


U.S. ARMY CORPS OF ENGINEERS
BUILDING STRONG®

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BUILDING STRONG® for stability in Afghanistan

KANDAHAR AIRFIELD, Afghanistan — “Afghanistan’s future is clear: a country led by Afghans, defended by Afghans and working for the benefit of Afghans,” said NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen in October of 2012.

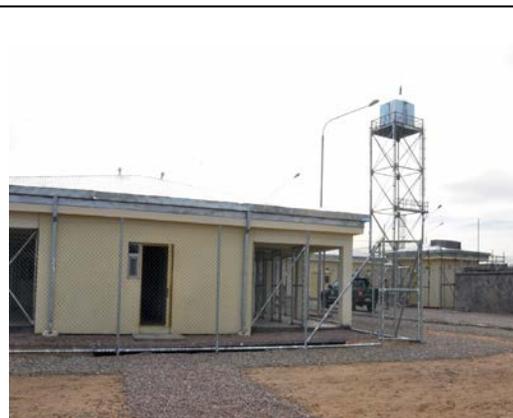
The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers is playing a significant role in that growing reality. It oversees construction projects for the Afghan National Security Forces that not only employ Afghan companies and workers, but also develop the knowledge, skills and abilities of Afghans. Since its inception in 2009, each project the USACE’s Afghanistan Engineer District-South has constructed in its area of responsibility, which includes Badghis, Daykundi, Farah, Ghor, Helmand, Herat, Kandahar, Nimroz, Uruzgan and Zabul provinces, has been aimed at fostering security and stability.

Through its Afghan National Security Forces Program, the district completed and transferred to the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, 31 Afghan National Army facilities valued at about \$540 million. Forty-four Afghan National Police facilities valued at about \$340 million have been completed and transferred, too. In doing so, the district has afforded the ANSF suitable settings in which to live, work and train.

“Armies play a vital role in the defense and stability of any country,” said Afghan National Army Major General Taj Mohammed Jahid, commander of the 207th Corps through an interpreter. “You must have adequate facilities for armies,” he said. “Not only do bases provide the location for training and day-to-day operations, but they serve as deterrents to violence. Military bases and the soldiers who inhabit them have a positive effect on neighboring communities because they provide both physical security and peace of mind. Herat is a prime example. We have better security here in Herat than some of our neighboring provinces,” said Jahid, who leads 12,000 troops from his base of operations at Camp Zafar in Herat province. “Peace of mind allows people to focus on more than mere survival; on things like building businesses, going to school and leading everyday normal



Construction workers labor at the Camp Zafar construction site. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers oversees construction projects for the Afghan National Security Forces, including Camp Zafar, that not only employ Afghan companies and workers, but also develop the knowledge, skills and abilities of Afghans. (USACE Photo by Jasmine Chopra-Delgadillo.)



The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers oversaw construction of this police facility at Tor Gundi which was completed in December. A local, Afghan-owned and operated company constructed the facility in compliance with globally-recognized standards. (USACE Photo by Jasmine Chopra-Delgadillo.)

lives,” he said.

Camp Zafar, a sprawling base built with Afghan contractor labor, has everything from barracks for thousands of soldiers, to armories, gyms, warehouses, a medical clinic and more. It’s one of the Afghanistan Engineer District-South’s signature projects; tangible evidence the district is putting lead on target. Thousands of Afghan National Army troops now live, work and train on the base and the camp is currently expanding to accommodate even more troops. Countrywide, Afghan officers and noncommissioned officers mentored by Coalition forces now train most Afghan soldiers. This holds true at Camp Zafar where at the close of 2012, about 85 percent of recruits and soldiers, which include women, received training from Afghan instructors. They train at ranges, courses and classrooms built by the USACE.

For U.S. Army Col. Vincent Quarles, commander of the Afghanistan Engineer District-South, executing quality and timely construction for his customers and end users is a top priority. Everything his district builds supports the advancement of Afghanistan.

