

INSPECTOR GENERAL FOR AFGHANISTAN RECONSTRUCTION'S 2019 HIGH-RISK LIST

HEARING

BEFORE THE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON NATIONAL SECURITY
OF THE
COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT
AND REFORM

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C O N T E N T S

Hearing held on April 3, 2019	Page 1
WITNESSES	
The Honorable John F. Sopko, Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction Oral statement	6
<i>Written opening statements and the witness' written statement are available at the U.S. House of Representatives Repository: https://docs.house.gov.</i>	

INDEX OF DOCUMENTS

- The documents entered into the record during this hearing are listed below are available at: <https://docs.house.gov>.*
- * Cost Benefit Analysis of Uniform Specifications for Afghan National Defense and Security Forces camouflage uniforms; submitted by Rep. Lynch.
 - * U.S. Based Training for Afghanistan Security Personnel: Trainees Who Go Absent Without Leave Hurt Readiness; submitted by Rep. Cloud.

INSPECTOR GENERAL FOR AFGHANISTAN RECONSTRUCTION'S 2019 HIGH-RISK LIST

Wednesday, April 3, 2019

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
SUBCOMMITTEE ON NATIONAL SECURITY
COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND REFORM
Washington, D.C.

The subcommittee met, pursuant to notice, at 2:29 p.m., in room 2154, Rayburn House Office Building, Hon. Stephen F. Lynch (chairman of the subcommittee) presiding.

Present: Representatives Lynch, Welch, Rouda, Kelly, DeSaulnier, Hice, Amash, Gosar, Cloud, Green, and Jordan. Also present: Representative Massie.

Mr. LYNCH. Good afternoon. We'll come to order. Without objection, the chair is authorized to consider a recess at any time.

This is the first hearing of the Subcommittee on National Security to examine the Special Inspector General for Afghan Reconstruction's High-Risk List of major construction programs in east Afghanistan that are at risk for waste, fraud, and abuse. I will now recognize myself to give an opening statement.

Good afternoon, everyone. I want to welcome all the new members to the committee. And especially I want to personally welcome and congratulate my friend, the gentleman from Georgia, Mr. Hice, who joins me as the ranking member on this subcommittee. Congratulations or condolences, I'm not sure which it is.

Back in 1947, Senate Foreign Relations Committee Chairman Arthur Vandenberg, in calling for bipartisanship on the issue of national security, asserted on the Senate floor that, quote, "Politics stops at the water's edge," close quote.

Today, more than 70 years later, the international security environment is more complex and dangerous than ever. States with hegemonic aspirations, such as China, Russia, and Iran, all threaten to undermine the representative democracy and the international order that the United States has supported since World War II. Terrorist organizations, such as ISIS and al-Qaida, although significantly degraded, continue to threaten the United States homeland and our international neighbors. And there are also new and emerging challenges, such as the proliferation of cyber threats and capabilities that could discredit and undermine U.S. national political, economic, and human rights issues.

Although the Constitution grants the executive branch with the authority to implement the foreign policy of the United States, Congress has also been given a solemn responsibility to provide oversight. In today's increasingly complicated international security

environment, Congress cannot afford to sacrifice our oversight responsibilities in some vague hope that by doing so, we might be able to get along better with the White House. We have our jobs to do.

As we enter the 116th Congress, I hope all of us on the subcommittee will commit to working together across the aisle to do what is best for the safety and security of the American people.

In that spirit, I am pleased to inform the ranking member that, at his request, we have scheduled May 8 as a potential day to convene our next hearing on the suicide epidemic that is plaguing our Nation's veterans and active military.

During his first Cabinet meeting of 2019, President Trump raised the very topic that we'll examine today: public inspector general reports on critical areas of U.S. military operations including Afghanistan. According to the President, government military watchdog reports should be, quote, "private and locked up," close quote, and their release to the American public is, quote, "insane," close quote. He also cautioned Acting Defense Secretary Patrick Shanahan not to let that happen again.

America's long and strong tradition of robust and responsible congressional oversight flatly rejects the Trump administration position on this point. In fact, congressional oversight has a long history of providing tangible real-world benefits for our warfighters serving on the front lines.

For example, in the mid-2000's, when I was a member of this committee, then Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld had repeatedly refused to acknowledge that an insurgency was emerging in Iraq.

It was only after members of this subcommittee and others meeting with American servicemembers on the front lines in Iraq, and with the help of Stuart Bowen, the Special Inspector General for Iraq Reconstruction, that Members of Congress from this committee and elsewhere were fully and appropriately informed about the potential risk to American servicemembers, and as a result, were able to take action to provide our sons and daughters with armored up Humvees and mine resistant ambush protected vehicles, or MRAPs, to protect them from IEDs, and to also fund the development and employment of detection and counter-IED technologies.

Similarly, in 2007 Congressman John Tierney, my predecessor from my home state of Massachusetts, opened an investigation when wounded soldiers at Walter Reed Medical Center returning from Iraq and Afghanistan, many of whom had lost limbs or suffered traumatic brain injuries, reported being quartered for months in moldy and rodent-infested rooms with inadequate followup care. We held hearings, this subcommittee did, at Walter Reed until the situation was corrected.

In another example, the U.S. Army in 2007 awarded a \$300 million contract to supply ammunition to the Afghan Security Forces to AEY, Inc., a company owned by an inexperienced 21-year-old.

After reviewing more than 26,000 pages of documents from AEY, the Department of State, and the Department of Defense, as well as interviewing U.S. Army, Department of State, and Department of Defense contracting officials, and after multiple trips to Afghanistan by members of this committee, this committee determined

that more than \$66 million in taxpayer dollars were paid to a contractor who provided unserviceable munitions, much of it Vietnam era weaponry and some of illegal Chinese origin.

Three years later, this committee opened a 6-month investigation into the circumstances surrounding the Department of Defense's outsourcing of security for vital U.S. supplies in Afghanistan to questionable trucking companies and providers, which revealed a vast protection racket run by a shadowy network of warlords, strongmen, commanders, and corrupt Afghan officials. Not only did the system run afoul of the Department's own rules, it also risked undermining the U.S. strategy for achieving our goals in Afghanistan.

So today, after more than 18 years of war in Afghanistan, more than 2,400 American servicemen have made the ultimate sacrifice in support of Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation Freedom's Sentinel. More than 14,000 U.S. troops are still deployed in the region. To date, the U.S. has allocated more than \$750 billion in taxpayer funds to pay for the war in Afghanistan. That's in addition to the \$132 billion contributed toward efforts to secure and stabilize the country.

The American people deserve to remain informed on the progress or lack of progress of our military and reconstruction efforts in Afghanistan. They have every right to know whether our sons and daughters in uniform are well deployed and well equipped and whether taxpayer money is being well spent. The Department of Defense must also continue to permit congressional travel to the region, and especially to those locations where American servicemen are deployed, to facilitate our oversight efforts.

In addition, the oversight reports issued by the Special Inspector General that we discuss today since 2008 have served to identify for the public and Congress those projects that have been subject to significant waste, fraud, and abuse. Today, we'll be examining Inspector General Sopko's recent 2019 High-Risk List of reconstruction areas that are especially vulnerable to waste, fraud, abuse, and mission failure.

This report is extremely timely in light of the continuing peace negotiations led by the Special Representative for Afghanistan and Reconciliation Ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad. In anticipation of a potential peace agreement that could result in a large-scale withdrawal of U.S. personnel and the reintegration of the Taliban into the Afghan Government, the report examines the sustainability of U.S.-funded reconstruction programs in a post-reconciliation Afghanistan.

I'd like to again thank Inspector General Sopko for helping this committee with its work.

I now yield five minutes to our distinguished ranking member, the gentleman from Georgia, Mr. Hice, for his opening statement.

Mr. HICE. Thank you very much, Chairman Lynch. I want to thank you for calling this important hearing and congratulate you for your role as chairman of this committee. I thank you for working with us and your staff with our staff, and I really look forward to working with you in the remainder of this Congress on a variety of issues.

