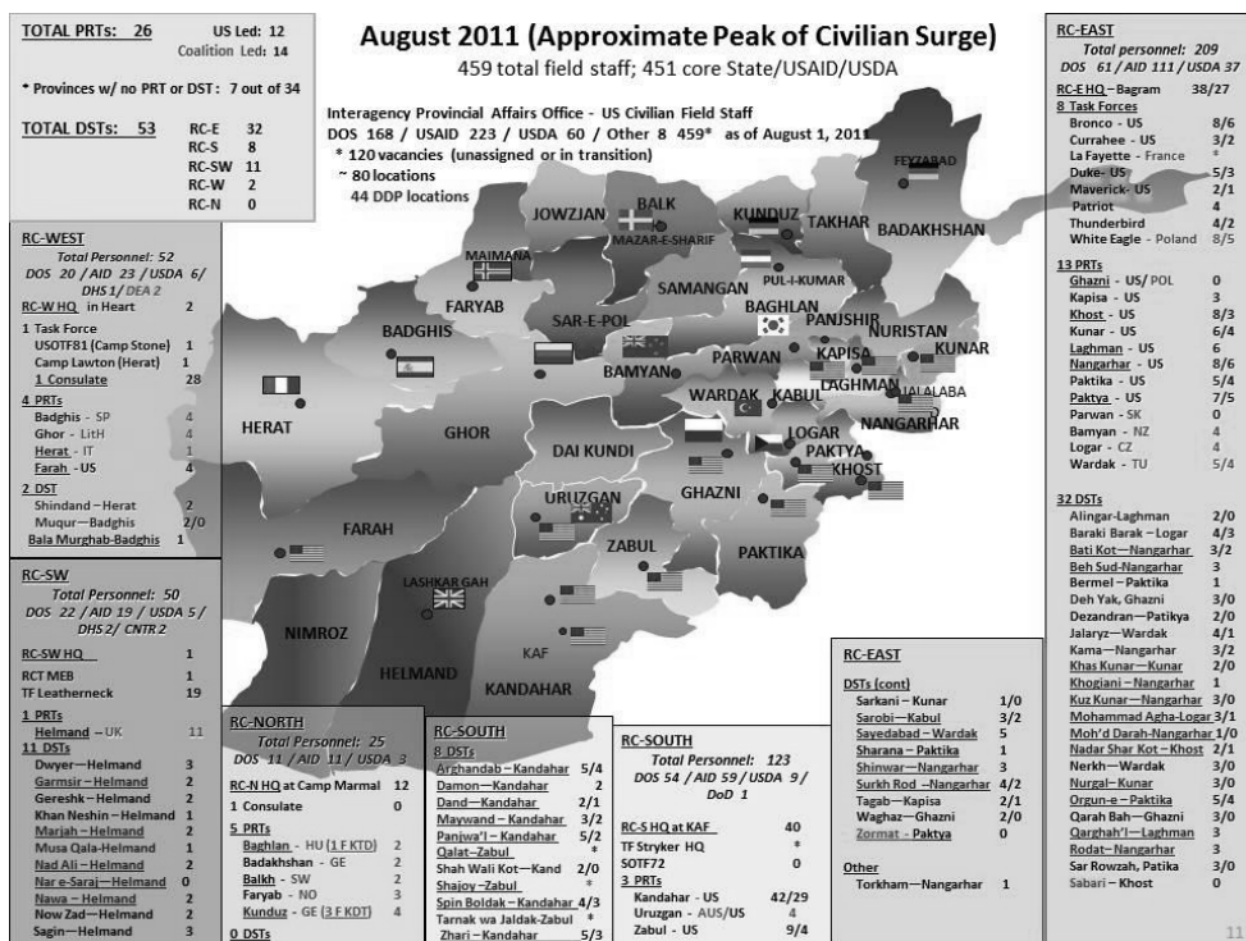


Afghanistan Civilian Field Retrospective

Interagency Provincial Affairs

U.S. Embassy Kabul

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Introduction to the Civilian Field Retrospective Project

As the Office of Interagency Provincial Affairs (IPA) was contemplating its planned 2014 closure in the summer of 2013, it decided to launch a legacy project to capture lessons learned and best practices from our civilian field experience in Afghanistan. IPA developed a question set and interviewed 30 civilian field personnel and received another six written responses from current or prior field veterans from State, USAID, and USDA serving at Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs), District Support Teams (DSTs), or regional field platforms. The project developed into three products: more than 500 pages of raw transcripts or surveys, 34 question-consolidation products, and this project overview, with a sampling of “best of” quotes. All these products are available through the provincial affairs portfolio (restricted files) of the Embassy Kabul Knowledge Continuity site: <http://portal.kabul.state.gov/pc/>.

Counter-insurgency experts persistently argue that a more robust effort is needed to document field experience before knowledge is lost or compromised by time. Their concerns are articulately reflected in Karl Eikenberry’s September 2013 “Foreign Affairs” article, which urges a “dispassionate” study to capture the “rich experience, acquired at great cost and sacrifice” of our civ-mil teams in Afghanistan (and Iraq). Literature on the subject to date is heavy with assumptions and conclusions, but rarely do the authors show their math: how they arrived at these conclusions. If we really want to understand the PRT experience with the intent of improving future efforts, we need raw data from the people who experienced it directly, undistilled by department/agency agendas. We believed the effort required inclusion of frank opinions, even if contradictory to “known” assumptions and conclusions.

This product assumes the reader has some background of the subject. Many acronyms are not spelled out and participant references to Afghanistan history, current events, and USG policy are not explained. Many terms and particularly terms bolded in the text can be found in the glossary (annex 2). Regarding bias, we gave majority opinions more weight and space, but we attempted to include a wide variety of opinions and outliers. As with any analysis, bias is bound to leak into both the gatekeeping and the commentary. To encourage frankness and wider distribution, we attempted to make places and names generic when possible, with deliberate exceptions to preserve valuable context. Additional information on the project’s methodology and execution are found in annex 1.

This is not a rigorous academic study. Our main objective, given limited resources and expertise, was to capture field experiences from people who lived them before recollections became clouded with the passage of time. We hope our efforts will be useful to social scientists, historians, and policy makers, of course, but the main objective was to ensure this unique experience in U.S. foreign policy, the civilian field effort in Afghanistan, would not be lost for them or others. We hope to have done justice to the interviewees, who trusted us with their candor and stories. The opinions, assessments, and commentary are not those of the Department of State but solely of the interviewees and the author of this project overview. Any mistakes in transcription or interpretation are the author’s.

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Interagency Provincial Affairs (IPA) Field Retrospective Project

QUESTION SET 1: PERSONAL CONTEXT

This survey does not attempt to replicate proportionately the geographic or agency distribution of USG civilians serving in Afghanistan. It is a sample of current and former civilian field veterans who volunteered to share their thoughts and stories, most of them just prior to completing their tours.

Question 1.A

Personal Context: *Where and when did you serve?*

Of our 36 USG civilian interview or survey respondents, 17 were serving or had most recently served in the south of Afghanistan, 12 in the east, 4 in the west, and 3 in the north. Thirteen of the respondents had served in multiple field platforms (DST, PRT, military base, or civilian regional platform-RP) and three had served in multiple geographic regions. Ten had served exclusively at a regional platform. Although a larger sample size is always preferable and our group disproportionately represents the South in particular, the geographic distribution of our interviewees and survey respondents is reasonably well attuned to historic U.S. government spending and troop distributions in Afghanistan.

A slight majority of 18 respondents served in the last two years (2012-2014) as the civilian surge was winding down in anticipation of transition of stabilization efforts to the Afghan government (GIRoA). As of May 2014, only six were still serving in Afghanistan. Sixteen respondents served or started their tours during the build-up and peak years of the civilian surge (2009 to 2011). IPA also received survey replies from two officers who served during 2006 and 2007.

Question 1.B

Personal Context: *What agency did you represent and what background/skills did you have?*

The State Department accounts for 23 of our respondents, including 11 regular Foreign Service Officers and 12 contracted officers (3161s). Likewise, eight USAID officers participated, four Foreign Service Officers and four contracted officers (Foreign Service Limited or FSLs). USDA rounds out the group, with five respondents.

Beyond their years of diplomacy and development experience, the participants brought with them a variety of backgrounds directly applicable to stability operations in Afghanistan. A strong majority, 27, had prior experience with stability operations in either Iraq (14) or in prior assignments to Afghanistan (13). Three respondents had prior tours in both Iraq and Afghanistan. Eleven members of our sample had dedicated language training in either Dari or Pashto. Nine respondents had prior experience with the military, including three who were prior civilian contractors with the Department of Defense.

Question 1.C

Personal Context: What motivated you to take the job?

Respondents provided four general motivations for taking an Afghanistan field assignment: intellectual curiosity/challenge (22), career (13), altruism (13), and money (1). Three of 36 respondents did not answer the question. Only about a third of respondents cited two or more of the motivational categories listed above, which are admittedly somewhat subjective and overlapping.

Intellectual curiosity and challenge was cited more than any other factor. Multiple respondents mentioned a desire to take on the challenges of a field assignment, sometimes described as an “adventure,” in order to both learn about their own disciplines and bureaucracies and try to “understand what the war was about.” Most described being “intrigued,” “interested,” or “fascinated” with the complexities of Afghanistan. One of our FSLs described wanting “to learn more about what I was complaining about” as a tax payer and war protester. A 3161 was particularly passionate to “understand what the war was about at its simplest level. It was a time when there was a lot of deliberation on what to do with Afghanistan and I felt I couldn’t make a good judgment about that unless I really understood what was going on.”

Many respondents referred to career motivations, both positive and negative. Some more positive examples included to “implement policy,” “garner more seniority,” and “being responsible for several different aspects” of stabilization efforts. On the other end of the spectrum, some respondents provided negative perceptions that they had to go in order to “avoid DC,” check a career box, or remain employed, e.g., “After Iraq, I had a very hard time finding a job.”

Altruistic reasons also ranked highly with respondents, typically with expressions of “making a difference” in the lives of Afghans and helping to “be a part of a different history for this country,” as one USAID officer put it. Many also related volunteering directly to “doing my part” to prevent future terrorists attacks on the U.S. A 3161 from New York put it thusly:

“The motivation starts on 9/11. ... I wanted to be with the State Department in Afghanistan, looking at the root of the problem. If we could actually help set the country on the right course ... maybe we could avoid having problems like this in the future.”

Only one respondent cited money as a motivating factor. While it is certainly possible that others simply didn’t want to admit that money was a driving motivation in their decision-making process, the reality may be that monetary incentives only underscore the more principle driving factors. In fact, in at least a few contractor cases, respondents appear to have left lucrative positions to come to Afghanistan.

Interagency Provincial Affairs (IPA) Field Retrospective Project**QUESTION SET 2: PRE-DEPLOYMENT****Question 2.A**

Pre-Deployment: How long did it take you to get from applying for the position to the field?
(Targeted to USDA, 3161s, and FSLs)

As we went through iterations of the question set, we found this question of little relevance for State and USAID FSOs, for which field tours in Afghanistan had become very much a part of regular bidding cycles by the time most of our respondents were deployed to the field. It took an average of just over six months for the 26 respondents to this question to get from application to field (weighted heavily to USAID, 3161s, and FSLs, but including three State or USAID FSOs). However, even an analysis of the statistical information for contractor officers is of limited value if the purpose is to track the speed of the bureaucracy to place officers in the field. For example, staff with existing security and physical clearances were fast tracked and skew the numbers, often making it to the field in less than half the time of their colleagues. One respondent without existing clearances lamented that after two months without hearing anything from PASO, he entered the military's Human Terrain System, until his HTS deployment was postponed due to budget cuts, and then reapplied with PASO – a total of eight months.

A few respondents noted that sometimes personal connections made a difference, but not always. One interviewee was recommended by an Ambassador, yet her application sat in the PASO office for three months before someone acted on it, and then only because the interviewee asked another person on the staff to inquire about the status.

Question 2.B

Pre-Deployment: How do you evaluate your training and preparation for the field?

Of the 32 respondents who provided substantive input, the vast majority (24) had generally positive feedback regarding pre-deployment training. Three respondents provided generally negative feedback and five respondents provided mixed feedback. Three respondents who deployed in 2006 or 2007 said there was either no training or only minimal training that was not worth commenting on. One commented that "the training program came far too late. ... If one of these efforts ever happens again, the training must come earlier." The value of meeting people who had worked in Afghanistan and networking with future colleagues at training was cited by some interviewees.

Note: The first interagency PRT training was developed by an ad-hoc group of volunteer interagency staff in Kabul, who produced a five-day course at the National Defense University in 2006. However, attendance for field personnel was not required and the course was only

offered once. In 2007, the first FSI course for field staff was developed by the Afghanistan Desk at the State Department, with assistance and input from FSI and S/CRS (now CSO). It eventually became RS415 Afghanistan Familiarization and AR421 Field Orientation. Civilian field personnel were also integrated into Afghanistan PRT training offered by the military at Fort Bragg in early 2007, a one-off exercise that eventually developed into the much more robust and mandatorily attended Muscatatuck/Camp Atterbury training (RS510 Interagency Integrated Civilian-Military Training Exercise for Afghanistan). A new emphasis on language training was also advanced in 2007, which evolved into months of study for some positions and at least a few hours of language instruction integrated into RS415 for others. Some version of FACT training (OT610 Foreign Affairs Counter Threat Course; aka “Crash and Bang”) has been offered to incoming civilian field personnel throughout the civilian field presence, which eventually became mandatory. End Note.

Respondents were almost universally positive about the Muscatatuck/Atterbury field training. Many respondents felt more time should have been devoted to the course, which was typically described as “realistic” and “worthwhile.” One interviewee said it was particularly important for students to “get blown up [simulated] and panicking like they were in Afghanistan.” These comments from a State Department 3161 are representative:

“I thought the Camp Atterbury training could have been extended. The realistic working environment, role playing, getting in and out of conveyors, getting in and out of helicopters, the fake FOB [Forward Operation Base] they set up was really useful for someone that had never been in the military. ... I was able to adapt to that after I got here, but I know of people who were not able to adapt and perhaps were not able to appreciate the difficulty and the completely different environment they were walking into.”

Another interviewee found the military’s immediate “hot wash” style of after-action review refreshing: “Within the State Department there is never the opportunity to be ranked on or get feedback on how you do during a meeting.”

Although there were a few critical comments, most concerned who was required to take it, not the quality of the course itself. Some respondents thought veterans of civilian field efforts in Afghanistan and Iraq or USG civilians either stationed at the Embassy or working in support roles in the field should not have been required to participate. One respondent mentioned that while it was impressive that a role player actually was a provincial governor in Afghanistan, it would have been useful to have had the opportunity to “have lunch with those guys and talk to them as Afghans.” Another interviewee cited the training as unintentionally useful in illustrating that “the military and development aren’t synergistic at all.” He credits that early realization with helping him “work very well with the military” by abandoning the illusion of a

“nirvana”-like common field strategy and instead focusing on working through inevitable disagreements based on conflicting agendas that “is bound to happen.”

The FACT training was also very popular with our interviewees and in many cases cited as “the best part the training.” However, some respondents questioned whether everyone deploying to Afghanistan, including those assigned to the Embassy, would have any use for it. In contrast, two respondents who survived the 2013 bombing of the consulate in Herat credited the course as providing a base line of skills used successfully in the response to the attack (and subsequently built upon by in-country drills), including one who had to stop the bleeding of a wounded guard.

While language training received mixed reviews, its importance was underscored throughout the interviews, and many respondents opined that more language training would have been useful, even at the expense of time spent on other coursework. This was true both of students who had dedicated language training and those who received a few hours of it through the orientation course. One outlier discounted the value of language training, stating it “was useless because we had interpreters.” A few others contradicted that view, underscoring the importance to Afghan interlocutors of being able to communicate with them directly, even to a limited degree, while imploring FSI to focus language training on oral communications vice reading and “test taking.” (The disadvantages of overreliance on interpreters are outlined in question set 4.E.5.-Interpreters.) Another interviewee found it ironic that Embassy personnel were more likely to receive language training than those in the field because “most of their contacts speak English, where if you are speaking with a famer or village elder in the district they didn’t know what English was and didn’t [even] speak Dari.”

FSI’s Afghanistan familiarization and field familiarization courses also received mostly positive reviews, although not as enthusiastic as FACT and Muscatatuck trainings. One respondent noted the courses were “better than what I received in training on the DOD side” [from a prior tour] and another compared it favorably to what his ISAF civilian counterparts received.

Respondents cited the difficulty of keeping the course current (“the feedback loop is always going to be behind the times”) and applicability of material to a very broad range of students as unavoidable handicaps. Although one respondent who trained in 2013 noted a specific focus on transitioning efforts to GIRoA, two others complained that transition was not adequately addressed in 2012: “We spent a lot of time listening to people who’d served at PRTs in 2005, 2006, 2007. And those experiences, while interesting, were completely irrelevant to the transition mission that I knew I was going to have to do.”

These issues will come as no surprise to course organizers and only speak to the challenge of constructing a one-size-fits-all curriculum that covers enough material without covering too much, as well as keeping curriculum current in a rapidly and unpredictably changing field

environment. To illustrate, some of our respondents complained that the courses “may have been a little deeper than what we all needed,” while at least an equal amount thought the courses were “too general.” One respondent said the courses “lacked sufficient detail,” but also said “I just don’t see the value in pumping information into people that they are not really going to need.”

A few respondents had novel suggestions. A USDA interviewee recommended that agencies supplement “good” existing general training with department-specific training, which in USDA’s case might include training as a Grant Officer Representative (GOR), a duty forced upon many of his colleagues who were neither qualified nor legally authorized to take on that role. Another respondent suggested that familiarization and programmatic training be conducted in the field at the platform, to ensure information is specific and timely. “You need to get as close to where you are going to be working at to get that orientation or training.”

Question 2.C

Pre-Deployment:

How long was your tour? What would be the optimal time for a tour and why?

There was a general consensus among respondents that 18 to 24 months would be an optimal field tour length, with an average of 22 months. Notably, actual average tour duration for this sample was also 22 months. Most of our respondents opined that one year was insufficient to be productive or offer continuity or overlap between assignments. The following analysis was generally representative:

“... You’re playing on a different level [after a year]. You know stuff. For example, I’m currently on my third iteration of the command group [at the Regional Command]. ... So I’ve seen everything they think of. I call them paving stones on the road to hell. That second year you can recall things that happened the first year, you know the people. In any job, it’s going to take you that first six months to get used to what you’re doing. The sweet spot is maybe six months [into the tour] until six months before you leave. ... Well in Afghanistan you have one to two months to get up to speed in the most dynamic environment you can imagine, unless maybe you are an ER surgeon in Chicago or something like that. You’re jumping on a treadmill that’s cruising at 60- to 80-miles-per-hour. On that second year, it really helps your interactions with your military counterparts. It helps to have a new group come in there while you’re still in place. Then they look at you as the guy who knows what he’s talking about. So if you can fake that well enough, or actually know what you are talking about, then you’re valuable. ... They would say ‘I want to do this and I want to do that.’ Then I would explain why that’s not going to work. ... That all only starts to happen after your first year. The second year can be really tough, it was really tough for my family for sure, but I’ve found the second year to be the more rewarding of the two.”

Many claimed it takes six month just to “really understand what’s going on” and to establish rudimentary levels of trust with Afghan interlocutors, while a minority claimed it “takes a year just to learn the culture, what’s going on, how to function in that military environment.” A few added a caveat that extensions beyond 24 months be entertained “on a case by case basis” or that tour duration should depend on subject matter, e.g., USDA deployments should be longer because “agriculture is a long-term commitment, so a three- to five-year commitment is necessary.”

Many respondents agreed with a 3161’s sentiment that the breaks allowed by the State Department were “very generous and should be used” to maintain mental health and, ultimately, effectiveness. He added that he once thought field staff should stay as “long as possible,” but now does not advocate staying more than two years. “I’m coming up to my 24th month now. I feel very tired and frustrated and short with people.” Another officer agreed the breaks are “good,” but lamented that “it’s a little bit difficult to come back [from leave] and get the wheels spinning again. He suggested no more than three R&Rs rather than two R&Rs and three RRBs. A couple of other respondents also agreed that the breaks had a down side. One State Department officer put it thusly: “By the time you get going with 65 days out of country [per year] you ... have four or five really good months where you are getting something accomplished, which is a blink of an eye for an Afghan. Then you are out of here and it creates this cycle of failed projects. ... People have great ideas but they are actually never there to execute or implement them.”

There were some outliers. One respondent claimed there was no sense in staying longer than a year because “you need fresh ideas. ... It’s like banging your head against a wall. You’re not going to change it and you’re still going to have a headache at the end of the day.” Others cited family concerns: “One year was plenty for them.” Another opined that people with families shouldn’t serve longer than a year lest they lose touch with reality:

“This [place] is like fantasy land. You enter this mindset that someone is going to be fixing your meals. You’re not paying bills. It can become too great, too comfortable for some people. Extending forever is not a good thing.”

Respondents also offered some innovative ideas. One proposed that a two-year tour include four months of training and two months to “decompress.” Another said leadership positions should be two to three years to ensure continuity, while rank and file officers could serve one-year tours. A State Department 3161 offered that duration is secondary to how field staff is employed:

“There should have been a program of developing them, not just keeping 3161s or FSLs on location and then they go quietly crazy without anyone noticing, and then they have to leave the country. I say that jokingly but it happened. ... You don’t just squeeze

them dry. I think there were people who were left in single locations for too long and may not have known it themselves, but their effectiveness was diminished.” This officer suggested rotating staff from field to Embassy to field to leverage employee’s knowledge and keep them mentally fresh.

Interagency Provincial Affairs (IPA) Field Retrospective Project**QUESTION SET 3: SECURITY****Question 3.A.**

Security: How many times a week did you travel outside your base?

It should be noted that this is a relatively small 36-person sample size and caution should be given to extrapolation of this data. A more robust study is recommended. Despite the limitations of the data, however, the anecdotal stories our officers told supported the narrative that travel has decreased significantly over time.

The average for all respondents from 2007 to 2014 was four trips per week outside their compound. There is a clear downward trend in the number of trips outside the respective platforms (typically collocated with a military base). Using the three groups established in the previous question set, on average our respondents went “outside the wire” seven times a week in the pre-surge era (2006/2007), five times a week during the surge (2009-2011), and three times a week in the surge recovery period (2012-2014). Moreover, the two officers who started their tours in 2013 report an average of twice a week travel, one of whom is in the less restrictive north, and the other of whom said “every foot or vehicle move was denied” during a four-month period.

Many officers (14) cited a gradual drop-off in off-compound travel starting in 2012 with a steep decline in 2013. Then-and-now comparisons ranged widely but fell from between 2 and 7 times a week two years ago to 0 to 2 within the last year. The most dramatic decline was reported from seven days a week to zero. Some of this decline can be explained by the retrograde of field locations and military security resources. Many respondents who left PRTs or DSTs for regional platforms also stated that the nature of their portfolios changed, so that they did not require as much contact with Afghan interlocutors. However, respondents serving during the surge recovery period were unanimous in stating that the main factor in the reduction of outreach beyond the wire was a more restrictive security posture. The reasons for that and related comments from our respondents will be left to the next question.

Regarding the merits of travel, one respondent challenged the premise of the question, arguing that it was a poor metric of overall effectiveness because his interlocutors could visit him much more easily than he could visit them to the same effect:

“In the context of that question I think you need to be careful because you can do as much work by your counterpart coming to you as you can by going out. ... I think a better question to ask ... [is] how many times did you engage with Afghan counterparts? Because I didn’t find that the going out part was really important.”

That perspective stood in stark contrast to many other respondents, who believed their ability to be effective was ipso facto tied to their ability to project themselves outside of their bases:

“You could walk ... to the district governor’s compound, which was adjacent to our **COP**, and stay late into the night having tea with the Governor, district elders, the police chief. It helped build the relationship and understanding of the area. It wasn’t always discussing policy or mentoring or governance. It was learning about them, their families, the area. It was absolutely essential for building the trust. A few months later when we had to compel the District Governor to not do something ... because of the strong relationship we had, he heeded our advice.”

Officers also mentioned concerns about putting their Afghan interlocutors in danger and offending them by forcing them to undergo a “difficult and at times humiliating” base screening. One officer commented that such practices eroded trust with Afghans over time. He proposed that “it is more appropriate that we, the visitors, should be going to them. The British Ambassador does not have the President of the United States come from the White House to The British Embassy in Washington.” Six respondents cited use of adjacent district centers as a useful workaround for visitors who preferred not to come to their compounds. None of them described this as “travel,” as the compounds were “right next door,” although a few noted that this still required an RSO approval.

Another officer used the question to argue that the use of limited transportation resources be dedicated to field officers assigned to the area vice more senior ranking visitors:

“Every time you go visit the district governor or [other Afghan officials] ... as the boss, you bring expectations of resources and promises, and I didn’t want to do that. On many occasions my SCR would say that he was going to this district to see the governor and I would say, ‘You shouldn’t be talking to the governor. You have someone out there with a relationship with him that sees him every day. The governor is almost looking behind you to see where the bag of money you brought is.’ That ruins the relationship that your field officer has with them.”

One respondent said while she could leave her compound fairly easily and drove her own vehicle, she was concerned about the opportunity cost of leaving base: “I could either sit at my desk and respond to emails ... or I could do public diplomacy and then not sleep because I would go home at night for dinner and then go to the office and do five hours of email.” She was also concerned that if she left she might have problems getting back in because of overzealous and uninformed security personnel who once told her “to come back in the morning” because they were taking coffee breaks, “oblivious to the fact that I actually lived in the base.”

Question 3.B.

Security: How safe did you feel? Were the security restrictions appropriate?

All of the participants claimed they felt safe during their deployments, or “as safe as one can be in an environment like that.” Respondents were very complimentary and thankful to the RSO and military for their security, particularly the Marine Corps. An officer serving with the Marines in Helmand Province summarized his experience thusly: “The military embed model is perfect for folks who like this work and like to get out there because the military wants to enable us as much as they can when it comes to government engagement and development.”

However, just because they were appreciative did not mean they agreed with the overarching security posture. A strong majority of surge recovery period respondents thought “restrictions placed on the field were needlessly restrictive” and negatively impacted effectiveness. A USDA officer was torn between understanding “there are all these reasons why [unarmed civilians] should not be out there,” but ultimately reasoned that mission effectiveness requires a trade-off for personal risk, a sentiment mentioned by at least four other officers. “You kind of signed up for this. In my opinion it [risk] is part of the deal. ... Any insurgency book you look at will tell you that you can’t sequester yourself on your base and expect to be effective.”

