



LESSONS LEARNED RECORD OF INTERVIEW

Ktds	
LL-07 – Stabilization in Afghanistan: Strategy and Interventions of the U.S. Government	
Interview Title:	
(b)(3), (b)(6), (b)(7)(C)	
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LL-07	
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Woodbridge, VA	
Purpose:	
Efficacy of stabilization	
Interviewees: (Either list interviewees below, attach sign-in sheet to this document or hyperlink to a file)	
SIGAR Attendees:	
David Young (Project Lead)	
Sourcing Conditions (On the Record/On Background/etc.): On the record	
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Prepared By: (Name, title and date)	
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Civ-mil relations, efficacy of stabilization	

On the record but check back on quotes for accuracy.

There was a 2011 CERP study at P4's request, (b)(3), (b)(6), (b)(7)(C)

Counterinsurgency Advise and Assist Teams (CAAT) were instituted under McChrystal to serve as a directed telescope to be COMISAF's eyes and ears on the ground, to advise and assist commanders at every level in the field, and to identify best practices and disseminate them across the country. General Allen changed CAATs to be called the "COMISAF Advise and Assist Team". Mostly contractors, started out as about 25-30 but grew to over a hundred, reported directly to the commander, briefed him monthly and mostly made up of SOF. Everyone was a COIN advisor, but most had specialties, like PsyOp etc. CAATs ended when ISAF transitioned to RS.



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Truth was rarely welcome on the CAAT. Everyone at ISAF just wanted to hear good news, so bad news was often stifled. There was more freedom to share bad news if it was small—we're running over kids with our MRAPs—because those things could be changed with policy directives. But when we tried to air larger strategic concerns about the willingness, capacity or corruption of the Afghan government, it was clear it wasn't welcome and the boss wouldn't like it.

There were lots of turf wars at the operational level between USAID and DoD. USAID officials would often tell the battlespace owner, "I don't work for you" and the BSO would ignore State/USAID and treat them as irrelevant contributors, especially if the BSO refused to implement COIN.

The strategy was ineffective because it was never implemented consistently. Commanders were regularly throwing out their predecessor's plans and priorities, even when both embraced COIN, which many CDRs didn't. Many BDE and BN CDRs were still focused on "move with close and destroy the enemy".

There were a number of faulty assumptions in the strategy: Afghanistan is ready for democracy overnight, the population will support the government in a short time frame, more of everything is better.

We went too fast, and that's why we wound up with corruption. Next time, we should provide more oversight and not rush to democracy.

The Afghan government was the largest source of instability because of corruption.

Unless the population is convinced the government will support and protect them indefinitely, counterinsurgency and stabilization won't work (see "Inside the Green Berets"). You've got to start with protection, and it has to be genuine—a real ink blot—not a clearing operation followed by ISAF or ANSF visiting once a month. Clear hold build assumes holding is possible, but we did a horrible job holding because there were not enough ANSF and those that were available were not effective. Stabilization may have occasionally helped, but all that could win the day was permanent security presence. What community would denounce the Taliban in exchange for a school if they only see ANSF once a month? Even if they do support the government as a result of the school, they can't act on it because their lives would be in danger, and I never saw a new school or a series of trainings changing that.

One time USAID wanted to staff a (b)(3), (b)(6), (b)(7)(C), and the local DST told them that there was no BHC, and USAID refused to believe them because they saw on a spreadsheet in front of them in Kabul that the BHC had been built, but we went to the location with our GPS and told them, there's nothing here. They still wouldn't believe us.

With stories like that, it's clear how the strategy became self-validating. Every data point was altered to present the best picture possible. Surveys, for instance, were totally unreliable but reinforced that



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everything we were doing was right and we became a self-licking ice cream cone. This continued long after all the surge troops were in, so it wasn't to justify more troops.

When stab was over and transition had completed, AID often vetoed worthy CERP projects because it didn't conform to their 30-year plans. They were pretending stabilization had been effective enough to actually transition to long-term development. They said these CERP projects weren't sustainable, which was sometimes true but not always.

BN CDRs couldn't even find out what aid projects were taking place in their AO. The USAID reps at the PRTs and DSTs were focused on coordinating CERP projects, so even they didn't have visibility of the national aid programs, which made it hard to know when an area was getting too much or too little of one kind of aid.

Talk to:

(b)(3), (b)(6), (b)(7)(C)