



February 2010

FREEDOM **BUILDER** MAGAZINE



Capacity Development

**AED-N looks to train Afghanistan's
future construction professionals
through mentorship**

AED-N Partners with AISA

Conference held to make local contractors
more competitive for Corps projects

Renewable Energy

ANP outpost gets outfitted with solar panels



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The mission of The Freedom Builder is to support the Commander's Internal Communication Program for the Afghanistan Engineer District. It also serves as the Commander's primary communication tool for accurately transmitting policies, operations, technical developments, and command philosophy to the Afghanistan Engineer District.

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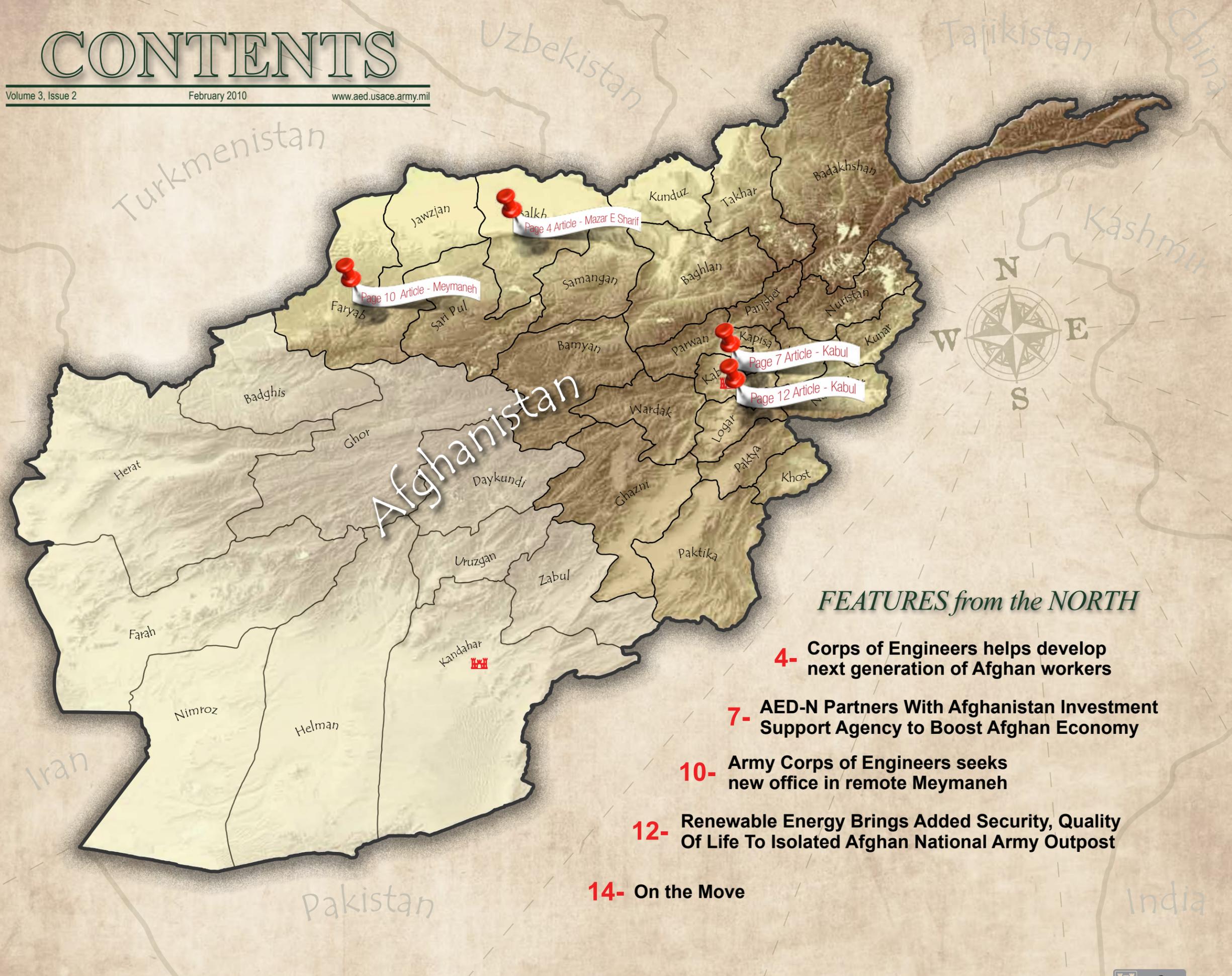
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Cover Image:



