

SIGAR

**Special Inspector General for
Afghanistan Reconstruction**

OFFICE OF SPECIAL PROJECTS

**BRIDGES IN KABUL PROVINCE,
AFGHANISTAN: SIX BRIDGES ARE
IN GENERALLY GOOD CONDITION,
BUT AFGHAN GOVERNMENT LACKS
BUDGET FOR SUSTAINED
MAINTENANCE**



DECEMBER 2018

SIGAR 19-08-SP



SIGAR

Office of the Special Inspector General
for Afghanistan Reconstruction

December 04, 2018

The Honorable Jim Mattis
Secretary of Defense

General Austin Scott Miller
Commander, U.S. Forces–Afghanistan and
Commander, Resolute Support

Dear Secretary Mattis and General Miller

I am writing to inform you of the results of site visits to verify the locations and conditions of six DOD-funded bridge projects in Kabul province, Afghanistan. The six bridges were constructed or rehabilitated using funds from the Commander's Emergency Response Program (CERP) between 2009 and 2012.

We found that the location information maintained in DOD systems was accurate as all six bridges were within one kilometer of their recorded coordinates. We also found that all six bridges were open for use and in generally good condition. However, we have one concern that without sustained maintenance, there is reasonable risk that the bridges will fall into disrepair and U.S. investment in this infrastructure will not be sustained over the long-term.

SIGAR provided a draft of this report to the Department of Defense for comment on November 5, 2018. DOD provided technical comments to the report on November 28, 2018, which we incorporated as appropriate.

We conducted our work in Kabul province, Afghanistan and Washington, D.C. from December 2017 to December 2018 under the authority of Public Law 110-181, as amended, and the Inspector General Act of 1978, as amended; and in accordance with the Council of Inspectors General on Integrity and Efficiency (CIGIE) Quality Standards for Inspection and Evaluation. Should you or your staff have any questions about this project, please contact Mr. Benjamin Piccolo, Director of Special Projects, at (703) 545-2192 or benjamin.j.piccolo.civ@mail.mil.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "John F. Sopko".

John F. Sopko
Special Inspector General
for Afghanistan Reconstruction

BACKGROUND

DOD established the Commander's Emergency Response Program (CERP) in fiscal year 2004 to enable military commanders to respond to urgent humanitarian relief and reconstruction requirements in Iraq and Afghanistan.¹ In Afghanistan, CERP funds were used to implement projects in all 34 provinces to support projects in diverse sectors, including transportation, education, agriculture/irrigation, healthcare, and water and sanitation. CERP was intended for small projects that cost less than \$500,000. CERP projects that cost more than \$500,000 were also authorized when approved at the appropriate level within DOD.

Projects that supported Afghanistan's transportation sector were among the most common and expensive CERP project categories. One component of CERP-funded transportation projects included the construction, repair, and replacement of pedestrian and vehicle bridge infrastructure throughout Afghanistan. Bridges are important because they help link communities and provide access to markets—both of which aid in economic development and promote stability. However, Afghanistan's mountainous terrain, seasonal snowmelt, and tectonic activity, coupled with its tenuous security environment and budgetary constraints, pose challenges for the maintenance and longevity of CERP-funded bridges.

This is the second in a series of reports examining bridges throughout Afghanistan that were constructed or rehabilitated using CERP funds. This report includes our observations from six such bridges in Kabul province. The six projects cost approximately \$610,000.

We worked jointly with an Afghan civil society organization to perform limited inspections of the bridges in May 2018. At each site, we took time-, date-, and location-stamped photographs.² Where possible, the following activities were also completed during each visit:

- An overall assessment of the bridge to record, among other information, the geospatial coordinates of the project and whether the bridge appeared to be open to the public, structurally sound, and safe to use
- An interview with a community member
- An interview with a Ministry of Public Works (MOPW) official

We conducted our work from December 2017 to December 2018. Our site inspections did not include comprehensive engineering evaluations of the structures.

SIX BRIDGES IN KABUL PROVINCE ARE IN GENERALLY GOOD CONDITION BUT LACK BUDGET FOR SUSTAINED MAINTENANCE

Using the province, district, bridge project name, and geospatial coordinates for each bridge, we confirmed the existence of all six bridges. We found that the location information maintained in DOD systems was accurate, and less than one kilometer from the geospatial coordinates contained in DOD files. Enclosure 1 shows the location information for each bridge we visited. This enclosure will not be publicly released due to security concerns.