Many respondents cited security events in Benghazi, Libya in 2012 and Zabul Province in 2013, when FSO Anne Smedinghoff was killed, as turning points that led to much stricter security procedures, referred to by some officers as an “overreaction.” This comment from a DST veteran was reflective of most:

“The provincial capital is just like a city in the developing world, a lot of hustle and bustle, but I never felt unsafe. There were of course explosions and there was a constant stream of reporting that they were trying to target us specifically. But, at that time, it was judged that the risk was worth it. But that stopped after the April 2013 incident in Zabul. [Then] it was judged that the risk is no longer worth it. We were prevented from going off [compound] to the point that even though the RSO and the marines would say it’s safe, the platform leadership would say, ‘We were told not to accept any risk and this is risk; you’re not going.’ This was very frustrating and demoralizing for those of us that had been used to doing that and were used to achieving results. But at the same time they’d ask, ‘Why has your reporting dried up? Why haven’t you been able to go out and influence this?’ ‘Well, we are not allowed to go out anymore.’ ‘Well can’t they come to base?’ ‘Well [sometimes] they do go to the base, but most of them get strip searched and patted down, and mistreated, all in the name of force protection. So we need some kind of happy medium here.’ ‘No, the risk is too high; the threat stream is too high. In fact it’s elevated.’ I looked at the same intelligence they did and in fact nothing had changed. My perception is the risk tolerance, both in Kabul and Washington, and London, had changed.”

Sometimes during interviews, field staff seemed to take out their security frustrations on the RSO (“RSO needs to meet our needs, not have us scaled back to their paranoia”), Embassy leadership writ large (“There was a feeling within the Embassy – ‘Oh my God. I’m here for 300 days, please don’t let anything go wrong.’”), or field leadership (“Leadership was afraid to take responsibility for anything. So they said, ‘Absolutely no movement out of there.’”). Beyond questioning the validity of the security restrictions, several respondents reasoned that if the post-Zabul security posture is the new normal in the field, “we should just close up shop because you can’t do your job properly.”

Rightly or wrongly, a handful of participants criticized the RSO for “one-size-fits-all” policies that didn’t take into account regional distinctions; for an inability to monitor staff in the field and whether they were abiding by restrictions; and, above all, compared the RSO unfavorably with the military with regard to security. A long-serving Political Advisor to the military said, “What I found troubling towards the end of the four years was the RSO either at Embassy or [platform] started to second guess the ability of the military to protect its civilian components.”

However, at least three of the respondents did feel recent restrictions were appropriate. One was critical of civilians “arguing with the security detail” and advised deference to “the RSO or anyone whose job it is to [provide security]; my job is not security.” Another senior-level officer provided a more nuanced and personal response:

“I have never felt unsafe anywhere but driving between the Embassy and the airport. The security restrictions are onerous but ... I’ve lost people in the time that I’ve been here, so I don’t spend a lot of time second-guessing them. Now, my guys did, for sure. People – PRT people particularly – bitched and moaned about security restrictions, not being able to walk to the governor’s compound that was adjacent to the PRT, wearing body armor – I mean, we got all the garden-variety complaints. But I personally never had any reason to question the security restrictions.”

Despite some passionate opinions on both sides of the movement-restriction divide, most of our respondents conceded this was a difficult issue and acknowledged the validity of the counterargument. The thoughts of a participant who served at two DSTs, a PRT, and a regional platform are representative of the measured consideration with which respondents typically addressed this question, which can be of life and death consequence:

“I was compensated and I think I knew what I was getting into. ... I’m sure there are many people who completely disagree, but the idea that the safety of our people comes first—well, actually, I think the mission comes first and then you have to manage the mission to make sure that the safety of your people comes first as much as possible.”

Question 3.C

Security:

Were you personally or your unit ever attacked or threatened?

If so, please describe the attack or threat. Was it adequately handled?

About half (17) of our respondents replied that they were attacked during their field assignments (not including two who had been attacked in previous assignments either in Afghanistan or Iraq). Of those experiencing an attack, 12 said the situations were well handled by security forces, both U.S. and Afghan, again with particularly enthusiastic kudos for the Marine Corps. One respondent did not think the situation was well handled and four did not offer clearly positive or negative responses.

These numbers should be taken with a grain of salt due to the imprecise nature of the question and the unexpected subjectivity that respondents applied to it. This led to some seemingly incoherent responses, such as “no, we had attacks,” which really means “no [I wasn’t attacked personally], [but yes] we had attacks.” There seemed to be some head scratching about what an attack was. To be clear, we allowed the respondents to self-identify what they considered an attack to be, which might mean some events your average American would count were not mentioned by our respondents.

A rough consensus emerged that only a “sustained, heavy engagement” or being “shot at once” constituted a clear and unambiguous attack. Other incidents were perceived as lesser violence (at least by many participants), including IDF, convey attacks, or IEDs in which the respondent was not the direct target of the attack. The question further compromised clarity by vaguely including “attacks or threats” against the participant or “unit.” Many respondents discounted attacks on their military compounds, particularly for larger compounds where IDF and rocket attacks are routine and rarely impact personnel or property. For example, this was a somewhat typical response:

“During the fighting season, the platform was attacked via indirect fire two to four times per week. During the winter this reduced to two times per month. There were three to four rockets a week compared to 300 a week in Iraq. I found it all a bit silly.”

Of course, experiences (and bravado) varied, and different locations were prone to different types of attacks, including greater numbers of “silly” rocket attacks: “As I recall, we were rocketed 200-245 days a year and often times, multiple times a day. You would say, ‘When should I go to the gym? Oh, it’s 4:30. Probably after the rocket attack.’”

A handful of our respondents were in convoys that were attacked by IEDs. An officer recalls responding to the attack thusly:

“The most frightening thing from that experience was going up to the vehicle and not knowing what is going to be inside. ... The guys were messed up. They were all concussed; one of them was screaming out control, the rest of them were knocked out. They were all strapped in so you had to climb in and cut them out. And then drag them out. ... The main problem at the time was internal bleeding, but they all lived. I was very proud of that. ... If I would have just sat there I think I would have regretted it the rest of my life.”

The outlier for this question, who regarded a response to an attack as not adequately handled by security forces, was driving the vehicle that was attacked. Her account follows:

“I was driving a vehicle and we hit an IED. We were in a place that we shouldn’t have been, doing what we shouldn’t have been doing. The military was adamant that we take sporting equipment to a girl’s school in the middle of a troubled village, and while I had maintained a pretty good relationship with the village elders it was near a mosque where [during] Friday prayers they were pretty vocal about the great Satan and everything involved with it. I had strongly advised the military that this was not a good project, that this was a bad idea, that they were not engaging GIRoA in the way that they should have. So the day that it happened they said they had contacted everyone and this was all up and aboard. I started contacting some of the government officials and nobody had heard anything about it. So I went and picked up some of the government officials to ensure that there was that face on it whenever we were there. ... They went into the girl’s school and a surrounding group of teenage boys were getting more and more agitated. Finally it was time to leave because I had the Line Director for Education with me. He said, ‘I really need to get back to the office.’ As I drive him out, there was a frag grenade that had been buried and it hit the vehicle. It was minor damage like it hit the gas tank and punctured some tires but no one was injured. We eventually proceeded on and got back to the FOB. I wouldn’t say it was a wake-up call because that wasn’t the first time that we’d been hit with something. We had had indirect fire, rocket fire, and other vehicles that were hit with rocks. It was basically about learning who was agitated where, why they were agitated, what the government was doing to correct it, and to pay attention to that. For me it was realization that this team that I was working with wasn’t going to be listening to some of the development direction that we felt was appropriate. They were a little more focused on some short-term gains.”

Her complaint appears to be based less on the competency of the response than on her contention that the attack could have been avoided in the first place and may have actually been caused by the decision to force an event without “discussion with the village, no discussions with the appropriate GIRoA officials,” and “nothing for the guys.”

Some of respondents were at the Consulate in Herat when it was attacked on September 13, 2013 at 5:30 in the morning. An officer's description of that event:

"There was a big 'kaboom' -- it felt and sounded like a lightning bolt right next to my head. I was still in bed [and it happened] before I was fully awake. And [I was] barefoot, glass cutting the bottom of my feet. ... We begrudgingly went through many drills all the time, ... [but] they made a huge difference when the real thing hit. Everybody knew what was going on, you could picture in your mind what was going on, you could picture what was going to happen next, you knew what was going to come over the loudspeakers and your backpack was already packed. ... Here is the lesson learned: do the drills. Don't let people say, 'Oh I already did this, or I don't want to do this, or I am too busy.' ...

They had a VB [vehicle-borne] big truck, jingle truck, with 2000 pounds [of explosives] by some estimates, ran right into the front gate, went 'kaboom,' blew [up] the security apparatus, the static security on the front. Another smaller truck, pickup truck, comes rolling in from the opposite side, stops like at 500 feet or so, maybe a 100 meters, in front of that gate where the first one blew up, smoke clearing, there is already a 'ratatattat' coming. It stops. Eight guys get out ... and the driver hands each one of them from the cab a backpack. And they come forward, they all have AKs, some of them have RPGs. And they come walking in, thinking that the first truck was big enough to open the whole thing up, that they were just going to waltz through right in. They all got out of the [smaller] truck, but it continued to roll slowly as if it was in first gear toward the front gate, towards the first explosion. They either had a remote or timing device on it because it went also 'kaboom' – a much smaller one. Then those eight guys came in, they came into what they call the kill zone, and they came front and center. What they didn't know was the fire power that was about to meet them. I think they shot about 1,000 rounds in the first couple of minutes. ... I don't think any of them got to detonate their suicide packs. ... Big truck bomb, small truck bomb, eight guys trying to bridge the security and then they are getting covered from across the street – a pretty complex attack. ...

We lost eight Afghans. First ring of security, Afghans. Second ring, our contracting guys, El Salvadorans. On the very inside we had our Diplomatic Security guys. We treated three [Salvadorans], one of them pretty seriously. He is fine. He got some disability on his elbow. He lost a piece of his elbow. He came up bleeding, arms flying, and screaming in Spanish how he killed two Taliban. 'Dos Talibanes muertos' or something like that. ... They did very well. ...

Everyone had a job to do. ... Our rule of law guy, he's got his finger up to the bone, he's stopping the blood, his finger's deep in there. I asked him afterwards. He said, 'No, I'd never done that before.' But went through the drills, didn't freak out, calmly following the Physician Assistant's directions."

Interagency Provincial Affairs (IPA) Field Retrospective Project

SBU – Sensitive But Unclassified

QUESTIONS SET 4: ANALYSIS AND ASSESSMENT OF SECTORS AND ACTORS

There was a wide variety of examples and views provided by interviewees for this question set. Those interested in more detail are advised to review the consolidated responses. That said, there were discernable trends and some clear winners and losers regarding efforts and actors.

The first series of questions regards specific sectors or actors. Participants were asked to “evaluate the following topics or actors during your assignment. Did your area progress or regress? What USG efforts including your own were useful and not useful?” These questions are intended to address the overall worth of the effort, the concluding question, by dissecting it into some component parts.

The first part of the question set (4.A.1. through 4.A.6) provides respondent assessments based on their field experiences of the Civ-Mil Framework’s security foundation, pillars (governance, rule of law, and socio-economic development), and its cross-cutting efforts most relevant to civilian field efforts (political reconciliation and reintegration; role of women in society). Our field veterans naturally focused on questions that were most closely related to their specific roles and gave light analysis or skipped other questions.

Question 4.A.1.

Analysis and Assessment of Sectors and Actors: Local Governance

By a strong majority, our respondents tracked positive gains in the governance section in their areas of operation during their field tenures. Only five of 36 respondents were decidedly negative, stating that governance had either devolved or stayed the same. Respondents spoke optimistically of GIRoA’s improving ability to provide services, mediate local disputes, balance competing interests, and develop, administer, and lobby for budgets. On the other hand, “You’re talking about a starting point of pretty minimal performance.” Corruption was frequently cited as undermining governance efforts, as was the centralized state of the Afghan government itself and its propensity to bolster patronage networks at the expense of good governance.

Many respondents noted significant progress in governance, sometimes “phenomenal,” although often with caveats such as “despite the challenges” or “given the circumstances.” On the far end of the positive spectrum, an officer serving in the south said the “tremendous amount of change” in Kandahar actually exceeded his team’s expectations. “After [the last mayor] was assassinated, there were a lot of questions: Is the bench deep enough on the municipal staff? Can the governor handle this? Can the new mayor rise into this position? And we were just amazed ... I’m confident about local governance in the city.”

Multiple participants cited improvements in staffing (filling the government **tashkil** or complement), being more responsive to local needs (often with a commensurate decline in requests for USG assistance), and convincing insurgents to stand down. Two examples follow, one each from the provincial and district levels.

Province: “The governor has to run 11 districts and he only had a six-member staff to try and handle 350,000 people. It doesn’t work very well. As time progressed, we saw how the governor was and we started making suggestions to the governor. Then we started to get more of a push from the governor. By the time I left the province in December of 2011, the governor had 50 staff members, had every district governor at the district [rather than hunkered down at the provincial capital], and all the line directors [in place]. They now create their own provincial development plan. ... In 2009 he could not even leave his compound with how bad security was, whereas now he [travels at will] ... to all these other districts. ... So when you look at it across the board, it’s pretty amazing the progress that’s been made.”

District: “Again this owes more to the British governance strategy than it does to the U.S. strategy. As part of this DDP model, they created these things called District Community Councils, which may or may not be constitutional, but they are elected district representative bodies in seven out of the 14 districts in Helmand. ... My district DCC had a re-election in January or February [2013]—6,000 people turned out. That was up from about 1,000 in 2009. So people were starting to vote with their feet. ... So they are familiar with voting and I predict that in this coming 2014 [presidential] election they will have more people that voted in 2009.”

Our respondents found their Afghan interlocutors generally appreciative and accepting of advice, particularly advice backed with monetary incentives. One noted the district governor and police chief “developed over time” with the help of USG mentoring, although he conceded there are “hard cases and you are never going to change them.” Some examples were also provided of Afghan solutions emerging independently of U.S. mentorship or of a governor taking ideas from USG mentors and making it his own, such as a water distribution project in the south which GIRoA has taken over and expanded. However, as this officer from the south illustrated, some Afghan governance problem-solving involved making deals that the USG wouldn’t necessarily approve of:

“In the last six or seven months, the provincial government has really made an effort with political outreach and encouraged a political settlement up in the north. You are not going to like this, but part of this settlement is negotiating the narcotics interests; who gets money and what percentage of what pie. Think of the mafia, think of the godfather and the heads of the five families sitting around the table. This is unfortunately what is necessary to achieve some kind of stability, getting agreement on

that. And as long as everyone loosely pays lip service to the government that actually benefits the government because that's one less problem they have to deal with."

Provincial/District Governors

Respondents provided many anecdotes to illustrate their positive and negative assessments of provincial and district governors, which were on the whole favorable. Many explained that the appointment of governors from Kabul engendered a patronage system that led to high turnover of governors, both good and bad, undermining continuity and ensuring only governors in favor with the national administration (i.e., "Karzai's golden children") were on firm footing. Unfortunately, that favor often had more to do with paying off power brokers in Kabul than merit. A respondent in the south relates that a 22-year-old district governor's "dad bought him a district and he wanted 3-D billboards, like he'd seen in India." Although the same officer gave this district governor an F, he said they generally were "a mixed bag," as did many of our respondents. He gave the other district governors in the province a combined A-minus grade.

Officers that worked with multiple district and provincial governors frequently illustrated this "mixed bag" outlook with examples, such as this officer who served in two PRTs and the Regional Platform in the south:

"At the district governor level I worked with two. One had a strong background in security. He had been a district chief of police in several districts in the province. Rose up through those ranks, became district governor. He is another very outgoing, charismatic, mature leader with a proven track record of dealing with the insurgency. ... He drew large crowds. I thought he was very effective. He has corruption issues. He was actually tried and convicted through some of these USAID programs and distribution programs [for] taking water pumps, seed fertilizer and other stuff. ... The other district governor I worked with for two years happened to get his appointment because of his ties with another governor. He was by far one of the most corrupt district governors in this province, whether he was making money off of military CERP programs or USAID programs. ... We would have laborers from some of these independent contractors ... come to the gate and complain that they didn't get paid because ... [the contractor] had to give his share of money to the district governor and didn't have enough money left over to pay his workers. ... And once a lot of these large projects kind of died off and we weren't in that spending and building mode anymore, he wasn't as distracted from trying to profit personally off those. He turned his attention toward governing and working relations with key elders. Toward the end he was effective. "

Officers frequently noted their assessments changed over time, frequently based on new information about the individuals or actual changes in capacity or outlook.

Many officers lamented that the “constant turnover” of governors interrupted progress, sometimes rotating more frequently than USG officers. One DSTER complained that he had gone through “four different district governors and seven district chiefs of police over the course of the year.” The same officer advocated field staff in similar situations focus on “how you support institutions versus individuals” and “finding that second- or third-tier guy who’s maybe not really in power, but wants to do good work.” Others felt governors were put at an inherent disadvantage with their constituents who “feel like they don’t have a stake in who their leader is” because governors were appointed rather than elected and because of the common belief that appointments had more to do with patronage than meritocracy.

Provincial Councils

Provincial councils, the only elected provincial body, did not have the same legitimacy issues associated with provincial and district governors, appointed from far-off Kabul. However, assessments from our officers were generally mixed and slightly more negative than governors, with most officers speaking to the councils’ “potential” rather than their existing value. Common criticisms of the councils included “in it for personal gain,” “ineffective,” and “not real players.” However, negative perceptions of the councils were tempered by the realization that they had not been afforded significant power under the Afghan constitution. In other words, how can you expect them to be “real players” without real power?

At least four of our respondents had strongly positive comments about “effective” provincial councils that were a legitimate “voice of the people” and “kept some checks and balances” with appointed officials. However, another officer argued it is precisely the council’s role as “a platform to compete with the governor” that causes “many unintended consequences.” “I’m sure that there are many of my colleagues who would say that they are a flowering of Jeffersonian democracy in Central Asia, but that was not my experience.” A handful of officers noted some success in their efforts to steer the councils to more productive activities than “creating protests,” and others mentioned that they hoped the councils would serve as effective training grounds for locally elected officials should changes be made in that direction.

A DSTER from the south explained that some Afghans in his district saw value in the council, but sometimes for the wrong reasons: “The chairman paid \$40,000 this year during the chairmanship election to bribe the other council members to elect him chairman. ... There is some value in this provincial budgeting system I talked about. But there isn’t nearly as much money as when the **CERP** money was floating around and all these guys got rich because they could say [to the CERP contractors] ‘I’ll cause problems for you,’ and ... the contractor would give them five percent or something.”

Service Delivery

Most officers reported significant progress with the capacity and execution of GIRoA ministry representatives or “line directors” in provinces and districts with regard to service delivery, particularly municipalities that had begun supporting such efforts as trash cleanup and market lighting with funds from new local taxes. For many, the proof of progress was a marked decline in locals asking for USG assistance “because they knew the government wasn’t as capable.” As one respondent put it, GIRoA service delivery may not be up to Western standards, but, “They were still delivering, and that’s still light years ahead of the Taliban or the local insurgency. ... Line ministries got better. I think our capacity building efforts have really paid off.”

Despite the almost uncontested progress noted for service delivery, challenges persisted, particularly in pushing ministries and services to more remote, restive districts. A DST officer recounts aptly the progress and challenges in her contested southern district:

“If [ministry officials] show up at all, [they] stayed for a couple of days or couple of weeks and then out. The Pashtun word that they used was ‘escape’ from the district. This tells you what they thought about the place. People in [the provincial capital] are terrified of this district. And not just the Taliban, but [also of] the residents here. ... By the time I left, you had a district governor, you had the tashkil filling out, and you had schools that were open ... [and] you had teachers that were staying. ... You also had local clinics that were open. The public health officials were doing their jobs ... without any assistance from us, as well as the education officials. We more bothered them with meetings and questions. ... You got a judge, a prosecutor, a criminal investigator who could actually do their jobs and built up the judicial capacity of the district, which is huge. ... [District leadership was] harmless and that was part of their problem. Their reach was fairly small; they were afraid to shake the tree very hard because they would feel the pain from opposing factions or from the Taliban. ... You can bring government services up to a certain level, but if you don’t get those locally-respected tribal leaders to support you, then you eventually hit a wall on the political front. That district governor was never willing to take that risk. I don’t blame him. ... He wasn’t willing to put himself on the line to draw those contentious actors back into the government.”

Budget

Our respondents also cited solid, if hard fought, progress in the abilities of provincial governments to develop budgets and lobby Kabul ministries to get funds. There were some “chicken and egg” explanations regarding whether USG officers reduced funding to provinces because of the budget progress or whether cutting the funds led to the improvements. Regardless, an officer explained that after his platform stopped CERP and other short-term assistance, he actually saw GIRoA doing a better job in some respects administrating the same

type of projects: “We saw the price on bids for contracts come way down because the Afghans were out there getting the bids instead of us.”

A political officer serving in the east argued that GIRoA advances should not be a surprise because “it was a misconception on the part of USAID and ISAF that we’ve got to teach capacity. ... They know how to do it; what they don’t have is the money they’re supposed to be getting from the central government. ... My frustration was that we were always pushing the provinces to reach up to Kabul, but there was no one pushing Kabul to reach down to the provinces.” Many officers were likewise frustrated, along with their Afghan interlocutors no doubt, with the budgeting process when provincial and district authorities “don’t have a budget of their own” and “are just crippled by the structure – it’s very difficult to be responsive.”

According to some respondents, it was exactly this frustration with inefficient central government spending that led to the development of USG and ISAF funding of various provincial and district entities, which have since dried up. Some officers viewed these initiatives favorably as tools to build capacity and participatory decision making locally while national systems developed, but others viewed them as unconstitutional and inconsistently applied “slush funds” that undermined both the development of a healthy budgeting relationship between national and local governments and national sovereignty more broadly. One officer said such spending is inherently dysfunctional as “we only grant our friends in these environments, so they do what we tell them to do because we are paying them.”

Democracy

Respondents were generally supportive of democratization efforts and found those efforts to be bearing fruit. “I found that the Afghans themselves really wanted the democratic process.” They differed, however, in how and how fast democratization efforts should be rolled out, particularly in more remote districts, and many criticized U.S. expectations as naïve and short-term focused.

There were some naysayers. A respondent argued that the Afghan system is inherently undemocratic because local leadership (with the exception of the Provincial Council) is appointed and elections are controlled by backroom deals. Another officer from the west characterized Afghan democracy as “whoever has the most power wins. I don’t think the Afghans understood democracy.” Others considered Afghan abstractions of democracy lamentable, but ultimately within a system that was still broadly democratic and improving. One noted that even “advanced democracies” have influence peddling, appointed positions, and elites. A DSTer questioned whether “democracy is the right form of government for Helmand Province,” but that Afghan arguments on the merits of democratization were generally expressed in other questions and lumped in with other “western concepts.”

Resistance to a one-size-fits-all approach was expressed by some respondents. “As long as you tailor the governance strategy to the local environment, that’s a good foundation. But you need to understand that you can’t just walk in and [provide] ‘government in a box’ here you go. You need to understand the landscape before you start making recommendations.” A political officer provided an illustrative tale of two districts in Helmand:

“In Garmser, every single elder was a mujahedeen except for one guy ... so they were important people. In Musa Kala, they were taxi drivers, they were mechanics, a couple of them were proxies for important people, but most of them were just looking for their 50 bucks a month, not real representatives. So at the local level, if you can get the true elders to have these positions, then you have this form of representative democracy. If you’re talking about democracy for electing provincial and national candidates for office, it doesn’t seem to be a real democracy. It seems to be a lot of influence over the votes; they’re going to vote for whoever they’re told to, basically.”

Challenges: Corruption and Communication

Many officers mentioned examples of the corrosive influence of corruption on governance and its affect in distancing the population from the government, with multiple mentions of bribes, extortion, and skimming from project funds (including from USG sources). For example, a development officer recalls being surprised to find that tractors and bags of fertilizer that were supposed to go to farmers and cooperatives were instead diverted to the Lashkar Gah market by local elders charged with distribution. Farmers complained to the PRT and governor to no avail. Another officer provided a two-stage corruption example whereby new district governors needed to extort their constituents to make up for the money they spent “buying” the position, a phenomena exacerbated by frequent turnover of district leadership.

One officer provided an example of a governor who characterized his corruption as essential to working in a corrupt system and confided that he “had to” maintain some minimal level of corruption to maintain any influence whatsoever. This raises the question of “how much” corruption is acceptable to the USG, which a PRTER who encountered the corruption problem in Iraq as well framed thusly:

“There is a certain level of acceptable bad behavior, I mean let’s be honest. But is that 10 percent? Or is it 20 percent? Has he gone too far when he hits 40 percent? Where is that line? ... What I found over the years is that people live around the 20 percent mark. And that is [for both the] State Department side and military side of the house. After that you got a lot of naysayers. And I am not justifying [Afghan corruption] one way or another, but zero tolerance won’t get you far in this country and we all know that.”

Another officer provided the example of her governor, who everyone knows “is a crook,” but is in fact largely popular because he also brings the province schools, hospitals, and roads. “He

gets the results. You have to ask yourself, 'What is good governance?' For the average Afghan it is just enough to keep me safe and you leave me alone to make my own life."

An officer in the south said despite overall progress, GIROA officials have been "terrible" with regard to messaging and public relations. The governor in his province was an exception who "reminded them that your Afghan governments have done good work for you. Why is there power in your house? How do you get to Kabul? Oh you go on a bus that parks at a bus station that was built by your government. So he understood more than any Afghan politician that there was a lot of good done by the Afghan government that simply wasn't acknowledged or recognized by much of the local population."

USG Efforts

Our respondents generally thought USG efforts to bolster governance were successful and "worthy." However, even fans of our governance efforts had criticisms of certain approaches, and some were downright negative. A political officer argued that the strategy is only as good as the person implementing it and that "we have assigned people to speak with and on behalf of the U.S. Government ... [who] don't understand the dynamics of negotiation or the ... context of the culture that they are in. So it should come as no surprise, although it does, that we get mixed results." A few officers complained about the military's approach to governance. These complaints are covered in question 4.E.1.

Many participants related positive stories of linking provincial officials with districts, even physically transporting them to local shuras (meetings). "It's about educating the ministries and government. They need to go out to the district." Another respondent said one of the most important aspects of USG efforts with regard to governance was countering half-baked ideas sent up to Kabul from appointed officials, typically not from the areas they were sent to govern. Her example was leveraging Embassy colleagues to kill a "crazy, crazy plan" to move the capital of Bamyan Province to a colder area that "no actual citizen of Bamyan had been consulted on and were unlikely to move to." To the contrary, another officer complained that the USG interfered too much in Kabul with regard to the appointments of local officials, which is covered in detail in question 4.C.

Taking a bigger-picture, longer-term perspective, an officer with almost five years in the field characterized USG governance efforts from 2001 to 2008 as "very bad." However, he said with the creation of (and USG support of) **IDLG**, the **Accelerating Sustainable Agriculture Program**, the District Delivery Program, and the district community councils, "there was a sincere effort on the part of the U.S. government to actually build local governance across Afghanistan" and "those programs paid off." However, he added that our interest in sub-national governance seems to have waned since 2011.