Valdez Blackwell talking to Afghan man wearing a black leather jacket (Full story on pg. 4)

Photo by Joe Marek



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Developing next generation of Afghan workers

Story by: Paul Giblin - Photos by: Joe Marek

Valdez Blackwell inspects one of the ANP sites located in Khana Char Bah, taking note of the project's progress.

QURGHAN, Afghanistan – As a group of U.S. Army Corps of Engineers employees arrived to tour a police compound under construction in a village in the northern region of the country on Feb. 14, an Afghan man in a black leather jacket met them at the gate and led them inside.

The man pointed out the most recent work completed by a team of Afghan construction workers to project engineers Valdez Blackwell and Chuck Cameau. The Afghan man guided them through the heavily constructed building, noting the quality and progress of the electrical system, the plumbing system, guard towers, well houses, boundary walls and other aspects of the job. Likewise, he also pointed out deficiencies in the construction.

The man also served as a translator between the Corps personnel and the construction crew's foreman and workers, who all spoke Dari. After wrapping up the inspection, the Afghan man, Blackwell, Cameau and their armed security team

moved onto similar projects in the near-by villages of Andkhoy and Khana Char Bah.

The Afghan man who wore a black leather jacket that day serves as a quality assurance inspector for the Corps of Engineers' area office in Mazar-i Sharif which has oversight of millions of dollars' worth of construction projects in the northern region of Afghanistan. (Freedom Builder is not identifying the man by name because of concerns for his safety.)

In all, 30 Afghans work in professional capacities for the Mezar-i Sharif area office as part of the Corps of Engineers' human capital development initiative in Afghanistan. Some work primarily in Corps of Engineers offices, while others work primarily in the field. Similarly, other Corps of Engineers offices in the north district of Afghanistan tap the local workforce.

Quality assurance inspectors review and report the status of Corps of Engineers projects across the country. For some projects in distant locations, they are

the only representatives of the Corps of Engineers to visit the sites.

The intent of the program is two-fold, said Col. Michael McCormick, the officer in charge of the Corps of Engineers' headquarters in northern Afghanistan. Afghan workers extend the Corps of Engineers' ability to build infrastructure projects in the country, which is the size of Texas. And more importantly, the program is helping develop a new generation of Afghan workers with job skills that languished during three decades of war.

Afghanistan has a labor force of 15 million people, but 40 percent are unemployed, and 53 percent of the country's population lives below the poverty line, according to the 2010 edition of The CIA World Factbook, which compiles statistics about countries worldwide.

In that type of economy, job skills are priceless, McCormick told about 150 contractors at a small business conference on Jan. 10 in Kabul.

"Skills transcend wages. Once workers gain that knowledge, they have it forever. It's theirs. It's locked in their heads," he said at the conference that was sponsored by the Afghanistan Investment Support Agency. "It allows them the opportunity to earn a better living, and to pass on a trade or this better living to their children," he said.

The thinking is that after the coalition's multi-billion-dollar rebuilding efforts in Afghanistan come to completion, the skilled Afghan workers will remain and be available to work on new private-sector construction jobs.

The man in the black leather jacket and other Afghans aligned with the Corps of Engineers in the Mezar-i Sharif area office are eager to learn new skills and they're attuned to the Corps of Engineers' interests, Blackwell said.

"They're very interested in what we're doing," he said. "They actually do pretty a good job, as far as quality assurance, as far as making sure workers are paid, as

far as safety. If they get any pushback or problems, they'll let us know."

