

Afghanistan: the need to develop a cost effective plan for health and educational facilities

1. An important objective of the campaign in Afghanistan has been the development of facilities and services that will provide the basis for an independent and stable country.

The COIN counter insurgency programme has involved a number of developments.

- 1.1 The watchwords for winning the trust of the population are 'shape, hold, clear and build'. It has been recognised that Britain over-emphasised build and constructed too many facilities.
- 1.2 A report commissioned by the Provincial Reconstruction Team and the US General Charles Gurganus, head of the military regional command in the south west, concluded there is:

"a mismatch between the value of the assets and the Afghan government's ability to maintain the services. Some of the projects have not been adequately budgeted over the long term".

An official noted:

"Of course we built too much. We didn't think about how the Afghans would pay for it... We wanted to show them what we could do for them, but without regard for sustainability."



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¹ The permission given by the Ministry of Defence to use their photographs of the war in Afghanistan is gratefully acknowledged.

2. The COIN counter insurgency programme has since 2003 supported considerable developments in Helmand province. Developments include the:
 - 2.1 provision of 26 new schools and the restoration and reopening of 86 schools;
 - 2.2 increasing the number of health facilities to 55 centres;
 - 2.3 restoring 66 miles of highways and constructing an additional 168 miles of road.
3. Since the completion of these projects it has been recognised that there are a number of weaknesses in the planning programmes:
 - 3.1 too much emphasis has been placed on the building of new facilities;
 - 3.2 there have been little discussion with the Afghans concerning the availability of future budgets to support long term operations;
 - 3.3 Sir Richard Stagg, the British Ambassador, has emphasised that overbuilding has been caused by a desire to show the Afghans that there is a serious commitment to help their development.

“With the best of intentions... in 2003–2008 we developed a very expensive view of how we could help Afghanistan and many countries invested a lot in that mission. We focused on the physical and visible rather than the human capital which would manage the country in the longer term. The challenge for Afghanistan now is not a lack of roads and school buildings it is a lack of capacity in its government structures to run the country.”

Actions have now been taken to address these weaknesses in the development programme.

4. Catriona Laing is the most senior NATO civilian in Helmand and is the head of the Provincial Reconstruction Team. She is working with Afghans to identify the facilities that should be retained.

Laing has already made a number of important decisions and has:

- 4.1 identified the aim to develop educational and health facilities that can be supported by available long term budgets;
- 4.2 ordered a stop to further building projects unless there is a proper long term maintenance budget;
- 4.3 prioritised schools, health centres and other facilities in important population centres such as the capital Lashkar Gah and the nearby city of Gareshk;
- 4.4 released schools and health centres in rural areas away from the central Helmand valley that are less secure and more vulnerable to attack.

Stellae has a proven record of developing accommodation strategies for schools and colleges on the basis of specified space utilisation levels and viable room timetables. The developments in Afghanistan could have been planned objectively on the basis of specified educational budgets. The present rationalisation of facilities could have been avoided at a fraction of the incurred total capital costs.

The current rationalisation of health and educational facilities is demoralising for the Afghans and the armed forces. This setback could have been avoided whilst achieving a viable balance between new developments and available long term budgets. The investment in space planning would have been a small proportion of spent capital investment.