

**Lessons Learned: USAID Perspectives on the Experience
with Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs) in Afghanistan**

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Executive Summary

This report examines findings from more than 100 personal interviews with returning Foreign Service Limited (FSL) personnel who served as Field Program Officers on Provincial Reconstruction Teams, District Stabilization Teams, and on Regional Platforms co-located with the five Regional Commands during the Civilian Uplift of 2009-2012. Commentary and review for the Points for Consideration were compiled after consultations with a compliment of current and former Senior Development Officers, Deputy Mission Directors and Mission Directors, and from the Director of Afghanistan Affairs located within the Office of Afghanistan and Pakistan Affairs in USAID/Washington. Finally, the report includes a description of the evolution of the PRT model and how the civilian surge was addressed by USAID.

Principal Points Raised by Those Interviewed

1. It was extremely difficult, if not impossible to implement stabilization or development activities with adequate monitoring in kinetic areas, or areas in the **clear** phase, and difficult even in the **hold** phase because of residual combat activity.
2. Funding in the billions of dollars during the period covered in this report was spent through DOD funded CERP and donor development programs with little reflection on decades of experience showing the critical link between local buy-in, institutional absorptive capacity, sustainability, and/or lasting development impact of the projects.
3. The PRT model was not fully integrated into the Mission's ongoing stabilization and development programs except during the first two or three years when USAID was a major player in adapting the model to Afghanistan and backstopping the first wave of FSLs.
4. There appeared to be little success by Kabul to match the skills and experience of the FSLs to the needs of the PRTs/DSTs.
5. There was an overwhelming consensus that a one year tour was inadequate to achieve implementation objectives.

Principal Recommendations and Lessons Learned

1. The model was most effective (project activities had a chance of being sustained) when there was a reasonably stable, or semi-permissive environment. (**Build** phase in COIN terminology).
2. The USAID Mission must take ownership of the PRT/DST model and integrate it into its ongoing stabilization and development programs. The role that FSL Field Program Officers could have played in terms of carrying out project monitoring and extending the

reach of CORS and AORS into the hinder land was often not taken advantage of by the Mission.

3. USG Funding levels for conflict countries should be based on country development strategies that take into account local needs, economic, social and political priorities, government revenue generation, and the critical issue of institutional absorptive capacity of organizations receiving funds.
4. Development programming decisions should be made by USAID in close collaboration with the State Department and US military. USAID should directly coordinate and manage its FSLs and FSOs in the field who are acting as on site monitors for development projects. This recommendation implies that USAID must deploy field officers with adequate development experience and with proven abilities to engage the State Department and the military in rigorous dialogue.
5. USAID experience has shown that smaller amounts of CERP funding (somewhere in the range of \$50,000 per PRT) would have been sufficient to focus on small, local initiatives requested by the Afghan district or provincial governments trying to build legitimacy.
6. The Mission should make every attempt to match individual skills of Field Program Officers to geographic position requirements in order to maximize the effectiveness of the model.
7. Continuity of leadership and other staffing at the Regional Platforms and at PRTs/DSTs is paramount to success. Far too often the consensus was that a one year tour was inadequate to achieve implementation objectives.

See full report for **Other Recommendations related to Personnel and Training.**

I. Introduction

This report examines the findings of more than 100 personal interviews with returning Foreign Service Limited (FSL) personnel who served as Field Program Officers (FPOs) on Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs), District Support Teams, later called District Stabilization Teams (DSTs), and on Platforms at Regional Commands (RCs) during the Civilian Surge of 2009-2012. The report also takes into account comments and interviews regarding the Recommendations Section. Commentary was also sought from, or vetting conducted with, eight current or former Senior Development Officers, five current or former Mission Directors and Deputy Directors who had served in Afghanistan, and with the current Director of Afghanistan Affairs in the Office of Afghanistan Pakistan Affairs (OAPA).

The **Objectives of the Report** are to provide:

- A brief history of the evolution of the PRT model in Afghanistan;
- An examination of the PRT's role in supporting and enhancing the legitimacy of Afghanistan's central government outside of its capital in Kabul; and
- Lessons learned on how the model can be made more effective in achieving this goal.

II. Methodology

The report incorporates the findings of more than 100 face to face interviews of returning FSLs serving on PRTs, DSTs, RCs, and sometimes in Kabul from May 2012 through May 2013. The "Tiger Team", a group of retired FSOs hired for recruiting FSLs during the time of the civilian build-up in 2010-2012, conducted all the interviews based on a structured and field-tested questionnaire. Approximately 12,000 candidates applied for the FSL positions and more than 950 candidates passed the basic qualifications, the subject matter expert reviews, reference checks, and were recommended to the Mission in Kabul. The Office of Human Resources, Division of Foreign Service Personnel in USAID/W approved the selections made by the mission for hiring. Approximately 832 FSL/FSO/PSC/EFM/PASA personnel¹ have deployed and served, or are still serving in Afghanistan during the period 2009 to 2012. Staffing grew steadily from January 2009 at just under 100 FSLs to more than 333 in July 2011 and reached a peak of 387 by the fall of 2011. Staffing then gradually began declining in January 2013. Almost no returning FSLs refused to be interviewed. In fact, they were gratified that they could voice their experience and give us their recommendations.

III. Evolution of the PRT Model

The PRT model was first conceptualized in 2002 in Afghanistan, growing out of the Coalition Humanitarian Cells (CHLCs), the *Chiclets*,² established in Kosovo to provide the US military

¹ Data from the IBM's contract Business Analysis Team" based in OAPA.

²Chiclet was the name of the Kosovo cells that grew out of the war in Bosnia and Kosovo to provide the military with information on the humanitarian needs stemming from the genocide.

with information on humanitarian needs, help de-conflict military operations with assistance, and implement small projects to build trust and confidence among the local populations.³

In 2002, USAID utilized the “chiclets” in Afghanistan as a platform for project monitoring and oversight, as well as gaining local context on the development environment via a “circuit rider” from USAID’s Office of Transition Initiatives (OTI), Deborah Alexander. Deborah also acted as a Development Adviser to the military in the design of their own reconstruction projects. The “chiclets” evolved into Civil Affairs Teams Afghanistan, (CAT-A), which then became the foundation for the PRTs. The PRTs were originally titled, Joint Regional Teams (JRTs), and their mandate had a strong security component that USAID viewed as an essential precursor to enable reconstruction work by aid organizations. President Karzai gave the JRTs the name, Provincial Reconstruction Teams. “The PRTs were conceived as joint civilian military units deployed throughout Afghanistan to extend the reach and enhance the legitimacy of the central government to the provinces by improving security and facilitating reconstruction and development efforts”.⁴ The PRT chief architect was Col. (ret) Michael Stout. Deborah Alexander was the USAID representative to all the planning sessions. The interagency agreed that after a rollout of a few PRTs, there would be a “pause” to identify lessons learned and make changes to the concept. As the PRTs began to roll out, major issues emerged, such as lack of clarity of the roles and responsibilities for each agency. Was the primary purpose of the PRT to create an enabling environment (i.e. security) by working with local security forces? Or was it to do reconstruction work? What was the chain of command? Did everyone report to the military commander, Department of State, or their own home agency in Kabul? Should money specifically be made available for PRTs to program? There were initial hopes that the Afghan Government would be an active participant, but that did not materialize.