Part of that success is spurred by close interaction among American Corps of Engineers personnel and Afghan hires, said Lt. Col. Steven Jordan, the officer in charge of the Mezar-i Sharif operation. Americans and Afghans work side by side both in the office and in the field. Furthermore, Corps of Engineers personnel present monthly seminars on specialized topics such as electrical codes, reading architectural plans, and computer-aided drafting.



Chuck Cameau asks the man in THE leather jacket what is the status at the ANP sites.

Simply working in the same setting spurs meaningful development, Jordan said.

"What I've noticed during my almost nine months here is that their English-speaking ability has just soared. Some of them could just speak one or two words when I got here," he said. "It's just the daily interaction with our folks, both in a working

environment and a social environment.”

Jordan is making plans to increase social interaction with regularly scheduled lunches for all members of the staff. He said he took a cue for the mealtime get-togethers from Gen. Stanley McChrystal’s counterinsurgency guidance, which is posted in the Mezar-i Sharif office. McChrystal, the commander of international forces in Afghanistan, wrote in August 2009 that conflict in Afghanistan will be won by gaining the support of the population, rather than by destroying the enemy.

They relevant passage of the general’s message states: “Live, eat, and train together, plan and operate together, depend on one another, and hold each other accountable – at all echelons down to soldier level. Treat them as equal partners in success.”

The all-staff lunches will present ideal opportunities for meaningful

social interaction, Jordan said.

“We can just talk about their hopes, their dreams, their aspirations, how they feel about the coalition effort here,” he said. “How is their image of us and our effort different than what they grew up seeing or hearing from their parents about the Soviet era? Do they see the effort that we’re doing together as a springboard toward a self-sufficient, democratic Afghanistan?”

Another Afghan who has been working with the Corps of Engineers since 2006 said he has had a positive experience. The man, who was wearing a gray suit jacket one day recently, started as an administrative assistant in the Mezar-i Sharif office and has since been promoted to a quality assurance inspector. (Freedom Builder is not identifying him by name because of concerns for his safety.)

“I am so happy. I am coming here. I am

working here. I find lots of experiences from here,” the man in the suit jacket said in English. “And I like everybody. We are working like a family here.”

Working with the Corps of Engineers provides an ideal setting to learn about the engineering and construction trades, because the Corps adheres to construction standards that other organizations in Afghanistan ignore, he said. “This is an engineering office. It is the best office in Afghanistan to work, because of standard work,” he said. He plans to become an engineer himself.

While the relationship is positive on a one-to-one basis, the capacity development program isn’t regarded warmly by everyone in Afghanistan.

The man in the gray suit jacket said he hasn’t told his Afghan friends that he works



with Corps of Engineers, because he is afraid the information might somehow get into the hands of anti-American insurgents. Instead, he’s told friends that he works for an Afghan construction company, which is technically correct, because the Corps of Engineers holds a contract with an Afghan company that provides the workers, rather than with the individual Afghan workers themselves.

Jordan said the country simply isn’t stable enough yet for some Afghan workers to be public about their association with the Corps of Engineers. They – or their families – could become targets of insurgents. “The last thing we want to do is jeopardize the safety and security of one of these people who really are putting their lives on the line daily to support our mission,” he said. ☐

Boosting Economy by Partnering With Afghanistan Investment Support Agency



Story & Photos by: Hank Heusinkveld

Mike Weaver, AED-North Deputy for Afghan Small Business Development, Listens to a member of AISA concerning the future development of local businesses.

Representatives from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers’ Afghanistan Engineer District-North in Kabul helped explain to Afghan contractors how to do business with the Corps at an Afghan business development conference.

Sponsored by the Afghanistan Investment Support Agency, Corps officials gave presentations on everything from how to provide security at job sites to filling out standard U.S. Army Corps of Engineers contracting forms.

“We wanted an Afghan company or agency connected with (local businesses) to advertise our projects,” said Mike Weaver, AED-North Deputy for Afghan Small Business Development. “AISA issues business certificates and they’ve got more

than 3,000 businesses registered with their agency. (The district) will do well in excess of three billion dollars worth of projects this year. There’s a lot of money going into the country and we want that money to stay in the country.”