A senior ranking officer at a regional platform, also with many years of field experience in Afghanistan, said the greatest governance success occurred “the minute the PRTs stopped functioning” and “the Afghans were forced to step up and start taking care of things for themselves.” According to this officer, GIRoA is without exception taking over the heavy lifting on governance that PRTs and DSTs used to shoulder because “no one else was around to do it”:

“So it has gotten better in every case. I think we can take credit for the effectiveness of the programs at the local level that the PRTs and DSTs were doing. So you give USAID and everyone that was involved credit for teaching the Afghans how to do it. I think at the policy level, you give us credit for saying, ‘Okay, we’ve done enough. We’re going to step back and watch how you guys do it.’ And then give credit to the Afghans for trying to do it.”

Question 4.A.2.

Analysis and Assessment of Sectors and Actors: Rule of law

Respondents were about equally divided between generally positive (9), negative (10), and mixed (8) responses regarding the status of rule of law in their areas of operation, ranging between “good progress” to “weak to nonexistent.” It should be noted that not all answers are created equal and many of our participants admittedly are not rule of law advisors or practitioners. Participants spoke mainly of how effective Afghan rule of law structures were during their tenures; how these structures competed with traditional or Taliban justice; corruption; and how USG efforts factored into rule of law development.

Those stressing progress pointed to increasing numbers of evidence-based investigations, anti-corruption cases, and use of the GIRoA justice system (e.g., **huqooq**’s with “lines out the door all the time,” including females). A lawyer working for the State Department on rule of law issues in the south told us there were no prosecutors and no district trials being held when he arrived at a PRT in the south, but by the time he left “they had a murder trial and a negligent homicide case, so they were actually trying cases at the district level,” although there was still no access to defense council at the districts. He contends USG rule of law efforts have been generally successful and that GIRoA judicial capacity is expanding. “They just need that continued support, and ongoing training, and there is no doubt they will flourish in that area. These younger generations, they want justice, fairness, transparency in the process; they don’t like corruption, because they realize what it’s done to their country.” Another rule of law advisor pointed to “formal judicial actors” for his province’s compliment (tashkil) fill out from four to 38 during his tour, many of whom were judges, prosecutors, and huqooqs pushed into the various districts. “Clearly we were taking away business from the Taliban justice system. So in terms of governance, more specifically in the rule of law, I think the province made great strides.”

But some respondents were more skeptical that filling in the rule of law roles had a necessarily positive impact. A DSTer was particularly critical of military efforts to “fill the tashkil,” which he found an empty metric if justice sector government employees were not properly trained. He added it was also an impossible metric because “frankly, educated people don’t want to come and work” in the district where he worked. He argued you needed the right people, rejecting the alleged military maxim of “once we get bodies we’ll make progress.” A political officer explained that in the absence of fully-developed institutions, personality and leadership played an oversized role in rule of law effectiveness:

“It all has to do with this [District] Police Chief. He basically controlled everything, politically and justice [related]. The locals liked him because he provided security and predictability. He kept his own cops from misbehaving. They could say to him, “Your post commander stole my kid the other day. Could you please fix the problem?” And he would punish his own police. Stealing boys is a huge problem in this country. Not many people talk about that. Especially with police and militia. They all have the *chai boy* phenomenon; it’s pervasive. The Taliban also do it, to some extent, and they’re some of the more perverted ones. A common thing that people were saying was, ‘Look, the police chief stopped the little boys being stolen out of the cars.’ That was a big deal to the locals. ... [The District Chief of Police] only came back to the district once while I was there after his attack, and you had old men crying at his feet to have him back.”

Others reported “no substantial progress” or worse in rule of law. One of the worst examples from the south illustrates how tenuous progress can be:

“Over the course of my year I think rule of law was the area where we saw the most backsliding. When I arrived, there was good cooperation between the district prosecutor and the police. They were conducting evidence-based operations. They were properly pushing cases to the provincial capital. The **Huqooq**, the sort of traditional justice actor in the district, was resolving cases in a pretty frenetic pace, like ten, 15 cases a day. A lot of that was because we had a very engaged Marine SJA [Staff Judge Advocate] who was really kind of trying to push these guys to do more and to be accountable. ... And when he left, ... we saw the rule of law [actors] really started engaging in pretty significant corruption. I mentioned how they had one of the district governors removed. ... They were not present in the district for about eight months of my one-year tour. And again, I think the big word is accountability, that they weren’t accountable to anyone in the provincial capital. I don’t think that there was any ability for provincial actors to sort of direct these district guys to do their jobs. It just wasn’t in their interest. It didn’t matter if a case was resolved. They would leave the district and go to the provincial capital, just hang out, drink tea, get district governors removed. They were just really ineffective.”

Respondents often referred to the “justice shopping” that Afghans did among the GIRoA, traditional, and Taliban systems. Afghans considered a number of factors when deciding what system to use, or what systems to use in what order if they did not receive a verdict they liked, such as speed of service, enforceability of verdict, and price. Also factoring into the “shopping” calculus was the personality and experience of the person meting out the justice:

“I remember we got two new judges when I was in the district, and the guys were like in their early twenties maybe mid-twenties. And they are going to work out a difference between two big time rival factions? No. That is not going to happen. First [the disputants] will probably take it to the elders, then they will take it to the mullahs, and they can take it to the Taliban as well.”

At least two other participants lamented GIRoA’s inability to deal with simmering land ownership disputes as a grievance that fueled Taliban courts:

“Land disputes are hard to resolve, in no small part because the government sold off government land as well as private land to other people. So when the previous district governor was selling off his opponent’s land, and his guys would go and occupy it, who do you go to for justice? You don’t go to the government; you go to the Taliban. ... It’s now full of IEDs.”

Many respondents were skeptical that GIRoA justice structures would ever be fully accepted or integrated with traditional justice systems. One officer thought the USG should stop all rule of law efforts because “the tribal rule of law is alive and well and that is the system. The formal judicial system of course is kind of irrelevant. It is tertiary at best.” Another officer who served in the south agreed in principle that traditional justice “is the system that exists” there and that western advisors should not get “upset” that justice was being administered “at the tribal level or [by] mullahs.” He argued, however, that adding a formal GIRoA system has value because it “adds another source of authority to what the tribes and mullahs are saying.”

A development officer who served in the west explained why traditional justice maintains its appeal compared to GIRoA structures:

“I’ve seen a family come in with a daughter who shot her husband dead – with both families there, the district governor there, [and] the village head’s leading it. Everyone stepped forward, including the dead husband’s family, and said, ‘This guy was a drug addict who was abusing his family and his wife and we, the family and community, are glad that he’s gone.’ Charges dropped. So when you ask those folks, ‘What do you think about rule of law? They’ll say, ‘Oh, the corrupt officials in Kabul, is that what you’re talking about? Where nothing happens and you can buy your way out if you have enough money? ... Or it takes forever to get justice and it’s all corrupt; it’s all closed door?’ They would prefer under the shade tree with the old guys. It’s

transparent, it's inclusive, and everyone agrees. Like I said, it's *his* interpretation of Sharia law. ... In every village that is a different guy with a different law."

An officer serving in a DST in the south provides some insight into the Taliban justice system:

"[The GIRoA judge] was functional but corrupt: everyone is making money. He would receive money and make his decisions based on how he was getting paid. But there was a significant number of people in the city that went through the GIRoA system. There was one case specifically that was enlightening for me. I went into the judge's office there one day and there was a man sitting there who told me his story. He handed me a piece of paper and on the top was 'The Islamic Emirates of Afghanistan,' which of course is the Taliban government. They had issued this notice, this warning that said, 'You will come to our court in Pakistan or we will kill you.' And it was over a promise that was made by this man to marry off his daughter to this man's son who was his friend. Then the daughter, when she got older, she said, 'No, it's my right not to marry the man. This is in the Constitution.' And the man went to the Taliban. First, supposedly, they went to the [GIRoA] judges and they didn't get any progress, any decision. Then he went to the Taliban family member who was a judge, a member of a court over there [in Pakistan], so they issued this summons to this man that said you come to this court or we will kill you. He didn't go, so they abducted him from his village in Garmser and they took him to Pakistan. They arrested him. They said, 'You didn't answer your summons so you're under arrest.' So they took him to Pakistan. They tried him. They said, 'You made this agreement.' They held him for two weeks. They said we're going to hold you until your wife and daughter show up, so eventually the wife and daughter showed up. They had their trial. They said, 'You made the agreement; your daughter now belongs to this man's son.' They let the man go, but they held the daughter and wouldn't let her go. So the daughter and the son are now not-so-happily married. So when I saw the man in the judge's office, he was not happy. He was like, 'I came to you for help and now my daughter is married.' Not a happy story. So you have some successes, you have a lot of heartbreaks too."

Some respondents explained that Taliban justice has an unfair advantage in competing with traditional and GIRoA justice systems because of its lethal enforcement. In other words, to maintain the shopping metaphor, they are making Afghans an offer they can't refuse.

Regarding USG efforts, an officer from the east criticized expensive biometric identification and truck-scanning border control systems. "That's fantastic. What happens when the power goes out? There's no consistent broadband connection and they [Afghans] don't really see a reason to do it and maintain it. Another field veteran from the east criticized the military's rule of law efforts, asserting that the military was "only interested" in training the police to fight against

the insurgency, not for civilian policing. “Then they [the military] complain when crime is up in Kabul or there’s no rule of law in the provinces.” Another officer said his field colleagues had made some rule of law progress, but that in 2012 “we lost all the rule of law advisors and we were wondering, okay, so does [Embassy] Kabul think that rule of law is great?”

No discussion of USG efforts in rule of law in Afghanistan would be complete without the equivalent of an intellectual cage match on the merits of the counternarcotics effort, aka the war on drugs. There were two respondents who provided solid arguments for both sides of the question from Helmand. We present them here without comment, starting with an experienced rule of law advisor who explains how our counternarcotics efforts in Afghanistan can work:

“[The governor] had the vision to create the provincial food zone. In essence it was a plan where he was focusing on mitigating or eliminating as much as possible the opium production and cultivation. He gathered the security teams along with the coalition security folks and built a [security] bubble throughout the province’s river valley. Then he orchestrated the international donor community in bringing in alternative livelihood agricultural crops. Then he put together a program that if individuals were cultivating poppy, he would come in with his team and eradicate it. Now, a culmination of security, alternative livelihoods, deterrence to poppy growth, and the political will of this governor created a model of growth in agriculture and security and awareness that poppy growth was not going to be tolerated. So that program over a four-year period was so successful that [the U.S.] Congress decided they wanted to replicate that in five other provinces in Afghanistan. That is a whole different story and I could probably tell you why that replication won’t work, but it did work in the province.”

And now for the counterpoint from a DSTer:

“It’s tough. I know what the government policy is [on counter-narcotics], but our policy, both the British and the American strategy, has failed. You had something going for a little while when you could just dominate the entire AO [Area of Operation] with Marines and British military. Then the Afghans felt comfortable going out and eradicating, but it was still 10,000 hectares or something. You fly over Helmand [now] and its one big poppy field. It was a cosmetic effort. ... The farmers had no other alternative to make money. We kept pushing alternative livelihood programs, the food zone programs, and those did have some impact in some areas, but the idea of the Governor Led Eradication Program, **GLE**, actually contradicted the stability narrative because oftentimes the only interaction people would have with their government was when they showed up to eradicate their fields, [only] because they weren’t rich [enough] to pay the bribe for them not to eradicate their fields. In these cases, you have district and provincial officials double dipping two pots of money. They’d get money from us for the hectares they eradicated and money for the hectares they didn’t

eradicate from the narcotraffickers. So all we were doing is furthering corruption and not making a dent at all. This year, with the reduced drawdown in Helmand Province, we had something like 40 percent less eradicated hectares than last year and that matched the shrinking number of coalition forces in the province. To be fair, the poppy is largely out of the green zone along the river, but they just started growing it in the desert. They just kept getting farther and farther until people stopped eradicating the poppy. It's embarrassing. You go to Leatherneck and Bastion, the big U.S. and British military base there and there's just giant poppy fields all around the landing strip, just outside. It's an economic problem. There's such a demand for it and so much money that can be made for it, that unless you are out burning everything, which is going to upset the population, you are not going to make a significant dent in it. ... I'm not sure I have a better suggestion, [but] it pushed people further away from the government. .. A district council member told us a few days earlier that 'I hate poppy,' is out at his poppy field scoring the poppy. When I see him he says, 'You guys are getting out more lately. I'm very embarrassed.'"

Many officers criticized the USG's overall approach to the effort and a few even questioned the effort itself. "We are impatient, we are unrealistic, and we send them these western ideas and models that don't work here." Another participant said he "was not convinced" that "concepts we hold dear, like democracy and formal law" are possible to export as a "sustainable solution" in Afghanistan. Although he agreed that traditional dispute resolution mechanisms will continue to be the dominant system in the immediate future, a respondent nevertheless thought time is on the side of a more formal system: "For young people in their 20s and 30s, they no longer feel those communal ties that hold them to their tribal or ancestral lands. So in many ways, traditional dispute resolution will take care of itself. It is on the wrong side of history."

Question 4.A.3.

Analysis and Assessment of Sectors and Actors: Role of Women in Society

Responses were decidedly mixed for this question. Eleven of our respondents responded with roughly equal positive and negative statements. Even respondents who were primarily positive (9) or negative (8) typically included some acknowledgement of the mixed results of efforts to improve the role of women of society (3 did not answer). For example, one respondent launched into a scathing rebuke of the "Stone Age" environment in Afghanistan, in which women "have no rights, they are property." Later, the same respondent conceded that in the district where he was working, he saw "a strong women's shura" (with regular meetings) and an increase in women voter registration, and he opined that, once the insurgency ebbs, "I think you will see almost exponential growth in the role of women in society." Many registered pride in their accomplishments and indicated that although progress "will be measured over

generations” and much work remained to be done, “going from one percent to two percent is 100 percent improvement, even if the scale goes to 100.”

Among positive remarks, respondents often cited the empowerment of women through government positions (police, prosecutors) and local political structures, such as Provincial Councils, District Councils, and less formal women’s shuras (meetings), often supported by the Director for Women’s Affairs (DOWA) or USG field elements. Some illustrative comments:

- “There were pockets within the south where the local and provincial governments started to be very inclusive in terms of roles of women. ... I was shocked when I walked in and saw there were four women on the provincial council. Not only were they present but also very vocal and they had no problem sitting at the same table as the men. They asked the questions, they would put out arguments and they were highly educated.”
- “Shortly before I left, the provincial court added its first female prosecutor to the court system. There were four women involved in the formal rule of law system in the province after I left. .. Now in the nearby province there is no doubt in my mind that it is sustainable. They are like, ‘Thanks a lot for helping us move forward, but we got it now.’
- “[Both civilian and military officers] made some big inroads in introducing women’s rights and equality and getting girls into schools.”
- “We gave women training in agriculture, in crops, and in poultry farming. ... The woman who leads [the cooperative] lost her husband and a couple children in the war. She is very tough and she doesn’t take crap from the men usually. ... There were four women that were elected to the DCC and this woman was one of them.”
- “The other thing that has mattered a lot in women’s rights is the positions that have been allotted to women in the provincial councils and the parliament. Those are extremely important. [Lobbying for those constitutional allotments] are the best decisions that the U.S. made in Afghanistan because those [allotments] can’t be changed. They’ve put them in a position of power, ... of access to the media, access to influence things that were happening.”
- “They’ve had some good role models out here; they’ve seen women in power and authority. ... In Herat, we have the only female head provincial prosecutor. We, the U.S. Government, did everything we could to protect her and keep her as a role model up there. That sends a message to the Afghans.”
- “We set up a women’s shura. ... We had about 20 women. It started off very casual like a bitch session. They were very sympathetic because they realized that we were surrounded by men all the time too. ... [They would say] ‘any time you need to get away from those boys, you come.’ ... We got lots of great information from them. The most surprising, we had [been tasked] from the Embassy [to ask about night

raids]. I was kind of embarrassed and said, “Sorry I have to bring this up, but how do you feel about night raids?” Their basic response, and obviously I’m going to speak cruder than they do, was ‘Fuck ‘em. If they are harboring insurgents, fuck ‘em, they deserve what they get.’

Negative remarks reflected both disgust at the poor base line status of women in Afghanistan and some respondents’ frustrations that they made little or no progress. “Any progress that was made was a simply the collateral effect of the province being cleared and the Taliban being removed. None of our efforts made much of a difference at all to women.” Despite many good stories respondents related about increasing female voting, one officer claimed women accounted for only 15 of 3,300 total voter registrations in his district because there were “a lot of cases of husbands telling them, ‘No, you can’t go.’”

Other officers were critical about how organic Afghan government efforts were to enhance the role of women, and how much officials were “dragging the female provincial council members out or the DOWA or somebody because that’s what they think we want to see.” Although there were accounts of active and altruistic DOWAs, there were also a few criticisms that some DOWAs used their positions for personal gain, creating a “cottage industry” of female empowerment projects, and “training the same women on the same thing over and over again.” Likewise, an officer recounted her suspicions that a governor wanted a girl’s school built so he could ingratiate himself with the U.S. military and reap a portion of the project’s cost from the contractor. “There was one female teacher who went there for a week, screamed horribly, and left. It ended up being a toilet for the cops, a \$25,000 toilet.”

Beyond rating progress, respondents spoke at length about different USG approaches and projects to empower women, whether we could have improved our approach, and whether we should or shouldn’t be prioritizing this line of effort. A vocal group of participants from the south argued that well-intentioned female empowerment initiatives designed in Kabul and Washington should have taken regional differences into account. There were some examples provided from the south of projects or initiatives backfiring, including two beheadings of local women returning from a Female Engagement Team (FET) meeting. Another officer from the north underscored the profound differences between regional perceptions of gender by explaining that the “King Burger” restaurant in Mazar-e Sharif has a separate floor for singles to bring dates, something “you would never even dream of” in the south.

One member of this group argued that field officers should be consulted before gender initiatives are launched, even down to the district level. She said that there are significant differences in how locals perceived women’s initiatives in her district, where locals recount stories of men threatening to blow themselves up at the prospect of opening a girl’s school, and the district next door, where locals wanted a girl’s school “right away,” because “they had a tradition of having a girl’s school there 30 years ago.” Another like-minded DSTER from the

south said efforts needed to be targeted “where you would get the most momentum” and would spread organically, like an inkblot, to women in more conservative areas who would “hear about it.”

Another subset of respondents from various regions criticized the USG for failing to “do more, but with the other sex ... our mistake was focusing on women.” An officer suggested the approach should be to “work with the elites like we do everywhere. So if you wanted to change things you would find a woman that was married to a powerful man and talk to her about what can be done. The other way is to work with a man who cares about these things and that has power, but we did not do that.” However, a development officer working in the west said he actually tried exactly that approach to involve the provincial governor and other prominent males in gender issues, but the governor rebuked him, saying, “Gender issues are for women.”

A political officer decried that “gender is a religion to many people in USAID, which is to say that all they have to do is believe and preach, but when it comes to actually getting something done, you have to make harder decisions.” He argued that international efforts be narrowly focused on literacy and elimination of violence. He further postulated that not only should gender efforts attempt to recruit influential males, but that the gender agenda should not assume that the status quo benefits males, and that it be broadened to include abuse of boys. “There’s no discussion about the abuse of boys. There’s no discussion about how marriage practices affect the lives the young men, who are often not happy about being put into arranged marriages or having to sell their cars to pay for weddings to people they’ve never met.”

The following comments from a development officer in the south were representative of many of the group’s criticisms about the USG approach:

“The first ten times I heard someone brief the U.S. State Department at the gender strategy sub-meeting, ... all I could think about was, ‘You are going to get people killed in the region by doing that.’ ... In other places we achieved women’s empowerment, leadership and status through more subtle means. You worked for the public health system, you trained village health promoters, you teach women how to take care of their children better, you give them a little bit more status in their family, you train a midwife in the community ... you don’t come to the city and say you have to change this law. There is a backlash and there was. We lost some gains that were slowly being made because of that. I think that is a little bit of arrogance on our part. ... [When pressed to pass a women’s right law] the council said, ‘No and in fact we are going to take this away from you.’ The women had a women’s shura in one district and they did it without getting permission from the men on the district council. The woman that organized it was literally stoned and walked out of the meeting beaten up and kicked. ... Our military certainly did not know and they were surprised but they shouldn’t have

been surprised. ... So it's going to happen but we can try to mitigate that by being careful on how much we push."

A few respondents questioned the merits of the effort to varying degrees. One argued that we shouldn't be attempting to change how Afghans view women because our notions of the role of women do not correspond with those of Afghan society. "It is not wrong. It is not right. It is different." He questioned the prioritization of gender issues in Afghanistan when perhaps we should be focusing on other elements of our global foreign policy, such as preventing North Korea from "weaponizing a nuclear device that could strike North America."

However, the vast majority of respondents were supportive of the effort, even if they had criticisms of the execution. "I think it is worthwhile beyond just the duty, the ethical, the moral duty that we hold to not let people be enslaved and to change the mindset of the men who are doing that." Many spoke about our own expectations in analogies: e.g., being content with "baby steps" and recognizing "we are never going to hit a home run." Some were as passionate about the effort as they were frustrated about the progress, like this veteran of both west and south regions:

"We have provided opportunities ... we have shown them good heart. We have shown them our values. We have done the best that we can, but the mountain was too steep. The verdict is still out. ... I think the people that have been here, including myself, get teary-eyed thinking about my visits to the burn clinic ... with the women who self-immolated. I get frustrated thinking about my inability to convince the chief prosecutor with respect to making rule of law better and the prosecution office better."

Some of our respondents expressed concern about backsliding on women's empowerment, reflecting a concern many of our more recently deployed field staff heard from Afghans: "their biggest concern is everything being set back. Afraid of losing all the gains they made over the last 10 years." Whether those gains will be lasting remains an open question, particularly in rural areas where many of our field officers served. It will ultimately be answered by the Afghans themselves. As a respondent put it, will they still "do it on their own when we aren't around to watch?"

Question 4.A.4.

Analysis and Assessment of Sectors and Actors: Security

Most respondents (15 out of 28) felt security had improved in their areas of operation. Eleven respondents said security had either stayed the same or regressed and three offered substantive replies but refrained from opining on the overall state of security. One participant said he couldn't tell if security had actually worsened or if that's "just the perception" being projected by vested interests.

Many officers were effusive about progress made by the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF; largely the Afghan National Army, ANA, and Afghan National Police, ANP). One officer described the conversion of the province where he worked from the “wild west” as “nothing short of a miracle.” Another characterized the capabilities of ANSF in the east as being “light years ahead of where they were in 2009 and 2010.” He described a string of victories through 2013 and 2014, when ANSF were providing security for high-profile events and conducting combat operations on their own. “They may have had help with raids or information sharing, but all the actual boots on the ground were Afghans. ... Our role was to put them in the front and let them do it. And it was a risk. But they did it.” A development officer in the west said she and her colleagues had initially been skeptical: “So we were waiting for this to absolutely implode [when coalition troops left the province over a year ago] and we were all wrong.”

Perhaps the strongest comments concerning the improved security environment came from a senior officer in the east who proclaimed:

“Never in human history have we done what we’ve done in this country, which is building a professional army out of nothing. I’ve certainly heard it from American soldiers who came in with Karzai in 2001. ... So look at where we’ve come: 352,000 ANSF who have gone through a standardized training, who espouse loyalty to a national institution, defend a national constitution, protect the people of Afghanistan and in the east, at least, there’s nowhere they can’t go today. They’re proving themselves able to go places that we couldn’t go and hold. So I’m pretty impressed.”

Beyond battlefield victories, an officer in the north proposed that ANSF maturity includes being able to transition into the more mundane tasks of maintaining the peace and engaging constructively with civilians. He reported a police commander “gathered all the campaign representatives [for the 2014 national elections] together, asserted his independence, and told them they needed to notify him 48 hours ahead of time of any events [so that he could provide security]. The four campaigns that I met with so far all mentioned this meeting as a very positive development. They all believed him when he said he was a neutral actor.”

Likewise, an officer serving in the south claimed that by the time he left in 2014 the security situation had improved to the point that locals no longer complained to him about security. “Now it is all boring stuff like can you fix potholes, expand the schools, we want poetry festivals, all this stuff.” He recounts an anecdote in 2013 at the height of the fighting season when insurgents targeted a district for recruitment, “pitched jihad,” and showed up with a bag of money. “The locals said, ‘Thanks but we have a good thing going on in our district and that is not enough to lure us.’ A victory for stability and GIRoA to be sure, but he also warns of overconfidence. “If they show up with ten bags of money, you may have the insurgency all over again.”

There were some criticisms, including from a respondent who conceded that security had improved but that corruption, not battlefield competency, was undermining the gains. “The ANA can fight, [but] they can’t buy bullets or gasoline. What is going to kill them is their inability to manage sustainment, which is gasoline, fuels, bullets that keep an army running, probably because of corruption within the ANA.” Selling ammunition off before a major engagement is not a military best practice, this officer noted. Likewise, another officer reports that it wasn’t insurgents who defeated the police in her district, but rather crass politics. She relates that a feud between influential families started after the police chief “picked up the wrong stash of opium” and angered a member of parliament from a competing family. Leaders of the aggrieved family told their patrons on the police force to abandon their posts, which “ripped apart the police force. They never recovered from that.”

Some of our respondents also identified the challenge facing the ANSF, particularly the ANA, with the ethnic overrepresentation of Tajiks and Uzbeks operating in the Pashtun south and east. At least a couple of respondents discounted this as a major concern. One said that although there is some latent ethnic animosity, many elders in the south described the ANSF as “our boys.” Another officer spoke of the increasing acceptance of the ANSF commensurate with its increasing professionalism and effectiveness. An officer who spoke extensively to rank and file ANA troops added that troops expressed satisfaction with “army living” and had relatively high morale.

Among other security challenges, some interviewees identified narcotraffickers and the role of Pakistan as an insurgent base. Some respondents offered anecdotes indicating that these challenges may be manageable and are exaggerated in the minds of westerners. For example, a respondent relates a story where an ANA Commander “keeps the peace. And when I say keeps the peace I mean he makes arrangements with people in Pakistan, people that we would call our opponents. ... It is one of reasons things run more smoothly down there. ... This guy is [also] not fighting the fight against poppy.” Other current and future ANSF challenges mentioned included an inability to plan “for the next fighting season,” lack of sufficient health care, leadership (as always), and, in the case of the police, drug abuse and kidnapping.

Almost without exception, respondents noted a higher level of proficiency and confidence in the Afghan National Army (ANA) than the Afghan National Police (ANP). Many noted recent improvements in the police and that they were “closing the gap” with the ANA in terms of professionalism and capacity. Despite generally favorable opinions of the ANA, some officers indicated that the ANA was sometimes more reluctant to engage insurgents. One example from the south:

“The Corps Commander didn’t want to get involved even though the district was in threat of being overrun by the insurgency. He was happy to sit out at his base in the

desert with 17,000 soldiers, just kind of watching the **AUP** and **ALP** [police] get slaughtered. So they are effective, but they don't have any will."