Mr. Sopko, thank you as well for being here today and for testifying about the work that you and your team are doing to protect the enormous investment that the American taxpayers have made in Afghanistan. I'm excited to get to work on this issue and many others that this subcommittee will deal with on behalf of the American people.

As the chairman mentioned, it's been almost 18 years since the U.S. began its efforts in Afghanistan, making it the longest war in American history. Young adults back in Georgia and elsewhere who were born after 9/11 can actually be serving in Afghanistan at this time. We've been through three Presidents. More than \$780 billion has been obligated, with \$132 billion being spent on reconstruction efforts.

While the effort has been expensive, we must also never forget that we've endured the loss of over 2,400 Americans in uniform during this time, not to mention civilian casualties. There have been more than 20,400 who have been wounded in action. Just this year, four Americans died serving their country. I think we ought to keep all of them and their families in our prayers.

So, Mr. Sopko, as I understand it, it's your responsibility to protect the financial investment of the American people in Afghanistan. It's important today that we discuss your new High-Risk List report. This report, which you release at the beginning of each new Congress, helps set the scene for how taxpayer money is being spent. The most recent report, unfortunately, paints a bleak picture of the progress even through the new prism of the current peace negotiations.

In your submitted testimony, you mention the importance of planning for the day after a peace deal is reached. The current talks could be an important moment in securing future peace in Afghanistan on favorable terms for the United States and for the Afghan people. We all recognize that a deal could be reached and that any deal would have implications in how we move forward.

But today we need some updates. We need to better understand the current status of the U.S. dollars being spent there. The American people sent us here to protect their hard-earned tax dollars and to ensure that this operation is being conducted as efficiently as possible.

Your 2019 High-Risk List highlights several troubling issues that I'd like to spell out here.

First, the widespread security and its impact on conducting reconstruction efforts, including restricting oversight, is very disturbing. I'm concerned that our efforts to conduct oversight and improve security are headed in the wrong direction, and that is alarming not only for us in this subcommittee, but for the American taxpayer. So I hope we can hear more about what has happened to hamper that important mission and what should be done to address it.

Additionally, there's the illicit narcotic trade and endemic corruption that does not at all seem to be improving. Both of those things have likely led to the sluggish economic growth and underdeveloped civil policing, both of which made the list.

For Afghanistan to be successful, we must see these things improve. After 18 years in the region, it seems we should be making greater strides in these areas.

Through the lens of the peace negotiations, you've included in the list the risk to women's rights and the reintegration of Taliban fighters. I'm very much curious where it stands and how that reintegration will take place. These are extremely important issues, and I'm especially glad that you included them in the list, and probably they will be on the next list to come as well.

Finally, the last time that I spoke to you in a hearing we dealt with those in the United States who have gone AWOL on the taxpayers' tabs, and we need to hear an update on that today on this troubling issue.

So I want to thank you very much for appearing before the subcommittee today. I look forward to your testimony.

And, Mr. Chairman, I thank you for holding this hearing and look forward to more bipartisan hearings. I thank you already for the announcement you've made for the one concerning military suicides on May 8. I appreciate that.

And I yield back.

Mr. LYNCH. The gentleman yields back.

Just a little bit of a housekeeping matter here. I would like to get unanimous consent to enter the cost-benefit analysis of uniform specifications for Afghan National Defense and Security Forces camouflage uniforms into the record.

Are there any objections?

Hearing none, so ordered.

Today we'll hear from Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction John F. Sopko, who was sworn in on July 2, 2012. Mr. Sopko was appointed to the post by President Obama. He has more than 30 years of experience in oversight and investigations as a prosecutor, congressional counsel, and senior Federal Government adviser.

Mr. Sopko's government experience includes over 20 years on Capitol Hill where he has held key positions in both the Senate and House of Representatives. He served on the staffs of the House Committee on Energy and Commerce, the Select Committee on Homeland Security, and the Senate Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations.

We are grateful to hear from you and your considerable expertise, Mr. Sopko.

If the witness would please rise, I'll begin by swearing you in. Please raise your right hand.

Do you swear or affirm that the testimony you're about to give is the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help you God?

Mr. SOPKO. I do.

Mr. LYNCH. Let the record show that the witness answered in the affirmative.

Thank you, please, and be seated. The microphones are a bit sensitive, so please speak directly into them. Without objection, your written statement will be made part of the record.

With that, Mr. Sopko, you are now recognized for five minutes to give an oral presentation of your testimony.

**STATEMENT OF THE HONORABLE JOHN F. SOPKO, SPECIAL
INSPECTOR GENERAL FOR AFGHANISTAN RECONSTRUCTION**

Mr. SOPKO. Thank you very much, Chairman Lynch, Ranking Member Hice. Thank you for inviting me today. I'm honored and pleased to be here to discuss our High-Risk List.

Thank you also to the various Members who are attending, some who are old colleagues I've seen before, and I hopefully will answer the questions better this time than I did the last time you asked them.

This report, as both the chairman and ranking member have indicated, identifies eight key areas of the \$132 billion reconstruction effort that we believe are at high risk of waste, fraud, abuse, mismanagement, and most importantly, mission failure.

Today's report differs from its two predecessors which we have issued because it is issued in the midst of the ongoing U.S. negotiations with the Taliban that could lead to the end of America's longest war, something which I think all of us support. As a result, the High-Risk List addresses not only current risks to the reconstruction effort, but also those that may persist or arise in the wake of any peace agreement or even risk the ultimate success of any lasting peace agreement.

Now, SIGAR is not taking a position on whether a peace agreement is achievable, imminent, or even practical, although we hope all three are true. Nor do we speculate on what provisions it should include. Those decisions we leave to the administration, to Congress, and to our able negotiators. But what today's report does do is highlight areas that are currently at serious risk and points out risks that may persist, be magnified, or emerge despite or even because of a peace deal.

Policymakers, we urge, should be planning for what may come in the days, weeks, months, and years after any peace agreement is reached because, as we all recognize, failure to plan is planning to fail. Every effort must be taken to ensure that the progress purchased with the ultimate sacrifice made by over 2,400 U.S. soldiers and over \$780 billion is not lost because we failed to adequately plan for the day after a peace agreement is signed.

As for one of the most serious risks we highlight, I will not mince words with this subcommittee. The Afghan Government simply cannot survive without financial assistance from the U.S. and other nations. And should peace come, if that peace is to be sustainable, financial supports from donors will continue to be required for years to come.

Beyond the perilous state of Afghanistan's finances, the risks we identify in our report are widespread insecurity and underdeveloped civil policing capability, endemic corruption, the massive illegal narcotics trade, threats to women's rights, the reintegration of ex-combatants, and restricted U.S. Government oversight.

It is that last risk area that I think this committee, with your jurisdiction and expertise, should be of the greatest concern, especially in light of the potential that more U.S. funds will go directly to the Afghan Government as on-budget assistance or through multilateral trust funds.

Additionally, some of our major work that's ongoing in Afghanistan, such as our joint investigation with CSTC-A into ghost work-

ers whose salaries we currently pay who don't exist and who in all probability, even after a peace deal, we will still have to pay those salaries; as well as a joint investigation, again with CSTC-A, into the massive, and I'm talking about billions of dollars, theft of fuel which we pay for now, which in all likelihood we will continue to pay for if a peace deal is signed; as well as our investigation into one of the major corruption scandals dealing with the public utility DABS in Afghanistan, all of those may be seriously impaired if our ability to conduct oversight is diminished or limited.

Therefore, it is critical that Congress not just think about how much money is provided to Afghanistan if you decide to do so, but how it is provided and what kind of oversight is available to protect the U.S. taxpayer dollars in those instances.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Hice. I'm now happy to answer any questions you have.

Mr. LYNCH. Thank you for your testimony.

I ask unanimous consent that the gentleman from Kentucky, Mr. Massie, a member of the full committee, be permitted to join the subcommittee on the dais and be recognized for questioning the witness.

Without objection, so ordered.

