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Afghanistan's Information and Communications Technology Sector: U.S. Agencies Obligated Over $2.6 Billion to the Sector, but the Full Scope of U.S. Efforts is Unknown

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Afghanistan's Information and Communications Technology Sector: U.S. Agencies Obligated Over $2.6 Billion to the Sector, but the Full Scope of U.S. Efforts is Unknown

SIGAR 16-46 AUDIT REPORT

WHAT SIGAR REVIEWED

In 2001, Afghanistan had only a rudimentary telecommunications system located in major cities and along its borders. Since then, considerable development has taken place as a result of private sector investment, as well as the Afghan government and international partners' efforts. According to U.S. and Afghan officials, the information and communications technology (ICT) sector is generally seen as a success. The U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) reports that, among other things, the sector contributed $1.81 billion in revenues to the Afghan government in 2013, employs about 130,000 Afghans, and provides mobile phone services to roughly 90 percent of the population. Private sector investment alone had reached $2 billion by 2013. Additionally, the Department of Defense (DOD) estimates that the ICT sector could generate an additional $1 billion in revenue per year to the Afghan government within the next decade from data transit tariffs and the provision of information services.

U.S. agencies and other stakeholders have recognized the importance of the ICT sector to Afghanistan's economic success. For example, the ICT sector has become a key enabler of the Afghan government and has expanded its ability to communicate with Afghan citizens. In addition, the sector includes communications networks that are critical to the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces' (ANDSF) operations.

The objectives of the audit were to determine (1) the scope of U.S. agencies' efforts to develop Afghanistan's ICT sector since 2002 and (2) the extent to which the agencies coordinated these efforts.

SIGAR is not making any recommendations in this report. SIGAR provided a draft of this report to the Department of State (State), USAID, and DOD for comment. State and DOD provided technical comments, which are incorporated, as appropriate. USAID provided no substantive comments on a draft of this report.

WHAT SIGAR FOUND

Due to the efforts of the private sector investors, the Afghan government, the U.S. government, and other international partners, the Afghan ICT sector has grown substantially since 2002. Although the United States, coalition partners, and other stakeholders have supported the development of Afghanistan's ICT sector through a variety of projects and programs, the sector's infrastructure has largely been created through Afghan-led efforts, such as the Afghan government's policies and regulations encouraging private investment, and private entities making those investments.

The country has six active service carriers, including five 3G-licensed mobile network service operators. These companies are responsible for building most of the over 5,000 telecommunications cellular towers in Afghanistan that power the mobile networks used by most cellular phones in the country. Roshan and MTN are the largest mobile cell phone carriers by customer base. Two of the six service carriers—Afghan Telecom and Wasel Telecom—also offer landline telephone services. Afghan Telecom provides landline services nationally, while Wasel Telecom provides landline services regionally in northern Afghanistan.

Based on SIGAR's analysis of DOD, State, and USAID data, SIGAR determined that, since 2002, those agencies have provided over $2.6 billion to support the Afghan ICT sector. DOD invested the most in ICT, obligating more than $2.5 billion. However, according to DOD, the department's primary reason for spending in the ICT sector was to support the ANDSF's communication needs. State obligated at least $83 million to support Afghan media and rule of law development, and USAID obligated at least $44 million to increase the ICT capacity of various Afghan ministries.

However, because the agencies were not required to track their ICT efforts in a centralized database, the information reported to SIGAR by DOD, State, and USAID may not be comprehensive or entirely reliable. For example, SIGAR independently identified a DOD contract, valued at over $400 million, to procure radios for the Afghan National Army that was not included in the data DOD provided. Additionally, SIGAR found that some of State's and USAID's ICT sector activities were implemented as part of larger programs, and funding information was not disaggregated by separate components. Finally, records for some USAID programs implemented before 2005 were not available because the agency's document retention requirements only extend to 3 years after a program's completion date. As a result, the full scope of U.S. efforts is unknown.

SIGAR also found that DOD, State, and USAID coordinated their efforts to support the ICT sector in Afghanistan. State established the first formal coordination unit, the Afghanistan Reconstruction Group (ARG), in 2004. In 2005, State appointed the first U.S. Senior Telecommunications Advisor to coordinate and synchronize efforts with both public and private organizations. State eliminated the ARG in 2008 and, along with it, terminated the Senior Telecommunications Advisor position. However, State officials indicated that informal coordination with the Afghan government continued. In 2010, the International Security Assistance Force created the Telecommunications Advisory Team, which became the primary coordinating entity for U.S. agencies and led the Telecommunications Working Group until its mission ended in late 2014. DOD officials stated that since 2014, the Telecommunications Working Group has continued to meet under the auspices of the U.S. Embassy in Kabul.

July 19, 2016

The Honorable Ashton B. Carter
Secretary of Defense

The Honorable John F. Kerry
Secretary of State

The Honorable Gayle E. Smith
Administrator, U.S. Agency for International Development

General John W. Nicholson, Jr.
Commander, U.S. Forces–Afghanistan, and
    Commander, Resolute Support

This report discusses the results of SIGAR's audit of efforts of the Department of Defense (DOD), the Department of State (State), and the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) to develop Afghanistan's information and communications technology (ICT) sector. According to DOD officials, revenues from the ICT sector could potentially provide over $1 billion annually to the Afghan government's budget and reduce its reliance on foreign aid. We found that DOD, State, and USAID have invested over $2.6 billion in the Afghan ICT sector since 2002, with DOD contributions totaling more than $2.5 billion alone. The reconstruction funds invested in the ICT sector largely supported the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces and the Afghan media, and aimed to increase the ICT capacity of various Afghan ministries. However, the full scope of U.S. efforts is unknown because the agencies were not required to track projects as specifically benefiting the ICT sector. We also found that the agencies coordinated their efforts. For example, DOD officials stated that the Telecommunications Advisory Team within the International Security Assistance Force was created to exchange information and coordinate ICT efforts among U.S. agencies, coalition partners, Afghan ministries, and Afghanistan's private sector. The team was active from 2010 through October 2014. According to State officials, U.S. coordination on the ICT sector continues to occur between State, USAID, and DOD mission personnel. We are not making any recommendations in this report.

We provided a draft of this report to State, USAID, and DOD for comment. We received technical comments from State and DOD, which we incorporated, as appropriate. USAID provided no substantive comments on a draft of this report.

SIGAR conducted this work under the authority of Public Law No. 110-181, as amended, and the Inspector General Act of 1978, as amended; and in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards.

