



Afghanistan Operations Reconstruction

10 Nonpolitical Takeaways for DoD Program Managers

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CONGRESS CREATED THE SPECIAL INSPECTOR GENERAL FOR AFGHANISTAN RECONSTRUCTION (SIGAR) as an independent agency—not under any single department. SIGAR is the only inspector general focused specifically on the Afghanistan mission.

SIGAR's final report, upon which this article is based in part, was comprehensively developed and professionally presented. Its eight chapters span the entire Afghanistan "experience" and should be a valued reference document for military and civilian professionals in the Department of Defense (DoD). Each chapter ends with "Key Findings" and "Recommendations." The report identified, as it must, many issues of international foreign policy, NATO, global strategy and politics—all beyond the control of DoD program managers (PMs) and other acquisition professionals, and all beyond the scope of this article. However, the report identified issues that are within the control of DoD PMs and acquisition professionals, and provided actionable recommendations, and these are within the scope of this article.

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Chapter 4, “Equipping the Force,” and Chapter 5, “U.S. Based Training,” are the focus of this article and provide valuable program management instruction, independent of “politics.” That said, PMs and other acquisition professionals, knowing that they cannot change politics must, nonetheless, appreciate its existence, and be mindful of it as they execute their programs. Similarly, the Foreign Military Sales (FMS) Program is another area exerting an influence. FMS program execution is unique in Afghanistan. Referred to throughout the report as the “pseudo FMS” program, it does not follow traditional FMS procedures, which caused numerous issues in theater.

The good news is that your work is still “Program Management,” which, when robustly executed, results in a superior,

mission-fulfilling product—whether that product is going to Afghanistan or Arkansas.

Summary of Applicable I.G. Findings

Table 1 covers (in greatly condensed fashion) some of the applicable findings of the report.

Does it look bad? You bet, but let’s be guided by a few thoughts. First, U.S.-based acquisition professionals must get involved in decision making earlier, ensuring that we’re providing the right products for the mission. Next, we must make those products as provably effective, robust, reliable and sustainable as possible. Next, we need to qualify (not just train) operators, leaders, advisors and logisticians the best that we can. Last, if we don’t do our jobs as best we can, the first one to know it will be that

Table 1. Applicable I.G. Findings

I.G. Finding	U.S. At Fault?	U.S. Can Fix Alone?	U.S. Can Make Better?
There is no comprehensive long-term plan to train, advise, assist and equip a partner nation’s military and security forces.	Yes	No	Yes
Command and control suffer from a lack of long-term vision to transfer responsibility.	Yes	Yes	Yes
U.S.-NATO military and security plans require improved coordination among all stakeholders.	No	No	Yes
The foreign military sales process currently has no viable plan to transfer ownership and responsibility for recourses.	Yes	Yes	Yes
U.S. financing of partner nation security forces may be a continuing requirement even as their capabilities improve.	Yes	Yes	Yes
Creating professional military advisors requires long-term assignments, proper incentives and skills development.	Yes	Yes	Yes
Advisors should be selected based on technical expertise, proper training and vetting, and training focused on partner nation military structures, processes, culture and equipment.	Yes	Yes	Yes
U.S. military and civilian agencies cannot meet the high demand for advisors, and require special hiring authority to recruit/train advisors to fill advisor requirements.	No	No	Yes
The United States must determine the capabilities needed by partner nations to meet both long-term (ongoing) and short-term (specific) threats, and equip and train them for both.	Yes	Yes	Yes
Failure to establish lead organizations results in inability to identify needs, fragmented command and control, and limited accountability and oversight.	Yes	Yes	Yes

Tables and figures by the author.

young soldier standing out there in the sand. Let that sink in, and let’s get back to work.

Equipping the Force

Chapter 4 of the report, titled “Equipping the Force,” described the Afghan National Defense and Security Force, or “ANDSF” since 2002. Lack of consistency and direction took a heavy toll on equipping decisions—initially and throughout life cycles—and often lacked the involvement of all stakeholders. No further discussion of those decision-making processes is needed, except to sketch a more streamlined approach as shown in Figure 1 and described in the paragraphs that follow.

Note first the inputs in the boxes to the left. These boxes cover essential program management practices that, stated generally or specifically, were found lacking in-theater. The boxes are, for the most part, self-explanatory, except the top and bottom boxes. Training, as will be discussed later, must be in place, provably effective and focused on the right individuals and teams; and the overarching objective is the ultimate transfer of ownership to the forces in theater.