In Washington, Michael McNerney, a DOD civilian policy specialist, worked closely with USAID’s Jeanne Pryor, Team Leader for Afghanistan in the Bureau for South Asian Affairs, to develop an interagency PRT concept paper; both advanced the PRT concept in Washington, winning wide interagency support.⁵ The PRT model was refined, tested, and ultimately implemented by Nick Marinacci, a USAID Program Officer serving in Kabul who had field experience with stabilization models. PRTs were elements of a broader civilian-military strategy that also included coalition and ISAF (International Security Assistance Force) combat operations, civilian assistance programs, training and deployment of Afghan national army and police units, and diplomatic engagement with Afghanistan’s neighbors.⁶

Vietnam - PRT model rooted in Vietnam experience?

It is often stated that the PRT model arose out of the USG experience in Vietnam. As stated above the model came from Kosovo and Bosnia. CORDS (Civil Operations and Rural Development Support Program - previously called Revolutionary Development Support Program) is still the best model with which to compare the PRTs due to similar mandates and

³“ From PRTs – “Toward Unity of Effort”, USAID document, Marinicci, Nick, April 2005.

⁴From USAID Fact Sheet on Provincial Reconstruction Teams, drafted by Nick Marinacci, USAID, January 2005.

⁵ Jason Alexander, State/CSO in emails to Norma Parker of the Tiger Team, dated April 16 and 18, 2013 and Jeanne Pryor, Office Director for Afghanistan, OAPA, May 2013.

⁶ Ibid.

comparable successes and failures.⁷ The Rural Affairs and CORDs model was somewhat familiar to the architects of the PRT model.⁸

The CORDS program was a whole-of-government approach to achieving rural pacification through development activities strategically coordinated with military operations. The civilian and military efforts were integrated under one command structure.⁹ The civilian-military program in Vietnam, CORDS program, grew out of the Rural Affairs Division of the US Operations Mission (USOM – the local name of USAID in Vietnam). It was one of the first programs to integrate numerous activities conducted by the military, USAID, Department of State, and other USG agencies into one program. Similar to the Rural Affairs Division, CORDS strictly adhered to the interagency unified command structure, focusing military and civilian members on important non-kinetic activities. “Under CORDS, USG civilians worked with American and South Vietnamese military personnel to establish programs designed to win popular support, mitigate North Vietnamese political influence, enhance South Vietnamese government legitimacy, and diminish popular support for the insurgency.”¹⁰

It is interesting to note that before the establishment of CORDs, USAID’s Mission Management Information staff (MIS) had developed and installed an initial Provincial Reporting System for 47 provinces in South Vietnam. Beginning in January 1967 a monthly report from each province was received in USAID in Saigon which recorded progress on the USAID pacification and development program in five pages, including a narrative section. Each provincial team was briefed by the Information Staff to insure consistency of approach. The reports not only collected quantitative data on the programs, but also provided space for the provincial representatives to record narrative data and impressions to provide context to their reporting. These reports were summarized every six months for Washington.¹¹ This reporting function was taken over by DOD shortly after CORDs was established, and an automated Hamlet Evaluation System was introduced that gained some notoriety by focusing mostly on body counts with the narrative component eliminated.

CORDS was developed in September, 1967 and overseen by Ambassador Robert Komer. CORDS personnel supervised the formulation and implementation of both civilian and military programs operating under a unified organizational structure.¹² CORDS district advisers provided direct assistance to Vietnamese farmers in order to improve agriculture (rice) production and incomes. CORDS advisers were placed at every level of the Vietnamese government down to the districts in the provinces. CORDS staffs were composed of, inter alia, direct hire FSOs (Foreign

⁷ CORDS itself grew out of the US military experience with counterinsurgencies in the Philippines during WW II.

⁸ Jason Alexander from State/CSO, May 2013.

⁹ “A Legacy of Vietnam: “Lessons from CORDS”, paper authored by Honn, Meisel, Mowery, and Smolin for the *Interagency Journal*, vol 2, Issue, Summer 2011, published by the Col. Arthur D. Simons Center for the Study of Interagency Cooperation, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas.

¹⁰ Alexander, Jason, “Fostering Effective Civil Military Integration; The Need of a Standardized, Field – based Stabilization Methodology” unpublished paper, 2013.

¹¹ In many cases the provincial reports, incorporated into the Summary Report, presented an insufficiently positive picture of the counterinsurgency effort (two schools built and four blown up by the insurgents) resulting in reduced management interest in USAID reporting. From an email to N Parker from a member of the MIS staff of USAID/Saigon, dtd 7/3/2013.

¹² Alexander, op.cit.

Service Officers, USDA (United States Department of Agriculture), International Volunteers in Service (IVS) and selected Implementing Partners. The majority were US Government personnel. In 1969, 2,685 civilian personnel from State, USAID, and USIA (United States Information Agency) were working for CORDS.¹³

CORDS District Advisers had few security restrictions and were allowed to move freely among the population. They lived in strategic hamlets¹⁴ on the local economy. Any security was provided by Vietnamese village Self Defense Corps and hamlet militia who were minimally trained. The Vietnamese Army was fully engaged in fighting alongside US troops and not charged with protecting CORDS advisers. CORDS advisers were grounded in the reality of everyday life, supporting grassroots political, social and economic development. They had in-depth knowledge of the local operating environment. They also had substantially longer training, averaging six to nine months, in culture and language (as compared to two months training for Afghanistan with only a select few FSOs receiving brief language training). Their tours usually lasted more than one year. They had direct access to resources and were clearly in charge of the development programs in their districts. They were not under the supervision of the US military, although at the provincial level they worked alongside the Military Assistance Advisory Group (MAAG) advisers.

From the CORDS experience, we learned the importance of strengthening district and provincial governments and working directly with villagers. The major difference with the PRT program was that the CORDS advisers were in charge of the development programs and lived locally in the villages, not on forward operating bases established by the US military.¹⁵ Security provided by the Vietnamese local Self Defense Corps or militias was the only security visible in their villages. The CORDS advisers were welcomed allies in South Vietnam reconstruction and development, and not viewed as foreign invaders. The civilians on PRTs, on the other hand, were heavily barricaded, and all USG civilians had difficulty getting out to the villages and working freely with the Afghans, except in the most secure areas.

