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From: Sullivan, Jacob J <SullivanJJ@state.gov>
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Fyi

----- Original Message -----

From: Dan Schwerin [redacted]
Sent: Thursday, July 05, 2012 10:13 PM
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http://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/invaluable-civilians-on-harms-way/2012/07/05/gJQAYJoPQW_story.html?hpid=z2

Invaluable civilians on the warfront

By Ryan C. Crocker,
The Washington Post
Friday, July 6, 2012

KABUL

I do two things each week at our management meeting: Read aloud the names of colleagues, mostly military but occasionally civilian, who have given their lives in service of our country; and welcome those recently arrived to serve the State Department, the U.S. Agency for International Development and other agencies. These volunteers leave homes, family and sometimes careers to work 16-plus hours a day, six to seven days a week, living in shipping containers. All are aware of the threats we face at the embassy and the more frequent indiscriminate fire against field positions.

These are tough jobs, in a tough place, under even tougher conditions.

One cannot underestimate our civilian volunteers' contributions to achieving our goal of creating a peaceful, stable, self-sustaining Afghanistan that can no longer harbor terrorists who would attack the United States. Since I arrived last July, Afghan forces have begun to take the lead on security for about 75 percent of the population. Never before have so many Afghans had access to health care and education, both boys and girls.

In April, it was Afghan forces who repelled simultaneous attacks in four provinces and Kabul. In May, our countries' presidents signed a Strategic Partnership Agreement with mutual commitments that ensure we will be allies well into the future.

While work remains, none of this would have been possible without the American men and women who volunteered to serve here. People like Paul Folmsbee, our senior officer in regional command east, and Karl Rios, head of the Provincial Reconstruction Team in Logar Province. Both work closely with local government, security, business, civil and religious leaders. On April 15, during a meeting with the provincial governor, Karl and Paul spent 12 hours under heavy fire. They sent me a stream of updates and at 2 a.m., still under fire, Paul was evacuated with a badly wounded Afghan soldier. Karl remained on site until dawn, when Afghan forces suppressed the last of the attackers. And once they got the all-clear, both returned to work.

B6

This team is motivated by a desire to make a difference for others. A civilian officer in the east is helping facilitate a program to teach 200 madrassa high school students basic computer and Internet skills to better connect them to job opportunities and to the outside world.

"When I touched the mouse for the first time and put my eyes on the monitor screen," said one student, Fatima, "I felt that I was flying to the sky and seeing a new world of brightness, which gave my heart much happiness."

While our civilian employees are considered targets, we have not simply hunkered down. Regional security officers and drivers risk their lives to support more than a hundred daily engagements, essential to diplomacy, between Americans and Afghans in Kabul and beyond. I was humbled by their work during the attacks against our embassy in September and April, when I joined them in the operations room.

Despite the danger, our civilian and military personnel, working with their Afghan counterparts, regularly travel "outside the wire,"

helping Afghans refurbish homes, canals and irrigation systems left dormant or damaged by the insurgency. For International Women's Day, civilian Jessica Brandt and her military counterpart, Lt. Col. Barbara Crawford, worked with female Afghan partners to stage an empowerment event for more than 400 women.

The U.S. commander, Gen. Marine John Allen, also recognizes the commitment of our civilians. "Many of the men and women of the State Department serve out in the field, riding in the same vehicles as our Marines and soldiers, living in very austere forward operating bases, exposed to the same hardships and the same dangers that our military personnel face. And yet they go unarmed," he said. "I cannot praise them highly enough. Without them and this close relationship, we would not be able to accomplish all we have so far."

I'd also like to thank the 859 Afghan staffers who risk their lives every day to work for the betterment of their country and ours. It takes a special kind of heroism for them to serve alongside us. Taj, for instance, has worked for the U.S. government for more than 20 years; he returned from Pakistan after the fall of Taliban as the first local staffer in the reopened embassy. His outreach to imams to discuss religious tolerance and women's rights under the Koran is achieving measurable results in fighting extremism. Reza helps connect embassy leadership with politicians and thought leaders, supporters and critics, to hear their concerns and ideas.

Working alongside some of the most committed and determined people that Afghanistan and the United States have to offer has deeply enriched the last assignment I will take in the service of my country.

It has left me confident about the future of their nation and ours. I have served in a lot of hard places, with a lot of very good people.

None has been better than those I have been privileged to call my colleagues here.