of that vulnerability can be found in State cables, including a declassified cable from late 2009 that describes how an ASOP shura leader was abducted and killed a day after participating in an ASOP workshop in Helmand. The day after the assassination, "only seven members attended the Community Council's regularly-scheduled weekly meeting, and their discussion during the meeting focused solely on security concerns. . . . Several requested weapons." U.S. Embassy Kabul, "Nawa: Assassinations Cast a Pall Over Recent Gains," Kabul 003727 cable (declassified by State on April 28, 2017, at SIGAR's request), November 18, 2009.
715. Joe L'Etoile, *Transforming the Conflict in Afghanistan: Village Stability Operations/ Afghan Local Police and Bottom-up Population Mobilization*, ORBIS, 2011, p. 5. Jonathan Goodhand and Aziz Hakimi, *Counterinsurgency, Local Militias, and Statebuilding in Afghanistan*, USIP, 2014, p. 14.
716. Goodhand and Hakimi, *Counterinsurgency, Local Militias, and Statebuilding*, p. 15.
717. Mathieu Lefevre, *The Afghanistan Public Protection Program and the Local Defense Initiatives*, Afghanistan Analysts Network, 2012, p. 1.
718. The first class of AP3 recruits graduated in March 2009. U.S. Embassy Kabul, "Scenesetter for CODEL McConnell," Kabul 000803 cable, April 1, 2009; Zimmerman et al., *If You've Seen One VSP*, p. 6; Lefevre, *The Afghanistan Public Protection Program*, p. 2.
719. According to Halim Fidai, the former governor of Wardak province, the U.S. and Afghan governments disagreed about the best definition of "local" and the implications for security force vetting. Fidai says the Afghans preferred to have the program and vetting conducted at the provincial level where, according to him, the Afghan government would be able to hold representatives accountable for ALP members they approved. Fidai did not explain how or why those individuals would be held accountable when so many other Afghan officials acted with impunity. Halim Fidai, SIGAR interview, January 10, 2017.
720. Moses, SIGAR interview, October 6, 2016; Lefevre, *The Afghanistan Public Protection Program*, p. 2.
721. Goodhand and Hakimi, *Counterinsurgency, Local Militias, and Statebuilding*, p. 20.
722. Lefevre, *The Afghanistan Public Protection Program*, p. 2. Mark Moyer, "Village Stability Operations and the Afghan Local Police," *Joint Special Operations University*, vol. 14, no. 7 (2014), p. 9.

723. Goodhand and Hakimi, *Counterinsurgency, Local Militias, and Statebuilding*, p. 14; Lefèvre, *The Afghanistan Public Protection Program*, p. 3.
724. Edward Reeder, SIGAR interview, October 26, 2017; Moyer, "Village Stability Operations and the Afghan Local Police," p. 9.
725. Reeder, SIGAR interview, October 26, 2017; Moyer, "Village Stability Operations and the Afghan Local Police," p. 9.
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727. Jones, "Community Defense in Afghanistan," p. 10; JCOA, *Village Stability Operations and Afghan Local Police*, p. 3.
728. Reeder, SIGAR interview, October 26, 2017.
729. Goodhand and Hakimi, *Counterinsurgency, Local Militias, and Statebuilding*, p. 12; Lefèvre, *The Afghanistan Public Protection Program*, p. 3.
730. Reeder, SIGAR interview, October 26, 2017.
731. JCOA, *Village Stability Operations and Afghan Local Police*, p. 3.
732. Mark Brown, "Village Stability Operations: An Historical Perspective from Vietnam to Afghanistan," *Small Wars Journal* (2013), pp. 1–4.
733. Goodhand and Hakimi, *Counterinsurgency, Local Militias, and Statebuilding*, pp. 11–12.
734. Reeder, SIGAR interview, October 26, 2017.
735. Bolduc, "The Future of Afghanistan," p. 24.
736. Bolduc, "The Future of Afghanistan," p. 24.
737. Goodhand and Hakimi, *Counterinsurgency, Local Militias, and Statebuilding*, p. 12.
738. Moyer, "Village Stability Operations and the Afghan Local Police," p. 11.
739. Goodhand and Hakimi, *Counterinsurgency, Local Militias, and Statebuilding*, p. 15; Moses, SIGAR interview, October 6, 2016. The nature of these trends suggests there may have been unknown changes in operations as CDI became VSO; General Reeder could not recall a single attack on the initial 11 CDI sites, but by the time VSPs were increasing in number in mid-2010, they were clearly being attacked by insurgents. Reeder, SIGAR interview, October 26, 2017.
740. Moyer, "Village Stability Operations and the Afghan Local Police," p. 11.
741. Moyer, "Village Stability Operations and the Afghan Local Police," p. 11; Goodhand and Hakimi, *Counterinsurgency, Local Militias, and Statebuilding*, p. 12.
742. Bolduc, "The Future of Afghanistan," p. 23; Moyer, "Village Stability Operations and the Afghan Local Police," p. 12.
743. A November 2010 DOD report to Congress said President Karzai authorized the establishment of the ALP in August 2010. Brigadier General Donald Bolduc reported Karzai signed the decree authorizing ALP in September 2010. DOD, *Report on Progress Toward Security and Stability in Afghanistan*, November 2010, p. 9; Bolduc, "The Future of Afghanistan," p. 24; DODIG, *Assessment of U.S. Government and Coalition Efforts to Develop the Afghan Local Police*, DODIG-2012-109, 2012, p. 23.
744. Zimmerman et al., *If You've Seen One VSP*, p. 8.
745. Moyer, "Village Stability Operations and the Afghan Local Police," p. 10.
746. Carmen Gentile, "In Afghanistan, Special Units do the Dirty Work," *USA Today*, November 10, 2011; Scott Mann, SIGAR interview, August 5, 2016.
747. Petraeus, SIGAR interview, August 16, 2017; Mann, SIGAR interview, August 5, 2016.
748. Allen, SIGAR interview, November 2, 2016; International Crisis Group, *The Future of the Afghan Local Police*, June 4, 2015, p. ii.
749. Goodhand and Hakimi, *Counterinsurgency, Local Militias, and Statebuilding*, p. 16; Gentile, "In Afghanistan, Special Units do the Dirty Work," p. 16.
750. Goodhand and Hakimi, *Counterinsurgency, Local Militias, and Statebuilding*, p. 13; DODIG, *Assessment of U.S. Government and Coalition Efforts to Develop the Afghan Local Police*, p. 2.
751. Human Rights Watch, *Just Don't Call It a Militia: Impunity, Militias, and the "Afghan Local Police"*, p. 24.
752. DODIG, *Assessment of U.S. Government and Coalition Efforts to Develop the Afghan Local Police*, p. 71; Goodhand and Hakimi, *Counterinsurgency, Local Militias, and Statebuilding*, pp. 21–22.
753. Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission, *From Arbaki to Local Police: Today's Challenges and Tomorrow's Concerns*, 2012, p. 22; Human Rights Watch, *Just Don't Call It a Militia*, pp. 70–71; DOD Press Briefing, Col. Johnson and Governor Fidai, 2010.
754. DODIG, *Assessment of U.S. Government and Coalition Efforts to Develop the Afghan Local Police*, p. 71.
755. DODIG, *Assessment of U.S. Government and Coalition Efforts to Develop the Afghan Local Police*, p. 63; Human Rights Watch, *Just Don't Call It a Militia*, p. 49.
756. Goodhand and Hakimi, *Counterinsurgency, Local Militias, and Statebuilding*, pp. 21–22.
757. Goodhand and Hakimi, *Counterinsurgency, Local Militias, and Statebuilding*, p. 22.
758. Goodhand and Hakimi, *Counterinsurgency, Local Militias, and Statebuilding*, p. 22.
759. Allen, SIGAR interview, November 2, 2016; Moyer, "Village Stability Operations and the Afghan Local Police," p. 11.
760. Moyer, "Village Stability Operations and the Afghan Local Police," p. 51; DOD, *Progress Toward Security and Stability in Afghanistan*, October 2011, p. 68.
761. Moyer, "Village Stability Operations and the Afghan Local Police," p. 51; Moses, SIGAR interview, October 6, 2016.
762. DOD, *Report on Progress Toward Security and Stability in Afghanistan*, July 2013, p. 98.
763. DOD, *Report on Progress Toward Security and Stability in Afghanistan*, December 2012, p. 81.

764. DOD, *Report on Progress Toward Security and Stability in Afghanistan*, December 2012, p. 81.
765. Goodhand and Hakimi, *Counterinsurgency, Local Militias, and Statebuilding*, pp. 29, 35.
766. U.S. Embassy Kabul, "Kunduz: Illegal Armed Groups Increase Risks for Election," Kabul 000660 cable, February 19, 2013.
767. Mann, SIGAR interview, August 5, 2016; Petraeus, SIGAR interview, August 16, 2017.
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769. Mann, SIGAR interview, August 5, 2016.
770. Petraeus, SIGAR interview, August 16, 2017.
771. JCOA, *Village Stability Operations and Afghan Local Police*, p. 9.
772. Moses, SIGAR interview, October 6, 2016; Mann, SIGAR interview, August 5, 2016.
773. Afghan Hand for VSO, SIGAR interview, September 7, 2016.
774. Reeder, SIGAR interview, October 26, 2017; Moses, SIGAR interview, October 6, 2016.
775. Mann, SIGAR interview, August 5, 2016.
776. Petraeus, SIGAR interview, August 16, 2017; former CFSOCC-A official, SIGAR interview, August 15, 2016.
777. Reeder, SIGAR interview, October 26, 2017; Moses, SIGAR interview, October 6, 2016.
778. DOD, *Report on Progress Toward Security and Stability in Afghanistan*, October 2011, p. 69.
779. Petraeus, SIGAR interview, August 16, 2017; Mann, SIGAR interview, August 5, 2016.
780. JCOA, *Village Stability Operations and Afghan Local Police*, p. 12; Moyar, "Village Stability Operations and the Afghan Local Police," p. 25.
781. Moyar, "Village Stability Operations and the Afghan Local Police," p. 25.
782. DOD official, SIGAR interview, October 28, 2016.
783. DOD official, SIGAR interview, October 28, 2016.
784. Petraeus, SIGAR interview, August 16, 2017. In his memoir, Daniel Green, an advisor to VSO in Uruzgan in 2012, provides limited anecdotal evidence that the SEALs he supported were effective implementers of VSO, despite their traditional focus on direct action. Daniel R. Green, *In the Warlords' Shadow: Special Operations Forces, the Afghans, and Their Fight against the Taliban* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2017), pp. 115–116.
785. DOD official, SIGAR interview, October 20, 2016.
786. DOD official, SIGAR interview, October 20, 2016.
787. DOD advisor, SIGAR interview, December 19, 2017; DOD advisor, SIGAR interview, December 14, 2017; DOD advisor, SIGAR interview, December 15, 2017.
788. Petraeus, SIGAR interview, August 16, 2017.
789. Jan Osburg et al., "Assessing Locally Focused Stability Operations," RAND, 2014, p. 16.
790. Bolduc, "The Future of Afghanistan," p. 26.
791. Former CFSOCC-A official, SIGAR interview, August 15, 2016; Moses, SIGAR interview, October 6, 2016; Moyar, "Village Stability Operations and the Afghan Local Police," p. 17.
792. Moses, SIGAR interview, October 6, 2016.
793. Reeder, SIGAR interview, October 26, 2017; CJSOTF-A, *Village Stability Operations and Afghan Local Police*, pp. 11–12; Zimmerman et al., *If You've Seen One VSP*, pp. 13–14; Moyar, "Village Stability Operations and the Afghan Local Police," p. 17.
794. Moyar, "Village Stability Operations and the Afghan Local Police," p. 23.
795. Mann, SIGAR interview, August 5, 2016; Goodhand and Hakimi, *Counterinsurgency, Local Militias, and Statebuilding*, p. 22.
796. Reeder, SIGAR interview, October 26, 2017.
797. Goodhand and Hakimi, *Counterinsurgency, Local Militias, and Statebuilding*, pp. 22.
798. Kate Clark, "Update on the Afghan Local Police: Making sure they are armed, trained, paid, and exist," Afghanistan Analysts Network, July 5, 2017.
799. Goodhand and Hakimi, *Counterinsurgency, Local Militias, and Statebuilding*, pp. 29–30, 35.
800. International Crisis Group, *The Future of the Afghan Local Police*, p. 13.
801. Goodhand and Hakimi, *Counterinsurgency, Local Militias, and Statebuilding*, p. 15; International Crisis Group, *The Future of the Afghan Local Police*, p. 13.
802. Moyar, "Village Stability Operations and the Afghan Local Police," p. 51.
803. Bolduc, "The Future of Afghanistan," p. 24.
804. Moyar, "Village Stability Operations and the Afghan Local Police," p. 64.
805. DOD, *Report on Progress Toward Security and Stability in Afghanistan*, December 2012, p. 80.
806. DOD, *Report on Progress Toward Security and Stability in Afghanistan*, July 2013, pp. 97–98.
807. Moyar, "Village Stability Operations and the Afghan Local Police," p. 51.
808. Moyar, "Village Stability Operations and the Afghan Local Police," p. 57.
809. Moyar, "Village Stability Operations and the Afghan Local Police," pp. 64–65.
810. Moyar, "Village Stability Operations and the Afghan Local Police," p. 65.
811. "Q&A: Brigadier General Edward M. Reeder Jr," *Special Warfare*, vol. 24, no. 4 (2011), p. 21; Moyar, "Village Stability Operations and the Afghan Local Police," p. 58.
812. Moyar, "Village Stability Operations and the Afghan Local Police," p. 65.
813. DODIG, *Assessment of U.S. Government and Coalition Efforts to Develop the Afghan Local Police*, p. iv; Goodhand and Hakimi, *Counterinsurgency, Local Militias, and Statebuilding*, p. 16.
814. Jefferson Marquis et al., *Assessing the Ability of the Afghan Ministry of Interior Affairs to Support the Afghan Local Police*, RAND, 2016, p. 22.
815. Moyar, "Village Stability Operations and the Afghan Local Police," p. 67.
816. DOD, NSOCC-A response to SIGAR, April 7, 2014.
817. Clark, "Update on the Afghan Local Police."
818. UNAMA, *Afghanistan Midyear Report 2014: Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict*, July 2014, p. 46.