John F. Sopko
Special Inspector General
    for Afghanistan Reconstruction

TABLE OF CONTENTS

TABLES

FIGURE

ABBREVIATIONS

ANDSF	Afghan National Defense and Security Forces
ARG	Afghanistan Reconstruction Group
CERP	Commander's Emergency Response Program
DOD	Department of Defense
ICT	information and communications technology
ISAF TAT	International Security Assistance Force Telecommunications Advisory Team
MOCIT	Ministry of Communications and Information Technology
State	Department of State
USAID	U.S. Agency for International Development

In 2001, Afghanistan had only a rudimentary telecommunications system located in major cities and along its borders. Afghan citizens often had to leave the country to obtain telephone service in neighboring Iran or Pakistan. Building a strong national information and communications (ICT) sector has been a top priority for the Afghan government since 2002. In that year, the Afghan government began implementing a telecommunications development strategy with the goal of providing Afghan citizens with access to telephone and data communications, and implementing policies and other regulations intended to be favorable for private investment in the ICT sector.

In its July 2013 *Report on Progress Toward Security and Stability in Afghanistan*, the Department of Defense (DOD) estimated that private investment in the sector had reached nearly $2 billion. According to officials we interviewed, private investments by Afghanistan's telecommunications service carriers have been responsible for building most of the telecommunications infrastructure in the sector. For example, as early as 2012, just four commercial telecommunications service providers in Afghanistan—Afghan Wireless Communications Company, Roshan, Etisalat and MTN—had reportedly already invested $1.5 billion and owned most of the infrastructure for mobile services and wireless connectivity.[1]

In addition to private investment, the United States—primarily DOD, the Department of State (State), and the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID)—and other international partners have provided support to develop Afghanistan's ICT sector. According to the Afghan Ministry of Communications and Information Technology (MOCIT), as of June 2014, an estimated 27 million Afghans had access to mobile phone service. Subject matter experts at the National Defense University have also reported that the sector includes communications networks that support the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces' (ANDSF) operations. According to DOD, the ICT sector has become the highest revenue-generating sector.

The objectives of this audit were to determine (1) the scope of U.S. agencies' efforts to develop Afghanistan's ICT sector since 2002 and (2) the extent to which the agencies coordinated these efforts. To accomplish these objectives, we obtained documents, contracts, reports, and economic research studies from DOD, International Security Assistance Force Telecommunications Advisory Team (ISAF TAT), State, and USAID, and interviewed officials representing these entities. We reviewed contract, grant, and other project documentation related to ICT activities in Afghanistan, as well as acquisition regulations and guidance. In addition, we spoke with officials from the Afghan government and the World Bank. We conducted our work in Washington, D.C., and Kabul, Afghanistan, from November 2013 to July 2016, in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards. A more detailed discussion of our scope and methodology is in appendix I.

BACKGROUND

The Afghan government adopted a telecommunications development strategy in October 2002 and implemented the Afghan Telecommunications and Internet Policy the following year. In 2005, Afghanistan passed its first Telecommunications Law, which was intended to promote private sector investment. The MOCIT is responsible for establishing a modern telecommunications sector based on free markets and competition by organizing and leading ICT sector development, and coordinating with other ministries and international partners. The ministry was given the authority to establish ICT policies and regulations, and to issue licenses.[2]

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[1] Javid Hamdard, *The State of Telecommunications and Internet In Afghanistan: Six Years Later (2006-2012)*, Internews, March 2012.

[2] Another key agency, the Afghanistan Telecom Regulatory Authority, which reports directly to the MOCIT, was created in 2005 to regulate telecommunications markets, collect taxes and tariffs, and manage and allocate telecommunications spectrum. Prior to 2005, the Afghanistan Telecom Regulatory Authority had been referred to as the Telecom Regulatory Bureau.

In its 2008 *Afghanistan National Development Strategy*, the Afghan government established a strategic vision for its ICT sector to be implemented through its E-Afghanistan National Priority Program and created a strategy for implementing this program in 2011.[3] The MOCIT is the primary implementer of the program in coordination with other ICT stakeholders. The program's main goals are to create a modern and efficient ICT sector and e-government to enhance the effectiveness, efficiency, and transparency of the public sector; provide for social services; develop a vibrant private sector; and create a connected and productive society. The program's objectives are to strengthen all components of the ICT sector, including the regulatory framework, electronic and mobile processes, and telecommunications networks.[4]

According to Afghan and U.S. officials we interviewed, the Afghan ICT sector is largely considered a success. For example, USAID has reported that the ICT sector:[5]

- Generated an estimated $1.81 billion in revenue in 2013;
- Employs about 130,000 Afghans;
- Provides mobile phone services to roughly 90 percent of the population; and
- Provides internet access to over 1 million Afghans;

According to DOD, the ICT sector is Afghanistan's greatest source of foreign direct investment, largest remitter of taxes to the government, and largest licit employer. According to ISAF TAT, Afghanistan is geographically positioned in an optimal location to serve as a transnational conduit for modern telecommunications processes in South Asia, and the Afghan government envisions an international role for the ICT sector. For example, with the expected upcoming completion of the initial phase of its optical fiber cable network, Afghanistan is closer to offering a premier regional telecommunications capability that could potentially generate over $1 billion per year in revenue from data transit tariffs and the provision of information services and content throughout Central Asia.

The Afghan ICT sector's infrastructure has largely been created through Afghan-led efforts, such as the Afghan government's policies and regulations encouraging private investment, and private entities making those investments. The country has six active telecommunications service carriers, including five 3G-licensed mobile network service operators. These companies built most of the over 5,000 telecommunications cellular towers in Afghanistan. Roshan and MTN are the largest mobile cell phone carriers by market share. Afghan Telecom is the only provider to offer national landline telephone services over national civil networks made available to commercial service providers.

Despite the growth of the Afghan ICT sector, several challenges confront its success, including the security environment and the need for reliable electric power. According to DOD officials, additional challenges that could prevent the Afghan ICT sector from achieving its full potential include development and implementation of cyber security laws and regulations, improved network reliability, and effective civil spectrum management.[6]

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[3] The *Afghanistan National Development Strategy*, approved in April 2008, laid out the strategic priorities and mechanisms for achieving the government's overall development vision. It served as Afghanistan's national development master plan for security, governance, socioeconomic growth, and poverty reduction. The strategy is supported by 22 National Priority Programs grouped under six major clusters: peace, human resource development, infrastructure development, private sector development, agriculture and rural development, and governance. The E-Afghanistan National Priority Program is one of the 22 National Priority Programs. See Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, *Afghanistan National Development Strategy, 2008-2013*, February 2008.

