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Report of Inspection

Embassy Kabul,
Afghanistan

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KEY JUDGMENTS

- In a nominally post-conflict environment, Embassy Kabul has major responsibility for nation building. The scope and duration of the task will require significant human and financial resources. The Department must work to attract and assign qualified staff and to provide expanded office and housing facilities well into the future.
- The inspectors' rightsizing review at Embassy Kabul produced a conflicting result. For a bilateral embassy in a poor and undeveloped third-world country of 29 million people, the embassy is too large. Contrarily, for a mission charged with leading U.S. efforts to rebuild a shattered nation, conducting active counterterrorism and counternarcotics programs, and promoting democracy, the embassy may be too small.
- Afghanistan was the source of almost 90 percent of the global production of raw opium in 2004. Inevitably, counternarcotics issues will vie with counterterrorism and counterinsurgency on the U.S. government's policy agenda. Meshing these critical objectives is not easy or automatic.
- Embassy Kabul is taking commendable steps to wean the host government from over-dependence on the U.S. government for policy guidance and policy decisions.
- Embassy Kabul is staffed by energetic, capable employees who work tirelessly to accomplish their work. All assigned Americans are volunteers, a factor that enhances *esprit de corps*.
- The U.S. mission in Afghanistan is bereft of institutional memory. This is, by far, the most serious impediment to good executive direction. Essentially the entire American staff turns over each summer, there is rarely any overlap, and some officers assigned to Kabul are inexperienced in the responsibilities assigned to them. The embassy has proposed imaginative ways to ameliorate these problems. The out-of-country leave policy, a benefit provided by the Afghanistan service recognition package, exacerbates staffing problems.
- Almost all Afghan employees were hired after the embassy reopened in 2002. Overburdened Americans have little time to train, mentor, and evaluate the locally employed staff. Supervision will be even more problematic when some American officers move into the new chancery while their local employees work in temporary offices scattered across the compound.

CONTEXT



Afghanistan's political history has been one of repeated invasions with only episodic periods of unified, quiescent rule. Geography has played a part. The country is astride historic trade and invasion routes. Alexander the Great pushed into the northern reaches in the third century B.C. Genghis Khan invaded in 1219, thereafter to impose brutal rule for a short time. In the 15th century, Tamerlane, one of Genghis Khan's descendents,

incorporated Afghanistan into a wider Asian empire. The 19th century was marked by the Anglo-Russian "Great Game" contest for control of Central Asia. Neither imperial power subdued Afghanistan for long.

Just as outsiders have exercised but ephemeral control, homegrown rule often has attenuated sharply beyond the confines of the capital. In terms of governance, topography and climate are as much determinants as geography. The ruggedness of the terrain, the cold winters and hot summers, the isolation of sparsely populated areas, ethnic and linguistic differences, and difficult access to much of the country all shape a highly tribal, individualistic society. Personal and tribal loyalties are paramount, but political participation in recent elections demonstrated a sense of nationhood. The populace also shares a deep-rooted commitment to Islam, although there is a wide variety of religious practice and interpretation.

From 1880 to 1973, the country was ruled by a kingly dynasty. Since the overthrow of the monarchy, Afghanistan has experienced almost continuous conflict. A short-lived republic under Sardar Mohammad Daoud gave way to Marxist rule in April 1978 and an Afghani tilt towards the Soviet Union. The comity between Kabul and Moscow soon soured, and on Christmas Eve, 1979, Soviet troops invaded. As was the case with predecessor attempts, the Soviets

were unable to subdue and rule the country. Abetted by the U.S. government and allies, Afghan freedom fighters (“mujahideen”) ultimately inflicted such heavy tolls that the Soviets were forced to withdraw.

The mujahideen were not parties to the 1988 Geneva Accords that ensured full Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan by February 15, 1989. Absent the common threat of the Moscow-directed infidels, the mujahideen fell on each other, and a bloody civil war ensued. When the zealous and puritanical Taliban movement gained strength in the mid-1990s, the war-weary population initially welcomed them. Only later did harsh imposition of retrogressive interpretations of Islam alienate significant numbers of the population.



Inspector General Howard Krongard and ISP Team Leader David Zweifel examine damage at the former Taliban Headquarters, now a base used to train members of the Karzai Protective Detail.

Based on perceived religious affinities, the Taliban government gave sanctuary to rabidly anti-Western terrorist elements, most notably the al-Qaida movement led by Osama bin Laden. After the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks in New York and Washington, the Taliban refused to turn over al-Qaida leaders. The die was cast, and on October 7, 2001, the United States took the lead in military action aimed at overthrowing the regime in Kabul. The capital fell on November 13, 2001.

Like the country, Embassy Kabul has a turbulent history. Although diplomatic relations between Washington and Kabul date from 1934, it was 1948 before the first resident American Ambassador presented credentials. Relations with King

Zahir Shah (1933-1973) flourished. Sizeable economic assistance programs, even a Peace Corps presence, marked this period. The existing office building (EOB) was dedicated in 1967 during the tenure of Ambassador Robert Neumann, father of the current Ambassador.

A crisis in bilateral relations came with the February 14, 1979, assassination of U.S. Ambassador Adolph (“Spike”) Dubs. Thereafter, U.S. representation was at the chargé d’affaires level until the embassy closed in 1989.

With the quick capitulation of the Taliban government, the U.S. embassy reopened on December 17, 2001. Now, it is the U.S. government’s turn to help Afghans establish governance and rule of law in what many perceive to be a state barely able to function.

Despite the rapidity with which U.S. and coalition forces achieved military success, Afghanistan is far from a tranquil, pacified arena. The virulent threat of the al-Qaida movement still emanates from the mountainous region on the Afghanistan-Pakistan border. Thus, the coalition’s top priority appropriately is a focus on the global war on terror. At the same time, remnants of the Taliban fuel a counterinsurgency movement requiring constant military action. In time-honored tradition, personal feuds and tribal disputes occasion frequent “green-on-green” violence.

In a word, this is a very dangerous operating environment, one in which personal security considerations severely constrain movements of personnel and their ability to carry out official duties.

Looming beyond the immediate security issues is that of counternarcotics. In 2004, Afghanistan produced 87 percent of the world’s raw opium. Opium accounts for much of the entire country’s economic livelihood. Corruption is rampant, especially so in relation to the refining and trafficking of marijuana and opiate derivatives. Politically, the society teeters on the brink of becoming a “narco-state” - with all that that portends in challenges to the United States and other governments.

Against this gloomy backdrop, the embassy’s broad mandate is to help build a nation, establish governance, infuse democracy, and implant the concept of rule of law. This is not a task for which the Department is well equipped by training, human resources, or operational experience. Even with a continuing infusion of human and financial resources, the rebuilding of Afghanistan could easily take a generation, and success is not at all assured.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTION

A frequent statement at Embassy Kabul, almost a mantra, is “there are too many moving parts.” Indeed, the complex activities that swirl around involve so many logistical, security, and personnel aspects as almost to defeat orderly planning.

Challenges abound for top management at Embassy Kabul. The staff works in decrepit or temporary offices amid an active construction zone. Living conditions have been likened to those at a minimum-security prison. Some American supervisors distrust a willing, essentially under-trained Foreign Service national (FSN) cadre. Since May 2005, because of pervasive security concerns, the embassy has restricted nonofficial travel in Kabul and requires armed security details on official travel outside Kabul.

Congressionally-mandated restrictions dating from 2002 on construction of embassy facilities in Kabul mean that the new office building (NOB) and residential units cannot accommodate current requirements for office space and housing. The space problem will only get worse as mission elements continue to staff up to take on increased program demands. The USAID director, for example, noted that his officers now attempt to manage portfolios that are often 10 times larger than portfolios in other AID offices - a situation that demands the assignment of additional employees. This is a pattern across the mission. Indeed, the bilateral embassy envisaged in 2002 is very different from today's official U.S. government presence. The ongoing growth of programs and responsibilities at Embassy Kabul precluded a meaningful rightsizing exercise by the Office of Inspector General (OIG).

Security considerations are paramount in all aspects of embassy operations. In the view of the inspectors, the overall quality of the security program is high, although many embassy employees expressed frustration over their inability to move around more easily in Kabul and around the country, both for personal and official travel. Reporting and other program officers stationed in Kabul, but with national responsibilities, face major challenges in carrying out their duties. The Ambassador has direct responsibility for embassy security and is acutely sensitive to the threat environment. The regional security officer effectively manages the embassy security program covering six compounds in Kabul and providing personnel protection to embassy officers. Performance of the embassy protective detail (EPD) is discussed later in this report.

In the realm of policy direction and execution, interaction with the CFC-A is critical. The roles of the Ambassador and the commanding general overlap to a degree. Both have important business that demands access to the few top-level Afghani officials who are able to make and implement decisions. There is a constant potential for duplication of effort or, even more troubling, sending mixed signals and messages to the host government.

To alleviate - but not obviate - this problem, the Ambassador and commanding general are in frequent dialogue on issues across the board. Especially at the top, the cooperation is excellent. However, even with the best of intentions and effort, it is an unequal equation. CFC-A is engaged in political, social, economic, and development issues on a broad scale. It is work normally the province of the embassy. Naturally, the embassy has no responsibility for or say in military operations. The CFC-A role in achieving a modicum of security is critical to the survival of the regime. The embassy's actions, whether in terms of development, reconstruction, capacity building, etc., are much slower acting. For President Karzai and his government, survival comes first in hopes that the rest will follow.

But, by far, the most serious impediment to good executive direction is the near total lack of institutional memory. This stems from the rapid turnover of American staff and the inexperience among the FSN staff. Essentially the entire American staff is on one-year, unaccompanied assignments. Most transfers take place during the summer months. There is rarely any overlap among American officials. This further hampers the ability to establish the depth of interpersonal relations so vital to success in working with the fledgling government. In keeping with the Afghanistan service recognition package, Americans assigned to the embassy are entitled to two regional rest breaks and two rest and recuperation (R&R) trips outside the region (London is the designated R&R point) during the course of a one-year tour. Thus, effective on-the-job time in country averages out to about 10 months.

The embassy is in active dialogue with the Director General concerning some innovative proposals to address the issue of continuity. OIG finds the embassy's suggestions meritorious.

OIG perceives the general quality of American staff to be quite high. However, with this pattern of rapid turnover, the 'learning curve' is never-ending. New arrivals almost invariably reinvent the wheel. Continuity of policies and procedures is far from assured. Efficiency suffers as most of the staff try to get on top of their jobs while fielding the demands of the moment. There is insufficient time to focus on visionary planning.

The Ambassador is determined to guide a transition process towards a more orthodox embassy. At the intergovernmental level, this means a calibrated move away from the pro-consul actions that hitherto stamped the relationship. OIG commends this decision gradually to pass to the Afghan government decision-making and implementation responsibilities. (b) (2)(b) (2)(b) (2)(b) (2)(b) (2)(b) (2)(b) (2)(b) (2)

Within the mission, the leadership style is one of a high degree of delegation of authority and responsibility. The Ambassador expects to engage on interagency issues if and when these cannot be resolved at lower levels. During the brief time he has been here, he has not needed to do so. Nonetheless, like the Ambassador, OIG is aware of internal tensions. In instances in which these relate to differences of policy interpretation or execution, the Ambassador should be provided with decision memoranda that will clarify the matter for all concerned.

The complexity of coordinating the many moving parts of the mission, combined with rapid turnover of personnel, gives particular importance to basic planning documents like the Mission Performance Plan (MPP). Embassy Kabul initiated an unusual process that incorporated the expertise of military planning specialists who oversaw preparation of the MPP. The result was an MPP that won recognition as the Department's best MPP for FY 2006. These same specialists are also heavily engaged in the preparation of "Action Plan 2006" for Afghanistan, a document that will outline U.S. government objectives in Afghanistan from a broader perspective than that provided by the MPP. The drafters are striving for harmony and coherence in the two documents, as both will have a number of issues in common.

The Ambassador and the deputy chief of mission (DCM) conveyed to OIG their determination to use the MPP and especially "Action Plan 2006" as key tools to coordinate the complex programs underway in Afghanistan and to help resolve issues discussed above related to tracking action assignments and program decisions. OIG therefore did not make a formal recommendation regarding the creation of additional planning mechanisms but did stress to the Ambassador and other embassy officers the need to decide on and then implement a systematic approach to setting priorities, allocating resources, and evaluating progress.

Although the FY 2006 MPP won the Department's prize, OIG concluded that the utilization of a special team to produce the document did not encourage 'buy-in' by several mission elements. Indeed, some section heads reported they felt marginalized and so did not engage in the normal discussions and interaction that

accompany MPP preparation at most missions. At the same time, some of the same section leaders are determined to be more involved in the next MPP cycle. OIG discussed this with the embassy leadership and made an informal recommendation on the need for all mission elements to engage fully in MPP preparation.

With the prominence of Afghanistan as a policy concern of the Administration, the heavy flow of high-level visitors is the norm. During the course of this inspection, the Secretary, the Undersecretary of Defense, and U.S. Central Command Commander were in country.¹ The National Security Advisor completed a visit shortly before OIG's arrival. The preparation, handling, and reporting on such visits involves large amounts of embassy resources and, ipso facto, reduces the time and energy that otherwise might be devoted to reporting, management, and executive direction.

The DCM, like the Ambassador, spends much of his time on policy issues. The relationship between the two follows a classic 'alter ego' model of embassy leadership. Both are approachable and expect to be in open dialogue on all issues pertaining to management issues. At the same time, their 'light rein' approach and the complexity of operations mean that they are not always fully informed. Training, treatment, and morale among the FSN cadre are among areas that merit closer front office attention.

The DCM oversees an established career development program for entry-level officers, but there is no similar organized effort for entry-level specialists despite their inclusion in the embassy's written "Junior Mentoring Program," announced in September 2004. The inspectors discussed this omission with the DCM, who will take the necessary action to bring the entry-level specialists into the mentoring program.