819. UNAMA, *Afghanistan Midyear Report 2014: Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict*, July 2014, p. 36.
820. Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission, *From Arbaki to Local Police: Today's Challenges and Tomorrow's Concerns*, Spring 1391 (2012), pp. 5–6.
821. UNAMA, *Afghanistan Midyear Report 2014: Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict*, July 2014, p. 47.
822. UNAMA, *Afghanistan Annual Report 2015: Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict*, February 2016, p. 68.
823. Fazal Muzhary, "How to replace a bad ALP Commander: in Shajoy, success and now calamity," Afghanistan Analysts Network, September 21, 2016.
824. UNAMA, *Afghanistan Annual Report 2015: Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict*, February 2016, p. 67.
825. UNAMA, *Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict: Annual Report 2016*, February 2017, pp. 96–97; UNAMA, *Afghanistan Annual Report 2015: Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict*, February 2016, p. 67.
826. UNAMA, *Afghanistan Midyear Report 2014: Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict*, July 2014, p. 48; UNAMA, *Afghanistan Annual Report 2015: Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict*, February 2016, pp. 67–68; UNAMA, *Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict: Annual Report 2016*, February 2017, p. 96; UNAMA, *Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict: Annual Report 2017*, February 2018, p. 49.
827. Mujib Mashal, "U.S. Plan for New Afghan Force Revives Fears of Militia Abuses," *New York Times*, September 15, 2017.
828. Output: A tangible, immediate, and intended product or consequence of an activity within USAID's control. Examples of outputs include people fed, personnel trained, better technologies developed, and new construction. USAID, "Glossary of ADS Terms," April 30, 2014, p. 186.
829. U.S. Mission to Afghanistan, *U.S. Foreign Assistance for Afghanistan*, annex VII, p. 5.
830. As Andrew Natsios, former USAID Administrator, has written about at length, focusing on measurable outputs to the detriment of more abstract outcomes can have dangerous programmatic implications. In his words, "Those development programs that are most precisely and easily measured are the least transformational, and those programs that are most transformational are the least measurable." The emphasis within USAID and other donors, such as the World Bank, on more measurable outcomes over less measurable outcomes tends to favor the direct delivery of goods and services (for example, distributing food aid and humanitarian assistance after a disaster, doing immunizations, distributing bed nets to control malaria, building of schools and roads), over the more critical, but also more difficult, task of building local, self-sustaining institutions (for example, the training of staff, construction of business systems, and development of regular organizational procedures, institutional cultures, and reform). Andrew Natsios, *The Clash of the Counter-Bureaucracy and Development*, Center for Global Development, July 2010, pp. 1, 4, 37–38.
831. MSI, *An Inventory and Review of Countering Violent Extremism and Insurgency Monitoring Systems*, prepared under contract for USAID, December 10, 2012, p. v; U.S. Mission to Afghanistan, *U.S. Foreign Assistance for Afghanistan*, annex VII, p. 5.
832. Gordon, *Winning Hearts and Minds in Helmand*, p. 42; UK Stabilisation Unit, *Responding to Stabilisation Challenges in Hostile and Insecure Environments: Lessons Identified by the UK's Stabilisation Unit*, November 2010, pp. 1–2.
833. Ben Connable, *Embracing the Fog of War: Assessments and Metrics in Counterinsurgency*, RAND, 2012, pp. iii, xviii, 81.
834. Connable, *Embracing the Fog of War*, pp. xviii–xix.
835. MSI, *Stability in Key Areas (SIKA) Program Final Performance Evaluation*, p. 4.
836. Social Impact, *USAID/OTI Afghanistan Program: Final Evaluation*, August 15, 2005, p. 28.
837. The White House, *Memorandum to the National Security Council on the Presidential Policy Directive/PPD-6*, "U.S. Global Development Policy," September 22, 2010, p. 6. USAID then adopted an agency-wide evaluation policy in January 2011. USAID, *USAID Evaluation Policy: Year One*, February 2012, p. 2. DOD, which spends \$8–10 billion per year on direct assistance to more than 180 countries, had no evaluation policy at all until it released DOD Instruction 5132.14, covering security cooperation programs, in 2017. Diana Ohlbaum, "You've Come a Long Way Baby: Evaluations at USAID," Modernizing Foreign Assistance Network, 7 April 2016; DOD, *DOD Instruction 5132.14, Assessment, Monitoring, and Evaluation Policy for the Security Cooperation Enterprise*, January 13, 2017. Even at USAID, evaluating impact remains rare. A study of USAID evaluations conducted between 2011 and 2014 found that only 3 of the 609 were impact evaluations, with the rest being other types of efforts, such as midterm and final evaluations. MSI, *Evaluation Utilization at USAID*, February 23, 2016, p. 6.
838. See, for example, U.S. Mission to Afghanistan, *U.S. Foreign Assistance for Afghanistan*, annex VII, p. 10; USAID, *Community Cohesion Initiative Quarterly Report April–June 2013*, prepared under contract for USAID, p. 1; USAID, *Community Cohesion Initiative: Final Report*, pp. 1–2; MSI, *MISTI Stabilization Trends and Impact Evaluation Survey: Analytical Report, Wave 5*, pp. 27, 213.

839. See, for example, Jan Osburg et al., *Assessing Locally Focused Stability Operations*, RAND, p. 11; U.S. Mission to Afghanistan, *U.S. Foreign Assistance for Afghanistan*, annex VII, p. 11; MSI, *An Inventory and Review of Countering Violent Extremism and Insurgency Monitoring Systems*, pp. 46–47.
840. See, for example, MSI, *MISTI Stabilization Trends and Impact Evaluation Survey: Analytical Report, Wave 5*, April 28, 2015, p. 3; MSI, *An Inventory and Review of Countering Violent Extremism and Insurgency Monitoring Systems*, pp. 46–47; USAID, *Counter-Insurgency Programming: A Meta Evaluation*, May 2010, p. 33.
841. See, for example, USAID, *Counter-Insurgency Programming: A Meta Evaluation*, May 2010, p. 33; MSI, *Stability in Key Areas (SIKA) Program Final Performance Evaluation*, p. 30; Gordon, *Winning Hearts and Minds in Helmand*, p. 10; MSI, *MISTI Stabilization Trends and Impact Evaluation Survey: Analytical Report, Wave 5*, p. 23.
842. U.S. Mission to Afghanistan, *U.S. Foreign Assistance for Afghanistan*, annex VII, p. 11; MSI, *Monitoring & Evaluation in Postconflict Settings*, prepared under contract for USAID, March 15, 2006, pp. 3–4; MSI, *MISTI Task 1: Desk Review of Stabilization Resources and References*, July 11, 2012, pp. 10–11.
843. Jan-Rasmus Böhnke and Christoph Zürcher, “Aid, Minds, and Hearts: The Impact of Aid in Conflict Zones,” *Conflict Management and Peace Science*, vol. 30, no. 5 (2013), p. 415; MSI, *Monitoring & Evaluation in Postconflict Settings*, pp. 3–4; Gordon, *Winning Hearts and Minds in Helmand*, p. 5; MSI, *MISTI Task 1: Desk Review of Stabilization Resources and References*, p. 10.
844. Gordon, *Winning Hearts and Minds in Helmand*, p. 54; Civ-mil planner at Embassy Kabul, SIGAR interview, November 4, 2016.
845. USAID, *Planning and Monitoring Environmental Compliance in Non-Permissive Environments*, n.d., p. 17; MSI, *Monitoring & Evaluation in Postconflict Settings*, p. 4; USAID, *Lessons Learned: Monitoring and Evaluation in Complex, High-Threat Environments*, April 2010, p. 1.
846. Gordon, *Winning Hearts and Minds in Helmand*, 2011, p. 10; Connable, *Embracing the Fog of War*, p. 54; UK Stabilisation Unit, *Monitoring and Evaluation of Conflict and Stabilisation Interventions*, What Works Series, October 2015, p. 11.
847. Connable, *Embracing the Fog of War*, p. 54; MSI, *Community Outreach and Engagement*, p. 13.
848. USAID, *Lessons Learned: Monitoring and Evaluation in Complex, High Threat Environments*, p. 2; MSI, *An Inventory and Review of Countering Violent Extremism and Insurgency Monitoring Systems*, pp. v, 46–47; Osburg et al., *Assessing Locally Focused Stability Operations*, p. xvi; UK Stabilisation Unit, *Monitoring and Evaluation of Conflict and Stabilisation Interventions*, pp. 11–12.
849. MSI, *Monitoring & Evaluation in Postconflict Settings*, p. 2; UK Stabilisation Unit, *Monitoring and Evaluation of Conflict and Stabilisation Interventions*, p. 11.
850. The absence of reliable census data, maps, and disaggregated aid data created myriad challenges even before taking into consideration the logistical challenges of working in an insecure environment with very limited infrastructure. Böhnke and Zürcher, “Aid, Minds, and Hearts,” 2013, p. 415. Polling was often conducted in public spaces, inhibiting frankness for fear of personal safety. In an environment where the presence of outsiders was often seen as an opportunity to attract more funding, respondents likely made their responses more positive or negative in order to attract more programming. Gordon, *Winning Hearts and Minds in Helmand*, p. 10. Security concerns also restricted where information could be safely collected and forced evaluators to rely on local surveyors with supervision. Beath, Christia, and Enikolopov, *Winning Hearts and Minds Through Development*, p. 13; MSI, *Stability in Key Areas (SIKA) Program Final Performance Evaluation*, p. 2.
851. MSI, *An Inventory and Review of Countering Violent Extremism and Insurgency Monitoring Systems*, p. v; USAID, *Lessons Learned: Monitoring and Evaluation in Complex, High Threat Environments*, p. 2; Osburg et al., *Assessing Locally Focused Stability Operations*, p. xvi. SIGAR has previously reported on the importance of triangulation through multiple levels of accountability in M&E in Afghanistan. SIGAR and USIP, *Report on International Symposium on Monitoring and Management in Insecure Environments*, p. 12.
852. This system was designed to supplement implementing partner reporting with reporting from the following additional sources: (1) direct observation by U.S. government sources, (2) USAID implementing partners (3) Afghan government sources, (4) local organizations and beneficiaries, and (5) third-party contractors hired explicitly to conduct monitoring and evaluation. The USAID Afghanistan Mission only documented one project activity to which the model was successfully applied. USAID OIG, *Audit of USAID/Afghanistan’s Strategy for Monitoring and Evaluating Programs Throughout Afghanistan*, F-306-16-001-P, December 10, 2015, pp. 1–2.
853. According to a survey of 127 awards conducted by the USAID OIG, the CORs/Agreement Officer Representatives (C/AORs) were unable to conduct site visits on 74 percent of those programs. Further, some C/AORs considered visits to a partner’s office to be site visits. USAID OIG, *Audit of USAID/Afghanistan’s Strategy for Monitoring and Evaluating Programs*

