



SIGAR

Office of the Special Inspector General
for Afghanistan Reconstruction

July 8, 2013

The Honorable Charles T. Hagel
Secretary of Defense

General Lloyd J. Austin III
Commander, U.S. Central Command

General Joseph F. Dunford, Jr.
Commander, U.S. Forces–Afghanistan, and
Commander, International Security Assistance Force

The Office of the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR) is charged with preventing and detecting waste, fraud, and abuse in programs and operations relating to the reconstruction of Afghanistan. On a recent trip to Afghanistan, I uncovered a potentially troubling example of waste that requires your immediate attention.

I was told by senior U.S. military officials that the recently completed Regional Command-Southwest (RC-SW) Command and Control Facility, a 64,000 square foot building and related infrastructure with a contract award value of \$34 million that was meant to serve as a command headquarters in Helmand to support the surge, will not be occupied. Based on documents provided to SIGAR, it appears that military commanders in Afghanistan determined as early as May 2010 that there was no need for the facility, yet the military still moved ahead with the construction project and continued to purchase equipment and make various improvements to the building in early 2013. Based on these preliminary findings, I am deeply troubled that the military may have spent taxpayer funds on a construction project that should have been stopped.

In addition, I was told that U.S. military officials expect that the building will be either demolished or turned over to the Afghan government as our military presence in Afghanistan declines and Camp Leatherneck is reduced in size. Both alternatives for how to resolve this issue are troubling—destroying a never-occupied and never-used building or turning over what may be a “white elephant” to the Afghan government that it may not have the capacity to sustain. Determining all of the facts on how we reached this \$34 million dilemma and what can be done to prevent it from happening again is the reason for sending this management alert letter to you.

I toured the facility and, as the photographs show on the following page, in my opinion it appears to be an impressive and well-constructed building. In fact, it appears to be the best constructed building I have seen in my travels to Afghanistan. Unfortunately, it is unused, unoccupied, and presumably will never be used for its intended purpose.



Photos: RC-SW Command and Control Facility



Note: Top left: exterior view; top right: tactical operations center; bottom left: cubicles; bottom right: unopened boxes and unused chairs.

Source: SIGAR site visit, May 8, 2013.

One senior U.S. military official told me that this facility was designed for a military division that was never deployed and, subsequently, a decision was made not to construct the facility, but inexplicably the building construction started and is now complete. Military officials explained this is an example of what is wrong with military construction in general—once a project is started, it is very difficult to stop.

In addition to my recent inspection of the facility, in May and June of 2013, SIGAR investigators and auditors visited the facility, conducted interviews, and reviewed documentation that indicated the following:

- In February 2010, the Department of the Army requested funding from Congress for the project.
- In May 2010, the I Marine Expeditionary Force (Forward) submitted a request to U.S. Forces – Afghanistan (USFOR-A) to cancel the project.
- In February 2011, the Air Force’s 772nd Enterprise Sourcing Squadron issued a task order to AMEC Earth and Environment Inc. to construct the facility.¹
- In November 2012, the U.S. government took ownership of the facility.

¹ Air Force Materiel Command issued contract number FA8903-06-D-8507-025 to AMEC Earth and Environment Inc. on April 12, 2006, to build and update facilities and infrastructure at various locations in Afghanistan. On February 3, 2011, the 772nd Enterprise Sourcing Squadron issued Task Order 0025 under this contract to build a command and control facility (Project No. 76916).



- The facility is now completed and usable, though it still needs additional communications equipment. It is estimated that such equipment may cost \$2 million to obtain and \$1 million to install.
- According to an official at Camp Leatherneck, the building can accommodate approximately 1,200 to 1,500 staff, and includes a war room, briefing theater, and offices for senior military officials, including a three star general. However, even under the best case scenario, only 450 people may be able to use the building today, which would result in excessive operation and maintenance costs because the cooling systems would be underutilized.
- The same official at Camp Leatherneck stated that the building's heating, ventilation, and air conditioning system are expensive to operate and maintain, and there is no one currently at Camp Leatherneck who can maintain the air conditioning system.