Another important point learned from CORDS was the necessity of the Battle Space Owner to be on the same page operationally and philosophically with the civilian actors. In Vietnam military operations would wipe out any gains made through the “hearts and mind” campaign. This phenomenon was recognized in both Afghanistan and Iraq, and the counterinsurgency (COIN) strategy was much more population focused.¹⁶

Iraq - PRTs in Iraq

The PRT model, with adjustments, was introduced to Iraq in 2005 at Ambassador Khalilzad’s direction. “The U.S. goals in both Iraq and Afghanistan were similar: to establish democracy and defeat terrorism. But their geopolitical, economic, historical, and cultural differences complicated applying the Afghan model to Iraq.”¹⁷ In 2002, Afghans had little or no access to basic services including water and electricity. Iraqis, on the other hand, were accustomed to such

¹³Honn, Meisel, Mowery and Smolin, op.cit.

¹⁴ Hamlets were rural areas too small to be considered villages.

¹⁵ Phillips, Rufus, *Why Vietnam Matters*, Naval Institute Press, Annapolis, Maryland, 2008

¹⁶ Rice, Jeffrey, *War Comes to Long An* and Jason Alexander in a note to Norma Parker, May 2013

¹⁷ Chapter 22, p 244, *Hard Lessons, The Iraq Reconstruction Experience*, Stuart Bowen, Jr. Inspector General for Iraq, US Government Printing Office, February, 2009.

services under President Saddam Hussain. The PRTs had a different mission and organizational structure. The 18 PRTs in Iraq worked mostly with provincial governments. The “embedded” PRTs¹⁸ worked with local municipal councils and civil society groups to build local governance capacity, carry out reconstruction projects, and improve security in the provinces. In Afghanistan, PRTs worked to extend the authority of the Afghan government to the provinces in order to develop a stable and secure environment. Both countries staffed the PRTs with civilian and military personnel; however, in Iraq the staffing was weighted more toward civilian personnel, using only a score of USAID FSLs and State 3161s. In Afghanistan, the military dominated the PRTs. Both countries faced the critical challenge of finding the right combination of development experience, technical expertise, and adequate number of qualified civilian advisers to staff the PRTs.¹⁹

PRTs in Afghanistan

The first PRT in Afghanistan was established in Gardez Municipality in Paktia Province in November 2002, and was co-located with US Special Forces. A Civil Affairs Team had daily contact with local villagers and tribal leaders. A contingent of the 2nd Battalion, 504th Infantry Regiment, and 82nd Airborne Division provided security in and around the compound. The sole civilian when the PRT became fully operational on February 1, 2003, was Thomas Praster of the State Department. At the end of March, he was joined by former US Army Lieutenant Colonel Randolph Hampton, who worked under contract with USAID, providing oversight to the rebuilding of schools and medical clinics throughout Paktia, Khost, and Ghazni Provinces.²⁰

The Gardez PRT was followed shortly by PRTs in Bamyan, Kunduz, Mazar, Kandahar, and Herat in 2003. The selection of the sites for these first six was based on political rationale such as location of major ethnic groups, the spiritual home of the Taliban, and the location of some of the most troublesome warlords. Each PRT operated according to local conditions.²¹ In 2004 the PRTs were expanded to 16, adding Parwan, Nangerhar, Kunar, Ghazni, Khost, Zabul, Farah, Uruzgan, Helmand, and Paktika to the original six. These next sites were chosen based on their lack of security and presence of reconstruction activities, setting the stage for the PRTs to play a much larger role in stabilization and reconstruction. In 2004 the DOD (Department of Defense) added the Commander’s Emergency Response Program (CERP), and State/USAID provided funding for Quick Impact Funds to promote stabilization. Three Regional Commands were created to decentralize decision-making as combat units were disbursed to insecure areas along with the PRTs²² that were conducting reconstruction and stabilization activities to help address the causes of insurgency. The total number of State, USAID, and USDA civilian employees at PRTs grew from 15 to more than 45 in 2004.

In 2005 a “unity of effort”, or a unified military, diplomatic, and development strategy (an interagency strategy) was devised for the PRTs. The military argued that the PRTs were never truly unified as each agency representative still ultimately reported to his/her respective

¹⁸ An embedded PRT was composed of one or two civilians working inside a military brigade that was fighting in highly kinetic (active combat) zones at the district or municipal level.

¹⁹ Phillips, opus cit.

²⁰ Wikipedia

²¹ *From PRTs – Toward Unity of Effort*, USAID document drafted by Nick Marinacci, April 2005

²² Ibid.

agency.²³ Under this approach the military was still in command at the PRT but State and USAID representatives were included in the leadership group. Many challenges emerged from the previous two years' experience with PRTs at this point: a scattershot approach to projects; undefined role in reconstruction and development activities; overlap and duplication with NGO programs; measuring progress by the amount of money spent; lack of Afghan ownership; lack of strategy and project information from Kabul; and lack of measures of effectiveness. Some PRTs were under-resourced in terms of staffing and program funding.

After the 2005 parliamentary and provincial council elections in Afghanistan, a team was sent out to gather lessons learned from the original PRTs²⁴ because some of the PRTs were going to transition to other International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) countries. Based on their positive findings, more civilians were sent out to the PRTs. Since October 2006, PRTs have been part of the NATO - led International Security Assistance Force.

According to a handbook drafted by the US military, USAID, State and USDA, The PRT Field Operations Guide, "PRTs were joint, integrated military-civilian organizations, staffed and supported by ISAF member countries, operating at provincial and district levels within Afghanistan." They were intended to fill in for weak Afghanistan provincial structures, making it easier to provide civilian assistance to help deflect and discourage instability.²⁵ The PRTs were staffed by military brigades from various participating nations, and had civilian (USAID, State Department, and USDA) representatives working alongside the military civil affairs officers, helping to program CERP funds and attempting to coordinate donor assistance efforts. PRTs were intended to establish a stable environment in which international agencies, NGOs, the local authorities, and civil society could engage in reconstruction, political transition, and social and economic development.²⁶

Originally, there were U.S. civilians assigned to work on Human Terrain Mapping teams that were tasked with identifying major issues in villages that contributed to instability and conflict: "drivers of conflict" and root causes of instability. Once the "drivers of conflict" were identified, the PRTs were expected to develop a strategy for their province that would address these problems. They would map the social, cultural, political, and economic networks that the population lived with and then identify interventions that could reduce conflict and promote a more stable environment.²⁷ This analysis in 2009 became known as the District Stability Framework (DSF) which was endorsed by USAID as a tool to be used in Afghanistan.²⁸ As will be discussed below, this was perhaps an unrealistic job for the civilians assigned to PRTs, who

²³ In contrast, CORDS was truly "unified" in that the members were completely assigned under the CORDS leadership with little or no direct reporting to agency heads assigned to the team. As such, reporting went through the Chain of Command in CORDS, not around team leads to their agency heads or desk officers. Therefore, PRTs were a "unity of effort" while CORDS was a "unified command" effort. This had an impact on programming, such as commonly agreed upon planning and objectives.