- Throughout Afghanistan*, F-306-16-001-P, December 10, 2015, p. 2.
854. USAID Afghanistan, Mission Order 201.05, September 20, 2017, pp. 7–8.
855. Connable, *Embracing the Fog of War*, p. 161; Berman et al., “Modest, Secure, and Informed,” p. 513; Renard Sexton, “Aid as a Tool against Insurgency,” p. 737; MSI, *MISTI Stabilization Trends and Impact Evaluation Survey, Analytical Report, Wave 5*, p. 337; MSI, *An Inventory and Review of Countering Violent Extremism and Insurgency Monitoring Systems*, p. 58.
856. Jan Osburg et al., *Assessing Locally Focused Stability Operations*, p. 9.
857. MSI, *MISTI Stabilization Trends and Impact Evaluation Survey, Analytical Report, Wave 5*, p. 13; Connable, *Embracing the Fog of War*, p. 165.
858. MSI, *MISTI Task 1: Desk Review of Stabilization Resources and References*, p. 12; Fishstein and Wilder, *Winning Hearts and Minds*, p. 6.
859. Social Impact, *Final Performance Evaluation of USAID/OTI Community Cohesion Initiative in Afghanistan*, p. 25; DAI, *Local Governance and Community Development: Final Report*, August 2011, p. xx; senior USAID official, SIGAR interview, August 15, 2016. SIGAR previously documented USAID’s failure to comply with the Office of Management and Budget Circular A-16, issued in 1990, requiring agencies to issue guidance for the collection and reporting of geospatial data. SIGAR also documented the problems caused by poor data collection with regard to evaluations of USAID’s work, as did RAND’s Peer Review of MISTI. SIGAR, *USAID’s Measuring Impacts of Stabilization Initiatives: Program Generally Achieved Its Objectives but USAID’s Lack of Geospatial Data and Standards Affected its Implementation*, SIGAR 17-10-AR, October 26, 2016, pp. 11–14; Daniel Egel and Peter Glick, *Peer Review of the MISTI Survey and Evaluation Methodology*, RAND, September 2014, p. 2.
860. USAID, response to SIGAR data call, January 24, 2017; Egel and Glick, *Peer Review of the MISTI Survey*, pp. 14–15.
861. USAID, response to SIGAR data call, January 24, 2017.
862. SIGAR, *USAID’s Measuring Impacts of Stabilization Initiatives*, SIGAR 17-10-AR, p. 12. Data quality issues were also observed by evaluations of individual programs. For example, MISTI found the data quality and accuracy of SIKA East’s activity tracker were questionable, with frequent changes to project status, start and end dates, and deletions or additions of projects not on previous trackers. MSI, *Stability in Key Areas (SIKA)-East Mid-Term Performance Evaluation*, p. 41.
863. SIGAR, *USAID’s Measuring Impacts of Stabilization Initiatives*, SIGAR 17-10-AR, p. ii.
864. USAID Afghanistan, “Admin Notice 2017-0070: Data Quality and Verification Process Training,” July 20, 2017; USAID Afghanistan, “Admin Notice 2017-0111: Afghan Info Indicator Clean Up Process,” October 10, 2017.
865. USAID Afghanistan, “GIS/GPS Guidance for Program Managers and Implementing Partners,” version 5, August 2016.
866. MSI, *MISTI Task 1: Desk Review of Stabilization Resources and References*, p. 10; UK Stabilisation Unit, *Monitoring and Evaluation of Conflict and Stabilisation Interventions*, p. 10.
867. Connable, *Embracing the Fog of War*, p. 191; MSI, *Monitoring & Evaluation in Postconflict Settings*, p. 2. A USAID study on the role of PRTs in Afghanistan found the agency’s reporting during the war in Vietnam, under the CORDS program, faced similar pressures to report good news and subsequent distortions. USAID, *Lessons Learned: USAID Perspectives*, p. 5, endnote 11.
868. UK Stabilisation Unit, *Monitoring and Evaluation of Conflict and Stabilisation Interventions*, p. 11.
869. Senior USAID official, SIGAR interview, August 15, 2016.
870. DAI, *Local Governance and Community Development: Final Report*, August 2011, p. xx.
871. MSI, *An Inventory and Review of Countering Violent Extremism and Insurgency Monitoring Systems*, pp. v, 46.
872. USAID, “Approval of the Concept Paper for the Third Party Monitoring and Evaluation IQC,” pp. 2, 3.
873. John Agoglia, Michael Dziedzic, Barbara Sotirin, *Measuring Progress in Conflict Environments (MPICE): A Metrics Framework*, developed by PKSOI, USIP, and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, 2010, pp. x, xi.
874. Chandrasekaran, “U.S. Military Dismayed by Delays in 3 Key Development Projects in Afghanistan.”
875. MSI, *An Inventory and Review of Countering Violent Extremism and Insurgency Monitoring Systems*, pp. 20, 28, 34.
876. USAID, “Approval of the Concept Paper for the Third Party Monitoring and Evaluation IQC,” pp. 2–3, 5.
877. U.S. Mission to Afghanistan, *U.S. Foreign Assistance for Afghanistan*, annex VII, p. 11. The same can be said about the military’s effort to assess the effectiveness of counterinsurgency, which is “a poorly understood process.” Connable, *Embracing the Fog of War*, p. xxi.
878. MSI, *MISTI Stabilization Trends and Impact Evaluation Survey, Analytical Report, Wave 5*, p. 1.
879. MSI, *MISTI Stabilization Trends and Impact Evaluation Survey, Analytical Report, Wave 5*, p. 3.
880. MSI, *An Inventory and Review of Countering Violent Extremism and Insurgency Monitoring Systems*, pp. 46–47.

881. MSI, *MISTI Stabilization Trends and Impact Evaluation Survey, Analytical Report, Wave 5*, p. 2.
882. The 2014 version of the Stab-U PMP clarifies that “while inputs and outputs at the project and activity levels are often similar to traditional development projects, stability operations identify and implement activities with the distinctly different objective of diminishing or eliminating [sources of instability], defined as local issues that: 1) decrease support for [the Afghan government], 2) increase support for antigovernment elements; and, 3) disrupt the normal functioning of society. Tracking developmental activity outcomes such as improved water supply, access to jobs, more productive agriculture, and access to quality education is important to demonstrate that projects are producing desired results. However, these output measures are secondary to progress in areas (i.e., outcomes) such as increased public support for [the Afghan government] and its institutions and increased levels of community cohesion and area resiliency, which are thought to deny insurgents the possibility of drawing support from the local populace.” MSI, *USAID Stabilization Unit Afghanistan Performance Management Plan Update, FY 2012–2015*, May 2014, pp. 12–13.
883. Christoph Zürcher, “What Do We (Not) Know About Development Aid and Violence?: A Systemic Review,” *World Development*, Vol. 98, 2017, pp. 508, 519.
884. MSI, *Stability in Key Areas (SIKA) Program Final Performance Evaluation*, p. 4.
885. Senior OTI official, SIGAR interview, August 12, 2016.
886. Tamas, SIGAR interview, July 13, 2016; SIGAR, *USAID’s Measuring Impacts of Stabilization Initiatives*, SIGAR 17-10-AR, p. 10. The military experienced similar challenges resulting from the lag between programming and detectable impact. Retired Maj. Gen. Karl McQuillan told SIGAR that impact from a CERP project was not usually felt until after the unit that implemented it had rotated out and a new unit arrived. McQuillan, SIGAR interview, July 21, 2016.
887. Iyengar, Shapiro, and Hegarty, *Lessons Learned from Stabilization Initiatives in Afghanistan*, pp. 6, 9.
888. MSI, *USAID Stabilization Unit Afghanistan Performance Management Plan Update, FY 2012–2015*, May 2014, p. 7. These challenges are not limited to Afghanistan. The mission’s Independent Monitoring Unit in Pakistan, a \$71 million, five-year effort, suffered from similar shortcomings. The USAID OIG found the mission could not explain how it had used the majority of the M&E recommendations it had received to manage its portfolio. USAID OIG, *Audit of USAID/Pakistan’s Independent Monitoring and Evaluation Program*, Audit Report No. G-391-13-003-P, October 28, 2013, pp. 1, 5.
889. Ashraf Nasiri, SIGAR interview, December 11, 2016.
890. USAID, ADS Chapter 201: Program Cycle Operational Policy, Updated September 7, 2016, pp. 128–129; USAID response to SIGAR data call, March 1, 2018. A 2016 USAID report also found the Afghanistan Mission was the only one systematically tracking evaluation recommendations and utilization across its entire portfolio. MSI, *Evaluation Utilization at USAID*, February 23, 2016, p. 141.
891. These include inflexible budgets and awards that do not allow for adaptation, lack of staff time to respond effectively and follow up on evaluation findings, lack of demand for evidence-based program design from senior leadership, and lack of incentive to use scarce resources for M&E, learning, and adapting. Lugar Center and Modernizing Foreign Assistance Network, *From Evidence to Learning: Recommendations to Improve U.S. Foreign Assistance Evaluation*, November 2017, p. 9.
892. George Ingram, “Gayle Smith: USAID has Gotten Real about Evaluation,” Brookings Institution, April 1, 2016.
893. Natsios, *The Clash of the Counter-Bureaucracy and Development*, p. 35.
894. USAID, *Office of Transition Initiatives, 1994–2009*, 2009, p. 11; MSI, *MISTI Task 1: Desk Review of Stabilization Resources and References*, p. 2.
895. UK Stabilisation Unit, *Responding to Stabilisation Challenges in Hostile and Insecure Environments*, p. 11.
896. Hammink, USAID in Afghanistan, p. 13.
897. Social Impact, *Final Performance Evaluation of USAID/OTI Community Cohesion Initiative in Afghanistan*, p. 11. In a similar vein, a 2005 evaluation of OTI’s first Afghanistan program, the Afghanistan Transition Initiative, found that program played a major role in ensuring the success of the 2002 emergency Loya Jirga, after UNDP found itself unable to do so. Only approximately half of that program’s activities involved community infrastructure, rather than other types of programming such as capacity building at the ministerial level or election support. Social Impact, *USAID/OTI Afghanistan Program: Final Evaluation*, August 15, 2005, pp. 7, 8, 9, 34. Similarly, LGCD supported national-level programming, including support to a local news network to hire and train journalists, to expand Pashto-language radio coverage to enable the government to better engage the population, and to produce radio programming to combat youth radicalization. DAI, *Local Governance and Community Development: Final Report*, August 31, 2011, pp. 71.
898. Social Impact, *Final Performance Evaluation of USAID/OTI Community Cohesion Initiative*, p. 14.
899. Joint Chiefs of Staff, *JP 3-07, Stability*, August 3, 2016, p. x.

900. Senior USAID official, SIGAR interview, November 10, 2016.
901. Former USAID official, SIGAR interview, June 1, 2017.
902. MSI, *USAID Stabilization Unit Afghanistan Performance Management Plan Update, FY 2012–2015*, May 2014, p. 16; former USAID official, SIGAR interview, June 1, 2017.
903. Social Impact, *Final Performance Evaluation of USAID/OTI Community Cohesion Initiative in Afghanistan*, pp. 27–28; USAID, *Lessons Learned: Monitoring and Evaluation in Complex, High Threat Environments*, p. 1.
904. MSI, *MISTI Task 1: Desk Review of Stabilization Resources and References*, p. 9; former USAID official, SIGAR interview, June 1, 2017.
905. Social Impact, *Final Performance Evaluation of USAID/OTI Community Cohesion Initiative in Afghanistan*, p. 28.
906. Fishstein and Wilder, *Winning Hearts and Minds*, p. 3; Christoph Zürcher, “What Do We (Not) Know about Development Aid and Violence,” p. 512; Sexton, “Aid as a Tool against Insurgency,” p. 731; MSI, *MISTI Stabilization Trends and Impact Evaluation Survey, Analytical Report, Wave 5*, p. 3.
907. MSI, *MISTI Stabilization Trends and Impact Evaluation Survey, Analytical Report, Wave 5*, p. 6.
908. SIGAR, *Quarterly Report*, January 30, 2016, pp. 117–118.
909. MSI, *MISTI Stabilization Trends and Impact Evaluation Survey, Analytical Report, Wave 5*, p. 217.
910. MSI, *MISTI Stabilization Trends and Impact Evaluation Survey, Analytical Report, Wave 5*, pp. 325–326. A 2005 final evaluation of ATI and the final evaluation of the SIKA programs found instances of a similar erosion of confidence in the government when popular expectations exceeded the programs’ ability to help the government deliver on them. In other words, sometimes the more exposure the population has to their government, the worse their perception of that government may become. Social Impact, *USAID/OTI Afghanistan Program: Final Evaluation*, pp. 40–41, 46; MSI, *Stability in Key Areas (SIKA) Program Final Performance Evaluation*, p. 20.
911. MSI, *Stability in Key Areas (SIKA) Program Final Performance Evaluation*, p. 47.
912. Berman et al., “Modest, Secure, and Informed,” p. 515.
913. MSI, *MISTI Stabilization Trends and Impact Evaluation Survey, Analytical Report, Wave 5*, p. 14. However, a former senior USAID official noted that only a small fraction of the communities studied by MISTI were controlled by the Taliban. Larry Sampler, “USAID Afghan Programs,” *New York Times*, December 29, 2015.
914. Christoph Zürcher, “What Do We (Not) Know about Development Aid and Violence,” p. 508.
915. Beath, Christia, and Enikolopov, *Winning Hearts and Minds Through Development*, p. 2.
916. Beath, Christia, and Enikolopov, *Randomized Impact Evaluation of Afghanistan’s National Solidarity Programme*, 2013, p. 63; Jan Böhnke, Jan Koehler, and Christoph Zürcher, “Assessing the Impact of Development Cooperation in Northeast Afghanistan: Approaches and Methods,” *Freie Universität Berlin*, 43, February 2013, p. 39; Iyengar, Shapiro, and Hegarty, *Lessons Learned from Stabilization Initiatives in Afghanistan*, p. 8.
917. Böhnke and Zürcher, “Aid, Mind and Hearts: The Impact of Aid in Conflict Zones,” Research in International and Global Studies seminar series, University of California at Irvine, November 5, 2010, p. 27.
918. Iyengar, Shapiro, and Hegarty, *Lessons Learned from Stabilization Initiatives in Afghanistan*, p. 8.
919. Böhnke and Zürcher, “Aid, Mind and Hearts,” 2010, pp. 27.
920. Brown, *The U.S. Surge and Afghan Local Governance*, p. 2.
921. Gulla Jan Ahmadzai, SIGAR interview, February 15, 2017; USAID officials, SIGAR interview, September 18, 2011.
922. U.S. stabilization official, SIGAR interview, September 13, 2016.
923. State, “Reflections on Afghanistan: Lessons for Future Conflict and Stabilization Operations,” p. 2; senior USAID official, SIGAR interview, October 24, 2016; USAID officials, SIGAR interview, September 18, 2011.
924. The social capital questions covered the community’s ability to solve internal and external problems and how often villages worked together. The questions about informal leaders covered whether local leaders considered citizens’ interests and women’s interests, whether they were able to secure funds for projects, and whether they inspired confidence, were responsive, and were able to get things done. MSI, *MISTI Stabilization Trends and Impact Evaluation Survey, Analytical Report, Wave 5*, p. 215.
925. USAID, *Community Cohesion Initiative: Final Report*, pp. 1–2.
926. USAID, *Community Cohesion Initiative: Final Report*, p. 1.
927. DAI, *Final Report: Afghanistan Stabilization Initiative-East*, pp. 29–30.
928. MSI, *MISTI Stabilization Trends and Impact Evaluation Survey, Analytical Report, Wave*, pp. 6, 340.
929. MSI, *Stability in Key Areas (SIKA) Program Final Performance Evaluation*, p. 1.
930. Beath, Christia, and Enikolopov, “The National Solidarity Programme,” p. 311.
931. MSI, *MISTI Stabilization Trends and Impact Evaluation Survey, Analytical Report, Wave 5*, p. 11, 348–349.
932. MSI, *Stability in Key Areas (SIKA) Program Final Performance Evaluation*, p. 4; USAID sta-