The boxes to the right are where “partnership” is molded in mutual respect and where preparation plus competence plus early/continuing involvement equal productivity.

This more accommodating decision-making process satisfies both DoD and FMS requirements, especially in how it includes partner nation involvement in the planning, execution, Continental United States or (CONUS) reach back, sustainability and configuration management, risk and threat definition/mitigation, development of Concepts of Operation, or “CONOPS,” and in the feedback loops.

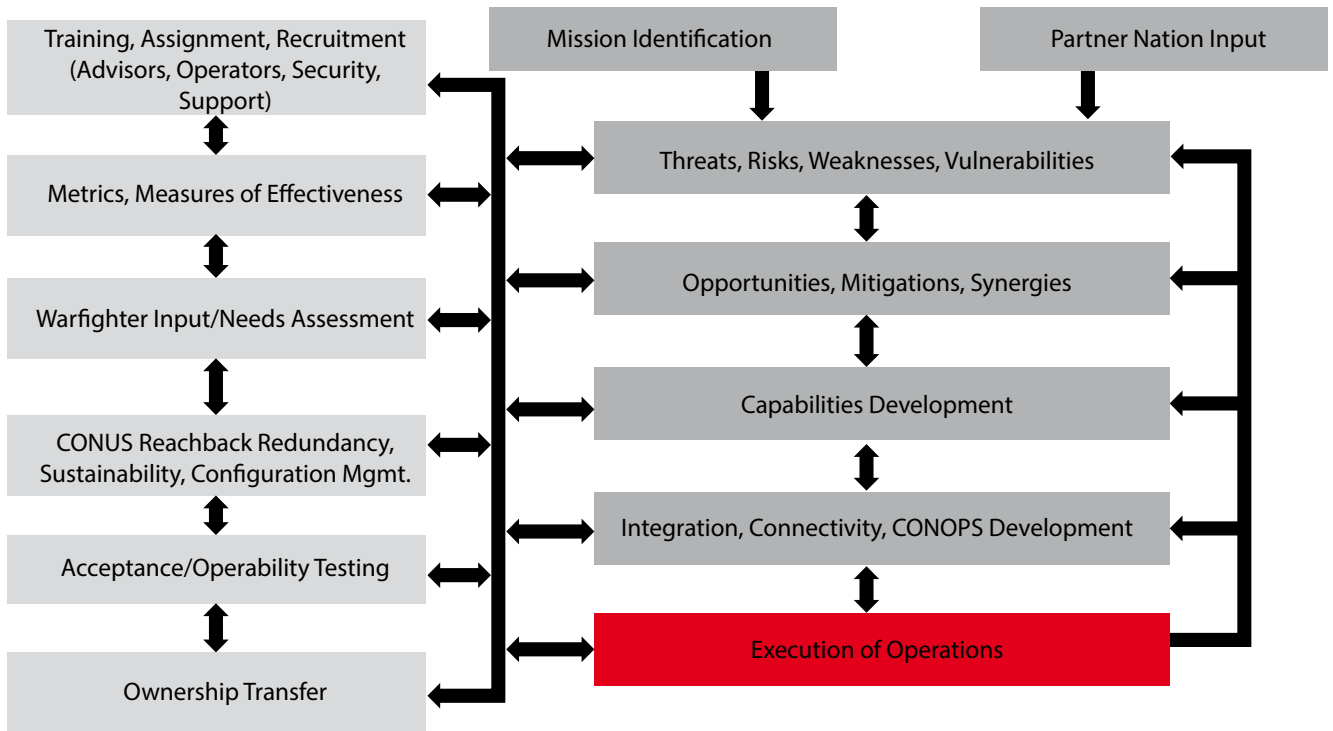
The pseudo-FMS process increases roles and responsibilities for personnel in-theater, who are not as qualified as CONUS-based acquisition professionals, who (according to the report) are being “sidelined.”

1 Mission Identification—Get Acquisition Experts Involved at the Beginning

Mission identification and adherence posed a continuing challenge, often due to lack of communication between the United States and its partner nations. A mission, before it can hope to be accomplished successfully, must be appropriate, realistic, actionable, measurable and fully understood and concurred in by all participants. Anything less is unsafe and self-destructive.

Missions must be realistic sub-sets of a realistic “vision.” Then missions should be broken down into measurable goals, objectives and milestones. Otherwise, missions will be as specious and meaningless as “end world hunger” or “make the world safe for democracy.”