An officer who spent extensive time with both the army and police to successfully roll back insurgent control in the south provides his take on the ANA and ALP and how they complement each other:

"So the ANA were fairly well trained. ... The leadership seemed to really care about Afghanistan and wanted Afghanistan to succeed. They were limited a lot by the fact that they [were from other parts of the country and] didn't know the area. That made it difficult for them to interact with the people. ... The police are less well trained, especially in the beginning. Leadership was...more prone to desertion, less prone to work hard. You always had to be worried with the police ... that they could be influenced by the Taliban and could do something against you. ... But the police ... were better than the ANA in knowing what was happening on the ground. They were better at being able to find an insurgent and go after him quickly [but] more reckless too. In effectiveness, the ANA is not going to survive without the police and the police are not going to succeed without the ANA."

ALP (Afghan Local Police)

A number of political and development officers acknowledged criticisms that the Afghan Local Police (ALP) had occasionally ran away when pressed and that there were risks of it devolving into "hundreds of local militias running around." But they also provided examples of the ALP exceeding operational expectations, pushing Taliban forces back "beyond where they were launching attacks from." Ultimately they defended the program as a mostly effective tool against insurgents and, perhaps just as important, a way to pull local tribal elders into the government:

"The elders organized people and the elders would also tell the people, 'Don't support the Taliban,' because they have a large influence network, but the elders aren't going to do that if they are going to get killed. So the most important thing about the **arbaki** [precursors to the ALP] was that they provide immediate protection to those elders."

Another officer claimed "people really like it and view it as a real security solution for most things; [it is perceived as] sons defending the village." He and his colleagues viewed ALP as a governance program because "essentially you empower an elder, you give him money and guns and people to fight with." Officers noted that the program works as long as elders stay on the side of the police and receive logistics, pay, and fuel from the national police. A development officer adds that ALP fills an important gap in security and discounts the concerns. "Armed militias – well, that sounds pretty nasty but that's what you've got out there anyhow so you

might as well get them organized and paying at least lip service to you. Loyalty is never for sale but it is for rent.”

But at least one of respondents remains unconvinced and has “absolutely no faith in the sustainability or the utility of the Afghan Local Police.” She argues that the problem is that the U.S. military, rather than the Afghan government, is selecting program winners and losers:

“We just don’t know these areas well enough. So the Special Forces will go in ... and they’ll talk to the locals. They’ll say, ‘We’re going to set up the ALP here.’ And the locals will say, ‘Yea!’ and then six months later, they’ll figure out the dynamics a little better and figure out that you’ve armed one tribe against another.”

She recounts that an **ALP** commander is “absolutely a warlord in training” and “right now, his loyalty is with the Special Forces. Who is his loyalty going to be to when we’re gone? Not the Ministry of Interior, I can pretty much guarantee you. ... It’s a short-term imperative that is a long-term headache.”

Sustainability

A handful of respondents registered some concern over the sustainability of the gains made by the Afghan Security Forces, specifically whether western countries would pony up the funds to keep them operating at current manpower and capability. One long-time field political officer went further, stating that in some ways we’ve set the ANSF up for a rocky transition after we pull most of our troops out in 2014:

“I remember what a brigade commander said just as he was leaving: that he felt that the U.S. military had turned the greatest mountain warriors in history into second-rate U.S. soldiers. ... [We are leaving] a military in Afghanistan that expects a level of supply that they will never be able to buy for themselves. The things that we’ve given them have been a gold standard and there’s this fantasy that after 10 years the Afghan military will be able to pay for itself ... Also, a lot of what we’ve done and the way that they are structured are too rigidly hierarchical ... and the type of battle rhythms, based on our own battle rhythms, I think they will dispense with that immediately as soon as they can get away with it.”

A political officer reasoned that such a continued investment to allow the Afghans to further develop their capacity and confidence is “good for us too. Because they are going to be the ones ... we are going to have to partner with to make sure that these [bad] guys that are still hunkered down in parts of Afghanistan can’t reach back to us and hurt us.

Question 4.A.5.

Analysis and Assessment of Sectors and Actors: Political Reconciliation and Reintegration

Participants were strongly negative about political reconciliation and reintegration efforts, more so than with any other element of the Civilian-Military Framework. Most respondents (12 of the 19 who replied) were highly critical of the efforts' effectiveness, while four were supporters and three offered mixed evaluations.

In one of the more nuanced and dispassionate evaluations of reintegration efforts, an officer in the east relates that 166 former fighters put down their weapons during his tenure, but he complained that the Afghan Peace and Reintegration Program (APRP) was hampered by a lack of capacity; problems providing security for reintegrees and their families; the provincial leadership's emphasis on public rather than private reintegration; and the slow payment process for former fighters. Other respondents who supported the program claimed it was a "good idea" undermined by poor funding. Respondents widely agreed that timely funding of the program was a major problem, especially when there is an expectation of payment and the provincial government "couldn't even buy these guys a cup of tea." An officer in the north said the program had been successful there, in no small part due to the attraction of a stipend, jobs, and training.

A few critics of reintegration cited the fear factor of both reintegrees and the program's practitioners. An officer explained that after getting some traction with a "really good director," the reintegration program in his district shut down after "somebody walked into their office and point blank shot one of the officers." The officer, not surprisingly, pointed out that the attack did not engender confidence in potential reintegrees, already fearful of retaliatory attacks from insurgent organizations. Another officer noted that his governor finally decided to forgo big public ceremonies that made reintegrees a target and turned to a more informal model to get participants to say, "Let's just agree to stop shooting each other."

Many of our respondents' criticisms were more about the design of the effort than the concept itself, leading to suggestions that would improve reintegree numbers:

- Make reintegration funds part of a governor's budget to facilitate prompt payments, rather than paying for a stand-alone program.
- Discontinue a requirement to enroll reintegrees in a biometric program.
- Maintain a monetary reward, but for the sake of smooth reintegration with neighbors, "Don't [publically] single out individuals. It is the same with refugees."
- Abandon the existing program and instead advise fighters to join the Afghan Local Police; "You'll get a paycheck and a gun to protect your village."

But many viewed reintegration as beyond repair. A USDA officer reflected a common vein of cynicism in many respondents, questioning, “What are we hoping for here? We are attempting to have this kumbaya moment with people that have killed someone’s family.” A development officer called it a “welfare program” that seasonal opportunists, not reformed fighters, took advantage of during winter when they “may be a little hungry or need fuel.” She said that although the program may be sounder in other regions, in her western district many reintegrees would simply re-integrate with criminal or insurgent elements if offered a better deal. She also said the program stirred resentment from locals. “They would say, ‘Why are you rewarding them? We’ve done nothing wrong, why do they get preferences?’” Another development officer thought the numbers belied the program’s failure, noting that a relatively peaceful district in the west had the highest numbers of reintegrees compared to conflict-ridden provinces in the south with low participation.

Some critics of reintegration pointed to legitimate grievances of insurgents against GIRoA or the Karzai Administration specifically. An officer who interviewed reintegrees in his province found that:

“The number one complaint that they have ... was specifically the abuses of the Afghan National Police on their communities. They would basically rob, rape, kill, destroy, sell girls, I mean they were all part of the narco network. They were like a mafia-like GIRoA system that was completely destroying their communities. ... Many of the local Afghan insurgencies joined the Taliban to fight the ANP because they had no other means to fight those that had the guns.”

However, the same officer said if bad experiences with GIRoA were the main driver of the insurgency, then good GIRoA experiences were also the leading cause for them to lay down their arms:

“One of their main reasons ... is you had a dynamic governor who was good on the stump and delivering on these programs. They came out of the cold to support their government because at the end of the day they are Afghans. They want to see good for the future of their country. And they want to participate in that process and they are tired of war. They want to ... go back to their family farms and have a normal life. It’s because of this emerging political system that is much more cohesive from the national to the district level that they actually have hope that their government will become strong enough to allow them to govern their own affairs without the influence of foreign nations.”

Another officer who is “guardedly optimistic” about the initiatives’ long-term success underscored that the effectiveness of the program really depended on the personalities of government officials implementing it. For example, he mentioned a provincial governor who brought in many reintegrees (“guys we aren’t fighting anymore”) and compared him to a

governor who was more disposed to shoot them and “just talks about how many Taliban he killed. It’s a fish story, right? There were 100 of us and we killed 500 Taliban. Then it turns into, there were 100 of us and we killed 700 Taliban. Then it turns into, ‘They had to get trucks to get the bodies out.’ ... So he’s not big into reconciliation.”

Some respondents with various views of current reconciliation and reintegration efforts nevertheless agreed that both efforts should get a boost once the U.S. is “out of the way and out of the picture.” A political officer argued that once the U.S. completely pulls out of combat operations at the end of 2014:

“One real issue of fighting will disappear, largely us. I mean, we see this quite a bit in the south where the ideological leadership says, ‘You need to keep fighting to wipe out the infidel.’ ... You already see this on the ground in many cases in the south and southwest. ‘Well they left, why are we still fighting?’ In many cases the question is, ‘why can’t we go home?’ It was the same question in 1989. This is where the provincial governors can really take advantage of fractures in the insurgent leadership.”

The same officer was less sanguine about the prospects for complete reconciliation after 2014, calling it a “pipe dream” because it requires making peace with three separate main insurgent power brokers. “Even if two of three quit, that doesn’t mean it will end the insurgency.”

Another officer from the east argued that reintegration and reconciliation efforts were operating at cross purposes with U.S.-supported raids of suspected Taliban hideouts:

“These older guys, they probably just want to go home and see their families; they are probably getting sick of this fight. They are not so young and testosterone-filled anymore. Those are the guys that we are killing with all this [raids] and they are also the prime targets of reintegration. And we are wiping them off the map. ... I was talking to an International Red Cross guy and he said, ‘You guys have killed off so much of the Taliban. The old Taliban kind of understood us and accepted us because they understood that we are neutral and we didn’t want to get involved in the fight and they would let us in. New Taliban don’t do that. They see westerners and they immediately want to kill us. Because we killed off the guys who are moderating as they get older ... we are taking out the people that we might be able to reach out to by other means.’”

Question 4.A.6.

Analysis and Assessment of Sectors and Actors: Development

As with other sector-specific questions, all opinions are not equal and many are not from development professionals. By the strongest majority of any sector question, 23 respondents out of 33 had generally positive comments regarding development progress in their areas of Afghanistan, with one generally negative comment and 9 mixed replies. Positive comments included frequent references to improvements in education, health, and infrastructure, the

success of which was often correlated with economic activity, e.g., a market that grew from 200 to 2,000 shops during an officer's tenure. Although there were criticisms about what could have been done better, there was widespread agreement that development efforts were worthwhile and led to concrete gains for the Afghan people.

But the numbers may not mean much. All the responses regarding status of Civilian-Military Framework elements are, of course, relative and subjective, but none more so than the development question. It became clear early in the interviews that this question leads to another question regarding the baseline against which one is measuring development progress, i.e. progress relative to what?

After providing a mixed assessment of development in his district, a DSTer pointed out that it is still "more than they've had in 30 or 40 years." Frankly, that may be an exaggeration given the history of Afghanistan and what westerners commonly perceive as benchmarks for modernization and *progress*. Throughout the history of PRTs in Afghanistan, civilian field hands have commonly scoffed at the moniker "Provincial Reconstruction Team," wondering if a better name wouldn't be "Provincial *Construction* Team." Indeed, although the USG is rebuilding some preexisting projects, such as Highway 1 and the Kajaki Dam, a great deal of our development effort is focused on providing Afghans with infrastructure, services, and training that they never had before, particularly in rural areas.

Some interviewees insinuated a bit of cultural imperialism woven into the fabric of the Civ-Mil Framework and particularly its development pillar. For example, an officer told us that with the impending completion of a water project, "People are going to think they are starting to become civilized." Later he said that power and energy "determines to me what is civilized and what is not." Occasionally, interviewees challenged assumptions that what makes us content will make Afghans content, namely economic progress and expansion of knowledge and rights.

The deeper question here is how our development activities are linked to our stated overarching goals to ensure Al Qaeda is defeated and Afghanistan is never again a launching pad for terrorists. Few respondents questioned the link, but it could profitably be explored in greater detail. Put another way, how does progress on some western concept of development ultimately make the kind of extremism that nurtures terrorism less attractive to Afghans? A political officer addressed the link directly: "education has an inverse effect on radicalization." A development officer addressed the linkage in a more nuanced way:

"The way to go is education. That changed my life and that will change everybody's life here. Half the people can't read or write, and they are taking their instruction from a few mullahs who are interpreting the Quran by themselves."

A political officer also found benefit of a sort in opening Afghans to the world beyond their villages, an opening made possible by a reliable source of electricity and good roads:

“We bring in some infrastructure and we bring some power in. The next thing you know, people have access to larger cities on a more frequent basis. So then you get a television, a satellite dish and the next thing you know, little Johnny is watching some Miami Vice or Egyptian MTV and he is like ‘Whoa, I like that.’ ... Here is secularism. Welcome to the 21st century.”

There was little discussion about whether western-style development and modernization was stabilizing or destabilizing, although there was a healthy amount of reflection among our sample about the utility of using western means or even westerners who lack sufficient development expertise. A development officer from the south observed that many donors and development workers in Afghanistan “have never worked in development ... so they look at things and try to do them the western way and it doesn’t work. “ There was widespread agreement that not everyone who came to Afghanistan to conduct development was qualified for the job, either technically or culturally. This criticism spanned agencies and participants were sometimes brutally critical of their own agencies.

Although many of our respondents assumed cause and effect between *development* and fewer insurgents or terrorists, many of them, particularly for this question and question 4.C., did argue that the USG plunged ahead with an arsenal of development projects without seriously understanding what Afghans actually thought and valued. They often accused overzealous civilian development officers and, especially, military officers of “not asking the Afghans what they wanted.”

It is also true, however, that many field officers who asked locals for project input sometimes received blank stares, with one field officer explaining this by opining, “They’ll always be happy with the stuff you build.” When asked whether this made Afghans “bad partners,” a development officer retorted:

“I think that’s looking at it from our perspective. I mean that’s what we’d like to think, but I think from their perspective it’s eat or be eaten. It’s like hungry, hungry hippo, the balls are going to go away, and you’ve got to grab what you can. ... When we leave, they’ll still be here. So they grab while they can. It makes going to work a little frustrating, but I don’t know what it’s like to have 10 family members die or children starving. So, it’s frustrating, but I don’t blame them.”

A political officer argued that it wasn’t just the Afghans who didn’t scrutinize poor project decisions. He reported being “worried” about a \$10 million dollar program for his district because, “Its long-term effect was very elusive.” He scaled it back to five or six million dollars,

but acknowledged it is difficult for officers “to turn down funds and say will you please take that away and put it somewhere else?”

A strong majority of respondents provided a “mixed bag” assessment of development writ large, with some development sectors, line ministries, or projects faring better and others faring worse. Respondents provided a broad array of development projects to illustrate their underlying takeaways on development, most of which will be saved for question 4.B. Here we will focus on overarching development lessons learned.

Much depended on leadership, a common theme across all the Civilian-Military Framework elements, to include Afghan government, U.S. or coalition, and local leadership. Although a common refrain was “some line ministers were better than others,” respondents felt development-related line ministers were generally good and improving. Some of our respondents were able to see the difference that leadership can make by witnessing one or two turnovers in Afghan local government positions. Corruption undermined development writ large and was widespread among GIRoA officials, another common theme across sectors.

Leadership criticisms on the development front were not limited to Afghans. A political officer criticized overall U.S. leadership, but particularly the U.S. development approach as being “half pregnant” and risk averse:

“This is that old thing. Leadership. You are going to lose people doing these very tough missions. Man the fuck up; make the call. ... This happens to every type of organization or firm across the world. So there is just a typical bureaucratic mentality of ‘oh I don’t want to be responsible.’ Thank God we didn’t think like that in Normandy. We’d still be sitting on the boat. We used to have this can-do kind of spirit, but now it’s an I-don’t-want-to-get-caught-spirit.”

According to this officer, USG development leadership should have identified that the contracting out of development was the “wrong tool for the job” and invested much earlier in Afghan capacity and government institutions. “We should’ve said, ‘We really need to get the Afghans to do it themselves. It puts them to work, it puts money in their system, and it takes energy out of the insurgency. So what if ten thousand Afghans have to build it?’” A development officer from the west made a similar point: “It should be information transfer, not material transfer. ... It’s the classic are you going to give them the fish or teach them how to fish? We’ve been giving them the fish.”

Another key variable, not surprisingly, was whether the public wanted a service. Services like education and health were universal winners, to varying degrees, across the regions where our officers served. “There are two things we never heard anyone complain about: education and health.” Other popular services, such as roads/transportation and agricultural education and

support also were cited intermittently as success stories. The takeaway here is that projects with organic local support tend to be the most successful and sustainable.

On the subject of sustainability, officers complained that prior civilian development project planning did not consider sufficiently the expertise required to transition efforts to the Afghan government; operations and maintenance costs; and actual, versus imagined, demand and resources available. With foreign assistance being reduced and increasingly funneled through the central Afghan government, and with the coalition field presence shrinking, a development officer lamented that “seeing things that were not carried on made me think that a little bit more foresight, more planning and engagement with the Afghans could have been done.” An example from the east:

“You can go out there and convince them to build a cold storage facility and that is awesome, that is fantastic! Except for the fact that they have no power. And then it ends up being a warehouse for someone’s crap. They keep their motorcycle parts in there or some shit. But boy howdy does it look great on an EER [evaluation] the number of cold storage facilities and express raisin drying facilities that have been built here.”

Cold storage projects like the one mentioned above were a clear loser with our respondents, but not all sustainability arguments are so cut and dry. One example, alternatively characterized as a failure or a potential success, is the promotion of cotton, wheat, and other crops as an alternative livelihood for would-be poppy growers. A few respondents argued these are not sustainable programs because the crops quickly saturate the local markets and do not have other markets to expand to (“They have all this stuff and can’t sell it”). Another officer, however, defended the programs and blamed setbacks on a lack of companion road, bridge, and infrastructure projects “to get alternative livelihood crops to new markets” so “they don’t have to rely on selling opium to terrorists.” The sustainability argument spiral then takes on a new layer, as another officer argued that road projects in the region would not be sustainable after coalition forces retrograde because the Transportation Ministry doesn’t even have the capacity to “fill potholes.”

A few respondents noted that some USAID officers were often at loggerheads with military or interagency colleagues, who also had development money, regarding the long-term sustainability of projects. A DSTer, who ultimately admits the USAID sustainability police were correct, shared a related anecdote:

“They were always asking us for pens and pencils and notebooks for the kids. Some people didn’t like me doing it because it was supposed to be coming from GIRoA but, come on, the kids need some pencils. When I would go out on patrol, I would hand out some pencils and then I’d see the same kid the next day asking for pencils. I would ask, “Are you selling these pencils?”

Another political officer with years of field experience chronicles his USAID conversion:

“Development should have been disengaged from stability operations. Our stability operations were a failure in the past four years. The District Stability Framework was an utter and a complete waste of time. ... It was to identify the sources of instability and then flood it with money. Someone referred to it as some sort of elaborate machinery structure where you pour all the problems of Afghanistan into the top, and at the bottom, boom, the perfect Twinkie. It was just a fiasco. I’ve become a big believer in what USAID was saying at the beginning, that development is different than stability operations. There’s certainly some value to stability operations, but to create real long-term stability, it needs long-term development projects that are not necessarily aligned to strategic [military] goals.”

Likewise, another common development theme in our interviews concerned differences in development outlook and approach across agencies, with the military, and with GIRoA. The most common manifestation of this dissonance was between the military’s get-it-done yesterday development timeline and USAID’s “development takes generations” approach. (A fuller look at department and agency performance in Afghanistan is addressed in question set 5.) A development officer said that development “takes more time than we have allowed here. You can’t make a tree grow faster by putting more money on it.” He added that USAID takes a more holistic approach to development in other countries, but in Afghanistan the approach is more “compartmentalized” and driven by turf wars between USAID offices.

As with other USG efforts, many respondents mentioned the failure of program planners in Kabul or Washington to allow for regional differences or flexibility. One example provided was the Afghanistan Social Outreach Program (ASOP). A political officer derided the program as “ludicrous” for “paying elders to come to shuras [meetings].” He argued that it should only have been rolled out “in provinces where there was never a shura structure, where you were trying to build it from the ground up. In Afghanistan, the north is not the same as the south. Whatever you did in the north you can’t do it in the south. I don’t think we ever got that concept.” Similarly, some field officers complained that program planners in Kabul and Washington did not take field feedback into account in planning, inexplicably cancelling or reinventing good programs, rather than simply extending them.

A development officer serving in the west went a step beyond advocating for field input to national programs, arguing that at least some funds be reserved for field staff discretion. She said her coalition colleagues had access to such funds so that when emergencies arose, such as an influx of refugees arrived at the province, they could be dealt with quickly. “They had a paradigm of development that I think was more efficient than ours. Their PRT and their aid agency actually had control of how to spend their money. All our money is already spent, so we

had no control on projects.” A political officer from the south working with another ISAF country joined her in observing that their coalition development colleagues were given more latitude to develop and implement projects. “They trusted their people,” as he put it.

Many respondents were optimistic about current and future efforts of GIRoA to take over development, and a handful cited examples of GIRoA doing a better job than the USG. A political officer postulated that corruption would decrease as Afghan provincial and district officials no longer solicit USG field units for project funding and are increasingly being “forced to argue for their priorities” with the central government. Another emphasized the importance of perception, saying that even if GIRoA development and service delivery execution isn’t perfect, just trying shows the Afghan people that “the Afghan government cares about them.”

Question 4.B.

Analysis and Assessment of Sectors and Actors:

Provide some illustrative examples of projects or initiatives that were effective and not effective

A wide variety of examples were elicited by this question. This summary focuses on projects or initiatives that were mentioned by at least three of our respondents. Please consult the consolidated question 4.B. report for a more complete rendering. Also note that there is some double counting in this section. For example, some respondents addressed broad categories of projects (e.g., health clinics or cash for work) while others addressed specific programs or funding mechanisms (e.g., RAMP-UP or CERP). We took some liberties to combine like-minded efforts—this is not a scientific poll. General development lessons learned are primarily covered in question 4.A.6.-development, while individual projects are covered here. However, we did identify a couple common themes to conclude this section.

The Good

By far the most positive comments (7) were registered for USAID’s **RAMP-UP** program. Respondents lauded RAMP-UP for building the capacity within local municipalities to collect revenue and support trash, water, electricity, and other services “that really instill confidence in local communities” and “helped people see the value in their mayor’s office and want to pay taxes.” A development officer said it increased monthly revenues in one city tenfold in three years. “It works because it is really low level, so not zillions of dollars,” according to a political officer from the south. Embedded teams working with local officials ensure training is “needs-based;” that officials who do the work “get the credit” through a communications plan; and provide local officials exposure to constituents. “We’ve brought district governors to places they’ve never been before.”

Three officers singled out USAID’s Community Cohesion Initiative (**CCI**) for praise, particularly efforts to promote wakils (“neighborhood representatives who process government documents

and act as GIRoA field agents”) and develop smaller projects with local input. Health clinic projects also received kudos from three respondents

The Bad

The Commander’s Emergency Response Program (**CERP**), a funding source for military officers in the field, was singled out by four officers as encouraging project inefficiency and was also negatively mentioned during other questions. The most positive comments came from a political officer in the south in defense of short-term stabilization projects in general and a development officer from the west, who noted that sometimes CERP and USAID projects complemented each other if field officers were sufficiently collaborative. Development officers in particular criticized CERP for funding unsustainable “photo-op” projects that were not sufficiently vetted either for merit or graft and sometimes created tensions in communities instead of stabilizing them. One rhetorically asked, “Do we have any proof that fewer soldiers were killed because thousands of sheep and goats were vaccinated or thousands of farmers have new grapevines?” Another opined that CERP had “devolved into something it wasn’t meant to be—the E was emergency ... [but] CERP’s now building \$7 million hospitals.” (Unfortunately, our sample does not include military officers, who could offer additional useful insights on CERP.)

The District Delivery Program (DDP), funded by USAID and designed to establish governance and development programs in secured areas, was strongly criticized by three officers as a “fiasco” and “disaster” (with no positive comments):

“We’re sitting there watching this unfold, and you can raise your hand, ‘I don’t think this is going to work in our district. Here’s the reason why.’ [They say] ‘That’s great and here’s what we’re going to do.’ So you dutifully go forward and ask for all this fucking information from people, only to raise their expectations, ... and the little shuras were set up, only to say, ‘Sorry, the program was cancelled due to some fuck-up in another district that really has nothing to do with you.’ So we lost a lot of credibility with this.”

Another USAID initiative, aimed at injecting USG funds into provincial governments’ Provincial Development Plans (PDPs), was similarly criticized, at least in execution, as formalizing unsustainable “wish lists” from local power brokers. However, a handful of officers from the south defended a British-led effort to likewise funnel funds into projects proposed by local representative bodies, now called SPAD (Strengthening Provincial Administration and Delivery), as successful because of its unique approach and popularity with locals.

Cold storage projects also received exclusively negative comments (3); however, these will be considered more broadly in a discussion of agriculture projects below and were substantively covered under the summary for question 4.A.6.-Development. Likewise, counternarcotics

efforts (which received three negative and two positive mentions) are discussed substantively in the question 4.A.2.-Rule of Law summary.

The Differences of Opinion

Great minds do not always think alike, and so it was with the decidedly mixed feedback on the following USG projects or initiatives in Afghanistan. There was an even split of respondents both for and against counternarcotics projects and cash-for-work projects. A development officer said cash-for-work projects didn't teach Afghans "things that they didn't already know how to do," circumvented the Afghan Department of Public Works, and did not generate "any allegiance." A political officer was more nuanced, stating cash-for-work had utility "five or six months after you clear the area," but after that "was not as effective." Alternately, a development officer defended some of the cash-for-work projects as accomplishing "remarkable work," citing refurbished health clinics and markets. Another development officer said in his area cash-for-work "absolutely achieved its goal of employing people at a critical time and putting money in their pockets so they did not need to go and get 50 bucks for laying an IED instead."

People were likewise divided on the effectiveness of agricultural projects. USDA training and demonstration farm projects aimed at training farmers received high marks from four officers for "bringing something that the Afghans wanted to hear about." Officers said Afghans could be blasé about "governance and rule of law, but when we talked about cleaning seeds and castrating goats or whatever The Afghans couldn't get enough of it." On the other hand, agricultural infrastructure projects such as cold storage facilities, a "large scale" dairy farm, a chicken farm, and a \$500,000 demonstration farm were blasted by participants as being unsustainable, eventually falling into disrepair and turning into "high-cost goat pens."