I now recognize myself for five minutes for questioning.

Inspector General Sopko, in 2017 your office reported to Congress that the Department of Defense had implemented a new policy to retroactively classify or otherwise restrict the release of information pertaining to the readiness of the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces. This information had been included previously in your reports each and every year. It included important performance measures, such as casualties among the defense forces of Afghanistan, attrition rates, personnel strength, the ability to recruit new members into the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces, equipment readiness. All of that information had been included in SIGAR's, your office's, public quarterly reports for years.

Inspector General Sopko, DOD justified this policy by stating that it had classified this data at the request of the Afghan Government. Is that correct?

Mr. SOPKO. That is correct, sir.

Mr. LYNCH. Okay. So this is U.S. money that is funding this effort, and we've talked about somewhere in the area of \$800 billion since day one. It's been 18 years. We've lost 2,400 people here. And the United States taxpayer has funded all of that. Yet, when we ask for data to report on how our troops are equipped and how this effort is going, we're being denied information.

So why do you think the Afghan Government is interested in keeping previously public information on the performance of its security forces a secret?

Mr. SOPKO. I don't actually know. They've never explained it to us.

Mr. LYNCH. Microphone. I'm sorry.

Mr. SOPKO. I'm terribly sorry.

I don't know actually know. They've never explained to us, nor have they explained, I believe, to even the RS commander. I think it may just be embarrassment.

Mr. LYNCH. So this is a change from the practice of DOD under President Bush, under President Obama, up until this policy change in 2017. Is that correct?

Mr. SOPKO. The first request, I believe, came in under President Obama, but then it was reversed after, I believe, we highlighted our concerns, and I believe some Members of Congress did, and that was reversed.

But our military felt obligated when it was raised again by President Ghani's staff and their national security advisor to respect that request because the data was coming from the Afghan Government that we were reporting.

Mr. LYNCH. So that information that we're talking about, troop strength in the Afghan National Army, the ability to get new recruits, the rate at which Afghans are leaving the Afghan National Army and defense forces, all of that, casualty rates, how many are being killed in battles with the Taliban, all that information is very, very important to our strategy, would it not?

Mr. SOPKO. That is correct, and it would be important to Congress to understand how well a job we're doing.

Mr. LYNCH. Right. And by classifying that, even though Members can go to the SCIF and read that information, they're not allowed to discuss it with the public. Is that your understanding?

Mr. SOPKO. That is correct. The classification rules would apply.

There's also a further complication, and that is some of the classification we're applying—or not we, but our military's applying what they call NATO classification. You may talk to your staff, and I know, Mr. Chairman, you had this problem yourself, that unfortunately your security office does not let your staff, unless they go through a special process of getting NATO cleared, to even review that.

If you recall the last time I briefed you, and I know I've briefed other Members, and their staff had to be excluded because they weren't quote, unquote, "NATO cleared" to read the material.

Mr. LYNCH. Right. In closing, I have a few seconds left here, do you agree that the American people have a right to know about the progress of their investment in the Afghan National Security Forces?

Mr. SOPKO. Absolutely, sir. I totally believe transparency is the best policy for everybody. Think I'm not the first one to say that. A number of people have said going back to the times of George Washington and the Constitution.

Mr. LYNCH. Okay. Thank you.

I yield and recognize the ranking member for five minutes.

Mr. HICE. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Based on the discussion we had earlier, you mentioned that 36 out of 1,900 Afghan trainees who are being trained here in the United States, that 36 of them have claimed asylum. Are we still paying those individuals who have no intent to return to Afghanistan?

Mr. SOPKO. Ranking Member Hice, I can't tell you for sure because the data we got from DHS, Department of Homeland Security, was so inadequate we couldn't tell, but in all likelihood, they are.

And if I could say, sir, we invoked your name to finally get that information from the Department of Homeland Security. So we mentioned—and we had been waiting for over nine months to get the data. The data we got is totally inadequate, but it does indicate that some of the people we have brought over to train them to fly helicopters, et cetera, have asked for asylum. And in all likelihood, we still are paying for them to be trained here.

Mr. HICE. Do we have any idea, do you have any idea how much it costs to train one of these individuals?

Mr. SOPKO. I do not have that specific number.

Mr. HICE. Is there any way to get that information?

Mr. SOPKO. Well, the difficulty is each training program costs separately, and since DHS won't identify the individuals, it's hard for us to say: Is he in the mechanics program? Was he in the air program? Is he a C-130 pilot? Et cetera. So that's the problem.

Mr. HICE. I think this a lot of the accountability that we need for us to do oversight. I mean, are these people getting paid? How much are they getting paid? If there's any way to get that information.

Also, in addition to those who are over here, 36 who have claimed asylum, there is a quite a number who have gone AWOL once they've gotten over here, and we've discussed this before. Eighty-three of them are still missing somewhere, who knows where. Do we have evidence that Afghan forces are still going AWOL and disappearing somewhere in the United States?

Mr. SOPKO. That is our best information, sir, but we don't have any more up-to-date information.

Mr. HICE. It's our best information that it is still happening?

Mr. SOPKO. Yes, it is.

Mr. HICE. Okay. I find that amazing, that we are continuing a program that has a much larger percentage of people going AWOL, and we've got to get to the bottom of this. I thank you for invoking my name today. We're going to continue pushing on this issue.

Let me hit a couple of other things real quickly. You mentioned that we've had 24—we know 2,400 military deaths, but that does not include contractors and civilian deaths. Do you have any idea how many of those deaths we've seen?

Mr. SOPKO. Yes, I do, and I'm glad you highlight that point because I think we tend to forget the U.S. contractors and how many casualties they have, because they are important parts of the team. Our best estimate is over 4,000 U.S. contractors have died in Afghanistan.

Mr. HICE. So 2,400 military and 4,000-plus contractors and civilians?

Mr. SOPKO. That is correct. In addition, we know a minimum of 14 U.S. Government civilian personnel. If you go to Afghanistan, and I know you've been there, sir, and I know Chairman Lynch, right in front of our embassy are 14 plaques.

Mr. HICE. Right.

Mr. SOPKO. Yes. They list the U.S. civilian government employees but not all by name, but there are quite a few. And this goes back to our former Ambassador who was assassinated there. Excuse me.

Mr. HICE. Thank you.

Okay. You mentioned in the High-Risk List, and this really concerns me, I wish we had more than five minutes with all this stuff, but we've got approximately 60,000 Taliban fighters who need to be reintegrated back in Afghan society. I find this farfetched. I can't wrap my head around how this is even possible. Do you have a comment on that?

Mr. SOPKO. What we highlight is a risk. I mean, you're absolutely correct. We've got approximately 60,000 trained killers. They're Taliban. They've been doing this for years. You've got them and their family.

Now, for peace to—and we all want peace to occur, but for peace to occur, every expert—and we're actually doing a larger lessons-learned study like these we've already done on other issues on reintegration—it's extremely difficult. It has to be done.

So how are you going to reintegrate 60,000 trained killers into an Afghan economy that can't even support the thousands of young men and women in Afghanistan who are coming of age because of the economy?

So it's difficult. We're not saying it's impossible. Again, this is a policy decision. That's not my job. We're just highlighting for you when you think of appropriations, when you think of oversight, think in terms of—and when somebody comes up here to testify about the peace deal, what are you doing about reintegration? Because if you don't reintegrate, and they don't get jobs, if they don't get their land or whatever, you're going to have some angry highly trained people who would love to destroy the peace deal.

Mr. HICE. I share your concern. Thank you very much.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. LYNCH. The gentleman yields back.

The chair now recognizes the gentleman from Vermont, Mr. Welch, for five minutes.

Mr. WELCH. Thank you. First of all, congratulations, Mr. Chairman. It's delightful to have you serving as our chair with your long experience on this committee. I look forward to working with Mr. Hice, too.

Your openings remarks, by the way, did remind me of how much we owe SIGAR for the work you've done consistently and well. You've got a great team. You and your predecessors have done a tremendous job.

