A Historical Exploration of Military-Driven Infrastructure Development: Lessons Learnt and Way Forward

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Abstract

Military-driven infrastructure development has emerged as a critical aspect of national security and global power dynamics. This paper delves into the historical nexus between military strategy and infrastructure development. It aims to provide key insights and chart a pathway for future discourse. The study employs a qualitative research approach to comprehensively analyse relevant literature comprising case studies, theoretical frameworks, and empirical studies to elucidate the evolution of military involvement in infrastructure projects. It examines the ancient civilizations spanning through medieval advancements, colonial expansion, and post-war reconstruction efforts to trace the pivotal historical moments where militaries played a decisive role in shaping infrastructure landscapes. Likewise, the study advocates for a nuanced approach that prioritizes sustainable development goals. The paper identifies key themes, highlighting the potential of military-led infrastructure initiatives and the necessity for clear delineation of military involvement. Thus, the study substantiates the symbiotic relationship between security imperatives, infrastructure development, and economic prosperity, and offers strategic recommendations for future military-driven infrastructure development from a historical perspective.

Keywords: civil-military relation, infrastructure development, nation-building, sustainable development, strategic construction

Introduction

Globalization has incentivized interconnectivity but has also made geopolitics increasingly volatile. The need for balancing asymmetric powers in global power nexus has increased the significance of militaries in national development in contemporary times. However, military involvement in national development is not a new phenomenon. Historically, militaries have always upheld that infrastructure development of strategic significance and continued throughout. For instance, according to the guidance outlined in DoDI 3000.05 of the United States, it expressly mandates the U.S. Military to take charge or provide assistance in infrastructure constructions for capacity building and stability operations within the purview of national security (Webster, 2010). Indeed, military infrastructures are a significant aspect of conventional warfare strategies but their significance can be traced outside traditional scope of logistics and securing supply routes towards economic growth and scaling up socio-economic progress. Hence, the projects such as the Great Wall of China, the Panama Canal, and the Interstate Highway System in the United States serve as landmark examples of confluence between military and national development.

Militaries aim in infrastructure development is not to build defense mechanisms within the infrastructure but assisting national development to pave a trajectory independently. National militaries are motivated by broader impetus of a holistic developmental project besides a successful project completion. They also vitalize the sustainability of the project in the long run. For instance, these include job creation, the establishment of critical infrastructure, disaster response and recovery

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efforts, support for agricultural and industrial projects, collaboration with corporate entities, and investments in research and development initiatives (Khokhar, 2022).

While historical precedents underscore the pivotal role of militaries in shaping infrastructure landscapes, the contemporary landscape reveals a pressing need for a comprehensive understanding of the dynamics and implications of military-driven infrastructure initiatives. This nexus can be effectively seen in the evolution of infrastructure development in National Highway-1 of India in Kashmir Region. NH-1 was a key target during the outburst of the Kargil War in 1999. However, after 25 years of the war, post-war reconstruction efforts within the line of Cold Start Doctrine of Indian Army have completely changed NH-1, particularly the construction and upgrading of roads, strategic tunnels, and the near-completion of the Udhampur-Srinagar-Baramulla Rail Link (USBRL), Chenab Bridge, Zojila Tunnel. It offers year-round connectivity to Kargil and Leh. These infrastructure improvements not only reduce travel times and enhance troop mobility but also ensure uninterrupted supply lines and provide a strategic edge to the Army (Haider, 2024). In this regard, this study advocates for a nuanced approach ensuring that military involvement serves as a catalyst for stability, prosperity, and resilience through a historical exploration and qualitative analysis of military-driven infrastructure development.

Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

Kapoor (1990) highlights that the militaries maintain critical infrastructures during crises, showing historical examples of military interventions preventing economic paralysis when key sectors face disruptions. He argues that a competent military safeguards national interests and fosters long-term growth in the nation's favour. Likewise, he emphasizes the disciplined, systematic approach developed through rigorous military training for warfare is also invaluable during peacetime to support nation-building and infrastructure development (Kapoor, 2014). Similarly, Shaw (1979) asserts that modern armies are vital to national development beyond the conventional security architecture. However, he points out potential drawbacks, such as the strain on military resources and operational readiness. For instance, public trust in the military as a security provider may not extend to civilian development, affecting the success and legitimacy of such initiatives. Hence, decision-makers must carefully evaluate the impact on military capabilities, strategic objectives, and public perception before committing to development projects (Shaw, 1979).