During the inspection, a member of the staff engaged the dissent channel process. The issue of concern was discussed in detail with the Ambassador who, correctly, did not dissuade the submission of the cable. The process was correctly handled in a timely fashion.

In judging decisiveness as a hallmark of executive direction, the Ambassador receives high marks from his subordinates. OIG notes that, during the inspection, he took action to terminate U.S. involvement in a controversial project that was a priority for several top government officials in Afghanistan.

¹ The former U.S. Ambassador to Afghanistan was also in Kabul to visit an ill family member.

Unique to Embassy Kabul, the ARG was established in 2003. The concept, developed at the Department of Defense (Defense), was to enlist the expertise of private sector individuals charged with advising the Ambassador and Afghan government officials. In practice, there have been problems. Most of the ARG experts are involved in areas of economic development. At the very minimum, this calls to the fore the need for close coordination and collaboration with other U.S. elements engaged in the same areas. Personal relationships variously have enabled these elements to work harmoniously or, conversely, have set the scene for internal disagreement. The potential for confusion arises among the USAID mission, the embassy's economic section, and CFC-A's political-military integration officers and ARG advisers who independently seek to influence Afghan officials. With multiple sources of advice coming from the U.S. government focusing on a limited number of key Afghani ministers and ministries, the potential for crossed-signals or conflicting views is ever present. Roles and tasks need to be better coordinated. Records indicate instances in which previous ARG members implicitly committed the U.S. government to projects that subsequently could not be funded.

To address these issues, the Ambassador decided that ARG experts should no longer perceive of themselves as direct, personal advisors to the chief of mission. Instead, the unit now reports through the ARG chief of staff to the DCM and the Ambassador.² This arrangement seems to be working well. Furthermore, the Ambassador instructed the ARG chief of staff to draw up a plan outlining the future for the ARG, e.g., what elements should be incorporated into the established embassy structure and which should be terminated when there was no longer a needs-based justification. At the time of the inspection, this detailed transition plan was in preparation. The recently arrived ARG chief of staff has indeed proven himself to be a 'team player' and responsive to the Ambassador's concerns.

Another innovation in this mission was the creation of provincial reconstruction teams (PRT), also a concept initiated at Defense. Twenty-three of these have been established across the country. The PRTs, all but one under U.S. or other military command, have civilian components. For example, there are 17 Department officers assigned to PRTs, along with a number of USAID and U.S. Department of Agriculture civilians. Leadership of the PRTs is passing progressively to the ISAF or to NATO governments, a transition that will require careful definition of the roles of the U.S. civilians who are under chief of mission authority even as they look to the military commanders for security and local logistical support.

² OIG addressed this issue in its management review of Embassy Kabul in May, 2004 and issued a recommendation that the ARG chief of staff report to the DCM (Report Number ISP-I-04-35, June, 2004, p. 6).

Plans call for augmenting the civilian cadre by one or two FSNs. OIG discusses PRT issues at greater length later in this report. Here, it should be noted that each PRT is *sui generis*. The assigned American civilians act in good faith but with little direction from the embassy. Importantly, the embassy does not closely monitor or assess PRT-initiated projects. Nevertheless, both the embassy and CFC-A consider the PRTs to be vital to the ‘nation-building’ agenda.

Finally, top leadership in both the embassy and CFC-A must balance multiple, sometimes competing, policy demands. At present, there is no question that counterterrorism and counterinsurgency concerns are the top priority. Governance, capacity building, economic development, and rule of law rank almost as high. And, haunting the party, the interrelated issues of counternarcotics and corruption threaten to derail achievements in those areas presently demanding highest attention.

POLICY AND PROGRAM IMPLEMENTATION

POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC SECTIONS

Reporting by Embassy Kabul's political and economic sections - which split into separate units in August 2005 - is well regarded throughout the foreign affairs community in Washington. In-depth analytical pieces win praise for being well drafted and rich in context and useful commentary. The reporting stream is remarkable given the wide range of obstacles to efficiency and productivity that the sections face, many of which affect the entire mission. Travel restrictions in particular have an impact on the ability of political and economic reporting officers to broaden their knowledge of conditions across the country and expand the range of their contacts.

Less than a third of the two sections' officers are proficient in a national language (Dari or Pashto). After arriving, most reporting officers find that a routine of six-day workweeks precludes rigorous language training. As a result, skilled interpreters - quite limited in number - prove essential to most reporting efforts. The dependence on interpreters means that officers must schedule meetings so that the interpreters can accompany them, and this leads to difficulties in establishing and maintaining relationships with Afghan contacts.

Each section is now crammed into a single room, with officers placed desk-to-desk and without partitions. Access to classified communications is an ongoing problem. The existing system, with its unreliable hardware and inscrutable software problems, is obsolete. Newly arrived officers complain of delays of up to four weeks in getting on the system, and transmitting a cable - which normally takes just minutes in Washington - sometimes requires hours. The move to the NOB in November should help ameliorate these problems, but the shortage of classified communications capacity still will require sharing equipment.

Political Section

The political counselor is a seasoned senior Foreign Service officer. The section is now fully staffed with three mid-level officers (a deputy, a political military officer, and refugee affairs chief), five entry-level officers, a political advisor, and one office management specialist. All but two officers arrived during the summer rotation.

A number of significant changes have recently occurred in the political section. First, the section is now organized into three distinct units: a political military affairs unit, a unit for external affairs and societal development, and a parliamentary affairs and political parties unit. (The new focus on parliament quite properly reflects the September 2005 parliamentary elections and Afghanistan's formal return to democracy.) Second, there is now an annual reporting plan, a carefully constructed one that the DCM has approved. Third, the embassy's refugee affairs section - previously a separate entity - has moved into the section and reports to the political counselor. The refugee unit manages a reintegration program to provide returning Afghan refugees and internally displaced persons with shelter, health care, vocational training, water, and sanitation facilities. Fourth, the section is strengthening its ties to the Department officers assigned to the PRTs. Because of the embassy workload and difficulties in getting outside the capital, the section has had trouble covering events outside Kabul. To address this, each political officer will become expert on a specific region of the country and visit the PRTs in that region for several weeks each year, as well as facilitate basic PRT reporting.

OIG identified several challenges that lie ahead. First, flocks of official visitors - especially congressional delegations and senior Administration officials - will continue to descend on Kabul, and all will require control officers, many of whom will be drawn from the political section. In OIG's view, the number and frequency of visitors suggests that the embassy should consider a visitor control office that could be directed by an eligible family member (EFM). OIG made an informal recommendation on this subject. Second, there are certain to be additional requests for operational assistance on Afghan-related matters of special interest to Washington (e.g., Guantanamo detainees and military armaments). Third, the move to the NOB will improve classified e-mail capabilities and likely generate an up-tick in taskings from senior policy makers. However, the move will further distance the officers from the FSN support staff.

Economic Section

A well-qualified economic cone officer leads the section. The staffing consists of a mid-level commercial officer, a mid-level economic reporting officer, and one entry-level economic reporting officer - none of whom has previous overseas experience in either commercial or economic work. The section's deputy position is vacant, owing to a curtailment. The delay in assigning a replacement has had a major negative impact on the ability of the section to meet its growing responsibilities and continue its development.

The section is a work in progress, evolving from scratch. The section head has assigned formal portfolios for the three officers covering commercial affairs, telecommunications, labor, environment, transportation, trade, and energy. Specific reporting requirements are spelled out in work requirements, thereby creating a detailed - and very ambitious - reporting plan for the coming year. The economic counselor holds short, focused staff meetings every morning to set priorities and track progress. He also devotes considerable time and effort to tutoring new officers on drafting skills and economic tradecraft. The section has begun producing a stream of excellent sector-specific reports, and its well written analytical reporting is laced with policy-relevant commentary. Contact lists and biographic files are steadily expanding.

At present, the economic section is the sole provider of systematic economic reporting to Washington policy makers. The ARG provides a weekly activity report to the Ambassador, the Department, and Defense chronicling meetings and travel. Treasury's representative, who occupies ARG office space, awaits the arrival from Washington of two back-to-back six-month temporary duty (TDY) financial attachés to do monetary and financial reporting. USAID reports on the status of its programs but not on economic trends and policy developments. The accredited Foreign Agricultural Service officer, who resides in Islamabad, submits trip reports on periodic visits to Kabul.

In addition to carrying out economic reporting, the economic section advises the Ambassador on economic issues and maintains regular contact with Afghan economic policy makers and influential members of their staffs. In that regard, the section is not alone. Officials from two other mission elements - ARG and USAID - plus CFC-A's political-military integration unit - are separately advising the same small cohort of senior Afghan economic officials on a daily basis. In a July 2005 report on reconstruction efforts in Afghanistan, the Government Accountability Office (GAO) reported that ARG advisors had not coordinated Afghan ministry

meetings with other embassy staff or informed them about the meetings' results³ After the GAO report, ARG advisers began providing information to the political and economic sections. All parties increasingly participated in meetings and relied on one another for meeting coverage and feedback. As personnel change, there will need to be continuing emphasis on maintaining this commonality of effort.

GAO also indicated - and OIG likewise was informed at post - that Afghan government ministers have at times received conflicting messages concerning U.S. government intentions and availability of resources. An interlocutor at Embassy Kabul summarized the situation by telling OIG, "a lot of people have pieces of this, but no one's in charge." Officers in both the political and economic sections advised OIG that one of the first challenges faced upon arrival in Kabul is learning to "get a handle on all the moving pieces" and "discern everybody's lanes."

Facilitating U.S. business falls to the economic section since the Department of Commerce does not have a representative in Kabul. The economic section tracks investment trends in Afghanistan, paying particular attention to emerging opportunities for U.S. entities. The section's coverage of the promising telecommunications sector is a good example. On trade prospects, U.S. exports to Afghanistan are largely capital equipment and related services funded by USAID assistance programs. The commercial officer maintains a registry of U.S. companies and counsels Afghan-Americans, resident and visiting, on business prospects. However, the incumbent arrived at post with no previous overseas commercial experience and no training in this field. Consequently, that officer is unable to provide U.S. businesses with the full range of advice and services normally available from the Department of Commerce - information that is especially important for new-to-market business players in an environment with very limited economic infrastructure. The commercial officer does coordinate with the Overseas Private Investment Corporation and Trade Development Administration in Washington, as well as the Foreign Agricultural Service officer in Islamabad.

Recommendation 1: The Bureau of Human Resources, in coordination with the Bureau of South Asian Affairs and Embassy Kabul, should assign the next commercial officer at Embassy Kabul to the one-week course on commercial diplomacy at the Foreign Service Institute or an equivalent course at the Department of Commerce. (Action: DGHR, in coordination with SA and Embassy Kabul)

³"Afghanistan Reconstruction: Despite Some Progress, Deteriorating Security and Other Obstacles Continue to Threaten Achievement of U.S. Goals," Government Accountability Office, report no. GAO-05-742, July 2005, p. 51.

INTERNATIONAL NARCOTICS AND LAW ENFORCEMENT AFFAIRS

	2002	2003	2004
Net opium poppy cultivation (hectares)	74,000	80,000	131,000
Opium production (metric tons)	3,400	3,600	4,200
Farmers cultivating poppy (millions)	1.7	1.7	2.3
Percentage of legal GDP	17	50	60
Provinces where opium is grown	24	28	34
Gross profits to traffickers	\$1.3 billion	\$1.3 billion	\$2.2 billion
Farm value of opium production	\$1.2 billion	\$1.0 billion	\$0.6 billion
Total	\$2.5 billion	\$2.3 billion	\$2.8 billion

Source: UN Office on Drugs and Crime, as published in the July 2005 GAO Report no. GAO-05-742, op.cit.

In 2004, Afghanistan was the source of nearly 90 percent of the world's raw opium. According to UN estimates, illicit profits from poppy cultivation are now equal to some 60 percent of the country's legitimate gross domestic product.⁴ In 2004, U.S.-funded counternarcotics efforts produced very mixed results in Afghanistan. In its first year of operation, the Afghan Central Poppy Eradication Force did not fare well. The goal was 15,000 hectares during the 2004-2005 growing season, but only 220 hectares were actually eradicated. New UN data will soon show that poppy cultivation last year registered a decline of nearly 27,000 hectares (almost 20 percent), primarily attributable to public exhortations by provincial governors and religious leaders. However, heavy rains and other favorable conditions, resulting in higher yields, canceled out that reduction in acreage. As a result, Afghanistan's annual opium production was virtually unchanged. Also, during the past year there were growing indications that extremist and narco-trafficking interests were starting to overlap, especially in the southern reaches of the country. In short, a nexus of narcotics with corruption and crime now threatens Afghanistan's fragile political and economic structure. The issue has assumed heightened importance at the highest levels in Washington.

⁴ Opium Production in Afghanistan, 2002-2004

Embassy Kabul responded to the challenge with a new comprehensive counternarcotics strategy and promptly revamped its 2005-2006 counternarcotics implementation plan. Unveiled in mid-October, 2004, the “Five Pillar Strategy” provides for an aggressive public information campaign, alternative livelihood programs to provide economic alternatives to poppy cultivation, renewed efforts at poppy crop elimination/eradication, enhanced interdiction of processed opium and heroin, and law enforcement/justice sector reform. The implementation program calls for a 20 percent reduction in the 2005-2006 Afghan poppy crop. To achieve that, it calls for “elimination” of poppy - by persuading farmers not to plant - and supporting courageous governors and local officials prepared to conduct forcible eradication of any surviving plantations. This would be implemented through a poppy elimination program (PEP) with joint involvement of the Afghan and coalition governments.



Senior Inspector Tom Martin observes incineration of narcotics near Lashkar Gah.