You outlined some of the things, Mr. Chairman, where we actually made a difference not just for taxpayers, but probably, most importantly, for some of our men and women who served us well.

I want to just ask some questions about restrictions on your oversight, some of them practical, and I want you to comment on that, because I think it's really important that we back up your office and the steps and the resources it needs in order to inform Congress.

Can you just walk us through how the security situation is having an immediate impact on your ability to provide Congress with the information that we seek?

Mr. SOPKO. Well, it's a dangerous place, and obviously I don't want to risk my staff needlessly, nor does the State Department or DOD. So we have to rely on them to provide security to my investigators and my auditors.

I think I may have pointed out to one of the Members, just to give you a feel, I can't remember the page, there's a picture of me—I'm sorry, page six? Okay.

If you want to see, this is what your typical detail looks like. There's 30 or 40 security people just for our staff to go out to the Marshal Fahim Center.

Mr. WELCH. Well, I would say you're worth it.

Mr. SOPKO. Well, my wife does, too.

Mr. WELCH. It's a practical challenge. That's really what that says. I mean, you just can't send a couple of staffers over there and then in support to get 40 people each to provide security for them when they go out to where the projects are, right?

So practically speaking, do you have confidence that you're able basically with your best efforts to assess how much we are wasting?

Mr. SOPKO. I wish I had more visibility. What we have done is tried to overcome that by using more sophisticated technology, some of which I cannot describe in public. We also have partnered with an Afghan civilian organization which we trained and mentored, and they give us an extension to our visibility.

So even at that site, we're limited in how much time we can go there, but we can send the Afghan engineers who we train to take a look, so we try to do it.

Am I happy? Is it as good as I would like? No.

Mr. WELCH. Let me just elaborate on that. If there is a withdrawal, presumably local actors would have to take over lots of functions. But one of those functions hopefully would be assessing whether we're wasting money. There's no, my understanding is, there's no Afghan organization that we either trust or is competent to do oversight on the money that we're sending over there for reconstruction.

Mr. SOPKO. You're right, sir. We trust our Afghan trained staff, but they're limited, and they can't get everywhere in the country themselves. There are places that even Afghans can't get to because of the Taliban.

There are also bases they can't get on because—for example, it's very difficult for them to get on Afghan military bases because they don't trust the Afghan military, and the military demands certain remuneration and certain things that we will not permit. So there is a limitation.

Mr. WELCH. So if there is a withdrawal, and aid is then funneled fundamental through international organizations so that it's not direct payments from us but it's payments to organizations that then distribute it, what is the mechanism by which we have any confidence that the money is being spent on the intended purposes?

Mr. SOPKO. We rely on the international organizations, such as the World Bank, Asian Development Bank, and the United Nations, to perform that function that USAID would normally do or we would do. We have raised concerns about them because they don't have very good internal controls. We've done two audits on the Afghan Reconstruction Trust Fund where billions of dollars go to the Afghan Government. It's run by the World Bank. It's improved, but we still have serious concerns.

But, Congressman Welch, what you're highlighting, and this is the other issue that I think we can't lose sight of, and that is we can't wash our hands of the taxpayers' dollars just because we give it to the World Bank. We have to hold their feet to the fire, too, that they're doing the right type of oversight.

Mr. WELCH. Thank you. I yield back.

Chairman CUMMINGS. The gentleman yields back.

The chair now recognizes the gentleman from Michigan, Mr. Amash, for five minutes.

Mr. AMASH. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Sopko, thank you for your work and for being here today.

Since the war in Afghanistan began in 2001, and again, it's the longest war in U.S. history, the United States has spent nearly \$800 billion—I think you mentioned \$780 billion, was your figure—on the war, including over \$100 billion appropriated for reconstruction activities.

In 2017, our colleague and my good friend, the late Rep Walter Jones, requested information from SIGAR about the total amount of waste, fraud, and abuse SIGAR has uncovered. SIGAR identified up to \$15.5 billion in waste, fraud, and abuse and failed whole-of-government reconstruction efforts, 29 percent of the \$52.7 billion in spending it reviewed.

How much money is still being lost to waste, fraud, and abuse and failed whole-of-government reconstruction efforts?

Mr. SOPKO. Well, as you know, it took us a while to do that study for the Members who requested it, and it's very difficult.

I can't give you that number. It's billions. Just recently, I was told by a senior U.S. Government military official that over 50 percent of the fuel we are buying for the Afghans never reaches its intended purpose. Now, we're talking billions. But I haven't documented it.

As you know from that report, we were very careful in documenting based upon what we have actually looked at, and that's where we came up with that number.

Mr. AMASH. So it's your impression that it's billions on an ongoing basis.

Mr. SOPKO. Yes.

Mr. AMASH. It continues to be annually—

Mr. SOPKO. Yes.

Mr. AMASH [continuing]. billions of dollars.

Mr. SOPKO. Yes.

Mr. AMASH. Wow.

According to the Department of Defense, corruption in Afghanistan remains the top strategic threat to the legitimacy and success of the Afghan Government. Your office has stated that, quote, "Failure to effectively address systemic corruption means U.S. reconstruction programs at best will continue to be subverted, and at worst, will fail," end quote.

What role does corruption play in the failure of U.S. reconstruction efforts in Afghanistan?

Mr. SOPKO. The most obvious is that money we're directing toward it gets diverted to somebody's pocket and it buys property in Dubai or northern Virginia. But the more sinister part is that a

corrupt official is identified with us, and in the eyes of the Afghans we're viewed as evil and as bad as he is or she is.

You may wonder why is the Taliban over all of these years able to survive. In part is it's feeding on this frustration and lack of support for the Afghan Government because they see these corrupt officials, corrupt military, et cetera. So that's the two-edged sword or the prongs of the problem of corruption.

Mr. AMASH. What steps are the U.S., its coalition partners, and the Afghan Government currently taking to eradicate the culture of corruption?

Mr. SOPKO. Well, the Afghan Government promised at Brussels to establish an anti-corruption strategy and to implement it. Congress has asked us to look at that. It was in the last three appropriations bills. We looked at it and said, well, they issued a good policy. It has some problems. But now they hadn't had—it was late, so they haven't really implemented it.

So this year, on behalf of yourself in Congress, it was in the appropriations bill, we're looking at its implementation. I can't tell you the results yet because we're not done, but it's mixed, to say the least.

Mr. AMASH. Given the issues with corruption, should the U.S. continue to make additional reconstruction investments?

Mr. SOPKO. Should they?

Mr. AMASH. Yes.

Mr. SOPKO. Well, that's a policy call, and, Congressman, I'm going to have to beg off on that. If you decide it's important to be there, if you decide it's important to rebuild Afghanistan for the stated goal to keep the terrorists out or keep them at bay, then you've got to give reconstruction money. As I told you before, without us funding Afghan Government, it will cease to exist.

Mr. AMASH. Thank you. I'll yield back.

Mr. LYNCH. I thank the gentleman, and I appreciate his warm remarks regarding Walter Jones, who did some wonderful work on this committee. He was a dear friend to many of us.

The chair now recognizes the gentleman from California, Mr. Rouda, for five minutes.

Mr. ROUDA. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you, Mr. Sopko, for joining us today and your testimony. My line of questioning will be similar to my colleague from Michigan.

I'd note that Afghanistan is widely ranked as one of the most corrupt nations in the world, with a score of 16 out of 100, with zero being bad and highly corrupt. Would you agree with that statement and that observation?

Mr. SOPKO. Absolutely.

Mr. ROUDA. I'm trying to get a sense of how much money is being wasted with the fraud and corruption. And appropriated for this year's \$5 billion, a similar number in 2018, and you talked about billions of dollars being lost to fraud and corruption, yet we don't have a firm percentage. But it seems like you could probably make a guesstimate, and I guess that's what I'm asking you to do.

If you had to guess based on all the information you have, your best educated guess, are we losing 25 percent to fraud and corrup-

tion, 40 percent, 50 percent, more? I mean, for every dollar we put in there, what do you expect is being lost?