We found that the six bridges, having spans of between 5 and 18 meters and mostly fording seasonal rivers or creeks, all appeared to be in generally good condition. We further found that all six were being used, although one pedestrian overpass, according to a community member, was rarely used. According to an Afghan Ministry

¹ Emergency Supplemental Appropriations Act for Defense for the Reconstruction of Iraq and Afghanistan, 2004, Pub. L. No. 108-106, § 1110, 117 Stat. 1209, 1215 (2003).

² Nearly all photographs contained time, date, and location stamps; however, at some locations, there were individual photographs that did not contain geospatial stamping.

of Public Works (MOPW) official tasked with maintaining the structures, the bridges are important to the province and are generally heavily relied upon by the citizenry. The December 2009 MAAWS-A gives guidance that construction projects in excess of \$50,000 “require a memorandum of Agreement (MOA) between the project sponsoring unit and the appropriate GIROA representative with the authority to accept and fund follow-on maintenance and sustainment requirements of the project.”³ SIGAR found MOAs with MOPW for four of the bridges in projects files. SIGAR also found letters of support for the two remaining bridges. One from a local police department and one from a group of six village elders. Both letters offered support for the upkeep and maintenance of the respective bridges. However, the MOPW official stated that the ministry had no budget for maintenance or repairs for any of the bridges.

We also spoke to a community member in the general vicinity of each bridge to obtain their opinion on how useful the bridge was to the local community. While an MOPW official noted that four of the bridges were requested by local leaders, only three expressed the opinion that the bridge in their community was “very useful.” Two stated that the bridge in their community was “somewhat useful,” and one stated that the bridge in his community was “not so useful.” The combined cost of the bridges was \$609,920.

Bridge 1

Bridge 1 is a pedestrian bridge completed in May 2010 at a cost of \$85,000. We found that the bridge is in generally good and usable condition. The steel bridge spans 16 meters across a river, which separates two villages that have close socioeconomic ties. We estimated it serves 300 people a day. We were told that the bridge was built with the strong support of local leaders who described it as “one of the important needs of the village.” One community member interviewed in close proximity to the bridge described how, prior to the bridge’s construction, village residents would travel to another village just to cross the river, making it difficult to access services and facilities. The MOPW representative stated the community relied heavily on the bridge to connect community members with their workplaces, schools, clinics, and the local markets. We were able to locate an Agreement letter from six village elders requesting construction of the bridge and a promise to sustain the bridge. According to an MOPW official, the MOPW has not included maintenance for the bridge in its budget.

Photo 1 - Bridge Project 1



Source: SIGAR, May 1, 2018

Photo 2 - Bridge Project 1 (from Opposite Bank)



Source: SIGAR, May 1, 2018

³ Money As A Weapon System Afghanistan (MAAWS-A), USFOR_A Pub 1-06, Commander’s Emergency Response Program (CERP) SOP, Updated: Dec 2009 Page 26 Annex A, Section 3 subsection B-1.

Bridge 2

Bridge 2 is a vehicle and pedestrian bridge. The 5-meter concrete bridge was constructed at a cost of \$120,715. We found that the bridge is in generally good condition and found no visible damage to its surface or support structure. We estimated that roughly 250 individuals travel on foot or in vehicles daily across this bridge. The MOPW official we interviewed stated that the bridge was heavily relied upon by the community to attend schools, access markets, and perform other daily necessities as it connects two villages. A community member described the bridge as “somewhat useful”, noting that it was used predominately during seasons when water flowed beneath it. The community member further noted that prior to the bridge’s construction villagers could not cross to the other side when the river was flowing. An undated Memorandum of Agreement between the U.S. Department of the Army and Afghan Government estimated that recurring maintenance costs are \$1,000; however, according to an MOPW official, the Afghan government has not included maintenance for this bridge in its budget.

Photo 3 - Bridge Project 2 (Child on Bridge)



Source: SIGAR, May 1, 2018

Photo 4 - Bridge Project 2 (Viewed from Approach to Bridge)



Source: SIGAR, May 1, 2018

Bridge 3

Bridge 3 was completed in November 2012 at a cost of \$80,000. It is a pedestrian overpass 16 meters long and 1.2 meters wide. We found that the bridge is in usable condition. The MOPW official noted that the community was “moderately” reliant on the bridge and believed it had led to a decrease in traffic accidents since it provided a safer crossing for children going to school. However a community member stated that he believed the overpass was “not so useful” and estimated that only 3 to 5 people use the bridge each day. An April 2012 Memorandum of Agreement between MOPW and U.S. Department of the Army estimated that the recurring operations and maintenance costs for the overpass to be \$400. According to an MOPW official, the Afghan government has not included maintenance for this overpass in its budget.