Embassy Kabul has a coordinator who leads the embassy’s counternarcotics task force. The coordinator - on a one-year contract funded by the Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs (INL) - is a retired Drug Enforcement Administration special agent with over 20 years experience in international operations. He served earlier in Afghanistan and Pakistan. He coordinates weekly task force meetings attended by representatives of INL, the Drug Enforcement Administration, the Department of Justice, ARG, USAID, PRT, the political section, and the defense attaché office. The INL section’s director - a retired senior Foreign Service officer with extensive counternarcotics experience in the Andes - is also on a one-year contract covered by INL/Washington. In less than a year, the INL section has grown from just two people to a staff of nine. It now includes three Foreign Service officers (the deputy, a management officer, and a reports officer), one long-term TDY program officer, one contract program officer on a personal services contract, three non-personal services contract program officers, and an office management specialist. The INL team collectively has decades of first-hand experience in planning and implementing counternarcotics and law enforcement programs.

In two respects, the counternarcotics organization and program management were unique at Embassy Kabul. At other posts around the world, either the DCM or narcotics affairs section director serves as the counternarcotics coordinator. Globally, the narcotics affairs directors are normally senior Foreign Service officers who simultaneously handle - and integrate - both policy and program management. In Kabul, the counternarcotics coordinator is effective within the embassy, with CFC-A, authorities of the United Kingdom (the coalition lead nation for narcotics), and Afghan officials. The INL director's purview is confined to program management. For each of the three INL-funded program areas, funding last year went directly to major contractors, and INL/Washington retained both the contracting officer's and contracting officer's representative authority. In large part, the rationale for this pattern reflected the persistent shortage of longer-term officers at post eligible to receive contracting officer's representative authority. INL/Kabul consequently had little authority or influence over projects for which it has responsibility. OIG observed that, as a result, efficiency of program management suffered, and INL program officers were unable to advise the Ambassador fully and accurately regarding the status of ongoing INL-funded programs.

By October 2005, however, INL/Washington was delegating contracting officer's representative authority for the counternarcotics and justice sector programs - along with government technical monitor authority for the police-training program - to officers at post. This will greatly enhance INL/Kabul's status with the contractors, improve INL/Kabul's ability to monitor progress of the programs, and enhance the advice that the Ambassador receives.

In discussions with the section's leadership, OIG concluded that the section is making progress on resolving several problems that have affected its operations in the past. INL did not participate in the preparation of last year's MPP. This year, though, the new INL reports officer will be a drafter of the counternarcotics and law enforcement-related portions of the document and participate in fine-tuning the metrics. This will be important in view of the great attention paid to the mission's counternarcotics efforts. Owing to severe understaffing during the past year, INL did not submit regular financial reports and did not regularly review post records to confirm the status of unobligated funds. The INL staff now includes an experienced narcotics affairs management officer who will do the necessary reporting; an INL/Washington assistance team is arriving soon to help conduct a review of funds. There is strong demand throughout the Washington interagency community for in-depth commentary and spot reporting on narcotics-related topics. There was little such reporting last year. A newly arrived reports officer should address this need. Finally, the shift of the section to the NOB should improve working conditions and communications.

Congress has provided INL with FY 2005 funding (regular appropriation combined with a supplemental) totaling \$755.5 million for counternarcotics and law enforcement directed to the following program areas:

- \$308 million for PEP, aviation support, public diplomacy, demand reduction, and interdiction;
- \$424 million for training and mentoring of Afghan police, related ministerial reform/salary support, equipment and infrastructure; and,
- \$23.5 million for the justice sector support program, corrections facilities, and a prosecution task force.

These INL-funded programs are large in scope, reflecting the difficulties of nation building and the high priority assigned by the U.S. government to counternarcotics operations in Afghanistan. The post-conflict environment, where basic infrastructure and services are minimal or absent, further complicates all undertakings in Afghanistan. OIG also learned that coordination difficulties have arisen from the leadership styles of other coalition countries designated as lead countries for implementation in related areas (i.e., the United Kingdom for counternarcotics, Germany in police training, and Italy on justice sector reform). Similarly, working with other U.S. government agencies (e.g., Defense on police training and Department of Justice representatives in justice programs) further complicates efforts to implement programs in a timely and efficient manner. As a result, each of the INL programs faces formidable challenges.

In particular, OIG found that some key elements of the PEP plan are untested and remain to be fleshed out. Prospects for success will depend greatly upon the level of commitment from senior Afghan officials, coupled with uncertain security conditions in the provinces and efforts now underway to improve mobility for counternarcotics efforts within Afghanistan. At the operational level, there are also some lingering coordination difficulties with CFC-A (e.g., lack of agreement on a secure area at which to base a package of 10 Huey II helicopters, scheduled to arrive in country in January 2006 to provide critical support to INL's counternarcotics program).

Following a senior level interagency decision in Washington earlier this year, responsibility for the INL-funded police-training program transferred to Defense. An INL program officer now serves as embassy liaison to a new U.S. military unit, the Office of Security Cooperation - Afghanistan, that will handle the training program. The Chief of Mission remains responsible for this program's ultimate implementation.

The INL-funded justice sector support program is encountering delays in implementation. The objective of the program is to train Afghan judicial personnel and foster cohesion across the Afghan rule-of-law spectrum, particularly in the realm of counternarcotics. INL acknowledged that Afghan authorities must endorse a unified justice sector strategy, and Embassy Kabul needs better to clarify the roles of U.S. government agencies. The Ambassador recognizes the need to develop a more structured approach to program development and implementation of law and justice sector programs to ensure strong policy direction.

An interagency working group has been formed at the direction of the Ambassador, the purpose of which is to coordinate U.S.-sponsored rule-of-law programs. Effectiveness of this working group could be enhanced if directed by a coordinator specifically designated for that responsibility. This would be consistent with the Ambassador's consideration, aired in discussion with OIG, of creating a "law and justice" section in the embassy to bring together policy oversight and programs. OIG found merit in the concept.

Across the board, INL programs in Afghanistan merit additional attention and careful management by the Ambassador and DCM.

AFGHANISTAN RECONSTRUCTION GROUP

One of the unique features of Embassy Kabul is the existence of a unit known as the ARG. Conceptually, the ARG brings American private sector expertise to the table to helping develop strategies for the nascent elected government of President Karzai.

Structurally, the ARG is complicated. Individual experts are recruited through a "reach-back office" in Defense. Résumés of candidates are forwarded to the ARG chief of staff in Kabul. The ARG chief, after consultation with the Ambassador, USAID director, and others decides whether or not there is a "fit" with defined needs.

Once a decision is made to bring an expert on board, the responsibility shifts to the Department. The hiring process, by which ARG members receive limited non-career appointments from the Department, is time consuming, notably in obtaining security clearances. Reportedly, information on conditions of employment and benefits provided by Defense's "reach-back office" is not entirely consistent with the rules under which the Department operates. This has resulted in some misun-

derstanding and complaints on the part of ARG members who ultimately accept assignment to Afghanistan. OIG made an informal recommendation regarding provision of information to applicants for ARG positions.

One issue in need of immediate attention is health insurance, because some ARG members faced problems when they discovered that the Department's medical program and their U.S. health insurance did not cover certain types of overseas medical expenses and medical evacuation costs. Applicants for ARG positions should be briefed on the Department's medical program and receive guidance on purchasing additional insurance. OIG made an informal recommendation to provide new ARG employees with a comprehensive orientation of the terms and conditions of their employment with the Department.

The ARG experts were initially direct advisors to the Ambassador and to Afghan ministers in the sectors within the purview of the ARG member. Because ARG engagement is almost exclusively in economics, finance, and development, this inevitably resulted in some overlap of responsibilities with other mission elements engaged in those same areas. Duplication of effort is a constant danger. Evidence indicates there have been instances in which ARG experts implicitly have made commitments to Afghan ministers without coordinating with organizations involved in funding or implementing such projects. The potential, sometimes a reality, was that different U.S. officials provided different advice to the Afghan government. This was a particular problem in one instance in which a member of the ARG staff in Washington failed to coordinate with Embassy Kabul.

The number of Afghan officials with decision-making authority is limited. Reportedly, at times different embassy officials (and, in some cases, political-military integration personnel under the authority of CFC-A) successively take up five or six hours of an individual minister's workday. Clearly, the embassy should encourage closer coordination on official contacts with high-level Afghan government officials. OIG discussed this with the embassy front office and made an informal recommendation for managing high-level contacts.

Some relationships between the ARG and specific individuals under chief of mission authority are awkward. Interpersonal skills ease or heighten differences. In part the tensions stem from the two differing cultures. Bureaucrats are not accustomed to the assertiveness of the ARG in advising Afghan counterparts without first having coordinated their proposals with affected embassy entities. ARG members sometimes are mystified by how the U.S. not-for-profit government achieves goals and objectives.

The present Ambassador is determined to avail himself of the added value represented by the ARG, but at the same time to deal forthrightly with the perception that this unit is, somehow, a “rump embassy.” ARG now coordinates with the DCM.

From the outset, ARG was to be a temporary organization. There is, however, no defined “sunset.” Recently, the Ambassador pressed the new ARG chief of staff to prepare a paper outlining the future of the ARG, specifically addressing the issues of which ARG functions should be incorporated into normal embassy work (and when), and which functions and positions should be terminated (and when). This approach will clarify issues for both the Ambassador and Washington policy makers and enable an orderly transition from the present configuration to the longer-range organizational architecture of this mission.

Recommendation 2: Embassy Kabul, in coordination with the Bureau of South Asian Affairs, should determine how residual elements of the Afghanistan Reconstruction Group are to be incorporated within the mission. (Action: Embassy Kabul, in coordination with SA)

PROVINCIAL RECONSTRUCTION TEAMS

Twenty-three PRTs are scattered across Afghanistan. Department and USAID officers are assigned to many (Department officers at 17), USDA representatives to some. Especially in furthering the reach of the central government (a high priority U.S. policy objective), the PRTs are the ‘front line’ in American involvement in nation building. That effort is international and very diverse. The U.S. military commands some PRTs, others are under ISAF or NATO command. In the coming months, several more PRTs will move under NATO command.

With one exception,⁵ the PRT commanders are military officers. At U.S.-led PRTs, physical security for PRT personnel is the responsibility of CFC-A (CJTF-76). This responsibility devolves to ISAF and Coalition military elements at those PRTs under non-U.S. leadership. Rules of engagement and maneuver are established at NATO or, in some instances, at national capitals where governments

⁵ About six weeks prior to this inspection, a new PRT was established for the Panjshir Province; the director is a Department Foreign Service officer.

desire more restrictive rules; American PRT personnel must abide by those rules even in cases in which they limit movement and effectiveness of the PRT.

The American civilian officials assigned to PRTs fall under chief of mission authority for program and policy purposes. Thus, in a sense, the U.S. civilian components at the PRTs comprise constituent outposts of Embassy Kabul, posing one of the most complex management challenges of any mission.



Provincial Reconstruction Team Compound

In practice, the PRTs most often operate with almost complete autonomy in carrying out their work. Each PRT operates in a manner best suited to the environment in the province. The result is a very dynamic situation in which the officers assigned at the moment shape the functions, projects, and operations of the particular PRT. A broad mandate for PRT actions is to help establish security, foster stability, and guide provincial leaders towards good governance. Those assigned are mostly left to their own devices to give substance to that charge. Local needs and conditions, personal interests, enthusiasms, and skills thus mold PRT initiatives.

In terms of projects initiated by the PRTs, civil affairs military personnel at the PRTs have access to the Commander's Emergency Relief Program funds. The USAID representative - often a personal services contractor - brings Quick Impact Program funds, provided from State Department Economic Support Fund monies, to the table. U.S. Department of Agriculture personnel provide technical expertise. The Deputies Committee has given the Department representative the lead among the civilian contingent at U.S.-led PRTs.

OIG team members traveled to four PRTs and participated in an embassy conference in late October that brought together the military commanders with Department, USAID, and U.S. Department of Agriculture civilians assigned to PRTs.⁶ A number of PRT issues merit attention.

Although each PRT is unique - and the concept thus only arguably replicable - it is essential to have an agreed strategy of what is to be accomplished and how PRTs fit an articulated, coherent pattern.⁷ Without detracting from the desirable flexibility in the program, there should be a unified vision more precise than the security-stability-good governance formulation. More frequent and specific guidance from the embassy and Washington is needed to ensure focused objectives beyond and above personal interests and enthusiasms of the persons assigned to the PRT. Most Department personnel lacked the seniority and professional background to serve as advisors to comparatively senior U.S. military officers and provincial representatives of the Afghan government. Most had no ability to work in either of the national languages.

The PRT experiment is a costly one in terms of personnel resources and associated assignment processes (the number of those assigned, the constant need for getting volunteers in the pipeline, etc.). At present, security and many logistics costs are borne by the military. When that support diminishes or shifts to non-U.S. elements, the burden for relevant funding may accrue to the Department. These considerations are among factors germane to any calculation of cost/benefit ratios in the PRT context. Another dimension is the implicit tradeoff between centrally directed economic development efforts and the impact of those undertaken at PRT initiative. Several PRT officers interviewed by OIG opined that if and as security improves and international military forces draw down, the work done by PRTs should devolve to nongovernmental organizations. OIG agrees. Such a transformation must be condition-determined, not driven by a timetable.

There is a need for systematized evaluation of the projects and overall effectiveness of each PRT. At the time of this inspection, embassy plans were for establishment of additional PRTs, recruiting and assigning FSN staff, and allocation of an additional \$100 million from a proposed FY 2006 supplemental. OIG

⁶This inspection coincided with field work by a team from the Department's Office of the Coordinator for Reconstruction and Stabilization on (S/CRS), focusing on "lessons learned" from the PRT experience in Afghanistan.

