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For Afghan Reconstruction, Millions of Dollars Up in Smoke

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Unconscionable levels of waste, fraud, and abuse continue to plague America's 11 year nation-building mission in Afghanistan. According to an investigation by the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR), officers with the NATO training mission shredded the financial records of fuel purchased for the Afghan National Army. As a result, "the U.S. government still cannot account for \$201 million in fuel purchased to support the Afghan National Army."

On the document destruction, SIGAR investigators determined among its many findings that:

- The two fuel ordering officers cited efficiency, saving physical storage space, and the ability to share document [*sic*], as factors in the decision to scan and shred the documents. They added that they believed that the scanned documents had been stored electronically on a [Combined Security Transition Command-Afghanistan (CSTC-A)] SharePoint portal or shared drive, but they could not recall the exact locations.
- ... CSTC-A was unable to locate any of the missing documents.

A number of other projects underscore the problems U.S. agencies confront in carrying out large-scale development initiatives. For instance, the U.S. military plans to provide electricity via diesel generators to about 2,500 Afghan homes and businesses around Kandahar, according to a

report over the summer by the *Washington Post's* Rajiv Chandrasekaran. U.S. government planners expect the program, called the “Kandahar Bridging Solution,” to cost American taxpayers about \$220 million through 2013, that is, until the United States Agency for International Development and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers build a new hydropower turbine at a dam in neighboring Helmand.

Washington planners, in keeping with their population-centric counterinsurgency doctrine, assume that many Afghans will be pleased to have power, and thus, will throw their support behind the Afghan central government. Instead, U.S. Army Maj. Gen. Kenneth Dahl, the deputy commander of U.S. forces in Kandahar last year, found no evidence that the added electricity was yielding greater support for the government, a conclusion far from surprising. Moreover, Dahl also discovered that the turbine at the dam will provide residents with less power than what they currently get from the generators. As SIGAR noted, “the U.S. government may be building an expectations gap.”

Yet another in a laundry list of dashed expectations may soon be the new \$23 million road in Helmand, dashed because the Afghan government has yet to compensate landowners for buildings and property demolished during construction.

The United States continues to expend money and lives for stabilization efforts and infrastructure projects that may *still* fail to leverage Afghan support for the government. At its heart, that failure lies not only with the mission’s overlapping, redundant, and expensive development strategies, but also with the underlying assumption that when armed with “performance-based contracts” and “metrics to measure achievement,” government bureaucracies can successfully plan such projects.