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Preventing Future Natural Disaster Casualties: Partnering with USAID and the Office of Reconstruction and Development

by Nicholas Dickson

On March 4, 2010, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, ADM Mullen, discussed the future of the military in the 21st Century to the Command and General Staff College at Fort Leavenworth KS. ADM Mullen stressed that in our future conflicts, the United States military would need to be prepared for several eventualities. First, the Military should be the last resource used in the elements of national power at the President's disposal. Second, ADM Mullen stressed heavily that the Military must take care of the civilians. At one point, he mentioned that the military needed to focus on people and prevent strategic failures with tactical success. (Mullen, 2010) While this was an obvious nod to GEN McChrystal's new policies which attempt to limit civilian casualties in Afghanistan, it is easy to see this focus stretching out to almost all that the military encompasses. It is essential that we carry this focus to all aspects of our efforts. Most importantly, it is necessary to examine an unexplored crisis developing in our nation's efforts. The majority of our military led construction projects do not adequately address proper design or engineering standards commensurate with the level of geological risk in the development area. This is a failure which will damage our reputation, or relationships, and has the potential to kill innocent civilians in the future.

One of the key aspects of the military's efforts to reach out to civilians and local leaders is the Civil Affairs team. These teams, as part of the Special Operations Forces missions in both Iraq and Afghanistan, have unique access to the populace. With this access comes an unparalleled chance to build trust with the local civilians and government organizations. It is through this trust that the majority of the efforts to legitimize the host nation occur. ADM Mullen highlighted this during his speech when he said, "trust is the coin of the realm." (Mullen, 2010) GEN McChrystal's new strategy in Afghanistan attempts to earn the trust of the populace by separating the population from the insurgency and attempting to limit events which could harm this trust. However, our current policies on Commander's Emergency Response Program (CERP) projects, and especially our implementation of these projects, do not currently show the planning or execution to keep the trust of the populace. The mutual support, or lack thereof, between the Department of Defense (CERP) and Department of State projects has already been explored at length in many Congressional studies. What has not been explored is how CERP projects for infrastructure and buildings are potentially setting the stage for future failures in this trust with our host nation partners and citizens and how Civil Affairs forces can work to prevent this from happening.

SCOPE OF THE PROBLEM

The largest tool that the ground commander has in his arsenal to wage war in the counterinsurgency environment is not a weapons system in the strict sense. CERP funds are the backbone of our COIN efforts in both Iraq and Afghanistan. GTA 90-01-017 discusses that “CERP funds provide tactical commanders a means to conduct multiple stability tasks that have traditionally been performed by U.S., foreign or indigenous professional civilian personnel or agencies.” (Department of the Army, 2008) It also states that the Civil Affairs Officer is “the key planner for the execution of the unit CERP. Provide the critical links to civil authorities within the unit’s AOR. In the unit CERP, the S-9 can be expected to develop plans and programs and recommend policies to build relationship between the unit and local civil authorities.” (Department of the Army, 2008) As you can see, Civil Affairs personnel hold a key position in establishing the trust between the unit and the local populace/government, and the main tool for this is CERP. CERP has both short term and long term goals. In the short term, CERP works to “provide security to local populace and restore essential services and meet humanitarian needs.” In the long term, CERP strives to “develop indigenous capacity for: Essential services, viable market economy, rule of law, democratic institutions and robust civil society.” (Department of the Army, 2008) As mentioned earlier, these long term CERP goals are interrelated with Department of State goals. Several studies have shown that DOD and DOS (USAID) coordination with respect to CERP has been severely lacking.

The two entities, “lack information that would provide greater visibility on all U.S. government development projects in Afghanistan.” (United States Government Accountability Office, 2009) It is important to note that “USAID is the leading US government agency responsible for promoting peace and stability by fostering economic growth, protecting human health, providing emergency humanitarian assistance, increasing literacy, and enhancing democracy in developing countries.” (Natsios, 2005) However, as we have learned through experience, USAID is not staffed to undertake a situation like Afghanistan or Iraq. “The success of military strategy and the success of development strategy have become mutually reinforcing.” (Natsios, 2005) The duplication of long term goals necessitates a high level of coordination. As mentioned above, many reports have linked the lack of civilian response to USAID efforts as one of the main disconnects between DOD and USAID. The Secretary of Defense, Robert Gates said, “The Department of Defense has taken on many...burdens that might have been assumed by civilian’s agencies in the past...but it is not replacement for the real thing – civilian involvement and expertise.” (Gates, 2007) So, it is clear that CERP is spearheaded by the Civil Affairs personnel on the BCT staff. CERP shares long term goals with USAID, and CERP is a measure instituted to make up for initial short falls from true leaders of international development, USAID. Implementation of CERP, therefore, can carry long term ramifications for our nation’s success in foreign countries. Herein lays the main issue discussed by this paper. Implementation of CERP funds in Iraq and Afghanistan, specifically supervision of these projects, is placing the future success of the Nation’s foreign policy at risk. SOF forces, especially Civil Affairs forces, must adapt to ensure projects completed with CERP funds do not potentially undermine the long term goals of USAID and the United States government.