⁷The Secretary has proposed establishment of PRTs in Iraq. OIG notes that cultural differences, security considerations, quality of existing infrastructure, size of local population centers, and other factors are important differences in the two countries. The basic format of PRTs in Afghanistan - military security and logistics with a civilian-led reconstruction effort, combined with the flexibility to operate and focus on local conditions - would have to be modified if/as the model is adapted to Iraq.

did not perceive any existing process by which the cost/benefit ratio of these activities might be assessed, although during the inspection OIG learned that USAID has allocated \$2 million in FY 2006 to the development of a metric that will seek to measure the effectiveness of PRTs.

Recommendation 3: Embassy Kabul should establish a working group with other agency representatives and evaluate the impact of projects undertaken by provincial reconstruction teams, specifically to incorporate an assessment of costs/benefits of such projects. (Action: Embassy Kabul)

There is also considerable variation in the role and authority of Department representatives and other civilians at the PRTs. In the case of U.S.-led PRTs, some commanders view themselves as responsible for providing maximum support to the civilians and make every effort to facilitate the efforts of civilians located at their installations. Other commanders apparently do not understand why the civilians are based with them and offer grudging support. At non-U.S. led PRTs, OIG heard of similar variations in treatment of U.S. civilians. Some Department personnel at non-U.S. PRTs did not receive accurate advance information on how they would fit and what authority they would have in their assignments. This results in part from the lack of position descriptions for Department PRT personnel (and other U.S. government civilian personnel) that lay out clearly the role of U.S. government civilian personnel at the PRTs, the scope of their duties, and their relationship to PRT commanders. In the absence of such position descriptions (which should be agreed upon by the embassy and the PRT commanders), there has been a wide variation in how Department officers have viewed their role and in how their military commanders have received and supported them.

Recommendation 4: The Bureau of South Asian Affairs, in coordination with Embassy Kabul, should outline the purpose and objectives of the civilian elements of the provincial reconstruction teams and the role and authority of Department officers assigned to provincial reconstruction teams, and disseminate that outline to other U.S. government civilians and the military commanders of the teams. (Action: SA, in coordination with Embassy Kabul)

Recommendation 5: Embassy Kabul, in coordination with the Bureau of South Asian Affairs, should provide U.S. government civilians assigned to provincial reconstruction teams with position descriptions defining duties and authorities that are acceptable to the respective provincial reconstruction team commander and to the U.S. government civilian agencies represented at the provincial reconstruction team. (Action: Embassy Kabul, in coordination with SA)

The issue of how to integrate counternarcotics efforts at the PRTs illustrates another aspect of U.S. military-civilian dynamics in Afghanistan. INL's 2005-2006 counternarcotics implementation plan centers on PEP teams. Each would be comprised of five to seven Afghans and two international (not all American) supervisors. At the outset, PEP teams are to be located in each of seven provinces where the lion's share of poppy cultivation occurs. Primary PEP emphasis is to orchestrate public awareness programs, advise the local governor, monitor poppy planting, and help plan next steps. In the event efforts at persuasion are less than satisfactory, eradication efforts undertaken at the direction of Afghan officials and carried out by Afghan personnel would be the next focus of the PEP efforts.

For security and logistical support, the two international supervisors on each team are to be housed at the local PRT. When the concept was first announced, some PRT commanders registered strong concerns. Objections centered on the additional logistical effort (especially security, mobility, and translators) that might be required and fears of antagonizing the local populace whose support coalition forces count upon in the continuing effort against the Taliban and/or al-Qaida.

The embassy followed up with a circular message to the PRTs clarifying the core mission of the PEP teams (i.e., to do public affairs and advise both the governors and central government on poppy elimination efforts, not to conduct actual eradication programs). PEP representatives are now deploying to PRTs in the seven provinces. As PRTs shift from U.S. military control to ISAF/NATO command, though, additional international understandings — bilateral, possibly multi-lateral — regarding operational concerns may need to be concluded.

American civilians stationed at the PRTs are all volunteers. With competing demands - notably in Iraq - for volunteers, the Department is experiencing progressively more difficulty in staffing existing positions in such venues. Department assignees to the PRTs are a mixture of Foreign Service and Civil Service professionals. Experience levels vary. All are assigned on one-year, unaccompanied tours. Living conditions vary, but are often spartan. None of those interviewed by

OIG had gone through any systematized training or orientation in preparation for their challenging assignments. Some benefited from consultations in Washington, but such were self-designed with varying input from Department officials. (The PRT office in Kabul told OIG that it has started polling incoming personnel for information on particularly useful consultations and contact information in an effort to put together better guidance for new personnel on how to prepare for their assignments.) Even though assigned to work in this dangerous environment, few had gone through the Bureau of Diplomatic Security (DS) survival skills course. The PRT office in Kabul prepared a very useful handbook for civilians assigned to PRTs, but this should complement rather than replace a comprehensive orientation program.

In recognition of the need to better prepare its staff for PRT assignments and better integrate the civilian and military elements at PRTs, USAID is designing a training and orientation program for USAID personnel who are assigned to PRTs. According to OIG's USAID interlocutor in a post-inspection meeting, this course could be available to other departments and agencies, including the U.S. military. OIG believes that the Department should explore participation of Department officers in this program.

Recommendation 6: The Bureau of South Asian Affairs, in coordination with Embassy Kabul, should prepare and implement a comprehensive orientation program for personnel assigned to provincial reconstruction teams in Afghanistan, or arrange for the participation of Department officers in a similar program offered by other agencies. (Action: SA, in coordination with Embassy Kabul)

Recommendation 7: The Bureau of Human Resources should establish a mechanism to require that all U.S. government civilian personnel assigned to provincial reconstruction teams take the Bureau of Diplomatic Security's survival skills course before proceeding to Afghanistan. (Action: DGHR)

Finally, there are questions of how many PRTs are enough and how success (or failure) of this concept can be measured. There is a temptation to be omnipresent in the effort, but this may not be practicable - or necessary. Planners in Afghanistan talk about expanding the PRT presence, both in numbers and agencies or departments represented. This should be done only after a careful analysis of all

factors, including the human resources implications. The embassy has considered various alternatives to the present PRTs: a 'hub-and-spokes' model with regional PRTs coordinating several other elements; evolution of as many as four of the PRTs to the status of regional embassy offices (and, perhaps, eventually consulates); traveling or mobile PRT teams rather than teams working from fixed sites; and, consolidation of some PRTs. Each of these deserves careful consideration, taking into account the resource implications as well as the political and developmental objectives of the PRT concept.

Recommendation 8: Embassy Kabul should include representatives of all relevant U.S. agencies in the preparation of the Mission Performance Plan to propose the future of the provincial reconstruction teams.
(Action: Embassy Kabul)

Communications between PRTs and the embassy are via e-mail and military unclassified and classified systems. At the time of the inspection, Department PRT officers were receiving software and instructions for sending encrypted e-mail via commercial systems. Some officers at ISAF and other Coalition PRTs have access to secure military communications channels. Most Department assignees report recent improvements in communications.

When in Kabul, PRT staff consult at the embassy. Recently, the political section was reorganized to assign specific officers to be the point-of-contact for specific regions covered by PRTs. Communications other than on administrative matters have been mostly one-way. During the summer of 2005, cable transmission to the field broke down; at the time of the inspection, the channel was only starting to function again. PRT staff may or may not know whether the embassy transmits their cables and other reporting beyond the embassy. Feedback and guidance from the embassy could be better. Department PRT management staff based in Kabul told the inspectors that they make every effort to respond to requests from their colleagues in the field and distribute reporting and action requests to the right addresses in the embassy, and some PRT staff asserted to OIG that this is the case. Nevertheless, there appear to be occasional problems. OIG discussed with the PRT office in Kabul the need to be closely attentive to requests from field staff.

PUBLIC AFFAIRS AND PUBLIC DIPLOMACY

The Public Affairs Section

At the time of the inspection, the embassy's public affairs section (PAS) had nearly a full complement of five American officers and six of seven local employees. PAS Kabul also received an English language coordinator on a one-year limited appointment. PAS personnel have successfully launched basic programs and activities to meet mission objectives. Several experienced public affairs officers (PAOs) have led the section, and the PAO position is now classified at the senior Foreign Service officer level. For the last several months, the section has also benefited from the service of a highly qualified press officer. Assignment of entry-level officers to other positions, however, remains the rule.

PAS suffers from the same personnel problems affecting the rest of the mission. The three entry-level officers lack experience, there is constant staff turnover, most of the FSNs are new, and taskings connected with the constant flow of visitors to the mission and requirements not specifically tied to public diplomacy objectives disrupt work schedules and program planning and execution.

The public affairs section does receive extensive support from Washington elements in the start-up of key public diplomacy programs, in particular from the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs (ECA) through funding for substantial International Visitor grants, Fulbright academic exchange grants, and Citizens Exchange grants. The Bureau of International Information Programs (IIP) provided a series of useful democracy papers in the main national languages (Dari and Pashto), the post's first American speaker, and four American Corners, in addition to the normal Internet-based information resources available to field posts. The Bureau of South Asian Affairs (SA) has been generous in funding special post projects, purchasing equipment, approving additional staff, and representing PAS Kabul to Washington support offices.

In meetings with Department offices working with PAS, OIG heard that the section needs to improve reporting on the use of the considerable resources it receives, and especially to reporting on evidence of effectiveness and results. To its credit, PAS recently initiated a "weekly highlights" e-mail to SA, ECA, and IIP. This will facilitate favorable decisions on resource allocations for Kabul public diplomacy programs. To increase the utility of this product, OIG suggested that PAS add the embassy front office and other key mission staff to distribution of the "weekly highlights" report.

OIG concluded that the fundamental elements for an effective PAS are in place in Embassy Kabul. The information officer has established himself as an authoritative voice for the embassy and has developed excellent contacts with the U.S. and international press, and his team provides normal media reaction and other press services to the embassy. Academic and cultural exchange programs are well underway. However, PAS has not made the transition from the hectic - often ad hoc - quality of its start-up phase to an office better integrated with other embassy sections, better coordinated with Washington support elements, and better able to contribute to mission objectives.

As part of this transition, OIG discussed with the PAO the need to draft a public affairs action plan for Afghanistan. This document would lay out the major directions for public affairs and public diplomacy activities over the next several years with an emphasis on public outreach, describe the PAS role in coordinating public affairs by mission elements, and address resource and facilities requirements. The process of drafting and clearing this action plan would, in OIG's view, lead to a consensus at the embassy and in Washington on the future of public diplomacy programs in Afghanistan, and, at the same time, provide a road map to guide plans and programs in an environment plagued by high staff turnover. This plan would complement and add to public affairs strategies and objectives as outlined in the MPP.

Recommendation 9: Embassy Kabul, in consultation with the Bureau of South Asian Affairs, should draft a public affairs action plan for Afghanistan to address the major directions for public affairs and public diplomacy activities over the coming years, public outreach, and requirements for resources and facilities. (Action: Embassy Kabul, in consultation with SA)

The two main long-term challenges facing the PAO are the management of the transition to a full-service section and the development of the section's capability to meet core public diplomacy and public affairs responsibilities. Several aspects of the PAS program warrant attention in the short term. The new PAO should review all American and FSN position descriptions and, where necessary, revise them to reflect actual duties and eliminate the current confusion in the section as to who is supposed to do what. The PAO should move ahead on planning for the creation of an information resource center - a key tool to increase public outreach and to build relationships with key audiences around the country. The PAO needs to define the relationship of the English language coordinator to the broader PAS program and clarify the role played by the four American Corners in mission outreach. As part of the transition to a full-service public diplomacy operation, the PAO should work

with the embassy's front office to establish an embassy-wide International Visitors selection committee. The PAO should standardize grant procedures to bring them into line with Department requirements and align grants with MPP priorities. To help create an institutional memory, PAS needs to begin development of a contact management system to track its engagement with exchange program alumni and to record participation of the section's contacts in other programs. OIG made a series of formal and informal recommendations on these subjects.

Department officers assigned to PRTs told OIG they needed better information on PAS resources available to them to assist in their work. They also need revised embassy guidelines on media contact to allow them some flexibility in taking advantage of immediate media opportunities to highlight their work. OIG recommended that PAS develop a plan to amplify the embassy's public voice by developing a capability to produce transcripts of the Ambassador's public remarks and remarks of high level visitors to Embassy Kabul. This initiative will require transcription equipment and dedicated staff. OIG discussed with the Ambassador the possibility of hiring EFMs to provide transcription services.

Developing Capacity in the Public Affairs Section

The main operational issue in need of PAO attention is the lack of public diplomacy and public affairs experience among most of the American officers and local employees. The PAO, fully cognizant of this situation, discussed with OIG the requirement for formal training and mentoring of these employees. Embassies in the region with fully developed public affairs and public diplomacy programs can assist. PAS Islamabad has expressed its willingness to receive PAS Kabul information and cultural staff for training and to dispatch its own employees to Kabul to work with counterparts. While most FSNs in the section do not meet the minimum length-of-service requirement for formal training offered at the Foreign Service Institute, every effort should be made to secure this advanced professional training at the earliest opportunity.

In its brief history, PAS Kabul has not made much use of the expertise of Department officers with specialized portfolios who could help shape the section's program planning and build the skills of American and FSN staff. Accessible personnel resources include the regional educational advising coordinator, a new regional English language officer for South Asia, and the regional information resource officer. PAS has developed a training program for local employees, but should revise and update the training program with assistance from these Department regional specialists.

Coordinating Public Affairs in the Mission

The primary means by which various mission elements coordinate public affairs messages and strategies is the weekly interagency public affairs meeting chaired by the PAO. This brings USAID, CFC-A, the Office of Security Cooperation - Afghanistan, ARG, military information support teams, ISAF, and PAS to the table to review recent media activity, look ahead to events that will require or provide opportunities for public affairs support, and discuss press guidance. OIG had opportunities to observe these meetings and found them to be productive and informative for all participants. Public affairs staff in all offices have also created a good network of informal communication primarily by cell phone and e-mail to handle breaking news and coordinate guidance. Representatives of these offices confirmed to OIG that coordination with and information flow from PAS meet their needs.

