

Protecting a Nation's Borders

The Corps' commitment to providing facilities to Georgia through the U.S. Customs and Border Protection and the U.S. State Department's Bureau for International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs will help this emerging democracy's security.

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As darkness falls, the sky comes alive with cold bulbs lighting up and burning bright in the night air. This once dark, disheveled place now has order as the buzz of people continues to stream through this seemingly remote part of Georgia. Structures that were once cold and lifeless now hold life, as well as a purpose – to secure Georgia's place in an ever-changing world.

This is not home to Fort Stewart or Fort Benning, rather, the Republic of Georgia, a small sovereign nation bridging Europe and Asia – a developing democratic nation. Building these customs, border guard stations and ports shows Georgia's commitment to stopping drugs,

radioactive materials and other contraband from transiting the country.

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' Europe District, the U.S. Bureau of Customs and Border Protection, and the U.S. State Department's Bureau for International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs (INL) are working together to help the Georgians protect their borders. The Corps is erecting a series of border crossings and ports for Customs and Border Protection (who also work with the Georgian coast guard) and is renovating a nine-story building to be used as a forensic laboratory and a police academy, funded by INL, in Georgia's capital, Tbilisi.



The new customs' station at Red Bridge will help facilitate the safe and efficient travel of people and businesses transiting to and from neighboring Azerbaijan.

TEAMWORK

U.S. Bureau of Customs and Border Protection

“Our mandate is to secure the borders of Georgia against all threats, but in particular, the threats of importation, or transportation, of weapons of mass destruction,” said Jon Trumble, chief of party, U.S. Bureau of Customs and Border Protection. Customs and Border Protection has worked with their Georgian counterparts since 1997. Europe District became involved with the bureau in 2002 with the renovation of a Soviet aircraft hangar. This project was important because it helped establish border guard aviation.

“We know that this part of the world is vulnerable to the transport of radioactive materials illicitly,” said Trumble, citing the importance of radiation detectors the Corps is installing at their border stations and port projects.

Customs and Border Protection also has mandates for antiterrorism efforts and overall security improvements. However, threats to security are not always physical. The loss of economic security is also a viable threat to a developing democracy like Georgia.

“In Georgia, that’s particularly strong,” said Trumble. After Georgia gained independence from the Soviet Union in 1991, it has been an economic uphill battle. “In working with the customs’ department in Georgia ... their focus is on revenue collection to fund the government.

“Just a few years ago, corruption ran rampant through this government,” he said. Top officials were purportedly skimming from the top.

However, the burgeoning democracy stood up and spoke out in November of 2003. Without a drop of blood, the “Revolution of Roses” took place. Since then, corruption has become less outrageous, or at least there’s evidence of this change, much of which the Georgians have affected

RIGHT: A Georgian construction worker smooths concrete at the new customs’ station at Red Bridge – the first station of its kind.

BELOW: A car is halted as a guard swings the gate shut at the old customs’ station at Red Bridge. The new building is equipped to examine cars and built in radiation detectors will reduce the risk of these materials transiting the country’s borders.



themselves. Customs and Border Protection laid the groundwork to help them revolutionize their revenue collection practices. And the Corps has put in place the buildings to allow collection with ease, as well as aid the country’s security.

“I think that the projects that we have elected to go forward with in our program thus far, have improved the morale of the people in the agencies,”



said Trumble. "They've improved the ability ... of the people doing their jobs."

In the last year, custom's revenues have gone up. Trumble said there is more of a willingness now to enforce existing law and to collect existing tariffs and duties, where in the past customs may have allowed cargo to enter the country without paying duties.

This improved morale, and subsequent duty collection, may be a direct result of the completion of the new customs' station at Red Bridge, the border entry with Azerbaijan. The Corps built this station to serve as a tool for revenue collection, and to check what travels into and out of Georgia's borders, said Trumble.

Instead of a jumble of cars and people at the crossing, traffic lanes have been separated. This allows for more in-depth examination by passport control officers. For customs, the facility provides loading docks and a place to examine vehicles from above.

The Corps' involvement also has a direct impact on the quality of life of border guard and customs personnel.

In early 2003, the Corps handed over new housing, a dining facility, a vehicle maintenance building, a munitions storage facility, and other projects for the border guard garrison at Red Bridge.

The Corps also plays an important role for customs personnel with the completion of the customs station at Red Bridge. It is equipped with heat, electricity and running water – a great improvement from the



austere trailers they were previously using.

"The facilities themselves provide a nice place to go to work," said Trumble. "The quality of life is in the professional setting. It has an impact."

For Trumble, the most important aspect of these buildings is how they are used to control the border.

It's all about facilitation. Getting things where they need to go safely and efficiently. Trucks carrying goods will get to their destinations more likely on time than in the past.

The process has also made it more efficient for businesses to import, export and transit through Georgia. Tax and duty revenue is now collected in a more uniform manner, thus contributing to the economic stability of the nation, he said.

When the new customs' station at Red Bridge opens, it will help secure the relationship between the Corps and Customs and Border Protection.

According to Trumble, the Corps of Engineers manages around \$7 million in projects for Customs and Border Protection per year.

U.S. State Department's Bureau for International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs

Georgia's corrupt government wasn't limited to those in power at the top. It also trickled down to those who should protect, not extort – the police.

Police had been stopping cars at intersections with little to no reason and drivers were expected to pay them off with a few lari, the Georgian currency.