- bilization official, SIGAR interview, September 9, 2016.
933. MSI, *MISTI Stabilization Trends and Impact Evaluation Survey, Analytical Report, Wave 5*, pp. 10, 12.
934. MSI, *MISTI Stabilization Trends and Impact Evaluation Survey, Analytical Report, Wave 5*, p. 349.
935. MSI, *MISTI Stabilization Trends and Impact Evaluation Survey, Analytical Report, Wave 5*, p. 355.
936. MSI, *MISTI Stabilization Trends and Impact Evaluation Survey, Analytical Report, Wave 5*, p. 329.
937. Nijat et al., *Subnational Governance in Afghanistan*, p. 44.
938. Böhnke and Zürcher, “Aid, Mind and Hearts,” 2010, p. 27.
939. Egel and Glick, *Peer Review of the MISTI Survey*, p. 39.
940. MSI, *MISTI Stabilization Trends and Impact Evaluation Survey, Analytical Report, Wave 5*, p. 5.
941. MSI, *Stability in Key Areas (SIKA) Program Final Performance Evaluation*, p. 4.
942. Most stabilization projects were “one-time distributions or events that did not foster lasting systems or take future operations and maintenance needs into account.” Brown, *Rethinking Afghan Local Governance Aid After Transition*, p. 5.
943. MSI, *MISTI Stabilization Trends and Impact Evaluation Survey, Analytical Report, Wave 5*, p. 15.
944. Iyengar, Shapiro, and Hegarty, *Lessons Learned from Stabilization Initiatives in Afghanistan*, p. 8.
945. U.S. Embassy Kabul, “Using Cash for Work,” Kabul 000666 cable, February 3, 2011.
946. Iyengar and Shapiro, *Afghanistan Stabilization Program: A Summary of Research and Key Outcome Trends*, ESOC, prepared under contract for USAID, April 11, 2017, p. 12.
947. Iyengar, Shapiro, and Hegarty, *Lessons Learned from Stabilization Initiatives in Afghanistan*, p. 7; Iyengar and Shapiro, *Afghanistan Stabilization Program: A Summary of Research and Key Outcome Trends*, p. 2.
948. Chou, “Does Development Assistance Reduce Violence? Evidence from Afghanistan,” p. 5; Egel et al., *Investing in the Fight*, p. xxii; Adams, “Honing the Proper Edge,” p. 53.
949. Social Impact, *Final Performance Evaluation of USAID/OTI Community Cohesion Initiative in Afghanistan*, pp. vii, 18; former USAID official, SIGAR interview, June 1, 2017. A five-year study on the relationship between service delivery and state legitimacy in eight conflict-affected countries found this relationship is much less linear than state-building efforts like the one in Afghanistan historically assumed. The study found there is no clear relationship between improvements in people’s access to or satisfaction with services and improvements in their perceptions of government. However, the study did find a relationship between civic participation and accountability (for example, being consulted about services, community meetings, and knowledge of grievance mechanisms) and positive perceptions of government. Sturge, Mallett, Hagen-Zanker, and Slater, *Tracking livelihoods, service delivery and governance: panel survey findings*, Secure Livelihoods Research Consortium, June 2017, pp. viii, ix.
950. MSI, *Stability in Key Areas (SIKA) Program Final Performance Evaluation*, p. 47.
951. SIGAR, *Corruption in Conflict*, pp. 11–12, 77; U.S. Embassy Kabul, “Alikozai Tribal Elders Meet with Ambassador Crocker,” Kabul 000989 cable; Wilder and Gordon, “Money Can’t Buy America Love;” U.S. Senate Committee on Armed Services, *Inquiry into the Role and Oversight of Private Security Contractors in Afghanistan*, p. i; Lamb and Shawn, *Political Governance and Strategy in Afghanistan*, p. 28; DAJ, *Preliminary Impact Assessment of ASI-East in Four Districts in Eastern Afghanistan*, p. 66; senior USAID official, SIGAR interview, August 15, 2016; Vieha, Afshar, and Heela, *Rethinking the Civilian Surge*, p. 41.
952. State, USAID, and DOD, “Sustainable Stability: A Feasible Future for U.S. Stabilization Efforts,” 2017; USIP and PKSOI, *Guiding Principles for Stabilization and Reconstruction*, p. 15.
953. Lute, SIGAR interview, February 20, 2015.
954. Military planner, SIGAR interview, November 3, 2016.
955. Military planner, SIGAR interview, November 3, 2016.
956. Senior U.S. official, SIGAR interview, September 16, 2016.
957. Allen, SIGAR interview, November 2, 2016.
958. Nasr, *The Dispensable Nation*, p. 28.
959. Senior USAID official, SIGAR interview, November 8, 2016; USAID, *Lessons Learned: USAID Perspectives*, p. 13; CRS, *Building an Interagency Cadre of National Security Professionals: Proposals, Recent Experience, and Issues for Congress*, July 8, 2008, p. 5. Coalition partners likewise recognized the immense difficulty of finding the right people for the right positions, particularly in the numbers necessary to staff a stabilization mission. UK Stabilisation Unit, *Responding to Stabilisation Challenges in Hostile and Insecure Environments*, p. 3; Ball et al., *Afghanistan Lessons Identified: 2001–2014, Part II*, p. 65.
960. Sibghatullah, SIGAR interview, December 5, 2016.
961. Fidai, SIGAR interview, January 10, 2017. According to former Deputy Minister for MRRD Tariq Esmati, timelines at the program level were not particularly realistic either: “Programs were designed for two to three years, while the situation at the village level needed a 10-year program. . . . Nobody was thinking beyond two years.” Tariq Esmati, SIGAR interview, December 12, 2016.

962. Senior U.S. official, SIGAR interview, September 13, 2016. A Danish government-commissioned study about lessons from Afghanistan for future interventions in fragile and conflict affected states came to the same conclusion: "If the efforts are to make a positive difference, a significantly longer time horizon is needed than the two to three years that are typically considered to be 'long term' in the context of stabilization." Andersen, *Afghanistan Lessons Identified: 2001–2014*, Part I, p. 9.
963. MSI, *An Inventory and Review of Countering Violent Extremism and Insurgency Monitoring Systems*, p. 40; USAID, "Theory of Change Activity–Stabilization Summit II," undated event handout; Egel and Glick, *Peer Review of the MISTI Survey*, p. 36.
964. USAID, "Stabilization Fact Sheet," State, *Afghanistan and Pakistan Regional Stabilization Strategy*, February 24, 2010, p. 19.
965. Former senior USFOR-A official, SIGAR interview, July 18, 2016; MSI, *Stability in Key Areas (SIKA) Program Final Performance Evaluation*, p. 3; IRD, *AVIPA Plus Final Report, September 1, 2008–November 15, 2011*, pp. 35–36; Dressler, *Counterinsurgency in Helmand*, p. 37.
966. IRD, *AVIPA Plus Final Report, September 1, 2008–November 15, 2011*, p. viii; MSI, *Community Development Program: Final Performance Evaluation*, p. 4.
967. MSI, *Stability in Key Areas (SIKA) Program Final Performance Evaluation*, pp. 3–4, 32; MSI, *MISTI Stabilization Trends and Impact Evaluation Survey: Analytical Report, Wave 5*, p. 16; MSI, *MISTI Task 1: Desk Review of Stabilization Resources and References*, p. 25; senior USAID official, SIGAR interview, August 15, 2016; MSI, *Community Development Program: Final Performance Evaluation*, p. 15; Fishstein and Wilder, *Winning Hearts and Minds*, p. 47.
968. Dressler, *Counterinsurgency in Helmand*, p. 37.
969. Chretien, SIGAR interview, July 22, 2016. The system and database was the Biometric Automated Toolset and Handheld Interagency Identity Detection Equipment (BATS-HIIDE).
970. Wesa, SIGAR interview, January 7, 2017.
971. Field director for an implementing partner, SIGAR interview, May 9, 2017.
972. U.S. Embassy Kabul, "Using Cash for Work," Kabul 000666 cable, February 3, 2011.
973. See, for example, Eli Berman et al., "Do Working Men Rebel: Insurgency and Unemployment in Afghanistan, Iraq, and the Philippines," *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, vol. 55, no. 4, p. 496; Rebecca Holmes et al., *What is the evidence on the impact of employment creation on stability and poverty reduction in fragile states: a systematic review*, Overseas Development Institute, May 2013, p. 22; Mercy Corps, *Does Youth Employment Build Stability: Evidence from an Impact Evaluation of Vocational Training in Afghanistan*, January 2015, p. 20; Christopher Cramer, *Unemployment and Participation in Violence*, World Bank, November 16, 2010, p. 2; Antonio Giustozzi and Niamatullah Ibrahim, *Thirty Years of Conflict: Drivers of Anti-Government Mobilization in Afghanistan, 1978–2011*, AREU, January 2012, pp. 31–32; Berman et al., "Modest, Secure and Informed," p. 515. Other types of economic interventions may be more effective. For example, one recent study from Kandahar suggests that a combination of vocational training and cash transfers reduced support for political violence six to nine months later, but providing only one or the other did not. Mercy Corps, *Can Economic Interventions Reduce Violence? Impacts of Vocational Training and Cash Transfers on Youth Support for Political Violence in Afghanistan*, February 2018.
974. *FM 3-24, Counterinsurgency*, 2006, chapter 1, p. 3.
975. Ambassador Karl Eikenberry, testimony before the Senate Foreign Affairs Committee, hearing on "The New Afghanistan Strategy: The View from the Ground," December 9, 2009, electronic p. 8.
976. Andrew Exum, *Hearts and Minds in Afghanistan: Explaining the Absence of Victory*, French Institute of International Relations (IFRI), 2011, p. 7; Sarah Ladbury, *Testing Hypotheses on Radicalisation in Afghanistan: Why Do Men Join the Taliban and Hizb-I Islami?: How Much Do Local Communities Support them?*, 2009, p. 7.
977. Giustozzi and Ibrahim, *Thirty Years of Conflict*, p. 32. Ambassador Eikenberry often observed, for example, that "wherever the roads end, that's where the Taliban begins," a sentiment explicitly embraced by President Bush. *NPR*, Interview with Karl Eikenberry, November 20, 2006; President George W. Bush, "Remarks on the Global War on Terror," American Enterprise Institute, February 15, 2007.
978. Karimi, SIGAR interview, January 16, 2017. Secretary of State Clinton likewise wrote, "If the government in Kabul could build more credibility with its citizens, deliver services, and administer justice fairly and effectively, it would help undercut the appeal of insurgency." Hillary Clinton, *Hard Choices* (New York, NY: Simon & Shuster, 2014), p. 156.
979. Antonio Giustozzi, "Hearts, Minds, and the Barrel of a Gun: The Taliban's Shadow Government," *PRISM*, vol. 3, no. 2, p. 80; Florian Weigand, "Afghanistan's Taliban—Legitimate Jihadists or Coercive Extremists?" *Journal of Intervention and Statebuilding*, vol. 1, no. 3, p. 375; Carl Forsberg, *The Taliban's Campaign for Kandahar*, p. 33; USAID official, SIGAR interview, December 7, 2016.
980. Wais Barmak, SIGAR interview, January 17, 2017; Mangal, SIGAR interview, March 3, 2017; Safullah Baran, SIGAR interview, February 18, 2017; Crowley, SIGAR interview, August 3, 2016. One academic study suggests that providing aid