Mr. SOPKO. Again, I don't mean to dodge the question. It's difficult. The best I can say is we took a look at all of the audits and inspections and investigations we did, which isn't the total, isn't the 132. I was actually looking for the number. I can't find it before me. But when we looked at that number, we then did an assessment how much of that was waste, fraud or abuse. I believe we came up with about the figure of—was it 35 percent?—about 30 percent we could identify as waste, fraud, or abuse. So that doesn't specifically talk about corruption, but we came up with that number.

So we looked at 766 audits, investigations, or inspections we had done which covered \$52 billion of the \$132 billion. So we were very conservative. We didn't look at anything we didn't audit. With that number, we found that up to \$15 billion of the \$52 billion, and this gets a little complicated, had been lost to waste, fraud, and abuse.

Mr. ROUDA. So about 30 percent.

Mr. SOPKO. About 30 percent. So that's—I would say it's a safe number. Now, some of my auditors may say that doesn't meet GAGAS, which is Generally Accepted Government Auditing Standards, but I think that's a fair assessment.

Mr. ROUDA. Do you have any evidence or opinion as to, of that 30 percent, what is falling into enemies' hands?

Mr. SOPKO. Not out of that audit, but other experts have said publicly, and I think the military, about 30 percent of the Taliban's money comes from either taxes on businessmen or from theft themselves. But I think it's a pretty safe guess that if you're stealing money from us, you're probably kicking a percentage back to the Taliban or whoever the local terrorist group is. But I can't say for sure. We haven't looked at it.

Mr. ROUDA. In looking at, I think it was touched on, the anti-corruption processes that Afghanistan has attempted to put in place, how would you characterize the success so far?

Mr. SOPKO. Very mixed. We are still troubled by that. In every corollary report, we report on it. They did create an anti-corruption justice center where they were supposed to vet the police and the prosecutors. From the beginning, they didn't vet them. By vet them means they polygraphed them. Well, it turned out they polygraphed them but they never fired them, so what was the use of polygraphing them?

They have a real problem issuing warrants and executing arrest warrants and search warrants on the big fish, and we've identified that. Actually, I've gotten into a very public spat with the Afghan Attorney General on his inadequacy in enforcing subpoenas or arrest warrants, et cetera.

So it's mixed. But I will say it's better than the prior regime. So you do have a willing partner to some extent. So I don't want to paint it totally black.

This isn't California. This isn't—well, you know where it's just above? North Korea and Somalia.

Mr. ROUDA. Well, and I know there's many partners in this process within the Afghan Government, I'm sure some do better than others.

Finally, can you just maybe share us one or two examples of the significant fraud and corruption that you have seen?

Mr. SOPKO. Well, I think that the two biggest examples I talked about, fuel. One of the examples we identified early on was not just stealing it, which is massive, but actually sitting down and controlling the contracts which would cost the U.S. taxpayer \$250 million on one contract. That's one.

The other one is ghosts. We are still finding ghosts. And by that I mean not spectral ghosts. I'm talking about we're paying the salaries of policemen who don't exist. Somebody is pocketing their salary. We've still got loopholes.

So we're working very closely with CSTC-A, my audit team, my investigative team, and CSTC-A, which is the military group that pays for all of this, trying to identify current holes in the system. So I would say the ghosts and the fuel are two things.

Mr. ROUDA. Ghosts and gas.

Mr. SOPKO. Ghosts and gas.

Mr. ROUDA. Okay. I yield back. Thank you.

Mr. LYNCH. The gentleman yields back.

The chair now recognizes the gentleman from Arizona, Mr. Gosar, for five minutes.

Mr. GOSAR. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Sopko, first of all, thank you for what you're doing. It's a tough job in a dangerous part of the world, and when you go back to your staff, please give them our thanks.

But I want to come back to this. As a business owner, we try to position our employees for success. Just the colloquy and questions that I'm hearing from the other members really brings us back to the home base, is that there are too many variables here to actually get success, is what it seems to me.

You know, the two countries are diametrically different. Would you agree with that.

Mr. SOPKO. The U.S. and Afghanistan? Yes, to a great extent, you're right. You're absolutely correct.

Mr. GOSAR. Yes. And their history is very different, isn't it?

Mr. SOPKO. Absolutely.

Mr. GOSAR. So to think that our solutions actually can benefit or actually be forced upon them seems pretty ludicrous to me.

Mr. SOPKO. Well, now you're getting into policy, sir.

Mr. GOSAR. I understand.

Mr. SOPKO. I'm going to dodge that one.

Mr. GOSAR. I understand, but there's a fine line here, and we have to think about, you know, I hear losing X amount of dollars in gas, we have these ghost people that we're paying for.

You know, the American public is really frustrated. I want to give them a solution that says, "Hey, listen, we looked at this through the big lens and we put you in a position of success." And I don't think we do that, you know, when you're talking to me that you can't track funds through United Nations, through the World Bank.

It seems to me like there's a lot of different heads here without a central—how do I say this?—dispensing. Would you agree to that?

Mr. SOPKO. I agree. Yes.

Mr. GOSAR. How could we better maybe look at those diametrics? What could Congress do that could facilitate something better for success? I mean, instead of having to answer this, that, and everything, why not choreograph it if it's our money and the bulk of our money is going to this reconstitution and rebuilding? Why don't we be the fish that dictates everything?

Mr. SOPKO. I don't know if this is the answer, sir, but when I first started this job I had the same frustration you did back in 2012, 2013. I couldn't believe this. I mean, I did organized crime in the United States, and I was thinking this is ridiculous. I oversaw some big programs for Senator Nunn, and I had never seen anything as crazy as what was going on in Afghanistan.

So I said, what—we hadn't done the lessons learned. We've done five lessons-learned reports on various subjects. But I said, what does this all mean? We came up with seven questions, and it actually was, I think, one of the appropriations bills. They took that seven questions and they posed them.

I would start with the seven questions we asked, and that was, does the project or program, even before you start it, does it support our mission? If it does, it's more likely to succeed in Afghanistan than fail. Do the Afghans even know about the program and want it? If they don't, it's going to fail more likely, and it's more likely to succeed.

So you go down this list. Does it consider where we're working, that there's major corruption? And if it doesn't—and you can design a program, just like you as a businessman, if you're in a bad area, you know how to design a program that protects it from theft and corruption. Well, we're designing programs like they're in Kansas or in Norway. It was ridiculous.

One of the other things is, does it have metrics for success? We are spending money, and we didn't even know—first of all, as I told one of the Congressmen, we don't even have a list of all the programs in Afghanistan. So how do we know if any of them are succeeding?

And you remember, Mr. Chairman, I got into an actual—I won't say fight—a serious discussion with a senior official from USAID about racking and stacking programs in USAID. He turned on me, saying: The audacity of Mr. Sopko to want me to list which programs are working and which ones are failing. It's almost like picking your favorite child.

I just stopped for second. I mean, I never thought development aid was sort of the Sophie's Choice that we had to pick. I mean, doesn't it make sense as a businessman?

Mr. GOSAR. Oh, yes.

Mr. SOPKO. If this product is not working, why are you using it? Now, if you have unlimited money, like we did back then, it's okay just to waste money, I suppose.

Mr. GOSAR. Well, we didn't have.

Mr. SOPKO. We didn't.

Mr. GOSAR. I'm sorry. A limited pot.

Mr. SOPKO. We're lowering it. So if you don't rack and stack—and I must say, and I don't want to attack USAID, the new Administrator, who is one of your former colleagues, Congressman Green, is racking and stacking programs right now, and that's a tremen-

dous success. I think it's because of a committee like this and the full committee who have been holding their feet to the fire.

But those are the things I think may help to answer your question. I'm saying that because I can't tell you what the policy should be, because that's as far—I can only tell you, if this is your policy, I can talk about the process, is it failing or succeeding. And those seven questions I talked about help us get there.