According to its website, AISA’s sole purpose in Afghanistan is to “seek investment for the country.” Since USACE Contracting is the business end of the Corps, Weaver said it was only natural to have a partner that was in tune with that.

“They’re very influential people and they hold regular meetings between the ministers and other Afghanistan government officials.”

The conference keynote speaker, AED-North Commander COL Michael

McCormick, praised AISA as a pro-active organization that is attracting investors to unique opportunities in Afghanistan and highlighting the country's exportable products. At the 29th annual India International Trade Fair in New Delhi in November, McCormick noted the Afghan Pavilion featured a variety of Afghan products – carpets, saffron, dried and fresh fruit and other goods. The Afghan entry won First Place and a Gold Medal Award, outdoing the other 28 participating countries.

McCormick told the crowd that the Corps of Engineers expects to award about 300 large construction and service contracts in Afghanistan in 2010, six or seven times the number of contracts it awarded in 2009. “We expect the majority of those contracts



Darrel Johnson explains the intricacy of “One Contract, One Project” methodology.



Danielle Bolte speaks about the importance of supporting local businesses.

will be awarded to Afghan companies. Of the 300 contracts we expect to award this year, about 140 will be for projects valued at 1 million to 5 million dollars each. The remaining 160 contracts will be for projects in excess of 5 million dollars.”

McCormick explained an important change to AED-North’s processes and procedures that’s taking place this year. The “One Contract, One Project” methodology will reduce the number of projects that can be awarded by a single contract.

“We learned that was not helpful to Afghan general contractors. Too often, contractors were unable to deliver all of the projects on their contracts and we overburdened them. We were in error and we’re not going to make that mistake again,” said McCormick. “This year, each project will have its own contract. This approach will offer many benefits. The most important is that it will allow you to focus all of your attention on a single project, so that you’re more successful.”

In addition, McCormick said AED-North will disperse work as much as possible to local construction companies

that are located close to the projects that need to be built. With this approach, he explained, people in each village will feel more association with the projects. “We encourage you to hire local villagers for construction and security jobs, and to buy supplies from other local companies.”

McCormick said the scope of work scheduled to be awarded this fiscal year includes construction of Afghanistan National Police stations, Afghanistan National Army bases, roads and more. In just the northern and eastern areas of Afghanistan, he said the Corps expects to award more than 2.2 billion dollars worth of contracts in 2010.

Weaver reiterated that the Corps of Engineers is committed to providing as much of an economic boost to Afghanistan’s economy as possible. The “Afghan First” initiative, he said, is designed to keep contracting legitimate, and will help promote economic stability and security in Afghanistan.

“What we’ve seen in the past is the prime contractor would get the money and take a percentage of 10 or 20 percent off of the top,” he explained. “They would then sell the contract to someone else instead of taking an active part in management or building. There was only 80 percent of the money left. If you divide that amongst the subcontractors that are doing the work then that means less money is available for the workers at the bottom. That’s not helping the economy.

“Afghan First is directed at keeping money in country, and COL McCormick wants

to make sure that the prime contractors know that they’re going to have some responsibility in that contract. It can be management, it can be building processes, but it has to be 25% of what’s going on with that contract.”

Overall, Weaver said organizations like AISA are key to helping the Afghan people help themselves. The push is on to streamline contracting rules and regulations to help Afghanistan become a more stable country both economically and politically.

“The quicker these companies bring in educated people and the more experience they’ve got working on projects that we offer, the quicker they’re going to be able to take hold and take over from us when we leave Afghanistan.”



Mike Weaver explains “Afghan First is designed to keep contracting legitimate, and will help promote economic stability and security in Afghanistan.”



Army Corps of Engineers seeks new office in remote Meymaneh

Story by: Paul Giblin - Photos by: Capt. Michael Beck

New Corps office upper right located on Norwegian army base in the north-central region of the country.

