Commander's Emergency Response Program (CERP)

I thought very highly of CERP but it got out of control. This was walking around money and I guess you could call a million dollars walking around money, but in most places in the world that's just not the case. It seemed like a good idea for patching up holes in the street, clearing away garbage that kind of thing, but then you saw it being used to build roads and for megaprojects. That wasn't the intent. It clearly led to abuse, and the reason it led to abuse was because people didn't know what it was about. For something like CERP to work people need to know what they're getting the money for if they want to use it. We were shocked with CERP. It was intended as walking around money, but that amount of money isn't walking around money, not even in the Pentagon. It was intended to get people off the streets at the level that some Lt. Col. could deal with. This level of money led to abuses because people didn't know what the program was about. People need to understand what they are getting this money for. Spending in the Pentagon takes on a life of its own. CERP was considered a good program, so they naturally asked for more money. Bremer was dead set against CERP, wanted to spend money his own way.
LESSONS LEARNED RECORD OF INTERVIEW

For this kind of effort to work there really needs to be clear oversight back here in DC. There’s always a tradeoff there with oversight, of course, though because either people who are going out there don’t want to get kicked around by someone inside the wire or because people back in DC don’t want to get burned for not providing oversight. There’s tension when the field knows what’s going on [as opposed to DC], but there also needs to be some percentage of oversight. Should this be provided by the Pentagon bureaucracy? No, there should be a Special Inspector General or a Stuart Bowen-type group. If you’d had that from the beginning, maybe the whistle would have been blown earlier on CERP. You need some sort of OCO Inspector General conglomerate. To pass something like this through Congress, you need a lot of luck. You need Congressional champions – one in the House, and one in the Senate at least whose staff believes in these changes. Unless recommendations are legislated, they are not going to happen. Also, Congress tends to legislate reactively, not before the fact. This makes things [proactive changes] exceedingly hard.

The Role of the Office of Management and Budget (OMB)

In 2001, the Department of Defense (DOD) could have gotten anything out of Congress. The real restrictions came from OMB. Had the issue been brought regarding an inspector general then as part of a governance package, Congress absolutely would have approved it. Remember, DOD was not focusing on getting itself inspected. The Management side of OMB is the right place for an inspector general; they have a vested interest in not wasting money. The Government Accountability Office (GAO) would also be a good place for this type of inspector general. A GAO-Special IG combination would be pretty powerful. The special IG could report directly to the Comptroller General. Here, they wouldn’t have to scream and yell to get attention to issues. However, the Deputy Director of OMB on the Management side is like the little brother to the Budget side. It doesn’t have as much clout. At this time, OMB Budget was frustrated with the Pentagon because they put together their own budget to a greater degree than anyone else. OMB complained to the president about this and got shut down. OMB’s job is to keep the budget close to something that can make it through the Hill and align with the Presidential priorities. The 18-20 people trying to manage DOD’s budget formation in OMB just doesn’t work. Different directors of OMB either totally acquiesced or had mild objects, while others tried to impose their own thinking. OMB Management, on the other hand, was different and very helpful.

Budgeting and Planning for the Unknowable

There are two sides to a conflict, so how do you scope what the other side is going to do? For example, in 2003, IEDs came into play. How would you know that was going to happen and know that you’d need a whole MRAP program to deal with it? Needs assessments are not only offensive but you also need to also respond to what the other side does [defense]. What controls waste is oversight. If a light is shining on someone, they’ll be more careful with what they do.

Size of Footprint

Shinseki was right: we needed more than 100,000 troops. The challenge is what do you want to do with them? Depending on the goal, you’re in a very different place. It depends on the policy decisions. The decision was made to make them [the Afghans] fight the way we fight. They’d been fighting the same way for over two thousand years. Were we prepared to change that? We were ready to work with warlords? You need to make a policy decision here. Are you willing to work with some warlords, but not others? If you want to reform Afghanistan into Switzerland, you need a third kind of force. The issue is whatever the policy or force, how do you make sure it’s going to be useful?
LESSONS LEARNED RECORD OF INTERVIEW

The more inspector generals stay away from policy and focus on waste, which will always be there, the better. So who will raise questions about the purpose of an inspector general? Congress. It's the job of Congress. It wasn't a partisan decision to not have an inspector general from the beginning, it was just dumb and no one said anything. GAO is effective because it's clearly not policy driven. They are a good model.

With reconstruction we basically took our eye off the ball on this.

Civilian-Military Coordination Issues
In 2002-2003, the Taliban were not there. Al Qaeda was on the run. We could have put far less resources in place if we had focused on Afghanistan at this point and put the most relevant people in key positions. The resources that we could have put in were far less than what we put in to fighting the insurgency. Had the people whose job it was to pay attention paid attention this might not have happened. If these resources had been put into place then, we'd be in a different place today. It wasn't a function of footprint per se it was a function of attention. Had there been attention on the reconstruction piece then the footprint might have been bigger or there might have been better cooperation between USAID and DOD.

The number one impression regarding coordination between USAID and DOD is duplication of efforts. This is a function of lack of coordination, not so much with USAID itself but with the Department of Agriculture. Agriculture never filled its quota, so you had military guys helping farmers while wearing their kit, rifle, and uniform. This creates a different impression on a villager than working with a traditional development expert. USAID maybe should have been the coordinator for all government agencies regarding non-military activity. Yet this role defaulted to DOD, and there are just certain things that shouldn't fall to them.

I like to say we were fighting both wars with one and a half agencies [ intimating that only DOD was fully functional, and State and AID were only a quarter functional each]. Everyone should be involved, and USAID should coordinate the civilian side of things. The problem is that AID is a contracting agency. They cannot fulfill the government polices as contractors. Why is farming a disaster? First, the military is constantly rotating and second, contractors answer to the bottom line. This is not a way to build trust with a population.

Fixing USAID
So how do you fix AID? People who are out there in the field for AID are in OTI. But they are all individual contractors, not part of the ladder of promotion, and don't have the "requisite background" for USAID. I said to Raj[iv] Shah at one point, "Create a separate track within USAID, like Special Ops in the military where you can make it up to the same rank as general, and give it its own budgetary authority." If something like this doesn't exist, development work will always default to DOD. From 2001-2003, the table was dominated by Rumsfeld. But if guys in uniform don't want to do development, you need someone that will.

[Regarding 1206-1207 authority swap:] Well, it went to State and USAID couldn't handle it. Gates and Clinton were able to work together very well, but Clinton did not have the department behind her to receive the pass from Gates. USAID was just not there. If Clinton could have handed this authority to Shah to hire and bring in a core of people they would have been able to set a precedent for the future.

[Regarding "acting" officials:] It wouldn't matter as much if USAID had a solid core of people. At the end of the day, if the civil service corps implements policy, then an "acting" director isn't a disaster. But if there is no core to fall back on, an acting director is terrible. They often have no authority or expertise.