Figure 1. More Cooperative Decision Making—Dumb It Down, and Wise Up



Key: CONOPS=concept of operations; CONUS=Continental United States.

Only after PMs and Warfighters, together with partner nation counterparts, have agreed on the missions, and on how (and with what) to execute them, can they move on to identify threats, risks and vulnerabilities.

2 Identify Threats, Risks and Vulnerabilities

Threat Assessment is the practice of determining the credibility and seriousness of a potential threat, as well as the probability that the threat will become a reality. It consists of (first) identifying the threats, and then prioritizing them in order of danger level, and identifying mitigations or solutions. Identifying threats, weaknesses/vulnerabilities of own forces to the threats, and mission criticality is called risk assessment; and when courses of corrective action are explored, it becomes risk management.

3 Identify the Capability Gap—Partners, Not Customers

The report states that the “pseudo-FMS” process does not compel the United States to seek “buy in” from the host/partner country. It is considered a best practice, but not mandatory, as it would be with traditional FMS. When carried to the extreme, partner nations end up with equipment that, according to the report, they “don’t want, don’t use, and didn’t ask for.” DoD can correct this when

assessing the capability gap between the mission and the available assets. Figure 11 on Page 70 of the report compares FMS and pseudo-FMS processes.

A capability is not simply a weapon or piece of equipment. It is a complex system of mutually reinforcing inputs that combine to enable military units to execute necessary functions in support of a mission. A capability gap may exist within an already existing system, or outside, where the risks, threats or vulnerabilities are yet to be assessed. Closing capability gaps requires that U.S. and partner forces work together, coalescing synergistically, producing outcomes exceeding those of the same forces working separately or when not cooperating. Partner forces must truly be thought of as partners—not hosts and definitely not customers.

Material solutions (e.g.; improved sensors) or non-material solutions (e.g.; revisions to the CONOPS) can close capability gaps. Non-material solutions may close those gaps faster and sooner.

4 Configuration Enforcement—Give Everyone the Same Upgrade

Configuration management is a critical subset of every acquisition program. It refers to systems

engineering processes that establish and maintain consistency of product performance. Configuration enforcement, however, ensures that functional and physical attributes remain consistent with design and operational requirements throughout the life of the product. Configuration enforcement may be the single most useful tool in the configuration manager's toolbox.

5 Connectivity—Don't Leave Home Without It

Connectivity refers to a program's or device's ability to link with other programs or devices. A program that can import data from a wide variety of sources and can export data in many different formats is said to have "good connectivity," especially when connecting to or communicating with another computer or computer system. The finest sub-systems are useless (or at least fall short) if they cannot effectively connect with each other and form a system. Connectivity in decision making means harnessing information from many information generators into one total picture—often called the Commander's Dashboard.

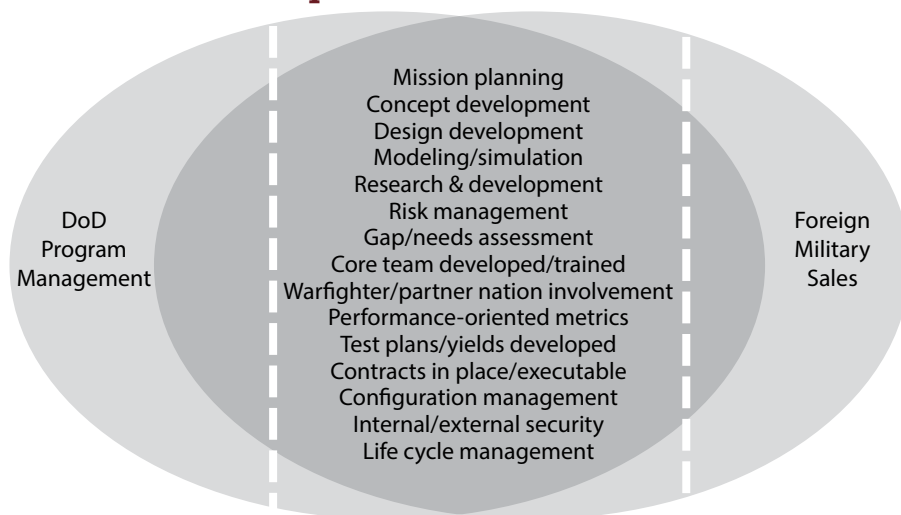
The I.G. report was replete with illustrations of where connectivity was lacking or nonexistent—between systems, staffs and hemispheres. People were operating different systems, not coordinating and failing to implement a comprehensive total package approach. Activities were not "synched" to a common purpose. I.G. team members used the term "Powerless Middlemen" to describe ineffectual or superfluous participants—unnecessary links in an overly slack supply chain. In-theater personnel reportedly resorted to "internet research" rather than using structured procedures to locate and procure needed supplies and replacement parts.