Dencio (1993) analyzes the historical significance of military involvement in nation-building, noting its substantial influence on national identities and trajectories. However, the evolving geopolitical landscape requires reevaluating traditional military roles. There is ongoing debate about whether expanded military roles should be constrained to avoid deviation from original purposes or broadened to address challenges beyond civilian capacities. Dencio advocates for a nuanced approach, emphasizing the military's role in shaping the socio-political fabric of nations. Expanding or limiting military involvement in nation-building requires careful consideration of its implications for organizational dynamics, national development, and state survival. A comprehensive evaluation of potential consequences, grounded in strategic objectives and the need for long-term stability and prosperity, is essential. Thoughtful navigation of this terrain allows decision-makers to optimize the military's contributions to nation-building while preserving state integrity and resilience (Dencio, 2006). Despite thorough exploration of the historical and evolving roles of the militaries in nation-building, there remains a gap in understanding effective collaboration between military and civilian entities in infrastructure development. Existing studies highlight the broad contributions and challenges of expanded roles of militaries beyond traditional security functions. However, there is limited discussion on practical strategies for optimizing military involvement in infrastructure projects, particularly when civilian agencies face constraints or require assistance.

While these literatures comprehensively explore the historical significance and evolving roles of militaries

in nation-building, there remains a notable gap in how to navigate the study of military involvement in the infrastructure development from a historical perspective. Existing studies shed light on the broad contributions of militaries to national development and highlight the challenges and considerations associated with their expanded roles beyond traditional security functions. However, there is limited discussion on the practical strategies and guidelines for optimizing military involvement in infrastructure development, particularly in contexts where civilian agencies face operational constraints or require assistance. This article aims to weave a trajectory of how militaries have contributed in infrastructure development through a historical lens to provide evidences on how their role is crucial in current citizen-state-military complex that is revitalizing soft geopolitical stances at a global order. For this purpose, this article attempts to carve out a conceptual understanding of infrastructure power from Michael Mann's Social Power theory.

Methodology: Adaptation of Mann's Infrastructure Power for Historical Analysis

Mann's concept of infrastructural power delineates two distinct forms of state power: infrastructural and despotic. While despotic power aligns with Marxist views on state autonomy, infrastructural power resonates more closely with Weberian perspectives, depicting the state as a network of institutions regulating social relations and controlling territory (Mann, 1984). Mann situates infrastructural power within Max Weber's framework, viewing it as fundamental in gauging the state's ability to shape societal dynamics. He describes the state as operating through a hierarchy of central elites and intermediaries, exerting influence over local communities (Mann, 1984). Mann's framework suggests three key relationships: between central state leaders and society, between the state and its intermediaries, and between these intermediaries and society (Mann, 1984). Accordingly, Soifer (2008) delineates three distinct analytical lenses of infrastructural power: the national capabilities approach, weight of the state approach, the subnational variation approach. Soifer (2008) elucidates that the national capabilities approach concentrates on the resources available to the central state, which are instrumental in exerting control over society and shaping social relations. Conversely, the weight of the state approach delves into the impact of state actions on societal actors, offering insights into the operation of state power. Additionally, the subnational variation approach scrutinizes the varying degrees of influence exerted by state institutions across different territories (Soifer, 2008).

For a historical analysis of military-driven infrastructure development, the national capabilities approach emerges as the most effective methodology. It focuses on the resources available to the central state for exerting control and regulating social relations, to understand the dynamics of infrastructure projects throughout history. It shows how militaries strategically leveraged financial investments and manpower to construct vital infrastructure, such as roads, fortifications, and defensive structures, across ancient civilizations and early empires. Moreover, this approach sheds light on the role of the state in planning and executing military infrastructure projects, illustrating how direct intervention and oversight facilitated large-scale development initiatives. It is also possible to trace the evolution of state capabilities over time, reflecting shifts in governance, military strategy, and economic priorities. Additionally, the national capabilities approach provides insights into how military infrastructure projects were utilized to regulate social relations highlighting the interconnectedness between infrastructure development and societal dynamics. While alternative approaches offer valuable perspectives, the national capabilities approach stands out for its comprehensive examination of the central state's role and resource management in historical military-driven infrastructure development, encompassing aspects of resource allocation, central state authority, historical evolution, and social regulation.