Mr. GOSAR. Well, Mr. Chairman, the real quick answer is in reverse, it should be back and forth, that they do not match what your policy is. If what you're telling me is what you're showing me, they don't match.

Mr. SOPKO. Mr. Chairman, can I just answer real shortly?

Mr. LYNCH. Yes. Way over time, but go ahead.

Mr. SOPKO. Okay. Real quickly.

We see that problem right now, and we've seen it before. We're now doing a review, the State Department is, of the number of personnel they should have in Afghanistan before they know what our program should be and what's our policy. Isn't that putting the cart before the horse?

Normally good businessmen would find out what you're selling or what's your program, then determine how much staff. What we're doing—and we did it before, so I'm not blaming this administration, the prior administration did it, too—here is your staff, you figure a program that fits.

Now, as an auditor, that's something backward, and I can't say it in public.

Mr. LYNCH. I appreciate that. The gentleman's time has expired.

The chair now recognizes the gentleman from Texas, Mr. Cloud, for five minutes.

Mr. CLOUD. Thank you very much for being here. Thank you for your thoughts. I can't help but think and share in a sense the frustration that while we talk about budget matters, a lot of this seems to go beyond that, in the fact that our wonderful form of government was birthed out of a Constitution that was birthed out of a revolution that was birthed out of a people that were ready for self-governance.

It makes me wonder if our efforts are a little misguided in that we are trying to force self-governance on a people that may or may not be ready. I don't have the answers to that, but I think that's one of the underlying questions that goes beyond the scope, I realize, of today's meeting. But I appreciate it.

Your work is certainly quite critical considering the \$132 billion that's been appropriated since 2002 for Afghanistan reconstruction.

I wanted to see if I have unanimous consent to enter into the record your report titled—and it summarizes the findings, so I appreciate that—"U.S.-Based Training for Afghanistan Security Personnel: Trainees Who go Absent Without Leave Hurt Readiness, and May Create Security Risks." It's a long title, but it pretty much sums it up.

Mr. LYNCH. Without objection, so ordered

Mr. CLOUD. Thank you.

Mr. LYNCH. I'm sorry. Without objection, so ordered.

Mr. CLOUD. I appreciate it, Mr. Chairman.

Your report noted that 152 of the 324 military trainees that went AWOL while training in the United States since 2005 are from Afghanistan. I believe it's almost 50 percent of Afghan trainees go missing.

Mr. SOPKO. That is correct, sir.

Mr. CLOUD. A number of those, about a third of those, I think 56 of them, went AWOL from Lackland Air Force Base, which is about an hour from my district. Do we have any idea where those individuals are, where their whereabouts are, what they're up to?

Mr. SOPKO. No, sir.

Mr. CLOUD. We do not. Okay.

Given the troubles and insecurities we have with this program, if the DOD were to eliminate it, is that something, based on the merits and effectiveness of the program, that you think might be warranted?

Mr. SOPKO. I don't believe I can answer that totally. I think you would have to talk to DOD whether that would be counter-productive. I know they're concerned about the AWOLs. But some of this training is very significant.

Mr. CLOUD. How do we know that we're not training the next Osama bin Laden, in a sense, that we funded him and supported him before?

Mr. SOPKO. Yes. I think, again, our report didn't look at that, but that's a good question, what type of vetting we're doing. And we did raise concerns about the vetting on that.

In particular, one of the issues I know the ranking member has raised before is a simple thing about interviewing all of the people that come here for training, and the State Department still refuses to do that. They won't do an interview for these people coming over even though they interview everyone else in Afghanistan who gets a visa. They refuse to do it.

Mr. CLOUD. Wow. Do we have any sort of sense as to why trainees are going AWOL? Is it for opportunity? Is it they're just wanting to blend in? Or do we have any threads, any bread crumbs?

Mr. SOPKO. Well, we had some, and we reported it in that report back in 2017. Of course, some of these people disappeared, we can't find.

But we did interview some of them, and some left because the security situation was going bad back there and they didn't want to go back and get hurt or killed. Some were upset because they found out that even though they're trained, let's say, to be a pilot or mechanic, when they went back, if they wanted to get a job in the military as a pilot or mechanic, they would have to pay a bribe, and they refused, and they said forget it.

And some, just it's a better life here. And some of the AWOLs that we were able to track down from talking to DHS were actually en route to Canada. So this was get out here, and then you can make it to Canada.

Mr. CLOUD. Just want to freeboard, basically.

Mr. SOPKO. Well, that could be or—

Mr. CLOUD. Travel.

Mr. SOPKO. Yes.

Mr. CLOUD. Okay.

Pivoting to the Afghan National Police, the High-Risk List identifies them as currently lacking the capability to defend the rule of law and provide static local level security nationwide in part because of the focus on reconstructing the Afghan National Army.

What further actions are needed from the U.S. to ensure that the Afghan National Police is well prepared to address the country's civil policing needs?

Mr. SOPKO. Well, we issued an entire High-Risk List—I mean, excuse me—lessons-learned report looking at that.

But the key point is we have the wrong people training the police. The military are great at training military. They are not too great at training police. So you really need to get over the right people to train the police.

What we found is there are some reserve units that are made up of police. And those reserve units, when they're assigned to that task, do an excellent job. And there are also some other countries that do an excellent job in training police in these areas. But the way our system—so the simply answer is we're not bringing over the right people to train the police, and we're not really spending the time and effort on that, which is unfortunate.

Mr. CLOUD. Thank you very much.

Mr. SOPKO. You're welcome, sir.

Mr. LYNCH. The gentleman's time has expired.

The chair now recognizes the gentleman from Tennessee, Mr. Green, for five minutes.

Mr. GREEN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member.

It's not the Mark Green that's USAID, although I get all his Google alerts, and I'm sure he gets all mine, which is worse for him than for me.

Just be very quick, I've got a couple of questions, and that's it. I'm sure you've been to Afghanistan many times.

Mr. SOPKO. Yes. About four times a year.

Mr. GREEN. It's a beautiful place. It's been a long time since I was there. But when I think of the potential of securing that place and creating tourism as an industry for them, I just see lots of potential. It is a beautiful place, from my memory, from 2004–2005 timeframe.

But the UH–60's that we've been shipping over there, can you kind of elaborate on where we are on that issue? It just seems like we didn't put a lot of control measures in place when we started that program. If you could kind of tell us where we are on that, I'd greatly appreciate it.

Mr. SOPKO. The UH–60 program, obviously our purpose was to get about 160 Black Hawks, UH–60's over there.

What we identified, the big problem there is the UH–60's are getting there on time, but the problem is with the pilot training, mechanic training, and sustainability.

So we raised the concern that why ship those very expensive pieces of hardware over there if you don't have the pilots or mechanics to use them, particularly if something happens. So you're going to have just wonderful UH–60's sitting if there's a problem with the government.

I mean, initially we promised to train 477 pilots. That was reduced to 398; 398 then was reduced to 357. It's now down to 320.

We don't see any major change to that. I think it's a problem with getting the pilots trained. English language is the biggest issue, to an extent.

So we're not attacking the platform. It's a wonderful platform. It's an expensive platform, but it's a wonderful platform. But we are raising questions about whether it's going to succeed if you don't have the pilots and the mechanics.

Mr. GREEN. These are the A models, right, the old ones that we have sort of mothballed, as I understand it?

Mr. SOPKO. I believe they are the A model. I don't have that in front of me. It is the A model.

Mr. GREEN. The A model? Okay.

Have they stopped the flow of the aircraft? Are they still shipping aircraft while they have no pilots?

Mr. SOPKO. I think they still are, but I'd have to check with my staff.

Mr. GREEN. Okay. Well, that does make a lot of sense.

Mr. SOPKO. That's our understanding, but we can get back to you.

Mr. GREEN. Will those aircraft be used in a combat service support role, or were they actually combat, for lifting combat forces into an area?

The reason I ask is the capability of the Black Hawk at elevation—and the Taliban tend to operate—at least, again, I'm speaking from my experience, which is a little bit old—but they tended to function at pretty high levels. So we used our Chinooks in order to insert combat forces.