“We stand by the Afghan people and the goal of defeating the insurgency so Afghanistan can thrive,” he said. “The facilities we construct provide an important base of operations for the Afghan National Army and Afghan National Police to serve and protect their communities,” said Quarles. “And we have more to do.”

More than 100 ANSF projects ranging in size, cost and complexity are slated to be completed by the time the ANSF will assume full responsibility for security throughout Afghanistan in 2014.

With such a high volume of projects, the district has had to grow up fast, explained Laurel Stevens, deputy chief for programs and project management.

Prior to 2010, many of the facilities USACE built were traditional concrete masonry units. Construction of a police station used to take about two years to build. It was difficult to find local qualified construction contractors. Materials were not easily acquired. Design features appealed to western sensibilities, not Afghan ones. As a result, projects were delayed, equipment was hard to access and end users accidentally broke features such as sinks because they were not designed for common Afghan practices such as foot washing before prayer. A team of experts including personnel from the USACE, the Defense Logistics Agency and GIRoA discussed courses of action to address challenges. The way ahead included employing a more austere and standard design, using Government-Furnished Equipment instead of Contractor-Furnished Equipment, and selecting culturally-appropriate features such as squat toilets and ground level sinks that allow for ablutions.

To employ maximum affordability with no reduction in quality, the district draws on reachback services which allow personnel on the ground to access timely, organized and responsive support from technical experts located at districts in the United States, Europe and Asia. Reachback personnel design projects, administer contracts, manage budgets and more. Reachback allows the deployed force to remain as small as possible while still executing a large-scale mission. This type of “insourcing” reduces costs. Along with affordability and quality, the need for sustainability, meaning facilities that can be operated and maintained by Afghans, is essential. Now it takes about 2/3 of the time to construct a facility with austere and standardized designs that are easier to build using materials that can be locally or regionally sourced.

In addition to austere and standardized designs, the type of military construction USACE prefers to build in Afghanistan now is the self-supporting steel arch structure. It's quickly erected, relatively inexpensive, yet reliable. Arch-span structures have attributes that make them ideal because they offer weather-proofing quickly. Once the structure is up, laborers are able to work on the "guts" of the building: mechanical, electric and plumbing, sooner rather than later. The construction requires a commercial, trailer-mounted, automatic building machine, coiled steel and an electric seamer. A crane to lift arch panels into place, concrete form work and a welder are required. The time savings achieved is significant when compared to traditional construction. Delivering facilities on time and on budget has increased. Yet construction in Afghanistan remains no easy duty. Perhaps the most grueling task for project managers entails keeping aggressive project schedules on track, said Ron Muriera, a senior project engineer with the district's Herat Area Office. Other challenges include logistics, since some supply routes remain dangerous and materials have gotten shot, stolen, or damaged, said Muriera, who deployed from the Seattle District.

Site accessibility is an issue, too, since a number of construction sites are in remote areas far away from forward operating bases in harsh, mountainous terrain. The USACE does not determine where to build. The Combined Security Transition Command-Afghanistan works with GIROA's Ministries of the Interior, Defense and others to determine locations. Collaboration and frequent communication is essential, said Nick Norals, a realty specialist with the district who deployed from the Nashville District.

"It has been the right mix of people, planning, coordination and commitment by everyone involved, with the common goal of achieving sustainable outcomes for and with the Afghan people that has resulted in providing dozens of high-quality installations in strategic locations," said Quarles.

DELIVERING WHAT THE CUSTOMERS WANT, WHAT THE END USERS NEED

On a visit to a police department near the border with Turkmenistan in December, Muriera met with ANP Colonel Noor Mohammad Adel to determine how the facility was operating. The facility was transferred in December to the ANP, although a few minor "punch list" items remained.

"I cannot even begin to explain what a positive effect this facility has had on the policemen and the neighborhood," said Adel through an interpreter. "Before, all we had was an old, decrepit building and some shacks for cooking, sleeping and working. Look what we have now: A proper facility where police can effectively train and operate," he said. "Most of the police are from this town and having such a good facility here makes their morale high. Their families feel safer, too," he said.