²⁴ *Provincial Reconstruction Teams in Afghanistan, An Interagency Assessment*, USAID, June 2006

²⁵ *Afghanistan PRT Field Operations Guide*, June 2009

²⁶ NGOs at first were working independently of the PRT effort, being reluctant to work with the military.

²⁷ *Afghanistan Provincial Reconstruction Team Handbook*, U.S. Army Combined Arms Center, Feb. 2011

²⁸ The DSF originally was called the Tactical Conflict Assessment and Planning Framework (TCAPF) which was developed by Dr. James Derleth, a consultant to USAID's Office of Military Affairs. In 2010 OTI working with Dr Derleth modified the Framework and renamed it the DSF. The Interagency Conflict Assessment Framework (ICAF) in use by the State Department was the basis for both frameworks.

often had little development experience, very limited knowledge about Afghanistan culture and mores, no language training, at times limited access to villages due to security, and, most importantly, their one year tour peppered with frequent R&Rs did not allow sufficient time to conduct such analysis. Although training in DSF was extensive, it proved unrealistic to implement on the ground, and it gradually evolved into other innovative research instruments,²⁹ such as the RSSA (Regional Security Stabilization Assessment) used by RC/South.

At a level below the PRT, were District Support Teams (DSTs), first established in 2010 and assigned to districts. By 2012, there were 27 DSTs in Afghanistan. These districts were sometimes designated as Key Terrain Districts which followed the military criteria of population centers, access to major trade routes and had the highest potential for economic development.³⁰ DSTs were staffed with a few civilians, often FSLs hired by USAID and sometimes by State Department 3161s (temporary hires). The DSTs were co-located with Forward Operating Bases (FOBs) or Combat Outposts, which were the smallest military unit located in a District.

In 2005, the military asked for a high-level civilian presence to sit on platforms at the Regional Command (RC) level. State and USAID sent senior personnel, either active or recently retired, to staff four RCs in Baghram (East), Herat (West), Kandahar (South), and Mazar-e-Sherif (North). In July 2010, a fifth RC was created comprising Nimruz and Helmand Province in the Southwest (RC/SW). The civilian personnel coordinated with the military so that the military was kept informed about regional activities taking place in the PRTs. These RCs were also intended to coordinate PRT activity and to keep the Embassy and USAID Mission in Kabul aware of field activities.

At the Regional Command Level, in 2009, a State Department official was designated as the Senior Civilian Representative (SCR). (A Presidential Directive issued in 2005 stated that the State Department was in charge of coordinating all Overseas Contingency Operations). The State SCR assumed the leadership of the civilian group that also included a Senior Development Officer (SDO) from USAID who was either an active duty or retired senior official. The SCR was seen as the political officer responsible for supporting and facilitating local governance, engaging local leadership, local and international press, and civil society representatives. The SCR provided political advice and guidance to the PRT, kept the Embassy and Washington informed and reported on local developments and personalities.³¹ The SDO's responsibilities were not as clearly spelled out, but basically they advised and backstopped the USAID Field Program Officers (FPOs) at the PRTs and DSTs. The idea was to match the military surge with a civilian surge. It was very difficult for USAID to match the military staffing at the Regional Commands to the regional civilian platforms.

At the height of the surge there were 26 PRTs in Afghanistan; 12 PRTs were under US command. In the early days of the PRT program, the PRT Office was established at USAID/Kabul to backstop the FPOs and was headed by a Senior Foreign Service Officer. It was one of the pillar offices in the Mission. It served a useful function and was a place that the field

²⁹ PRT members stated they did not receive enough training on the qualitative methodology. CORDS had a similar approach to assess popular support based on quantitative methodology. Neither approach can answer the large number of unknowns in a complex environment.

³⁰ Key Terrain District (KTD) designations were important in that the current USAID development strategy works in Regional Economic Zones, which are the next evolution of KTDs.

³¹ *PRT Field Operations Guide, 2011*

officers and their local national deputies could turn to for help and questions. In 2010, as part of the Embassy's attempt to manage the civilian surge, the office was replaced by the Inter-Agency Provincial Affairs Office (IPA), a section within the US Embassy (which was modeled after the DOD's PRT Office) to coordinate the work of Provincial Reconstruction Teams. At times the IPA involved itself in the assignment of FSLs to PRTs/DSTs, but did not perform the same personnel backstopping as the USAID office. That responsibility fell to the Mission's Executive Office. The USAID PRT Office then morphed into the Stabilization Unit led by a senior FSL. Field officers eventually were backstopped by a regional coordination section that was placed in the program office and staffed by junior level FSOs.³²

IV. Civilian Build-up in Afghanistan

In March 2009, President Obama, at the urging of the military, authorized a "civilian surge" to increase the numbers of civilian personnel, especially development experts, on the PRTs, DSTs, and Regional Commands. The total number of civilians in the field skyrocketed from 320 in early 2009 to 1,004 by June 2010. The civilian surge was matched by a 30,000 troop increase approved by the President. A new civilian-military (civ-mil) strategy was crafted in May of 2009 that became the Integrated Civilian-Military Campaign Plan signed off by US Ambassador Eikenberry and ISAF Commander (COMISAF), General McChrystal.

Civilian-Military Objectives

This new plan, to be overseen by General McChrystal, introduced the COIN strategy to Afghanistan. The military objective was to shape, clear, hold, build/transfer – a paradigm that emerged from the Iraq War. Stabilization activities were to start in the **clear** phase, as soon as kinetic operations ceased and access to local leaders was available. Quick response grants, OTI (USAID's Office of Transition Initiatives) planning, infrastructure design, and the Afghanistan Civil Assistance Program (Senator Leahy's War Victims Fund) would also begin during this phase. The **hold** phase was to support GIRoA delivery of basic services and include community involvement and ensure stabilization activities were addressing the root causes of conflict. District stabilization activities supported by the RCs were to start with small community grants, cash for work, small-scale infrastructure, strategic road building, support for customary law and alternative dispute resolution, and similar activities. In the **build** phase Kabul-based programs were to support national systems and ministries, Parliament, and the formal judicial system. Regional platforms were to support provincial and district governments through the PRTs and DSTs. Projects, such as large scale infrastructure (roads, energy) and smaller scale infrastructure (schools and irrigation systems), health, education, market-led agriculture development, financial services, civil service capacity building, civil society support, media training, and trade and economic growth programs, were to be implemented by USAID partners through grants, cooperative agreements, and contracts. Unfortunately, these stages turned out to be unrealistic on the ground, since communities did not always stay in one of these phases, often reverting to insurgency status requiring kinetic operations.³³

OAPA meets the staffing challenges

³² The point of this history is to highlight the gradual devolution of USAID's capacity in Kabul to directly backstop the FSLs in the field and to deny them access to senior foreign service officer experience. This happened between 2009-2011.