BACKGROUND

Recent events in the world have made it acutely obvious that the world is a dangerous and hazardous place. The 2004 earthquake and tsunami off of the Aceh coast in Indonesia killed over 230,000 people and had a magnitude of 9.1. (United States Geological Survey, 2010) Just this year, a devastating earthquake struck Haiti. This 7.0 moment magnitude earthquake has a current death estimate of close to 230,000. Up to 1 million are expected to eventually become homeless due to this tragic event. (Rodgers, 2010) More recently, a massive earthquake having a moment magnitude of 8.8 struck Chile on February 27th of this year. Currently, the latest death estimates are slightly below 300 people. (ANI News, 2010) This brings up several key points to examine. The Chilean earthquake actually was in the top ten earthquakes by moment magnitude observed in modern history. However, the Haiti earthquake released over 500 times less energy, at the epicenter, than the Chilean earthquake did. Both countries had large population centers located near the earthquake. In addition, Chile's earthquake was much deeper than the Haitian quake. Energy, traveling from the epicenter, dissipates at varying rates in differing rock strata. The foundation rock strata that the population centers sit on also affects the overall quake results. However, the differences between the quakes cannot account for the vast margin of difference in the death, casualty and homeless numbers experienced in the two countries. Russ Stein, a United States Geological Survey geophysicist, said that a citizen of Haiti had an eight percent chance of dying in violent shaking during the earthquake. The same person, if he or she was a citizen of Chile, would only have a 0.01 percent chance of dying due to violent shaking during the earthquake. (Stein, 2010) He continued to discuss that this vast difference in this comparative factor is due almost completely to structures, engineering, and building codes. He says that the buildings in Haiti were possibly 1000 times less safe than the buildings in Chile. (Stein, 2010)

Now that we have explored the devastation caused by earthquakes and how that destruction, combined with lack of proper controls for buildings, can cause massive casualties, it is important to look at how Civil Affairs personnel interact with CERP projects at a tactical level. The Civil Affairs team worked with the local government to solidify their links with the populace and with the central government of Afghanistan. This meant often paying for structures such as schools, government buildings, district centers, health clinics, micro-hydro stations, and markets. The Civil Affairs teams would contract with the local businesses and contractors to construct these buildings. These buildings were not built to international building code standards. These are Afghan buildings built by Afghans to Afghan standards. Even with specialized military engineering teams provided by the US Army and our sister services, the pressure to spend CERP and see benefits in the space of a single rotation, make proper design and inspection impossible. Teams are currently satisfied with the knowledge that these buildings might be built to the Afghan Governmental standards set by the respective ministries. In some cases these designs are decades old and do not take into account proper engineering techniques and calculations. However, the Civil Affairs teams are forced to wash their hands of the issue, even though they would not sanction the building of these structures at home in America. The issue here is that they are paid for by CERP money, and potentially these buildings are ticking time bombs which could set the US's efforts in Afghanistan (and other countries using CERP) back decades. The main reason for concern is highlighted in the above discussion of the Haiti earthquake vs. the Chile earthquake.

