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U.S. LESSONS LEARNED IN AFGHANISTAN

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BEFORE THE

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U.S. LESSONS LEARNED IN AFGHANISTAN

Wednesday, January 15, 2020
House of Representatives
Committee on Foreign Affairs

WASHINGTON, DC

The committee met, pursuant to notice, at 10 a.m., in room 2172 Rayburn House Office Building, Hon. Eliot Engel (chairman of the committee) presiding.

Mr. SHERMAN [presiding]. The committee will come to order. The chairman's staff has asked me to sit in for a bit. Without objection, all members will have 5 days to submit statements, extraneous materials, and questions for the record, subject to length limitations in the rules.

Pursuant to notice, we are here today to examine the lessons from America's war effort in Afghanistan.

Inspector General Sopko, welcome to the Foreign Affairs Committee. I look forward to learning the lessons of Afghanistan, but also getting some input as to what we should do in the future. Our casualties in Afghanistan over the last 6 years have averaged roughly ten. We mourn those deaths; we take them seriously. But compared to the other conflicts we are engaged in, compared to the training deaths we suffer in our military, we cannot have the exhaustion of 10 years ago blind us to what is the operation now and what is its cost.

I know the chairman has an opening statement, but I will first recognize the ranking member, then I will recognize our witness for his opening statement, and hopefully by then we will hear the chairman's opening statement.

Mr. McCaul.

Mr. MCCAUL. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, pro tem.

The United States has been in Afghanistan for almost 19 years. It is the longest war in the history of the United States. We sacrifice much on the battlefield, but we have also achieved a great deal. We decimated al-Qaida and greatly weakened their global network. As a result, Afghanistan has not been the staging ground for another successful attack against our homeland.

After the 9/11 terror attacks, it was clear that our approach to foreign threats and intelligence efforts needed to change. We could no longer sit back and wait while our enemies plotted attacks thousands of miles away. We needed to go on the offense, and we did. Our presence in the region allowed us to capture Khalid Sheikh Mohammed, the mastermind of 9/11, kill Osama bin Laden, and, more recently, remove his son Hamza from the battlefield.

I visited Ambassador Crocker there many times and saw firsthand the challenges we faced and the opportunities we had to succeed. We have led the charge on other important issues as well be-

yond those on the battlefield. They include supporting democracy and women's rights, countering the drug trade, developing the private sector, promoting economic growth, fighting corruption, stabilizing former Taliban-controlled districts, among others, and this type of work does not always make the news, but it is vital to our future and our security.

But unfortunately, there have been many costly missteps. We know about these missteps because of the important work performed by the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction. Since 2001, the United States has spent an estimated $132 billion on development assistance. One hundred and thirty-two billion. SIGAR has found that much of this money was wasted, stolen, or failed to address the problems it was meant to fix.

This is clearly not the best use of American tax dollars. For example, we have spent nine billion on counternarcotics programs, yet today Afghanistan is the largest producer of opium, which finances our enemies. How is it possible that after two decades, billions of dollars spent, and thousands of lives lost, we still cannot slow drug production? Our efforts in counternarcotics have clearly failed.

We have also learned that our strategy to build an Afghan army and police force has not made the security situation any better. A lack of coordination, the misuse of funds, and insufficient training for Afghans has failed to reduce violence across the country. This is completely unacceptable. And the publication of the Afghanistan Papers in the Washington Post last month serves as a sober reminder of our past mistakes and underscores the importance of the Trump Administration's efforts to end this war.

The American people have been very patient with our involvement. We have sacrificed greatly. In fact, two American soldiers lost their lives in an attack this weekend. We owe it to them and to others who have served to finally get this right. We need to step back and learn from the mistakes we have made. SIGAR's Lessons Learned Program initiated in 2014 offers key insights into the complex challenges we face. These evaluations provide opportunities for Congress and the executive branch to prevent the same mistakes from happening again in Afghanistan or in other operations around the world.

So I would like to thank Mr. Sopko for his work on this very important report and for appearing here today before this committee. And with that, Mr. Chairman, I yield back.

Mr. SHERMAN. Thank you.

We will now hear from John Sopko, the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction, for 5 minutes.

STATEMENT OF JOHN SOPKO, SPECIAL INSPECTOR GENERAL FOR AFGHANISTAN RECONSTRUCTION

Mr. SOPKO. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman and Ranking Member McCaul and other members of the committee.

Congress created SIGAR in 2008 to combat waste, fraud, and abuse in the U.S. reconstruction efforts in Afghanistan. So far, we have published over 600 audits, inspections, and other reports that have saved the American taxpayer over three billion dollars, while

convicting over 130 individuals for misconduct related to that reconstruction effort.

Although this is the twenty-second time I have presented testimony to Congress since my appointment, today is the first time I have been asked to address SIGAR's rather unique Lessons Learned Program and what we have learned from it. I thank you for that opportunity. In light of the recent attention our reports have gotten, I am particularly pleased to have the opportunity to clear up any misconceptions about what that program does or does not do.

As with everything produced by SIGAR, this Lessons Learned Program's mandate is limited just to reconstruction, not the warfighting. We do not assess U.S. diplomatic and military strategies nor our warfighting capabilities. Likewise, we are not producing an oral history of our involvement in Afghanistan nor opining on whether we should or should not be there. Rather, we are the only U.S. Government agency focused on conducting research and analysis which meets strict professional standards aimed at providing an independent and objective examination of U.S. reconstruction efforts there and to make practical recommendations to you, the Congress, and executive branch agencies for improving our efforts there and elsewhere.

I would like to mention six overarching lessons that you can draw from these thousands of pages of reports we have issued. First, that successful reconstruction is incompatible with continuing insecurity. Second, unchecked corruption in Afghanistan has undermined our goals there and, unfortunately, we helped foster that corruption.

Third, after the Taliban's initial defeat there was no clear reconstruction strategy and no single military service, agency, or country in charge of reconstruction efforts in Afghanistan. Fourth, politically driven timelines undermine our reconstruction efforts. Fifth, the constant turnover of U.S. personnel, or what we have euphemistically called the "annual lobotomy," negatively impacted all of our reconstruction efforts there. And, sixth, to be effective, reconstruction efforts must be based on a better understanding of the historical, social, legal, and political traditions of the host nation.

In addition to these key lessons, your staff has asked us to give you certain recommendations that you can focus on now, and here are six: First, in light of the ongoing peace negotiations Congress should ensure that the current administration has an actionable plan for what happens the day after peace is declared. Second, to ensure that Congress is made aware of problems in a timely manner, it should require agencies to provide regular reports to Congress disclosing risks to major reconstruction projects and programs as they occur. This would be analogous to the requirement we impose upon publicly traded corporations for the SEC.

Third, Congress should condition future on-budget assistance on a rigorous assessment of the Afghan ministries and international trust funds to ensure that they have strong accountability measures in place. Fourth, oversight is still mission-critical in Afghanistan. Congress must require that this administration continues to ensure adequate oversight, monitoring, and evaluation capabilities continue.

Fifth, Congress should require U.S. Government agencies to rack and stack their programs and projects on at least an annual basis to identify their best and worst performing programs. And sixth, Congress should require State, DOD, and USAID to submit the anticorruption strategy for reconstruction efforts that was mandated to be filed by June 2018 and still has not been filed that was mandated by the National Defense Authorization Act.

So in conclusion, our work at SIGAR is far from done. For all the lives and treasure the United States and its coalition partners have expended in Afghanistan, the very least we can do is learn from our successes and failures there to improve future operations. I thank you very much for the opportunity to appear today and I look forward to your questions.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Sopko follows:]

Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction

Testimony

Before the Committee on Foreign Affairs
U.S. House of Representatives

U.S. Lessons Learned in Afghanistan

Statement of John F. Sopko,

Special Inspector General
for Afghanistan Reconstruction

January 15, 2020

Chairman Engel, Ranking Member McCaul, Members of the Committee:

It is a pleasure and an honor to testify before you today. This is the 22nd time I have presented testimony to Congress since I was appointed the Special Inspector General nearly eight years ago. SIGAR was created by the Congress in 2008 to combat waste, fraud and abuse in the U.S. reconstruction effort in Afghanistan. We are the only one of the 73 independent federal inspectors general that is not housed within a larger government agency. We have the authority to oversee any federal agency that has played a role in the Afghanistan reconstruction effort.