- in environments where insurgents could freely coerce communities only made the population less able and likely to ally with the government, given the retribution they faced for doing so. Christoph Zürcher, “What Do We (Not) Know About Development Aid and Violence,” p. 516. A U.S. Embassy Kabul cable, recently declassified at SIGAR’s request, documented this dynamic in Marjah in May 2010, shortly after clearing operations there. Fifty-nine percent of residents interviewed believed the Taliban would return to Marjah after Operation Moshtarak concluded, and 71 percent wanted ISAF forces to leave. Another declassified cable notes that some of the population of Nawa planned to refrain from voting because they were waiting to see whether the security improvements brought about by ISAF and Afghan forces would last. U.S. Embassy Kabul, “Marjah: Reports of Civilian Exodus Exaggerated, but Security Constrains Residents and Officials,” State cable 001644 (declassified by State on April 28, 2017, at SIGAR’s request), May 7, 2010; U.S. Embassy Kabul, “After the Taliban: High Expectations in Helmand’s Nawa District,” Kabul 002261 cable (declassified by State on April 28, 2017, at SIGAR’s request), August 7, 2009.
981. Other scholars have gone one step further to argue that improving service delivery is not even necessary to defeat an insurgency, and instead, counterinsurgents need only accommodate local elites and apply enough brute force to coerce both communities and insurgents. See, for example, Jaqueline L. Hazelton, “The ‘Hearts and Minds’ Fallacy,” *International Security*, vol. 42, no. 1 (2017), pp. 80–113.
982. Senior U.S. official, SIGAR interview, September 16, 2016. According to research by Antonio Giustozzi, by 2009 Taliban judges were present in most districts where the group operated, and the Taliban judiciary was highly institutionalized. Antonio Giustozzi, “Hearts, Minds, and the Barrel of a Gun,” p. 74.
983. Senior USAID official, SIGAR interview, November 18, 2016.
984. The study also found that poor service delivery can undermine people’s perceptions of government and be destabilizing when the rules and patterns of resource distribution are perceived to be unfair. Sturge, Mallett, Hagen-Zanker, and Slater, *Tracking livelihoods, service delivery and governance: panel survey findings*, p. viii.
985. Eikenberry, “The Limits of Counterinsurgency Doctrine in Afghanistan: the Other Side of COIN,” pp. 66–67; Thomas P. Cavanna, *Hubris, Self-Interest, and America’s Failed War in Afghanistan* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2015), p. 135.
986. Astri Suhrke, “Exogenous State-building: the contradictions of the international project in Afghanistan,” in *Rule of Law in Afghanistan*, ed. Whit Mason and Martin Krygier (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp. 9, 13–14. Granted, as Suhrke notes, under the circumstances, options were limited, and service delivery was the only pitch the coalition could help the government make as a basis for its legitimacy. Invoking Islam was politically untenable, and invoking nationalism to address outsider threats was counterproductive, as the coalition was the outsider and most likely candidate for nationalistic ire. Suhrke, *When More Is Less*, p. 153.
987. Esmati, SIGAR interview, December 12, 2016.
988. MSI, *Stability in Key Areas (SIKA) Program Final Performance Evaluation*, p. 20; Farid Mamundzai, SIGAR interview, December 29, 2016; Beath, Christia, and Enikolopov, “The National Solidarity Programme,” p. 310.
989. Brown, *The U.S. Surge and Afghan Local Governance*, p. 4.
990. SIGAR, *Corruption in Conflict*, p. 4.
991. Frances Z. Brown, “Bureaucracy Does Its Thing, Again,” *The American Interest*, vol. 8, no. 2 (2012), pp. 39–40.
992. Fishstein and Wilder, *Winning Hearts and Minds*, p. 62.
993. Chandrasekaran, *Little America*, pp. 165–166; Eikenberry, “The Limits of Counterinsurgency Doctrine in Afghanistan: the Other Side of COIN,” pp. 68–70; Coll, *Directorate S*, pp. 397, 491.
994. Chretien, SIGAR interview, July 22, 2016; Chandrasekaran, *Little America*, p. 168.
995. Ehsan Zia, SIGAR interview, January 30, 2017.
996. Chretien, SIGAR interview, July 22, 2016.
997. Mujib Mashal, “After Karzai,” *The Atlantic*, July/August 2014.
998. Senior U.S. official, SIGAR interview, September 13, 2016.
999. Chandrasekaran, *Little America*, pp. 46, 139–140; Mashal, “After Karzai;” U.S. Embassy Kabul, “Karzai Visit to Helmand,” Kabul 004187 cable (declassified by State on April 28, 2017, at SIGAR’s request), January 13, 2010.
1000. State, “Reflections on Afghanistan: Lessons for Future Conflict and Stabilization Operations,” p. 4.
1001. Scott Horton, “Afghanistan: Six Questions for Thomas Barfield,” *Harper’s*, May 21, 2010.
1002. Fishstein and Wilder, *Winning Hearts and Minds*, p. 59.
1003. Nasr, *The Dispensable Nation*, p. 20; stabilization implementing partner chief of party, SIGAR interview, August 15, 2016; senior U.S. official, SIGAR interview, September 13, 2016; senior USAID official, SIGAR interview, December 4, 2016.
1004. Vanda Felbab-Brown, SIGAR interview, January 13, 2017.
1005. MSI, *Community Outreach and Engagement*, p. 27; Fishstein and Wilder, *Winning Hearts and Minds*, p. 59; Massoom, SIGAR interview, March 10, 2017.
1006. Mamundzai, SIGAR interview, December 29, 2016.

1007. MSI, *Community Outreach and Engagement*, p. 38; Caerus Associates, *The Stability Analysis Methodology in Afghanistan*, pp. 25–26.
1008. A 2016 study commissioned by the Danish government on lessons learned in Afghanistan came to the same conclusion: “Based on the experience of Afghanistan this study suggests that future stabilization interventions should take their starting point in the local context and from there seek to outline a possible political process that can lead the country away from fragility and toward stability. Only on the basis of such an analysis can meaningful decisions be made about the specific combination of international instruments and the degree to which these instruments need to go hand-in-hand in the field in order to succeed.” Likewise, the study found that a key lesson was that transforming political development in fragile states is much harder and takes much longer than had been assumed, and that future efforts should be much less ambitious. Andersen, *Afghanistan Lessons Identified: 2001–2014, Part I*, pp. 10, 82–83.
1009. Karimi, SIGAR interview, January 16, 2017. See also, Vanda Felbab-Brown et al., “Second Wind: Taliban Coercion and Governance in Afghanistan,” in *Militants, Criminals, and Warlords: The Challenge of Local Governance in an Age of Disorder*, (Washington: Brookings Institution Press, 2018), pp. 39–42.
1010. Giustozzi, “Hearts, Minds, and the Barrel of a Gun: The Taliban’s Shadow Government,” p. 80; Weigand, “Afghanistan’s Taliban–Legitimate Jihadists or Coercive Extremists?,” p. 375; Forsberg, *The Taliban’s Campaign for Kandahar*, p. 33; USAID official, SIGAR interview, December 7, 2016; former DOD advisor, SIGAR interview, April 20, 2017; senior U.S. official, SIGAR interview, September 16, 2016.
1011. USAID official, SIGAR interview, October 7, 2016.
1012. Mamundzai, SIGAR interview, December 29, 2016; Karimi, SIGAR interview, January 16, 2017; Wesa, SIGAR interview, January 7, 2017; Massoom, SIGAR interview, March 10, 2017; Latif Nasiri, SIGAR interview, March 20, 2017; USAID official, SIGAR interview, October 7, 2016; senior U.S. official, SIGAR interview, September 16, 2016; Anthony H. Cordesman, *The Afghan War: Reshaping American Strategy and Finding Ways to Win*, CSIS, 2016, p. 40; Forbes, “The Significance of Taliban Shari’a Courts in Afghanistan,” p. 14; Giustozzi and Ibrahimi, *Thirty Years of Conflict*, p. 60; Woodward, *Obama’s Wars*, p. 243; Vanda Felbab-Brown et al., “Second Wind,” in *Militants, Criminals, and Warlords*, p. 41.
1013. Mangal, SIGAR interview, March 3, 2017.
1014. Rubin, SIGAR interview, February 17, 2017. One former USAID official likewise observed, “The simplest thing the Taliban was providing was dispute resolution and we built everything else. We built courthouses instead of mobile conflict resolution mechanisms. We didn’t understand what was needed.” Former USAID official, SIGAR interview, October 18, 2016. More recently, State, USAID, and DOD have cautioned against “promoting formal national and criminal justice-focused institutions based on Western domestic experiences,” and stressed the importance of supporting informal justice mechanisms, “such as local, tribal, religious, or other non-government justice institutions.” State, USAID, and DOD, *Stabilization Assistance Review*, p. 15.
1015. Noah Coburn, *Informal Justice and the International Community in Afghanistan*, USIP, 2013, p. 15.
1016. Coburn, *Informal Justice and the International Community in Afghanistan*, p. 86; M. Cherif Bassiouni and Daniel Rothenberg, “An Assessment of Justice Sector and Rule of Law Reform in Afghanistan and the Need for a Comprehensive Plan,” in *The Rule of Law in Afghanistan*, 2007, pp. 16, 36; Suhrke, *When More Is Less*, p. 200. There were contentious debates among Afghan officials, donors, and civil society about the wisdom of promoting TDR, the norms of which regularly led to human rights violations. As often occurred during the reconstruction, there was tension between short- and long-term efforts to stabilize these areas, as short-term gains often created long-term problems.
1017. State, *U.S. Government Rule of Law Strategy for Afghanistan*, September 2009, p. 1; Coburn, *Informal Justice and the International Community in Afghanistan*, p. 31.
1018. Giustozzi, “Hearts, Minds, and the Barrel of a Gun,” p. 78.
1019. Mamundzai, SIGAR interview, December 29, 2016; Miakhel, SIGAR interview, February 7, 2017.
1020. Former senior USAID official, SIGAR interview, August 15, 2016.
1021. Rubin, SIGAR interview, February 17, 2017.
1022. SIGAR, *Rule of Law in Afghanistan: U.S. Agencies Lack a Strategy and Cannot Fully Determine the Effectiveness of Programs Costing More Than \$1 Billion*, SIGAR 15-68-AR, July 2015, pp. 30–34. Total informal rule of law spending may be closer to \$50 million, as the \$47 million Afghanistan Rule of Law Program only partially focused on informal rule of law.
1023. State, *U.S. Government Rule of Law Strategy for Afghanistan*, p. 9. It is worth noting that one of ASOP’s central objectives was to resolve community disputes through TDR, but ASOP was technically a \$35 million governance program, not a Rule of Law program. Likewise CCI and SIKa conducted TDR training and activities, though only for a fraction of their projects.
1024. Sibghatullah, SIGAR interview, December 5, 2016.
1025. SIGAR, *Rule of Law in Afghanistan*, SIGAR 15-68-AR, p. 17.
1026. State, *U.S. Government Rule of Law Strategy for Afghanistan*, p. 2.
1027. Sayara Research, *Performance Evaluation of the Rule of Law Stabilization–Informal*