³³ Afghanistan Integrated Civilian-Military Campaign Plan, PowerPoint Presentation, April 12 2013

In 2009, the US Government began a civilian surge, sending large numbers of employees to Afghanistan to support multi-agency accelerated development and stabilization efforts. USAID was asked to play a major role in this surge by rapidly placing technically qualified personnel in the field to monitor USAID development projects. USAID did not immediately have enough staff to fill the requirements and chose to hire Foreign Service Limited (FSLs) on temporary appointments to supplement career Foreign Service Officers. Before the civilian surge, the selection and hiring of FSL personnel who were to function as Field Project Officers (FPOs) on PRTs/DSTs was fluid and *ad hoc*. In the early years of the PRTs, most civilians worked for the military. Later, a small team at USAID's AfPak Task Force was responsible for advertising for FSLs and then interviewing and selecting them. At the time of the surge, however, more specific, consistent, and rapid hiring practices had to be put in place. The AfPak Task Force hired a team of six retired FSOs to develop criteria for FSL hiring, help draft the position-specific announcements for the search and engage in a standardized interview process with candidates who had passed basic qualifications and subject matter expert reviews. This team was fully functional by mid-2010, when it was interviewing five candidates a day and recommending between 15-20 candidates per week to USAID Kabul for review and selection. Also by June 2010, the AfPak Task Force had become the Office of Afghanistan and Pakistan Affairs.

In the fall of 2009, a six week pre-deployment training program was set up in Washington, including a one week stint at Camp Atterbury, Indiana, where a model Afghan village was created and trainees were able to role play their jobs in a simulated environment. On most occasions the civilians trained with the military, which was extremely useful in terms of familiarizing them with military terms and practices. Other training included lectures on Afghan culture, Afghan familiarization course sponsored by the Foreign Service Institute, and defensive driving and weapons familiarization training (FACT) at Summit, West Virginia. What was missing was language training. In 2011, a course on contract and grant management (COR or Contracting Officer Representative) and On Site Monitoring were added to the curriculum, allowing FPOs to learn about USAID procurement and implementation methods. This is in contrast to no USAID specific training provided to FPOs during 2002 – 2008, when they only received two weeks training at Ft. Bragg, North Carolina.

In early 2013, after President Karzai met with President Obama, an agreement was reached that PRTs and the military presence would be scaled down and combat troops transitioned out of Afghanistan by the end of calendar year 2014. Since then few FSLs have been sent to the field, and many FSL assignments have been curtailed before the minimum one year tour has been completed. The curtailment of civilians has been forced by the withdrawal of troops stationed at the DSTs and PRTs. By the end of 2014 OAPA projects that there will be very few, if any, FPOs in the field to staff consulates that are gradually replacing the five Regional Commands. The staff at the USAID Mission will also be substantially reduced, although the final numbers have not yet been decided.

V. Lessons Learned

This section will present the conclusions and recommendations from the FSL interviews and summarizes the most important.

Principal Points Raised by Those Interviewed

1. **Almost all of those interviewed agreed it was extremely difficult, if not impossible, to implement stabilization or development activities with adequate monitoring in kinetic areas, or clear phase, and difficult even in the hold phase because of residual combat activity. Hold areas that had been cleared were problematic because they would slip back to needing clearing operations before the area was even semi-secure for stabilization and reconstruction activities. Basically, though, the early conclusion was that PRTs were most appropriate where, "there is a mid-range of violence, i.e. where instability still precludes heavy nongovernmental organization (NGOs) involvement, but where it is not so acute that combat operations predominate"**³⁴. FSLs gave examples of reconstruction/stabilization projects that were carried out in the **hold** phase and were cited as being questionable investments, e.g. building schools where the construction could not be monitored, the government could not maintain and staff them, and students only attended sporadically due to the insecure environment.³⁵ In every interview involving security the recommendation was not to send PRT/DST based civilians to do reconstruction work in areas that were not secure, or in terms of the COIN strategy, were not in the **build** phase.
2. **Program funding in the billions of dollars during the period covered in this report was spent through DOD-funded CERP and donor development programs. It appears that little thought was given to the significance of Afghan buy-in, institutional absorptive capacity, sustainability, and/or development impact of the projects.** This phenomenon helped to fuel corruption, created dependency, and enforced a sense of entitlement on the part of Afghan counterparts. There was also general consensus that the "development experts", USAID officers, should always participate in programming of CERP and advise on USAID project funding being spent in the areas covered by PRTs/DSTs. One problem that was mentioned frequently was the lack of funds for immediate projects requested by local officials, such as fuel for transport or generators, which the FSLs could tap without need for high-level approval. Early in the surge Quick Response Funds were made available to PRTs and DSTs but funding did not continue. The funds that were available at the PRT level were controlled by the military commanders, or the State Team Leads. There were few exceptions to this, such as on the Kandahar City DST that was entirely civilian led. Almost all FSLs mentioned the need for the lead civilian officer at a PRT or RC to be a USAID development person, instead of the State Department's Senior Civilian Representative (SCR), because 95% of the job dealt with development and reconstruction issues. Also mentioned was the large number of projects and their overlapping nature.
3. **The PRT model was not fully integrated into the Mission's ongoing stabilization and development programs except during the first two or three years when USAID was a major player in adapting the model to Afghanistan and backstopping the first**

³⁴ "Provincial Reconstruction Teams in Afghanistan, An Interagency Assessment, Morris, Stephenson, Ciminelli, Muncy, Wilson, and Nugent, June, 2006

³⁵ Another example of this: Many schools had walls built around them to define the grounds and to provide an element of security. However, if a ribbon cutting ceremony was held or other public notice given to the new school, the headmaster was often targeted by the insurgency and sometimes killed, negatively impacting student and teacher attendance alike.

several waves of FSLs. The role that FSL Field Program Officers (FPOs) could play in terms of extending project monitoring capabilities of the Contract Office Representatives (CORs) was never fully utilized. This resulted in FSLs feeling unappreciated and disconnected to USAID and its development programs and limited the effectiveness of the FSLs. Later in the program, after all FSLs were given either COR or On Site Monitoring training, this aspect improved. In summary, the Mission failed to take ownership of the program after the first three years, failed to promote it, and did not try to take advantage of a USDH field presence for monitoring USAID development and stabilizations projects. The military and State Department dominated the development and stabilization work of the RCs and PRTs/DSTs.