Historical Contexts

The intersection of military strategy and infrastructure development can be traced back to centuries as the state and militaries evolve and diminish side by side. Thus, strategic studies

with the evidences from notable events include Military-driven infrastructure development that deliberately engages armed forces in construction projects instrumental in shaping global geopolitics and promoting socio-economic advancement. The imperative to mobilize troops, fortify borders, and assert national power has been a driving force behind significant infrastructure initiatives. Thus, historical synopsis of military participation in infrastructure development is discussed, spotlighting critical milestones, events, and endeavors that have left an indelible mark on the field's evolution.

Ancient Civilizations and Early Empires: Military-driven infrastructure development finds its origins in ancient civilizations and early empires, where armies played a crucial role in constructing strategic infrastructure to support military endeavors and facilitate trade. The Roman Empire provides a prime example, boasting an extensive network of roads, aqueducts, and defensive fortifications. Roman legions were tasked with constructing roads, bridges, and fortifications to connect provinces, facilitate troop movements, and assert territorial control (Purton, 2018). Similar patterns are evident in ancient China, where the Great Wall served both defensive and infrastructural purposes (Evans, 2006). These early projects established a trend that military forces employed their engineering skills and labor force to build infrastructure facilitating not only military operations but also economic development and communication within their empires.

For instance, in Roman Empire Specialist engineers and craftsmen were integral to the military formations of the later Republic and Principate Empire, including experienced surveyors, architects, and builders (Goldsworthy, 2003). These pioneers, akin to modern combat engineers, cleared paths and built camps ahead of marching columns in enemy territory (Cowan, 2003). Naval military specialists constructed fortified harbors to support legionary advances (Elliott, 2016). Roman military units, whether legionaries, auxilia, or naval, possessed a wide range of artisan skills. Paternus lists many specialists, such as ditch diggers, farriers, master builders, smiths, masons, and plumbers. The legionary fortresses, like Vindolanda, showcased extensive metalworking and craftsmanship, producing weaponry and tools. Military workshops were crucial in maintaining equipment and supplies. Specialist military personnel also included land surveyors and aqueduct inspectors (Garrison, 1998). These specialists supported non-military activities, particularly administrative tasks, with clerical staff managing grain records and financial accounts (Southern, 2007). Elliot (2017) provides direct evidence that the Roman military was used to construct the aqueducts as in the Fig.1. The following aqueduct that dates to the reign of Hadrian who heavily modified the Herodian original structure. Elliot (2017) mentions that inscriptions show that a wide variety of military vexillations were used for building the structure and maintenance.

Figure 1: Aqueduct located outside the colonia of Caesarea Maritima on the coast of Judea

Source: (Elliot, 2017).

Medieval Advancements: The Middle Ages witnessed significant advancements in military infrastructure, with castles and fortifications taking precedence. These defensive structures represented more than mere construction projects; they were symbols of engineering prowess and required substantial resource allocation. Feudal lords and monarchs, amidst intricate alliances and rivalries, sponsored these endeavors, commissioning military engineers and laborers to build strategic infrastructure (Langins, 2003). These structures were not just defensive bulwarks but also symbols of authority. Military commanders assumed the role of project managers, overseeing the construction and maintenance of these vital outposts. The Middle Ages epitomized the intertwined relationship between

military might and infrastructure development.

For instance, in Al-Andalus, military involvement in infrastructure development is exemplified by the construction and maintenance of fortified granaries, known as alcazabas. These structures, like the one at Alhambra Fortress in Granada (Fig. 2), were built during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, a period marked by social unrest and instability. Military engineers designed these granaries with defensive features, such as a single entrance and a strategic mountaintop location, to protect valuable agricultural produce from both internal conflicts and external threats. The alcazaba included various storage rooms, communal spaces, cisterns, and possibly oratories, mirroring similar Moroccan designs. The granaries served dual purposes, functioning as both storage facilities and refuges during sieges. Their strategic positioning often overlooked key agricultural and irrigation systems, reinforcing the military's role in safeguarding and optimizing local agricultural production. This integration of military and civilian functions highlights the crucial role of military engineers in ensuring the sustainability and security of vital infrastructure in Al-Andalus, contributing to the region's agricultural prosperity and resilience amidst political and social upheaval.