- Component Program*, prepared under contract for USAID, May 2014, pp. 6, 49–50; Checchi and Co., *Final Evaluation Report: Rule of Law Stabilization Program—Informal Component*, prepared under contract for USAID, April 2014, pp. 35–36.
1028. For more on the program’s mixed results and the evolution of rule of law programming in Afghanistan more broadly, see Geoffrey Swenson, “Why U.S. Efforts to Promote Rule of Law in Afghanistan Failed,” *International Security*, vol. 42, no 1 (Summer 2017), pp. 114–151.
1029. USAID, “Fact Sheet: Rule of Law Stabilization Program—Informal Justice Sector Component,” October 1, 2013. Specifically, the program actually employed sharia to emphasize the suitability of TDR to resolve civil aspects of disputes (usually involving some kind of financial restitution or “restorative” justice), but also emphasized the importance of referring criminal aspects of disputes that might involve punishment to the formal justice system. (According to political anthropologist Noah Coburn, “Informal justice mechanisms tend to apply restorative justice, as opposed to the retributive or punitive justice decisions obtained through most formal court proceedings.”) It was exactly the kind of hybrid effort recommended by UNDP, the World Bank, and USIP. See Coburn, *Informal Justice and the International Community in Afghanistan*, 2013, p. 11; Suhrke, *When More Is Less*, pp. 213–217.
1030. Saftullah Baran, SIGAR interview, February 18, 2017.
1031. Senior USAID official, SIGAR interview, November 23, 2016.
1032. Stabilization implementing partner deputy chief of party, SIGAR interview, August 30, 2016; USAID stabilization contractor, SIGAR interview, September 27, 2016; USAID stabilization official, SIGAR interview, October 7, 2016; senior USAID official, SIGAR interview, November 10, 2016.
1033. Senior USAID official, SIGAR interview, October 24, 2016.
1034. MSI, *MISTI Task 1: Desk Review of Stabilization Resources and References*, p. 14; Caerus Associates, *The Stability Analysis Methodology in Afghanistan*, pp. 23–24; Barmak, SIGAR interview, January 17, 2017; Esmati, SIGAR interview, December 12, 2016.
1035. MSI, *USAID Stabilization Unit Afghanistan Performance Management Plan Update, FY 2012–2015*, May 2014, pp. 21–22.
1036. MSI, *Community Outreach and Engagement*, pp. 3, 22; stabilization implementing partner deputy chief of party, SIGAR interview, August 30, 2016.
1037. Stabilization implementing partner chief of party, SIGAR interview, August 15, 2016; stabilization implementing partner deputy chief of party, SIGAR interview, August 30, 2016.
1038. Rubin, SIGAR interview, February 17, 2017.
1039. MSI, *Stability in Key Areas (SIKA) Program Final Performance Evaluation*, pp. 3–4; MSI, *USAID Stabilization Unit Afghanistan Performance Management Plan Update, FY 2012–2015*, May 2014, p. 17.
1040. Mamundzai, SIGAR interview, December 29, 2016.
1041. Fishstein and Wilder, *Winning Hearts and Minds*, p. 47; Ashraf Nasiri, SIGAR interview, December 11, 2016; Fidai, SIGAR interview, January 10, 2017; Mamundzai, SIGAR interview, December 29, 2016; Esmati, SIGAR interview, December 12, 2016.
1042. Brown, *Rethinking Afghan Local Governance Aid After Transition*, p. 5; stabilization implementing partner deputy chief of party, SIGAR interview, August 30, 2016; senior USAID official, SIGAR interview, October 24, 2016.
1043. Fishstein and Wilder, *Winning Hearts and Minds*, pp. 3, 31–34.
1044. USAID stabilization contractor, SIGAR interview, September 27, 2016.
1045. Beath, Christia, and Enikolopov, *Randomized Impact Evaluation of Afghanistan’s National Solidarity Programme*, 2013, pp. 71–73. Perceived economic well-being also increased in NSP villages. Beath, Christia, and Enikolopov, *Winning Hearts and Minds Through Development*, p. 15.
1046. Caerus Associates, *The Stability Analysis Methodology in Afghanistan*, p. 27.
1047. USAID stabilization official, SIGAR interview, September 9, 2016; military planner, SIGAR interview, November 3, 2016; senior USAID official, SIGAR interview, November 18, 2016.
1048. Former USAID official, SIGAR interview, October 18, 2016; Ashraf Nasiri, SIGAR interview, December 11, 2016; Babakarkheil, SIGAR interview, December 29, 2016; Esmati, SIGAR interview, December 12, 2016.
1049. USAID stabilization official, SIGAR interview, September 9, 2016; senior USAID official, SIGAR interview, October 24, 2016.
1050. USAID stabilization official, SIGAR interview, September 9, 2016; Mamundzai, SIGAR interview, December 29, 2016.
1051. This was especially true given that “extending the reach” often amounted to a government official making a single visit to a community and assuming this would establish an enduring government linkage with that community. For more, see Brown, *Rethinking Afghan Local Governance Aid After Transition*, pp. 8–10.
1052. USAID stabilization official, SIGAR interview, September 9, 2016.
1053. Former USAID official, SIGAR interview, October 18, 2016.
1054. Jabar Naimee, SIGAR interview, March 6, 2017.
1055. MSI, *Stability in Key Areas (SIKA) Program Final Performance Evaluation*, p. 29; USAID stabilization contractor, SIGAR interview, September 27, 2016; senior USAID official, SIGAR interview, October 24, 2016; stabilization implementing partner deputy chief of party,

- SIGAR interview, August 30, 2016; USAID official, SIGAR interview, August 12, 2016.
1056. Former USAID official, SIGAR interview, October 18, 2016.
1057. Senior U.S. official, SIGAR interview, September 13, 2016; senior USAID official, SIGAR interview, November 10, 2016.
1058. Former USAID official, SIGAR interview, October 18, 2016; senior USAID official, SIGAR interview, October 24, 2016; senior USAID official, SIGAR interview, November 18, 2016; Woodward, *Obama's Wars*, pp. 238–239.
1059. The White House, *White Paper of the Interagency Policy Group's Report on U.S. Policy toward Afghanistan and Pakistan*, March 2009, p. 2.
1060. Embassy Kabul and USFOR-A, *Integrated Civilian-Military Campaign Plan*, 2009, pp. 3, 11; Chandrasekaran, *Little America*, p. 107.
1061. Nasr, *The Dispensable Nation*, p. 26.
1062. State, “The President’s Announcement on the Way Forward in Afghanistan and Pakistan: Text of the Speech, Fact Sheet and Questions and Answers,” State 123222 cable, December 2, 2009.
1063. Former USAID official, SIGAR interview, October 18, 2016.
1064. State, *Afghanistan and Pakistan Regional Stabilization Strategy*, February 24, 2010.
1065. Former USAID official, SIGAR interview, October 18, 2016; U.S. Mission to Afghanistan, *U.S. Foreign Assistance for Afghanistan*, annex VII, p. 10. By 2012, the embassy also released a gender strategy to “mainstream gender concerns into all policies and programs” and promote “gender equitable programming” across all portfolios. U.S. Embassy Kabul, *Gender Strategy*, Interagency Gender Working Group, September 2012, pp. 2, 10.
1066. State, *Afghanistan and Pakistan Regional Stabilization Strategy*, February 24, 2010, p. 7.
1067. Former USAID official, SIGAR interview, October 18, 2016.
1068. MSI, *Stability in Key Areas (SIKA) Program Final Performance Evaluation*, pp. 1, 27.
1069. State, “Reflections on Afghanistan: Lessons for Future Conflict and Stabilization Operations,” p. 4; Felbab-Brown, “Slip-Sliding on a Yellow Brick Road: Stabilization Efforts in Afghanistan,” p. 11.
1070. Chretien, SIGAR interview, July 22, 2016.
1071. USAID stabilization contractor, SIGAR interview, September 27, 2016.
1072. McQuillan, SIGAR interview, July 21, 2016; Massoom, SIGAR interview, March 10, 2017.
1073. USAID official, SIGAR interview, August 12, 2016.
1074. Senior USAID official, SIGAR interview, August 15, 2016.
1075. Chandrasekaran, *Little America*, p. 191.
1076. Senior USAID official, SIGAR interview, November 23, 2016.
1077. Senior USAID official, SIGAR interview, January 25, 2017.
1078. The White House, *White Paper of the Interagency Policy Group's Report on U.S. Policy toward Afghanistan and Pakistan*, March 2009, p. 2.
1079. Embassy Kabul and USFOR-A, *Integrated Civilian-Military Campaign Plan*, 2009, p. vi; McChrystal, *Commander's Initial Assessment*, chapter 2, pp. 19–20.
1080. A 2016 Danish government-funded study on lessons learned from the effort in Afghanistan noted that the myriad challenges posed by working in such insecure areas raised the question whether more would have been achieved if the stabilization effort had been focused in more secure areas. Andersen, *Afghanistan Lessons Identified: 2001–2014, Part I*, p. 57.
1081. MSI, *Stability in Key Areas (SIKA) Program Final Performance Evaluation*, pp. 29–30.
1082. Senior USAID official, SIGAR interview, November 18, 2016; stabilization implementing partner deputy chief of party, SIGAR interview, August 30, 2016; Barmak, SIGAR interview, January 17, 2017; Esmati, SIGAR interview, December 12, 2016; Fishstein and Wilder, *Winning Hearts and Minds*, pp. 42–43.
1083. Senior USAID official, SIGAR interview, June 28, 2016.
1084. Stabilization implementing partner deputy chief of party, SIGAR interview, August 30, 2016; USAID stabilization contractor, SIGAR interview, September 27, 2016; MSI, *Stability in Key Areas (SIKA) Program Final Performance Evaluation*, p. 3; Fishstein and Wilder, *Winning Hearts and Minds*, p. 37.
1085. Senior U.S. official, SIGAR interview, September 13, 2016.
1086. Senior USAID official, SIGAR interview, August 15, 2016.
1087. McQuillan, SIGAR interview, July 21, 2016; Barmak, SIGAR interview, January 17, 2017; Mangal, SIGAR interview, March 3, 2017.
1088. USAID, *OTI Afghanistan Strategy: 2012–2015*, June 2013; David Axe, “U.S. Tests ‘Ink Spot’ Strategy in Afghanistan,” *Washington Times*, November 12, 2009.
1089. Senior USAID official, SIGAR interview, December 4, 2016; senior USAID official, SIGAR interview, November 18, 2016; Mangal, SIGAR interview, March 3, 2017. For a discussion of the competing theories that advocate for focusing on the least stable areas first versus expanding ink spots from semi-stable areas, see ISAF, *ISAF Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) Handbook*, Edition 4, March 2009, pp. 16–17.
1090. See, for example, Douglas Saltmarshe and Abhilash Medhi, *Local Governance in Afghanistan: A View from the Ground*, AREU, June 2011, pp. 39–40.
1091. MSI, *Stability in Key Areas (SIKA) Program Final Performance Evaluation*, p. 2; USAID stabilization contractor, SIGAR interview, September 27, 2016; USAID stabilization official, SIGAR interview, October 7, 2016.