[4] See appendix II for a description of Afghanistan's ICT infrastructure.

[5] *ICT Economic Impact Assessment*, prepared for USAID by Altai Consulting, July 2014.

[6] Wireless communications systems depend on the use of radio frequencies, generally referred to as the radio frequency spectrum. Spectrum management is the process of regulating the use of radio frequencies.

U.S. AGENCIES HAVE INVESTED OVER $2.6 BILLION IN THE AFGHAN ICT SECTOR, BUT THE EXACT AMOUNT AND NUMBER OF ACTIVITIES FUNDED ARE UNKNOWN

We and the U.S. Government Accountability Office have previously reported that no comprehensive, multi-agency database of U.S. reconstruction activities in Afghanistan exists, and agencies are not required to maintain one.[7] In lieu of such a database, we requested information from DOD, State, and USAID, and interviewed officials from those agencies to determine the number and cost of U.S. efforts to support the Afghan ICT sector. DOD, State, and USAID reported implementing nearly 6,000 activities, valued at approximately $2.2 billion, to support the sector since 2002.[8] These activities varied from providing support to the ANDSF to developing the capacity of non-security ministries. However, this information may not be comprehensive or entirely reliable. For example, while reviewing a report issued in June 2013 by DOD's Office of Inspector General, we identified one ICT-related contract for procuring Datron radios for the Afghan National Army worth over $400 million that had not been included in the information DOD provided in response to our request for information. This contract brings the total investment in ICT to over $2.6 billion. Additionally, agency officials we interviewed stated that some programs contained ICT components, but the agencies did not separate the cost of the ICT components of those programs from other activities being performed under the programs. As a result, the full extent of U.S. efforts to support the development of the Afghan ICT sector is unknown.

DOD Obligated Over $2.5 Billion to Support the ICT Sector, Primarily through Its Effort to Develop the ANDSF

Among U.S. agencies, DOD invested the most in the Afghan ICT sector since 2002, obligating over $2.5 billion for ICT activities through July 2014.[9] Over $1.8 billion of this was designated for command and control equipment, such as tactical radios, cell phones, and maintenance and installation services. According to DOD, the primary focus of DOD efforts in Afghanistan has been suppling equipment and support needed to meet the communication needs of Afghan National Army and Police. From 2004 through 2013, DOD implemented an additional 477 telecommunications activities, with obligations of over $19 million, under the Commander's Emergency Response Program (CERP).[10] This information, however, may not represent the full scope of DOD efforts. As noted, through our own review, we identified a $400 million, DOD-funded ICT contract that was not

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[7] SIGAR, *A Better Management Information System Is Needed to Promote Information Sharing, Effective Planning, and Coordination of Afghanistan Reconstruction Activities*, SIGAR Audit-09-3, July 30, 2009; and U.S. Government Accountability Office, *Afghanistan Development: Agencies Could Benefit from a Shared and More Comprehensive Database on U.S. Efforts*, GAO-13-34, November 7, 2012.

[8] For purposes of this report, "activities" refer to U.S. government agencies' and other donors' programs, contracts, task orders, delivery orders, grants, and other procurement initiatives issued in support of the Afghan ICT sector. Although our focus was on DOD, State, and USAID efforts, we identified three other agencies that provided support to the Afghan ICT sector: (1) the Department of Agriculture through its Capacity Building and Change Management Program, (2) the Department of Commerce through its Commercial Law Development Program, and (3) the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention through its support of the Afghan Ministry of Health's Data/Immunization Office.

[9] We requested that DOD provide updated data through December 31, 2015, but we had not received the data as of the time we drafted this report.

[10] CERP is designed to enable local commanders in Afghanistan to respond to urgent humanitarian relief and reconstruction requirements within their areas of responsibility. In August 2015, we initiated an audit examining the effectiveness of CERP in Afghanistan. We plan to issue a report in mid-2016.

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included in the data DOD reported to us. Table 1 summarizes DOD's known support for the Afghan ICT sector.[11]

Table 1 - Summary of DOD Activities Supporting the Afghan ICT Sector

ICT Activity Description/Objective	Number of Contracts or CERP Projects	Number of Contract Actions Funded Through ASFF[a]	Contract Amount or Amount Obligated[b]
Tactical and strategic radios (training, installation, service, etc.); signals and intelligence	6	354	$1,826,895,042
Communications networks and connectivity (Afghanistan-wide)	43	199	$584,058,133
Cell phones and computers	3	4,886	$114,804,146
Applications for managing ANDSF personnel and logistics	15	19	$22,317,411
CERP	477	n/a	$19,328,187
Totals	**544**	**5,458**	**$2,567,402,919**

Source: SIGAR analysis of DOD ICT-related contracts provided as of June 2014

[a] ASFF is the Afghan Security Forces Fund.

[b] All figures in this table were rounded to the nearest dollar.

State Obligated Over $83 Million for ICT Support of Afghan Media and Rule of Law Development

In total, State obligated at least $83 million on 68 activities to support the Afghan ICT sector through November 2015. According to State officials we interviewed, the department did not directly fund ICT activities until 2010. In that year, the Public Affairs Section at the U.S. Embassy in Kabul began awarding contracts and grants to implement ICT activities.[12] The Public Affairs Section supported the Afghan ICT Sector, primarily in the five areas listed in table 2.

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[11] See appendix III for a more detailed listing of these activities.

[12] We have previously reported on the Public Affairs Section's grant program. See SIGAR, *Inquiry Letter: State Public Affairs Section Grants*, SIGAR 15-21-SP, November 21, 2014; SIGAR, *Inquiry Letter: Communication Trucks*, SIGAR 15-09-SP, October 15, 2014; and SIGAR, *Selected Public Diplomacy Awards Mostly Achieved Objectives, but Embassy Can Take Steps to Enhance Grant Management and Oversight*, SIGAR Audit 12-13, July 30, 2012.