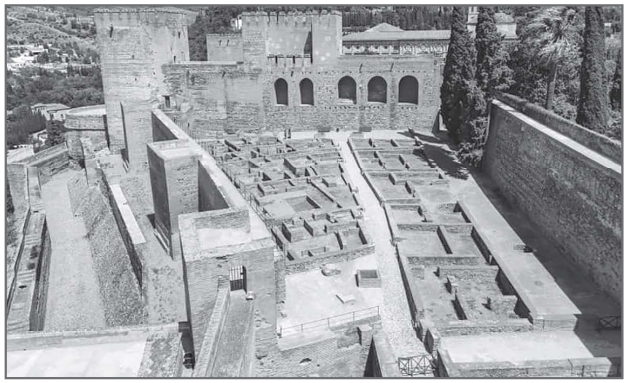


Figure 2: Alcazaba at Alhambra Fortress

Source: (Lovegranada, 2024)

Rise of Nation-States and Colonial Expansion: The emergence of nation-states in Europe marked a new era where infrastructure development became pivotal for national defense. Centralized states sought to expand their influence, fostering a surge in infrastructure projects aimed at bolstering national security. Concurrently, the age of colonialism saw European powers leveraging infrastructure development to assert dominance over distant territories (Haddad, 2005). The British Empire serves as a prime example, with projects like the Suez Canal and the Indian railway network epitomizing imperial ambitions. These endeavors were not just engineering feats but tools of imperial dominance. Colonial armies were tasked with constructing roads, railways, ports, and telegraph lines to facilitate administrative control and economic exploitation, ensuring swift military deployment across vast territories. Thus, the colonial era witnessed infrastructure emerge as a crucial component of imperial power.

The construction of colonial railroads in Africa illustrates significant military involvement in infrastructure development, driven by strategic, economic, and practical motivations (Kerby et al., 2017). Colonial powers, notably in Kenya and Ghana, built railroads primarily for military dominance, mining interests, and agricultural exploitation (Kerby et al., 2017). In Kenya, the Kenya-Uganda railroad, constructed between 1896 and 1901, exemplified this approach, as it connected Mombasa to Kisumu, bypassing populated areas in favor of the shortest and least costly route to Uganda (Fig. 3) (Kerby et al., 2017).

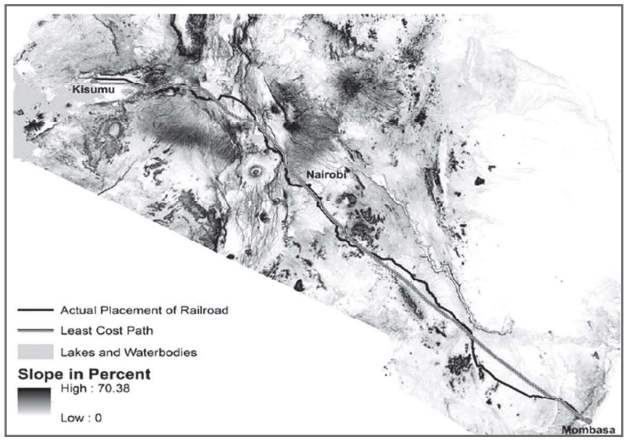


Figure 3: Kenya-Uganda railroad (1896-1901)

Source: (Jedwab et. al., 2016)

This railroad was crucial for military logistics and economic extraction but overlooked the immediate local needs, causing some areas to prosper incidentally due to their proximity to the railroad (Kerby et

al., 2017). In Ghana, the railroads facilitated cocoa production, leading to increased rural populations and the emergence of cities along the lines. Despite the decline of these railroads post-independence due to mismanagement and the rise of motor roads, the legacy of military-driven infrastructure persists. Locations along former colonial railroads remain more developed and urbanized, underscoring the enduring influence of military involvement in shaping Africa's infrastructural and economic landscapes (Kerby et al., 2017).

