



A force for positive change in the design / construction industry

**Attacks Open a New  
Front on the U.S. Efforts in Iraq**  
(May 19, 2004)

Yesterday, yet *another* new front opened in the war in Iraq. Like the one calling into question the integrity of America's military service people over the unacceptable activities of a few in Abu Ghraib prison, this one calls into question the integrity of the design and construction contractors undertaking the incredibly difficult and dangerous efforts to rebuild Iraq. In both instances, these fronts were not opened by our adversaries or antagonists, but by the Democratic Party and its allies in the U.S. media.

The May 18<sup>th</sup> release of a flawed "study" (all of five pages long) entitled "*Contractors Overseeing Contractors: Conflicts of Interest Undermine Accountability in Iraq*", by the *minority* staff of the House Government Reform Committee and the Senate Democratic Policy Committee criticizing the Iraq reconstruction effort set-off a stunning media feeding frenzy. What was truly stunning is the "study's" findings and conclusions total failure to understand the long established processes used to manage and carry out complex construction projects on behalf of the taxpayer.

Organizations representing the design and construction community have consistently stressed that private sector companies are uniquely qualified to handle the massive, complex and often dangerous projects on behalf of government clients. If the industry were to take the study to its logical conclusion, no firm of any size or capacity would be available to offer its skills and expertise to the federal government to accomplish the very difficult and often complex projects it needs contractors to handle. These contractors use a time-honored and transparent practice, favored by many government agencies, of tailoring joint ventures and construction management to suit specific project execution and financial requirements.

The study's imagined "conflicts of interest" seem to totally ignore that construction management (CM) is a professional service that applies effective management techniques to the planning, design, and construction of a project from inception to completion for the purpose of controlling time, cost and quality. The entire nature of a construction manager is to deliver unbiased, expert guidance to their client—the owner.

Construction management and joint ventures are neither new concepts nor are they strangers to all types of public and private construction projects – *although* the study's belief that CM and joint ventures amount to "conflicts of interest" is! Countless local, state and federal owners utilize these traditional services and have for years. The industry has always been committed to avoiding any and all conflicts of interest and to operate under a professional obligation to immediately acknowledge any influences and offer to withdraw from any assignment when any actual conflict exists which may impair objectivity or integrity in the service of the client/owner.

The study also fails to understand the substantial, time-tested safeguards that provide an auditable trail that can be used to measure the performance and costing of design/construction contracts. Numerous government audit agencies are involved in the oversight of these contracts. This audit process, coupled with the professionalism and management controls in the community, provide ample safeguards to protect the interests of the taxpayer.

Under the direction of the Coalition Provisional Authority, the Iraqi Governing Council, and federal agencies such as the Corps of Engineers, the design and construction community has stepped forward in extraordinarily difficult circumstances in Iraq to provide expert services to further the nation's interests. The work being done is making a long-term difference in the quality of life for Iraqis – and as such it holds the potential for winning the peace.

That is, of course, unless we manage to lose it at home!

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