4. **Unfortunately it appears that the pressure to get “boots on the ground” overshadowed the need to match skills and experience of the FSLs with the requirements of the PRTs/DSTs.** In the rush to place FSLs in the field as soon as they became available, meeting high staffing targets took priority over matching skills to positions. Moreover, the skill sets needed were rarely conveyed from the field to the recruiters in USAID/Washington, leaving them little choice but to announce positions with very broad descriptions. As a result, many FSLs were deployed to areas and positions for which they did not have the appropriate skills.³⁶ One of the lessons learned from Vietnam and Iraq was the need to place expert advisory assistance in locations where it was most needed. FSLs suggested that assignments to PRTs should be a shared responsibility with the platforms and the EXO in Kabul. (Note: this would have been difficult to implement with the number of FSLs being deployed at the height of the surge. A central control point was necessary).
5. **There was a huge consensus that a one year tour was inadequate to “make a difference” in the areas served by PRTs or DSTs.** Experience in both Iraq and Afghanistan raise serious concerns about the impact of one year tours on programs held to development standards and implemented in clear and hold areas. FSLs voiced almost unanimous agreement that at least an 18 month, and better a 24 month tour, was needed to effectively carry out the activities assigned to them. Too much time was spent away from the post in a 12 month period due to five R&Rs. Ideally, a two year tour with three R&Rs (in lieu of five) broken by a Home Leave at the end of the first year (if returning for a second year) would have provided sufficient time to accomplish stabilization and reconstruction objectives and allowed time for the steep learning curve required to understand the complex cultural and ethnic realities of Afghanistan. In contrast, the US military received only two weeks leave during their six to nine month tours. These leaves were later cancelled, and the military currently has no leave in the six to nine month period. The World Bank and Asian Development Bank personnel only received two R&Rs per year. It was equally advisable to limit the tour to no more than three years to avoid burn out.

³⁶ For example, one FSL who had a strong economic growth background and had worked with the World Bank and the Asia Development Bank in Afghanistan was assigned to RC East, rather than to Kabul where his previous experience working with Afghan ministries would have served him and the Mission well.

Positive Comments by FSLs

- FSLs universally valued the challenge of working in Afghanistan. Most were glad to have served, even if their tours had been curtailed. Of course, the financial incentives provided by USAID played a part in this favorable reaction. (35% danger pay, 35% hardship, 20% overtime pay, and 5% for working a six day work week including Sunday).
- Some FSLs found it possible to forge productive and congenial relationships at the provincial and district levels and to advise on the use of both CERP and development funds, either from GIRoA or international donors, if they worked in a relatively secure area and could easily get around the region. Most visits, however, to both urban and rural areas were in military convoys. Those who could self-drive (such as in the West and North) and therefore had a lower profile, had a better chance of success. Regular contact with Afghan counterparts was required to establish the level of confidence and trust before advisers were accepted and listened to by their Afghan counterparts. This relationship building required almost daily contact. This is another reason to limit reconstruction activities to relatively secure areas in the **build** phase.
- The most satisfying tours were at the DST level where the FSL engaged directly in capacity building so that districts could access national and provincial GIRoA funding to meet the observed needs and requested programs of local villagers.
- Most FSLs understood that PRTs/DSTs were part of the stabilization and reconstruction strategy intended to strengthen the link between sub-national government officials and their local citizens and to make this a process of inclusion of all ethnic groups. Some FSLs even tried to focus on longer term development issues of sustainability as they reviewed and monitored project activities.
- Almost all FSLs found the Pre-Deployment Training had adequately prepared them for their assignments; especially the training at Camp Atterbury (which provided real time experience on what it was like to live on a PRT and to work with the military and Afghans). COR training, added later, was also singled out as being very valuable.

Other Conclusions

Personnel Selection, Skills, and Assignments:

- As stated above, there was little to no apparent effort to match FSL skills to the positions they filled on PRTs/DSTs. In some cases, this had disastrous effects. Until late 2011 many criticized the State Department and USAID for “managing by the numbers” when USAID was under the greatest pressure to place people in the field.
- The skills most needed and sought after were previous USAID experience including knowledge of USAID business practices which could be easily explained to military commanders. (Making USAID experience a requirement, however, was prohibited in government hiring practices). This was closely followed by previous experience with the

military. The ability to problem solve on the spot, as well as knowledge of the GIRA budgeting processes, were also skills in high demand.

- It was perhaps unrealistic of USAID/Washington to expect temporary employees, like FSLs, to represent USAID in remote PRTs when most of them had no prior experience working with USAID. More FSOs should have served on PRTs/DSTs to fill this experience gap and mentor FSLs.
- Several FSLs mentioned the need for the candidates selected to be in relative good physical condition; otherwise they were putting their military and civilian colleagues at risk. State/Med needs to have a higher standard of physical fitness for combat zones (but has been reluctant to do so for fear of litigation).³⁷ However, older FSLs generally had a great deal of credibility with Afghan village elders.
- Most FSLs wanted to know ahead of deployment where they were going. If the mission had a better handle on the PRT program and its needs, perhaps through the SDOs at the Regional platforms, or the recently established regional field coordinators in Kabul, this could have happened. More effective use of FSL skills and experience and better alignment with the positions they filled would have been the result.
- FSLs did not feel they had clear work objectives. This became obvious at the time AEFs (Annual Evaluation Forms) were drafted, if drafted at all, at the end of the rating period instead of at the start of the period.
- If specialized skills were needed on a PRT/DST, recruitment should have included special advertising for these skills. In 2010, the EXO made a decision to only recruit General Development Officers.
- Specific skill needs were not well conveyed from the field to Washington recruiters (despite frequent requests to do so), leaving the recruiters with little choice but to cast a broad net with announcements with general descriptions, rather than targeting specific skills.
- In many cases FSLs, 3161s, and USDA representatives were doing the same work and were drawn from the same universe of people outside the USG. This created duplication of effort and probably was not necessary in order to adequately staff the PRTs. But it did fulfill the desire for a whole of government approach.

Roles and Responsibilities:

- Many FSLs mentioned that the lines of authority (chain of command) were not clear to them, and accountability was difficult if not totally lacking. Prior to the establishment of the regional platforms and IPA, the FPO chain of command was to the PRT Office in USAID/Kabul. Once the regional platforms were established, the FPO chain of command was to the Senior Development Officer (SDO) at the respective Regional Platform.
- Once deployed to the field, some FSLs were uncertain what to do. This happened most frequently when there was no hand off from their predecessor.
- Ideally FPOs would be self-starters because they worked in a very fluid environment and responsibilities frequently changed. Flexibility was one of the key attributes most often mentioned during the interview process.

³⁷ This may have been recently addressed by State /Med.