Quick Response Funds (QRF), a State Department small grants program designed for field officers to fill development gaps in the provinces, received a mixed grade. An officer in the south explained that the grant effectiveness was by definition highly variable due to the broad range of projects and implementers. Of the two QRF projects he proposed, a teacher training program was a success but a literacy project for a district community council fell apart because:

"When the DCC members saw that the teachers were getting fed and given refreshments, they said, 'Well, why aren't we getting these things?' ... I explained to them how much this free literacy program was worth—this free knowledge, being able to read, to be examples to the people in their village—think of the things you could do with that. But it was, 'Every day, I could be losing money, I could be selling sheep, my opportunity costs...'"

Common Themes: Is We Learning and Less is More

Respondents described most failed projects as the vestige of the work of past regional platforms, PRTs, and DSTs — not current efforts. That may indicate some improvement in incorporating best practices and lessons learned, or it may be merely self-serving. At best, we appear to have learned something. On the other hand, many officers described a method of trial and error when evaluating which development projects worked and which did not (“largely hit or miss”) that indicates that perhaps we didn’t learn enough from prior efforts or that national programs didn’t work the same in different areas or both. It is a little dismaying that this kind of “see what sticks” approach appears to be applied so late in our Afghan operations. Either the field is not learning how to mitigate the continuity challenges of fighting successive “one-year wars” or leadership is ignoring their advice.

Another explanation is that different USG departments are learning different lessons and criticizing the “other’s” projects. The following statement from a political officer illustrates both the propensity to criticize initiatives from other departments and the importance of learning from prior efforts:

“[A provincial governor approached a Special Operations commander] and said, ‘Hey, there’s this anti-Taliban movement in this district and if you build this road ... it will really have a good effect.’ If it sounds like I’m dripping with sarcasm, it’s because I am. So they put together a CERP package for something like \$6 million. Both State and USAID said the road is a bad idea. It will waste a lot of money and there’s been no work to see if this is what the people want. ... When one of the unit commanders showed up one day and said we’ve got to build a damn road from Kunar to Nuristan and we were like ‘no we don’t.’ And they were like, ‘Yeah we do, because that’s where Al Qaeda lives. And there’s agencies that can go up there and meet sources and if we don’t do this you have to think about 9-11,’ literally compared it to 9-11 if we failed to build this road. ... So we asked if they had looked up if anyone had ever tried to build this road. And they were ‘durp, what?’ Turns out it would have been the fourth attempt for the U.S. to build that road. U.S. military tried twice. Couldn’t do it. USAID tried. Couldn’t do it. ... It’s like trying to blast your way through the Rockies in Colorado in three months, with people shooting at you by the way. ... The logic was it would have facilitated a good [performance] evaluation.”

Respondents also identified a preference for simpler, lower-cost projects that target the capacity of Afghans rather than big infrastructure projects: more RAMP-UPs, fewer airports, industrial parks, and dams. The trend was clear: size matters, and less is more. To illustrate, take the example of agriculture projects, for which four respondents were favorably disposed and seven were negatively disposed. Digging down a bit, the favorable examples focused on training farmers and the negative examples included a menagerie of big ticket items: cold

storage (3), a “large scale” dairy farm, and a chicken farm. As one development officer put it, “it doesn’t take that much money to train people to do things, whereas if you are building a bridge I am not sure if it is worth \$5 million.” Another development officer stressed “information transfer — ‘Here’s a business plan, how you run a business.’ Not just, ‘Here’s a chunk of money.’” Even larger projects that are short-term successes should be avoided if they can’t be sustained. For example, a political officer in the south deemed a generator project to provide electricity to many Kandaharis as “a great short-term solution [that required donor assistance] that did not permit any sort of long-term solution.”

Some of our respondents went even further and provided examples of no-cost projects as effective examples, such as PRT personnel directly working with provincial and district officials to decipher the Afghan budgeting process and obtain development funds. Another officer boosted enrollment at a girl’s school by 600, according the school’s principle, by working with his military colleagues to obtain 365 surplus security walls and then convince the mayor to find the trucks and drivers to move them. The broader lesson is that some field officers were making progress on USG objectives without formal national programs, guidance from above, or spending an Afghani.

However, as this officer from the north recounts, initiatives to engineer solutions from the field don’t always end in success. After formidable coordinating efforts among German and U.S. militaries and a local NGO to donate and move military bathroom structures to a girl’s school, where the students were getting sick due to an open sewer, the officer found the school’s chancellor reneged on their “gentlemen’s agreement” to have the university pump the septic tanks. Instead, “He made a big statement publicly about how the U.S. government had let him down because we only did a half-ass job on these bathrooms. We had installed new generators ... for the hot water in the showers. ... So we did all this rewiring, all this stuff and then he can’t figure out how to pump the sewers. ... So get it in writing.”

For the final word on our development narrative, we turn to a political officer, who, while making the point that USG effort should build capacity rather than “stuff,” also emphasized that Afghans need to change their mindset with regard to planning:

“You look at this, for thirty-five years they’ve lived in isolation, violence, war, lawlessness, so it’s a society that has never planned long-term because the average person never knew that they were going to be alive next week, let alone planning for next year, five years or ten years down the road. They have a lot to overcome.”

Question 4.C.**Analysis and Assessment of Sectors and Actors:**

How effective was the Taliban and what factors contributed to its strength?

Our respondents provided a wide variety of explanations for the Taliban's resiliency and thoughts about its future. A few commented that it was the first time anyone had asked them to "analyze the enemy." The most frequently mentioned factors that contributed to Taliban strength were negative aspects of GIRoA (7), coercion/fear (7), foreign fighters (6), and the Taliban's "much better" public messaging (6).

Many officers commented on "poor GIRoA performance" or GIRoA corruption as a major source of Taliban strength. This is a well-known and well-worn narrative. However, a handful of officers went beyond that relatively benign description of GIRoA officials simply not doing enough or enriching themselves with petty bribes and described more actively predatory behavior. A DSTer said that in his district "The police went overboard. They were shooting people, hurting people, stealing from people." The result of such behavior, which the DSTer conceded was exceptionally bad, was to move support of the elders to the Taliban who would "start allowing more Talibs to come" into the district. Another officer who served in the same contested area, and also pointed out several Taliban cases of preying on the public, provided the following extreme example of GIRoA actively growing the Taliban:

"In my district, it was revenge against the police and the government. All that egregious behavior in the first six or seven years of the Karzai regime really upset people. I'll give one example: the [Taliban commander] who orchestrated the suicide attacks against that police chief ... used to be in the same patronage network as the police chief, as was the senator; they were all on the same team 15-20 years ago. That current Taliban commander ended up switching sides [to the Taliban] because of the behavior of the district governor, who was the senator's brother. ... That particular [district] governor was known in the Karzai era for raping his enemies. He raped this particular Taliban commander and he raped another Taliban commander. Enough people were saying this, that even if it isn't true, the perception is out there that it is true. Revenge would be the biggest reason for his joining the Taliban. He was competing. ... GIRoA and police drove a lot of people to the Taliban."

On the coercion front, respondents said the Taliban "just killed people" and "extorted the shit out the them" to great effect, leveraging fear even in places they were not particularly active in. A political officer in the south recounted the stark choice given to Afghan farmers in his area: "If you don't plant your poppy they will straight out shoot you. That's going to happen. So what do we offer?" He said the Taliban described USG officers as "not even Muslims, they are like the Soviets" and made planting and harvesting poppy for the Taliban a hard offer to refuse.

A DSTer explains the advantage violence provides the Taliban when most Afghans are more “practical” than ideological:

“A lot of the people thought the Talibs were a better option for them. Pro-Taliban? Most people would say it’s not ideological. Number one, they say, ‘The Taliban own my village. The security bubble has collapsed. How can I be anti-Taliban? They are here in the village. ... So of course I have to work with them. I have to work with both sides, that’s just the way it is.’”

A USDA officer in the east explained that the Taliban fear factor not only frustrated local buy-in to USG efforts in the provinces, but made it difficult to recruit and maintain staff because “they could be stopped at any given point along the way [at checkpoints] and get shot along the side of the road.”

A number of our respondents cited USG forces, simply by being USG forces, as feeding Taliban recruiting and enabling their most effective talking point: the enemy are infidels. A senior ranking field officer explained the dynamic thusly:

“The jihad is against foreign fighters – it’s not against Afghans. ... We’re foreigners; we’re not Muslims. The calculation changes when it’s an Afghan unit that goes into these places. And they may go in with the same objective that we had but they’re Afghans; they’re brother Muslims. And the people opposing them have to decide if they want to kill other Muslims. Generally speaking, they have not been [willing to]. We’ve heard that from Afghans who are reintegrating. They get asked why they are coming off the battlefield, and the answer is that they didn’t sign up to shoot other Muslims.”

A DSTer reported Taliban commanders berating their troops in radio intercepts for failing to fight because sub-commanders argued “‘there weren’t any infidels left. I’m not fighting the ANA.’ ... So the commander would have to come up with another reason to fight, usually monetary.”

The six officers who opined on the IO [information operations] war were as complimentary about the Taliban’s public relations savvy as they were critical of the USG’s messaging, which they found slow, confused, and sometimes non-existent. “There’s a kaboom, something bad happens. They are putting their own spin on it long before we make a statement.” A development officer describes Taliban messaging as selling “themselves as honest, decisive, and Islamic” while denouncing GIRoA as “ineffective, corrupt” and cronies of infidel foreigners. A specific example from a political officer in the south:

“ISAF sent tanks up into the district as part of our effort to support local security when we said we weren’t going to engage. And the Taliban basically spun that. ‘Here are the invaders again, they said they weren’t going to be doing this and here they are riding through your fields, destroying your compounds,’ even though we weren’t, ‘conducting airstrikes on compounds,’ even though we weren’t, ‘spraying your fields with

chemicals,’ even though we weren’t. But people believed it.”

Second tier answers to the question of Taliban strength included its effective dispensations of justice; foreign assistance (especially from Pakistan); paying fighters both in cash and land; narcotics profiteering; exploitation of tribal fissures; and perception of religious inspiration. A handful of respondents explained that the appeal of the Taliban is sometimes based on simple lack of GIROA presence. One officer said that there’s no downside to remote, conservative villages allowing, if not supporting, a Taliban presence. He reasoned that there are few if any opportunity costs from lost GIROA services and “if someone says there will be no more music or dancing, you’re really not taking away anything that was there before.”

Of those participants who commented on the overall trend of Taliban strength, there was general agreement that the movement was weakening, despite all the sources of Taliban resiliency listed above and the media narrative that the Taliban is raising up as foreign forces withdraw. Respondents cited the Taliban’s inability to provide any services beyond swift justice; backlash from its heavy-handed violence; “disarray” following a series of “serious hits” militarily; and fumbling its information operations advantage by overstepping its mandate. “They were losing the IO [information operations] campaign. They go and bomb a school and people go, ‘Why did you do that? We wanted that school.’” A political officer from the south reasoned that the Taliban will also suffer financially as extortion for safe passage and from development projects decline commensurate with the retrograde of foreign forces and development funds.

Many participants challenged the implication in the question that the Taliban are monolithic and noted a misapplication of the label such that it becomes a synonym for “bad guy.” There was a common perception that “criminal opportunists” were often misidentified as Taliban, and that even among the self-professed Taliban there were sharp distinctions between true believers and those along for the ride. A development officer in the west tried to explain it in terms an American might understand: “In terms of ideology, no we didn’t see a lot of that. ... It’s like you have the die-hard Catholics and people that only go [to Mass] on Christmas. So which one are you?”

A handful proposed that “dumbing down” the discourse about anti-government elements in Afghanistan was not only incorrect, but also worked against U.S. interests:

“One of the fundamental problems we have done, as a coalition, as a government, is we have categorized the insurgency as ‘the Taliban.’ ... As a result we have created this giant boogie man. ... In terms of our own internal deliberations, our intelligence, our public discourse, we have created real problems and given them much more political power than they actually deserve. ... You deal with them differently. There are different ways of politically engaging with them, of kinetically engaging with them. ...

And I've seen that here. You deal with **HIG**, different than you deal with Taliban, different than you deal with **Haqqani**, different than you deal with criminal elements, different if they are based up north."

Although field officers were generally highly critical of the Taliban for many of the reasons outlined above, there was an undercurrent of sympathy for some of the Taliban's complaints against GIRoA, particularly corruption. One officer went further, expressing his belief that GIRoA would benefit from including the Taliban in government to rein in its worst practices and hoped that reconciliation could facilitate such an outcome. Another officer noted that it is not just GIRoA defects that drive Afghans to support the Taliban, but also familiarity: Taliban are usually relatives, locals, fellow Afghans and Muslims. "These are not men from Mars." The implication being that coalition forces are alien by contrast. Often GIRoA officials are not from the areas they govern, and coalition forces are by definition outsiders, putting them both at a distinct disadvantage, especially in areas where the Taliban is the home team.

Question 4.D.

Analysis and Assessment of Sectors and Actors:

Do you think GIRoA will survive the transition?

Although the decidedly negative comments (1) were overshadowed by mixed (12) and positive comments (17), it should be noted that only about a third of the 17 respondents who said GIRoA would survive the transition were unequivocal. The rest have "yes but" answers similar in criticisms to many of the more mixed accounts caveating their generally positive assessments that GIRoA will survive. Six respondents did not comment directly on the question.

The lone naysayer offered little speculation on what would replace a central government whose writ extended to all regions of the country beyond saying, "We will see an Afghan north and Afghan south being created, just like Sudan." A handful of other respondents were concerned about backsliding on women's rights, increases in violence, brain drain, and other negatives associated with an advent of the Taliban, but no one else opined the GIRoA would outright fail.

Within the "yes but" group, seven respondents stressed that funding, both from the international community and from Kabul to the provinces and districts, was a key to GIRoA survival. A few officers stressed continued international support of ANSF and international support of ministries in the provinces lest they "die on the vine." A political officer commented that the central government will need to improve pushing funds and projects to district and provincial governments and suggested Kabul give up some authority over budgets if it cannot do so efficiently.

Other participants from the "yes but" school of thought said GIRoA's future hinged on a successful transfer of power in 2014, which some described bluntly as "whether Karzai remains

or not.” Respondents also said GIRoA will need to increase bureaucratic meritocracy at the expense of nepotism and corruption: “I’ve come to appreciate our own bureaucracy back home because really you need that mature bureaucracy and civil servants running these ministries and offices so that you can keep ... running smoothly from one administration to the next.”

Another sub-group of GIRoA optimists nevertheless stated the Taliban “won’t go away” and may actually increase in influence following the withdrawal of international troops from combat by the end of 2014. Most envisioned GIRoA controlling most of the country and all the major cities, but with tenuous control of rural areas that are already contentious. A political officer assigned to the south was particularly negative in this regard:

“I think GIRoA here in Kabul will, but I don’t think GIRoA will survive in the district. I don’t think it will survive in the province, outside of the capital. I think they are basically going to have islands of GIRoA in the south but the outlying areas will be run by the Taliban. It is interesting, I asked the district governor, we were talking about the upcoming elections and I said, ‘Well, who do you think the people down here are going to vote for?’ He laughed and he said, ‘Mohammed Omar.’ I didn’t recognize the name and he says, ‘It’s Mullah Omar, that is who they are going to vote for, the head of the Taliban. ... The marines are the strongest tribe. ... When you guys go, I’m gone.’”

A larger number of respondents discounted such dire accounts, however, arguing that transition had already occurred in their areas with few ill effects. A development officer from the west said his district was run by the Afghans “all along” during his tenure. Another development officer shared his observations from the PRT/DST drawdown in 2013 :

“I remember being in charge of closing all the PRTs and DSTs in southern Afghanistan. I’ve had my colleague civilians call me, send me e-mails, saying sir, this is the worst strategy ever, the Afghans are going to fall on the wayside when I leave, ... they need me here, so on and so forth. We heard a lot of things like that. So we closed everything down. We closed all the PRTs. We had 14 different locations in southern Afghanistan, now we are down to one in Kandahar. ... In some cases the district governor said, ‘I used to have your guys here five times a day.’ What are the DST members doing visiting the district governor five times a day? ... The transition for us has been completed in southern Afghanistan. I think they have done a great job. I have visited every district from the province ... [and] talked to the district governors, they are still there. They are very competent. They don’t move at our pace, at the western pace, ... but at the end of the day it’s not about us. It is not how we should grade them. ... I am a firm believer that the Afghans are better off once we are all out of the field, ... but if you ask the Americans they will say, ‘Oh my God, us leaving will be the worst thing ever,’ and it is really not.”

A DSTer agreed, saying GIRoA wouldn't "be able to sustain everything" PRTs, DSTs, and coalition military had done, but it would be able to maintain enough to be a "more attractive option than the Taliban."

At least four respondents argued that GIRoA has "enough tools to survive." A political officer added "if it wants to," postulating that GIRoA needs to show the political will to employ those tools which the USG, "as we're proving, doesn't really have an impact on." The key positive indicators for GIRoA sustainability they referred to were a combination of ANSF success, improving civil society, moneyed interests in GIRoA success, and grass roots support, especially by youth, for a process "to getting through this administration on to the next one."

We'll end this segment with an officer who arrives at his optimism after considering all the options:

"I think people look at the Taliban and look in the wrong direction. In the future there are three scenarios that are in some degree likely to play out and the least likely is the Taliban taking back over. I don't think they have the capacity, abilities, or people. There's not 30,000 Taliban on the border ... waiting to storm into Kabul. There just isn't. The Taliban are an insurgency now, but they are not in an insurgency that can win. So as long as the ANSF remain stable and we continue to fund the ANSF they just cannot do it. ... There's 350,000 ANSF. ... The two more likely options are that ... the country descends into some kind of factionalism and regional power brokers take hold and establish fiefdoms. And that leads to some kind of civil warish type thing. Option one is that a lot of that happens but the [future] President of Afghanistan is adept enough, as the current president is, at playing those factions off [each other] and keeping them under control and this kind of rambling wreck continues off into the future and there's some stability and therefore some development and over time people will maintain their affiliations, but the Kalashnikovs will be rusting in the garages. ... If you look at the three most likely candidates to win, all three are competent and capable. ... And slowly the country develops. That's most likely."

Question 4.E.1.**Analysis and Assessment of Sectors and Actors: ISAF**

Respondents generally ranked their military colleagues in the field highly, but were more critical of higher-level military commands and in particular ISAF in Kabul (“out of touch, unrealistic”). There was also a difference between respondent views of the military’s force protection capabilities, training of Afghan security forces, and establishment of security “bubbles,” which were universally highly regarded among our sample, and military efforts in the development and diplomacy aspects of **COIN**.

A few outliers complimented the military regarding diplomacy and development efforts, but typically in the context that military supported rather than competed with civilian efforts:

“They pretty much came in and said, ‘You guys are the experts—we will do whatever you want us to do.’ In fact, it got to the point where the brigade commander down there said, ‘I am not doing any **CERP** unless the State Department approves it.’ When I say that, it was combined [State and USAID]. We were so integrated in the provincial capital; we are just one big happy family.”

However, many participants did not have the “happy family” experience and were subject to the darker side of the personality-based interagency model. Development experts in particular complained that the military was fixated on short-term projects that produced reportable metrics, often at the expense of long-term development and in conflict with established doctrine:

“The second [military] team [rotated into the province] was kind of a struggle, we go back to personality driven [models]. There was a young women, specialist [E4], 21 years old. [I explained] the Afghans needed to be leading this [particular] development effort. I remember her turning to me and saying, ‘I’m CA [Civil Affairs], I’ve been trained in development, I’m an expert.’ ... This was also a young woman who thought she had the world’s greatest relationships with Afghans and would go up to a district governor with whom she thought she had a very positive relationship with and start doing a rather lewd dance and telling him she’s going to do the bad boogie with him. Thank you. You just set gender back. Now he looks at American woman and it reinforces this concept of America.”

A USDA officer was blunter, “The military should not be players in the development field. ... They know how to point guns and that’s all.”

On the diplomacy front, political officers recounted anecdotes of reeling in overzealous military commanders trying to “make decisions about [Afghan] politics.” A DSTer lamented that the number of high-ranking military in Afghanistan was like having “too many cooks in the kitchen,” which sometimes meant “they wanted to do a little bit too much.” A political officer with

multiple Afghanistan tours originally saw some utility in the military's proclivity to advocate for and against GIRoA leadership appointments, but changed his mind after concluding that the military was typically not well-versed enough in local Afghan politics to be meddling in it:

"At the provincial government, I felt in one province that we made a compact with the governor that if you do what we want, then we're going to let you do whatever you want to do. ... The local brigade commanders would tell the governor, 'Hey, get rid of poppy in the province. We [want] the province to be a poppy-free zone.' The governor made the very reasonable deduction that I don't really get that much money out of poppy, because I get most of my money through extortion [at a border crossing]. ... The military was complicit with that, as long as they got their poppy-free province. So what ... [this governor] was able to do was take so much money from the border crossing that he could pay off the poppy farmers, which was hardly a solution. ...

That was a very sobering lesson that I learned. ... Two years ago, there was still a lot of talk in embassy and military circles about positive and negative influencers, who should be identified for removal, and I now agree very much with the ambassador at the time who said that Afghan problems have to be solved in an Afghan way. I was quite happy that we moved away from that [earlier] strategy, having found that it didn't really accomplish the goals that we wanted and then created several other unintended consequences."

A development officer said while he was "always very impressed by my ISAF military colleagues," they sometimes "drove each other nuts" regarding "what they think their mission is." He argued that often his military colleagues would receive poor or unclear guidance, for example the decision of International Joint Command leadership to "take control of the non-security ministries because these civilians are not going fast enough for my taste. That's not his mission. And people will execute those ill-advised orders to the best of their ability."

Respondents also provided examples of positive collaboration with the military on governance and security issues. An officer working at a DST in the south was highly complementary of the Marines, who she credits for learning from mistakes in Iraq and learning about the importance of "understanding human terrain, the tribal dynamics." She added that the military did a great deal of effective mentoring of the police and ANA, which resulted in "more competent" units that have "cut down with shenanigans and hoarding and corruption." Another officer commented that some civilians didn't "understand or appreciate" the dangers that military force protectors accepted to escort civilian missions. He argued that civilians should have been more selective about lobbying for out-of-the-wire trips.

Question 4.E.2.**Analysis and Assessment of Sectors and Actors: State Department**

Respondent assessments of the State Department ranged from “pretty good” to “failing,” or as a former PRTER put it, “It does a lot of things good and it certainly gives critics enough ammunition to take quite a few little hits.”

Assessments appeared to vary wildly based on personal experience. For example, some officers blasted leadership at both the field and Embassy level. This DSTer said leadership improved over time, but was lacking when he arrived:

“There really wasn’t any guidance. So I went to the field having no idea what was expected of me, [what] my mission was. When I got here, I thought I was going to Zabul. That’s what my employment notification was. So I sat down in HR; they said ... ‘No you’re not; you’re going to another province.’ ‘OK, I’m glad I’ve been researching Zabul and I trained with the Zabul team at Muscatatuck.’ ... Nobody gave me any examples of the writing I was supposed to be doing, or what writing.”

On the other hand:

“I think State in the field did well because I was given very clear guidance from kind of the lead senior political officer of the PRT and ... the RP [Regional Platform] about what they wanted ... and then we had a conversation about what I was going to do. ... So that was very helpful, being very clear about what the reporting requirements were, what my mentoring and influencing requirements were, and sticking to that plan.”

Respondents tended to conflate the State Department with the Embassy, which is not surprising, but it often seemed that criticisms were directed more at “big Kabul” than the State Department per se. Some participants felt the Embassy was “clueless” about what was going on in the provinces and another described feeling like “an exotic bird” when visiting Kabul because “no one seemed to be aware of what was going on” in his province or terribly interested in finding out. A development officer railed about “wildly misguided micro-management and strong-arming of projects ... for the reasons of getting results fast,” which seemed more directly about USAID and the military. The same officer and many others were highly critical of “leadership and supervision in the platforms and DSTs [and, presumably, PRTs] and letting them, for better or worse, become kingdoms that were at the whim of the leadership there.” While he acknowledged that model empowered “some amazing, competent people,” it did the same for “some that never should have been here.”

Indeed, probably the most criticism was directed at State’s personnel system and practices. A State officer complained that the organization valued “grade and hierarchy” more than competency when selecting its field representatives. A USDA officer observed that State “doesn’t develop their people very well. They get someone in and they might be great or not

good at all.” Another USDA officer complained that for many of the jobs at the peak of the civilian surge, State was “filling spots” with officers who had no experience with development or local government. “Knowing the last four centuries of Asian art and culture and passing a Foreign Service exam does not qualify you for mentoring local governments.” A political officer similarly stated that, “State proved [in Afghanistan] they are really not set up for this sort of large stability operation,” pointing to the Department’s reliance on contractors. Although he conceded some contractors “were surpassing what an FSO could provide,” on the whole he found them limited by a lack of understanding of the interagency, diplomacy writ large, local culture or history, and basic skill sets and knowledge an FSO would bring, like “not promising visas to locals.”

Some respondents were as critical about how State handles its personnel after they arrive as how they are selected. At least six respondents bemoaned State’s perceived inability to pull out incompetent officers, who were, for example, “falling asleep at meetings” with commanding generals and provincial governors. A DSTer recounts that one of her field bosses would visit her platform without good reason, “put people needlessly at risk,” and provided “nonsensical bullshit” briefings:

“No one came out of it understanding what our State Department leadership wanted us to do. Thank God he had an underling who had some experience in this place and said, ‘OK, forget everything he just said. Go out and talk to the tribal leaders and get them on board.’ OK, I got it; that I can deal with that. It was embarrassing.”

Although lack of continuity and high turnover (“It’s Groundhog Day”) were common criticisms of all USG field agencies, one officer said it was particularly acute for State because of its key role mentoring high-level officials and “nation building.” At least three officers mentioned State’s failure to engage in lessons learned, particularly compared to the military:

“Any big institution is going to naturally do some things that are goofy. The key is to do reviews like this one and then listen to them. If you look at military units that are successful, one of the keys is that after anything that had any significance, they dissect the shit out of it. They look at it frontward, backward and sideways and they try to figure out what they did well and what they didn’t do well. Then they adapt. The only reason I agreed to do this is because this [interview] is the way a large organization will improve. Hopefully somebody will look at this.”

A DSTer commented that “risk aversion has kind of crippled us” and that “if you don’t want them [civilian field officers] to risk their lives, then don’t send them over here.” This was a common theme found throughout our interviews, but perhaps particularly targeted at the State Department because of the decision making role played by its Regional Security Office (RSO) in setting security policy.

With a criticism very specific to the State Department, A DSTer asserted that sometimes State officers did a poor job communicating their value to the military or thinking of [the military] beyond a force protection role. She recounts a Marine telling her the State representative at his platform only “asks questions and writes reports. He doesn’t provide us anything.” She called that situation a missed opportunity. “They want to understand and they want you to help them understand what the hell is going on. Why are they trying to kill you? Why is that guy trying to kill that guy? That’s the continuity that we can provide.”

