



SIGAR

Office of the Special Inspector General
for Afghanistan Reconstruction

April 3, 2018

General John W. Nicholson
Commander, U.S. Forces–Afghanistan, and
Commander, Resolute Support

Dear General Nicholson,

I am writing to alert you to a safety matter that warrants the attention of DOD and U.S. Forces – Afghanistan (USFOR-A). Specifically, a bridge currently in use in Baghlan province, Afghanistan that was partially rehabilitated using funds from the Commander’s Emergency Response Program (CERP) in 2012, has significant and extensive damage that poses a risk to people on or near the bridge.

As part of our ongoing effort to verify the location and condition of facilities or infrastructure built, refurbished, or funded by the U.S. as part of the reconstruction effort in Afghanistan, SIGAR is conducting site inspections of bridges in Afghanistan that were constructed or repaired with CERP funds. SIGAR is inspecting such bridges in several provinces and began its work in December 2017, by travelling to eight CERP bridge projects in Baghlan province, Afghanistan. DOD obligated \$1.6 million in CERP funds for the eight bridge projects. At each bridge site in Baghlan province, SIGAR conducted an assessment to determine the overall condition and use of the bridge, identify any safety concerns, and test the accuracy of location information maintained in DOD’s records. We also interviewed a local Afghan government official and a community member near each project, and took photographs embedded with global positioning system and time/date information.

At one such bridge in Baghlan province, we found significant structural damage that could lead to structural failure that threatens the safety of persons on or near the bridge.¹ In 2011, USFOR-A awarded a CERP-funded contract for \$16,180 to make limited repairs to the bridge to maintain a major supply route and to ensure the local population’s access to services and markets.² Prior to funding the project, USFOR-A signed a Memorandum of Understanding with a representative of the Afghan Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development (MRRD). The memorandum stated that MRRD would provide annual funding for the operation and maintenance of the bridge, including “staffing, routine maintenance, and supplies once construction has been completed and the road has been transferred to the GIROA [the Afghan government].”³ According to project records, USFOR-A terminated the project in early 2012, due to issues with the local population. Available documentation states that the repairs were 82 percent complete when the project was terminated and \$13,267.60 had been paid to the contractor for the work.

When we visited the bridge in December 2017, we observed extensive vehicle and pedestrian traffic traversing the bridge. The community member and an MRRD official with whom we spoke cited the bridge’s importance for commercial traffic and access to health facilities. However, we are

¹ Due to safety concerns, SIGAR will reproduce the global positioning system coordinates and the name of the bridge in Enclosure II, but will withhold the enclosure from public distribution.

² USFOR-A also cited the planned employment of local nationals in the rehabilitation work and improving the local population’s perception of the Afghan government as reasons for the project.

³ Memorandum of Agreement between the Deputy Commander, Regional Command North, Afghanistan and Baghlan Provincial Government Office, September 20, 2010.

concerned that continued use of this bridge, in its present condition, poses a danger to users unless needed maintenance is undertaken by the Afghan government. Specifically, we found that the bridge's superstructure, approach, retaining walls, and traffic safety rails show a lack of maintenance, pose a danger to users, and require repair. Further adding to the safety concerns posed by this heavily used bridge is its location in a highly seismic area of Afghanistan, where an earthquake could result in catastrophic failure of the bridge.⁴

Photographs 1-3 show the structural deterioration and condition of the bridge in Baghlan province as of December 2017.⁵

Photo 1: Structural Deterioration of the Bridge Poses Safety Risks



Photo 2: Structural Deterioration of the Bridge Poses Safety Risks



Source: SIGAR December 19, 2017.

Photo 3: Cracks in Bridge Foundation and Elevation Difference from Bridge to Road



Source: SIGAR December 19, 2017.

We understand that USFOR-A's involvement with this bridge project ended when it terminated the project. However, our site visit showed that the bridge is in urgent need of repairs and maintenance.

⁴ Baghlan is prone to seismic activity due to the proximity of the Chaman fault line system and other fault lines within the province.

⁵ Photos taken at the time the project was terminated in 2012, show the bridge in a similarly poor condition, but the structure appears to have further deteriorated since that time.

We believe that responsible Afghan government bodies should be notified of the bridge's condition to ensure the safety of people on or near the structure. As a result, SIGAR will notify our interlocutors within the Afghan government of the safety concerns associated with this bridge and urge them to take prompt action for its repair. To help ensure that this issue reaches the appropriate persons within the Afghan government, we suggest USFOR-A take similar action to notify its Afghan government counterparts of the risks posed by this neglected, and heavily trafficked, bridge.

We provided a draft of this letter to DOD for comment on March 13, 2018. USFOR-A responded in a letter dated March 18, 2018. In its response, USFOR-A stated that because the project was terminated, the repairs were never formally turned over to the Afghan government to assume responsibility for maintenance. However, due to safety concerns, USFOR-A agrees that it should notify the Afghan government about the condition of the bridge. USFOR-A's comments are reproduced in enclosure I. DOD also provided technical comments, which we incorporated, as appropriate.

We conducted our work in Kabul Afghanistan; Baghlan, Afghanistan; and Washington, D.C. from December 2017 through March 2018, in accordance with SIGAR's quality control standards. These standards require that we carry out work with integrity, objectivity, and independence, and provide information that is factually accurate and reliable. SIGAR performed this Special Project under the authority of Public Law No. 110-181, as amended, and the Inspector General Act of 1978 and the Inspector General Reform Act of 2008. Should you or your staff have any questions about this project, please contact Mr. Matthew Dove, Director of Special Projects, (703) 535-6051 or matthew.d.dove.civ@mail.mil.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'J. F. Sopko', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

John F. Sopko
Special Inspector General
for Afghanistan Reconstruction

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HEADQUARTERS
UNITED STATES FORCES-AFGHANISTAN
BAGRAM, AFGHANISTAN
APO AE 09354

USFOR-A J9

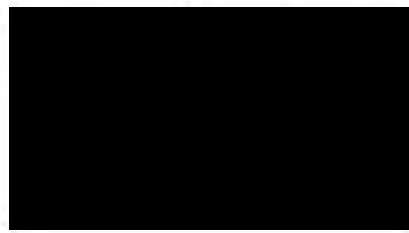
18 March 2018

MEMORANDUM THRU U.S. Forces-Afghanistan (DCDR-OPS, USFOR-A),
Bagram, Afghanistan, APO AE 09356

FOR United States Central Command Inspector General (CCIG), 7115 South
Boundary Blvd, MacDill Air Force Base, FL 33621-5101

SUBJECT: Response to SIGAR-SP-200 Alert Letter: "Kundah Sang Bridge"

1. (U) In response to the subject SIGAR Alert Letter, this project was Terminated in March of 2012 prior to completion. It is incorrectly showing in CIDNE as Completed/Transferred. In March of 2012, the Provincial Reconstruction Team commander cancelled the project due to problems with the local population. Members of the local village prevented the contractor from completing the work, assaulted the contractor and damaged his equipment. Because it was terminated, it was never turned over to GIROA to take responsibility for maintaining it. Pictures taken at the time of termination (Photos 6-11 in Enclosure 1) show the bridge in very similar condition to the SIGAR pictures taken in December 2017.
2. (U) Due to the safety concerns, we agree that notification should be made regarding the conditions of the bridge and will notify Afghan government officials.
3. (U) Our point of contact for this matter is the USFOR-A J9 Director, [REDACTED] who can be reached at [REDACTED]



- Encls
1. Kandeh Sang Final Report

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