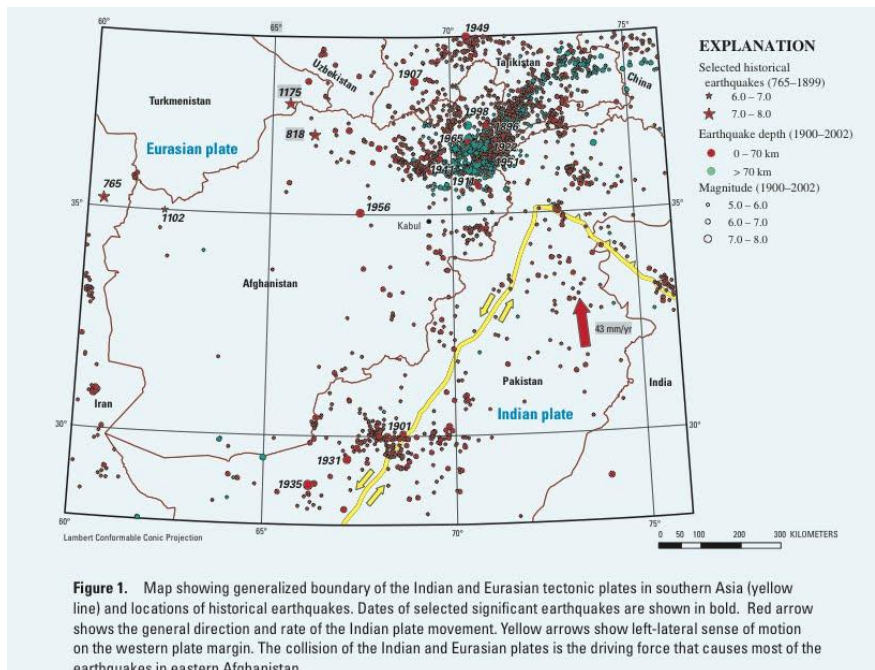


Figure one shows the significant earthquakes that have occurred in Afghanistan. (United States Geological Survey, 2007) Note that earthquakes in the area have the potential to be over 7.0 on the moment magnitude scale. The report from which the figure was extracted discusses the 7.6 magnitude earthquake on October 8, 2005 in Kashmir, Pakistan “which caused more than 80,000 fatalities and left an estimated 4 million people homeless.” (United States Geological Survey, 2007) The report warns, “as Afghanistan rebuilds following decades of war and strife, new construction and development need to be designed to accommodate the hazards posed by strong earthquakes.” (United States Geological Survey, 2007) With the majority of CERP projects in country, this is not happening. In my personal conversations with USAID representatives in Kabul during the summer of 2008, USAID had discovered that the education ministries engineering and construction plans for the country’s schools were fundamentally flawed. They were working on redesigning all of the schools that they were funding; upgrading them to currently accepted international building code. (Personal Communications with USAID Kabul Staff, 2008) Now that the problem has been identified, it is imperative to suggest possible solutions.

Analysis and Evaluation

There are several solutions which may help alleviate the potential problem described above. The key factor is the difference in spending time frames for CERP versus the spending time frames for USAID and other Department of State projects. As ADM Mullen discussed in his speech, the Military arm of national power should follow and support the Diplomatic and Policy arms of national power. (Mullen, 2010) One way to accomplish this is to mandate the slowing of CERP expenditures, especially for structures. This could be done by taking away the emphasis in the military which stresses dollars spent and projects complete. The new emphasis should be on properly designed and engineered projects. As a positive, this would slow down CERP spending and bring it more in line with USAID spending patterns. It would also ensure that structures were built to an acceptable international building code, and that capacity in the

Afghan professional industry is increased. On the negative side, this would prevent us from turning over the number of projects that we are used to turning over. It would prevent us from showing progress similar to past progress. It might even prevent the timely re-deployment of military units, if USAID maintains its current level of manning and project expenditures.

Another possible solution would be to augment CA teams directly with members of the new Civilian Response Corps. These Civilian Response Corps members would offer the Civil Affairs teams the necessary experience to properly scope, bid, and inspect the structures projects that fall under the purview of CERP. Due to the varied environments that our military operates in and around, it is impossible to maintain this expertise as a full time function in our military. However, the specialized skill sets could come out of the Civilian Response Corps. This would require very close integration between members of the Interagency and the military. Unfortunately, this would not allow the military to support the diplomatic and policy arm of national power as described by ADM Mullen in his talk to CGSC. Also, the CERP process on structures would once again experience significant slowdown in time from project conception to project completion.

The final solution presented here is a complete rethinking of projects that the military CERP would undertake versus projects that would be accomplished by the interagency functions of the government. Here projects would be separated; all engineered structures would be separated from other project types. The military Civil Affairs teams (and others) could still work on identifying the projects and working alongside of local leaders. Once the CERP projects are identified, they would then be separated by the S9 or the G9 into two separate categories. One category of non-engineered projects would be handled by the normal military channels. Projects which would require in-depth engineering design and inspection would make up the other set. The S9/G9 would then work in concert with USAID in country to transfer the projects to their control. Once USAID accepts this project, funding would be transferred to USAID from the CERP budget. In essence, this would be another level of approval, as USAID would have to prioritize this in their overall project list. The benefits of this plan would allow USAID to function with S/CRS to staff project engineers as necessary. In addition, USAID (and its parent organization the Department of State) are the ultimate inheritors of these projects after the military completely redeploys from the theater. While this would slow down the pace of the projects, it would in essence remove the projects requiring engineering from the CERP cycle once they were accepted by USAID. The push to identify, nominate and complete projects rapidly that is currently seen in today's military CERP environment would be negated for these specialized projects.

Conclusion

As the military CERP process continues to fill the gap in the interagency reconstruction and redevelopment process, especially in Afghanistan, the nation faces a little explored risk of funding unsafe buildings. This directly affects the Civil Affairs teams who are charged with working with local contractors and certifying the progress of these buildings. While, these buildings are built by indigenous contractors for indigenous use, they are still funded by the US through CERP. It makes no sense to build unsafe or un-engineered structures, which would be liable to fail much sooner than expected. In certain cases, the failure of these buildings could cause significant deaths and set back US foreign policy significantly. In order to combat this, the best possible solution is to separate CERP projects into two separate streams. Keep the

traditional funding, supervision cycle for non-engineered projects. Examples of these projects could be equipment purchases, job training programs, and small refurbishments of existing buildings. For new structures, transfer CERP funds to USAID and its sister organizations so these building can be designed, inspected and implemented properly. This would still build capacity, as USAID works at the national level ensuring that the ministerial engineers understand the new designs. It would also ensure that situations which occurred in Haiti after the earthquake would be limited due to properly designed and built structures. While the process would be more time consuming, in the end it would suit our national interests in these countries much better. Implementation of this plan would also be relatively simple as the basic structure of the Civil Affairs teams and staff sections would not be altered. It would also promote interagency coordination overall unity of effort. It is time for the Nation to look out past the close term horizon and start to plan for the fourth and fifth order effects of our decisions and actions. This plan would prevent some of those strategic failures that develop out of tactical successes.

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