- Confusion was most prevalent between the role of the COR back in Kabul and the Field Program Officer who was to act as an on-site monitor for USAID project activities and to interact with the Implementing Partner. Later in the program responsibilities of Activity Managers/On Site Monitors were spelled out in letters signed by the FPOs with their respective CORs. In some cases, however, CORs in Kabul prevented the FSLs in the field from communicating directly with the Implementing Partners.
- As stated above, many FSLs felt that the Senior Development Officer (SDO) at the Regional Platform should have been the lead civilian representative, rather than the SCR who was a State Department officer concerned with reporting issues to the Ambassador and was not necessarily conversant with development and implementation issues that an SDO had full knowledge of. Many times the USAID SDO was senior in grade to the SCR.

Pre-Deployment Training:

- FSLs generally gave the training high marks. However, specific comments were made about the lack of information on the geographic region to which they were assigned. Nearly all received a general briefing by sector. But this information was not detailed enough for the FSLs and did not include a list of projects operating in their PRT/DST areas, nor a list of USAID implementing partners and other donor activities in the region. Most got that information by digging it out on their own after they arrived, or discussing with their predecessor, if they had one. There clearly was a lack of information on USAID projects in the field including objectives, implementation plans and indicators. RC/ East developed a binder of projects and attendant information for use in their region. This was a good model for the other RCs to follow. The OAPA Tiger Team suggested that either the RCs or Kabul pull together this information before deploying from Washington to the field. No other RC followed-up, and the RC East binder was not kept up to date after 2011.
- Another area that would have been helpful was that of an overview of USAID's development strategy as it was being implemented at the time of FSL deployment.
- Since the PRTs/DSTs worked with provincial and district level governors and their staffs, as well as with the representatives of the various sector ministries in their provinces, e.g. DAILs - the Ministry of Agriculture and Irrigation's Provincial Offices - training in GIROA organization, and budgeting would have been extremely useful. Projects at the local level needed GIROA resources for operations and maintenance (staffing, for schools and equipment for clinics). This was handled by the local ministry representatives that submitted budget requests to Kabul. Likewise, provincial and district governors had no access to central funds. Funds had to be requested through the Ministry of Finance. Training FSLs on GIROA budget processes would have increased the ability of the FSLs to advise local officials on how to access GIROA funds, thereby fostering sustainability and legitimacy.
- Similarly, if training in GIROA budget processes and practices had been provided, it would have been easier to place experts in the Finance Ministry and to liaise with Ministry staff to ensure that funds flowed to the provinces and districts. Of course, this training would apply mostly to the FSLs (and FSOs) placed in Kabul.

- Training should have covered USAID business practices in-depth before deployment. This knowledge was crucial for FPOs in their interactions with their military and State Department colleagues.
- Most FSLs wanted more time in training, not less. Specifically, they thought time should have been spent on language training – at least to become familiar with daily salutations and the like. Of course this would have required their knowing where they would be deployed. If the tours had been 18-24 months in length, more language training a la Vietnam could have been justified.
- FSLs during training and afterwards were often referred to Afghan Info on the internet for additional program information. Most found it was not kept up to date.
- More training on understanding the culture of the US military would also have been useful. Conversely, the military would have benefitted from an overview of USAID and how it related to other USG agencies and Implementing Partners in their pre-deployment training. Many in the military thought USAID was a NGO.
- In addition to the descriptions on how the US military worked, ranks, insignia, etc. the training should include how the NATO (ISAF) structure worked. This discussion of the ISAF structure was missing from the Atterbury training and would have been useful to FSLs deployed to non-USG PRTs, of which at least half were run by NATO troops.

Communications:

- Fundamental respect for FSLs and their field monitoring role was lacking among most FSOs based in Kabul, contributing to a divide between Kabul and the field.
- The environment in terms of who was communicating with whom on Regional Platforms, PRTs, and DSTs was both vague and complicated. Clear lines of communication are very important at all levels including from Kabul to the field, with State Department colleagues, and with the US military. Communications across sectors, institutions and with GIRoA counterparts are equally important. The point is for communication to occur, whether it is within the established chain of command or not.
- The FSL backstop office in USAID/Kabul in the early years provided enormous support, both morally and logistically. When this office was moved to the Embassy and became the Inter-Agency Provincial Affairs (IPA) section, FSLs felt they had lost valuable support and a voice. The IPA office in the Embassy did not backstop FSLs - that responsibility shifted to the EXO office in the Mission, which was over extended.
- The assignment curtailment process was confusing and uneven. Many FSLs had counted on two to three year assignments, if not five (the FSL limit), even though advised repeatedly that the assignment was likely to be initially one year, and to be renewed annually as needed. Many curtailments occurred at the last minute, reflecting the accelerated close-down of military bases and PRTs. Numerous FSLs found the process for determining curtailments and extensions haphazard at best.
- Some degree of sexual harassment was present in the work place on certain PRTs. Many cases went unreported, and when reported, were not acted upon. Some attribute this oversight to the challenge of staffing Afghanistan and its special status. Profanity was frequent, as well as unprofessional behavior. When brought to the attention of OAPA and

OHR in Washington, appropriate steps were taken to curb harassment in the work place. Special training on sexual harassment was then provided in Kabul and to selected PRTs.

Impact on Stabilization and Development Programs:

- From the more than 100 interviews there appears to have been little quantifiable, although often observable, impact on long term development programs (especially infrastructure projects – roads, energy – and some health and education projects). There was limited success in short term stabilization programs in strengthening local government capacity in delivering basic services in selected areas.
- Most citizens at the local level realized the services or projects were actually coming from the donor community and not from the national government in Kabul.
- The District Stability Framework (DSF), although intricately designed and briefed, was too sophisticated an instrument and too ambitious for FSLs to use in trying to map the drivers of instability. It was an instrument designed for use by inter-agency civilian personnel serving in conflict situations. The military was the first to embrace the analytical framework for mapping and mitigating population grievances in Helmand Province.³⁸ A number of FSLs tried to use it; but it fell into disuse³⁹ or was replaced with a modified instrument, such as that used in the South, the Regional South Stabilization Approach (RSSA).
- The attempt to substitute the formal judicial system at the local level for the traditional/customary or informal legal system was observed by the FSLs to be a step backward, leading to more corruption and delayed justice.

Principal Recommendations

The recommendations are drawn not only from the FSL interviews, but from interviews with Senior Development Officers. The entire paper was vetted with a selected set of former Mission Directors, Deputy Mission Directors who had served, or are currently serving, in Afghanistan, and the Director of the Afghanistan Desk in Washington.

1. The PRT model was designed for use in countries that were in conflict, or just recently coming out of conflict, and where the military still had troops on the ground. It allowed USAID to operate in areas we normally would not have been able to be present because of the security and life support systems provided by the US military. It was a vehicle for delivering stabilization and development assistance. **The model was most effective (project activities had a chance at being sustained) when there was a reasonably stable, or semi-permissive environment, i.e. when we tried, “to consolidate secure areas rather than to pacify unstable areas.”**⁴⁰ It would seem that the **build** phase was the time to

³⁸ Note to Norma Parker, OAPA/AMS/HRT from Jason Alexander, State/CSO, May 2013.