1092. Senior USAID official, SIGAR interview, October 24, 2016.
1093. Senior U.S. official, SIGAR interview, September 13, 2016.
1094. Crowley, SIGAR interview, August 3, 2016; USAID stabilization contractor, SIGAR interview, September 27, 2016.
1095. Eli Berman, Joseph Felner, and Jacob Shapiro, "Constructive COIN: How Development Can Fight Radicals," *Foreign Affairs*, June 1, 2010.
1096. Former DOD advisor, SIGAR interview, April 20, 2017.
1097. Joel Vowell, SIGAR interview, March 21, 2017.
1098. Nasr, *The Dispensable Nation*, p. 26; McQuillan, SIGAR interview, July 21, 2016; Crowley, SIGAR interview, August 3, 2016; USAID official, SIGAR interview, August 12, 2016.
1099. USAID official, SIGAR interview, October 7, 2016.
1100. USAID stabilization contractor, SIGAR interview, September 27, 2016; senior USAID official, SIGAR interview, November 10, 2016; senior USAID official, SIGAR interview, November 18, 2016.
1101. Barmak, SIGAR interview, January 17, 2017; Mangal, SIGAR interview, March 3, 2017. For more on the deterioration of security since transition began, see Thomas Ruttig, "More violent, more widespread: Trends in Afghan security in 2017," Afghanistan Analysts Network, January 29, 2018.
1102. Woodward, *Obama's Wars*, p. 150.
1103. Forsberg, *Politics and Power in Kandahar*, p. 23.
1104. Civ-mil planner at Embassy Kabul, SIGAR interview, November 4, 2016.
1105. Fishstein and Wilder, *Winning Hearts and Minds*, p. 48; Babakarkheil, SIGAR interview, December 29, 2016; Miakhel, SIGAR interview, February 7, 2017.
1106. Vowell, SIGAR interview, March 21, 2017. There were also, however, examples of how a solid understanding of local political dynamics enabled programs to be more effective. Recognizing the district governor's corruption and ties to the insurgency's shadow government was one of the main drivers of the insurgency in Sayadabad District of Wardak Province, ASI-E chose to partner with traditional elders in the area instead. DAI, *Final Report: Afghanistan Stabilization Initiative-East*, pp. 29–30.
1107. USAID stabilization contractor, SIGAR interview, September 27, 2016.
1108. See, for example, Jacob Kipp, Lester Grau, Karl Prinslow, and Don Smith, "The Human Terrain System: A CORDS for the 21st Century," *Military Review*, September/October 2006; Clifton Green, "Turnaround: The Untold Story of the Human Terrain System," *Joint Forces Quarterly*, Third Quarter, 2015.
1109. See, for example, Vanessa Gezari, "The Human Terrain System Sought to Transform the Army from Within," *Newsweek*, August 16, 2013; Vanessa Gezari, *The Tender Soldier: A True Story of War and Sacrifice*, (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2013); Christopher J. Lamb et al., *Human Terrain Teams: An Organizational Innovation for Sociocultural Knowledge in Irregular Warfare*, (Washington, DC: Institute of World Politics Press, 2013).
1110. See, for example, Michael Davies, "The Truth About Human Terrain Teams: An Evidence-Based Response to Gian Gentile," *E-International Relations*, 2013; Christopher Sims, "Academics in Foxholes: the Life and Death of the Human Terrain System," *Foreign Affairs*, February 4, 2016; Ryan Evans, "The Seven Deadly Sins of the Human Terrain System," *Foreign Policy Research Institute*, 2015; Christopher Lamb et al., "The Way Ahead for Human Terrain Teams," *Joint Forces Quarterly*, Third Quarter, 2013; David B. Edwards, "COIN as a Cultural System," *Small Wars Journal*, 2010.
1111. One of the most well-known clarion calls for the military to better understand this kind of information is found in Flynn, Pottinger, and Batchelor, *Fixing Intel: A Blueprint for Making Intelligence Relevant in Afghanistan*, January 2010. Other programs were established to assist in the effort, including the Atmospheric Program-Afghanistan (APA), which ran from 2009 to 2014 and sent Afghan contractors into communities to document the contents of sermons in mosques and routine conversations held in public spaces. APA provided an atmospheric or "talk-of-the-town" perspective that anecdotally highlighted local perceptions about the Afghan government, Afghan forces, the coalition, insurgent groups, and similar topics. According to Mike Williams, the former director of the Civ-Mil Integration Program at ISAF headquarters from 2012–2013, APA employed more than 600 Afghan contractors at a time. These contractors lived and worked in almost every province and wrote nearly 150,000 reports at an approximate cost of \$150 million. The unclassified reports were then geotagged, uploaded to a database, and distributed to the coalition. Mike Williams, SIGAR interview, February 27, 2018.
1112. Nasr, *The Dispensable Nation*, p. 21.
1113. Former USAID official, SIGAR interview, January 25, 2017.
1114. Senior USAID official, SIGAR interview, January 25, 2017.
1115. Karimi, SIGAR interview, January 16, 2017.
1116. U.S. Army officer, 2nd Stryker Cavalry Regiment, SIGAR interview, May 5, 2017.
1117. Senior USAID official, SIGAR interview, November 23, 2016.
1118. Eikenberry, "The Limits of Counterinsurgency Doctrine in Afghanistan: the Other Side of COIN," p. 64.
1119. USAID, *Lessons Learned: USAID Perspectives*, p. 12; McQuillan, SIGAR interview, July 21, 2016; USAID official, SIGAR interview, August 12, 2016; USAID stabilization official, SIGAR interview, September 9, 2016; senior U.S. official,

- SIGAR interview, September 13, 2016; USAID stabilization contractor, SIGAR interview, September 27, 2016; USAID stabilization official, SIGAR interview, October 7, 2016; senior USAID official, SIGAR interview, October 24, 2016; Military planner, SIGAR interview, November 3, 2016; senior USAID official, SIGAR interview, November 18, 2016; Massoom, SIGAR interview, March 10, 2017.
1120. Senior USAID official, SIGAR interview, August 15, 2016.
1121. U.S. Mission to Afghanistan, *U.S. Foreign Assistance for Afghanistan*, annex VII, p. 10.
1122. DAI, *Preliminary Impact Assessment of ASI-East in Four Districts in Eastern Afghanistan*, p. 27.
1123. USAID, *Lessons Learned: USAID Perspectives*, p. 1.
1124. Crowley, SIGAR interview, August 3, 2016.
1125. USAID official, SIGAR interview, December 7, 2016.
1126. Fishstein and Wilder, *Winning Hearts and Minds*, p. 60; Social Impact, *Final Performance Evaluation of USAID/OTI Community Cohesion Initiative in Afghanistan*, p. 21.
1127. Social Impact, *Final Performance Evaluation of USAID/OTI Community Cohesion Initiative in Afghanistan*, p. xii.
1128. Antonio Giustozzi and Ashley Jackson, *Talking to the Other Side: Humanitarian Engagement with the Taliban in Afghanistan*, Humanitarian Policy Group, December 2012, p. 22; former USAID official, SIGAR interview, June 1, 2017.
1129. U.S. Embassy Kabul, "Nawa: Assassinations Cast a Pall Over Recent Gains," Kabul 003727 cable (declassified by State on April 28, 2017, at SIGAR's request), November 18, 2009; Mangal, SIGAR interview, March 3, 2017; Azami, "Kandahar: Assassination capital of Afghanistan."
1130. Christoph Zürcher, "What Do We (Not) Know About Development Aid and Violence," pp. 508, 512.
1131. Empirical Studies of Conflict Project analysis. Data from Andrew C. Shaver and Austin L. Wright, "Data on Combatant Activity During Afghanistan War Advance Scientific Investigation of Insurgency," Technical Report 2017.
1132. U.S. Embassy Kabul, "After the Taliban: High Expectations in Helmand's Nawa District," Kabul 002261 cable (declassified by State on April 28, 2017, at SIGAR's request), August 7, 2009; U.S. Embassy Kabul, "The Fight for Marjah is Just Beginning," Kabul 000763 cable (declassified by State on April 28, 2017, at SIGAR's request), March 3, 2010; senior U.S. official, SIGAR interview, September 13, 2016; Chretien, SIGAR interview, July 22, 2016; Egel et al., *Investing in the Fight*, pp. 268–275; Dressler, *Counterinsurgency in Helmand*, p. 38; Flynn, Pottinger, and Batchelor, *Fixing Intel*, p. 13.
1133. Senior U.S. official, SIGAR interview, September 13, 2016; Chretien, SIGAR interview, July 22, 2016.
1134. Chandrasekaran, *Little America*, p. 70; Fishstein and Wilder, *Winning Hearts and Minds*, p. 60.
1135. Andrew Wilder, SIGAR interview, January 25, 2017.
1136. Chretien, SIGAR interview, July 22, 2016.
1137. Mujib Mashal, "Marines Return to Helmand Province for a Job They Thought Was Done," *New York Times*, April 29, 2017.
1138. Chandrasekaran, *Little America*, p. 70; Egel et al., *Investing in the Fight*, p. 267; *FM 3-24, Counterinsurgency*, 2006, chapter 1, p. 13. For the operation in Marjah, a sub-district of Nad Ali (population 88,000), coalition nations contributed more than 15,000 troops to the operation, including three battalions from the United States.
1139. Wesley Morgan, *Afghanistan Order of Battle, 2009–2012*, Institute for the Study of War, pp. 77, 89, 203.
1140. Chretien, SIGAR interview, July 22, 2016.
1141. Chandrasekaran, *Little America*, p. 71.
1142. Mashal, "Marines Return to Helmand Province for a Job They Thought Was Done."
1143. Afghan Hand for VSO, SIGAR interview, September 7, 2016.
1144. State, USAID, and DOD, *Stabilization Assistance Review*, p. 2.
1145. State, USAID, and DOD, *Stabilization Assistance Review*, pp. 2, 6–7.
1146. State, USAID, and DOD, *Stabilization Assistance Review*, p. 8.
1147. State, USAID, and DOD, *Stabilization Assistance Review*, p. 11. Similarly, as the UK government notes, "even when there are military-led and implemented tasks in stabilisation (e.g., carrying out patrols to bolster local security), their application should occur in the context of an operationally civilian-led, politically-engaged, stabilisation approach." UK Stabilisation Unit, *The UK Approach to Stabilisation*, 2014, p. 5.
1148. SIGAR's CERP audit similarly recommends that DOD develop measures of effectiveness for CERP. SIGAR, *Commander's Emergency Response Program: DOD Has Not Determined the Full Extent to Which Its Program and Projects, Totaling \$1.5 Billion in Obligations, Achieved Their Objectives and Goals in Afghanistan from Fiscal Years 2009 through 2013*, SIGAR 18-45-AR, April 2018.
1149. For an overview of how cultural competency is already atrophying within DOD as it did after Vietnam, see Ben Connable, "Human Terrain System is Dead, Long Live . . . What? Building and Sustaining Military Cultural Competence in the Aftermath of the Human Terrain System," *Military Review*, January/February 2018.
1150. For more on the AFPAK Hands, see Capt. James Hamblet, "AFPAK Hands (APH) Program," Joint Staff J-5, Pakistan Afghanistan Coordination Cell, n.d.; U.S. Army, "The Afghanistan-Pakistan Hands Program," February 11, 2014.
1151. State, USAID, and DOD, *Stabilization Assistance Review*, pp. 12–13.

1152. For detailed discussions of which civilian skills May be necessary in such a standby component and the difficulty of civilian staffing in contingency operations more generally, see Terrence K. Kelly et al., *Stabilization and Reconstruction Staffing: Developing U.S. Civilian Personnel Capabilities*, RAND, 2008; Hans Binnendijk and Patrick M. Cronin, *Civilian Surge: Key to Complex Operations*, National Defense University, 2009.
1153. A good example of this kind of reform is the Foreign Aid Transparency and Accountability Act of 2016, which requires agencies to focus on outcomes rather than outputs, devote more programmatic resources to M&E, and be more transparent about the efficacy of their foreign assistance programs. See Adva Saldinger, “U.S. Congress approves long-sought Foreign Aid Transparency and Accountability Act,” *Devex*, July 7, 2016.
1154. Reconstruction and Stabilization Civilian Management Act of 2008, Pub. L. No. 110-417 (22 USC 2734).
1155. Vowell, SIGAR interview, March 21, 2017; Bill Roggio, “Afghan, U.S. Forces Hunt al Qaeda, Taliban in northeast,” *Long War Journal*, August 2, 2010; Combined Joint Task Force-101 (CJTF-101), *Comprehensive Plan for USG Support to Kumar Province 2009–2012*, March 2009, pp. 1, 11; Linda Robinson, *One Hundred Victories*, (New York, NY: Public Affairs, 2013), pp. 228–229.
1156. Robinson, *One Hundred Victories*, pp. 228–229; CJTF-101, *Comprehensive Plan for USG Support to Kumar Province 2009–2012*, p. 8; Vowell, SIGAR interview, March 21, 2017.
1157. Field director for an implementing partner, SIGAR interview, May 9, 2017.
1158. Vowell, SIGAR interview, March 21, 2017.
1159. David Kilcullen, *Accidental Guerilla: Fighting Small Wars in the Midst of a Big One* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2011), p. 106.
1160. Kilcullen, *Accidental Guerilla*, p. 106.
1161. Vowell, SIGAR interview, March 21, 2017; field director for an implementing partner, SIGAR interview, May 9, 2017.
1162. Field director for an implementing partner, SIGAR interview, May 9, 2017; DAI, *Preliminary Impact Assessment of ASI-East in Four Districts in Eastern Afghanistan*, pp. 26, 41.
1163. Field director for an implementing partner, SIGAR interview, May 9, 2017.
1164. Field director for an implementing partner, SIGAR interview, May 9, 2017.
1165. Vowell, SIGAR interview, March 21, 2017.
1166. Vowell, SIGAR interview, March 21, 2017.
1167. Greg Jaffe, “U.S. and Afghan forces launch major assault in eastern province of Konar,” *Washington Post*, June 29, 2010.
1168. Jaffe, “U.S. and Afghan forces launch major assault in eastern province of Konar;” Vowell, SIGAR interview, March 21, 2017; Toby Harnden, “Afghanistan: Gen. Petraeus Says U.S. Forces will remain through end of 2014,” December 8, 2010, Telegraph.
1169. DAI, *Preliminary Impact Assessment of ASI-East in Four Districts in Eastern Afghanistan*, p. 43.
1170. Vowell, SIGAR interview, March 21, 2017; USAID official, SIGAR interview, March 24, 2017; field director for an implementing partner, SIGAR interview, May 9, 2017.
1171. USAID official, SIGAR interview, March 24, 2017.
1172. Field director for an implementing partner, SIGAR interview, May 9, 2017.
1173. Field director for an implementing partner, SIGAR interview, May 9, 2017.
1174. Vowell, SIGAR interview, March 21, 2017.
1175. Field director for an implementing partner, SIGAR interview, May 9, 2017.
1176. Vowell, SIGAR interview, March 21, 2017; field director for an implementing partner, SIGAR interview, May 9, 2017.
1177. Field director for an implementing partner, SIGAR interview, May 9, 2017.
1178. DAI, *Preliminary Impact Assessment of ASI-East in Four Districts in Eastern Afghanistan*, p. 52.
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1180. As of February 2012, UNDP programs operating in Marawara included the National Area-Based Development Program and the Disarmament of Illegal Armed Groups program. DAI, *Preliminary Impact Assessment of ASI-East in Four Districts in Eastern Afghanistan*, p. 41.
1181. Field director for an implementing partner, SIGAR interview, May 9, 2017.
1182. DAI, *Preliminary Impact Assessment of ASI-East in Four Districts in Eastern Afghanistan*, p. 48.
1183. Field director for an implementing partner, SIGAR interview, August 30, 2016.
1184. Field director for an implementing partner, SIGAR interview, May 9, 2017.
1185. Field director for an implementing partner, SIGAR interview, May 9, 2017.
1186. Mangal, SIGAR interview, March 3, 2017; McQuillan, SIGAR interview, July 21, 2016; U.S. official, September 13, 2016; Chou, “Does Development Assistance Reduce Violence? Evidence from Afghanistan,” p. 5. One critical form of tangible community cooperation was information sharing by communities with the coalition regarding IED emplacement. Berman et al., “Modest, Secure and Informed,” p. 512.
1187. DAI, *Preliminary Impact Assessment of ASI-East in Four Districts in Eastern Afghanistan*, p. 17; field director for an implementing partner, SIGAR interview, May 9, 2017.
1188. Field director for an implementing partner, SIGAR interview, May 9, 2017.
1189. Field director for an implementing partner, SIGAR interview, May 9, 2017.
1190. Vowell, SIGAR interview, March 21, 2017.
1191. Vowell, SIGAR interview, March 21, 2017.
1192. Operation Strong Eagle II, conducted halfway up the valley a month after Strong Eagle I, was