So far we have published nearly 600 audits, inspections, and other reports. SIGAR's law enforcement agents have conducted more than 1,000 criminal and civil investigations that have led to more than 130 convictions of individuals who have committed crimes. Combined, SIGAR's audit, investigative, and other work has resulted in cost savings to the taxpayer of over $3 billion.

Although I have testified numerous times before Congress, today is the first time that I have been asked to directly address SIGAR's unique Lessons Learned Program and what we have learned from it and the rest of our work. In light of recent attention, I am particularly pleased to have this opportunity to discuss some of our significant findings about the reconstruction efforts in what has become our nation's longest war. But before I talk about what our Lessons Learned Program does, I want to clear up any misconceptions by defining what it does *not* do.

The Genesis and Purpose of the Lessons Learned Program

As with everything produced by SIGAR, the Lessons Learned Program's mandate is limited to the reconstruction of Afghanistan. Our Lessons Learned program is not and never was intended to be a new version of the Pentagon Papers, or to turn snappy one-liners and quotes into headlines or sound bites. We do not make broad assessments of U.S. diplomatic and military strategies or warfighting; nor are we producing an oral history of the United States' involvement in Afghanistan. More important, our Lessons Learned Program does not address the broader policy debate of whether or not our country should be in Afghanistan.

Our Lessons Learned Program produces unclassified, publically available, balanced, and thoroughly researched appraisals of various aspects of U.S. reconstruction efforts in Afghanistan. Unlike recent press reporting, it also makes actionable recommendations for the Congress and executive branch agencies and, where appropriate, offers matters for consideration for the Afghan government and our coalition allies.

Some may criticize us for using "dense bureaucratic prose" in our Lessons Learned reports, but we are not trying to win a Pulitzer Prize. Rather, we are focused on conducting original research and analysis aimed at providing an independent and objective examination of U.S. reconstruction efforts in Afghanistan, and to make practical recommendations to Congress and the executive branch agencies.

Put simply, we are striving to distill something of lasting and useful significance from our 18 years of engagement in Afghanistan. Considering the over 2,300 American service members who have died there and the $133 billion (and counting) taxpayer dollars spent on reconstruction alone, it would be a dereliction of duty not to try to learn from this experience. With our unique interagency jurisdiction, Congress gave SIGAR an extraordinary opportunity to do this work.

Moreover, the need is urgent: in Afghanistan, most military, embassy, and civilian personnel rotate out of country after a year or less. This means that new people are constantly arriving, all with the best of intentions, but with little or no knowledge of what their predecessors were doing, the problems they faced, or what worked and what didn't work. SIGAR's Lessons Learned Program is a unique source of institutional memory to help address this "annual lobotomy."

Given this reality, it is understandably difficult for individual agencies to see the forest for the trees—and even if they could, such efforts have a way of sinking into obscurity. For example, shortly after I became the Inspector General, my staff uncovered a USAID-commissioned lessons learned study from 1988 entitled "A Retrospective Review of U.S. Assistance to Afghanistan: 1950 to 1979." Many of the report's lessons were still relevant and could have made a real impact if they had been taken into account in the early 2000s. Unfortunately, we could not find anyone at USAID or the Department of State who was even aware of the report's existence, let alone its findings.

The genesis of our Lessons Learned Program occurred almost as soon as I was appointed Inspector General in 2012. Early in my tenure, it became apparent that the problems we were finding in our audits and inspections—whether it was poorly constructed infrastructure, rampant corruption, inadequately trained Afghan soldiers, or a growing narcotics economy—elicited the same basic response from members of Congress, agency officials, and policymakers alike. "What does it mean?" they would ask me. "What can we learn from this?"

In an attempt to answer these questions, and to make our audits and other reports more relevant to policymakers in Washington and our military and civilian staff in Afghanistan, I asked my staff in 2013 to develop a series of guiding queries aimed at helping Congress and the Administration improve reconstruction operations. These questions—SIGAR's first attempt to develop lessons from the U.S. reconstruction effort—were incorporated by Congress in the National Defense Authorization Act for fiscal year 2015 as a requirement for initiating infrastructure projects in areas of Afghanistan inaccessible to U.S. government personnel. They continue to inform our work:

- Does the project or program clearly contribute to our national interests or strategic objectives?
- Does the recipient country want it or need it?

- Has the project been coordinated with other U.S. agencies, with the recipient government, and with other international donors?
- Do security conditions permit effective implementation and oversight?
- Does the project have adequate safeguards to detect, deter, and mitigate corruption?
- Does the recipient government have the financial resources, technical capacity, and political will to sustain the project?
- Have implementing agencies established meaningful, measurable metrics for determining successful project outcomes?

These questions were useful, and they remain relevant. But the agencies named in our reports complained that we were too critical. Our reports failed to put their efforts in context, they said, and therefore we were not acknowledging their successes. Accordingly, on March 25, 2013, I sent letters to the Secretary of State, the Secretary of Defense, and the Administrator of the U.S. Agency for International Development, asking them to each provide me with a list of their agency's ten most successful Afghanistan reconstruction projects and programs, as well as a list of the ten least successful, along with a detailed explanation of how these projects and programs were evaluated and the specific criteria used for each.

The answers we received from the agencies were informative, but—as you can see from Appendix I—they failed to list or discuss each agency's 10 most and 10 least successful projects or programs. As my letter of July 5, 2013 noted, this failure limited our understanding of how government agencies evaluated and perceived both success and failure, which was critical for formulating lessons learned from past reconstruction projects and programs.

It is perhaps understandable that agencies would want to show their programs in the best possible light—and it is certainly understandable that the private firms, nongovernmental organizations, and multilateral institutions that implemented those programs would want to demonstrate success. Yet a recurring challenge to any accurate assessment has been the pervasive tendency to overstate positive results, with little, if any, evidence to back up those claims.

Unfortunately, many of the claims that State, USAID, and others have made over time simply do not stand up to scrutiny. For example, in a 2014 interview, the then-USAID administrator stated that "today, 3 million girls and 5 million boys are enrolled in school—compared to just 900,000 when the Taliban ruled Afghanistan." But when SIGAR subsequently conducted an audit of U.S. efforts to support primary and secondary education in Afghanistan, we found that USAID was receiving its enrollment data from the Afghan government and had taken few, if any, steps to attempt to verify the data's accuracy, even though independent third parties and even the Afghan Ministry of Education had called the numbers into question. And because USAID education support programs lacked effective metrics, it could not show how U.S. taxpayer dollars had contributed to the increased enrollment it claimed.

In that same interview, the then-USAID administrator said that since the fall of the Taliban, "child mortality has been cut [in Afghanistan] by 60 percent, maternal mortality has declined by 80 percent, and access to health services has been increased by 90 percent. As a result, Afghanistan has experienced the largest increase in life expectancy and the largest decreases in maternal and child deaths of any country in the world." However, when SIGAR issued an audit of Afghanistan's health sector in 2017, we found that while USAID publicly reported a 22-year increase in Afghan life expectancy from 2002 to 2010, USAID did not disclose that the baseline it used for comparison came from a World Health Organization (WHO) report that could only make an estimate because of limited data. A later WHO report showed only a 6-year increase in Afghan life expectancy for males and an 8-year increase for females between 2002 and 2010—a far cry from the 22 years that USAID claimed. As for the maternal mortality claims, SIGAR's audit found that USAID's 2002 baseline data was from a survey that was conducted in only four of Afghanistan's then-360 districts.

Likewise, a SIGAR audit into U.S. government programs to assist women in Afghanistan found that "although the Department of Defense, Department of State, and USAID reported gains and improvements in the status of Afghan women . . . SIGAR found that there was no comprehensive assessment available to confirm that these gains were the direct result of specific U.S. efforts." And while State and USAID collectively reported spending $850 million on 17 projects that were designed in whole or in part to support Afghan women, they could not tell our auditors how much of that money actually went to programs that supported Afghan women.

Another SIGAR audit looked into the more than $1 billion that the United States had spent supporting rule-of-law programs in Afghanistan. Shockingly, we found that the U.S. actually seemed to be moving backwards as time went along. Our audit found that while the 2009 U.S. rule-of-law strategy for Afghanistan contained 27 specific performance measures, the 2013 strategy contained no performance measures at all. If you have no metrics for success, how can you tell if you're succeeding?

While honesty and transparency are always important, when government agencies overstate the positive and overlook flaws in their methodologies or accountability mechanisms, it has real public policy implications. The American people and their elected representatives eventually start asking why, if things are going so well, are we still there? Why do we continue to spend so much money? While it may not be as headline-worthy, in the long run, honesty gives a development undertaking a far better chance at success: People can understand it will take time, patience, and continued effort to make a real difference. If there was no SIGAR, one may wonder how many of these discrepancies would have ever come to light.