MAZAR-I SHARIF, Afghanistan—U.S. Army Corps of Engineers officials are planning to open a new project office by early summer on a Norwegian army base in the north-central region of the country to meet the demand for new police stations in the area.

The new office in the city of Meymaneh will oversee construction of Afghanistan National Police stations and Afghanistan National Army complexes that are set to be built throughout Faryab Province, said Army Capt. Michael Beck, the officer in charge of the Corps' Mazar-i Sharif Resident Office. Faryab is a rural province along the border of Turkmenistan.

Construction is expected to start on five police stations and four army complexes in the province in 2010. Several projects

are plotted along Afghanistan's major thoroughfare, Highway 1, which will allow relatively easy access for Corps personnel in the new office. However, others are slated to be built remote regions, some of which are only accessible via bone-jarring dirt roads.

Personnel stationed in the Corps of Engineers' office in Mazar-i Sharif currently oversee projects in the region, but because of the distance and terrain involved, road trips to the region require full-day or overnight hauls. Meymaneh is 202 miles from Mazar-i

Sharif. The only road between the cities is Highway 1, which also is known as the Ring Road. However, the two-lane strip of pavement also is used by donkey carts and pedestrians, slowing travel.

While Corps personnel travel in armored vehicles and are accompanied by armed

guards, long trips pose security risks nonetheless, Beck said. Insurgents are active in the region.

"When we go down to that area, we are way out in the middle of nowhere, so our biggest concern was support if we needed it," he said. The top priorities are emergency medical evacuations and quick-response military back-up, if required, he said.

The new detachment should help resolve those issues. The four-person office is set to be built within a Norwegian army base called Provisional Reconstruction Team Meymaneh, which is centrally located within the cluster of planned developments. The office probably will come on-line in two phases, said Beck, who is leading negotiations with the Norwegians.

That's our priority – get our people down there, work our way into the Norwegians' battle plans and everything," Beck said. "It might be an office of two people for a while, but at least we'll get in our foothold."

Beck has been developing the relationship since November.

Initially, discussions focused on the U.S. Corps of Engineers' mission in the region and its need to place personnel closer to construction sites. He explained to the Norwegians that the Corps is overseeing construction of police stations and other infrastructure projects designed to assist the emerging Afghanistan government become self-sufficient after decades of war.

The negotiations are coming together well, Beck said. "We have the wheels turning right now. We've already submitted all kinds of various land usage agreements. The Norwegians said, 'Come on down. You guys are good,'" he said.

The sides are continuing to work through the construction and the procurement processes. Meymaneh currently accommodates about 400 people – mostly Norwegians, Latvians and Macedonians.

Eventually, the Corps will occupy three

converted shipping containers on the base. An existing shipping container that currently is being used for storage will be converted into office space. Two additional containers will be refurbished into a pair of two-person housing units.

Ideally, the Corps will staff the office with two project engineers and two construction representatives, though the specific staffers have yet to be identified, Beck said.

A key step is developing an Alignment, Movement and Security Plan, which is an agreement that partners Corps officials with foreign military forces that secure various regions of Afghanistan. In short, the foreign forces would provide security for the civilian Corps personnel in exchange for the opportunity to shoot photos of the region from the Corps' leased helicopter. The Corps already has similar agreements in place with other foreign forces in Afghanistan.