Connectivity with internal and external support sub-systems, and the corresponding systems of partner nations, must exist from the earliest developmental processes and throughout a product's service life. In-theater forces should be able to connect with any resource—any time and any place.

6 Mission-Centric Foreign Military Sales and DoD Program Management

The DoD program facilitates sales of U.S. arms, defense equipment, defense services, and military training to foreign governments. The purchaser does not deal directly with the defense contractor. Instead, the Defense

Figure 2. A Mission-Centric Comparison of DoD and FMS Requirements



Security Cooperation Agency serves as an intermediary, usually handling procurement, logistics and delivery, and often providing product support, training, and infrastructure construction (such as hangars, runways, utilities, etc.).

The FMS stated goals include:

- Identification of requirements (item, quantity, delivery time)
- Initial support requirements (test equipment, power units)
- Operational concept (mission, number of bases, hours)
- Training (English language skills, maintenance, operations, supply)
- Configuration management
- Services (site survey, quality assurance, transportation)
- Follow-on support (spares, repair, pubs, ammo)

Again, we're discussing traditional, not pseudo FMS.

While the FMS procurement, training, and support path may be different from normal DoD procedures, the "end product"—a working combat system capable of delivering measurable results when used by trained operators, looks the same to the engineer, builder and Warfighter. That's especially true with a mission-centric approach. Figure 2 makes a mission-centric comparison of DoD and FMS program requirements. It also argues that sound DoD program management (including the continuing involvement/consultation of acquisition professionals) is critical to FMS process success.

7 Total Package Approach

The total package approach (TPA) ensures that items can be operated and maintained in the future and that FMS purchasers can obtain support

articles and services required to introduce and sustain equipment. It is a way to ensure that FMS customers are aware of and are given the opportunity to plan for and obtain needed support items, training and services from the U.S. Government contractors, or from within the foreign country's resources that are required to introduce and operationally sustain major items of equipment or systems.

Table 2 describes how success in a DoD program's management means success in FMS as well.

Table 2. Comparing Program Management Requirements and the Total Package Approach

Requirement	DoD Program Management	Total Package Approach
Mission planning; concept development	✓	✓
Design/development (including hardware/software)	✓	✓
Modeling/simulation	✓	✓
Research and development	✓	✓
Risk management plan	✓	✓
Gap Analysis/needs assessment	✓	✓
Core team developed; responsibility/accountability assigned (including decision makers)	✓	✓
Warfighter/partner nation involvement	✓	✓
Performance-oriented; metrics developed/consistent/actionable	✓	✓
Test plans developed; tech yield identified	✓	✓
Contract in place; executable	✓	✓
Connectivity/feedback/CONUS (Contiguous United States) reachback	✓	✓
Configuration/change management process defined/in place	✓	✓
Internal/external security procedures in place	✓	✓

With all this in mind, we proceed to the next section.

Training—Train, Advise and Assist

Chapter 5 of the report is titled: "U.S. Based Training." The report deals with training partner-nation personnel in the United States. Corrections to those shortcomings are beyond the scope of this article. The chapter makes a plea to DoD to train, advise and assist, in any way that it can to measurably mitigate or eliminate as many training shortcomings as possible—regardless of their sources or intended remedies.

success significantly with modification and/or greater emphasis. Specifically:

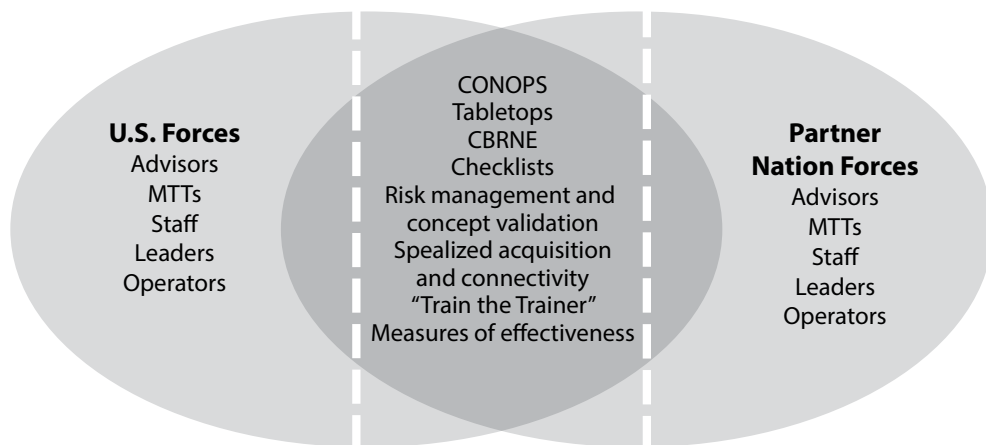
- Establish/upgrade mobile training teams, covering the common areas shown in Figure 3.
- Conduct tabletop exercises for senior-level U.S. and partner Warfighters and logisticians, walking the CONOPS through actual in-theater scenarios and revising it as necessary.