In some ways, I would argue that the agencies' reluctance to list their successes and failures is understandable. As the old saying goes, success has many parents, but failure is an orphan. Nowhere is this more true than in Afghanistan, where success is fleeting and failure is common. That is all the more reason why it is crucial to be honest with ourselves and to recognize that not

everything is successful. In other words, for honest analysis, failure may be an orphan, but it also can be a great teacher.

It was in response to this refusal by the agencies to be candid about their successes and failures, and at the suggestion of a number of prominent officials, including Ambassador Ryan Crocker and General John Allen, that SIGAR formally launched its Lessons Learned Program in 2014, with the blessing of the National Security Council staff. The Lessons Learned Program's mandate is to:

- Show what has and has not worked over the course of the U.S. reconstruction experience in Afghanistan
- Offer detailed and actionable recommendations to policymakers and executive agencies that are relevant to current and future reconstruction efforts
- Present unbiased, fact-based, and accessible reports to the public and key stakeholders
- Respond to the needs of U.S. implementing agencies, both in terms of accurately capturing their efforts and providing timely and actionable guidance for future efforts
- Share our findings with policymakers, senior executive branch officials, members of the Congress, and their staffs
- Provide subject matter expertise to SIGAR senior leaders and other SIGAR directorates
- Share our findings in conferences and workshops convened by U.S. government agencies, foreign governments, international organizations, NGOs, think tanks, and academic institutions

By doing so, SIGAR's Lessons Learned Program also fulfills our statutory obligation, set forth in the very first section of our authorizing statute, "to provide . . . recommendations on policies designed to promote economy, efficiency, and effectiveness [of reconstruction programs in Afghanistan] and to prevent and detect waste, fraud, and abuse in such programs and operations." SIGAR is also required to inform the Secretaries of State and Defense about "problems and deficiencies relating to the administration of such programs and operations and the necessity for and progress on corrective action."[1] In addition, the Inspector General Act authorizes SIGAR "to make such investigations and reports . . . as are, in the judgment of the Inspector General, necessary or desirable."[2]

How SIGAR's Lesson Learned Program Works

The Lessons Learned team is composed of subject-matter experts with considerable experience working and living in Afghanistan, as well as a staff of experienced research analysts. Our

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[1] National Defense Authorization Act for FY 2008, Pub. Law No. 112-181 (Jan. 28, 2008), § 1229(a)(2). A similar mandate that applies to all inspectors general is contained in Section 2 of the Inspector General Act of 1978, as amended. See 5 U.S.C. App. 3, § 2

[2] Inspector General Act of 1978, as amended, § 6(a)(2), 5 U.S.C. App. § 6(a)(2).

analysts come from a variety of backgrounds: some have served in the U.S. military, while others have worked at State, USAID, in the intelligence community, with other federal agencies, or with implementing partners or policy research groups.

As the program was starting in 2014, our Lessons Learned team consulted with a range of experts and current and former U.S. officials to determine what topics we should first explore. We decided to focus on two areas of the reconstruction effort that had the largest price tags: building the Afghan security forces (now more than $70 billion) and counternarcotics (now about $9 billion). We also chose to examine a crosscutting problem that SIGAR already had plenty of experience in uncovering, and which senior officials consistently urged us to tackle: corruption and its corrosive effects on the entire U.S. mission. The fourth topic was private sector development and economic growth—because we know that a stronger Afghan economy is necessary to lasting peace and stability, and without it, U.S. reconstruction efforts are largely unsustainable.

The topics of other reports have sometimes flowed logically from previous reports. For instance, our 2019 investigation of the tangled military chain of command, *Divided Responsibility*, had its origin in what we had learned two years earlier in our report on reconstructing the Afghan security and national defense forces. Other report topics come from brainstorming sessions with groups of subject matter experts and information my staff and I glean from our frequent trips to Afghanistan. For example, our latest lessons learned report, on reintegration of enemy combatants, as well as our soon-to-be-released report on elections, were specifically suggested by the prior Resolute Support commander and the outgoing U.S. Ambassador in Afghanistan.

SIGAR's lessons learned reports are not drawn from merely anecdotal evidence or based solely on our personal areas of expertise. Our Lessons Learned Program staff has access to the largest single source of information and expertise on Afghanistan reconstruction—namely, the information and expertise provided by other SIGAR departments: our Audits and Inspections Directorate, Investigations Directorate, the Office of Special Projects, and our Research and Analysis Directorate (RAD). For example, RAD is responsible for compiling the quarterly reports we are required by law to submit to Congress. It serves as our in-house think tank, collecting and analyzing vital data on a quarterly basis to keep Congress and the American public current on reconstruction in Afghanistan. To date, SIGAR has produced 45 publicly available quarterly reports, which provide detailed descriptions of all reconstruction-related obligations, expenditures, and revenues, as well as an overview of the reconstruction effort as a whole. SIGAR's quarterly reports constitute the largest and most detailed collection of data and analysis on reconstruction activities in Afghanistan, and are viewed by experts both in and out of government as the go-to source for information on reconstruction. SIGAR's quarterly reports were the first to question the accuracy of various claims of progress in Afghanistan, ranging from the accuracy of Afghan troop numbers to the number of children actually attending school to the state of the Afghan economy.

Our Audits and Inspections Directorate is another extraordinary source of information and assistance to our Lessons Learned Program. Since 2009, SIGAR has issued 358 audits, inspections and other reports, and has more auditors, inspectors, and engineers on the ground in Afghanistan than USAID OIG, State OIG, and DOD OIG combined. In a unique innovation, SIGAR also has a cooperative agreement to work with an independent Afghan oversight organization, giving SIGAR an unparalleled ability to go "outside the wire" to places where travel is unsafe for U.S. government employees. SIGAR's auditors and inspectors determine whether infrastructure projects have been properly constructed, used, and maintained, and also conduct forensic reviews of reconstruction funds managed by State, DOD, and USAID to identify anomalies that may indicate fraud.

Our Investigations Directorate conducts criminal and civil investigations of waste, fraud, and abuse relating to programs and operations supported with U.S. funds. SIGAR has full federal law enforcement authority, and pursues criminal prosecutions, civil actions, forfeitures, monetary recoveries, and suspension and debarments. SIGAR has more investigators on the ground in Afghanistan than any other oversight agency. Our investigators regularly work with other law enforcement organizations, including other IG offices, the Drug Enforcement Administration, the FBI, and others. Major investigations conducted by the Investigations Directorate include contract fraud, diversion of U.S. government loans, money laundering, and corruption. A very significant part of this work has been focused on fuel, the "liquid gold" of Afghanistan. The Investigations Directorate has provided valuable information to our Lessons Learned Program analysts, a prime example being the *Corruption in Conflict* report.

Lastly, our Office of Special Projects examines emerging issues and delivers prompt, actionable reports to federal agencies and Congress. This office was created in response to requests by agencies operating in Afghanistan for actionable insights and information on important issues that could be produced more quickly than a formal audit. Special Projects reports cover a wide range of programs and activities to fulfill SIGAR's legislative mandate to protect taxpayers and have proven useful to the Lessons Learned Program. For example, its examination of programs run by DOD's now-defunct Task Force for Business and Stability Operations was a major impetus for the Lessons Learned Program report on *Private Sector Development and Economic Growth*.

While the documentary evidence in our lessons learned reports tells a story, it cannot substitute for the experience, knowledge, and wisdom of people who participated in the Afghanistan reconstruction effort. For that reason, our analysts have conducted well over 600 interviews at last count—with experts in academia and research institutions; current and former civilian and military officials in our own government, the Afghan government, and other donor country governments; implementing partners and contractors; and members of civil society. Interviewees have ranged from ambassadors to airmen. These interviews provide valuable insights into the rationale behind decisions, debates within and between agencies, and frustrations that spanned the years. The information we glean from them is used to guide us in our inquiry, and we strive

to cross-reference interviewees' claims with the documentary evidence, or if that is not possible, with other interviews.