Many participants lauded the “great work” of State Department officers and lamented that the USG would lose a great deal of its eyes and ears in Afghanistan outside of Kabul as the field presence drew down. Another worried that State’s mentoring and governance efforts would be missed: “It’s going to be challenging post 2014 because there are no longer any PRTs or DSTs. So what is America’s reach going to be for the State Department to affect change?”

Question 4.E.3.

Analysis and Assessment of Sectors and Actors: USAID

Although some officers provided negative assessments of what USAID has been able to accomplish with “a lot of money,” many officers complimented USAID officers for bringing the development piece of the effort into focus for military and political officers in the field and assessed that USAID did “well” under the circumstances, including congressional restrictions on project development and sometimes challenging Afghan interlocutors. “If they had a more legitimate, less corrupt partner to deal with, I think they could’ve even done a lot more.” Respondents also revisited themes that USAID should have focused on smaller capacity building projects earlier on, which is covered at length in sections 4.A.6 and 4.B.

A few officers lamented a lack of USAID programming in their locations, where USAID representatives took on a strictly advisory role, as a waste of talent: “He could have been very effective.” Some respondents cited an overreliance on third-party implementing partners. Many participants thought USAID should have delegated more decision-making to the field:

“I guess that’s an institutional choice and that’s how they operate but ... you can’t wait for some COTR [Contract Officer's Technical Representative] up in Kabul to make a decision on something. If a project is wasting money or isn’t doing it, you need to delegate authority to your **FSL** [Foreign Service Limited] who you’ve placed in harm’s way to say, ‘No, contractor or implementing partner, you are doing it wrong and stop this because you aren’t helping anybody.’”

A political officer agreed that USAID in Kabul and Washington is “guilty” of not listening to its field representatives, but broadened the criticism to include USAID at all levels not asking the Afghans what they want. “Someone that is very smart says, ‘Oh well this worked in Africa 20 years ago so let’s get it funded ... and it’s cookie cutter.’”

Like the State Department, USAID was criticized for sending unprepared, unqualified people to fill billets during the civilian surge, or the “first 300 callers” as a development officer put it. He added that some focused “discussion about what is our mission, what is our strategy for this area” could have mitigated the lack of training, but that the “overriding directives” they received were insufficient.

Question 4.E.4.

Analysis and Assessment of Sectors and Actors:

Other USG Agencies

USDA was the most commented on of the remaining agencies represented in the field. Although there were some outliers who argued that USDA “has no point in being out here,” most respondents were complementary about USDA’s work in the field as “selling something the Afghans wanted.” Some made the point that because agriculture is still the overwhelming economic engine in Afghanistan, more attention should have been given to USDA. However, not everyone in our sample agreed that more would have been better:

“There were so many people out here working on agriculture it was embarrassing. The agriculture representative for the province had seven mentors. How is that efficient or effective at all with all of them saying, ‘Well I’m the lead for this.’ ‘Well I have the most money [USAID].’ ‘Well I’m with the military [Agribusiness Development Teams].’ ‘Well I’m the most experienced [USDA].’ Come on guys, get together on this.”

Another officer countered this perception, saying his USDA representative leveraged the other agriculture players in his province to positive effect.

Comments regarding the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR) were mixed. Some officers underscored its importance “for U.S. taxpayers to know their tax money is being used properly and achieving the desired goals.” However, most of the participants who commented on SIGAR criticized it for failing to put issues in context. A development officer opined that SIGAR is missing an opportunity to frame issues “in a way that the public is going to understand.” A political officer questioned how constructive SIGAR was by allegedly focusing on one-off examples of waste, but failing to identify best practices. “We know what doesn’t work. What should we be replicating?” He lamented that “if SIGAR’s main purpose is to demoralize anyone who is in the field, then they’ve done a good job. Even if it’s not specifically up here [in this province], if you are following the news, which a lot of people do up here, especially internationals, but Afghans as well, and every day you read about a new failed project that SIGAR is going after, you start to wonder what we are doing here and what is the point.” He argued that SIGAR was selectively targeting small parts of larger efforts to inaccurately color them as wasteful, such as criticizing fuel theft related to Border Management Task Force efforts but failing to “talk to them about all the good things they are doing.” (Another officer characterized BMTF representatives as “lone rangers” who were highly successful working with the Afghan Border Police.) A different respondent felt SIGAR was in

need of an audit itself for “\$150,000 in special flight requests, or [requiring] hundreds of man-hours to answer their questions and plan their visits.”

Some officers mentioned rule-of-law advisors, who are already covered in some detail in sections 4.A.2. No other agency or office was widely discussed.

Question 4.E.5.

Analysis and Assessment of Sectors and Actors: Interpreters

Respondents were mainly complimentary regarding their interpreters in the field: “These guys are my heroes. They helped me out a lot, they taught me a lot.” A political officer recounted a conversation he had with an interpreter who had been shot three times while working for the PRT. When he asked the interpreter why he did it, the interpreter replied, “I am doing this job to stay here and help build my country.” Such valor is not without risk. A political officer who served in the south said some have been killed and “many” of them receive death threats along the margins of PRT work, for example after official meetings. “A Talib will approach them and say, ‘I know where you live in Kabul and I’m going to kill you and your family.’”

There were some examples of poor translations. Sometimes GIRoA officials who knew some English had to stop the conversations to “tell you that your translator is pretty bad.” One officer described hoping that 50 percent of what he said was understandable. A political officer advised that field officers also need to work with their interpreters and that sometimes they put interpreters in impossible situations:

“I’ve heard some real horror stories. ... Like one guy, I heard he went into this **DCC** meeting in a district in the province and he said, ‘I want you to tell these guys I don’t trust them and they are all a bunch of fuckers.’ Can you believe this? This is a guy who was hired to work here. This is his approach. The interpreter didn’t tell them that and the guy kind of recognized that and said to him, ‘You’re fired.’ He fired the interpreter right on the spot. The guy had three interpreters there. He brought the next guy up and he says, ‘It is your turn to tell them.’ The interpreter didn’t do that so he did the same thing, he fired him. That’s two interpreters. ... The third guy told the DCC members and they almost killed him. They threw shoes at him. G4S [private security] had to rescue him out of there.”

Some respondents used such examples to underscore the importance of language training, even limited training, in order to be able to gauge an interpreter’s abilities. A DSTer explained that even though she knew the language well enough to talk to contacts, she still valued her interpreter for deciphering local and cultural complexities:

“He could pick up on things that I couldn’t because I was still a Western person trying to learn the language. Especially because southern Pashtuns use so much colorful

language to describe simple things, which is beautiful but can be perplexing to Westerners. Proverbs are huge. ... To us, they make no sense. Jokes about donkeys that we can't understand. So you need someone to interpret that, especially political stuff with the government. So they were priceless."

There was an operational criticism from our sample, because civilians were required in many cases to rely on the "generosity" of the military instead of having dedicated interpreters:

"I think every **SCR** should have their own interpreter, who can do other things. I spent most of this tour with no local staff whatsoever and we had to rely on the military for everything. It's hard to do, especially when it comes to your relationship with whoever's going to speak for you. If you're going to have these senior folks [e.g. SCRs], they've got someone they can build a relationship with. And I think that's true in most places; we just didn't have it."

Some went further and advocated that civilians should have been teamed with U.S. or third country national interpreters, perhaps with clearances, instead of local interpreters who "have allegiances" and sometimes subpar language skills.

Question 4.E.6.

Analysis and Assessment of Sectors and Actors:

Civilian casualties, night raids, UAV attacks

Most of our respondents acknowledged the military utility of night raids and unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) attacks, but some questioned a perceived "carelessness" with the capability and argued that most of the time "they are the wrong tool for the problem." One veteran political officer with several Afghan field assignments working closely with the military said in cases of unintended civilian casualties, he advises brigade commanders to "just admit the incident to begin with," involve the local governor, and make restitutions. Unfortunately, according to the officer, not all of the commanders took that advice, and those who didn't invariably ended up being "held responsible for more people than they killed" and losing the confidence of the locals. In one example, "we immediately denied it, then video emerged, then bodies emerged. We'll never be well thought of in that region." Another case cited was when a soldier "negligently discharged" three rounds into "the Marcus Welby of his village, the beloved family doctor, on a Sunday night taking his trash out like people do all over the world, and some soldier blew his head off. It goes to the point that some people just like killing people – on our side, on their side as well."

Other officers likewise underscored the importance of having "open discussions" about civilian casualty (civcas) incidents and leveraging both military and USAID funds to respond quickly with restitution payments. Some respondents were surprised at how well their GIRoA interlocutors handled civcas incidents, when given the opportunity. A development officer said his provincial

governor “was very good with getting out the counter-narrative right away, ‘This happened, we are really sorry, we are looking into it.’” With 10,000 troops in his province, he explained that “someone is going to do something stupid once in a while.” He added that having military leadership that understands how civcas can set back security progress is also vital and credited the commanding general in his area with reminding his troops to be respectful. A DSTer agreed, saying troops at her location were “really drilled” to avoid civcas and were presented “courageous restraint” awards for avoiding civcas.

Many officers confided that the civcas issue had been contentious in their relations with military interlocutors. Another political officer with years of experience working with the military in Afghanistan said he tries to approach the issue by asking the following questions: “Is the target worth the squeeze? Is it in our national security interests? And we are still doing drone strikes on IED facilitators. And I’m just like WTF really? And it results in civcas and we wonder why we have problems.” A political officer serving the east said his criticisms of military overreach are firmly based on special operations doctrine, namely that tactical operations have strategic impacts:

“We want Karzai to sign an agreement [Bilateral Security Agreement] and he gives us two reasons why not. One is night raids. ... If we did not at least have the horse sense to stop those raids for the two-week period in which we were trying to get him to sign the BSA, we failed. I made this point to [a commander of] the Special Forces here. He said we need a mitigation strategy. I said, sir, your mitigating strategy is you don’t do it. You cannot get involved in that. The truth will never get out in Afghanistan as fast as that lie will.”

He continued:

“There was the kinetic strike in Parwan where the Afghans actually fake footage to show civilian casualties. They used footage from a wedding five years earlier or something. You cannot win in that environment. So you have to ask yourself the question, is it worth it? Did you kill Mullah Omar? Did you kill a senior Haqqani? No, you killed some guy who may or may not have been placing IEDs. 10 dollar Taliban. And guess what, the IEDs are still getting placed. So there’s no real tactical effort, other than these guys want to go out there and kill people [insurgents]. That’s fine as far as it goes, but let’s be smart about how we do it.”

Despite the damage created by civcas incidents, however, some respondents defended night raids and UAV attacks as “by far the most effective military actions,” disrupting “bad guy” leadership and degrading capabilities. One asserted that “pointing fingers at ISAF is largely unfounded” considering the fact that the “vast majority of civilian casualties are at the hands of the bad guys—they just do a better job” with information operations.

Question 4.E.7.**Analysis and Assessment of Sectors and Actors:**

Media reporting/political news or statements

Not surprisingly, not every international story or statement makes it to the provinces, but some respondents asserted that news finds a way to get to even the most remote regions. “Yeah, they were news junkies,” related an officer serving in the north:

“They listened on radio all day in the fields. They would ask questions, especially some of the more thoughtful ones who understood foreign policy better, tribal leaders, would question policy. I found myself quite a few times having to either defend or explain U.S. policies. One of the classic ones is our relationship with Pakistan. ‘Why are you guys supporting the Pakistanis? You just found Bin Laden there. You should go to war with them; you’d have 30 million Pashtuns on your side.’”

Others had a different experience, asserting that Afghans care about “their jobs, their kids going to school—Afghans are really no different [than anyone else],” were not that interested in the impact of current events, and that international affairs, for good or ill, never impacted their work.

Regarding damage control for stories inflammatory to Islamic sensibilities, several respondents related success turning responsibility over to GIRoA officials. For example, a development officer in the west recounted that when a Florida pastor threatened to burn Korans, “Our local mullah started to get upset and our provincial governor sat him down and said, ‘Look this is obviously not the view of the people that are working with us every day. It’s an outlier. They don’t agree with it.’” But according to a DSTer serving in the south, sometimes the less said the better:

“So, Koran desecration, peeing on Taliban dead bodies. We, at the district level, we knew this was big in our [U.S. domestic] press and the international press. We went to apologize to the district governor saying, ‘Well, do you want us to make a statement,’ and he said, ‘Don’t tell anyone about this. ... If they do have a problem with it they’ll come to me and I’ll handle it.’ So we never had an issue because we let the district governor handle it. But if we’d have gone on radio and addressed it more people would have known about it and that would have created a potentially dangerous situation for us.”

Regarding messaging in cases of desecrating enemy bodies, a development officer noted a surprising reaction from local GIRoA officials: don’t apologize, it makes you look weak and “they deserved it.”

A number of respondents who were in country at the time said President Obama’s speech establishing a timeline for withdrawing from Afghanistan created some “backlash” with “people saying, ‘You guys can’t leave.’” On the flip side, a DSTER noted that the signing of the U.S. Strategic Partnership with Afghanistan was “very well-received” by locals, although the conditions of the Tokyo Mutual Accountability Framework “didn’t make it down” to the district.

Interagency Provincial Affairs (IPA) Field Retrospective Project**QUESTION SET 5: ANALYSIS AND ASSESSMENT OF GOALS, STRATEGY, AND MODEL****Question 5.A.****Analysis and Assessment of Goals, Strategy, and Model:**

To what extent were you able to collaborate with your interagency colleagues? What facilitated interagency cooperation and what worked against it? Was the IA model effective?

The watchword for this question was personality. Regardless of whether our respondents were fans of the interagency field structure or not, they all agreed that the system was personality-based, for better or for worse. Participants extrapolated on this focus on personality to make a variety of points regarding good and poor leadership, emphasizing the importance of personnel management and relationship-building skills. Ultimately, 23 respondents said the interagency field model was effective, versus 10 who said it was not, and three who offered mixed comments.

Some were supporters of the personality-based model, where civilians work as a team of “co-equals” among both themselves and, ostensibly, the military. They underscored its inherent flexibility and independence it offered teams in defining how to do their work. This allowed civilian field platforms to, as a State officer put it, “figure out what was most important [in their areas] without too much direction” or interference from regional or Embassy leadership.

However, most respondents who said the interagency model was effective appeared to be not so much endorsing the personality-based model which prevailed in most of Afghanistan, in which the military was in charge of a combined civilian-military team of co-equals, as they were relating the personal successes they and their colleagues were able to obtain under it (or perhaps despite it). Others simply argued that no system will be without its pluses and minuses, and, all things considered, the Afghanistan model was reasonably effective:

“Considering we’ve got Mars and Venus [the military and civilians] in the room, it works pretty well. ... It could be more effective, but let’s not let the perfect be the enemy of the good. ... The U.S. government didn’t have this kind of [interagency] cooperation before Afghanistan or Iraq. So we had to learn on the fly. I think we’ve gotten better at it. One problem is the massive budgetary gap between State and Defense and USAID and Defense.”

A few participants agreed with the above officer that civilian agencies were hampered more by budget than by any deficiencies in the system. “That’s not the model’s fault,” as one put it.

Of the 10 naysayers, there was unanimity that field operations suffered from both a lack of clear vision and clear command structure: “It’s better to have one person in charge.” A 3161 working at a DST was particularly critical:

“I was able to cooperate with my interagency partners to a great extent, [but] the model is crap, you could not design a worse system. What made it work were the personal relationships you developed with your military counterparts, your AID, your Danish, your UK [counterparts]. But that was all personality based, it was not based on a command structure. That was something that the military, who is very used to order and command structure, would comment on frequently. ... So why was that situation crap? ... By not having a clear chain of command and different competing civilian interests it created a lot of frustration and wasted time, so much so that the last six months of my deployment was more marriage counseling between the U.S, the task force country, and even the military, because at that point the military was not satisfied with the transition strategy and progressive disengagement that we had been enacting and stepping back, also partially related to the risk avoidance ... They started doing more things that we deemed inappropriate. There was a lot of friction at the senior levels and the staff levels, and the only thing that held it together was some strong relationships between key individuals to keep the ship afloat. But if you do this again, please do not let that happen. It created a lot of problems and distracted from the true mission which was working with the Afghans.”

Some felt very much at the mercy of personalities, particularly bad personalities who seemed obsessed with self-promotion at the expense of mission effectiveness and didn’t seem to be accountable to anyone. At least six respondents lamented that there seemed to be no mechanism to extract bad managers from the field. One respondent, reflective of others who derided “empire building” bosses, described a counterpart from another ISAF country as a “control freak” who attempted to isolate his subordinates from contact with Afghan officials because “he did not want to see any successes that were not his own.”

Observations about who is in charge of civilian field platforms and who should be were prevalent throughout the interviews. An officer serving in the east claimed his regional platform adopted an interagency senior civilian model for its civilians serving at PRTs and DSTs, to great positive effect: “As long as it’s acknowledged that there’s a lead – a first among equals – it works very well. But if you have, as they did in other locations, a State Department lead and an USDA lead and a USAID lead, they don’t feel compelled to coordinate with each other, then it falls apart.” He claimed leadership was given based on experience, time on the ground, and temperament, and wasn’t necessarily bestowed upon the State Department representative at a civilian platform.

However, another officer serving in the east characterized the change as an “imposed chain of command,” needless and detrimental to good relationships. “Instead of clarifying the chain of command, I think it cluttered it. I think a collection of peers would be better, particularly when they are from separate departments.” Others criticized any model that puts the State Department in command. A development officer lamented that her State Department boss requested she sign off on a particular project against her better judgment, explaining that, “Sometimes you have to make bad development decision for good political reasons.” Not surprisingly, a State Department Officer who also addressed the issue came to a decidedly different conclusion: “The argument was that we [USAID] have all the resources and programs in the province, and then we should be in charge of this. The counterargument to that is yes, your job is to manage and run programs, but the SCR is a diplomat and ought to be a diplomat, and is responsible for KLEs [Key Leader Engagements] with all these high-level people.”

An officer who served in the south refuted the contention that a stronger chain of command was desirable. “In that environment if I decided I wanted to run over someone or I wanted to demand that they were going to follow my lead, that only would’ve been harmful. ... On top of that, I didn’t have that authority. ... In reality, I don’t have control over their pay, I don’t have control over whether they are going to work here or not, I don’t have anything a boss or manager usually has to make things happen.”

Three officers with stabilization experience in Iraq favored the Iraq model, with a clear civilian State Department leader and a military deputy. One complained the USG was attempting to “reinvent the wheel” in Afghanistan when it should have applied lessons learned from Iraq, particularly with a military role more restricted to “logistics, intelligence, and operations.” Another Iraq field veteran said the Iraq model was “more effective” and blasted the regional platforms as an “extra layer of management” that is “just an obstacle.”

There were other negative comments from respondents regarding communication and coordination with regional platforms, but also a few about a “top-heavy” Embassy that didn’t understand the field, forced it to adopt “one-size-fits-all” policies and programs, didn’t support its views or equities with military leadership, and gave it inane and confusing tasking. One recalled frustrating conflicting guidance about whether or not the Embassy wanted reporting from the field at all, which “didn’t help morale.” A development officer described the pros and cons of being “off the Embassy radar”: “Someone [in Kabul] would say, ‘I need you to scan this document and send it to us.’ We’d respond, ‘Our scanner has not worked in three months. We’ve tried to get people [in Kabul to fix it] – so, whatever.’ But the flipside is that they are out of our shit; we’re not getting micromanaged, which is nice. We had more autonomy than a lot of PRTs. So it works both ways.” Another officer suggested that future stability endeavors require Embassy personnel to have served in the field because “it is almost impossible to know how to serve the field if you haven’t worked in the field.”

There was a clear distinction between challenges noted among the civilian interagency and the military, which respondents seemed to treat as a distinct layer of the interagency, with both positive and negative comments. Similar to complaints about poor leadership running amok on the civilian side of the field model, many respondents blamed poor military “personalities” for marginalizing civilians and meddling in the ostensibly civilian roles of diplomacy and development to the detriment of the mission. Although one officer stated “the military had no respect for the civilian leadership in the field,” few participants painted the military with as broad a brush and many beamed about their close and productive relationships with military colleagues.

A State Department officer complained that diplomats in the field were “enslaved” to the military and had to “beg our way onto movements.” Although perhaps a bit overstated, his comment reflected a wide-spread perception among respondents of a kind of inherent second-tier status because civilians were dependent on the military for security, transportation, life support, and sometimes interpreters. Even some respondents who highlighted their good relationships with the military joined more critical participants in lamenting, to one degree or another, the subordinate role civilians played to the military, sometimes expressed as having to “show our value” to the military: “At the General Officer level they kind of got it, but somehow the understanding of why the U.S. military should be supporting the Department of State mission never permeated its way down the chain.” Many respondents said that once “buy-in” to civilian value was achieved, civilians were able to collaborate effectively with the military and frequently curb poor decision making. For example:

“A new civil affairs unit was ... providing Relationship Building Items, RBIs, to some of the Afghans. ... An RBI might be a cooking set or some glasses or a turban. ... The Civil Affairs guys said, “We need to build these relationships, this is stuff we can use to do that.” The Stabilization Advisor said, “The District Governor doesn’t want you to do that, it is creating an imbalance in the district. It’s stupid. Why are you doing this?”

The civil affairs unit curbed its distribution of RBIs.

A State Department officer postulated that that the military’s perceived overreach into civilian disciplines, while not a good idea, was “a reaction to the failures of civilian agencies” to fill their traditional roles in the Afghan countryside. He opined that such a problem should never have existed because the military should never have been in charge:

“The U.S. model was a stopgap model back in 2003 that needed to go away. What we should’ve gotten on much earlier was a civilian-led PRT that had sector service specialists control cells, which would include a security component but would actually bring in the subject matter experts that could really address governance, issues, health, education. ... The U.S. had ... the lieutenant colonel [leading], ... but he was either driving a submarine six months ago, an airplane, or in some cases a truck and now he’s

been thrown [in here] to operate probably the most complicated organization he will ever experience in his life. On an individual basis, some of these gentlemen and ladies did fine work, but the structure itself was unsound. It was unsound shortly after it was created and it was completely unsound when we did the surge in 2009.”

The same officer opined the military created Human Terrain Teams (HTTs) of civilian social scientists largely to supplement or replace informational capabilities (cultural, political, language) that the military have been getting from the State Department and USAID. Ultimately, he argued the teams “created some good results, but also created a series of bad issues” because they would sometimes “engage with people they shouldn’t have been engaging with or [were] doing things that they shouldn’t have been doing.”

Many officers, and particularly USAID officers, decried the military’s focus on short-term successes, which they thought were at the expense of longer-term development processes and stability goals. The military’s typically shorter rotation cycles were a target as well, but this was also noted by a few respondents as an opportunity to provide continuity and “show value” to military units rotating in. (Although its deployments were often shorter, the U.S. military’s leave package is minimal while deployed to Afghanistan compared to generous leave packages for civilian field staff.) A State Department officer who works closely with the military blamed civilian-military disconnect at least partially on differences in culture and problem framing:

“... The question of looking at it as their battle space is part of the issue. Yes, the military has to fight. You wouldn’t want me to plan an assault on anything because I’d be like, ‘Y’all got ammo? Ok, y’all got enough ammo? OK, have fun, don’t get killed.’ By the same token, the military, by means of its culture, its indoctrination, the personalities that are driven to it and how they are acculturated and indoctrinated, if you say to them, ‘OK, now let’s turn this into a fully functioning government that can meet the needs of its people.’ They can be like, ‘Urp, what?’ They won’t know what to do. They’ll devise a plan and metrics by which they’ll know they achieved the plan, but that doesn’t mean they’ll actually have any success. If the metrics are subjective metrics, they will all leave saying ‘it’s green! [As represented on a PowerPoint presentation map.] We fixed it,’ and have no effect. ... So the idea of a battle space only looks at one part of the issue. The battle against the enemy and battle to build capacity are two distinct things and to some degree exclusive of one another.”

A development officer who was critical of the military’s role in Afghanistan nevertheless was highly complimentary of the military’s chain of command and the value it placed on lessons learned and best practices, remarking that civilian agencies “need to stop talking [about] lessons learned and really evaluate what we’ve learned.” She advocated the creation of a

civilian version of the Center for Army Lessons Learned (CALL) that civilian agencies would support, utilize, and to which they would send senior management.

Respondents also identified examples of civilian field leadership practices and qualities that are particularly important under the “personality-based” model, such as setting clear ground rules for engagements, clearly defining responsibilities, and demanding that subordinates share information. Some were critical about senior civilians who seemed unable to communicate with other civilian colleagues, the military, or Afghans: “I find it absolutely shocking that sometimes there are folks out here that don’t get along with other people and they are diplomats, so I thought that was the job. ... If you can’t get along with me, goodness knows how are you going to be able to get along with a governor that doesn’t even speak the language?”

Many participants strongly endorsed stationing teams in close physical proximity in contrast to having teams scattered at different FOBs, around a large base, or even in different parts of the same building. There was also a consensus for holding regular and inclusive meetings. This was slightly surprising considering both the general disdain for “more meetings” and the rise of electronic communication. In contrast, leaders and colleagues who hoarded information and guidance were widely criticized. A few officers mentioned that “the smaller the number, the better the interagency cooperation.” One USDA officer complained, however, that as the civilian field presence shrinks “we are seeing the interagency game being played more. Now the SDO’s [Senior Development Officers] are saying ‘this is USAID and we don’t have tell you what’s going on.’ It’s weird.”

Question 5.B.

Analysis and Assessment of Goals, Strategy, and Model:

Did you understand the USG goal and strategy when you got to the field?

This question attempted to determine why respondents thought they were sent to the field, i.e., what they thought the U.S. expected them do. In retrospect, the question should not have tried to combine goal and strategy, which probably led many to conflate the two in their answers.

Twelve respondents provided answers along the lines of defeating Al Qaeda and ensuring Afghanistan is never again used as a launching pad for attacks against the United States: “When we were in Washington [in training] I think they probably told us 40 times that the goal of the USG is to eliminate Al Qaeda and make Afghanistan safe for democracy.” Many extrapolated that their capacity-building efforts with GIRoA were aimed at making Al Qaeda’s presence untenable in Afghanistan.

