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Afghan Contractors: Anatomy of a Failure

By Jason Ditz

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Afghanistan's Parwan Province is the home of the notorious Bagram Prison, so needless to say, it's a major center for Afghanistan's justice system. Yet it doesn't have a courthouse, and the reason why reflects once again on the bungling system of contractors and subcontractors for Afghanistan reconstruction.

The contract for the Parwan Courthouse was actually handed out over two years ago, during June of 2011. The CLC Construction Company was awarded the \$2.38 million contract to build it by the Pentagon, and it was supposed to be done by the end of 2011.

Yet the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR) has issued a report (pdf) that details failure after failure in the project. Those who have read past SIGAR reports on other projects will find the story all-too-familiar, yet another contract that fell behind schedule almost immediately, and after years of wrangling was simply ditched.

Everything moves in slow motion with the government, and just two months after construction started, CLC was already a month and a half behind schedule. The company was still paid \$396,000 for preliminary work that largely was never done, and it wasn't until January, after the whole project was supposed to be finished, that the government issued a "letter of concern" to the contractors.

It took another 18 months and several passes back and forth between different government factions for the contract to finally get terminated “for convenience,” and CLC was \$396,000 richer.

The Parwan Courthouse, today, stands as a few stacks of rusty rebar and some half-poured concrete, and SIGAR says that at this point the Pentagon is going to have to pay to have the whole mess demolished and start over again.

Parwan is left to conduct impromptu court sessions in makeshift settings wherever they can, nearly two years after the courthouse was supposed to be finished. It’s another failure, and a dismal one.

Not that anyone outside of SIGAR will admit it. Ever eager to spin Afghanistan positively, the US State Department said that despite “issues” with the construction of the courthouse building they believe the project has “been a tremendous success,” citing the impromptu trials that the Afghans are holding in spite of them as proof of the Afghan justice system’s strength.

CENTCOM likewise disputed the report, saying that they later conducted a criminal investigation against CLC for botching the job. Once again this seems totally irrelevant since CENTCOM sat on the issue for years before getting around to terminating the contract, and no matter what they do at this point they’ve wasted years and a lot of money to build some rubble in the middle of Afghanistan, a nation which after decades of war has plenty of its own rubble.