There were problems in the past regarding some Embassy Kabul and PRT personnel assuming a press contact role outside their particular areas of responsibility. This generated some confusion, especially among international and U.S. media, as to who spoke authoritatively for the U.S. embassy. The problem arose in part because of a lack of clarity in job assignments for some incoming Embassy Kabul staff that expected extensive media portfolios and were not familiar with embassy policy that establishes the PAO and the press officer as spokespersons for the embassy. PRT civilian personnel expressed frustration at what they saw as overly restrictive embassy rules regarding media contact. The embassy and PAS took the necessary steps to centralize media contact in PAS and resolved that issue. The PAO plans to direct a review of the embassy's strict media guidelines, as informally recommended by OIG. The U.S. government has many good stories to tell about its work in Afghanistan, and mission personnel should not miss opportunities to tell those stories because of a strict clearance process. OIG discussed with the PAO the need to update media guidelines and improve PAS communication with embassy officers in the PRTs by providing them with current policy guidance and assisting them in conducting public affairs and public diplomacy programs to raise local awareness of PRT accomplishments.

The American Corners in Afghanistan

In view of the many problems associated with travel by embassy officers in Afghanistan, the opening of four American Corners (AC) in locations around the country seemed like an effective method of establishing an American presence and providing a platform for mission outreach activities.⁸ The effort has not been entirely successful, nor has it entirely conformed to IIP expectations regarding oversight by formally designated American officers, assumption of costs by local hosts, Internet connectivity, selection of venues with good public access, and other attributes associated with effective AC functioning. There is, however, recognition in the bureau that the unique program environment in Afghanistan may necessitate considerable flexibility in PAS Kabul's use of ACs.

OIG noted specific areas for concern. PAS Kabul has assumed many start-up and ongoing costs for ACs that would normally fall to a host institution. There are, however, few institutions able to bear costs that include salaries for AC directors, utilities, and other expenses. Ideally, ACs have good public access, but the placement of an AC in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' training institute and on the campus of Kabul University (with access limited to students and faculty) runs against the basic principle of venue selection. PAS awarded a grant to a local nongovernmental organization to provide certain administrative services to the ACs, including personnel services such as the recruitment of directors for the ACs and payment of AC expenses. The arrangement with this particular organization has not worked well. PAS Kabul is seeking a more suitable nongovernmental organization as its partner in the operation of the ACs. Not all the ACs have Internet connectivity - a crucial element in the basic concept of ACs as demonstrators of U.S. leadership in information technology.

Despite these shortcomings, PAS Kabul can point to real value in the work of the four ACs. Kabul University, with 23,000 restive students, is arguably an excellent venue for an American facility. In fact, one month after the embassy opened the AC there, the Iranian embassy set up its own version adjacent to the AC, complete with a high-speed satellite Internet connection and ready access to Iranian information sources. In the course of the riots in Afghanistan following allegations of Koran desecration by U.S. forces at Guantanamo in May 2005, religious extremists destroyed the computers and books at the popular AC in Jalalabad - a clear statement of their determination to restrict the impact of the facility in that city.

⁸The ACs are located at Kabul University and the Foreign Service Training Institute at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (both in Kabul), a building renovated to house the American Corner in Mazar-e-Sharif, and in Jalalabad.

According to PAS officers, the AC in Mazar-e-Sharif, with an active and highly competent director and a building renovated especially for the AC, could be a showcase for the U.S. presence in that region. The facility at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs has proven to be a useful platform for policy-oriented speaker programs organized by the U.S. embassy and by the ministry.

The ACs in Afghanistan could extend mission outreach. OIG discussed with the PAO the need to bring management of the facilities into line with IIP policies where possible. PAS should also begin to think of expanding the role of the ACs in student counseling and English teaching, as well as providing venues for PAS programming and access to an array of information sources on the United States. The PAO agreed that consultation visits by ECA and IIP experts could be very helpful in improving utilization of these facilities.

Public Affairs Section Grants Program

SA has been generous in providing financial support to PAS Kabul for an extensive series of grants to individuals and organizations in Afghanistan active in areas of interest to the embassy. In FY 2005, the total amount of grants approached \$800,000 (including \$25,000 available to the embassy for the Ambassador's fund for cultural preservation). Because PAS Kabul will not be able to engage in conventional public diplomacy programming for some time, grants can be an effective means to build contacts and demonstrate the embassy's commitment to assisting Afghans working to preserve their national heritage, encourage religious moderates in their efforts to combat extremism, and improve educational opportunities for women, among other mission priorities. The inspectors counseled PAS officers on the need to tie grants to specific MPP priorities and to include those MPP priorities in justifications for grants. PAS mentioned to OIG some innovative ideas regarding expansion of embassy participation in the grants program by including, at a minimum, proposals from the political and economic sections for projects they would like to support and making this resource available to Department officers at the PRTs.

There are deficiencies in PAS Kabul's internal management of grants. The total amount of funds awarded through these grants was \$789,000. A review of 12 of 42 grant files issued by PAS for FY 2005 revealed shortcomings in all 12, e.g., lack of financial and project completion reports, lack of grants approval dates, and lack of documentation showing bureau approval for grants over \$10,000. Periods of performance began before funding was obligated in eight instances. There is little indication found that PAS staff routinely checks grants files for completeness. OIG counseled PAS on the establishment of good grant procedures.

Recommendation 10: Embassy Kabul should establish and implement grant management procedures that include requiring and monitoring the submission of reports from grantees and preparing grant documents in a standard fashion with all required information. (Action: Embassy Kabul)

CONSULAR AFFAIRS

The consular section consists of a consul, deputy, and three consular FSNs. The embassy recently hired a fourth FSN who is awaiting security clearance. The section performs well despite the heavy workload. The security situation in Kabul remains critical. Some prison visits are particularly unsafe because the staff must travel dangerous roads.

There are several hundred U.S. citizens registered with the embassy. The section provides a full range of American citizens services, including processing approximately 100 passport cases a month, and has an active warden system. Currently, Embassy Kabul does not issue visas. Visas are processed by Embassy Islamabad. Embassy Kabul hopes to begin offering limited visa services in 2006, pending approval by the Bureau of Consular Affairs. The consular officer is preparing the staff for this eventuality.

RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

The exact number of employees under chief of mission authority in Afghanistan varies widely from month to month, and even from day to day. At the time of the inspection, best estimates were 180 direct-hire Americans and 343 FSNs. FY 2005 funding for the mission was approximately \$62.75 million. One embassy officer compared the process of ascertaining staff numbers to “trying to catch flies with chopsticks.” These totals do not include positions in the pipeline for approval, the ever-fluctuating pool of long-term and short-term TDY employees at the mission, or the growing number of personal services contractors. The only certainty is that the numbers are increasing and will continue to do so for the foreseeable future.

Embassy Kabul faces unique management challenges due to the rapid, and continuing, growth in mission size. The management counselor, a senior Foreign Service officer with extensive overseas experience, began tackling these challenges even before arriving in Kabul in August 2005. In addition to actively recruiting qualified candidates for key management section positions, including the financial management officer and two assistant general services officers (GSOs), the management counselor resolved a potential management controls vulnerability that she became aware of during a two-day visit to the embassy in June 2005.

At that time, the embassy and the Bureau of Overseas Buildings Operations (OBO) were planning the temporary relocation of employees from the EOB, which will be closed for nine months for renovations, to a series of small office hooches (converted shipping containers) located on the embassy compound. Because of the limited space in the hooches, the American supervisors could not be colocated with their FSNs. Proper oversight of employees is important at any embassy, but it is of particular importance at Embassy Kabul where the FSNs lack training and experience, making them more vulnerable to waste, fraud, and abuse. After returning to the Department, the management counselor successfully lobbied SA to purchase several larger temporary structures that were already on site but scheduled for removal. As a result, some of the most vulnerable embassy functions - consular, financial management, procurement, and the health unit - will be moved into space that can accommodate each section's FSNs together with the American supervisors.

FACILITIES AND REAL PROPERTY

One of the biggest challenges faced by the mission since it reopened almost four years ago has been where to put everyone. The temporary solution was to shoehorn as many people as possible into the EOB, which was abandoned when the embassy closed in 1989. It was reoccupied in January 2002. A skeleton staff of FSNs provided limited guard and maintenance services in the intervening years, but the building required significant repairs to render it minimally safe and habitable. The mission quickly outgrew this building, which provides



Existing Office Building

office space for over 100 American and FSN staff, and a temporary facility with capacity for another 156 desks was completed in July 2004 on a newly leased compound across from the embassy (commonly referred to as the CAFE). USAID, ARG, and PRT/Kabul offices are located in this temporary structure. An access tunnel joins the two compounds. Converted shipping containers, or hooches, provide additional office space on both compounds.

Providing living quarters for American staff has been another challenge for the mission. Security concerns preclude the use of local housing or hotels for employees under chief of mission authority in Kabul, and all permanent and TDY staff must be housed on the embassy compound or the CAFE. To meet this need, Embassy Kabul has, over the past few years, amassed an inventory of 220 housing hooches, creating a village of 150 hooches laid out on five named “avenues” on the CAFE, supplemented by 70 hooches on the embassy compound. Total capacity is 273 beds, with some TDY personnel sharing a 105-square-foot hooch with up to three other people while permanent employees are assigned to the coveted single-occupancy hooches. At the time of the inspection, employees were moving into the recently completed staff apartments, freeing up some hooches for employees who had been temporarily located off-compound and allowing employees housed in

quad and triple units to be moved to double or single units. Approximately 20 of the vacated housing hooches will be converted to temporary office space for offices displaced by the pending EOB renovation.

The New Embassy Compound Project



New Office Building

Background

Recognizing the need for suitable office and residential space for Embassy Kabul, the Department awarded a \$115 million cost-plus contract to Kellogg Brown and Root (KBR) on September 30, 2002, to “provide design and construction services to complete a New Embassy Office Building Compound.” The contract included provisions for an NOB, Marine security guard quarters, GSO facilities, staff apartments, and renovation of the EOB, with a completion date of December 30, 2004.

Owing to congressionally-mandated size and cost limits,⁹ the aggregate office space in the NOB and the renovated EOB was inadequate from the date the contract was awarded, with space for only 200 desks in the two buildings, vice the Department’s projected need for 304 desks. The gap between planned space and required space has not diminished in the three years since the contract was signed; on the contrary, the gap has widened, and the embassy spends an inordinate amount of time and resources on space issues.

⁹ Letter to Mr. Grant S. Green, Jr., Under Secretary for Management, Department of State, from Frank Wolf, Chairman, Subcommittee on the Departments of Commerce, Justice, and State, the Judiciary and Related Agencies, dated September 30, 2002

The move into the NOB, which was completed on November 21, 2005, should provide some relief. Problems and setbacks from the beginning of the project, however, affected its progress. Resolution of these issues has consumed considerable energy both on site and in the Department. Most of the problems can be traced back to shortsightedness regarding mission growth and the award of the contract as cost-plus, vice firm fixed price, because of the urgency of the project and uncertainties about working conditions in Kabul at the time. OBO informed OIG that it does not favor this cost-plus approach and will avoid using it again, even under similar circumstances. Other contributing factors include the three-time turnover in the on-site OBO project director position and the major logistical problems associated with building a state-of-the-art building in a third-world environment on an occupied and fully functioning compound.

Project Evolution

On April 30, 2003, OBO informed the embassy that it was reducing the scope of the project due to the increased cost of providing construction security. Construction of the GSO warehouse, shops, and support facilities was deleted from the contract, and the scope of the EOB renovation was reduced to minimal functional requirements.

On April 5, 2004, OBO informed the embassy that it had reduced the scope of the project again, after learning that KBR would exceed its cost ceiling by \$28 million under the current scope of work. The changes included deleting construction of the west perimeter wall; further descoping the EOB renovations; using non-U.S. materials in the staff apartments; eliminating two elevators from the NOB and the apartments; and downgrading selected doors and finishes in the NOB.

On May 2, 2004, Embassy Kabul requested \$30 million from FY 2004 and FY 2005 funds to reinstate the items descoped by OBO, and to add several essential requirements including space for a health unit, cafeteria, and recreation facilities that had been left out of the original plans for the compound due to funding limitations. At the same time, an OBO project in another region was cancelled due to problems with site acquisition, and OBO was able to reprogram \$43.9 million from that project to Embassy Kabul. OBO successfully converted the KBR contract from cost-plus to firm fixed price and used the reprogrammed funds to restore some of the previously descoped items to the contract and to award two follow-on contracts under competitive procedures to Framaco International to renovate the EOB and to design and build a GSO warehouse and support facilities, a health unit, a cafeteria, and recreation facilities.

Current Status

At the time of the inspection, the KBR portion of the new embassy compound project was nearing completion, six months after the amended completion date of May 2005 and almost one year after the original completion date of December 2004. The KBR project as completed is reduced significantly in scope from the original contract, because it did not include GSO facilities and renovation of the EOB. The current contract amount is \$147 million, which represents an increase of 28 percent over the original award amount. The contractor has been paying liquidated damages of approximately \$6,700 per day since May 2, 2005.

Despite concerted efforts by OBO personnel on site to hold KBR to high standards, OIG became aware of some finish work that is below acceptable standards. OIG has shared this information with OBO, and OBO has assured OIG that all of these items will be brought up to standards. At the time of the inspection the elevators in both the NOB and the staff apartments operated sporadically, the water softening system was not working, and there were ongoing problems with the supply of hot water to the apartments. OBO has assured OIG that these transitional problems have been remedied.

Preparations for the follow-on projects are well underway, with the new contractor and the OBO project director on site. To avoid some of the problems and delays encountered by KBR, the construction site is being fenced off from the rest of the compound for the duration of the project. Both follow-on projects are scheduled for completion in summer 2006.