World Wars and Military Mobilization: The 20th-century World Wars marked a turning point in military-driven infrastructure development, catapulting it to unprecedented scales. These global conflicts demanded rapid mobilization and intricate logistical networks, transforming armies into construction forces alongside their combat roles. Emblematic of this era is France's Maginot Line, an extensive fortification network symbolizing defensive strength and strategic limitations (Steele, 2006). Similarly, in the Pacific theater, remote islands were transformed into military strongholds crucial for pivotal island-hopping campaigns. Military efforts weren't limited to fortifications; they encompassed constructing military bases, airfields, supply depots, and defensive works on all battlefronts. Essentially, the World Wars became a monumental exercise in large-scale infrastructure development, reshaping conflict landscapes.

During World War II, the Alaska Highway, also known as the Alcan Highway (Fig. 4), emerged as a crucial military infrastructure project prompted by the threat posed by Japanese forces. The vulnerability of Alaska following the Pearl Harbor attack raised significant concerns for the U.S. military, prompting the construction of a highway to link airfields in British Columbia and the Yukon Territory, thereby providing a vital land connection to Alaska. Undertaken in early 1942, the project involved extensive collaboration between U.S. Army Engineer regiments and civilian contractors, culminating in the completion of the initial pioneer road by November 20, 1942. Despite encountering harsh conditions and logistical challenges, including fluctuating temperatures and rugged terrain, the highway became operational, serving as a crucial supply route for the remainder of the war. The project's success underscored the significant role of military involvement in infrastructure development during the war. Additionally, the Pan American Highway project, initiated for similar strategic reasons, employed thousands of workers but was eventually canceled in 1943 as the Japanese threat receded. Despite its cancellation, both highways left lasting legacies in terms of infrastructure and economic development of military-driven initiatives during World War II.

Figure 4: Building the Alcan Highway by the US Army Corps of Engineers

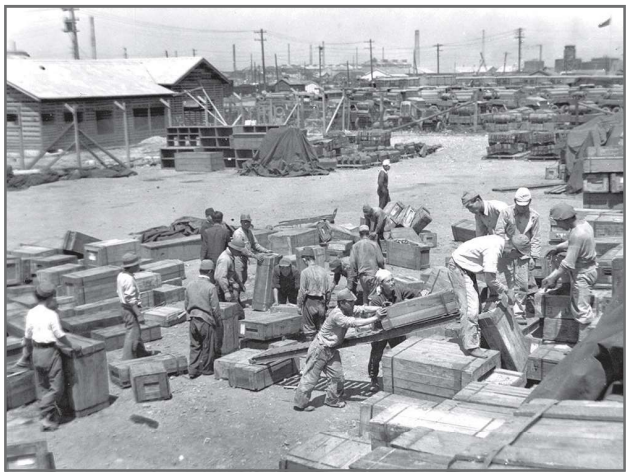
Source: (US Army Corps of Engineers, 2024)

Post-War Reconstruction and Nation-Building: The aftermath of World War II witnessed a significant shift in military involvement towards reconstruction and nation-building. The Marshall Plan emerged as a beacon of hope, focusing on meticulously planned infrastructure reconstruction to revitalize war-torn Europe. Military engineers, transitioning from warriors to builders, played a central role in this endeavor, restoring essential services and kickstarting economic recoveries. Beyond immediate reconstruction, the Cold War era saw militaries redirecting their efforts towards peacekeeping and humanitarian interventions. They became instrumental in not just securing regions but also rebuilding infrastructure destroyed by conflict. From bridges to basic utilities, militaries contributed to post-conflict development, signaling a paradigm shift towards stability and growth. In essence, the

post-war era redefined military infrastructure development, emphasizing its role in fostering stability, economic progress, and rebuilding shattered nations.

After World War II, Japan needed extensive reconstruction under Allied occupation, with U.S. Army engineers playing a crucial role. Led by Gen. Douglas MacArthur, the Supreme Command for Allied Powers (SCAP) established the Army Construction Agency, Japan, to oversee reconstruction efforts. Despite challenges like scarcity of skilled labor and inadequate infrastructure, U.S. Army engineers, along with local laborers, embarked on a significant rebuilding program (Fig. 5). This involved converting existing facilities for military use and providing housing, hospitals, airfields, and administrative structures for American garrison divisions. By 1950, Army engineers had completed construction projects valued at over $400 million. The outbreak of the Korean War further accelerated Japan's rehabilitation efforts, as the country became the principal supply depot for UN forces. The eventual end of Allied occupation in 1952 marked the beginning of a nearly permanent base construction effort, highlighting the enduring legacy of military reconstruction efforts in Japan. This contributed significantly to Japan's transformation into an advanced, democratic nation in the broader Asia-Pacific region.