Table 2 - Summary of U.S. Embassy in Kabul Public Affairs Section Activities Supporting the Afghan ICT Sector

ICT Activity Description/Objective	Number of Grants or Contracts	Contract Amount or Amount Obligated[a]
Afghan Media, Radio/TV Stations and General News Coverage	25	$42,376,200
Afghan Government Media Capacity Development	17	$23,507,527
Media Operations, Language Training, Phone-based Education	5	$8,525,026
Afghan ICT Access, Skills Development, Training	11	$7,791,556
Women's Capacity Development	10	$1,040,303
Totals	**68**	**$83,240,612**

Source: SIGAR analysis of State/Public Affairs Section-provided information, updated as of November 2015

[a] All figures were rounded to the nearest dollar.

State's Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs reported that its Justice Sector Support Program, funded at approximately $205.5 million, included one ICT-related activity, the Case Management System. The Case Management System was designed to track and record criminal cases throughout Afghanistan's judicial system. Funding for the system cannot be disaggregated from the larger program.

USAID Obligated Over $44 Million, Primarily on Activities Intended to Increase the ICT Capacity of Afghan Ministries

USAID has supported communications and capacity building in the Afghan ICT sector since 2001. According to USAID officials, the agency's earliest ICT activities were conducted in conjunction with DOD, the World Bank, and other ICT stakeholders, and focused on providing communications capabilities, such as support and funding for the Afghan government's national, provincial, and district communications networks.[13] USAID's most recent ICT investments have focused on supporting an E-Government Resource Center, which is a component of the Afghan government's E-Government National Priority Program for ICT and the development and use of "mobile money" in Afghanistan.[14]

Although ICT was an important component of many projects, USAID officials told us that many of their ICT activities did not focus primarily on ICT. For example, several of USAID's ministerial capacity development, economic governance, and economic growth programs had ICT support components. USAID officials we interviewed stated that some programs also provided skills training for mid-level Afghan ICT workers. USAID officials also told us they were not able to provide information on some programs implemented before 2005, such as the Afghan Financial Management Information System, and radios provided to provincial governments for emergency communications and connection to ministries in Kabul. Completion of these efforts is past the

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[13] See appendix IV for examples of other international support to the ICT sector.

[14] Mobile money is a means of transferring funds via mobile phone. We have previously inquired about the potential benefits and risks of mobile money (see SIGAR, *ANP Mobile Money Pilot Program Inquiry Letter*, SIGAR 14-50-SP, May 3, 2014; and SIGAR, *Inquiry Letter: ANP Mobile Money Pilot Program Response*, SIGAR 14-61-SP, May 3, 2014).

agency's timetable for records retention.[15] As a result, the full scope of USAID's efforts to support the Afghan ICT sector are unknown due to the lack of records. See table 3 for a summary of USAID's ICT activities for which we obtained funding and other program information.

Table 3 - USAID ICT Activities with Known Program/Funding Status

Program	Status	Period of Performance	Description/Objectives	Obligations ($ millions)
E-Government Resource Center II	Ongoing	2013–2016	Strengthen institutional capacity, promote transparency, and improve the business-enabling environment in Afghanistan	$3.9
Mobile Money[a]	Ongoing	2011–2016	Promote the use of mobile technologies and improve the transparency of payment systems	$24.4
E-Government Resource Center I	Completed	n/a	Strengthen the Afghan ICT sector's e-governance culture, train ICT personnel, and help digitize MOCIT processes	$1.0
District Communication Network	Completed	n/a	Deliver voice and data services to districts throughout Afghanistan, including municipal governments and civilian users.	$14.2
District Communication Network (Policy Capacity Initiative)	Completed	n/a	Established the ICT Directorate to promote modern ICT policies, standards, procedure and projects.	$1.0
Totals				**$44.5**

Source: SIGAR analysis of data and information from USAID and other sources as of December 31, 2015

[a] Mobile Money is funded as part of Financial Access for Investing in the Development of Afghanistan project.

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[15] USAID's Automated Directives System 502 is the agency guidance on record retention policies and indicates that records should be maintained for 3 years. 48 Code of Federal Regulations Part 4, Subpart 4.7 - Contractor Records Retention, governing record retention in acquisitions, has record retention requirements between 3 and 6 years, depending on the type of acquisition.

U.S. GOVERNMENT AGENCIES GENERALLY COORDINATED THEIR ICT ACTIVITIES

We found that U.S. government agencies generally coordinated their activities supporting the Afghan ICT sector. Initial coordination occured informally through efforts to assist the Afghan government in communicating with its citizens and in forming ministries capable of carrying out their basic functions. DOD officials we interviewed stated that the first formal U.S. agency coordination unit that dealt with ICT issues was organized in 2004 when State created the Afghanistan Reconstruction Group (ARG). The ARG included individuals from both the private sector and the U.S. government serving as advisors to Afghan ministries, such as a U.S. Senior Telecommunications Advisor who was the main liaison with the MOCIT. State ended the ARG in 2008. However, according to State officials, informal coordination continued until 2010 when DOD created the ISAF TAT.

State Initially Led U.S. Coordination in the Afghan ICT Sector

In 2005, State appointed the first Senior Telecommunications Advisor. According to reports written by subject matter experts from the National Defense University, all of the Senior Telecommunications Advisors were DOD officials. The U.S. Ambassador designated the Senior Telecommunications Advisor as the principal U.S. spokesperson for ICT matters and the official liaison with the Afghan Minister of Communications, other ministries, and private entities.[16] The advisor also participated in the ARG.

State eliminated the ARG in 2008 and terminated the Senior Telecommunications Advisor position. This resulted in a 2-year gap in which the United States was without a formal mechanism for coordinating ICT activities across agencies and with Afghan ministries. However, State officials stated that its coordination with Afghan ministries on ICT continued, even after the elimination of the Senior Telecommunications Advisor position

In 2009, State created the position of Coordinating Director for Development and Economic Affairs, an ambassador-level position unique to the U.S. Embassy in Kabul, that was expected to oversee and direct all U.S. government civilian agency development and economic assistance to Afghanistan. However, State officials we interviewed stated the coordinating director had only limited involvement in ICT activities, such as reviewing programs with an ICT component, and did not directly oversee or coordinate ICT issues.