U.S. AGENCY FOR INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT BUILDING

As noted above, USAID, along with several other mission offices, is currently housed in a temporary office building completed in July 2004, with an estimated life cycle of five to seven years. SA is working with OBO on a proposal to build a permanent, unclassified annex on the CAFE site for offices with high-volume public access needs, including USAID, but this project is not yet approved or funded, and construction could not begin until FY 2008 at the earliest. Meanwhile, USAID has outgrown its temporary facility and has proposed construction of a second story on the temporary office building as an interim solution, which would be used for both office space and for TDY housing. The Ambassador and the

regional security officer have approved this project, which USAID would fund, and plans have been submitted to OBO for approval. Given USAID's urgent need for additional office and TDY housing space, OIG endorses the concept of a second story - provided that the design and engineering problems are satisfactorily addressed. The construction of the permanent annex, in OIG's view, represents the best long-term solution.

GENERAL SERVICES

The GSO section provides a wide range of services to an ever-growing community in a difficult, third-world environment. American staffing includes an acting supervisory GSO, three assistant GSOs, and a rover office management specialist who manages the housing program. In addition to taking the lead on planning for the upcoming move to the NOB and staff apartments, a complex and multifaceted responsibility, the acting supervisory GSO is focusing on moving the office from a basically reactive organization to a full-service, properly functioning shop with standard operating procedures that will ensure compliance with appropriate regulations and policies. This is a huge task that will take months to accomplish, but normalization of GSO functions is long overdue. Committing time and attention to this goal in the short-term will reap long lasting benefits and protect against opportunities for waste, fraud, or mismanagement of government resources.

With the possible departure of the acting supervisory GSO in December, and no permanent employee assigned to the vacant supervisory position, it is unlikely that Embassy Kabul will be able to regularize its GSO functions in the foreseeable future. Mission management seeks to retain the services of the acting supervisory GSO until March 2006, for a total TDY period of six months, an effort that OIG endorses.

Facilities Maintenance

The facilities maintenance section, which reports to the supervisory GSO, is staffed with two American facilities maintenance specialists and 27 FSNs. The section has performed yeoman's work over the past year keeping the deteriorating EOB functioning until the NOB project is completed. The section maintains two compounds with a total of approximately 220 housing hooches, a dozen office and special-use hooches, support facilities, and a large temporary office building, and is preparing for assumption of maintenance responsibility for the NOB and staff apartments.

HUMAN RESOURCES AND STAFFING

Personnel Management

The human resources office at Embassy Kabul performs well despite the major challenges of supporting a mission with a huge influx of employees on one-year tours and a large volume of TDY employees. The human resources officer is an experienced Civil Service employee, with some overseas experience, assigned to the embassy on a limited non-career appointment. Additional staffing includes a shared human resources/financial management officer and five FSNs.

The Department has exerted considerable effort to attract individuals to work in Afghanistan. The Afghanistan service recognition package includes two R&Rs, two regional rest breaks, special differential and premium pay provisions, and a rollover of some pay benefits to the following year. The Department also uses Civil Service employees, assigned to Embassy Kabul under limited non-career appointments, to address staffing needs at this hardship post.

Staffing Challenges

Embassy Kabul is deeply committed to the mission of rebuilding Afghanistan. However, the embassy must also build a personnel structure strong enough to support the larger endeavor. This is a monumental task. The mission faces severe staffing challenges due to unfilled positions, staffing gaps, and the absence of each assigned employee for up to 62 days per year on R&R and regional rest breaks. Bureaus such as S/CT, INL, INR, and PRM merit consideration in identifying Afghanistan-related, short-tour assignments.

In an effort to mitigate the effects of this annual turnover, Embassy Kabul has proposed to the Department (in telegram 05 Kabul 4004) that one-third of its positions be designated as two-year tours, vice the current one-year assignment. Time-in-country would still be limited to one year, with the first and last six months of the two-year assignment spent in Washington. This proposal would allow employees to stay on the summer cycle for bidding and onward assignments but would provide continuity for embassy operations by reducing the summer turnover rate to less than 70 percent. The Washington segments of the tour could be used for job-related training (including language training), troubleshooting administrative problems for the embassy, and establishing a working knowledge of Afghan issues. The embassy's proposal is an innovative solution to the thorny problem of turnover at one-year posts, and could serve as a model to posts facing similar staffing challenges.

Recommendation 11: The Bureau of Human Resources, in coordination with the Bureau of South Asian Affairs, should institute a pilot program for two-year assignments to Embassy Kabul, with the first and last six months of the assignment spent on Afghan-related issues in the Department. (Action: DGHR, in coordination with SA)

Recommendation 12: Embassy Kabul should identify positions for inclusion in a pilot program of two-year assignments to the embassy, with the first and last six months spent in Washington. (Action: Embassy Kabul)

Recommendation 13: The Bureau of South Asian Affairs, in coordination with Embassy Kabul, should identify appropriate duties and training for employees during the Washington segments of the two-year assignments to Embassy Kabul. (Action: SA, in coordination with Embassy Kabul)

Shortly before the inspection, the Ambassador proposed a spouse visit program as another way to improve morale at the post. While the inauguration of such a program might indeed result in improved morale for some staff, OIG did not take a position on the proposal.

Foreign Service Nationals

Quality of managing FSNs at Embassy Kabul is mixed. Some sections, particularly those in which the American supervisors work closely with the FSNs, such as general services, facilities maintenance, and financial management, have done a good job of training and rewarding their FSN staff. In other sections, mostly where the American supervisors are physically separated from the FSNs or have little interaction with them on a daily basis, the FSNs are underutilized or poorly managed. More seriously, OIG witnessed several instances of rude and even verbally abusive treatment of FSNs by Americans on the compound. This is not pervasive, but there should be zero tolerance of abusive treatment of any employee. OIG informed embassy leadership of its observations and concerns on treatment of FSNs and suggested that this is an area for attention by senior managers.

Training

As in the case at longer-established posts, the FSN cadre ultimately will be a primary source of institutional knowledge. At Embassy Kabul, with a relatively new, inexperienced, and, in many cases, poorly educated FSN cadre, this poses challenges. With fleeting attention by harried Americans, the potential for learning and perpetuating bad practices exists.

Some embassy sections, mostly in the management area, have devoted considerable resources to training FSN staff. In response to OIG's 2004 Management Assessment Review,¹⁰ the embassy developed a comprehensive training plan for all of its FSNs, including provisions for sending employees to regional and Washington-based training and bringing in regional trainers and FSNs from other posts to conduct on-site training. Not all sections are implementing the plan, however. A newly assigned employee in the public affairs section has established an after-hours English language training program available to all FSNs. Several American supervisors have expressed interest in expanding this program to provide English language training during duty hours to encourage more employees to attend.

Local Leave Plan

Embassy Kabul's local leave plan does not follow prevailing laws and practices. Because Afghan labor laws and practices were in a state of flux at the time the leave plan for the FSNs was established, the employees were placed on the U.S. leave plan. The FSN committee raised this as a concern at a meeting with the inspectors. The Afghan government has recently drafted a new local labor law, which is awaiting approval. When that process is complete, the embassy plans to revise the local leave plan accordingly.

Foreign Service National Handbook

The FSN Handbook is current, but is available only in English. In its 2004 management review, OIG recommended translation of the handbook into Dari.¹¹ The embassy sent funds to the Department for the translation, which was contracted out to a Dari translator. The final product, however, reportedly contained numerous translation errors. The embassy is working with the Department to resolve this issue.

¹⁰ Office of Inspector General, Management Assessment Review of Embassy Kabul, Afghanistan, Report Number ISP-I-04-35, June 2004

¹¹ OIG is reissuing the recommendation in this report, thereby closing the recommendation (recommendation 12) made in the 2004 management review.

Recommendation 14: Embassy Kabul, in coordination with the Bureau of Administration, should complete the translation of the local employee handbook and distribute it to the local staff. (Action: Embassy Kabul, in coordination with A)

Foreign Service National Position Classification

Embassy Kabul has completed the computer assisted job evaluation process for 82 percent of the mission's FSN positions. However, some supervisors have found that the position descriptions for FSNs in their sections are not accurate, or that duties have changed since the initial evaluation, and have requested re-evaluation of those positions. The embassy is reviewing a number of FSN position descriptions for possible reevaluation via the computer assisted job evaluation process.

INTERNATIONAL COOPERATIVE ADMINISTRATIVE SUPPORT SERVICES

International Cooperative Administrative Support Services (ICASS) provides comprehensive administrative services to the Department, the Drug Enforcement Administration, and the Department of Defense. Administrative services are less integrated for USAID, which provides its own administrative support. The embassy has taken only minor steps toward combining services by forming joint agency housing and furniture pools. There may be more opportunity for sharing other interagency services. An analysis is needed to determine if combining overlapping services would result in cost savings to the U.S. government.

Recommendation 15: Embassy Kabul should identify duplicative services provided by the Department of State and the U.S. Agency for International Development, and the potential cost savings of commingling them, and provide this information to the International Cooperative Administrative Support Services working group in Washington. (Action: Embassy Kabul)

The ICASS council meets on an ad hoc basis, and relations among agencies are professional and productive. Embassy Kabul has an agreed ICASS charter. At the time of the inspection, most agencies had signed their subscription of services

invoice and memoranda of agreement for FY 2006. ICASS standards are in draft form and require only minor revision due to the embassy's decision to remain an ICASS Lite post rather than convert to ICASS standard, which the ICASS board previously planned in FY 2005.

FINANCIAL OPERATIONS

Financial management operations are satisfactory, even though the local staff is inexperienced and still learning financial operations. The assistant financial management officer is a first tour officer and also is inexperienced. An experienced financial management officer (FMO) is performing exceptionally well but has been at post for only five weeks. The FMO is working seven days a week to improve staff performance and is rejuvenating weak financial processes by establishing standard operating procedures.

The FMO's most challenging problem is finding enough time to train staff in a financial operation that is taxed by a demanding workload, handling complicated funding issues, and supporting a cadre of temporary personnel. This is a problem that will grow worse with the addition of three FSN positions and the loss of two of the more experienced FSNs to other sections of the mission. The FMO acknowledges the importance of training and the need to delegate additional responsibility to local staff after training is received. To address this issue, the FMO sought temporary assistance from regional financial centers. The Bangkok Financial Service Center is planning to send staff to Kabul to update financial software and to provide staff training. Embassy Islamabad will also provide on-site training assistance. The embassy will need additional visits from regional financial support centers when the embassy financial office adds more staff. OIG made informal recommendations addressing financial management issues.

MEDICAL UNIT

The health unit at Embassy Kabul is effectively managed and operated by two Foreign Service nurse practitioners and received high marks from mission employees who responded to OIG's workplace and quality of life questionnaire. There are also two local physicians on the staff, and the regional medical officer and regional psychiatrist make regular visits. The imminent move to a new temporary location on the compound will help resolve problems related to the unit's inadequate facili-

ties. The medical unit will relocate to its permanent location next summer upon completion of a new facility to house the health unit, recreation center, and cafeteria.

Medical Clearances

Embassy Kabul is a class 1 post for medical clearances. The medical clearance procedures are well established — 16 FAM 223 outlines procedures for determining medical clearances and 16 FAM 228 states the Bureau of Human Resources policy regarding medical clearances for overseas assignments. Despite these established procedures, employees with significant health problems have arrived for duty in Kabul, indicating that at some point in the assignment process the medical clearance system did not function properly, nor did the embassy receive advance notice about employees with special health needs.

In one case that came to OIG's attention, the medical unit had to close for several hours over a two-day period to attend to the health needs of one employee who arrived without a clearance and was in need of immediate treatment for a chronic condition. In another instance, an employee with a class 2 clearance was assigned, despite having an array of complicated medical conditions that required extensive medical management and monitoring. In other cases, employees have circumvented the clearance system by not disclosing known medical conditions that should preclude them from an assignment to Kabul. Furthermore, individuals have traveled to post without receiving any medical clearance.

The health unit is not equipped to accommodate employees with specialized medical needs and some types of specialized care do not exist in Afghanistan. The U.S. Army Field Hospital in Bagram offers the best medical services in the country, but it does not cover all specialties and is an hour's drive from Kabul on a route that is periodically closed because of security incidents.

Department regulations require individuals with a class 2 medical clearance to receive post-specific approval prior to assignment, and it is the Bureau of Human Resources' policy not to authorize travel orders for employees who do not have a current and appropriate medical clearance.

Recommendation 16: The Office of Medical Services should establish procedures to ensure that individuals are not assigned to Embassy Kabul without a class 1 medical clearance or post-specific approval. (Action: MED)

Recommendation 17: The Bureau of Human Resources should review and strengthen its process for assuring that employees have current class 1 medical clearances or post-specific approvals before authorizing travel orders for assignment to Embassy Kabul. (Action: DGHR, in coordination with SA)

EQUAL EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITY

Embassy Kabul has an active Equal Employment Opportunity program, but has not fulfilled some requirements. The designated counselor has not completed the required training or reporting. OIG discussed the proper procedures for the program with the human resources officer and made informal recommendations, which the embassy acted upon immediately.

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QUALITY OF LIFE

Despite gradual and ongoing improvements in some areas, quality of life at Embassy Kabul is poor and will remain so for the foreseeable future. The workload is heavy in virtually every section of the mission, and the hours are long. Employees live and work on two adjoined compounds, and security considerations severely limit any travel off the compounds for official or unofficial business. All meals are consumed at one of the two cafeterias at the embassy, with occasional forays to other cafeterias on other compounds approved by the regional security officer. Both cafeterias were closed at different times during the inspection, and on several occasions in the preceding months, because of concerns about sanitation and food preparation. The embassy recently contracted with a new vendor to manage one of the cafeterias, which hopefully will improve both the quality and variety of food choices for staff.