Our choice of which interviews or quotes to use is based on our analysts' judgment of whether it captures an observation or insight that is more broadly representative and consistent with the weight of evidence from various sources—not whether it is simply a colorful expression of opinion. Lessons Learned Program analysts must adhere to strict professional guidelines regarding the sourcing of their findings, in accordance with the Council of the Inspectors General on Integrity and Efficiency's Quality Standards for Inspection and Evaluation (commonly referred to as "the Blue Book.")[3]

While some of our interviewees do not mind being quoted, others have a well-founded fear of retribution from political or tribal enemies, employers, governments, or international donors who are paying their salaries. These persons often request that we not reveal their names. Honoring those requests for confidentiality is a bedrock principle at SIGAR, for three reasons. First, it is required by law—specifically, by the Inspector General Act of 1978, as amended.[4] Second, there are obvious humanitarian and security concerns. Finally, without the ability to shield our sources, we simply would not be able to do our work. In fact, at our last tally, more than 80 percent of those interviewed for the Lessons Learned Program reports requested their names not be disclosed.

Another important part of the quality control process used by SIGAR's Lessons Learned Program is an external peer review. For each of our reports, we seek and receive feedback on the draft report from a group of subject matter experts, who often have significant experience working in Afghanistan. These experts are drawn from universities, think tanks, and the private sector, and often include retired senior military officers and diplomats. Each group of experts is tailored to a particular topic, and they provide thoughtful, detailed comments.

Over the course of producing any one report, Lessons Learned Program analysts also routinely engage with officials at USAID, State, DOD, and other agencies to familiarize them with the team's preliminary findings, lessons, and recommendations. Our analysts also solicit formal and informal feedback to improve our understanding of the key issues and recommendations, as viewed by each agency. The agencies are then given an opportunity to formally review and comment on the final draft of every report, after which the team usually meets with agency representatives to discuss their feedback firsthand. Although Lessons Learned Program teams incorporate agencies' comments where appropriate, the analysis, conclusions, and recommendations of our reports remain SIGAR's own.

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[3] The Blue Book standards can be found at https://www.ignet.gov/content/quality-standards.

[4] Section 7(b) of the Inspector General Act of 1978, as amended, prohibits SIGAR from disclosing the identity of a source who provides information to SIGAR. Section 8M(b)(2)(B) of the Act prohibits SIGAR from disclosing the identity of anyone who reports waste, fraud, and abuse.

Once we have a draft of a report, it is sent to the agencies under review to get their feedback and clarify points of confusion. Our purpose here is not to avoid all points of conflict with the agencies we write about, but to make sure we are presenting issues fairly and in context.

When our reports are published, our next job is vitally important: getting the word out. We have no intention of producing reports that would suffer the same fate as that well-informed, but sadly unread, 1988 USAID report our staff discovered in Kabul. Until our findings and recommendations circulate widely to relevant decision-makers and result in action and change, we know we are not producing lessons learned; we are merely recording lessons observed. Each of our reports is the subject of a major launch event, usually at a research institution or think tank, designed to draw attention to reach policymakers, practitioners, and the public. Our reports are also posted online, both as a downloadable PDF and in a user-friendly interactive format.

Our analysts follow up by providing lectures and briefings to civilian and military reconstruction practitioners, researchers, and students at schools and training institutions worldwide. Our reports have become course material at the U.S. Army War College; our analysts have lectured or led workshops at the Foreign Service Institute, Davidson College, the National Defense University, Yale, and Princeton. A more extensive discussion of our ongoing outreach program and the successful use of the reports by U.S agencies is found in the next section.

What We Have Accomplished: Seven Lessons Learned Reports

To date, the Lessons Learned Program has published seven reports. Two more reports— one on elections in Afghanistan and another on the monitoring and evaluation of U.S. government contracts there—will be published in the early part of 2020. After those, we expect to issue a report on women's empowerment in Afghanistan and another on policing and corrections later in 2020 or early 2021 at the latest. Following are brief summaries of our published reports, the full versions of which can be found on SIGAR's website.[5]

- *Corruption in Conflict: Lessons from the U.S. Experience in Afghanistan*, published in September 2016, examined how the U.S. government understood the risks of corruption in Afghanistan, how the U.S. response to corruption evolved, and the effectiveness of that response. We found that corruption substantially undermined the U.S. mission in Afghanistan from the very beginning of Operation Enduring Freedom. We concluded that failure to effectively address the problem means U.S. reconstruction programs will at best continue to be subverted by systemic corruption and, at worst, will fail. The lesson is that anticorruption efforts need to be at the center of planning and policymaking for contingencies. The U.S. government should not exacerbate corruption by flooding a weak economy with too much money too quickly, with too little oversight. U.S. agencies should know whom they are doing business with, and avoid empowering highly corrupt

[5] https://www.sigar.mil/lessonslearned/

actors. Strong monitoring and evaluation systems must be in place for assistance, and the U.S. government should maintain consistent pressure on the host government for critical reforms.

- *Reconstructing the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces: Lessons from the U.S. Experience in Afghanistan*, published in September 2017, examined how the U.S. government—primarily the DOD, State, and the Department of Justice—developed and executed security sector assistance in Afghanistan from 2002 to 2016. Our analysis revealed that the U.S. government was ill-prepared to help build an Afghan army and police force capable of protecting Afghanistan from internal or external threats and preventing the country from becoming a terrorist safe haven. U.S. personnel also struggled to implement a dual strategy of attempting to rapidly improve security while simultaneously developing self-sufficient Afghan military and police capabilities, all on short, politically-driven timelines. We found that the U.S. government lacked a comprehensive approach and coordinating body to successfully implement the whole-of-government programs necessary to develop a capable and self-sustaining ANDSF. Ultimately, the United States—after expending over $70 billion—designed a force that was not able to provide nationwide security, especially as the force faced a larger threat than anticipated after the drawdown of coalition military forces. The report identifies lessons to inform U.S. policies and actions for future security sector assistance missions, and provides recommendations to improve performance of security sector assistance programs.
- *Private Sector Development and Economic Growth: Lessons from the U.S. Experience in Afghanistan*, published in April 2018, examined efforts by the U.S. government to stimulate and build the Afghan economy after the initial defeat of the Taliban in 2001. While Afghanistan achieved significant early success in telecommunications, transportation, and construction, and in laying the foundations of a modern economic system, the goal of establishing long-term, broad-based, and sustainable economic growth has proved elusive. The primary reason, the report concluded, was persistent uncertainty, created by ongoing physical insecurity and political instability, which discouraged investment and other economic activity and undermined efforts to reduce pervasive corruption. Other reasons were the inadequate understanding and mitigation of relationships among corrupt strongmen and other power holders, and the inability to help Afghanistan to develop the physical and institutional infrastructure that would allow it to be regionally competitive in trade and agriculture. Two of the report's major recommendations are that future economic development assistance, in Afghanistan or elsewhere, should be based on a deeper understanding of the economy and society, and that needed governance institutions be allowed to proceed at an appropriate pace.
- *Stabilization: Lessons from the U.S. Experience in Afghanistan*, published in May 2018, detailed how USAID, State and DOD tried to support and legitimize the Afghan government in contested districts from 2002 through 2017. Our analysis revealed the U.S.

government greatly overestimated its ability to build and reform government institutions in Afghanistan as part of its stabilization strategy. We found that the stabilization strategy and the programs used to achieve it were not properly tailored to the Afghan context, and successes in stabilizing Afghan districts rarely lasted longer than the physical presence of coalition troops and civilians. As a result, by the time all prioritized districts had transitioned from coalition to Afghan control in 2014, the services and protection provided by Afghan forces and civil servants often could not compete with a resurgent Taliban as it filled the void in newly vacated territory.