A local, Afghan-owned and operated company constructed the facility near the border with Turkmenistan and that fact was not lost on locals, explained Adel.

The new facility includes guard towers, entry control points, training rooms, barracks, a kitchen and more. Throughout the district's AOR, USACE engineers, again and again, have overseen construction of barracks, showers, latrines, storage facilities, dining facilities, headquarters facilities, classrooms, obstacle courses, maintenance facilities, training ranges, armories, electrical distribution systems, sanitary sewer collection system, antiterrorism/force protection features, medical clinics and so much more to support the development of the ANSF and advancement of the Afghan people.

“Good communication on all levels has been the key to being successful,” said Jennifer Zimmerman, a project manager responsible for projects in the Regional Command West area of operations.

Zimmerman, who deployed from the Portland District, has served in Afghanistan for almost three years.

“Whether it’s travelling frequently to visit the projects and meet with our internal team or daily meetings with the field office and customers to aggressively manage the schedule, frequent and good communication is key,” she said.

“We want to set the Afghans up for success,” Quarles said. “Building high-quality facilities, selecting Afghan companies when possible, employing Afghan professionals and mentoring Afghan soldiers, police and civilians in facilities management will go a long way toward promoting an independent Afghanistan,” he said.

MENTORING: A TWO-WAY PROCESS

In Afghanistan, where access to adequate supplies and a highly-skilled workforce is not easy due to years of hostilities and neglect, USACE has managed to locate and employ dozens of Afghan construction companies and engineering professionals. Since construction workers are most often Afghans and laborers from other developing nations where globally-recognized construction standards may not have been demanded, quality assurance and construction representatives play a critical role. Within the bounds of their authority, USACE quality assurance and construction representatives provide mentoring to Afghan contractors on the job sites. They visit sites several times a week and when they see a deficiency, they bring it to the attention of the contractor immediately. The contractor provides a corrective action plan to bring the construction into compliance. Since language and cultural differences can often be a barrier, the district supplements USACE personnel with Afghan professionals. All are engineering graduates of Afghan universities, speak English, inspect project sites and often are the only USACE eyes and ears on the ground.

“Afghan professionals are an essential part of the team,” said Nabil Abourialy P.E.

Deployed from the USACE Walla Walla District, Abourialy is the senior civilian at the Herat Area Office. For Afghan civil engineers like Tariq (full name purposely omitted,) 30, a graduate of Herat University and a project manager, USACE has afforded him the opportunity to be mentored by American engineers on projects designed to make the very province he hails from safer.

“When the Taliban left Herat, we just had one inadequate army base in the north of the city. We had no other police departments, no security forces buildings. Now we have much better facilities and forces. People in my neighborhood feel safe because they are actually safer,” he said.

After completing a USACE-sponsored training course that focused on compliance with globally-recognized construction standards and USACE business processes, Tariq began work as a USACE quality assurance representative on construction sites. Six years later he is now a senior engineer performing a full range of duties including developing cost and schedule estimates, researching local market pricing, and supervising and mentoring junior Afghan quality assurance representatives.

“The Corps of Engineers has changed my life; my family’s life. Before construction of the (ANSF) facilities, there was no security, no jobs, no hope. I didn’t even own a bicycle. Now I am building projects that are making my country safer and providing for my family.”

USACE has benefitted from the Afghan professionals, too.

“Their knowledge, skills and abilities rival American engineers,” said Abourialy. “They may be learning from us, but we are also learning about how to operate in their homeland.”

At the most remote construction sites, inaccessible to Americans, the Afghan engineers provide construction oversight and report back to USACE with photography, video and professional assessments about progress on construction.

“Their service is essential to meeting aggressive project schedules and delivering what we have said we will deliver,” Abourialy said.

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For more news and information on USACE construction in Afghanistan, visit our website at www.aed.usace.army.mil/aes, on Facebook at www.facebook.com/US-Army-Corps-of-Engineers-Afghanistan-Engineer-District-South or on Flickr at www.flickr.com/photos/usace-tas.