ISAF TAT Became the Major Coordination Entity in 2010, but Its Mission Ended in 2014

DOD officials we interviewed stated that from 2010 to 2014, ISAF TAT was the primary mechanism for exchanging information and coordinating ICT efforts among U.S. agencies, coalition partners, Afghan ministries, and Afghanistan's private sector. Additionally, based on lessons learned from military operations in Iraq, U.S. military and coalition officials established ISAF TAT in 2010 to help meet their own tactical and strategic telecommunications requirements, while at the same time supporting Afghanistan's ICT sector. According to officials we interviewed, ISAF TAT's primary goal was to ensure that the country's ICT infrastructure could support coalition and ANDSF requirements after 2014, and its secondary goal was to help the Afghan government develop its capabilities in the ICT sector. These same officials stated that to accomplish this secondary goal, ISAF TAT and other ISAF officials advised, assisted, and trained Afghan government entities involved in the ICT sector—specifically the MOCIT, Afghan Telecom, and the Afghan Telecom Regulatory Authority—on things such as cyber security strategy, implementation, and legislation;

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[16] The Afghan Ministry of Communications was the predecessor ministry to the MOCIT.

devising, issuing, and evaluating an international competitive contract for its new satellite; spectrum management and transition issues; and establishing and running regional emergency call centers.

DOD officials also stated that in addition to this advising role, ISAF created a Senior Telecommunications Advisor position for Afghanistan within ISAF TAT. This advisor became the key individual coordinating coalition support to the ICT sector and maintaining a general awareness of ICT projects undertaken by U.S. agencies', international donors, the Afghan government, and the private sector.

ISAF TAT also worked with the U.S. Embassy to lead the Telecommunications Working Group, an informal, non-decisional group involving various stakeholders in the Afghan ICT sector, such as U.S. agencies, coalition partner countries, Afghan ministries, and Afghan private sector entities. According to ISAF personnel we interviewed, the Telecommunications Working Group was used as a sounding board for ICT issues and ideas. For example, meeting topics discussed included the Afghan Ministry of Education's digital literacy applications, Internet bandwidth allocation and management, and updates on optical fiber cable installation. According to DOD officials, ISAF TAT's mission ended in October 2014. However, DOD officials told us that despite the closure of ISAF TAT, the Telecommunications Working Group, now under the auspices of the U.S. Embassy in Kabul, has continued to meet on the Afghan ICT sector and coordinates with the Resolute Support Mission.

CONCLUSION

Due to private sector investment, as well as efforts by the Afghan government, the United States, and other international efforts, the Afghan ICT sector has grown substantially since 2002. Since 2002, the United States, primarily through DOD, State, and USAID, implemented numerous projects costing over $2.6 billion to support the sector. However, private investment in the sector had reached almost $2 billion by 2013. U.S. investment in the sector will likely continue for at least the next few years, with the intent of increasing the sector's ability to continue providing much-needed revenue to the Afghan government. U.S. agencies took steps to coordinate their efforts between themselves and with other entities; however, this coordination varied in form between formal mechanisms, such as ISAF TAT and the Telecommunications Working Group, and more informal coordination with the ministries.

AGENCY COMMENTS

We provided a draft of this report to State, USAID, and DOD for comment. We received technical comments from State and DOD, which we incorporated, as appropriate. USAID provided no substantive comments on a draft of this report.

APPENDIX I - SCOPE AND METHODOLOGY

This report provides the results of SIGAR's audit of the U.S. government's support for Afghanistan's information and communications technology (ICT) sector. The objectives of the audit are to determine (1) the scope of U.S. agencies' efforts to develop Afghanistan's ICT sector since 2002 and (2) the extent to which the agencies coordinated these activities. The scope of this audit was U.S. government agencies' support for the Afghan ICT sector from 2002 through December 31, 2015.

To determine the scope of U.S. government agencies' efforts to develop the ICT sector since 2002, we obtained and reviewed Department of Defense (DOD), Department of State (State), and U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) responses to SIGAR's requests for information; relevant agency guidance and guidelines; supporting project and program documentation; and U.S. policies, strategies, and directives applicable to U.S. support of and coordination in the Afghan ICT sector. We reviewed the *Afghanistan National Development Strategy*, documents on the E-Afghanistan National Priority Program, and Afghan policy documents related to the ICT sector. We also reviewed analyses and reports on the status of the Afghan ICT sector. We interviewed officials from DOD, including U.S. Forces–Afghanistan, the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) and the ISAF Telecommunication Advisory Team (ISAF TAT), and U.S. Central Command, as well as State, USAID, the Department of Agriculture, the Department of Commerce, and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention project management officials. We also interviewed Afghan officials with the Ministry of Communications and Information Technology (MOCIT).

Because the agencies were not required to report ICT-specific activities and did not use a common database to track their projects, we requested data from DOD, State, and USAID on all the projects they implemented to support the Afghan ICT sector from 2002 through December 31, 2015. To ascertain the completeness of the data, we compared the agency-provided data with information we obtained through our own research, such as prior audits and summary reports, contract documents, and project documents. We reviewed contract documents, ICT subject matter reports, prior audit coverage, and other summary reports in order to evaluate the ICT programs we were able to identify. We also conducted interviews with agency officials representing DOD, State, USAID, ISAF TAT, and U.S. Central Command. We also interviewed an Afghan official with the MOCIT.

To determine the extent to which the U.S. agencies coordinated their efforts in the Afghan ICT sector, we identified and obtained information on the key formal and informal coordination mechanisms they employed. We reviewed documents addressing U.S. policy for coordination in reconstruction and stability operations. We also reviewed U.S. policies and commitments for coordinating with interagency and external stakeholders. We reviewed ISAF TAT reports and other documentation. In addition, we interviewed officials from DOD, State, USAID, ISAF TAT, and U.S. Central Command. We also interviewed an Afghan official with the MOCIT.

We did not rely on computer-processed data for the purpose of the audit objectives. We assessed internal controls to determine the extent to which the agencies had systems in place to track and report on their efforts supporting the ICT sector in Afghanistan; however, as stated in the body of the report, we determined that the agencies were not required to have such systems

We conducted our audit work in Kabul, Afghanistan, and Washington, D.C., from November 2013 to July 2016, in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards. Those standards require that we plan and perform the audit to obtain sufficient, appropriate evidence to provide a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives. We believe that the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives. This audit was performed by SIGAR under the authority of Public Law No. 110-181, as amended, and the Inspector General Act of 1978 as amended.

APPENDIX II - AFGHANISTAN'S ICT INFRASTRUCTURE

Although the United States, coalition partners, and other stakeholders have supported the development of Afghanistan's information and communications technology (ICT) sector through a variety of projects and programs, the sector's infrastructure has largely been created through Afghan-led efforts, such as the Afghan government's policies and regulations encouraging private investment, and private entities making those investments. Led by the Afghan Ministry of Communications and Information Technology (MOCIT), and driven largely by Afghan consumer demand, Afghanistan has substantially grown its ICT sector from almost non-existent in 2002 to one of Afghanistan's most successful economic sectors in Afghanistan today.[17] The sector is primarily comprised of cellular, optical fiber cable, and satellite components.