- *Counternarcotics: Lessons from the U.S. Experience in Afghanistan*, published in June 2018, examined how U.S. agencies tried to deter farmers and traffickers from participating in the cultivation and trade of opium, build Afghan government counterdrug capacity, and develop the country's licit economy. We found that no counterdrug program led to lasting reductions in poppy cultivation or opium production—and, without a stable security environment, there was little possibility of success. The U.S. government failed to develop and implement counternarcotics strategies that outlined or effectively directed U.S. agencies toward shared goals. Eradication efforts ultimately had no lasting impact on opium cultivation, and alienated rural populations. Even though U.S. strategies said eradication and development aid should target the same areas on the ground, we found—by using new geospatial imagery—that frequently this did not happen. Development programs failed to provide farmers with sustainable alternatives to poppy. Two positive takeaways are that (1) some provinces and districts saw temporary reductions in poppy cultivation, and (2) U.S. support and mentorship helped stand up well-trained, capable Afghan counterdrug units that became trusted partners. We concluded, however, that until there is greater security in Afghanistan, it will be nearly impossible to bring about lasting reductions in poppy cultivation and drug production. In the meantime, the United States should aim to cut off drug money going to insurgent groups, promote licit livelihood options for rural communities, and fight drug-related government corruption.
- *Divided Responsibility: Lessons from U.S. Security Sector Assistance Efforts in Afghanistan*, published in June 2019, highlighted the difficulty of coordinating security sector assistance during active combat and under the umbrella of a 39-member NATO coalition when no specific DOD organization or military service was assigned ultimate responsibility for U.S. efforts. The report explored the problems created by this balkanized command structure in the training of Afghan army and police units, strategic-level advising at the ministries of defense and interior, procuring military equipment, and running U.S.-based training programs for the Afghan military. Its findings are relevant for ongoing efforts in Afghanistan, as well as for future efforts to rebuild security forces in states emerging from protracted conflict.
- *Reintegration of Ex-Combatants: Lessons from the U.S. Experience in Afghanistan*, published in September 2019, examined the five main post-2001 efforts to reintegrate

former combatants into Afghan society, and assessed their effectiveness. We found that these efforts did not help any significant number of former fighters to reintegrate, did not weaken the insurgency, and did not reduce violence. We concluded that as long as the Taliban insurgency is ongoing, the United States should not support a program to reintegrate former fighters. However, the United States should consider supporting a reintegration effort if certain conditions are in place: (a) the Afghan government and the Taliban sign a peace agreement that provides a framework for reintegration of ex-combatants; (b) a significant reduction in overall violence occurs; and (c) a strong monitoring and evaluation system is established for reintegration efforts. If U.S. agencies support a reintegration program, policymakers and practitioners should anticipate and plan for serious challenges to implementation—including ongoing insecurity, political instability, corruption, determining who is eligible, and the difficulty of monitoring and evaluation. Broader development assistance that stimulates the private sector and creates jobs can also help ex-combatants to reintegrate into society.

Impacts of the Lessons Learned Program

To date, SIGAR's Lessons Learned Program has offered more than 120 recommendations to executive branch agencies and the Congress. To the best of our knowledge, 13 of those have been implemented, and at least 20 are in progress. In evaluating these numbers, it is important to note that some recommendations can only be implemented as part of *future* contingency operations; and some recommendations rely on outcomes that have not yet happened, such as an intra-Afghan peace deal. Going forward, SIGAR plans to work closely with agencies to get periodic updates to the status of its lessons learned recommendations.

Congress has already taken action on some of these recommendations. For example, Section 1279 of the 2018 National Defense Authorization Act calls for the Secretary of State, the Secretary of Defense, and the Administrator of the U.S. Agency for International Development to develop an anti-corruption strategy for reconstruction efforts. This amendment is in keeping with a recommendation in *Corruption in Conflict: Lessons from the U.S. Experience in Afghanistan.*

Additionally, the 2019 National Defense Authorization Act includes amendments related to two recommendations from our 2017 report entitled *Reconstructing the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces: Lessons from the U.S. Experience in Afghanistan.* Section 1201 of the Act required that during the development and planning of a program to build the capacity of the national security forces of a foreign country, the Secretary of Defense and Secretary of State jointly consider political, social, economic, diplomatic, and historical factors of the foreign country that may impact the effectiveness of the program. Section 1211 required the incorporation of lessons learned from prior security cooperation programs and activities of DOD that were carried out any time on or after September 11, 2001 into future operations.

The Lessons Learned Program has also had significant institutional impact. Staff from the *Reconstructing the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces* report participated in the Quadrennial Review of Security Sector Assistance in 2018, and the report was cited by the NATO Stability Police Center of Excellence in its Joint Analysis Report. SIGAR Lessons Learned Program staff contributed to—and were explicitly recognized as experts in—the 2018 Stabilization Assistance Review, the first interagency policy document outlining how the U.S. government will conduct stabilization missions. The acting Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for the Bureau for Conflict and Stabilization Operations later instructed his entire bureau to read the report. During Secretary of State Mike Pompeo's testimony before the United States Senate, Senator Todd Young asked him to respond in writing indicating which of the report's recommendations he would implement.

Each of our reports has led to briefings or requests for information from members of Congress. The lead analyst for the *Reconstructing the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces* report testified before the House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform in 2017. At the request of the chairman of the House Defense Appropriations Subcommittee, our analysts compiled a list of potential oversight areas relating to the train, advise, and assist mission in Afghanistan and to appropriations for the Afghan Security Forces Fund. In September 2018, after publication of the *Counternarcotics* report, the Senate Drug Caucus wrote a letter to SIGAR requesting an inquiry into the U.S. government's current counternarcotics efforts, including the extent to which a whole-of-government approach exists, the effectiveness of U.S. and Afghan law enforcement efforts, the impact of the drug lab bombing campaign, and the extent to which money laundering and corruption undermine counterdrug efforts.

Prior to the publication of *Reconstructing the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces*, SIGAR Lessons Learned Program staff participated in a multiday session convened by the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Joseph Dunford, on reconstruction-related activities in Afghanistan. They also participated in a failure analysis session led by the Secretary of Defense and run by the Joint Chiefs of Staff; this session was used to help develop the president's South Asia Strategy in 2017.

In addition, Lessons Learned Program staff have given briefings on *Reconstructing the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces* to the Commander of U.S. Central Command, the Commandant of the U.S. Marine Corps, National Security Council staff, the Deputy Supreme Allied Commander for Europe, the Acting Special Representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan, the Commander of the Combined Security Transition Command – Afghanistan, and multiple U.S. general officers in Afghanistan. Our analysts have given briefings on the *Stabilization* report to the Acting Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Stability and Humanitarian Affairs, DOD's Strategic Multi-Layer Assessment Group, the U.S. Army's 95th Civil Affairs Brigade, senior officials responsible for stabilization in Syria at the U.S. State Department's Bureau for Near Eastern Affairs, and high-ranking officials at USAID.

At the request of the State Department's Bureau for Conflict and Stabilization Operations, SIGAR analysts drafted a memo on the business case for deploying civilians alongside the U.S. military on stabilization missions. The Deputy Assistant Administrator for Democracy, Conflict, and Humanitarian Affairs at USAID said the report is already affecting stabilization efforts and planning in Syria and elsewhere. Lessons Learned Program staff who worked on the *Reintegration of Ex-Combatants* report have heard informally from contacts at USAID and State that the report has been well received and is seen as a resource for future policies or programs related to reintegration.

Our reports have also assisted NATO and other coalition partners. Following the publication of the *Divided Responsibility* report, NATO hosted an all-day event on the topic of the report at its headquarters in Brussels. The team lead from the *Reintegration of Ex-Combatants* report also briefed officials at the German Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development on the report in November 2019.

SIGAR Lessons Learned Program staff who worked on the *Private Sector Development and Economic Growth* report participated in a closed-door roundtable with Afghan President Ashraf Ghani's senior economic advisor focusing on recent reforms in Afghanistan's economic governance.

Following the publication of the *Stabilization* report, Lessons Learned Program staff briefed the senior United Nations Development Programme official responsible for stabilization efforts in Iraq, and answered requests for briefings from Germany's Foreign Office, the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development, and the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ).

Although not a complete list of our staff's activities, suffice it to say that the Lessons Learned Program has created for itself a reputation as a reliable source of expertise and analysis on our nation's longest war—the first step in the process of learning from our successes and failures.

Key Lessons from SIGAR's Ten Years of Work

Now the question becomes: after all this, what enduring lessons have we learned? Here are a few overarching conclusions from our Lessons Learned Program and SIGAR's other work:

- **Successful reconstruction is incompatible with continuing insecurity.** To have successful reconstruction in any given area, the fighting in that area must be largely contained. When that happens, U.S. agencies should be prepared to move quickly, in partnership with the host nation, to take advantage of the narrow window of opportunity before an insurgency can emerge or reconstitute itself. This holds true at both the national and local levels. In general, U.S. agencies should consider carrying out reconstruction

activities in more secure areas first, and limit reconstruction in insecure areas to carefully tailored, small-scale efforts and humanitarian relief.