These occurrences stopped in the summer of 2004. The entire police force was fired in an effort to root out corruption. Now, driving down the streets of

A Georgian contractor welds a beam above the walkway for the new customs' station at Red Bridge. The new station was designed by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' Europe District and the U.S. Bureau of Customs and Border Protection to help tighten the security of Georgia's borders.



TEAMWORK

Tbilisi, the police are in clearly marked blue and silver cars, not waiting for bribes, but doing their jobs as public servants.

“Georgia’s a strategic partner for the U.S. They are a coalition member in Iraq. And, they are an important ally in criminal matters,” said Meg Riggs, the in-country representative for the U.S. State Department’s Bureau for International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs.

Falling under the State Department and the Justice Department, INL is one of the newest partners for the Europe District.

“Since the Corps was here and had a good reputation, it seemed like a natural partner to do our two projects with,” said Riggs.

The Europe District is working with INL to renovate two buildings for a police academy and a nine-story forensic laboratory in Tbilisi.

INL is currently working with the Police Academy to develop basic and advance training curriculum to assist the new patrol police in meeting their mandate, according to Riggs.

The goal of INL is to develop law enforcement capacity with the United States’ partner countries, which includes Georgia, Ukraine, Kosovo, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iraq, Colombia, Peru and Bolivia, to name a few, said Riggs.

The Corps will provide INL with a facility to train federal law enforcement, traffic police and specialized task forces.

“Right now, the building is in complete disrepair and there’s no place for people to stay when they



Rustavi, Georgia lies on the main highway connecting the customs’ station at Red Bridge to Tbilisi. During the Soviet era, Rustavi was built up as an industrial city, but has perished since the Russian pullout.

come into the region (to train),” said Riggs. With help from the Corps, INL hopes to renovate the school classrooms and eventually the barracks buildings, which currently holds 600 people. Right now, the priority is repairing the classrooms.

One of the goals is to train the police out in the field, but the funding to bring recruits from outlying regions doesn’t currently exist.

“Our goal is to help them to be able to do it (train) themselves and have a facility that can support the type of training they need to meet the law enforcement demands of today,” said Riggs.

Law enforcement strategies and agencies are evolving. The Georgian border guard and coast guard, who have worked mainly with Customs and Border Protection in the past, have never worked with INL before, but this is changing.

In the past, the border guard and coast guard

were all military.

“We had a military-law-enforcement line between us and them, so our projects were very different than the GBLE (Georgia Border and Law Enforcement) programs,” said Riggs. “Now, the border guard and coast guard are becoming law

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers’ Europe District recently finished the Dagomi Orphanage in Tbilisi, Georgia. The orphanage received two new buildings, as part of a joint humanitarian effort between the Corps and the U.S. Navy.





enforcement agencies ... they'll be trained at our academy; there will be synergies in our programs."

There will also be overlap with the usage of the nine-story forensics laboratory being renovated by the Europe District.

"The forensics lab is meant to support all law enforcement ... they will be able to test anything," said Riggs. The top two floors will be for customs to test for such things as oil quality, to make sure the correct taxes are

being levied. The more refined the oil, the higher the tax value. Currently there is no way to determine the grade or the right tax, which makes customs reliant on the word of the person shipping the goods.

The remaining floors will also be for "criminalistics." With the death of Georgian Prime Minister Zurab Zhvania in February of apparent carbon monoxide poisoning, this sort of forensic lab could have proven useful. A proper lab would have allowed technicians to conduct tests to verify the cause of Zhvania's death, which is the subject of constant gossip and conspiracy theories among the Georgian population, said Riggs.

INL also aims to help stop the transit of drugs through Georgia.

"Hard stuff, like heroin and others, we're not seeing in mass quantities. Authorities suggest it's going straight through the country," said Riggs. Law enforcement has few resources but a forensics lab may help prove how, and what drugs, are moving through.

A common prescription drug being used is Subutex, a synthetic opiate used to treat heroin addiction. The belief is that party drugs like ecstasy and synthetics are coming from Western Europe, said Riggs. And with forensics, they hope to be able to prove it.

First though, recruits will need training – from the classroom of the police academy to the real world of the forensic lab.

The high-tech equipment that INL will provide

won't mean anything without training the people correctly, which is what they've been doing over the past few years in preparation, said Riggs.

Giving this training will facilitate Georgia's cooperation with U.S. agencies, such as the FBI and DEA, because they will have more ability to support such investigations. Though INL can't get involved in such operations, they can provide the training, facilities and technology that allow the Georgians to do it themselves.

"Because Georgia is a key partner in this part of the world, it's important to us that we help them do their job as much as possible," said Riggs.

And Georgia will be able to do this with help from the Corps' projects and INL's training.

The Corps' experience in Georgia has forged a good relationship with this emerging democracy. A joint humanitarian mission between the Navy and the Corps yielded two new orphanage buildings for special needs children, said Charles Truesdell, quality assurance representative, Europe District.

The Europe District is also working on projects able to sustain capable fighting forces across Europe. Aiding to Georgia's security and the security of other emerging nations also lends aid to the security of the United States. As part of the Army, the Corps is dedicated to bringing what is needed to where it is needed, and providing the necessary tools and expertise for the job.

The Corps of Engineers continues to make a difference alongside other U.S. agencies while Georgia's democracy continues to bloom, said Truesdell.



ABOVE: A young Georgian man sings at the Dagomi Orphanage in Tbilisi, Georgia, while his peers listen. The orphanage is used to help those with physical and mental handicaps.

TOP, LEFT: Georgian children play a game.