Cellular Networks and Landline Communications

Afghanistan's cellular infrastructure consists of its mobile networks and landline telecommunications market. The country has six active service carriers, including five 3G-licensed mobile network service operators. These companies are responsible for financing and building most of the over 5,000 telecommunications cellular towers in Afghanistan that power the mobile networks used by most cellular phones in the country. Roshan and MTN are the largest mobile cell phone carriers by customer base. Two of the six service carriers—Afghan Telecom and Wasel Telecom—also offer landline telephone services. Afghan Telecom provides landline services nationally, while Wasel Telecom provides landline services regionally in northern Afghanistan.

State-owned Afghan Telecom owns the largest amount of physical infrastructure, having inherited most Afghan telecommunications infrastructure contributed by the United States and other ICT stakeholders. This includes assets of the Government Communication Network; the Provincial Governors Communications Network, which extended communications services to the Afghan Government Ministry offices in the Provincial Capital areas and related facilities; and the Village Communications Network, a satellite-based network that allows the rural population of Afghanistan to have easy access to basic voice and Internet facilities, as well as the Afghan Optical Fiber Cable Network. Table 4 lists the licensed telecommunications operators in Afghanistan and the services they provide.

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[17] Comparative studies suggest that the Afghan mobile telecommunications market grew at a pace equivalent, proportionately, to the Chinese market and faster than India's. See Roshan, *Government and the Private Sector Working Together to Create the Afghan Telecommunications Industry, Effective Private Sector Contribution to Development in Afghanistan*, case study prepared for the Enabling Environment Conference, June 2007.

Table 4 - Licensed Telecommunication Network Operators and Scope of Services Provided

| Network Operator (Ownership)	License Awarded	Services Offered	Locations
Afghan Wireless Communications Company (MOCIT and Telephone Systems International)	April 2002	Mobile Global System for Mobile communication (GSM); 3G wireless	All 34 provincial capitals and principal cities
Roshan (Telecommunications Development Company of Afghanistan) (Aga Khan Fund for Economic Development, Monaco Telecom International, Telia-Sonera)	January 2003	Mobile (GSM); 3G wireless; M-Paisa (mobile money)	All 34 provincial capitals and principal cities
Afghan Telecom (Government of Afghanistan)	April 2006	Landline (digital); public pay phones; Mobile (GSM); 3G wireless; Internet Service Provider (retail and wholesale)	All 34 provincial capitals and satellite-based call-center and tele-kiosk services
MTN (South Africa-based MTN Group)	September 2005	Mobile (GSM); 3G wireless	All 34 provincial capitals and principal cities
Etisalat (U.A.E.-based Emirates Telecommunications Corporation)	May 2006	Mobile (GSM); 3G wireless	At least 30 provincial capitals and all major cities
Wasel Telecom (AG Telecom and U.A.E.-based Modern Technology International; private investors)	May 2006	Wireless code division multiple access; Landline	All 34 provincial capitals and principal cities wireless; landline provider in northern provincial capitals of Balkh, Baghlan, Kunduz, and Jawzjan

Sources: Javid Hamdard, *The State of Telecommunications and Internet In Afghanistan: Six Years Later (2006-2012)*, Internews, March 2012; *ICT Economic Impact Assessment*, prepared for USAID by Altai Consulting, July 2014; and updated information provided by the Department of State

Note: GSM (Global System for Mobile communication) is a digital mobile telephony system that is widely used in Europe and other parts of the world. GSM uses a variation of time division multiple access (TDMA) and is the most widely used of the three digital wireless telephony technologies (TDMA, GSM, and code division multiple access (CDMA)).

Optical Fiber Cable Network

With respect to fiber optics, in 2006, the World Bank implemented a project to construct an optical fiber cable network, with a first phase that extends roughly 3,300 kilometers in a ring alongside Afghanistan's main road system (see figure 1). The optical fiber cable network aims at building an optical fiber ring around Afghanistan and interconnections to neighboring countries. However, the Department of Defense estimated that just over 60 percent of this network is operational. Additionally, serious security challenges continue to delay completion and connectivity of the eastern spur and other critical parts of the network. Nevertheless, this network provides opportunities for connections to most of Afghanistan's 34 provinces and with five neighboring countries: Iran, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan.

Figure 1 - Afghan Optical Fiber Cable Network
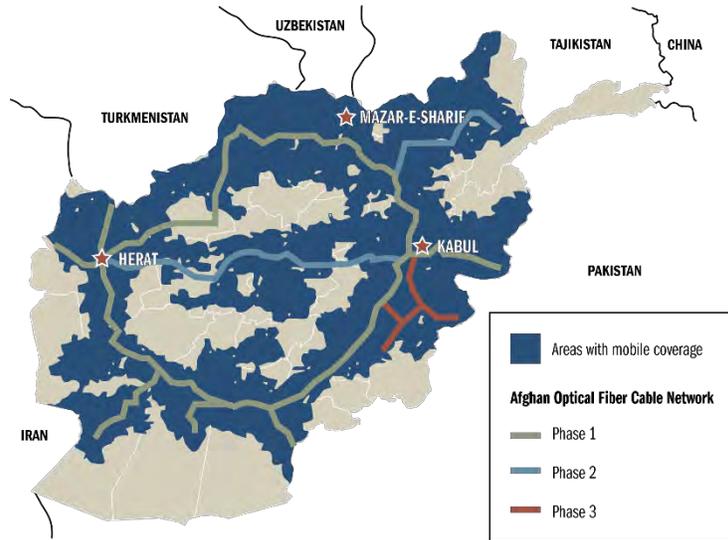
Source: SIGAR analysis of MOCIT's ICT infrastructure maps

Satellite

According to the MOCIT:

- Afghansat is the Satellite Services Provider Agency of the government of Afghanistan and has one satellite in orbit called Afghansat-1. Afghansat is managed directly by the MOCIT with the organizational and financial support of Afghan Telecom.

- Afghansat-1 is expected to allow mobile telephone and internet connection services, as well as high definition TV services to all Afghan provinces, neighboring countries, and countries in Central Asia.