- **Unchecked corruption in Afghanistan undermined U.S. strategic goals—and we helped to foster that corruption.** The U.S. government's persistent belief that throwing more money at a problem automatically leads to better results created a feedback loop in which the success of reconstruction efforts was measured by the amount of money spent—which in turn created requests for more money. The United States also inadvertently aided the Taliban's resurgence by forming alliances of convenience with warlords who had been pushed out of power by the Taliban. The coalition paid warlords to provide security and, in many cases, to run provincial and district administrations, on the assumption that the United States would eventually hold those warlords to account when they committed acts of corruption or brutality. That accounting rarely took place — and the abuses committed by coalition-aligned warlords drove many Afghans into the arms of the resurgent Taliban. The insecurity that resulted has harmed virtually every U.S. and coalition initiative in Afghanistan to this day —discouraging trade, investment, and other economic activity and making it harder to build the government institutions needed to support the private sector. In the future, we need to recognize the vital importance of addressing corruption from the outset. This means taking into account the amount of assistance a host country can absorb; being careful not to flood a small, weak economy with too much money, too fast; and ensuring that U.S. agencies can more effectively monitor assistance. It would also mean limiting U.S. alliances with malign powerbrokers, holding highly corrupt actors to account, and incorporating anticorruption objectives into security and stability goals.
- **After the Taliban's initial defeat, there was no clear reconstruction strategy and no single military service, agency, or nation in charge of reconstruction.** Between 2001 and 2006, the reconstruction effort was woefully underfunded and understaffed in Afghanistan. Then, as the Taliban became resurgent, the U.S. overcorrected and poured billions of dollars into a weak economy that was unable to absorb it. Some studies suggest that the generally accepted amount of foreign aid a country's economy can absorb at any given time is 15 to 45 percent of the country's gross domestic product, or GDP. In Afghanistan's weak economy, the percentage would be on the low end of that scale. Yet by 2004, U.S. aid to Afghanistan exceeded the 45 percent threshold. In 2007 and 2010, it totaled more than 100 percent. This massive influx of dollars distorted the Afghan economy, fueled corruption, bought a lot of real estate in Dubai and the United States, and built the many "poppy palaces" you can see today in Kabul. Another example of unintended consequences were efforts to rebuild the Afghan police—a job that neither State nor DOD was fully prepared to do. State lacked the in-house expertise and was unable to safely operate in insecure environments like Afghanistan; the U.S. military could operate in an insecure environment, but had limited expertise in training civilian police forces. Our research found instances where Blackhawk helicopter pilots were

assigned to train police, while other soldiers turned to TV shows such as "NCIS" and "COPS" as sources for police training program curricula. SIGAR believes that Congress needs to review this tangled web of conflicting priorities and authorities, with the aim of designating a single agency to be in charge of future reconstruction efforts. At the very least, there should be a comprehensive review of funding authorities and agency responsibilities for planning and conducting reconstruction activities.

- **Politically driven timelines undermine the reconstruction effort.** The U.S. military is an awesome weapon; when our soldiers are ordered to do something, they do it—whether or not they are best suited to the task. One example of this was DOD's $675 million effort to jumpstart the Afghan economy. DOD is not known for being particularly skilled at economic development. Frustrated by the belief that USAID's development efforts would not bring significant economic benefit to Afghanistan quickly enough to be helpful, in 2009 DOD expanded its Iraq Task Force for Business and Stability Operations ("TFBSO") to Afghanistan. TFBSO initiated a number of diverse and well-intentioned, but often speculative projects in areas for which it had little or no real expertise. For example, TFBSO spent millions to construct a compressed natural gas station in Sheberghan, Afghanistan, in an effort to create a compressed natural gas market in Afghanistan. It was a noble goal—but there were no other compressed natural gas stations in Afghanistan, so for obvious reasons, any cars running on that fuel could not travel more than half a tank from the only place they could refuel. In the end, the U.S. taxpayer paid to convert a number of local Afghan taxis to run on compressed natural gas in order to create a market for the station—which, to SIGAR's knowledge, remains the only one of its kind in Afghanistan. My point here is not to hold DOD up to ridicule; it was simply doing the best it could in the time it had with the orders it was given. The real problem was a timeline driven by political considerations and divorced from reality, implemented by an agency that lacked the required expertise and had little to no oversight.
- **If we cannot end the "annual lobotomy," we should at least mitigate its impact.** I assumed my current post in 2012. I'm now working with my fifth U.S. Ambassador to Afghanistan, my sixth NATO and U.S. Commanding General, and eighth head of the U.S. train, advise, and assist command. Some 80 percent of the U.S. embassy departs each summer and most of the U.S. military assigned to Afghanistan is deployed for a year or less. The lack of institutional memory caused by personnel turnover in Afghanistan is widely known. Even so, the U.S. government continues to routinely defer to the on-the-ground experience of deployed personnel to assess progress and evaluate their own work. The result is assessments that are often considerably rosier than they should be, or totally irrelevant—for example, when trainers were asked to evaluate their own training of Afghan units, they gave themselves high marks for instruction—a metric that had little to do with reflecting the units' actual battlefield readiness. The constant turnover of

personnel in Afghanistan highlights the need for more rigorous oversight and scrutiny, not less.

- **To be effective, reconstruction efforts must be based on a deep understanding of the historical, social, legal, and political traditions of the host nation.** The United States sent personnel into Afghanistan who did not know the difference between al-Qaeda and the Taliban, and who lacked any substantive knowledge of Afghan society, local dynamics, and power relationships. In the short term, SIGAR believes Congress should mandate more rigorous, in-depth pre-deployment training that exposes U.S. personnel to the history of U.S. involvement in Afghanistan, at the very least. In the long term, we need to find ways of ramping up our knowledge base in the event of future contingency operations, perhaps by identifying academic experts willing to lend their expertise on short notice as a contingency emerges. There is also a dearth of staff at U.S. agencies with the vital combination of long-term institutional memory and recent experience. In the case of Afghanistan, we should listen more to people who have developed expertise over time—most notably, Afghan officials, who have greater institutional and historical knowledge than their U.S. counterparts.

Matters for Congressional Consideration

In addition to the prior list of key lessons from SIGAR's work, at the request of committee staff, we have also compiled a list of six recommendations for immediate consideration for the Congress.

1. In light of the ongoing peace negotiations, the Congress should consider the urgent need for the Administration to plan for what happens after the United States reaches a peace deal with the Taliban. There are a number of serious threats to a sustainable peace in Afghanistan that will not miraculously disappear with signing a peace agreement. Any such agreement is likely to involve dramatic reductions of U.S. forces, and with that comes the need to plan for transferring the management of security-related assistance from DOD to State leadership. DOD manages some $4 billion per year in security sector assistance to Afghanistan, and State is wholly unprepared at this moment to take on management of that enormous budget. Any peace agreement and drawdown of U.S. forces raises a number of other issues that could put the U.S.-funded reconstruction effort at risk. As SIGAR reported last year in its High Risk List report, these include—but are not limited to—the capability of Afghan security forces to conduct counterterrorism operations; protecting the hard-won rights of Afghan women; upholding the rule of law; suppressing corruption; promoting alternative livelihoods for farmers currently engaged in growing poppy for the opium trade—and, not least, the problem of reintegrating an estimated 60,000 Taliban fighters, their families, and other illegal armed groups into civil society.

2. To ensure Congress and the taxpayers are properly apprised in a timely manner of significant events that pose a threat to the U.S. reconstruction mission in Afghanistan, Congress should consider requiring all federal agencies operating in country to provide reports to the Congress disclosing risks to major reconstruction projects and programs, and disclosing important events or developments as they occur. These reports would be analogous to the reports publically traded companies in the United States are now required to file with the Securities Exchange Commission to keep investors informed about important events.[6]

3. In light of the deteriorating security situation in Afghanistan and decreasing staffing, there will be a natural tendency for U.S. agencies to increase their use of on-budget assistance or international organizations and trust funds to accomplish reconstruction and development goals. Congress should consider conditioning such on-budget assistance on rigorous assessments of the Afghan ministries and international trust funds having strong accountability measures and internal controls in place.

4. Oversight is mission critical to any successful reconstruction and development program in Afghanistan. The Congress should consider requiring DOD, State, USAID, and other relevant executive agencies to ensure adequate oversight, monitoring and evaluation efforts continue and not be dramatically reduced as part of a right-sizing program, as witnessed recently by State's personnel reductions at the Kabul embassy. Without adequate oversight staffing levels and the ability to physically inspect, monitor and evaluate programs, Congress should consider the efficacy of continuing assistance.

5. The Congress should consider requiring U.S. government agencies supporting U.S. reconstruction missions to "rack and stack" their programs and projects by identifying their best- and worst-performing activities, so that the Congress can more quickly identify whether and how to reallocate resources to projects that are proving successful. The ambiguous responses to SIGAR's 2013 request of DOD, State, and USAID that they identify their best- and worst-performing projects and programs (see Appendix I) in Afghanistan indicate that the agencies may not routinely engage in the self-evaluation necessary to honestly evaluate what is working and what is not.