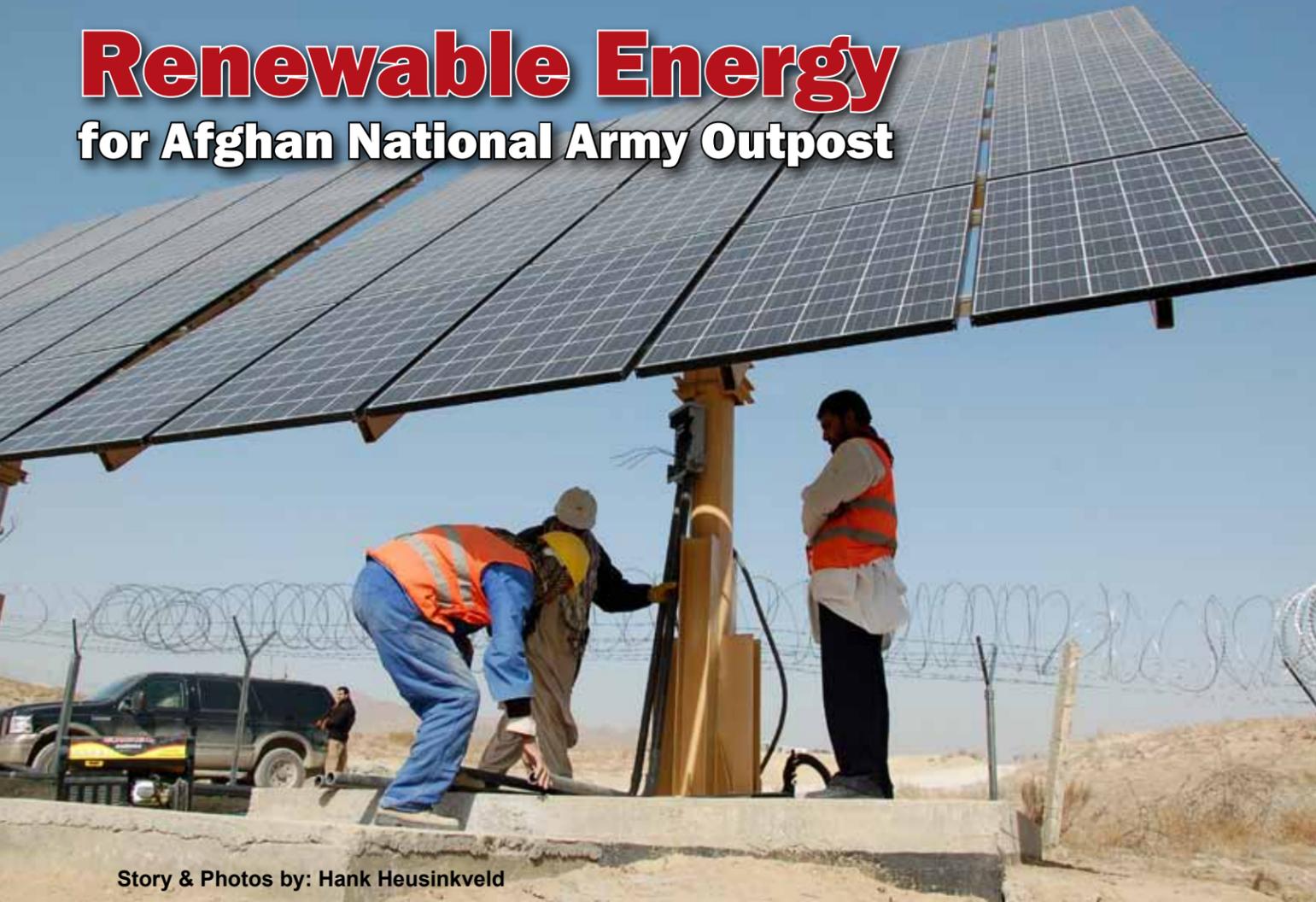
The Norwegians regularly roll out mobile observation teams to access conditions in their region.

"We've already done several missions with the Norwegians in which we embed or go out with them," Beck said. "The Latvians are actually the ones who drive us out and around. They are a top-notch infantry group. Their guys really know their stuff. They're very good at what they do," Beck said. 



Capt. Beck looks on while being briefed before a mission with Norwegian soldiers

Renewable Energy for Afghan National Army Outpost



Story & Photos by: Hank Heusinkveld

Contract workers finish installing a solar panel that will provide power to the Afghanistan National Army ammunition depot on the outskirts of Kabul.

KABUL, Afghanistan -- On top of a hill that overlooks an Afghanistan National Army ammunition depot on the outskirts of Kabul, Afghan soldiers keep a watchful eye on the expansive area from their isolated observation post. Security is tight here, and the soldiers seldom leave the hilltop. Their living conditions at the site are spartan. Inside of what looks like a shed are two bunk beds crammed next to each other with barely enough room for the soldiers to move. On the floor is a brass pot for their traditional tea drinking, and hanging on the side of the shed is a slab of mutton kept cold by the winter air. But as bleak as the

conditions appear, there has been a major technological improvement for security and quality of life.