8 Training Package Development


Figure 3 describes common areas of stateside training and qualification that lend themselves to in-theater training packages.

Many of the following in-theater training schemes for the common training and qualification shown in Figure 3 already are in use but could increase mission

Figure 3. Training Package Development



Key: CONOPS=concept of operations; CBRNE=Chemical, Biological, Radiological, Nuclear, Explosive (agents and weapons); MTTs=mobile training teams.



Needs assessments improve the quality of policy or program decisions—thus leading to improvements in performance and mission accomplishment.

- Make the training “qualification-specific.” Establish the qualifications for specific positions (e.g., HUMVEE maintenance manager, CBRNE trainer/instructor).
- Conduct senior-level workshops in risk management, concept development, and measures of effectiveness. Risk management and concept validation build on a set of parameters established, initially, for trade-off studies of selected processes, products, or tactics. Participants must be proficient in these if they are ever to assume full responsibility and management.
- Train/qualify U.S. and partner personnel in tailored, streamlined, acquisition management and CONUS (Contiguous United States) reach-back procedures, to maximize connectivity and minimize time spent awaiting replacement parts.
- Develop focused checklists and flowcharts for critical procedures and inspections (e.g., site hardening, supply chain security management, tactical operations centers). A structured and comprehensive set of checklists can make its user an experienced inspector with its first use.

Add to all these a capabilities-based or qualification-based “mindset” that focuses on the ability of a person or process to get a job done.

9 Needs Assessment—Closing the Capability Gap

With missions, risks, threats and vulnerabilities established and prioritized as described earlier, the needs assessment follows. A needs assessment is a systematic process for determining and addressing needs, or “gaps” between current and desired conditions. The discrepancy between the current condition and wanted condition must be measured to appropriately identify the need in quantifiable terms and to identify a viable solution. The need can be a desire to improve current performance or to correct a deficiency in a system, organization or strategy.

Needs assessments improve the quality of policy or program decisions—thus leading to improvements in performance and mission accomplishment. Needs assessments guide decisions regarding design, implementation, and evaluation of projects and programs, as well as individual and team training and/or qualifications.

10 Metrics and Measures of Effectiveness

The report mentions repeatedly that training effectiveness was measured with great difficulty, when measured at all. DoD can look back on many years of effective data collection and analysis, and needs only to apply and share that knowledge with partner nations using such measures of effectiveness as (to list only a few):

- Number of qualified flight and maintenance crews
- Vehicle/aircraft up time
- Missions scheduled versus missions completed
- Number of sorties/flight hours
- Losses, personnel and equipment

Many years ago, I worked for an admiral who could take down the most confident readiness briefer with a simple question: “How did we prove that?”

Summary

If we can’t fix it, we can at least make it better.

The report of the special inspector general leaves acquisition professionals (first) with great respect and appreciation that such an endeavor could be done so professionally, leaving us with an invaluable reference document. Next, it leaves us with the assurance that the same problems and shortcomings doubtlessly will continue—and indefinitely, without prompt corrective action. Then it calls for action, applying acquisition expertise here and in theater, interjecting where/when necessary. Next, it provides a worklist that screams for attention and doesn’t care where that attention comes from—especially attention that says, “If we can’t fix it, we can at least make it better.” Next, it offers a comforting reassurance that we already have the management skills and need only to adapt and streamline them, empowering and involving acquisition experts where they are most needed. Finally, it leaves us with the disconcerting knowledge that those young soldiers in-theater today (like my grand-nephew) can’t wait indefinitely for our help—and shouldn’t.

Check out the I.G. report at: <https://www.sigar.mil/pdf/lessonslearned/SIGAR-19-39-LL.pdf> and build your worklist!

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