So I'm wondering, are we even sending them an aircraft that they could use for the purposes that they want?

Now, if they want it for combat service support, i.e., Medevac, resupply, okay. But what is the stated purpose for the aircraft when they get there? That's my question.

Mr. SOPKO. I'd have to get back to you on that.

Mr. GREEN. Okay. If you wouldn't mind, just send a written, in an email or something.

Mr. SOPKO. I'd be happy to do that.

Mr. GREEN. That's all my questions.

Thank you for your time and for your service to our country.

Mr. SOPKO. Thank you.

Mr. LYNCH. I thank the gentleman. The gentleman yields back.

The chair now recognizes the gentleman from Kentucky, Mr. Massie, for five minutes.

Mr. MASSIE. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you Mr. Sopko.

I've quit preparing for these hearings, because this is like "Groundhog Day." I show up every 18 months and ask the same questions and we get the same answers, but the numbers are bigger every time I ask the question.

In 2015, I asked you how much we spent on reconstruction—which, by the way, I think—I'd like to change the name, your title of your job, change reconstruction to nation building, because I don't think people understand that's what we're tracking, is our effectiveness at nation building.

But in 2015 I asked you, and it was \$113 billion that we had spent cumulative. In 2017, I think it was September 2017, I asked you, it was \$121 billion we spent.

Can you tell me here today in 2019 how much have we spent on reconstructing Afghanistan?

Mr. SOPKO. Well, Congress has appropriated? \$132.3 billion. So we're up to that, sir.

Mr. MASSIE. Okay, 0.3. You always give me the decimal point afterwards. I appreciate that level of detail.

Mr. SOPKO. But to qualify that, and I know you are an expert on numbers here, but we still have \$10.8 billion in the pipeline.

Mr. MASSIE. Well, what are we waiting on? Let's spend it.

Mr. SOPKO. I will send that message immediately back to—

Mr. MASSIE. Please don't. Please don't.

One of the big misconceptions—so let's get rid of that misconception, that we're not nation building in Afghanistan. We are nation building in Afghanistan on steroids, okay, to what effect, I'm not sure.

But another misconception that I hear is that if we pull out of Afghanistan, the Taliban will come back. Have the Taliban left? How many Taliban are in Afghanistan kicking and, you know?

Mr. SOPKO. Our best estimate, and this comes from the military, is approximately 60,000 Taliban are active. That's not including the other terrorists, but Taliban.

Mr. MASSIE. Sixty thousand Taliban in Afghanistan.

Mr. SOPKO. That's correct.

Mr. MASSIE. So this notion that we've routed them and they're all gone and if we leave they might come back, that sounds a little dubious to me if there are 60,000 of them still there.

I wasn't asking for an answer on that.

Mr. SOPKO. Congressman, that's a tough question.

Mr. MASSIE. Yes, a tough question. I ask it every 18 months.

Mr. SOPKO. I know.

Mr. MASSIE. We get the same tough answers.

Another question is on the war on drugs that we're conducting over there. Every time you come I ask, how much have we spent eradicating poppy? And then I ask, how much poppy are they making or to what effect have our eradication efforts been effective?

Mr. SOPKO. Our eradication has absolutely had no effect on the amount of poppy being produced. We said that, and I think we briefed you or your staff when we came out with this lessons-learned report on narcotics.

As a matter of fact, none of our programs, not one, has been effective in Afghanistan on fighting narcotics.

Mr. MASSIE. So what's the price tag so far cumulative since we started that effort?

Mr. SOPKO. Well, the only good news, I think, sir, is we're spending a lot less on counternarcotics than we did before, so for you. I think it's about \$9 billion—am I correct?—\$9 billion we've spent on counternarcotics.

Mr. MASSIE. Nine billion. And do they produce more poppy now than they did 10 years ago or whenever?

Mr. SOPKO. Oh, absolutely. It's the only growth crop there is.

Mr. MASSIE. And what percent of their GDP does opium and poppy products—

Mr. SOPKO. I think the estimate—and this is kind of squishy, because they don't file tax returns, so it's kind of difficult. And there are no, really—GDP, I think it's approximately 30 percent.

Am I correct?

Yes, I would have to get back to you. It's about 30 percent.

It's the largest cash crop. I believe it's about 30 percent of the GDP. And the thing you also is the new data, which I think you should make certain you ask me again, is that we've had a lot—

Mr. MASSIE. Don't worry. I'm afraid I'm going to be here in 18 months asking the same questions. That's my fear.

Mr. SOPKO. I'm afraid I may be too. So, anyway, we always—

Mr. MASSIE. I do hope you keep your job, though. I know there's a lot of people that don't want you to have this job because you are putting daylight on this issue and to good effect. We've had good results. I mean, I think, like you were saying, they've reduced the money wasted on this poppy program, haven't they?

Mr. SOPKO. Yes. Yes.

Mr. MASSIE. When I say they, I'm talking about Congress. But we just sort of rubber stamp whatever comes over here without the data.

Mr. SOPKO. But, sir, real quickly is that the amount of interdiction that we have done over the last 10 years, and we've done a lot of interdiction, it's still only equal to less than five percent of what was produced in 2017. So you take all the interdiction we did over the last 10 years, and you will see happy talk coming out of Afghanistan—oh, we just caught this other lab, we just blew up this lab, we just—well, you add it all up for 10 years, my staff did that, and it's equal to less than five percent of the 2017 crop.

Now, the 2017 crop decreased to 2018. That's good news. But everyone admits it has nothing to do with our programs. It's because of drought.

Mr. MASSIE. Drought. Okay. Well, maybe global climate change, that's one positive effect in Afghanistan.

I appreciate your candor on this issue. I'm just disappointed that we're here asking the same questions.

Thank you, Chairman Lynch, for having this hearing. It needs to happen even if we don't like the answers.

Thank you.

Mr. LYNCH. I understand. I appreciate the gentleman's diligence on this, and I share his frustration.

I would suggest, however, that we have the power to change things. And I just want to point out that the tendency over the last few years is to give Congress less and less information so that we don't expose the inadequacies, the vulnerabilities, and the mission failure that we see, and the inconsistencies. So it could be different.

I'm going to yield myself five minutes, because I've got so more questions, and I share that with all of our colleagues. If they want to ask more questions, you get another five minutes.

But they've now changed the metrics. I've been to Afghanistan a lot. I think it's 15 times, something like that. I've been all over. And normally we would get maps from you that would show the areas and the provinces and portions of the provinces that were

under the control of the government in Kabul. Then they would show areas that were contested that the government was fighting with the Taliban. And then they would show Taliban territory, usually down around the southern end of Helmand Province, Kandahar Province, and parts of Nangarhar Province where the Haqqani Network is working it.

Now they've changed the metric. They're no longer publishing those reports, and they changed the metric from territory under Taliban control and government control, they've changed the metric to willingness of the Afghan Government to fight.

Now, how do you measure—you're the one that's got to use this metric, I guess. I mean, I know miles or square kilometers, that's subjective. It's either under control or not under control. When we would go on to codels and ask to go to Lashkargah, and they would say, "You can't go there, there's too much kinetic activity," we would know that, okay, that area is contested, at least, if not under Taliban control. Now it's a real mystery how we are supposed to determine how we're doing territorially.

So, Mr. Sopko, how do you use a metric like Afghan willingness to fight?

Mr. SOPKO. It's even worse, Mr. Chairman, than that, that now they're saying—you're absolutely correct. We no longer will be publishing the district control and population control, because our military says they're no longer collecting that data.

Mr. LYNCH. Under General Petraeus, under McChrystal, under everyone who was in command over there, Hammond, they used to say that is the metric. That is whether we know we're doing our job, whether we're making progress.

Mr. SOPKO. You're absolutely correct. As a matter of fact, in 2017, which I think is the last time—or one of the times I testified here—I said that the goal that our military said was that the Afghans would control 80 percent of the territory of their country by 2019. Now, that was the goal. That was the stated goal.