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' Afghanistan Engineer District-North has installed energy-efficient solar panels that provide solar energy. Funded and initiated by the NATO Training Mission-Afghanistan, this renewable energy source will be able to keep energy-hungry spotlights on throughout

the night, and bring some comfort to the soldiers.

"It gets cold here and it gets hot here," said AED-N Project Manager Elizabeth Chien. "The guard towers here that the solar panels are powering are now giving

"It's designed to be self-contained and self-operating"

the soldiers warmth in the winter, and they'll also power air conditioning units for the summer. More importantly, there are high-powered spotlights that use a lot of energy for the security of the site. The Afghans will no longer have to rely solely on diesel fuel for generators that previously powered the lights. And they have one or two outlets in the living area so that they can have some comforts like heating elements for their tea."

According to Chien, everything the soldiers needed to do their critical job had to be brought to the site by vehicles. Fuel is sometimes scarce and becoming more expensive in Afghanistan, so renewable energy was a viable solution. Although solar energy use is rare or non-existent in this Third World country, Chien said maintenance isn't really an issue because the system runs itself.

"It's designed to be self-contained and self-operating. This particular system is fully automatic. It will take power, store the power, and it will discharge power as necessary. It will make the transfer automatically to diesel generators if stored power runs out from the batteries. (The system) can then power up the generators which will then store energy in the batteries



Project Manager Elizabeth Chien talks with an Afghan contractor about adjustments to the solar power system.

as well as provide the power. All of this is done automatically."

Chien said the solar power system will be under a one year monitoring period to see how it functions in all four seasons.

"I anticipate it will be fully successful here



These solar panels will be able to store enough energy to run powerful security spotlights throughout the night.

ON THE MOVE

Moving in

David Miles	Ignacio Borja	Stanton Shirk	Edward Claypool	Barbara Benge
Philip Benge	Diane Schires	Joseph Warn	Roger Bullock	Osvaldo Collazo
Chris DeVries	Ronald Faulkner	Stephen Harper	Daniel Keenum	Michelle Rachel
Ray Reed	Gerald Shepherd	Matthew Tessier	David Waldeck	Michael Wolterman
MSG James Smith	SSG Bryan Tilden	Tracy Brunson	Braven Dyer	Thomas Hanby
Ansilla James	Sterling Johnson	Daniel Johnston	Danny Lunsford	Shafak Pervez
Daniel Shaver	Cynthia Turenne	YN1 Marvin Williams	Maj Daniel J. Hays	MSgt Edward Sarmiento
SSgt Idalisse Robinson	SSgt Paul Kelley	Jonathan Bailey	Westley Chun	Joyce Clark
John Connolly	Susan Crawford	Mark Curry	John Heard	Parris McGhee-Bey
Lauren Newsom	Lauren Pearce	Rodney Ring	Alisa Zarbo	LTC Donald Davis
LTC William Phillips	CMSgt Thomas Pachniak	John Shafer	TSgt Roderick Stewart	PS1 Alfredo Laatayan
Daniel Nordstrom	John Puvogel	Jackson Vanpelt		

Moving out

April Fitzner	Frederick Williams	William Tickell	Kevin Blair	Kirk Douglas
Teresa Holmes	Charles Kirtley	Antonio Castro	Mark Summers	David Vale
Christopher Wester	Traci Clever	R. Dale Holmes	CPT Samuel Figueroa	Capt Andrew Soine
SMSgt Adrian McCracken	MSgt Luis Fred	TSgt Antonio Mosher	SSgt Jennifer Hollister	Kevin Newman
Jon Allen	Christa Besing	Earl Smith	1LT Christian Boot	SSG Sharon Hayes
MSgt Paul Kim	PO1 Xavier Ware			

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