Morale at the mission is mixed. As indicated in OIG's personal questionnaire survey, some individuals have very high morale while other employees are less satisfied. Morale amongst most American staff falls somewhere in the middle. A variety of factors affect personal morale levels, including time-in-country, job satisfaction, separation from family members, and participation in the still-limited social activities. The Department and the embassy work hard to improve those areas over which they have some control, such as providing new office and living quarters, developing a benefits package to attract bidders to Kabul, and creating employment opportunities for EFMs. These measures alleviate, but do not eliminate, the harsh living and working conditions at the mission.

Within the FSN cadre, OIG perceived a correlation between morale and interaction with American supervisors. Those who have the closest association with their American colleagues were more satisfied than those with less direct working relationships.

Eligible Family Member Employment

Embassy Kabul has been an unaccompanied post since it reopened in 2002. With assistance and approval from the Department, the mission recently implemented a limited EFM program, patterned after Embassy Islamabad's successful model. Three EFM positions - two security escorts and one mailroom supervisor -

were approved and advertised, but there have been no applicants to date. In the embassy's view, the program is not working because personnel assigned to Embassy Kabul have no assurance that an EFM will have a job before the employee is assigned. Furthermore, by the time employees arrive in Afghanistan, the positions available for EFMs have been settled for the year. SA pointed out that the program is fairly new and the candidate pool remains limited. SA advised OIG that, starting with 2007 assignments, the bureau would advertise available EFM positions so that bidders on embassy jobs will know which might be available for an EFM at post. As discussed elsewhere in this report, OIG identified further opportunities for EFM employment (e.g. a visitor control officer and in a transcription service based in the public affairs section.)

The embassy is pursuing the establishment of an EFM community liaison office coordinator position. OIG supports this plan. In addition to coordinating activities for mission employees, a community liaison office coordinator represents community interests on the emergency action committee, works closely with the regional security officer to ensure emergency preparedness and disseminate security information to the community, organizes orientation and welcome information for new arrivals, and provides important guidance and counseling services to members of the mission.

Employee Association

The recent establishment of a recreation association at Embassy Kabul is a welcome development for mission morale. The nascent Kabul Embassy Employees Association provides limited services but plans to hire a manager soon, which will allow it to expand its activities. At present, mission employees perform all association work on their own, limited, free time.

The Department has approved the association's charter, by-laws, and license agreement, and the embassy has designated the management counselor to monitor the association's activities and certify that its operations are prudently managed. The association is financially viable, averaging \$2,000 per week for sale of logo items and has established an account at a local bank. The treasurer updates the budget report and distributes it to all members. OIG conducted a cash count and made an informal recommendation that the board conduct unannounced cash counts periodically.

MANAGEMENT CONTROLS

The chief of mission certification of management controls, submitted on June 30, 2005, identified three reportable conditions: no disaster recovery and contingency plan in the event of an automated data processing failure, no policies for full backup and recovery of data files, and incomplete inventory databases. Embassy management is working to correct all reportable conditions by December 2005.

Overall, the risk assessment and evaluation conducted in September 2005 received good scores. The assessment identified deficiencies in the areas of consular controls, security, information technology systems, and personnel. These issues are discussed elsewhere in this report.

Overtime

A review of payroll records covering the past 12 months shows that the embassy's American and local staff worked thousands of hours of overtime each month. Given the number of ongoing construction projects, high number of visits, security requirements, staffing gaps, and vacancies that occur throughout the year, there is a legitimate need for overtime work. However, contrary to requirements (as stated in 4 FAH-3 H-523.2), American supervisors do not always approve overtime in advance.

OIG analyzed the number of overtime hours worked and found that American employees (Foreign Service specialists and untenured officers) eligible for overtime worked an average of 15 to 30 hours overtime per week. The FSN average is lower. Tenured Foreign Service generalists receive an 18 percent special differential in lieu of overtime to compensate for long hours worked.

Recommendation 18: Embassy Kabul should establish procedures to prevent abuse of overtime and to link overtime work with mission objectives through advance planning. (Action: Embassy Kabul)

Local Guard Contract

DS did not submit requirements for local guard services to the Office of Acquisitions with sufficient lead-time to allow full and open competition. As a result, the local guard contract was awarded on an urgent and noncompetitive basis. DS officials say that requirements were submitted late because they received late notification from Defense of its plans to withdraw its combat Marine Task Force from Kabul. However, OIG learned that Defense gave official notification to the Department six months before deployment and gave earlier verbal notification of its plans on several occasions. This lack of advance planning by DS and lack of coordination among government agencies led to higher local guard contract cost. This noncompetitively awarded contract has been costing DS approximately \$6 million per month since the departure of the combat Marines on March 31, 2005. A new local guard contract, awarded on a competitive basis on July 7, 2005, to become effective on December 1, 2005, will cost the U.S. government less than \$2 million per month - a significant reduction.

There are legitimate reasons for issuing contracts on an urgent basis and also for contractual delays, but OIG found no evidence in the contract files that suggests DS conducted advance acquisition planning within time frames suggested in the Federal Acquisition Regulations. FAR 7.104 states that acquisition planning should begin as soon as an agency identifies a need, preferably well in advance of the fiscal year in which contract award or order placement is necessary. In August 2004, OIG made a recommendation to correct similar acquisition planning issues in its inspection of the Bureau of Diplomatic Security's Directorate of Infrastructure.

Consular Controls

Embassy Kabul's 2005 risk assessment review detected several weaknesses in consular controls, resulting in a below-average score for the consular section. The section was not properly securing printed U.S. passports, or Afghan passports holding U.S. visas, or reconciling controlled items. The previous consular officer did not properly reconcile and relinquish control of accountable items prior to departing post. The embassy has taken steps to correct these weaknesses.

The embassy also lost points on the assessment for answering questions that do not apply to its limited consular operations. For example, the embassy stated that it did not perform certain procedures for visas. However, because the embassy does not yet adjudicate any visas, these requirements are not applicable.

INFORMATION MANAGEMENT AND INFORMATION SECURITY

Information Management

Embassy Kabul operates an information management program that includes system administration of unclassified and classified computer networks, radio and telephone maintenance, telecommunications support, classified and unclassified pouch service, as well as embassy and residential cable television support. The information resource management section supports about 170 permanent staff on both the classified and unclassified systems, plus about 130 TDY users on both systems. In addition to the recommendations below, OIG left informal recommendations that address pouch management, cell phone administration, and management of the radio networks.

When the move to the NOB is completed, Embassy Kabul will have new systems provided through the Department's global information technology modernization program. This will enable the information resource management section to automate some maintenance fixes and reduce user problems requiring the section's assistance. Nevertheless, the section has already experienced and anticipates further problems occurring as a result of the transition, and these problems will continue to place significant demands on its staff.

Recommendation 19: Embassy Kabul should request, and the Bureau of Information Resource Management and the Bureau of South Asia Affairs should provide, one temporary duty staff to assist post in resolving information technology problems arising from the move to the new office building. (Action: Embassy Kabul, in coordination with SA and IRM)

This post generally operates in a reactive mode with little forward planning.
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(b) (2)(b) (2)(b) (2) The information technology equipment at post is old

and worn out by the environmental conditions in Kabul. As a result, the equipment requires maintenance beyond normal maintenance schedules.

Recommendation 20: Embassy Kabul should develop an operating plan that identifies and prioritizes information management operations and a schedule assigning personnel to those operations. (Action: Embassy Kabul)

Information management operations, especially customer support, received an unsatisfactory rating on the OIG questionnaire rating embassy service providers. There are several reasons for this unsatisfactory rating. The information management office frequently lacks full staffing. Allowable rest breaks, totaling eight weeks per employee, complicate staff scheduling and effectively reduce the hard pressed staff by one position over the year. At the time of the inspection, Embassy Kabul's information resource management section staff consisted of one information management officer, one information program officer, and two information management specialists. An information systems officer is scheduled to arrive in December, and an information management technical specialist is scheduled to arrive in January 2006. Two experienced FSNs support the section and two more are in the pipeline awaiting security clearances. During the inspection, information resource management section personnel were also addressing problems with personal television, telephone, and Internet services at the new apartment building - areas that are not generally handled by information management operations. Demands of this nature are likely to continue as embassy personnel continue to move into their new residences.

Recommendation 21: Embassy Kabul should not require information resource management staff to perform duties outside of their area of operations and should identify alternative providers for personal television and Internet services and support. (Action: Embassy Kabul)

Information Security

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OIG perceived a need for greater management attention to an active information system security program. Information system security officers were designated just prior to the inspection. However, neither of the security officers has received the Department's information system security officer training and neither performs most of the normal information system security officer duties. A staff member scheduled to arrive in December has received information system security officer training and, although it was initially intended for him to serve as the information system officer, he will be designated as the information system security officer.

Recommendation 22: Embassy Kabul should assess staffing levels and assignments to ensure that the information resource management section is appropriately staffed to carry out both information management and information security requirements. (Action: Embassy Kabul)

Many of the incidents involve other agency personnel connecting equipment to the Department's network. Malicious code has been introduced through laptops. The post can prevent this from occurring by disabling connections at all locations unless they have been specifically authorized through a written access request approved by a supervisor.

Recommendation 23: Embassy Kabul should comply with all Department information system security policies and procedures. Information systems security officers should enforce the Department's requirements. (Action: Embassy Kabul)

FORMAL RECOMMENDATIONS

- Recommendation 1:** The Bureau of Human Resources, in coordination with the Bureau of South Asian Affairs and Embassy Kabul, should assign the next commercial officer at Embassy Kabul to the one-week course on commercial diplomacy at the Foreign Service Institute or an equivalent course at the Department of Commerce. (Action: DGHR, in coordination with SA and Embassy Kabul)
- Recommendation 2:** Embassy Kabul, in coordination with the Bureau of South Asian Affairs, should determine how residual elements of the Afghanistan Reconstruction Group are to be incorporated within the mission. (Action: Embassy Kabul, in coordination with SA)
- Recommendation 3:** Embassy Kabul should establish a working group with other agency representatives and evaluate the impact of projects undertaken by provincial reconstruction teams, specifically to incorporate an assessment of costs/benefits of such projects. (Action: Embassy Kabul)
- Recommendation 4:** The Bureau of South Asian Affairs, in coordination with Embassy Kabul, should outline the purpose and objectives of the civilian elements of the provincial reconstruction teams and the role and authority of Department officers assigned to provincial reconstruction teams, and disseminate that outline to other U.S. government civilians and the military commanders of the teams. (Action: SA, in coordination with Embassy Kabul)
- Recommendation 5:** Embassy Kabul, in coordination with the Bureau of South Asian Affairs, should provide U.S. government civilians assigned to provincial reconstruction teams with position descriptions defining duties and authorities that are acceptable to the respective provincial reconstruction team commander and to the U.S. government civilian agencies represented at the provincial reconstruction team. (Action: Embassy Kabul, in coordination with SA)
- Recommendation 6:** The Bureau of South Asian Affairs, in coordination with Embassy Kabul, should prepare and implement a comprehensive orientation program for personnel assigned to provincial reconstruction teams in Afghanistan, or arrange for the participation of Department officers in a similar program offered by other agencies. (Action: SA, in coordination with Embassy Kabul)

Recommendation 7: The Bureau of Human Resources should establish a mechanism to require that all U.S. government civilian personnel assigned to provincial reconstruction teams take the Bureau of Diplomatic Security's survival skills course before proceeding to Afghanistan. (Action: DGHR)

Recommendation 8: Embassy Kabul should include representatives of all relevant U.S. agencies in the preparation of the Mission Performance Plan to propose the future of the provincial reconstruction teams. (Action: Embassy Kabul)

Recommendation 9: Embassy Kabul, in consultation with the Bureau of South Asian Affairs, should draft a public affairs action plan for Afghanistan to address the major directions for public affairs and public diplomacy activities over the coming years, public outreach, and requirements for resources and facilities. (Action: Embassy Kabul, in consultation with SA)

Recommendation 10: Embassy Kabul should establish and implement grant management procedures that include requiring and monitoring the submission of reports from grantees and preparing grant documents in a standard fashion with all required information. (Action: Embassy Kabul)

Recommendation 11: The Bureau of Human Resources, in coordination with the Bureau of South Asian Affairs, should institute a pilot program for two-year assignments to Embassy Kabul, with the first and last six months of the assignment spent on Afghan-related issues in the Department. (Action: DGHR, in coordination with SA)

Recommendation 12: Embassy Kabul should identify positions for inclusion in a pilot program of two-year assignments to the embassy, with the first and last six months spent in Washington. (Action: Embassy Kabul)

Recommendation 13: The Bureau of South Asian Affairs, in coordination with Embassy Kabul, should identify appropriate duties and training for employees during the Washington segments of the two-year assignments to Embassy Kabul. (Action: SA, in coordination with Embassy Kabul)

Recommendation 14: Embassy Kabul, in coordination with the Bureau of Administration, should complete the translation of the local employee handbook and distribute it to the local staff. (Action: Embassy Kabul, in coordination with A)

Recommendation 15: Embassy Kabul should identify duplicative services provided by the Department of State and the U.S. Agency for International Development, and the potential cost savings of commingling them, and provide this information to the International Cooperative Administrative Support Services working group in Washington. (Action: Embassy Kabul)

Recommendation 16: The Office of Medical Services should establish procedures to ensure that individuals are not assigned to Embassy Kabul without a class 1 medical clearance or post-specific approval. (Action: MED)

Recommendation 17: The Bureau of Human Resources should review and strengthen its process for assuring that employees have current class 1 medical clearances or post-specific approvals before authorizing travel orders for assignment to Embassy Kabul. (Action: DGHR, in coordination with SA)

Recommendation 18: Embassy Kabul should establish procedures to prevent abuse of overtime and to link overtime work with mission objectives through advance planning. (Action: Embassy Kabul)

Recommendation 19: Embassy Kabul should request, and the Bureau of Information Resource Management and the Bureau of South Asia Affairs should provide, one temporary duty staff to assist post in resolving information technology problems arising from the move to the new office building. (Action: Embassy Kabul, in coordination with SA and IRM)

Recommendation 20: Embassy Kabul should develop an operating plan that identifies and prioritizes information management operations and a schedule assigning personnel to those operations. (Action: Embassy Kabul)

Recommendation 21: Embassy Kabul should not require information resource management staff to perform duties outside of their area of operations and should identify alternative providers for personal television and Internet services and support. (Action: Embassy Kabul)

Recommendation 22: Embassy Kabul should assess staffing levels and assignments to ensure that the information resource management section is appropriately staffed to carry out both information management and information security requirements. (Action: Embassy Kabul)

Recommendation 23: Embassy Kabul should comply with all Department information system security policies and procedures. Information systems security officers should enforce the Department's requirements. (Action: Embassy Kabul)

INFORMAL RECOMMENDATIONS

Informal recommendations cover operational matters not requiring action by organizations outside the inspected unit and/or the parent regional bureau. Informal recommendations will not be subject to the OIG compliance process. However, any subsequent OIG inspection or on-site compliance review will assess the mission's progress in implementing the informal recommendations.