APPENDIX III - DOD NON-CERP CONTRACTS SUPPORTING THE AFGHAN ICT SECTOR

Table 5 lists of the Department of Defense's (DOD) contracts supporting the Afghan information and communication technology sector. It does not include data provided by DOD on 477 projects, with obligations of approximately $19 million, the department implemented under the Commander's Emergency Response Program (CERP).

Table 5 - DOD Non-CERP Contracts Supporting the Afghan ICT Sector

Contract or Project Number	Project Description	Number of ICT Activities[a]	Contract Amount or Amount Obligated	Period of Performance
W56KJD-13-C-0002	Network operations—Ministries of Interior and Defense bandwidth service	1	$11,127,288	February 2013– February 2014
W56KJD-13-P-0368	Network operations—Roshan modem, Subscriber Identity Module card, and service	1	$10,521	March 2013– November 2013
W56KJD-13-P-0501	Core Inventory Management System maintenance	1	$84,940	April 2013– March 2014
W56KJD-13-P-0621	Ministry of Defense bridge network	1	$450,780	June 2013– September 2013
W56KJD-13-P-0631	Afghan National Defense University labor support	1	$403,800	June 2013– October 2013
W56KJD-13-P-0632	Computers and equipment	1	$100,566	July 2013– July 2013
W56KJD-13-P-0658	Core Inventory Management System database repair	1	$14,280	August 2013– October 2013
W56KJD-13-P-0770	Afghan Human Resource Information Management System bridge contract	1	$555,669	October 2013– March 2014
W56KJD-13-P-0778	Equipment procurement for Corps signal kandaks	1	$472,045	September 2013– October 2013
W56KJD-13-C-0003	Very Small Aperture Terminal satellite and bandwidth	1	$2,199,364	March 2013– February 2015
W56KJD-14-C-0001	Maintain and manage Afghan Human Resource Information Management System	1	$4,118,504	January 2014– January 2015
W56KJD-14-C-0004	Afghan Wireless Communication Company bandwidth for the Ministries of Defense and Interior	1	$7,707,800	February 2014– September 2014

W56KJD-14-F-0008	Equipment procurement for the National Military Intelligence Center	1	$189,160	December 2013–February 2014
W56JKD-13-P-0620	Core Inventory Management System backup server license	1	$56,811	June 2013–June 2014
W56SGK-13-C-0004	QuickBooks accounting software and Training	1	$287,464	November 2012–November 2013
W56KJD-13-C-0006	Afghan National Defense University network	1	$2,068,463	September 2013–March 2014
W56SGK-13-C-0008	National Information Management System	1	$3,018,512	September 2013–September 2014
W56SGK-13-C-7033	Afghan National Military Intelligence Center Network Installation	1	$26,330	January 2013–March 2013
W56SGK-13-P-0017	Antenna repair at Sia Sang in Kabul	1	$26,125	November 2012–November 2013
W56SGK-13-P-0002	Software—Intel analytical tools and database	1	$111,755	November 2012–April 2014
W56SGK-13-P-0021	Internet services for Pol-i-Charkhi	1	$19,880	December 2012–December 2013
W56SGK-13-P-0086	Biometrics training	1	$745,200	September 2013–September 2014
W56SGK-13-P-4014	Biometric information tech skills training	1	$103,988	August 2013–December 2013
W56SGK-13-P-7058	National Information Management System Building	1	$433,780	September 2013–December 2013
W5KA4N-11-C-0148	Adobe barracks at Moqur, Ghazni, Kabul	1	$6,404,614	August 2011–February 2013
W90YVD-12-C-0059	Construct concrete masonry units offices and power plant	1	$181,444	May 2012–March 2013
W919QA-12-P-0060	Combined Tactical Operations Center	1	$12,834	February 2012–February 2013
W91B4L-12-C-0204	Belandey Ghundy police substation renovation, Kandahar	1	$198,625	August 2012–October 2012
W91B4M-07-C-4262	Network Innovations Inc.—IT network infrastructure	1	$88,514,402	December 2007–May 2013
W91B4M-10-C-0031	Biometric Enrollment and Personnel Security Program for the Afghan National Army	1	$9,143,194	May 2010–May 2013

W91B4M-10-C-4046	Radio training course	1	$2,202,277	June 2010–March 2013
W91B4M-10-C-4055	Jahaan Tech Corp—base information technology support	1	$229,897	June 2010–June 2014
W91B4M-10-C-4070	Afghan Police Information and Reporting System	1	$10,415,765	July 2010–January 2014
W91B4M-10-D-4004	Ministry of Interior Network Operations Expansion	36	$19,035,000	May 2010–July 2013
W91B4M-10-D-4006	Afghan Wireless—cell phone service	63	$24,000,000	July 2013–November 2014
W91B4M-10-D-4008	CERETECHS—IT network infrastructure	46	$95,197,654	July 2010–July 2014
W91B4M-10-D-4012	Network Innovations Inc.—IT network infrastructure	45	$95,039,531	August 2013-August 2014
W91B4M-10-D-4014	Global Technology—IT network infrastructure	20	$95,000,000	August 2013–August 2014
W91B4M-10-D-4015	CERETECHS—IT network infrastructure	10	$88,836,500	August 2013–August 2014
W91B4M-10-P-0285	Afghan National Army human resources database management (identification cards)	1	$4,233,689	February 2010–January 2014
W91B4M-11-C-0021	Intel Training Center information technology equipment	1	$4,341,959	June 2011–May 2016
W91B4M-11-C-4019	Radio installation services	1	$1,434,943	April 2012–March 2013
W91B4M-11-D-4001	VEKTI—manage and maintain the Afghan Human Resource Information Management System	5	$6,721,468	April 2013–September 2013
W91B4M-11-P-0249	Sia Sang internet access (GSG2 and Internet service support)	1	$80,109	October 2011–October 2012
W91B4M-11-P-4560	Global Rapid Response Information Package program	1	$1,883,224	April 2011–June 2014
W91B4M-12-P-0047	Copier contract	1	$14,207	June 2012–March 2013
W91B4M-12-P-0071	Ministry of Interior radio media buy	1	$93,600	April 2012–April 2013
W91B4M-12-P-0073	Ministry of Interior television broadcasting	1	$531,786	May 2012–August 2013