6. The Congress should request that State, DOD and USAID submit a finalized anticorruption strategy for reconstruction efforts in U.S. contingency operations. This requirement was part of the 2018 National Defense Authorization Act, which set a

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[6] Every publically traded company in the United States is required to file annual and quarterly reports with the SEC about the company's operations, including a detailed disclosure of the risks the company faces (known as "10-K" and "10-Q" reports). Public companies are also required to file more current 8-K reports disclosing "material events" as they occur, *i.e.*, major events or developments that shareholders should know about.

deadline of June 2018 for the strategy to be submitted to various congressional committees, including this one. In December 2019, State told SIGAR that the strategy "is still under development." Further, the NDAA language did not state that anticorruption is a national security priority in a contingency operation, or require annual reporting on implementation. The Congress should consider incorporating these elements into its renewed request to agencies.

Conclusion

As anybody who has served in government knows, when you undertake an effort such as our Lessons Learned Program, you will inevitably gore somebody's ox. The programs, policies, and strategies SIGAR has reviewed were all the result of decisions made by people who, for the most part, were doing the best they could. While our lessons learned reports identify failures, missed opportunities, bad judgment, and the occasional success, the response to our reports within the U.S. government has generally been positive. It is to the credit of many of the government officials we have worked with—and, in some cases, criticized—that they see the value of SIGAR's lessons learned work and are suggesting new topics for us to explore.

Our work is far from done. For all the lives and treasure the United States and its coalition partners have expended in Afghanistan, and for Afghans themselves who have suffered the most from decades of violence, the very least we can do is to learn from our successes and failures. SIGAR's Lessons Learned Program is our attempt to do that, and in my opinion, its work will be our agency's most important legacy.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. I look forward to answering your questions.

Appendix I – Correspondence Between SIGAR and U.S. Government Agencies Regarding Most and Least Successful Reconstruction Projects and Programs in Afghanistan

SIGAR | Office of the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction

March 25, 2013

The Honorable John F. Kerry
U.S. Secretary of State

Dear Secretary Kerry,

As you know, my office is charged by Congress with the responsibility for leading, coordinating, and recommending policies to promote economy, efficiency, and effectiveness of programs and operations for the reconstruction of Afghanistan. The audits, inspections, and investigations that SIGAR conducts form the basis for our execution of this responsibility.

In a recent conversation with the U.S. Ambassador to Afghanistan, I mentioned that we would be looking at the most and least successful reconstruction projects, as identified by U.S. agencies. I believe that this will be a valuable exercise. It is important to understand how U.S. agencies evaluate and perceive both their successes and failures. Such an understanding is critical for formulating lessons learned from our unprecedented reconstruction effort.

Therefore, I formally request that you provide:

- a list of the ten Afghanistan reconstruction projects/programs funded and deemed most successful by the Department of State;
- a list of the ten Afghanistan reconstruction projects/programs funded and deemed least successful by the Department of State; and
- a detailed explanation of how these projects/programs were evaluated and selected as the ten most and least successful projects, including the specific criteria used for each.

I am submitting this request pursuant to my authority under Public Law No. 110-181, as amended and the Inspector General Act of 1978, as amended. Please direct your staff to provide this information by April 25, 2013, to Monica Brym, SIGAR Director of Special Projects, at monica.j.brym.civ@mail.mil. If you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact me at (703) 545-6000 or Ms. Brym at (703) 545-6003. Thank you for your prompt attention to this matter.

Sincerely,

John F. Sopko
Special Inspector General
for Afghanistan Reconstruction

cc: The Honorable James B. Cunningham, U.S. Ambassador to Afghanistan

1550 Crystal Drive, 9th Floor
Arlington, Virginia 22202 | Mailing 2530 Crystal Drive
Arlington, Virginia 22202-3940 | Tel 703 545 6000 | www.sigar.mil

SIGAR | Office of the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction

March 25, 2013

The Honorable Rajiv Shah
Administrator
U.S. Agency for International Development

Dear Dr. Shah,

As you know, my office is charged by Congress with the responsibility for leading, coordinating, and recommending policies to promote economy, efficiency, and effectiveness of programs and operations for the reconstruction of Afghanistan. The audits, inspections, and investigations that SIGAR conducts form the basis for our execution of this responsibility.

In a recent conversation with the U.S. Ambassador to Afghanistan, I mentioned that we would be looking at the most and least successful reconstruction projects, as identified by U.S. agencies. I believe that this will be a valuable exercise. It is important to understand how U.S. agencies evaluate and perceive both their successes and failures. Such an understanding is critical for formulating lessons learned from our unprecedented reconstruction effort.

Therefore, I formally request that you provide:

- a list of the ten Afghanistan reconstruction projects/programs funded and deemed most successful by USAID;
- a list of the ten Afghanistan reconstruction projects/programs funded and deemed least successful by USAID; and
- a detailed explanation of how these projects/programs were evaluated and selected as the ten most and least successful projects, including the specific criteria used for each.

I am submitting this request pursuant to my authority under Public Law No. 110-181, as amended and the Inspector General Act of 1978, as amended. Please direct your staff to provide this information by April 25, 2013, to Monica Brym, SIGAR Director of Special Projects, at monica.j.brym.civ@mail.mil. If you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact me at (703) 545-6000 or Ms. Brym at (703) 545-6003. Thank you for your prompt attention to this matter.

Sincerely,

John F. Sopko
Special Inspector General
for Afghanistan Reconstruction

cc: Dr. S. Ken Yamashita, USAID Mission Director for Afghanistan

1550 Crystal Drive, 9th Floor
Arlington, Virginia 22202 | Mailing 2530 Crystal Drive
Arlington, Virginia 22202-3940 | Tel 703 545 6000 | www.sigar.mil

SIGAR | Office of the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction

March 25, 2013

The Honorable Chuck Hagel
Secretary of Defense

Dear Secretary Hagel,

As you know, my office is charged by Congress with the responsibility for leading, coordinating, and recommending policies to promote economy, efficiency, and effectiveness of programs and operations for the reconstruction of Afghanistan. The audits, inspections, and investigations that SIGAR conducts form the basis for our execution of this responsibility.

In a recent conversation with the U.S. Ambassador to Afghanistan, I mentioned that we would be looking at the most and least successful reconstruction projects, as identified by U.S. agencies. I believe that this will be a valuable exercise. It is important to understand how U.S. agencies evaluate and perceive both their successes and failures. Such an understanding is critical for formulating lessons learned from our unprecedented reconstruction effort.

Therefore, I formally request that you provide:

- a list of the ten Afghanistan reconstruction projects/programs funded and deemed most successful by the Department of Defense;
- a list of the ten Afghanistan reconstruction projects/programs funded and deemed least successful by the Department of Defense; and
- a detailed explanation of how these projects/programs were evaluated and selected as the ten most and least successful projects, including the specific criteria used for each.

I am submitting this request pursuant to my authority under Public Law No. 110-181, as amended and the Inspector General Act of 1978, as amended. Please direct your staff to provide this information by April 25, 2013, to Monica Brym, SIGAR Director of Special Projects, at monica.j.brym.civ@mail.mil. If you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact me at (703) 545-6000 or Ms. Brym at (703) 545-6003. Thank you for your prompt attention to this matter.

Sincerely,

John F. Sopko
Special Inspector General
for Afghanistan Reconstruction

cc:
General Joseph F. Dunford, Jr., Commander, U.S. Forces-Afghanistan, and
Commander, International Security Assistance Force
General James N. Mattis, Commander, U.S. Central Command

1550 Crystal Drive, 9th Floor
Arlington, Virginia 22202 | Mailing 2530 Crystal Drive
Arlington, Virginia 22202-3940 | Tel 703 545 6000 | www.sigar.mil

SIGAR | Office of the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction

July 5, 2013

The Honorable John F. Kerry
U.S. Secretary of State

The Honorable Chuck Hagel
U.S. Secretary of Defense

The Honorable Rajiv Shah
Administrator, U.S. Agency for International Development

Dear Secretary Kerry, Secretary Hagel, and Administrator Shah:

On March 25, 2013, I wrote to you asking that your agencies provide SIGAR with information on what each of you considers to be the 10 most successful and 10 least successful projects or programs within your agency in the U.S. effort for reconstruction of Afghanistan, supplemented with explanations of selection and evaluation criteria for your choices. A copy of that letter is attached.