Another common theme was transition of USG initiatives to GIRoA, which nine respondents cited as a USG goal or strategy. Some other responses to the question follow:

- The basic goal that I often gave people is that at the DST we were trying to mobilize people against the Taliban. ... We are trying to mobilize people to stand up for the government, mobilize to join the police, mobilize to form **arbaki**, mobilize them to tell people where Taliban are. Doing that was also important to prevent abusive behavior by the government and try to limit those abuses that happen.
- It depends on the day and who is talking. The military had a different take on those goals and I think everyone had a different take on the timeline for achieving results. One of the results was that we wanted results faster than the Afghans and certainly in areas that they didn't care about.
- My marching orders from Ambassador Crocker were, "Start right-sizing your platform. What do we need to turn this over to the Afghans? And take care of your people." That was clear guidance.
- We'd make a left turn, and then we'd see something big and shiny, and we'd focus on that. Then we'd get bored with that and see something shiny, and try to go trek after that. So probably not so much. In terms of what the embassy was thinking about and **COIN** – the only time I've heard people speak about COIN was at the platform, just recently, I didn't even think it was still relevant.
- The clear-hold-build paradigm ... is a fantasy, to tell you the truth. You can clear, but that hold period has to be longer than a week. You don't just clear a place, drop a few wells, refurbish the local clinic, and we're done. That was a very hard lesson to learn because I went down as a bit of a true believer in this. I developed the opinion over time that development goals have to be longer term and not tied to tactical goals.
- We had to ensure that provincial voices were represented and that the resources moved from Kabul to the provinces. "Lead from behind" was the mantra.
- It seemed like they had already transitioned [to] my role being just monitoring and reporting. ... And they didn't want to be kinetic, for lack of another word; they didn't want to be active. They just wanted to observe.
- Winning the hearts and minds of the Afghan people. For me it was simply about helping to build a nation from the district level up.
- The basic strategy was "tough love," i.e. saying "no" when they asked for projects, but advising, assisting, and mentoring them on how to work through their own system.
- To help in capacity building, watershed management, agribusiness, development and improve farm producing and production.
- Well, now you are testing me. But I knew it at the time!

The variety of responses to this pretty straight-forward question begs the question of whether our goals had changed over time, or were not clearly articulated, or whether some of our

respondents were not paying attention. We suspect all of these factors contributed to the confusion. One respondent said “there was not enough guidance and vision shared with the PRTs and the platform to make sure that people were following a coherent plan and strategy.” Another likeminded respondent claimed the Office of Provincial Affairs (OPA) in Iraq did a better job:

“Every time you went somewhere and you were [asked], “What is USG policy? What are U.S. Embassy Baghdad’s three priorities? What is the direction of USG?” It was very clear to us. ... There was no doubt in our minds that at that point OPA was in charge. When we got here it was very convoluted.”

An officer provided a comprehensive assessment of goal and strategy development over the course of his nearly five years in various field assignments. When asked if he understood the USG goals in Afghanistan he replied:

Absolutely yes [sarcasm]. From 2001 to mid-2009, we only had a series of one-year plans. When I got out to Afghanistan in 2007, there was no discussion about ending the war, transition or leaving, Afghan lead or sustainability. That was not even the framework. There was not a joint U.S. military framework in those days. It was simply do no harm, encourage the Afghans to lead, but there was no real policy on what are goals out here were. That is how inappropriate the first years of our effort were. I’d say since 2009, ... one thing that was clear under the new team [administration] that came in was that you had a joint civ-mil policy and also you had the transition plan. ... So we could basically end this effort. ... It took a while with this new [presidential] administration, but I think it was very clear after 2010 [that] transition was the priority, we were leaving, and the Afghans would take the lead on security and development.”

None of our respondents mentioned the U.S. Civil-Military Strategic Framework for Afghanistan (Civ-Mil Framework) without being prompted for this question. The Civ-Mil Framework is the “strategic guidance for all American civilian and military personnel serving in Afghanistan. ... The Framework articulates the vision for pursuing U.S. national goals in Afghanistan” This document is signed by the U.S. Ambassador and the Commander U.S. Forces-Afghanistan and is the first item linked on the Embassy’s home page. It defines U.S. National Goals in Afghanistan thusly:

“As expressed by President Obama, our two national goals in Afghanistan are:

1. Disrupt, dismantle, and eventually defeat al-Qaeda and its affiliates and prevent their return to Afghanistan.
2. Strengthen Afghanistan so that it can never again be a safe haven for international terrorism.”

The Civ-Mil Framework addresses transition as well:

“The period of transition in the run up to 2015 is designed to allow GIRoA to gradually take the lead in critical areas and take advantage of the opportunity to fully guide these efforts with the international community in support. Our efforts should build the confidence of Afghans in their government and their security forces.”

Many respondents mentioned a passing familiarity with the Civ-Mil Framework, but more along the lines of knowing it existed, somewhere. “I did read that somewhere. Isn’t that the one with the pillars? Disrupt, disable, and another D, something about Al Qaeda.” Another respondent said that a State Department representative actually came to his field location to “socialize” the Civ-Mil Framework, but that his colleagues discounted it for only providing “guidance to focus on the things we were already focusing on.” An officer from the South explained that his field colleagues “kind of figured it out when we got there, some of it circles back to what was written and some of it didn’t.” According to this respondent some of the strategy was “simply not achievable in all regions. The gender policy is not going to happen in Helmand. You are going to get people killed doing that. ... It is not one size fits all.”

One officer assigned to the south admitted “we were clueless of the Civ-Mil Framework.” This officer claimed that after he reviewed it in 2011, two years after his arrival, he determined it would be a useful framework around which to build a regional strategy to bring military and civilian efforts together in 2012. “We created this document ourselves with the division, with the military to say ‘Okay we need a document within our structure to ensure that you understand where we are going and where we are headed.’”

Some of our respondents used the question as a launching pad to attack the perceived goal or strategy (Note question 5.C. deals more directly with subject), while a couple attacked the whole notion having a “grand strategy” that one officer claimed “did not exist out there [in the field]:”

“The military would have their objectives, **IJC** would say this is what’s going to be done, USAID would have their own objectives, State Department would have their own objectives, and we didn’t seem to have an overall objective. ... All the different entities were working, but they weren’t working together.”

As an example, the same officer cited the USG approach to Afghan elections, where he claimed the military supported assisting GIRoA with transporting voter registration material while civilians were arguing that Afghans can and should do it themselves.

An officer’s frustration that “all of these decisions [regarding strategy] were being made without any input from the people that knew what was going on on the ground” was unique in this question set, but is a common criticism made throughout other questions, e.g., regarding development and governance efforts. She expressed additional frustration with trying to create a positive vision of USG commitment to a post-2014 Afghanistan while not knowing if her

compound was “going to be there the next week or not. How do you talk about, ‘We are here for the long run, we’re here for the stabilization, and diplomats don’t leave.’ Except that we do.”

A USAID officer lamented that all the talk about goals and strategy doesn’t mean much to people on the ground unless they have the time to process it and, because of all the overlapping areas of responsibility among agencies, execute it with an interagency approach. She observed that most people “don’t cross the aisle to talk to someone else” to deconflict or collaborate. “They are drowning in information. People are here for an incredibly short amount of time and there is a constant demand from Congress, the American people to show the results. We have invested well over 2,000 lives. We have invested most likely a trillion dollars so more. Where is the return on our investment?”

Question 5.C. and D.

Analysis and Assessment of Goals, Strategy, and Model:

Was the strategy correct? Were USG priorities consistent with the concerns of the people?

Respondents provided a wide variety of responses to this seemingly straightforward question. Only a handful offered a direct yes or no response and even then used it to launch into a series of observations and suggestions regarding the strategy. Comments basically ranged from thinking the strategy was sound but needed tweaking, to respondents commenting on pieces largely missed, by the strategy, to people who underscored fundamental flaws in the strategy’s approach.

Most officers basically endorsed the USG strategy in Afghanistan, and a couple even mentioned the Civ-Mil Framework by name, but only a small handful offered that endorsement without adding some thoughts on how it should be or should have been tweaked. Some thought it needed more of something (focus on or input from the provinces, getting outside the wire, agricultural projects)—although far more thought it needed a whole lot less:

“We tried to do too much for the Afghans, did so unilaterally too often, and for too long. In any future situations, our rebuilding efforts should be formulated based on thorough gap analyses, in consultation with the local populace and their leaders. We should really have taken more of an ‘advise and assist’ role ... rather than us ‘taking charge.’”

Many officers made the argument that, especially at this advanced stage in the field mission, any project the USG is “doing” for the Afghans is by definition not sustainable and should be dropped. A political officer articulated this common view:

“Earlier on we could have shifted the focus away from infrastructure. Built some [limited] key infrastructure and then focused on capacity building. Like rebuilding the Ring Road and Highway 7. OK fine. ... But we don’t need to be building 150 hospitals

that they aren't using. The truism in Afghanistan is we've been so paternalistic and done so much for them ...of course they are going to say yes they want that, because it's money and they can say they brought it and that's great. But the only time we will really be able to see what they want to do, the true articulation of their priorities, will happen once we pull away. Then they will figure out what they want to do and then we can help them do that. But we've been very paternalistic because we've assessed that you need [this] and you can't do it. I am constantly fighting, and this is for the whole interagency, ... about what the Afghans can and can't do. We have in the provinces a very different view."

A few respondents identified elements not included or lacking focus in the USG strategy such as land titling and reform; corruption/impunity; greater coordination and outreach with religious leaders; and greater involvement in tribal dispute mitigation. However, for the most part our participants recognized the pitfalls of engaging too deeply (or at all) in these areas, despite their undeniable importance to overall stabilization and development efforts, and the advantages of leaving them to GIRoA:

"I think we focused on things that we could affect as westerners. I think that absent a lot of strategic patience to dig into things such as land reform, even though we are here for ten years, that's just not an issue you handle in ten years. Religious community outreach. We're not going to be persuasive to religious leaders – we're not Muslims. So do I think that a strategy to engage religious leaders is important for sustainability? I think yes, but we are not the people to do it. ... But when you talk about security, economic growth, and local government, those things are the right thing absolutely to focus on."

By far the most commented upon subject in the "things we missed" category was the inability to gather (or lack of interest in seeking) local input for the strategy writ large and buy-in to its different elements.

There were plenty of respondents who thought that locals were intentionally uncritical of the USG's sub-national governance efforts in order to "milk us" for funds and would only complain that "you aren't doing enough." Many of these respondents attributed this to the fact that "they [local Afghans] were getting paid" and noted that we often based our ground-truthing of projects on feedback from GIRoA officials who were often not representative of the publics they served and too eager to "tell us what we wanted to hear."

In contrast, one officer said that when Afghan officials or elders did bring up input or criticism for USG initiatives, they were humored but "when the planning got down to the nitty gritty" the PRT said "nah" and discounted local input. Another said he didn't believe we had ever

earnestly “asked the Afghans what they wanted. They would have said, ‘Leave us alone,’ at least in southern Afghanistan. ... They don’t want the Taliban in their lives, they don’t want GIRoA in their lives, they don’t want the Russians in their lives, and they do not want the U.S. in their lives. They want to be left alone.”

Some officers proposed that it was incumbent upon us to ask the Afghans what they wanted, not just expect them to endorse what we were giving them. A political officer criticized the push “to spend money, to go out and do great things and build, and increase capacity:”

“A lot of the times we would go off half-cocked, really not informed because we really weren’t getting out to these villages and really assessing the problem correctly at the local Afghan level to then address it. We just overlaid our plans for them on their system and you had buildings that weren’t used, schools that weren’t either built in the right place or whatever the case would be. ... But for the most part, focusing on agriculture development stuff, improving shops, stalls, in the bazaar and all that stuff, it’s all very good.”

One surprising criticism not normally associated with Afghanistan strategy was that our own personnel evaluation systems were undermining USG efforts:

“Tours here are very short and, in order to get the points that you need on ... whatever version of annual evaluation, quantitative [progress] is so much easier to measure than qualitative. ‘I pushed through the construction of three schools that addressed 1200 students, half of which are girls’ is a lot easier than saying ‘over six months we worked with the director of education to build his capacity to incorporate women in the decision-making process.’”

This was not an outlier; at least four other participants spanning USAID, State, and USDA brought it up.

Although tour length and training are covered at length in sections 2.C. and 2.B. respectively, both were also mentioned as negative “strategic” factors. A development officer’s “big critique” of a strategy he otherwise classified as “correct” was a lack of officer cultural and language expertise. He asserted that with greater pre-deployment background, “We could have gotten a lot more with a lot less.” Another development officer addressed the common theme of turnover:

“The Afghans know that [the USG has short field deployments]. It was very much a situation of, particularly at the height of the PRTs, ‘Well if we don’t like the answer you give me than time is on our side, you will be gone, the new group will come in.’ I was sitting with the DoWA (Director of Women’s Affairs) one day and they were introducing a new [PRT military] team that had gone in. She was going off about the old team, how

they never gave them anything. ... I looked at her and said, 'What?' And she looked at me like, 'Crap, you're still here.'"

One of the most repeated themes throughout our interviews for this question concerns expectations management, both regarding Afghans and ourselves. An officer describes how this looks operationally in the field at ground level: "Our SCR at the time had come to our district governor and said we were going to provide 800 to 1000 bags of humanitarian aid and some other stuff and it ended up being 50 bags of rice and oil. It was real embarrassing because we didn't have the funds to fulfill the promise." But beyond the breakdown in trust when promises are not kept, our respondents spoke of the damage to the Afghan-U.S. partnership owing to a lack of understanding of each other's world view and culture. A respondent aptly argues for patience, understanding, and resetting expectations:

"One of the issues is timelines, right, expectations. One of the expectations when we got in here is we could fix this place. And 10 years from now this place is not going to look like Denmark, it's not even going to look like India looked 30 years ago. But it could in 20 years. And that's a huge success story. ... The U.S. military is the best in the world at training forces. When I [arrived in summer 2012], less than half of the fighting was done by the Afghans. Today [early 2014], over 90 percent of the fighting is done by Afghans in RC east with no coalition support or very minimum support. ... All the actual boots on the ground fighting is almost entirely done by the Afghans. That's a huge increase and by and large the survey data and the anecdotal data say that people generally trust the **ANSF**, particularly in areas they've cleared; trust for ANSF and GIRoA tends to go up. So, great, we've had an underrated success there. But after 30 years of civil war, you cannot replace a whole society in the space of 10 years. ... It's implicit in every article you read in the western press about Afghanistan: after 10 years why isn't this place like Denmark or Japan. I'd settle for Pakistan. If the elections in Afghanistan are seen as credible as the ones in Pakistan, that would be a huge success for everybody, for us and the Afghans."

Question 5.E. and 5.F.

Analysis and Assessment of Goals, Strategy, and Model:

Was it worth it? Are you personally satisfied with your tour?

This summary merges the results of question 5.E. and question 5.F. to facilitate a comparison of whether people felt the benefits of the USG civilian field mission in Afghanistan were worth the costs and whether they felt their tours were personally worthwhile endeavors. A strong majority of our respondents (19 of 30 who responded) said the benefits of the civilian reconstruction effort outweighed the costs in blood and treasure, with four stating it was not, and seven offering substantive but inconclusive responses. Results were more cut and dry for assessing the personal worth of the tour, with 33 of 36 participants [the entire sample] stating

their time in Afghanistan was well spent for their careers, personal development, or other reasons. Three offered mixed responses. No officer opined that his or her tour was without merit. Positive responses for personal satisfaction were far more emphatic and unambiguous than positive responses for USG interest, of which only about a third were unconditionally affirmative.

Our respondents seemed at once pleased that someone had asked their opinion of such a bigger picture question and exasperated at the prospect of answering it. More than any other question, this query, the shortest of the set, elicited the most profound and thought-provoking answers. Without exception, interviewees paused at the question and took a deep breath before commenting. Many looked off into the distance while mentally tallying the positives and negatives of their experiences, perhaps trying to peer beyond the statistics and anecdotal stories to a greater truth. This is a sampling of the various responses. Please see the complete subject file for the full gamut.

Regarding the merits of the effort for USG policy interests, most of the affirmative responses were subdued and conditional, e.g., “yes, and I say that with all the caveats of what we could have done better and the end state is obviously unclear.” The most common “yes, but” examples were “we didn’t need to spend so much money,” “we should have emphasized transition earlier,” and the suggestions to change the interagency civilian field model. One respondent thought the question inappropriate: “I don’t think you should ask that question. There are over 2,000 men dead, hundreds of billions spent.” However, most of our respondents thought it was “good question” that needed to be asked exactly to honor the dead and account for the spending: “I think that we have got to do a lot of these interviews, look at lessons learned.”

Guarded optimism was a common thread, enforced with positive examples of Afghans “getting on with their business ... in many parts of the country.” Respondents frequently cited GIRoA improvements in governance and security, both nationally and in their province or district. Comments from a PRT officer who served twice in the same province were broadly representative:

“[The province] is a better place today for our efforts there. We made lots of mistakes, but just in the six or seven years between my two tours, the province had improved dramatically. ... Boys and girls are going to school without the bad guys burning down school buildings, the medical system is much improved, the agriculture sector proceeding at a decent pace, the GIRoA officials are generally competent-to-good. People have greater hope in the future.”

Most were less optimistic, but, like this development officer, cited incremental progress:

“We ask that [question] every time we lose a soldier. Was this worth it? I’d like to think so. Even though you don’t feel the impact every day—you get frustrated going to work because of the corruption or what not—and then all of a sudden you see a little girl going to school. And you think, well that wouldn’t have happened ten years ago.”

Many officers underscored the importance of personal relationships built over years of partnership with Afghans as perhaps more endearing and valuable than projects or sectoral improvements:

“The more we interact with them, the less we become their enemy. We put a face, we humanize our relationship with them and our support for them, that they accept us and appreciate us, and we’re no longer the big infidel Boogey man that’s coming to rape, steal, and all this kind of stuff that the Taliban have spun up in their minds through their own ignorance. And that has got to continue, that relation. ... The multibillion-dollar price tag, I think, is not representative of this good will that we’re building up within Islam and Afghanistan specifically. That will pay dividends in the future as far as giving us a good legitimate partner in the future, here in central Asia, in this important region of the world.”

A political officer asserted relationships with and mentoring of GIRoA officials have improved governance and reduced corruption, but that “no one wants to read about a lot of mid-level officials who came to work every morning, did their work, and went home and supported their families.” He argued that a few “shocking examples” of “egregious criminals” have taken up headlines but are not representative of GIRoA writ large. “We had very little effect on the highest level of Afghan officialdom, but we had an effect on the middle generation and the upcoming generation, so it was absolutely worth it.”

A few officers underscored that although coalition efforts have given GIRoA “every opportunity to succeed,” the question ultimately will be decided by the Afghans—a final chapter only they can write. A development officer recounted political assassinations against GIRoA officials and political campaign workers, as well as the dramatic rise in ANSF casualties since 2013, as a grim indicator of Afghan resolve to make GIRoA work. “Am I saying they are angels? No, but they’ve paid a high price.”

At least six officers argued that field efforts in Afghanistan were narrowly successful with regard to the principle USG goal: making Afghanistan stable enough to keep it from again becoming a launching pad for terrorists to attack the U.S. “How many 9/11s can we deal with? We cannot have these safe havens for terrorists.” A high ranking officer noted that while civilians in Afghanistan can’t be responsible for terrorist advances in other parts of the world, they have been fairly successful in their own area of operation.

But while some officers argued that the war and subsequent stabilization efforts in Afghanistan were inevitable unless “we turn into an isolationist nation and not engage,” a vocal minority opined that there were alternatives. Three officers believed that although the U.S. was right to invade, topple the Taliban, and “chase al Qaeda,” it took its eyes off the terrorism ball when it turned to “nation building.” An officer illustrates this point while recounting a conversation he had with a visiting congressional representative:

“I was saying, ‘We are here trying to prevent Afghanistan from becoming a safe haven for terrorists, we are helping women, building these schools.’ And here she is as a Democrat and with respect to the gender issues she said to me, ‘What is so different with women that are in Africa and other places? Why should we care so much about these women and why should that be the piece which is part of the reason why we stay?’ I think it was a valid question.”

The same officer contended that although some initial economic assistance was warranted, “We certainly shouldn’t have continued to stay for so long with a government that was corrupt. It pains me to say that, I want to help people, but at the end of the day it was not worth it.”

Another respondent postulated that Afghanistan would be “in a better position” if the U.S. had “gotten out quickly.” He praised USG civilians for the stabilization effort but blamed Afghans for “not taking advantage of the help we were giving them.” A political officer was even more skeptical, arguing that the U.S. shouldn’t have invested any resources in Afghanistan at all and providing this advice to other countries: “Don’t go.” A veteran officer cautioned that naysayers should be taken in context:

“The overall, long-term, day-to-day work that I did in the past four years I think accomplished quite a bit. When we are a little bit further away from it, maybe we’ll start to see it. ... It’s only 2014, the surge just ended six months ago – people are still tired. I think when people start taking stock of what they accomplished, they’ll have a prouder understanding of what they did.”

A USDA officer confided that he was conflicted by the question. Although he felt the effort had ensured the Taliban, insurgents, and Al Qaeda “don’t come back” and was therefore “worth it,” he worried that “if it takes continual funding to do that, then I’m not so sure we do this in other places. How many times can we replicate this and what makes Afghanistan special as opposed to every other country that can house terrorists?”

Several participants spoke glowingly of interagency camaraderie and of solidarity both with coalition and Afghan interlocutors. A handful of participants used this question as a springboard to either endorse the civ-mil field model or castigate it. A political officer with multiple tours was in the majority, who thought it was effective, given the circumstances:

“As much as we had to compromise with the military, the military could not have done this by themselves. I was very appreciative when military commanders said, ‘We appreciate what your team did, because we could not have done this.’ ... In having the State Department and USAID involved in governance and sub-national governance, we were able to open up a whole different conversation that was useful not only to our immediate goals but to the long-term capacity building goals.”

A development officer thought “despite the risks, despite the hardship” it was essential to have civilians embedded with “our soldiers who are on the ground in a foreign city.” “Where we really add a lot of value ... [is with] these young captains who are not diplomats, don’t really understand the long-term ramifications of some of their actions. Being partnered with those people faster in the cycle is going to pay dividends down the line.”

A few officers revisited the question through the lens of expectation. A development officer reflected a common theme that “changes required in Afghanistan will take place over generations.” Others stressed that claims that USG stabilization operations were going to be quick, painless, and cheap should not have been taken seriously.

Turning to the question of whether respondents found the assignments personally “worth it,” respondents were unambiguously positive. A sample:

- I have contributed to something good and been part of history.
- I got the adventure I was looking for.
- I’d show up even if I wasn’t paid and I would come back again if asked.
- Hell yeah, absolutely. This has been one of the greatest experiences of my life.
- I genuinely felt like I made a difference.

Although altruism was the factor most commented upon, most respondents also mentioned professional and personal growth. A few specifically mentioned the “challenge” of working in difficult conditions and in different professional areas, for example political officers who had to learn how to monitor and evaluate development projects and development officers who had to learn to write political reports. A political officer said, “It was one of the most satisfying tours of my career. I found having to deal with political, public diplomacy, management, and development issues a welcome change from the normal FSO pigeon-holed job.” Another said he hopes his personal “learning experience” is replicated by his colleagues, so the benefit “can be applied professionally not just for myself but across the U.S. Government.”

Multiple respondents provided different answers for the first and last parts of their tours because “[later in tours] you were just not moving out of the wire” as platforms were drawing down or due to security restrictions. “The last six months was an exercise in futility ... buying the time until they tell us it is time to go home.” A political officer in the north proposed a

greater balance between protection and accessibility, citing a conference he helped organize that he was not allowed to attend. “The upshot of that is we look really bad.”

A few officers also mentioned personal growth, e.g., “it gave me a different point of view to see things from.” However, not everyone was so sanguine about the personal aspects of a field tour, especially the toll on family and small children. Some officers said that the USG owes a debt of gratitude to the unsung heroes on the home front, who take up all the family commitments when their spouses take an assignment in the boondocks of Afghanistan: e.g., raising kids, paying bills, dealing with the backed up septic tank, etc. A USDA officer reflected that it was difficult for his wife and “for me to know that she was back there, having to handle everything by herself, and yet I find this work very, very rewarding.”

A political officer succinctly pulled together many of the elements expressed in response to both the USG and personal aspects of the “was it worth it” questions:

“I really enjoyed it. I don’t believe in being proud of myself, because at the end of the day we’re all going to be worm food. But I do believe that the efforts that we fought with our people, with ISAF, with the Embassy, with IJC, we all did because we believed in something the Afghans could do and maybe they didn’t think they could do. And we were right. True story.”

Interagency Provincial Affairs (IPA) Field Retrospective Project**QUESTION SET 6: POST-DEPLOYMENT****Question 6.A.****Post-Deployment:** Was the equipment/support adequate?

Responses for this question were varied and we will not attempt to capture them here beyond identifying a few common themes. Most respondents indicated that equipment/support was adequate (13). Nine respondents said equipment/support was inadequate, eight had mixed responses, and five either were not asked or did not address the question.

The most frequently cited complaints were inadequate body armor/helmet or poor support for the same (5) and technological difficulties (5). Opinions on support from the military and the UK generally fared better than Embassy support, as reflected by this DSTer:

“Military, nothing but good things to say about the support. Field Support Unit in Kabul is a well-known misnomer. We never got support from FSU here and felt like we were more of a burden to them when we were in Kabul. The Political Section has always been good to me. IPA has been hit or miss. Now people know me in IPA and I feel like I get support, but when I first showed up, no one really had any time for me. ... My paychecks show up on time usually, but dealing with HR at the Embassy has been nothing but frustration. Always something difficult, but that’s a long conversation. I had body armor that was missing pads and didn’t fit right, but the military sorted me out.”

Several respondents cited the “diversity of computer networks” that are not interoperable as a problem. Some said they or their USG colleagues used personal computers or personal accounts for their work. A few respondents offered suggestions to improve Embassy support, such as providing a clothing allowance because “pretty much everything you use will be worn out” and using keys for vehicles instead of electronic starters that are inoperable with jammers.

Question 6.B.**Post-Deployment:** What actions did you or your team take to ensure continuity of efforts?

Many respondents commented on efforts to ensure continuity of electronic data, including contact information, through the Embassy’s Knowledge Continuity SharePoint site. Assessments of that process depended largely on regional prioritization and ranged from “very good” to “horrible.” Some officers were concerned that data continuity would be the “Achilles heel” in the retrograde strategy for PRTs and DSTs, while others who spent time on the initiative wondered if it was a futile task: “We’re always afraid that we’ll put all this time putting all this together but no one in Kabul is going to read it.”

A respondent noted that, regardless of efforts to preserve digital data, continuity would suffer due the high number of local staff leaving to the U.S. through the Special Immigrant Visa program. “So you lose a lot of the institutional memory. We have databases of contacts, information, files of projects that we’ve done, but whether or not my successor is going to take the time to review all the documents I have collected, that is another thing.” Another officer warned that the USG would have growing pains getting used to a dearth of information from the provinces as the USG retrogrades in 2013 and 2014. “We and the military are going to have to get used to knowing less and being able to verify less.”

Several respondents said, “We are really focusing on continuity with the Afghans,” and there were several encouraging stories of GIRoA officials “running with the ball:”

“In the PRT I worked with my [Afghan] counterpart every day in terms of briefs, educating him and working with the Department of Public Health. ... In the last six or seven months they’ve drawn their own agendas, they are looking at issues by themselves [and] they will brief me once in a while. The interpreter will go to these meetings and he will come back and brief me. It is remarkable what they are doing.”