³⁹ One FSL in Nerkh DST, however, actually trained a FSN in how to implement a DSF so that it would continue in use after the US departed. The FSN translated the DSF into Pashtu and taught other Afghans in its use.

⁴⁰ P.7, Workshop Report 7th International Lessons Learned Conference for Practitioners and Policy Makers Sharing Lessons on the Conduct and Design of Stability Operations, National Defense University, Nov 30-Dec 2, 2011. Some research has pointed out the destabilizing effects of aid by fostering corruption. Development aid has been effective when it was used to attain traditional development goals such as improvements in health and education and some capacity building programs. When used to promote security, rather than

focus on more sustainable projects. In Afghanistan most assistance, both CERP and USAID activities, went to the South and East, the more kinetic areas, rather than to the safer areas of the West and North.

2. **The Mission must take ownership of the PRT/DST model and integrate it into its long term planning and operations.** CORs should use the FSL field officers to increase their capacity to monitor their projects and the implementing partners. Implementing partners should be informed of the role of the FSL as FPO and told to keep them informed, as well as the CORs. The Mission should establish a free-standing FSL coordinating office to oversee their assignment process and provide them with backstopping and advice. The Mission should also ensure the timely flow of information from Kabul to the field, such as on closure of projects, changes in funding levels, and tour extensions. If the program were integrated with the longer term development strategy, the synergy between stabilization activities and development projects would have increased impact, and stabilization would have been viewed as part of the development continuum. The model originally called for a closer nexus between stabilization and development.
3. **Funding levels for a conflict country should be based on a country development strategic plan that takes into account local needs, government revenue generation, and absorptive capacity of the institutions receiving funding.** Too much money breeds corruption and damages legitimacy of the government. “Do fewer things better rather than tackling an unmanageable number of programs in order to avoid the pitfalls of corruption, waste, and discrediting stabilization efforts in the eyes of the population.”⁴¹ Too much money also distorts the economy. “We forget how Afghans see us, which is a way to make money...The country was blanketed with too many experts and too much money.”⁴²
4. **Stabilization and development programming decisions should be made by USAID development officers in close collaboration with the State Department and the military. USAID should coordinate and manage FSLs and FSOs in the field who are acting as on site monitors for development projects. This recommendation carries with it the attendant responsibility for USAID to deploy field officers with adequate development and stabilization experience and with proven abilities to engage the State Department and military in rigorous dialogue.**
5. **USAID’s experience has shown that smaller amounts of CERP funding (somewhere in the range of \$50,000 per PRT) would have been sufficient to focus on small, local initiatives of Afghan district and provincial governments trying to build legitimacy. Buy-in by the local stakeholders is essential for success of any activity and for not**

development, problems arose. One has to be careful when using economic assistance to achieve political and security goals in the context of stability operations. In Afghanistan most assistance was provided in the south and east - the most unstable areas of the country - with donors ignoring stable areas in favor of insecure areas.

⁴¹Ibid, p.8.

⁴² Ibid.

creating dependencies and or a sense of entitlement among the local Afghan citizens. If possible, Afghans should be choosing the projects that they need and making some contribution to the cost of the activity in cash and/or labor. Finally, greater emphasis should be placed on how local/provincial authorities can access GIRoA budget resources to provide a better chance for achieving sustainability.

6. **Every attempt to match individual skills of field program officers to position requirements at specific locations should be made to maximize the effectiveness of the model.** FSLs with prior USAID experience have the most potential for being successful. Having assignments made at the regional platform level would increase the chances for proper placement of personnel. However, a central control would have to be established in Kabul to track the process and archive the data. Having advance knowledge of technical requirements, and some implementation planning completed before recruitment begins, would also help clarify criteria for personnel selection. USAID/Washington should be informed of the field needs well in advance of the recruitment process.
7. **Continuity of leadership and other staffing at the Regional Platforms and PRTs/DSTs is paramount to success.** Tours of FSLs and FSOs serving in Afghanistan (or any conflict country) should be lengthened to at least 18 months, with no more than 3 R&Rs and one Home Leave after the first 12 months. If tours were lengthened to at least 18 months (24 months would be better), some language training would then become cost effective. In Vietnam, CORDS district advisers spent 120- 210 days in language training. FSLs in Afghanistan received virtually no training in Dari or Pashto, relying on interpreters to conduct business. Obviously, they would need to know where they were to be assigned before proceeding with language training.
8. **Other Recommendations Related to FSL Personnel and Training:**
 - FSLs, expected to be the eyes and ears of USAID in the field, need more substantive training, such as that received by CORDS advisers in Vietnam who received nine months of area and cultural studies, as well as language training.
 - The curtailment policy needs to be transparent and based on equitable criteria that are consistently applied. The policy for deployment extensions needs to be clear.
 - There should be some kind of professional recognition or appreciation for departing FSLs, perhaps as part of OAPA's out-processing procedures, accompanied by a letter signed by the AA/OAPA or the USAID Administrator. Recently, RC/South began such a recognition program.
 - USAID/Kabul should inform OAPA and OHR what the projected skill needs are so that candidates can be matched to PRT/DST needs, e.g. project management, close-out, activity design, or personnel management.

- It is critical that during the Pre-Deployment Training, or at the Mission in Kabul, the incoming FSLs be briefed on the USAID country strategy and programs, in depth, focusing on the geographic areas to which the FSLs are to be deployed. A list of implementing partners, other donor activities, and contact information by area of assignment should be provided to the FSLs. This would require telling the FSLs in advance where they are to be assigned. In addition, a specific list of duties (job description including the supervisory structure) should be given to the FSLs based on their areas of assignment, and whether they are in transition to closure.
- FSLs were most effective if they were able to work closely with and gain the trust of Afghan counterparts. This means more frequent contact with Afghan partners is required, assuming the security situation allows it.
- In the next Overseas Contingency Operation, USAID FSOs/FSLs should be more involved in CERP planning and implementation and could even assist in the management of CERP funds, if they receive the proper voucher training from DOD. For example, USAID officers know how to implement community development projects at the local level, involving stakeholders in selecting and managing the projects and providing cash, or in kind labor, as their counterpart contribution.⁴³

⁴³ The ending of the CERP program, a source of easy money, was not entirely a negative occurrence. Many FSLs said it resulted in Afghans seeking funding and services from their own government. A good example of this was from the Kundez PRT, one of the largest PRTs, wherein the FSLs viewed GIROA as driving the budget process and tended to use GIROA and/or SIKA funding for village stabilization projects. CERP funds then were viewed as a possible alternative donor for the project to supplement GIROA resources. (SIKA was the USAID/OTI funded stabilization project). The military was removed from the design process and merely gave their approval for financing.

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