According to a senior U.S. military official, as the footprint of Camp Leatherneck decreases, the building could be outside the security perimeter, thereby making it unsafe for the U.S. military to occupy it. This leaves the military with two primary options—demolish the building or give it to the Afghan government.

However, to make it usable for the Afghan government, the building would require a major overhaul of existing systems, including the expensive heating, ventilation, and air conditioning systems. A high-ranking, senior U.S. military official also advised me that the facility was built to U.S. construction standards rather than Afghan standards. For example, the power runs at U.S. 60 cycles versus Afghan 50 cycles and U.S. 120 volts versus Afghan 220 volts. Therefore, it would not be easy to transfer the building to the Afghan government. These were some of the reasons why the U.S. military officials we spoke with believe the building will probably be demolished.

Although the building may be demolished, it appears that the military made modifications to the building as recently as early 2013. According to documentation provided to SIGAR, the military recently completed work on a water tank, the commander's conference room, and other parts of the building, and in response to an audit conducted by the Department of Defense Inspector General that found problems with emergency exits at the facility, USFOR-A agreed to make improvements to the facility.² I am deeply concerned that USFOR-A may be spending additional taxpayer dollars on a facility no one will ever use.

Due to the regular rotation of military and civilian personnel, we were unable to locate officials at Camp Leatherneck who could provide more details about what happened. To better understand the circumstances regarding this situation, I am requesting information

² DODIG Report No. 2013-052, *Inadequate Contract Oversight of Military Construction Projects in Afghanistan Resulted in Increased Hazards to Life and Safety of Coalition Forces* (March 8, 2013).



from your Command and the Department. Please answer the following questions by July 25, 2013:

- Why did the I Marine Expeditionary Force (Forward) submit a request to USFOR-A to cancel the project?
- Since the U.S. military knew the facility would not be used for its intended purpose before construction began, who made the decision to continue with the project and what was the justification for that decision?
- Is there a process for terminating approved projects after Congress provides funding for them? If so, why did the military fail to stop this project?
- Why is the U.S. military continuing to spend U.S. taxpayer dollars to improve and equip a facility that may never be used?
- Did the U.S. military consider alternative uses for the facility when it first determined that the facility would not be used for its originally intended purpose? Are the alternatives proposed in the recently completed commander's inquiry viable options?³
- Is it true that another command facility was built to replace this facility and, if so, why? Is there a coordination function among construction projects that identifies potentially unnecessary or duplicate projects? If so, please explain the process.
- How was the decision made to choose the facility's heating, ventilation, and air conditioning systems? What are the current and estimated annual operation and maintenance costs? How are those estimates calculated? What steps are being taken to minimize operation and maintenance costs while the building remains unoccupied? What will be done with the building and its contents as the boundaries of Camp Leatherneck are reduced post-transition?
- Has consideration been given to turning this building over to the Afghan government? Does the Afghan government have the financial resources, technical capacity, and political will to sustain the facility? If the building is turned over to the Afghan government, who will be responsible for operation and maintenance costs? Are Afghan officials aware that the building was constructed to U.S. standards? Has a study been performed to determine the cost of retrofitting the building for use by the Afghan government? If so, please provide a copy of the study.

³ On May 20, 2013, the U.S. military completed an Army Regulation (AR) 15-6 Investigation into the headquarters building at Camp Leatherneck. Among other things, the investigations proposed turning the large briefing room into a movie theater and portions of the first floor into a gym.



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Should you or your staff have any questions about this request, you may contact me directly or contact Monica Brym, Director of Special Projects, at 703-545-6003 or monica.j.brym.civ@mail.mil. Thank you in advance for your cooperation in this matter. I look forward to your response.

John F. Sopko
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for Afghanistan Reconstruction