Executive Direction

The method of preparing the last Embassy Kabul MPP led to a feeling among some section heads that they did not need to engage intensively in the process and so did not give the MPP the attention it warrants from all mission elements.

Informal Recommendation 1: Embassy Kabul should engage all mission elements fully in the preparation of the Mission Performance Plan.

Political and Economic Sections

The number and frequency of visitors places considerable strain on the embassy. This problem could be ameliorated by the creation of a visitor control bureau.

Informal Recommendation 2: Embassy Kabul should propose and seek funding for a visitor control bureau. An eligible family member could direct such a unit.

Many elements in the U.S. mission, both civilian and military, have easy access to the relatively small number of senior Afghan officials directing key government offices. In this situation, there is real potential for conveying inaccurate information on U.S. policy and program resources.

Informal Recommendation 3: Embassy Kabul should institute a system for managing U.S. government contacts with senior officials.

Informal Recommendation 4: Embassy Kabul should conduct an orientation session for newly arrived Department economic and political officers on inter-agency dynamics at the mission and provide guidelines for official engagement with senior Afghan government representatives.

Afghanistan Reconstruction Group

Applicants for positions in the ARG do not receive comprehensive and accurate information on the terms and conditions of their employment. Lack of guidance on purchasing sufficient medical insurance in particular has led to problems for ARG employees.

Informal Recommendation 5: The Bureau of South Asian Affairs, in consultation with Embassy Kabul, should provide applicants for positions in the Afghanistan Reconstruction Group with a comprehensive briefing on the terms and conditions of their employment, with a particular focus on health care and health insurance.

Informal Recommendation 6: The Bureau of South Asian Affairs in consultation with the 'reachback' office in the Department of Defense should provide the same information in written form to prospective Afghanistan Reconstruction Group recruits.

Public Affairs Section

In interviews with OIG, several PAS American officers mentioned that they were not sure about their portfolios. Position descriptions for local employees in some cases do not match the type and level of employee responsibilities. The existing training program for some FSNs does not mesh with current responsibilities.

Informal Recommendation 7: Embassy Kabul should prepare accurate work requirements for the public affairs section American officers.

Informal Recommendation 8: Embassy Kabul should confirm the accuracy of public affairs section local employee position descriptions, and, where necessary, prepare new position descriptions and determine the correct position grades.

Informal Recommendation 9: Embassy Kabul should revise and update its training program for local employees in the public affairs section.

The English language coordinator has not been a full member of the PAS team and engages in activities without oversight by the PAO. There is no overall plan governing PAS support for English language teaching in Afghanistan. The coordinator is on a one-year nonrenewable appointment. The newly appointed regional English language officer for South Asia, resident in New Delhi, could provide valuable assistance to PAS as it develops this aspect of post program activity.

Informal Recommendation 10: Embassy Kabul should define the role of the English language coordinator in the execution of public affairs section programs and formally designate a supervisor for the English language coordinator.

Informal Recommendation 11: Embassy Kabul should establish a local employee position in the public affairs section focused on support for English teaching.

Informal Recommendation 12: Embassy Kabul should request an early visit by the newly appointed regional English language officer and, with the active assistance and guidance of the regional English language officer, develop a plan for public affairs section support for English language teaching in Afghanistan (to include use of American Corners as platforms for English teaching activities).

PAS Kabul has not established a mechanism for providing educational advising services to students interested in studying in the United States, or to assist local educational advisers providing such services to prospective students.

Informal Recommendation 13: Embassy Kabul should request a consultation and training visit by the regional educational advising coordinator.

The four American Corners in Afghanistan vary widely in their effectiveness as vehicles for mission outreach. Information resource officers in IIP mentioned to OIG that PAS Kabul has set up funding and other logistical arrangements that fall well outside the guidelines established to standardize American Corner operations. PAS Kabul also needs to begin planning for the development of an information resource center able to make use of the considerable public affairs and public diplomacy material available from IIP and other sources to provide policy support to mission objectives.

Informal Recommendation 14: Embassy Kabul should request continued support by the regional information resource officer to help the public affairs section define the role American Corners could play in public affairs section programming.

Informal Recommendation 15: Embassy Kabul should identify aspects of American Corners operations that conflict with standard Department requirements for American Corners and either resolve the conflicts or develop alternative approaches to present to the Department for approval.

Informal Recommendation 16: Embassy Kabul should request that the regional information resource officer assist the public affairs section in developing an information resource center to provide public affairs and public diplomacy policy support to the mission and then follow up with training of center staff and counseling on use of information resources.

The public affairs section does not have a contact management system to track participation of mission contacts in exchange programs or other public affairs and public diplomacy programs.

Informal Recommendation 17: Embassy Kabul should establish a contact management system to track participation of mission contacts in exchange programs and other public diplomacy and public affairs programs.

There is no mission-wide committee to select candidates for the International Visitor Program.

Informal Recommendation 18: Embassy Kabul should establish a mission-wide International Visitor selection committee.

In interviews with Department officers assigned to provincial reconstruction teams, OIG learned that the officers did not have much information on public diplomacy and public affairs resources available to them, such as translated publications and daily media reaction reports.

Informal Recommendation 19: Embassy Kabul should produce and distribute information on resources available in the public affairs section for use by Department officers and their colleagues in the provincial reconstruction teams.

The current “media guidelines” directed by Embassy Kabul greatly restrict the ability of PRT officers to highlight their programs to local and international media when press opportunities arise on short notice.

Informal Recommendation 20: Embassy Kabul should revise the existing media guidelines to allow some flexibility on short-notice opportunities for press coverage of provincial reconstruction team projects.

Embassy Kabul is not able to produce transcripts of speeches, press interviews, and other public remarks made by the Ambassador, other senior mission officials, and VIP visitors.

Informal Recommendation 21: Embassy Kabul should procure transcription equipment and designate office management specialist staff responsible for producing transcripts of official remarks.

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Financial Management

Embassy Kabul is not following departmental procedures for maintaining and monitoring post accounts. A review of financial records shows that the embassy needs to pay closer attention to monitoring status of funds and status of obligation reports. There are 14 accounts that require review.

Informal Recommendation 23: Embassy Kabul should establish procedures that include periodic monitoring of status of funds, obligations, and liquidation amounts.

The financial management office does not regularly consult with the GSO to determine if unliquidated obligations are still valid.

Informal Recommendation 24: Embassy Kabul should require the financial management and general services offices to schedule monthly meetings to determine the validity of unliquidated obligations.

In some instances, program offices do not always receive timely updates on budgets from the financial management office in order to plan programs and expenditures.

Informal Recommendation 25: Embassy Kabul should develop procedures to make certain that the financial management office provides program offices with the status of fund reports.

Embassy Kabul employees are not always submitting travel vouchers within five working days after completion of authorized travel in accordance with the provisions in 4 FAH-3 H-465.1-1.

Informal Recommendation 26: Embassy Kabul should ensure that employees submit a voucher for reimbursement of expenses within five workdays after completion of authorized travel as required by Department regulations.

An analysis of travel advances revealed that travelers did not settle balances in a timely manner. Department regulations (14 FAM 517) require all outstanding travel advances to be settled upon completion of travel.

Informal Recommendation 27: Embassy Kabul should develop and implement procedures to process all outstanding travel advances in accordance with Department regulations.

Embassy Kabul is not always paying invoices within 30 days in accordance with the Prompt Payment Act (31 USC 3901 et seq.)

Informal Recommendation 28: Embassy Kabul should implement procedures to pay vendors within 30 days.

Cash verifications of the advances to subcashiers designated at provincial reconstruction team sites are not being conducted as required by 4 FAH-3 H-397.2-2 and 2-3.

Informal Recommendation 29: Embassy Kabul should conduct cash verifications of advances to subcashiers as required by Department regulations.

Proceeds of sale of about \$24,000 have been placed in the suspense deposits abroad account. The financial management section is waiting for the GSO to identify appropriation accounts originally charged for each sale item so that these proceeds can be charged to correct appropriation accounts.

Informal Recommendation 30: Embassy Kabul should identify appropriation accounts originally charged for each sale item and transfer these amounts from the suspense deposit account to the correct proceeds appropriation accounts.

Copies of warrants for officers authorized to obligate U.S. government funds are not available in the financial management office.

Informal Recommendation 31: Embassy Kabul should place copies of warranted officers' certifications in the financial management office's files.

Copies of contract and grants are not available in the financial management office.

Informal Recommendation 32: Embassy Kabul should place copies of contracts and grants that it obligates payments for in the financial management office's files.

In some instances, program offices do not submit valid obligating documents.

Informal Recommendation 33: Embassy Kabul should issue an administrative notice defining the most commonly used obligating documents.

International Cooperative Administrative Support Services

Although the embassy established its ICASS service performance standards, these are not always integrated as part of daily management operations, nor are they incorporated in employee performance standards. Some units of the management section are not aware of the established service performance standards.

Informal Recommendation 34: Embassy Kabul should use its International Cooperative Administrative Support Services performance standards as a management tool and incorporate them in direct-hire American and locally employed staff work requirements.

Employee Association

The employee association has not conducted unannounced cash counts.

Informal Recommendation 35: Embassy Kabul should implement a procedure for employee association board members to conduct unannounced cash counts on an irregular basis.

Information Management Office

All classified and most unclassified pouches come into Afghanistan at Bagram Military Airport. Some unclassified material also arrives at the civilian airport in Kabul. Deliveries are usually every two weeks. The information resource management section provides courier escort service for all pouch deliveries, although 12 FAM 151.1 states that all agencies at post that use the classified pouch should share responsibility for providing courier escorts.

Informal Recommendation 36: Embassy Kabul should develop a courier schedule that includes all agencies that use the service.

In accordance with 5 FAM 526.3, the responsibility for administering cell phones is to be determined by the post based on staff capabilities and availability. At Embassy Kabul, GSO takes care of cell phones for permanent staff, while the information resource management section provides services for TDY staff.

Informal Recommendation 37: Embassy Kabul should assign all cell phone administration responsibilities to the general services office.

The information resource management section is currently operating 18 separate radio nets at Embassy Kabul. The section is working with the emergency action committee to develop an updated communications plan that would consolidate the number of nets operating.

Informal Recommendation 38: Embassy Kabul should consolidate radio nets.

Embassy Kabul does not efficiently manage its limited information resources. There is no information technology help desk operating at the post; the information resource management section employees respond to telephone calls asking for assistance and, more often, requests by employees who approach them in the hallway or even in the cafeteria. It is essential that the information resource management section establish a help desk operation as soon as possible to ensure that limited resources are used efficiently and recurring problem areas are identified.

Informal Recommendation 39: Embassy Kabul should establish a help desk, with a central phone number and e-mail address, to review, prioritize, and address requests in an orderly and timely fashion.

PRINCIPAL OFFICIALS

	Name	Date of Arrival
Ambassador	Ronald Neumann	7/05
Deputy Chief of Mission	Richard Norland	7/05
Chiefs of Sections:		
Management	Rosemary Hansen	8/05
Afghanistan Reconstruction Group	Edward Smith	9/05
Consular	Adrienne Harchik	8/05
Narcotics Affairs	Richard Baca	1/05
Political	Angus Simmons	9/05
Economic	Douglas Climan	7/05
Public Affairs	Anne O'Leary	10/05
Refugee Affairs	Gwendolyn Pascoe	9/05
Regional Affairs	Gregory Vogel	9/04
Regional Security	John Moretti	8/05
Other Agencies:		
Drug Enforcement Administration	Joseph Remanar	6/05
U.S. Agency for International Development	Alonzo Fulgham	7/05
Defense Attache Office	COL Michael Norton	8/05

ABBREVIATIONS

AC	American Corners
ARG	Afghanistan Reconstruction Group
CAFE	Compound across from the embassy
CFC-A	Combined Forces Command - Afghanistan
DCM	Deputy chief of mission
Defense	Department of Defense
Department	Department of State
DS	Bureau of Diplomatic Security
ECA	Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs
EFM	Eligible family member
EOB	Existing office building
EPD	Embassy protective detail
FMO	Financial management office
FSN	Foreign Service national
GAO	Government Accountability Office
GSO	General services office
ICASS	International Cooperative Administrative Support Services
IIP	Bureau of International Information Programs
INL	Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs
ISAF	International Security Assistance Force
KBR	Kellogg, Brown and Root
MPP	Mission Performance Plan
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NOB	New office building

OBO Bureau of Overseas Buildings Operations
OIG Office of Inspector General
PAO Public affairs officer
PAS Public affairs section
PEP Poppy elimination program
PRT Provincial reconstruction team
R&R Rest and recuperation
SA Bureau of South Asian Affairs
TDY Temporary duty
USAID U.S. Agency for International Development

FRAUD, WASTE, ABUSE, OR MISMANAGEMENT
of Federal programs
and resources hurts everyone.

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