Present and the Future: The 21st century presents a complex landscape for military involvement in infrastructure development, sparking ongoing debates. One side argues for a clear division between civilian and military projects to prevent militarization concerns, while others emphasize the unique advantages armed forces offer. Their expertise in engineering and rapid resource deployment can be critical, especially in crisis zones lacking civilian infrastructure. Looking ahead, military involvement may extend beyond traditional conflict zones to address global challenges like climate change and cyber threats. With their logistical capabilities, militaries could play key roles in post-disaster infrastructure rebuilding and cybersecurity efforts. The future of military involvement in infrastructure development remains uncertain, influenced by security needs, economic factors, and emerging global threats. Understanding its historical context and current complexities will be essential in leveraging this partnership for a stable, prosperous, and resilient future.



The 598th Engineers, Ports Supply Division, trying to bring order out of chaos as heavy shipments arrive from other commands to the Yokohama base depot, early 1948.

The 872d Airborne Engineers repair the runway on Atsugi Airdrome, Japan. The asphalt "kettle" was used to liquefy barrels of asphalt that was spread over areas under repair, 1945.

Figure 5: US Army Corps of Engineers in Japan

Source: (US Army Corps of Engineers, 2024)

Lessons Learnt

The historical narrative of military involvement in national development spans epochs and continents, revealing insights into the intricate dynamics between security imperatives, infrastructure development, and economic growth (Crocker, 2009; Callan et al., 2019). These engagements, from ancient civilizations to modern states, have left enduring legacies that underscore the importance of understanding their symbiotic relationship for societal progress. Military-led infrastructure projects can be transformative, particularly in fragile states, by bolstering stability and economic growth while mitigating social unrest. Research highlights their potential to expand transportation and communication networks, fostering commerce and alleviating poverty, which often fuels conflict (Callan et al., 2019).

Moreover, the military's wealth of expertise and resources positions it as a key player in infrastructure endeavors. Military organizations possess logistical capabilities and seasoned engineers who can efficiently drive projects forward, especially in challenging environments lacking civilian institutional support (Crocker, 2009). Their involvement in infrastructure projects often ensures the timely completion of essential works that might otherwise falter due to resource constraints or logistical complexities. This demonstrates the military's critical role in not only constructing infrastructure but also in providing the necessary stability for sustainable development.

However, while military involvement has its advantages, it is essential to approach such initiatives with a nuanced strategy that prioritizes long-term sustainable development. Clear delineation of military roles and responsibilities in infrastructure projects is crucial to avoid the militarization of civilian spaces and ensure that projects serve the broader goals of national development and economic prosperity. Understanding these lessons from historical contexts can guide future policies, ensuring that military-driven infrastructure development aligns with the principles of sustainable development and supports the overall welfare of the society (Crocker, 2009; Callan et al., 2019).

Conclusion

In conclusion, military engagement must align with principles of sustainable development, prioritizing long-term prosperity and community needs over short-term military objectives. Empowering local communities to take ownership of projects ensures their sustainability and resilience beyond completion. Yet, caution is warranted against the unchecked militarization of development efforts, which risks undermining civilian institutions vital for democratic governance and stability. Hence, a balanced approach is crucial, focusing on addressing civilian needs through inclusive processes that foster trust and collaboration, laying the groundwork for lasting progress and empowerment.

Way Forward

The way forward entails implementing proactive communication strategies to inform and engage the public about the rationale and benefits of military involvement in infrastructure construction, fostering open dialogue, addressing concerns, and building trust through transparent channels. It is imperative to foster partnerships and collaboration between the military, civilian agencies, private sector entities, and civil society organizations to leverage complementary strengths and resources, facilitating innovative solutions and enhancing project effectiveness. Clear delineation of the scope of military involvement in infrastructure projects is necessary, with military personnel refraining from non-essential construction and clear plans for transition to civilian authorities. Additionally, developing clear metrics to measure project success, conducting independent evaluations, and sharing best practices will enable the assessment of long-term effectiveness and sustainability of military-led infrastructure projects.

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