However, some bemoaned the concern that, despite significant progress with provincial and district officials, budgeting would ultimately be victim to “their counterparts at higher levels” in Kabul who have “no motivation ... to make this an expeditious process.” We note that although the field is drawing down, the Embassy can still work budget issues in Kabul, where most of our respondents felt there was a bottleneck.

Interagency Provincial Affairs (IPA) Field Retrospective Project**ADDITIONAL COMMENTS**

We concluded interviews by offering an opportunity for respondents to provide additional comments, which were mostly suggestions and observations about the civilian field experience. We also used this section as a repository for vestige questions that were eventually dropped from the standard question set, including dedicated feedback on land reform, inter-tribal relations, and religious leaders. To some extent, these are covered elsewhere in this overview and won't be commented upon further.

There were mostly negative comments about UNAMA's communication ("doesn't even talk to itself"), ineffectiveness ("overeducated PhDs that talked a lot"), propensity to overpromise to Afghans, and lack of resources ("They don't have the military resources. It is going to be very hard for UNAMA to succeed when we are gone").

Officers used this opportunity to provide suggestions for the "future conflict/stabilization efforts." A contract officer for the State Department suggested that a list of contractor all-stars who "did a good job" be compiled and maintained. A development officer lamented he spent three to five days planning a one-hour event for a congressional delegation. He railed that "time was wasted on VIP visits," which another respondent referred to as "war tourism." A development officer had a very different opinion regarding visits of rank and file USG officers, stating, "If this [civilian field stabilization effort] was to ever happen again, before you serve in Kabul, you should probably serve in the field. ... Some of the taskers [from the Embassy] seemed so out of touch with what is actually going on here. ... When you are developing these programs, go out in the field first. Let us help you set up shuras [meetings] to see what people really feel and think, using our relationships with people on the ground."

A few officers urged that civilian agencies, and particularly State and USAID, reform their evaluation process. A USDA officer aptly reflected this opinion, stating that the mixture of "constant rotations" and a metrics-driven evaluation process combined to ill effect: "Can I get this [project] done in my six, eight [months], or a year versus this [more sustainable project]? And the community may already have three wells, but I'm going to do this [build another well] because I can put on my resume that I was instrumental and I did this in this time period. So that was one of the negative things that I saw that impeded performance. And it is a natural thing, but their own career path got in the way of the mission at hand."

A PRter from the east provided many suggestions, starting with allowing those hired for civilian field positions to "drop out during training with no obligations incurred." He felt strongly that civilian agencies need to improve vetting of civilian field officers, to include greater recruitment of those with prior field, military, and sectoral expertise and higher standards for physical

fitness, “professional competence, intelligence, and good interpersonal skills.” This officer further advanced that “our assignment system should be tweaked so that individuals can be assigned or even reassigned where they can have the greatest impact.”

Reflecting comments we heard from a few other respondents, the same PRT political officer advocated a “formalized and institutionalized process for assessing the Iraq and Afghanistan PRT, ePRT, DST, POLAD, and platform experiences, drawing lessons learned and identifying best practices for the next post-conflict scenario.” Comparing the Iraq and Afghanistan PRT models, particularly the thorny question of civilian versus military leadership, would be among the questions such a process would address. He argued that such a process would need a civilian “office or institute that collects and analyzes lessons learned,” which he described as a counterpart to the Center for Army Lessons Learned (CALL). He said one-off efforts (for example this retrospective), prior lessons learned efforts by USIP and others, and the Embassy’s Knowledge Continuity SharePoint system, were “awesome,” but needed to be supersized: “PRTs have operated in Afghanistan for almost a decade, but there seemed very few resources that provided any lessons learned for incoming personnel besides handover files and some USIP reports.”

A USDA officer took the opportunity to critique a perceived disconnect between those fighting the war and the home front:

“I think that our citizenry at home needs to be more engaged. As USG we can help them be more aware of what’s going on ... so that the citizenry is better informed and better able to provide input to the policy makers. I feel like the policy that is developed by this type of effort is developed by such a few with so little support or input from the public at large that it’s like the people ceded that over to a few folks. And I am not sure that our government, and I am part of that, of course, that we are getting it right or that we are getting it consistent with what the folks back home want. I think we can all do better than that. Sometimes those that are directly involved and those higher up the line making policy have falsely assumed that they kind of know what’s best for all of us. We need to get people more involved in that overall process of helping to inform about public policy because this is a huge thing that we’ve done. We’ve invested billions, if not trillions, of dollars and a lot of good folks have lost their lives. There are other types of fall out: people go back and their marriages fall apart, lives are disrupted. It’s been a huge cost for us as a country and we’ve got to either do better or decide if this is something we really cannot do. Because how we’ve done this here in Afghanistan at this cost is not something we can afford to replicate. But there are going to be other things that go wrong in the world that we are going to need to decide if we address, and if so, how. How can we best do it? ... SIGAR is exposing things that need to be exposed, but there are some things that are good too. It would be nice to have that out there.

But it seems like from some sides they only want to say what is really rosy and others want to point out what is really bad. Maybe we have got to get it all out on the table and let people make up their own minds, but I think we all have to take some responsibility and try to help get the word out. And also, when you go back, each of us as individuals, we are not going to have the opportunity to talk to a lot of people but people don't want a lot of what we've got to say. ... But if we take these opportunities or they are presented like the hometown diplomat, that's something we can do. But if we squander those, then that might be our best chance which we've squandered."

This officer says he tried twice to submit a story for publication through official channels, but his offering was considered "too negative" and he was advised to "stay in your lane [of expertise]."

A development officer similarly observed a "weird" disconnect between war front and home front. Her thoughts on bridging that gap for those retuning home will get the last word:

"This is going to sound completely sappy, but there's a war going on and we don't feel it in the United States. There are no sugar rations or gas rations. But yet we have soldiers abroad and then you read about the PTSD stuff. And not to be able to relate to such a large population of our own countrymen seems out of touch. This is my first time working with the military in this context and it has just been fascinating. ... To be able to go back to the United States and relate to that and be an advocate for veterans ... is fantastic."

ANNEX 1: IPA Field Retrospective Methodology and Execution Notes

Joe Relk, IPA Regional Coordinator

After surveying some of the literature on field operations in Afghanistan, I decided to steer clear of overly open-ended questions, such as “what was a typical day at the PRT like,” and instead focus our interviews are some key questions that are contentious, central to the effort, and, for the most part, unresolved. There are some questions that only civ-mil practitioners will appreciate, but generally we believe the questions asked to be of interest to anyone who is concerned about the U.S. investment in Afghanistan, both in blood and treasure, and the future of our partners, the Afghan people.

Another reason for asking focused questions was to allow a comparison across officers, agencies, time periods, and geographic areas. The sample size isn't sufficiently large to make significant extrapolations, but clear differences that emerged are sometimes commented upon, and it is our hope that future efforts might expand the sample size. In fact, the project and its question sets are designed to be a platform for expansion to other agencies (particularly military PRT Commanders, whose voice is sorely missed here), missions (Iraq), and even international or Afghan interlocutors. It would be valuable to know if our non-USG partners judged us and others similarly. My hope is that the interviews conducted and methodology used can be leveraged in future efforts that will have a larger sample size worthy of a more resourced analytic effort. Ideally this would include a number of interviewees from different regions, times, and agencies proportionate to the actual U.S. government field effort in Afghanistan.

This project focused more on capturing the experiences of field officers than analyzing the outcomes of their efforts. As noted in the introduction, undoubtedly some bias has slipped into the selection of questions, how the interviews were conducted, and how respondent opinions were chosen and presented in the overview summary/analysis document, despite my best efforts to get out of the way and let the participants tell their stories. “Political officer” is used as shorthand for State Department staff; “development officer” is used as shorthand for USAID staff. No distinction is drawn between Foreign Service Officers and contract employees. I attempted to encourage frankness and wider distribution by making places and names generic when possible, with deliberate exceptions to preserve valuable context. For example, in most cases an officer working at PRT Nangarhar talking to Governor Sherzai would be described as “a PRT officer talking to a provincial governor.”

One of the biggest preconceptions I had going into this project is that over the course of these interviews, I would be able to synthesize shared opinions and common themes into bright shining truths about the U.S. experience in Afghanistan. I was wrong. Although there are some identifiable trends in the answers, on the big issues about why we undertook this venture and

how it should have been executed, interviewees had diverse and often opposing, conclusions. Answers were more nebulous than I expected. Not only was there widespread disagreement, but sometimes contradictions would arise within the same interview. One interviewee actually gave an answer and a few minutes into his explanation declared, “I just realized what I told you before was wildly wrong,” and proceeded to explain why.

I do note points of general agreement and provide outlying opinions, but in many cases, and particularly for the hardest questions, they are all outliers. My belief that clear truths would emerge from these interviews fueled obsession with increasing interview numbers. The more data I accumulated, the more accurate and compelling the conclusions, or so I thought. I wanted to uncover what we did right and what we did wrong by saying things like “78% of respondents thought cash for work programs were ineffective, therefore cash for work programs are ineffective.” But the answers were usually more nuanced than that, e.g., “cash for work programs can be effective within the first few months of the hold phase of counterinsurgency if executed impartially and oriented toward projects the community wants and will sustain.” It quickly became apparent that the binary right or wrong conclusions I was hoping for were not coming. Instead I was getting something perhaps more valuable: thoughtful reflections on both the why and how of counterinsurgency from the civilian perspective.

Another preconception is that all interviews are of equal value, which makes it easier to total them up and find enlightenment. But no. While most of the more insightful interviews came from people with extensive experience, which might cause one to weigh them more heavily, some did not. Some of the most compelling and well-reasoned responses were actually found in the minority opinions, sometimes a minority of one. A trend does not a truth make, and I’m only qualified to identify the former, along with a healthy sampling of quotes.

As with any attempt to turn anecdotal feedback into metrics, I encountered issues. For example, one interviewee answered that he had not been the victim of an attack, but proceeded to give details about how the military unit he was with responded when insurgents rattled his vehicle with small arms fire. Most of us would in fact characterize this as an attack, but his threshold for being “attacked” was a rocket, missile, or IED. We encountered similar responses from personnel stationed at a large military compound, where small arms fire or even rocket attacks were routine and rarely resulted in any damage to property, let alone personnel. On the other hand, without painstakingly defining the term “attack,” throwing rocks over the fence of an airfield might be considered an attack. We deferred to interviewees to self-define terms for the most part. To illustrate, we took interviewees at their word for the question about whether or not they understood U.S. goals and strategy. Some of the subsequent comments, particularly the variety of comments for those who felt they understood the goals, raise the question of whether

they actually did have a firm handle on the goals and/or strategy. We are not second-guessing the respondents. Anyone who is interested can explore the nuances of the replies in greater detail in the complete interviews.

Readers may note disconnects between the overview, the question consolidation products, and the raw interview transcripts. There is an inherent overlap in many of the questions, with similar points being made in several questions from slightly different angles. We've tried to limit repetition in this overview document, but some of this is inevitable. There were some relatively minor changes in the question set over first six or seven interviews, but mostly this had to do with consolidating questions and content was not lost when reorganized. We also moved the order of the questions for the final summary/analysis piece from chronological to thematic. For example, instead of separating the questions about understanding the USG goal and strategy upon arrival and assessing it before departing, they are considered back to back in the summary/analysis document.

Some of our questions were criticized, but generally the question set was lauded by the participants and the effort was viewed as "long overdue." Field personnel participating in the project were all volunteers, and all seemed eager to share their experiences and thoughts. One colleague who helped us review the question set considered "big picture" policy and strategy questions to be out of the lane of our field personnel and did not see the value of field officers speculating on whether the U.S. endeavor in Afghanistan was well designed, executed, or worth it. We disagree. Who better to assess our efforts than people in the field implementing those selfsame efforts?

Most participants made time for our interviews during short layovers in Kabul for consultations or outprocessing, which meant their experiences were fresh and relatively clear. Those few respondents who were years out of country, on the other hand, understandably had a harder time recollecting details. We indicated an "NA" or non-applicable designator for those who did not comment or were not asked the question in consolidation products.

A colleague from ISAF urged we not conduct the project exclusively as a survey, which would have been exponentially easier, but rather through live interviews. That proved sage advice. There was an exception when an officer provided 26 pages of written responses, but most of the six participants who responded by survey offered short, generally less detailed answers that read more like job evaluation reports.

I do not claim to be a social scientist and this is not a scientific study; it is a collection of thoughts from our civilian field veterans. My tallies of what respondents said should not be construed as

scientific survey data. Although the questions were directed, the responses were not. For example, just because only one person specifically mentioned expectation management when assessing the USG strategy in Afghanistan (question 5.C.), that does not imply that others would not agree; in fact, some allude to it without citing “expectation management” specifically. Tallying of respondent questions is imprecise either because the questions themselves were open-ended or because respondents tended not to reply directly to yes or no questions. We simply attempted to group responses as positive, negative, or mixed.

Where there were apparent contradictions, I categorize the response as “mixed.” For example, this response for the question of whether the interagency field model was effective: “I think it was, and a lot of that is personality driven just because people were willing to share information, people were willing to seek advice from their teammates. ... I don’t think that the organization we have works. When I say ‘the organization,’ we have regional platforms and then you have PRTs [and] the DSTs.” There is the implication here that the interviewee’s team made the system work despite its flaws, but also that one of its flaws, being personality driven, in fact led to success given the personalities involved in his experience.

Thanks to (b)(6) who were instrumental in getting this tome out. My own opinions about our Afghanistan efforts are richer thanks to this opportunity to understand my colleagues and their insights better. I found this to be a valuable project and time well spent. I hope you agree.

ANNEX 2: GLOSSARY OF TERMS AND ACRONYMS

AAEP	Afghan Agricultural Extension Program—A program to enhance the capacity of the Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock (MAIL) and the Directorates of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock (DAILs) at provincial and district levels. The aims of the program are to sustainably develop and deploy technology and knowledge-based solutions, and provide extension and advisory services to Afghan farmers and herders.
ADT	Agribusiness Development Team—Teams composed of Army National Guard soldiers with backgrounds and expertise in various sectors of the agribusiness field who provide training and advice to Afghan universities, provincial ministries, and local farmers.
ALP	Afghan Local Police—A police force trained by U.S. Special Operations forces and deployed as an armed neighborhood watch to fill in where there are few national security forces and to keep remote areas from reverting to Taliban control.
ANA	Afghan National Army
ANP	Afghan National Police
ANSF	Afghan National Security Forces—Generic term for all Afghan security forces (ANA, ANP, etc.)
ARBAKAI	A group of village men selected by elders to provide security or “defend the village.” This traditional mechanism for defense was adapted by GIROA and ISAF when developing the ALP.
ASAP	Accelerating Sustainable Agriculture Program—a program funded by USAID to accelerate broad-based, market-led agriculture development capable of responding and adapting to market forces in ways that provide new economic opportunities for rural Afghans.
AVIPA	Afghanistan Vouchers for Increased Productive Agriculture—AVIPA and AVIPA Plus were relief and stabilization programs funded by USAID in 32 provinces in Afghanistan during 2008–2011. Working closely with the Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation, and Livestock (MAIL), AVIPA distributed vouchers for high-quality wheat seed and fertilizer at a reduced cost to vulnerable farmers suffering from prolonged drought.
Camp Atterbury/ Muscatatuck Urban Training Center	Atterbury and Muscatatuck are Indiana National Guard assets that offer a venue-rich environment for military, governmental and civilian deployment training and pre-operational testing in Indiana. Training for civilians was typically offered at Muscatatuck, but occasionally civilians were also brought to Atterbury instead when military units headed to Afghanistan were

undergoing training there to enrich the civ-mil experience and allow colleagues to practice together, some of whom would actually end up working together in the field.

CCI	Community Cohesion Initiative—A USAID program that seeks to increase resilience in areas vulnerable to insurgent exploitation by strengthening ties between local actors, customary governance structures, and the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan (GIROA) and increasing cohesion among and between communities.
CERP	Commander's Emergency Response Program—special funds that U.S. military commanders can disburse for quick-impact reconstruction projects.
CHAMP	Commercial Horticulture and Agricultural Marketing Program—A program that began in February 2010 to help farmers shift away from relatively low-value annual crops, such as wheat, to high-value perennial crops, such as almonds, grapes, and pomegranates. The objective of CHAMP is to increase production and quality of orchard and vineyard crops for more effective domestic marketing and export.
C-IMCI program	Community Integrated and Management of Childhood Illnesses—A program first developed in 1992 by UNICEF and the World Health Organization (WHO) with the aim of prevention, or early detection and treatment of leading childhood illness. The program seeks to reduce childhood mortality and morbidity by improving family and community practices for the home management of illness, and improving case management of skills of health workers in the wider health system.
COIN	Counterinsurgency—A military doctrine stressing the need to protect civilian populations, eliminate insurgent leaders and infrastructure, and help establish a legitimate and accountable host-nation governments able to deliver essential human services.
COM	Chief of Mission (Ambassador or Chargé)
COMISAF	Commander of International Security Assistance Force
COTR	Contracting Officer's Technical Representative- a business communications liaison between the United States government and a private contractor. He or she ensures that their goals are mutually beneficial. The COTR is responsible for recommending actions and expenditures for both standard delivery orders and task orders, and those that fall outside of the normal business practices of its supporting contractors and sub-contractors.
CRC	The Civilian Response Corps is a program of the United States Department of State's Bureau of Conflict Stabilization Operations (CSO; formally S/CRS, the Office of the Coordinator for Reconstruction and Stabilization). Employees are trained and equipped to deploy rapidly to countries in crisis or emerging from

conflict in order to provide reconstruction and stabilization assistance. They are diplomats, development specialists, public health officials, law enforcement and corrections officers, engineers, economists, lawyers, etc.

DCC	District Community Council
D-COP or DCOP	District Chief of Police
DDP	District Development Plan (GIROA) A program that partnered Afghan officials from critical service delivery ministries (e.g., the Ministries of Finance, Public Health, Education, Agriculture, and Rural Rehabilitation and Development) with U.S. civilian experts and ISAF to deliver an integrated package of basic services in areas recently cleared by ISAF.
DG	District Governor
DLI	Defense Language Institute—Department of Defense language training facility in Monterey, California.
DoWA	Department of Women’s Affairs
DST	District Support Team—A combined civilian and military group responsible for integrating U.S. government activities in a specific district within a province. The DST activities include security, governance, development and strategic communications. DSTs are embedded into a maneuver battalion or company and most often report to the PRT in their province.
FETs	Female Engagement Teams
FOB	Forward Operating Base
FRAGO	Fragmentary Order—A change in a military OPORD [Operations Order] that does not require a wholesale change in the OPORD. A FRAGO determines timely changes to an already existing order.
FSI	Foreign Service Institute—FSI is the primary training institution for the U.S. foreign affairs community, located in Arlington, Virginia. It is where many civilian field representatives received familiarization training.
FSNs	Foreign Service Nationals- employees who are citizens of the countries in which the Department of State maintains diplomatic posts and consulates. They are valued members of embassy teams, provide continuity for the transient American staff and have language and cultural expertise. Also called locally employed staff or LES.
GIROA	Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan
Haqqani	Haqqani/Haqqani Network—The Haqqani network is an Islamist insurgent

group using asymmetric warfare to fight against US-led NATO forces and the government of Afghanistan. Mawlawi Jalaluddin Haqqani (born c. 1950) is the leader of the Haqqani network.

HIG	Hizb-i-Islami Gulbuddin—HIG, led by Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, is an insurgent group active in Afghanistan. Its main area of operation is northeastern Afghanistan. The original Hezb-e-Islami was founded in 1977 as a political party by Hekmatyar. Mulavi Younas Khalis, who split with Hekmatyar, established his own Hezbi Islami party in 1979, not to be confused the HIG insurgent group.
HTS	Human Terrain Systems—A United States Army support program employing personnel from the social science disciplines – such as anthropology, sociology, political science, regional studies and linguistics – to provide military commanders and staff with an understanding of the local population in the regions in which they are deployed.
Huqooq	Arbiters who serve to facilitate the adjudication of disputes and civil rights cases and reach a resolution without going to court. Huqooqs in Afghanistan fall under the Afghan Ministry of Justice and are overseen by the General Directorate of Huqooq. Evidence is presented by the parties in dispute, but if a resolution cannot be reached, the cases are referred to court.
IDF	Indirect Fire
IDP	Internally Displaced Persons
IDLG	Independent Directorate of Local Governance—An Afghan government agency headed by a presidential appointee responsible for coordinating subnational governance policy and controlling the appointments process for most government offices below the national level.
IED	Improvised Explosive Device
IJC	ISAF Joint Command
IPA	Interagency Provincial Affairs—the office in the embassy that focuses on mission activities and personnel in the Regions
ISAF	International Security Assistance Force—An alliance of 39 nations that conducts operations in Afghanistan to reduce the capability and will of the insurgency, support the growth in capacity and capability of the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF), and facilitate improvements in governance and socio-economic development in order to provide a secure environment for sustainable stability that is observable to the population.
I-PACS or IPACS	Initiative to Promote Afghan Civil Society- A program, funded by USAID, that works to create and promote a broader and deeper civil society infrastructure

that involves and serves the needs of the population by enabling Afghan citizens to more effectively participate in the political process, solve community problems, and demand good governance from their leaders.

Kandak	Dari for battalion
KLE	Key Leader Engagement—method for building relations with people and entities of influence in respective areas of operation.
Loya Jirga:	Pashto term for grand council; a gathering of tribal leaders used in Afghanistan to select leaders and settle disputes.
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
MAIL	Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation, and Livestock, sometimes used to refer to the Minister of Agriculture, Irrigation, and Livestock.
Muscatatuck	See Camp Atterbury
NDI	The National Democratic Institute is a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization working to support and strengthen democratic institutions worldwide through citizen participation, openness and accountability in government.
NDS	National Directorate of Security, GIRoA's lead intelligence agency
Nowroz	The Persian New Year marking the first day of spring
NSP	National Solidarity Program—An initiative by the government of Afghanistan that aims to rehabilitate and develop villages in Afghanistan. The program aims to develop local democratically elected institutions which will identify, plan, and manage for reconstruction in the locality.
O&M	Operation and Maintenance
OCC-P or OCCP	Operational Coordination Center, Provincial—GIRoA Operational Coordination Centers established at the regional and provincial level to enhance security, provide situational awareness, report and share intelligence, and coordinate operations.
OTI	Office of Transition Initiative—Part of USAID, OTI supports U.S. foreign policy objectives by helping local partners advance peace and democracy in priority countries in crisis. Typical activities include promoting reconciliation, jumpstarting local economies, supporting emerging independent media, and fostering peace and democracy through innovative programming.
PASO	The Pakistan and Afghanistan Support Office—State Department office that hires contractors for executive departments and agencies to strengthen the U.S. diplomatic presence in both countries.

PolAd	Political Advisor—State Department positions embedded with the military units to provide advice to senior commanders regarding diplomacy, politics, and culture.
PRT	Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) – A combined civilian and military team that operates under joint policy guidance from the Chief of Mission (Ambassador) and the ISAF Commander. The PRT harnesses both civilian and military resources to perform development, reconstruction and governance activities to implement the counter-insurgency strategy. The PRT also monitors and reports. Unlike District Support Teams (DSTs), PRTs are stand-alone organizations.
Purdah	A religious and social practice of female seclusion prevalent among some Muslim communities in Afghanistan, Pakistan and Northern India.
QRF	Quick Response Funds—A State Department-administered small grant fund designed to fill governance and development gaps in Afghanistan. Projects are submitted and developed by civilian field personnel at PRTs, DSTs, and regional platforms. This fund was discontinued for fiscal year 2014.
R&R and RRB	Rest and Relaxation and Regional Rest Breaks are leave periods that State Department employed staff working in Afghanistan are entitled to take. During a one-year tour, employees could take either three R&Rs or 2 R&Rs and 3 RRBs, provided they spent at least 300 days in country. R&Rs pay for employees to travel to their homes (even other foreign posts) while RRBs only pay for a short vacation to another country in the region (not the U.S.).
RAMP- UP	The USAID-supported Regional Afghan Municipalities Program for Urban Populations program strengthened institutional government capacity, improved delivery of municipal services, and increased municipal capacity to enable, support, and sustain economic growth and improve revenue collection.
RBIs	Relationship Building Items
RC	Regional Command—The ISAF RCs coordinate all regional civil-military activities conducted by the military elements of the PRTs, DSTs, and military Task Forces in their area of responsibility.
RSO	Regional Security Office- A Regional Security Office is a U.S. overseas mission section dedicated to protection of US personnel, information, and property abroad as defined by the Bureau of Diplomatic Security. Regional Security Officers are Department of State, Bureau of Diplomatic Security Special Agents. The lead officer in a Regional Security Office is designated the Regional Security Officer (RSO) and additional Special Agents either Deputy Regional Security Officer (DRSO) or Assistant Regional Security Officer (ARSO).

Solatia	Solatia payments are given as an expression of sympathy toward a victim or his family when there is no legal mechanism to make a claim. USAID and the U.S. military have special solatia funds to compensate for civilian casualties.
SCR	Senior Civilian Representative
SIGAR	Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction, an anti-corruption watchdog agency created by the USG, audits and investigates U.S. funded humanitarian and reconstruction assistance programs in Afghanistan. It maintains offices in Arlington, at the Embassy, and at several regional platforms.
SIVs	Special Immigrant Visas- for eligible Afghan citizens who were employed by or on behalf of the U.S. government for one year or more between October 7, 2001 and December 31, 2014, and who have experienced or are experiencing an ongoing serious threat due to that employment.
SPAD	Strengthening Provincial Administration and Delivery—SPAD is an inter-ministerial program, led by the Independent Directorate of Local Governance (IDLG), which provides extra budget to provinces and districts through the government’s ordinary budget. SPAD helps provincial government to adapt its services to local needs through the national budget process.
Tashkil	A generic term that refers to the complement of a government body or effort. It can be used to indicate the authorized or actual compliment of personnel or equipment/resources in a military, police, or civilian ministry unit. It is also used to refer to the official government document authorizing the complement, e.g., the parliament passed the tashkil for police units in Khost province last week.
Terp	Short for interpreter
TF	Task Force (TF) – Brigade combat teams with specific areas of operation which may perform development and reconstruction activities to implement the U.S. counter-insurgency and stabilization strategy.
TMAF	Tokyo Mutual Accountability Framework, part of the Tokyo Conference Declaration of 2012-07-08
TTP	Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan—Alternatively referred to as the Pakistani Taliban, is an umbrella organization of various Islamist militant groups based in the northwestern Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) along the Afghan border in Pakistan.
UNAMA	United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan is a political mission established by the Security Council in 2002 at the request of the Afghan government to assist it and the people of Afghanistan in laying the foundations for sustainable peace and development in the country.

UNODC

United Nations Office of Drugs and Crime

USFOR-A

U.S. Forces Command – Afghanistan

Wakils

According to an interviewee, these are locals who represent GIRoA and offer notary-like services, e.g., approving passports or IDs.