Photo 5 - Bridge Project 3 (Street View)



Source: SIGAR, May 3, 2018

Photo 6 - Bridge Project 3



Source: SIGAR, May 3, 2018

Bridge 4

Bridge 4 was completed in March 2010 at a cost of \$99,500. It is a pedestrian bridge, comprised of steel plates, measuring 1.6 meters wide by 18 meters long. We found that the bridge is active and in usable condition. We estimated that the bridge was being used by 300 people each day. The MOPW official we interviewed stated that the local community was heavily reliant on the bridge. The community member we interviewed responded that the bridge was “very useful.” Both noted the bridge was used for connecting villages throughout the district and for access to schools and work. We were able to locate a letter from the local police department requesting construction of the bridge stating that the local police department and elders in the area would be responsible for the maintenance and care of the bridge. According to an MOPW official, the Afghan government has not included maintenance for the bridge in its budget.

Photo 7 - Bridge Project 4, (Pedestrian Bridge)



Source: SIGAR, May 7, 2018

Photo 8 - Bridge Project 4 (from below)



Source: SIGAR, May 7, 2018

Bridge 5

Bridge 5 was constructed in July 2010 at a total cost of \$170,000. We estimated the bridge to be 5 meters wide by 15 meters long and that about 200 people and 25 vehicles cross the bridge daily. We found that the bridge is usable and in generally good condition.

The MOPW official stated that the community was heavily reliant on the bridge as it was the only way of connecting vehicle traffic between two villages. Similarly, a community member we interviewed stated that the bridge was “very useful” and that it connected villages and eased access to schools, clinics, and places of

employment in the district. He further noted that the bridge is used year-round, and is especially useful during the flooding seasons. We were able to locate a Memorandum of Agreement between MOPW and the Department of the Army which estimated the cost of maintenance at \$1,000. According to an MOPW official, the Afghan government has not included maintenance for the bridge in its budget.

Photo 9 - Bridge Project 5 Used by Pedestrians



Source: SIGAR, May 7, 2018.

Photo 10 - Bridge Project 5 from a Distance



Source: SIGAR, May 7, 2018.

Bridge 6

Bridge 6 was completed in June 2011 at a cost of \$54,704. It is a pedestrian foot bridge, which measures approximately two meters wide by ten meters long. The MOPW official and the local citizen we interviewed noted that the bridge spans a riverbed that is dry during much of the year. Therefore, the bridge is used more extensively during the spring flooding season.

During our site visit we noted a lack of safety rails and slight structural damage to the bridge, specifically, notable bending of the metal plates that compose the surface area of the bridge. The community member we interviewed noted that the bridge was used by vehicles. A Memorandum of Agreement between the MOPW and the Department of the Army (undated) stipulates that the MOPW agreed to provide \$200 for recurring operation and maintenance once the bridge was completed. However, according to an MOPW official, the Afghan government has not included maintenance for this overpass in its budget.

Photo 11 - Bridge Project 6 over Dry River Bed



Source: SIGAR, May 7, 2018.

Photo 12 - Bridge Project 6 Close Up



Source: SIGAR, May 7, 2018.

CONCLUSION

We concluded that all six bridges are open for use and in generally good condition. We are concerned, however, that without sustained maintenance by the Afghan government, there is reasonable risk that the bridges will fall into disrepair.

AGENCY COMMENTS

SIGAR provided a draft of this report to the Department of Defense for comment on November 5, 2018. DOD provided technical comments to the report on November 28, 2018, which we incorporated as appropriate.

This project was conducted
under project code SP-207

SIGAR's Mission

The mission of the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR) is to enhance oversight of programs for the reconstruction of Afghanistan by conducting independent and objective audits, inspections, and investigations on the use of taxpayer dollars and related funds. SIGAR works to provide accurate and balanced information, evaluations, analysis, and recommendations to help the U.S. Congress, U.S. agencies, and other decision-makers to make informed oversight, policy, and funding decisions to:

- improve effectiveness of the overall reconstruction strategy and its component programs;
- improve management and accountability over funds administered by U.S. and Afghan agencies and their contractors;
- improve contracting and contract management processes;
- prevent fraud, waste, and abuse; and
- advance U.S. interests in reconstructing Afghanistan.

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