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Corps of Engineers delivers 2 police stations in northeastern Afghanistan

KABUL – The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers turned over to the Afghanistan National Police two new headquarters complexes in the northeastern region of the country during the past two weeks. The facilities:

- A \$507,000 district police headquarters compound in Nurgaram, Nuristan Province, on Thursday, Dec. 9.
- A \$7.9 million border police battalion headquarters complex in Camkani, Paktya Province, on Monday, Nov. 29.

The Nurgaram compound, like other district police headquarters, includes a stone perimeter wall with guard towers, offices, meeting spaces, dining facilities, holding cells, laterines, an electrical generator, and gravel roads with curbs among other amenities. The main building features concrete construction. The police station is located along the main road in the hilly town that's located between a mountain ridge and a river.

The fortified single-story complex will be vital in helping police provide security for the 50,000 people who live in the area, said Nuristan Sub-Governor Mahrullah Muslim, who attended the grand opening.

"The police have problems here," he said through a translator. "They cannot do their job right because of insurgent anti-Afghan forces."

Insurgents who live in the mountains do not recognize the elected Afghan government, and they have threatened to behead residents, including police officers, who work for the government, Muslim said. Although there have been no beheadings in the region in recent years, residents are frightened because insurgents have beheaded people for the same reason elsewhere in Afghanistan, he said.

Just before the dedication, Police Chief Shah Mamood told U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Col. Thomas Magness that plans called for 40 police officers and 20 supervisors to take up residence in the facility immediately. "If you turn over the project to us today, then we are moving in tomorrow," Mamood said through an interpreter.



Afghan police and government officials, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers personnel and others tour the Afghanistan National Police Nurgaram headquarters complex during its grand opening on Dec. 9, 2010. Photo by Paul Giblin, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

The Nurgaram station was delayed because of management issues involving the Kabul-based construction firm Zurmat Construction Co., and because of security issues. The police station originally was one of 19 police stations throughout the Nangahar and Nuristan provinces that were awarded in a single contract for \$9.1 million in 2007.

However, security issues that kept construction crews from working safely at six sites prompted the Corps of Engineers to later descope the contract by eliminating those sites, reducing the contract to \$7.6 million. Zurmat struggled with the remaining structures, said Magness, commander of the Corps of Engineers' district in northern Afghanistan.

"This is a contractor that clearly was awarded too much work," he said. "We descope six of them and over time he's worked out the rest. This guy's just been at it for a very long time. He probably bid lower than they go for these days."

The Corps of Engineers personnel worked closely with Zummat executives to ensure the remaining projects were finished, he said. The Corps of Engineers since has adjusted its policy of bundling several projects into a single contract, in an effort to reduce overburdening emerging Afghan construction firms. The agency now awards just one or two police stations per contract to ease the load on individual firms.



Nuristan Sub-Governor Mahrullah Muslim, center with raised hand, welcomes guests into the Afghanistan National Police Nurgaram headquarters building during its grand opening on Dec. 9, 2010. Photo by Paul Giblin, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

Nawab Khan, an Afghan native who serves as a deputy resident engineer in the Corps of Engineers' resident office in Jalalabad, noted that security issues also slowed progress. He said insurgents sometimes planted improvised explosive devices along a road that is used to deliver supplies to the region and at other times insurgents robbed drivers hauling goods.

While insurgents never destroyed or stopped a supply truck headed to the police station, deliveries to the construction site were impacted nonetheless because drivers refused to use the road for long periods following attacks, Khan said. "When it happened, people were scared and no one wanted to drive on the road," he said. Furthermore, rocket attacks aimed at a U.S. Army post just outside the village similarly led to slowdowns at the construction site, Khan said.

The Corps of Engineers' involvement with the Nurgaram police station will continue. Engineers will explore options to find a permanent water source for the complex, Magness said. Presently, water is trucked in, just as it for the U.S. Army post nearby.

The Chamkani border compound includes a security wall and guard towers, plus 12 buildings including administration offices, barracks for 175 personnel, a dining facility, a logistics building, latrines, a vehicle maintenance facilities, gravel roads with curbs, among other amenities. It too features concrete construction.

The lead contractor was Technologists Inc., which is based in Rosslyn, Va., and has offices in Kabul. The project employed approximately 400 Afghan workers at the peak of construction.

The Corps of Engineers is the primary organization building army bases, police stations, roads, airstrips and other infrastructure projects in Afghanistan to increase the country's stability and economy.

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