What we were just told is that's no longer a goal. It's even more squishy, Mr. Chairman, than what you're saying is. The goal now is stalemate is good because stalemate will lead to peace.

Mr. LYNCH. What's stalemate at, though? What's the territorial split? Can you say that?

Mr. SOPKO. Last data we had, I think from our last quarterly report—

Mr. LYNCH. Like 60.

Mr. SOPKO. About 65 percent of the population and 56 percent of the districts. So the Afghans controlled 65 percent of the population and 56 percent of the districts. That's down from 2018 when it was a lot higher.

Mr. LYNCH. All right. I have another question.

Mr. SOPKO. Certainly.

Mr. LYNCH. I want to jump to another topic, and I apologize.

Okay, so we have a situation where we're trying to beef up the Afghan National Army. This includes the provision of uniforms and equipment for ANSF, right? And in June you released a report that examined the cost of the U.S. Government providing Afghan security forces with proprietary forest camouflaged pattern owned by

HyperStealth Biotechnology Corporation, and that was between November 8 and January 2017.

So I'm just—I've been to Afghanistan a bunch, right? What percentage of Afghan—maybe I'm missing it? Is there a forest? Because they've chosen—if this is the—sort of the options here. They've chosen this one over here, which is a dark green. This is the HyperStealth Spec4ce Forest. That's what they're picking out for the Afghan National Army. Most of the territory I've been to looks like this, like Helmand Province.

Mr. SOPKO. You're absolutely correct. That's what we highlighted. This was the worst uniform to pick and it was the highest cost.

Mr. LYNCH. The most expensive, right?

Mr. SOPKO. What's that? Excuse me, sir?

Mr. LYNCH. Most expensive.

Mr. SOPKO. Most expensive.

And only two percent of Afghanistan is forest.

This goes back to the good work that Congress can do. Congress put into the law: DOD, go do a real assessment. They did. That's the assessment we referred to. They agreed totally with our findings and that this was the most expensive and the least effective.

What's the bad news is it turns out the Afghans now are buying the second most expensive and the second worst, another green one. It's right next to the one you identified.

Mr. LYNCH. It's even greener, yes.

Mr. SOPKO. We don't—

Mr. LYNCH. Really want to stand out.

Mr. SOPKO. Oh, yes. I mean, it's—I hate to be an Afghan soldier wearing that uniform. It's sort of like "shoot me" written on the back.

We don't know why. And, unfortunately, when you don't know why in Afghanistan, you assume there's a bribe.

Mr. LYNCH. Yes.

Mr. SOPKO. That's all you can assume. But they are going to use their money to pay for it, so we may have to wash our hands of it for these uniforms.

Mr. LYNCH. Yes. All right. I am way over on my time. I apologize to my colleagues.

I yield to the gentleman from Georgia, Mr. Hice, for five minutes.

Mr. HICE. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I appreciate your leniency with everyone.

Real quickly, the AWOL. Is there any information regarding where the problem seems to be worse than other places? Is it certain training areas? Certain tasks?

Mr. SOPKO. Yes. That's a very good point, because I know one of the bases is close to you, and your colleague, one of the bases.

Texas was the problem. The Air Force did a wonderful job at Moody Air Force Base. I think it's because they spent the time and effort and they focused and they mentored. We've highlighted the Moody Air Force Base and the Air Force program for training, because they put mentors and followed the Afghans back to Afghanistan, they brought them back, and it was a fantastic program. We highlight that in our lessons-learned report.

So Georgia was one of the best programs out there.

Mr. HICE. Okay. But the Air Force in general, really.

Mr. SOPKO. Well, it sounds like somebody who served in Europe. I can't say for sure, but I can say in this instance——

Mr. HICE. But, no, it is an important issue, because to get to the heart of the problem we've got to know where the problem seems to be the worst. And at that point, maybe we can start finding some answers.

All right. Shifting gears, waste, fraud, abuse, that kind of stuff. There's gazillions, or whatever, of tons of taxpayer money going directly from the U.S. to the Afghan Government, correct?

Mr. SOPKO. That's correct.

Mr. HICE. Okay. Any idea how much?

Mr. SOPKO. Of on-budget assistance, I think I will have to get back to you. I don't have those numbers exactly.

Mr. HICE. Okay. If you would get back. It's a lot, though. Is that correct?

Mr. SOPKO. Yes.

Mr. HICE. Okay. So are we tracking that? Do we have accountability oversight of that? I know oversight is a problem in this whole. Is there any oversight over the money going directly to the Afghan Government?

Mr. SOPKO. Very little.

Mr. HICE. Very little.

Mr. SOPKO. As I said before, the agencies basically wipe their hands of it and say: That's the Afghan's problem, not ours. We've actually had our auditors being told that: Oh, we gave it to the Afghans, we don't—it's not our——

Mr. HICE. All right. So it's the old check the box. We did what we're supposed to do. Now we're done with it. We're not even going to look.

Okay. This highlights a whole lot more that we could go into.

Let's go to the day after. You mentioned that a number of times. All right. So the day after would be the day after a peace deal is made. All right? So let's just go there hypothetically.

So the day after comes, our troops come home. How would that affect our oversight of money going to the Afghan Government? I mean, it's bad now. Or could it get worse?

Mr. SOPKO. It could get worse unless the security is provided by some other organization that we trust. In this case, if all of our military came home, then you would have to boost up the security provided by the State Department security detail.

Mr. HICE. Right.

Mr. SOPKO. Those were the people who were guarding me.

Mr. HICE. Yes. That's a good point. If our troops come home, then the risk of that escalates dramatically, I'm sure.

All right. Then on a scale of one to 10, how important is it for us to continue supporting the Afghan Government?

Mr. SOPKO. Well, again, if we don't support them with money and with the military in all likelihood the Afghan Government will lose their fight against a terrorist group, whether it's the Taliban, ISIS, or the other 20-some——

Mr. HICE. Which that precisely brings me to my last question on this. I mean, all you of this—it's like this is a mess that's created that is a darned if you do, darned if you don't kind of a scenario.

We're giving money to the Afghan Government. We don't know what they're doing with it. We've checked the box. We gave it to them. Now we have no oversight.

If we get a peace deal, the day after it gets even worse. That money now may be going to places we don't want it to go. On the day after as well, the Taliban now has a seat at the table.

Mr. SOPKO. That is a problem.

Mr. HICE. So how does that affect our efforts there or the absence of our presence there?

Mr. SOPKO. We don't know. We're just highlighting. That's the exact point we're trying to highlight. What is the role of the Taliban going to be on counternarcotics, since they're involved in the narcotics industry; on protecting women's rights, since we know what their history was with women; in fighting corruption, since they are part of the corrupt influence; and in security?

So are you going to have to merge the Afghan National Security Force with people they've been shooting at for the last 10 years? It could happen. It may be successful, but we're just saying that's a risk.

So Congress, the executive branch, everybody should take a look and plan ahead and do oversight like you're doing now.

This report is not only a call of concern, but it gives you a road map for doing oversight. I hope committees, all the committees, particularly this one, because this committee has a whole-of-government capability and jurisdiction, will follow the road map we've given you.

Mr. HICE. I just, again, thank you for the incredible work you've done. You have given a road map.

Again, Mr. Chairman, thank you to you for having this hearing. I think one of the best things we can do is continue highlighting these problems and bringing people here who are involved in the problem and who have the capacity to deal with it. So, both of you and your teams, thank you very much.

And I yield back.

Mr. LYNCH. I thank the gentleman.

Mr. Sopko, I'd like to thank you as our only witness today for your testimony. I want to thank your staff who's behind you, been whispering answers to you throughout hearing. You're a wise man.

So without objection, all members will have five legislative days within which to submit additional written questions for the witness. Those will be submitted to the chair, which will be forwarded to the witness for his response. And I'll ask our witnesses to please respond as promptly as you are able.

This hearing is now adjourned. Thank you.

[Whereupon, at 3:56 p.m., the subcommittee was adjourned.]

