



# The growing Operations and Maintenance mission in Afghanistan

By Bruce J. Huffman

## Corps personnel inspect the power plant at the Kabul Military Training Center.

Since 2003, the major focus of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers in Afghanistan has been building facilities for the Afghan National Security Forces. These facilities are vital to building-up and sustaining the Afghan National Army and Police, and are essential to establishing security for Afghanistan and its neighbors. So far, the Corps has built nine Afghan National Army Garrison/Brigade facilities, and has nine more currently under construction. They've also built a handful of somewhat smaller Afghan National Police facilities, with plans to build about 300 more in the coming year. Eventually, each of these facilities will be complete, but the operations and maintenance mission will continue to grow indefinitely.

“That’s true, initial construction has a distinct beginning and end, but the O&M requirements just keep growing bigger with each facility that’s completed,” said Jon Allen, Deputy Branch Chief of the Operations and Maintenance Program for the Afghanistan Engineer District – North.

Since 2003, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers has invested more than \$3.5 billion to build facilities

for the Afghan National Security Forces, and an additional \$400 million for operations and maintenance; a cost that is expected to increase significantly over time. “We have to be good stewards of tax-payer dollars, and ensure these



Afghan maintenance workers repair a well at Camp Hero, an Afghan National Army base located in Kandahar.

facilities function as designed,” said Allen. The mission of the O&M program is to provide maintenance to all facilities and infrastructure in such a condition that they may be effectively used for

their designated functional purpose. “Without proper maintenance, little problems can become big, and big problems cost a lot of money,” said Allen. “Through proper maintenance we’re working to ensure that each facility has every opportunity to reach its life-span potential.”



**Contract plumbers fix a shower at Camp Commando in Kabul.**

Most of the ANA facilities are large self-sustaining compounds designed to house and support anywhere from 650 to 6000 Afghan Soldiers. The buildings are relatively straightforward with perimeter walls, power generation plants, water supply, storage and waste water treatment facilities, headquarters and administrative buildings, hospitals, dining facilities, barracks, logistical centers, warehouses, motor pools, training facilities, and ammo supply points.

ANP facilities are built for Uniformed and Border Police and range in size from just a few one-story buildings to large compounds that support hundreds of personnel. ANP facilities are geographically spread out, bringing governance and the rule of law to far and remote reaches of the country, but also making the facilities harder to maintain, because they typically don’t have on-site maintenance representatives like the larger facilities.

According to Allen, eventually the Corps wants to transfer the O&M responsibility to the Afghan Ministry of Defense and the Ministry of Interior. “One of the things that we want to accomplish in the days ahead, and this is one of the command

priorities, is to build capacity,” said Lt. Gen. Robert L. Van Antwerp, Commanding General, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. “So we’re looking at how we can engage more Afghans in the business of engineering. We’ve got some coaching, mentoring and partnering to do, all with the intention of building capacity among the Afghans. I think ultimately the success of the country depends on this kind of capacity building,” said Van Antwerp. According to Allen, some of the biggest challenges to overcome are the cultural differences. “You can apply lifecycle management planning and preventative



**An Afghan contractor monitors the control panel at the power plant at Camp Hero in Kandhar**

maintenance logic to the O&M equation, but you need to understand that most Afghan Soldiers and Police are not accustomed to these types of facilities. In fact, only about 25% of Afghans have electricity or indoor plumbing, so they are literally learning how

to use and take care of these types of facilities for the first time. We use locally procured fixtures and hardware in all the projects, in preparation for future sustainment by the Afghans, but you have to provide some basic training too,” said Allen.

Contrack International Inc. performs all the



**Contrack International Inc. personnel repair a split pack at an ANA military hospital in Kabul.**

operations and maintenance for the ANSF facilities, with a mandate of “Afghan First”, an initiative where special consideration is given to try and hire Afghan firms and workers whenever possible. With close



**The power plant at Camp Shaheen, an Afghan National Army base located in Mazar-e-Sharif.**

oversight from the Corps of Engineers, the staff of CII is training Afghans to perform maintenance and 24 hour emergency maintenance services of the facilities



**Afghan maintenance workers repair a well at Camp Hero, an Afghan National Army base located in Kandahar.**

and equipment.

Contrack currently has more than 1,200 personnel consisting of site managers, engineers, technicians and support staff, who work closely with the Corps and the end-user to maintain the facilities. “We’ve learned a lot about building here in Afghanistan in the last five years,” said Allen. “We’re not just building and maintaining facilities, we are also building bridges of understanding and incorporating them into the development, design, construction and maintenance. We’re striving to instill pride in ownership, and developing a long term capacity that will help this nation thrive.

For more information about the Corps of Engineers in Afghanistan please log on to: [www.aed.usace.army.mil](http://www.aed.usace.army.mil)



**Contrack International Employees repair a transformer in Pol-e-Charki**