W91B4M-12-P-0074	Operations and maintenance of Afghan National Police Strategic Communications Network	1	$1,844,195	May 2012– January 2013
W91B4M-12-P-4053	Computer training services	1	$28,567	December 2011– December 2012
W91B4M-12-P-4103	Printer service and photo copiers	1	$11,966	April 2012– March 2013
W91B4M-12-P-4121	Afghan Wireless—Internet	1	$196,500	August 2012– January 2013
W91B4N-10-C-5014	Information technology support for Combined/Joint Task Force 82	1	$28,178,849	June 2010– December 2014
W91B4N-11-P-5104	Commercial internet service provider for Task Force Protector	1	$131,117	August 2011– August 2014
W91B4N-12-P-5023	Internet and voice services and communications infrastructure for the Afghan Criminal Techniques Academy	1	$102,655	December 2011– December 2012
W91B4P-12-C-0043	Construction of Gardez Biometric Facility	1	$93,231	August 2012– April 2013
W91JA4-12-C-4001	Afghan Wireless—Very Small Aperture Terminal satellite and bandwidth	1	$7,763,473	November 2011– October 2016
W91JA4-11-P-4007	Dining facility service for Camp Blackhorse	1	$284,989	December 2010– June 2013
W91JA4-11-P-4084	Internet service at Camp Morehead, Kabul	1	$290,214	September 2011– February 2013
W91JA4-12-P-4106	Internet service for Sia Sang Afghan National Army Compound	1	$38,550	October 2012– April 2013
W91QUZ-06-D-0006	Netbook procurement for Senior Afghan National Army Personnel	4,270	$64,049,544	April 2006– April 2016
W91QUZ-06-D-0009	Laptop procurement for Afghan National Army National Military Academy	553	$26,754,602	April 2006– April 2016
W15P7T-10-D-D410	Ministry of Interior Radio Fielding	14	$43,176,754	July 2010- September 2014
W15P7T-10-D-D416	Afghan National Army radio repair and maintenance training contract	20	$185,510,792	July 2010– September 2014
W15P7T-11-D-H607	Harris Radios and Training	265	$1,145,705,172	December 2010– December 2014
W917PM-04-D-0003-0002	Construction of Communications Command Headquarters in Kabul	1	$6,968,711	Unknown

W15P7T-09-D-D212	Datron radios	53	$448,865,103	March 2009– March 2015

Source: SIGAR analysis of DOD-provided information and contract documents as of June 2014

Note: This table excludes data on individual CERP projects.

APPENDIX IV - EXAMPLES OF OTHER INTERNATIONAL SUPPORT FOR THE AFGHAN ICT SECTOR

The World Bank has been a providing support to the Afghan information and communications technology (ICT) sector since 2003. The World Bank has worked and coordinated closely with U.S. government agenices to develop Afghan ministerial capacity, particularly for the Ministry of Communications and Information Technology (MOCIT), intergovernmental communications, and infrastructure. Table 6 summarizes the World Bank's primary ICT activities.

Table 6 - Primary World Bank ICT Activities in Afghanistan Since 2003

Project Name (Funding Source)	Status	Timeframe	Description/ Objective	Funded Amount ($ millions)
Afghanistan ICT Sector Development Project (World Bank/International Development Association)	Ongoing	2011–2017	Expanded connectivity and mainstream use of mobile applications in strategic sectors in the government; funded several local, regional, and international consultancies to assist in such areas as open access policy, telecommunications development fund utilization, training on mobile government, mobile sector regulations, and Afghan ICT information technology industry policies.	$50.0
Emergency Communications Development Project (World Bank/International Development Association)	Completed	2003–2009	Supported activities designed to improve delivery of communications services to the government and people of Afghanistan, including expansion of the Government Communications Network, policy development and ministerial capacity building, and improvement in postal services delivery	$23.4
New Billing System–Telecommunications (Afghanistan Reconstruction Trust Fund)	Completed	2004–2005	Provided a new billing system, including installation of hardware and software at the MOCIT	$0.5
Satellite Earth Station, Kabul (Afghanistan Reconstruction Trust Fund)	Completed	2004–2005	Provided a high-capacity international gateway, capacity for telephone service, television programs, data communication, and Internet services	$3.8
Microwave Link Installation–Kabul to Pakistan border (Afghanistan Reconstruction Trust Fund)	Completed	2004–2005	Provided telephone access to neighboring countries, particularly Pakistan	$1.9

Source: Data gathered by SIGAR and checked for accuracy by the World Bank

In addition to the World Bank's contributions, other international sources of support for Afghanistan's ICT sector include:[18]

- The Iranian government granted $4 million for the rehabilitation and reconstruction of the Information and Communication Training Institute in Kabul.

- The Indian government granted $14 million for the emergency restoration of the telecommunications network in 11 Afghan provinces.

- International Telecommunication Union experts helped the MOCIT create telecommunications policy and laws, and localize spectrum monitoring standards. The union also provided ICT training courses, workshops, and seminars for MOCIT employees.

- The United Nations Development Programme has supported the Afghan ICT sector in several areas, such as ICT training, the National ICT Council, and the National Data Center.

- Microsoft provided assistance in Windows localization and information technology training programs to convert software into Dari and Pashto in order to make it useable by Afghans.

- Cisco helped the MOCIT by training ICT specialists at Cisco's Networking Academy Program.

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[18] Information as reported on the MOCIT website in October 2014.

May 17, 2016

MEMORANDUM

TO: John F. Sopko
            Special Inspector General for
            Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR)

FROM: Herbert Smith
            Mission Director
            USAID/Afghanistan

SUBJECT: Mission Response to Draft SIGAR Report titled
            "Afghanistan's Information and Communications
            Technology Sector: U.S. Agencies Obligated Over 2.6
            Billion to the Sector, but the Full Scope of U.S.
            Efforts is Unknown" (SIGAR Report 16-XX-AR
            under Code 88A)

REF: SIGAR Transmittal email dated 03/17/2016

USAID thanks SIGAR for conducting the audit and examining USAID's contributions to Afghanistan's Information and Communications Technology Sector.

cc: U.S. Embassy/Kabul Coordination Directorate

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Great Massoud Road   Email: kabulusaidinformation@usaid.gov
Kabul, Afghanistan   http://afghanistan.usaid.gov

APPENDIX VI - ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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Clifton Spruill, Analyst-in-Charge

Carlos Torres, Senior Program Analyst

This performance audit was conducted
under project code SIGAR-088A.

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- improve contracting and contract management processes;
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- advance U.S. interests in reconstructing Afghanistan.

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