- quite brief, because the coalition faced very little opposition, engaging in only one small firefight upon landing. Vowell, SIGAR interview, March 21, 2017.
1193. Vowell, SIGAR interview, March 21, 2017.
1194. Vowell, SIGAR interview, March 21, 2017.
1195. Field director for an implementing partner, SIGAR interview, May 9, 2017.
1196. Social Impact, *Final Performance Evaluation of USAID/OTI Community Cohesion Initiative in Afghanistan*, pp. ii, 56.
1197. DAI, *Preliminary Impact Assessment of ASI-East in Four Districts in Eastern Afghanistan*, p. 42.
1198. Morgan, *Afghanistan Order of Battle, 2009–2012*, pp. 5, 21, 27; Morgan, *Afghanistan Order of Battle, 2013*, Institute for the Study of War, pp. 4, 9; Vowell, SIGAR interview, March 21, 2017.
1199. Empirical Studies of Conflict Project analysis. Data from Andrew C. Shaver and Austin L. Wright, “Data on Combatant Activity During Afghanistan War Advance Scientific Investigation of Insurgency,” Technical Report 2017.
1200. DAI, *Preliminary Impact Assessment of ASI-East in Four Districts in Eastern Afghanistan*, p. 18. For more on the steady deterioration of security since transition, as measured by various indicators, see Thomas Ruttig, “More violent, more widespread: Trends in Afghan security in 2017,” Afghanistan Analysts Network, January 29, 2018.
1201. Checchi and Co., *Final Project Evaluation Report for Afghan Civilian Assistance Program*, prepared under contract for USAID, April 2010, p. 2
1202. Checchi and Co., *Final Project Evaluation Report for Afghan Civilian Assistance Program*, p. 12; USAID, “Fact Sheet: Afghan Civilian Assistance Program.”
1203. USAID, “Fact Sheet: Afghan Civilian Assistance Program.” ACAP did not provide assistance to individuals or families adversely affected by fighting between Afghan security forces and insurgents. Checchi and Co., *Final Project Evaluation Report for Afghan Civilian Assistance Program*, p. 11.
1204. Checchi and Co., *Final Report: Afghan Civilian Assistance Program Final Evaluation*, pp. 1, 12–14, 17, 29.
1205. Checchi and Co., *Final Report: Afghan Civilian Assistance Program Final Evaluation*, pp. 22–23.
1206. Senior USAID official, SIGAR interview, December 4, 2016; MSI, *USAID Stabilization Unit Afghanistan: Performance Management Plan, Fiscal Years 2012–15*, June, 2013, p. 7
1207. IRD, *Afghan Civilian Assistance Program II: Final Program Report*, May 2015, p. 41
1208. IRD, *Afghan Civilian Assistance Program II: Final Program Report*, p. 1.
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1210. IRD, *Afghan Civilian Assistance Program II: Final Program Report*, p. 3.
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1214. DOD, *Report on Progress toward Security and Stability in Afghanistan*, June 2009, p. 43
1215. AECOM, *Afghanistan Social Outreach Program: Final Report*, prepared under contract for USAID, January 2012, p. 3
1216. Saltmarshe and Medhi, *Local Governance in Afghanistan: A View from the Ground*, p. 44.
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1218. AECOM, *Afghanistan Social Outreach Program: Final Report*, pp. 4, 6, 22.
1219. AECOM, *Afghanistan Social Outreach Program: Final Report*, pp. 13–19.
1220. AECOM, *Afghanistan Social Outreach Program: Final Report*, pp. 30–31.
1221. AECOM, *Afghanistan Social Outreach Program: Final Report*, pp. 4, 32.
1222. AECOM, *Afghanistan Social Outreach Program: Final Report*, p. 28.
1223. Altai Consulting, *Afghanistan Stabilization Initiative: Third Party Evaluation and Strategic Support*, prepared under contract for USAID, June 2012, p. 6.
1224. USAID, *Afghanistan Stabilization Initiative Quarterly Report: January–March 2010*, prepared under contract for USAID, p. 3; Altai Consulting, *Afghanistan Stabilization Initiative: Third Party Evaluation and Strategic Support*, p. 11.
1225. USAID, *Afghanistan Stabilization Initiative–South: Final Report*, p. 14; DAI, *Final Report Afghanistan Stabilization Initiative–East*, pp. 13–36.
1226. DAI, *Annual Report, Year 1: Afghanistan Stabilization Initiative–East*, prepared under contract by USAID, July 2010, p. 3; USAID, *Afghanistan Stabilization Initiative–South: Final Report*, p. 6; DAI, *Final Report: Afghanistan Stabilization Initiative–East (ASI–East)*, September 2012.
1227. DAI, *Final Report: Afghanistan Stabilization Initiative–East*, p. 10; Altai Consulting, *Afghanistan Stabilization Initiative: Third Party Evaluation and Strategic Support*, p. 18.
1228. DAI, *Final Report: Afghanistan Stabilization Initiative–East*, p. 14.
1229. USAID, *Afghanistan Stabilization Initiative–South: Final Report*, p. 6.
1230. USAID, *Afghanistan Stabilization Initiative–South: Final Report*, pp. 8, 10.
1231. USAID, *Afghanistan Stabilization Initiative–South: Final Report*, pp. 11–12.
1232. USAID, *Afghanistan Stabilization Initiative–South: Final Report*, p. 11.

1233. USAID/OTI, *ALAG: Afghanistan Local Activity Guide*, August 27, 2011, p. 15. For example, a grant to repair gates controlling water flow through an irrigation system in Marjah required that the beneficiaries first clean out the canal, and that the provincial-level government entity responsible for regulating irrigation systems verify that the cleaning had taken place, before the grant could proceed.
1234. Shahmahmood Miakhel, “A Brief Overview of the Afghanistan Stabilization Program: A National Program to Improve Security and Governance,” Afghanistan Analysts Network, July 9, 2012, p. 2; DFID, *Country Programme Evaluation Afghanistan*, May 2009, p. 46; USAID, “Afghanistan Stabilization Program Scope of Work,” pp. 1, 9.
1235. DFID, *Country Programme Evaluation Afghanistan*, p. 46.
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1237. Miakhel, “A Brief Overview of the Afghanistan Stabilization Program,” p. 2; USAID, “Afghanistan Stabilization Program Scope of Work,” p. 8.
1238. USAID, “Afghanistan Stabilization Program Scope of Work,” pp. 3, 5.
1239. USAID, “Afghanistan Stabilization Program Scope of Work,” pp. 4, 8.
1240. Miakhel, “A Brief Overview of the Afghanistan Stabilization Program,” p. 3; Checchi and Co., *Performance Evaluation of District Delivery Program*, April 2012, p. 38; DFID, *Country Programme Evaluation Afghanistan*, p. 46. Many of ASP’s intended functions were reassigned to new, off-budget programs. These included ASOP, the Governor Performance Fund, and the Afghan Local Governments Facility Development Program. Miakhel, “A Brief Overview of the Afghanistan Stabilization Program,” pp. 3, 4.
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1243. Social Impact, Inc., *USAID/OTI Afghanistan Program: Final Evaluation*, pp. 7, 31.
1244. USAID, “USAID Field Report Afghanistan,” June 30, 2005; Social Impact, Inc., *USAID/OTI Afghanistan Program: Final Evaluation*, p. 19.
1245. USAID, “USAID Field Report Afghanistan,” June 30, 2005; Social Impact, Inc., *USAID/OTI Afghanistan Program: Final Evaluation*, pp. 10, 14.
1246. Social Impact, Inc., *USAID/OTI Afghanistan Program: Final Evaluation*, pp. 13, 15, 29, 30.
1247. Social Impact, Inc., *USAID/OTI Afghanistan Program: Final Evaluation*, pp. 8–9.
1248. Social Impact, Inc., *USAID/OTI Afghanistan Program: Final Evaluation*, p. 66.
1249. Social Impact, Inc., *USAID/OTI Afghanistan Program: Final Evaluation*, p. 39.
1250. Social Impact, Inc., *USAID/OTI Afghanistan Program: Final Evaluation*, p. 10.
1251. Social Impact, Inc., *USAID/OTI Afghanistan Program: Final Evaluation*, pp. 11, 28.
1252. USAID OIG, *Audit of USAID/Afghanistan’s Afghanistan Vouchers for Increased Productive Agriculture*, 5-306-10-008-P, p. 5; IRD, *AVIPA Plus: Final Report*, p. 2.
1253. IRD, *AVIPA Plus: Final Report*, p. vii; USAID OIG, *Audit of USAID/Afghanistan’s Afghanistan Vouchers for Increased Productive Agriculture*, 5-306-10-008-P, p. 5.
1254. IRD, *AVIPA Plus: Final Report*, pp. 2, 6.
1255. IRD, *AVIPA Plus: Final Report*, p. 1. This decision was prompted by the sudden cancellation of a five-year agricultural program that had been set to begin later that year, coupled with the U.S. military’s request that, in preparation for the anticipated troop surge in the south that summer, USAID have stabilization activities ready to be initiated as the troops cleared Helmand and Kandahar.
1256. IRD, *AVIPA Plus: Final Report*, p. 14.
1257. IRD, *AVIPA Plus: Final Report*, pp. 1–2.
1258. IRD, *AVIPA Plus: Final Report*, p. 3.
1259. USAID, *Office of Transition Initiatives: 1994–2009*, 2009, p. 2.
1260. Social Impact Inc., *Final Performance Evaluation of USAID/OTI Community Cohesion Initiative in Afghanistan*, p. ii; USAID, *Community Cohesion Initiative: Final Report*, p. 2.
1261. Social Impact Inc., *Final Performance Evaluation of USAID/OTI Community Cohesion Initiative in Afghanistan*, p. 3.
1262. USAID, *Community Cohesion Initiative: Final Report*, p. 3.
1263. Social Impact Inc., *Final Performance Evaluation of USAID/OTI Community Cohesion Initiative in Afghanistan*, pp. 5–6.
1264. Creative Associates International, *Community Cohesion Initiative Annual Report: Oct 2013–Sep 2014*, p. 7; USAID, *Community Cohesion Initiative: Final Report*, pp. 3, 7, 13.
1265. USAID, *Community Cohesion Initiative: Final Report*, p. 3.
1266. Creative Associates International, *2014 Afghan Presidential and Provincial Council Election: Assessment Report*, prepared under contract for USAID, December 2014, p. 12.
1267. Social Impact Inc., *Final Performance Evaluation of USAID/OTI Community Cohesion Initiative in Afghanistan*, pp. iv–v, 14.
1268. Social Impact Inc., *Final Performance Evaluation of USAID/OTI Community Cohesion Initiative in Afghanistan*, pp. xi, 1.
1269. “USAID “Factsheet: Community Development Program,” June 2011. MSI, *Community Development Program: Final Performance Evaluation*, p. 8.
1270. MSI, *Community Development Program: Final Performance Evaluation*, p. 4; Altai Consulting, *Community Development Program–North (CDP-N): Final Evaluation*, prepared under contract for USAID, November, 2012, p. 12; SIGAR, *USAID’s Kabul Community*

- Development Program Largely Met the Agreement's Terms, But Progress Toward Long-Term Goals Needs to be Better Tracked*, SIGAR 11-11-AR, June 2011, p. 2.
1271. MSI, *Community Development Program: Final Performance Evaluation*, p. 1.
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1273. MSI, *Community Development Program: Final Performance Evaluation*, p. 4.
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