Comparing outcomes is, in addition to being good practice for managers and part of the job for inspectors general, the subject of formal guidance for Executive Branch departments and agencies. In May 2012, the Office of Management and Budget issued a memorandum on "Use of Evidence and Evaluation in the 2014 Budget." That document said, in part:

> Agencies are encouraged to include measurement of costs and costs per outcome as part of the routine reporting of funded programs to allow for useful *comparison* of cost-effectiveness across programs. ... Once evidence-based programs have been identified, such a [return-on-investment] analysis can improve agency resource allocation and inform public understanding. ... OMB invites agencies to identify areas where research provides strong evidence regarding the *comparative* cost-effectiveness of agency investments.[i] [Emphasis added.]

I recognize that applying cost-effectiveness and comparative analysis to programs and projects in a contingency-operation zone like Afghanistan, where benefits may include "soft" outcomes like public opinion, and where multiple programs support similar goals, can be difficult. But the importance of the mission and the billions of dollars supporting it demand that comparisons be made as best we can. That consideration—and the well-documented flaws and disappointments in many U.S.-funded initiatives—was the motive for my March 25 letter to you.

I have the responses to that letter submitted by your designees. Mr. Daniel Feldman, Deputy Special Representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan, and Mr. J. Alexander Thier, Assistant to the Administrator for Afghanistan and Pakistan, supplied a joint State/USAID response dated May 9, 2013. Mr. Mike Dumont, Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Asian and Pacific Affairs, submitted a response dated June 18, 2013.

1550 Crystal Drive, 9th Floor
Arlington, Virginia 22202 | Mail: 2530 Crystal Drive
Arlington, Virginia 22202-3940 | Tel: 703 545 6000 | www.sigar.mil

Both response letters are thoughtful and informative, and include pertinent observations of the difficulty of executing reconstruction programs in a setting like Afghanistan, plagued as it is by violence, poverty, illiteracy, corruption, inadequate infrastructure, and other problems. In three trips to Afghanistan during my first year as Special Inspector General, I have seen and heard much evidence of the difficulties facing program and project planners, managers, and oversight officials, both civilian and military. I have special respect for the dedication and bravery of your staff working in that dangerous part of the world, and agree that they have contributed significantly to producing some indicators of genuine progress in security, governance, development, rule of law, human rights, and other areas that will benefit the people of Afghanistan and America's policy interests.

Nonetheless, I have some difficulties with the responsiveness of your agencies' letters.

First, State and USAID made a *joint* response, despite separate requests having been made to them. I understand—and am delighted as a citizen and taxpayer—that the agencies are in "close cooperation" on matters affecting Afghan reconstruction. However, each agency has its own internal organization and practices, its own in-house Inspector General evaluating that agency's projects and programs, and its own list of programs on its own website. Because State and USAID are legally distinct entities, and because they have operational autonomy within the ambit of their missions (however closely they cooperate), I ask that the two agencies provide separate responses to this letter. I speculate that State pursued the path of a joint response because of the limited number of its programs in Afghanistan; that point will be addressed later in this letter via slightly modified request language.

Second, neither response letter complied with my request for a listing and discussion of each agency's 10 most and 10 least successful projects or programs. The State/USAID response explicitly said, "we do not compare individual projects against others." Yet the same letter later notes that "not every program has succeeded as originally intended," which I read as evidence that someone has examined the results of individual programs and observed that some succeeded and others did not. Defense stated that many reconstruction programs are conducted in cooperation with partners and are "evaluated on a project-specific basis" rather than compared. That may well be, but I note that my March 25 letter asked about "projects/programs," not exclusively one or the other.

Program evaluation inevitably entails or at least facilitates comparisons of projects. If not, what basis would agency managers have for deciding—say, in the face of budget cuts, sequestrations, or new mission directives—which projects to prioritize, expand, contract, terminate, transfer, or redesign? How do they decide which project managers deserve greater responsibility or career advancement, or the obverse, without comparing outcomes? How do they capture lessons learned to improve agency performance without making comparisons? Nonetheless, even if a formal process of comparing program or project outcomes does not exist within your agencies, I hope it will not seem unreasonable if I ask you to make at minimum a limited, judgmental comparison to help SIGAR with its official duties.

My third concern with the agency response letters involves the concept of indicators. The letters contain many interesting and encouraging data points illustrating or suggesting overall progress in Afghanistan reconstruction. Unfortunately, many of them show no obvious causal nexus with a particular U.S. program or project, or present an output as a prima facie indicator of success. USAID projects and programs are assigned performance indicators that are the basis for

observing progress and measuring actual results compared to expected results of the program.[ii] Yet the joint State/USAID letter does not identify discrete, program-specific indicators necessary to identify characteristics and outcomes, or to inform decisions about current and future programming. Similarly, the Department of Defense mandated that projects executed through the Commander's Emergency Response Program (CERP) have performance metrics for all projects over $50,000 to be tracked up to 365 days after a project has been completed.[iii] CERP performance metrics include the issue of sustainability.[iv] These are worthy requirements, but not all metrics are equally salient or useful.

For an example of a possibly ambiguous indicator, the State/USAID letter notes that the proportion of the Afghan population within an hour's walk of a health-care facility has risen from 9 percent in 2001 to more than 60 percent today. However, Afghanistan has been slowly urbanizing for decades, with estimates of 4.7 percent annual growth in urban populations in the 2010–2015 period.[v] So some part of the observed increase in the one-hour's-walk parameter simply reflects a demographic trend. As urbanization continues, the indicator would improve even if health-facility construction stopped completely. For that matter, the indicator could also improve if more direct or better-surfaced roads and paths were built. Identifying reasonable and measurable indicators for specific efforts is admittedly not an exact science, but the causal haziness around the edges of this indicator suggests that careful attention to selection, logic, and measurement protocol is warranted.

In addition, the health indicators cited in the letter are for the country as a whole and are not specific to the 13 of 34 provinces supported by USAID. The USAID Inspector General found in one 2011 audit that

> measurement of the magnitude of USAID's contribution to the national objectives could be made only indirectly using proxy indicators because no current demographic information or health statistics were available to measure health outcomes directly.[vi]

The Afghanistan Mortality Survey of 2010 cited in the joint State/USAID letter does not address this issue as there is still no clear connection between United States government efforts and overall health improvements that have undoubtedly occurred since 2001. For example, the survey reports that the sample design had disproportionate exclusion, particularly of rural areas, in the southern region that would affect five of the thirteen provinces specifically supported by USAID.[vii] Some of these data points also appear to have been selectively chosen in order to emphasize progress, as with the life-expectancy improvement cited in the State/USAID letter, with a reported increase from 44 years to more than 60 years in the past decade. The World Bank, however, purposely did not include the Mortality Survey results in a recent report because the survey does not have time-series data for the last 10 years. For comparative analysis, they argue, it is essential to use statistics from a single international database.[viii] According to the World Bank figure, Afghan life expectancy is 48 years.

The indicators for education similarly appear to take credit for progress across the country as a whole without clear attribution to specific United States government efforts. The number of students enrolled is presented as the national total, but it is not clear what if any connection there is with the schools built and teachers trained through USAID efforts. I would have expected information such as the utilization rates of USAID-supported schools, as this would more clearly connect the United States government effort to the reported student numbers and additionally

would provide evidence of Afghan government capacity to make use of assets transferred to them.

The Department of Defense response offers some information with regard to Afghan government sustainment, but the examples are restricted to one province and cover only *three* of 4,000 education projects totaling $230 million obligated. The World Bank has raised the issue of sustainment, noting that school construction, the same indicator touted in both letters, has crowded out operations and maintenance, with allocations falling far below requirements and rarely reaching schools.[x] The joint State/USAID and Department of Defense responses to education highlight my issue with the indicators presented, with the State/USAID response disconnected from USAID efforts and the Department of Defense relying on anecdotal evidence.[x]

For another example, the Defense letter notes that more than 194,000 Afghan National Security Force personnel had "some level" of literacy and numeracy training. That is encouraging, but given that the 2009 rate of ANSF illiteracy was 86 percent[xi] and that the ANSF has fairly high turnover, it does not tell us whether the effort has materially improved the overall ANSF literacy rate and, more importantly, improved it to the extent of bolstering administrative and operational success. In addition, the datum does not tell us whether the literacy program itself is efficiently conducted and monitored.

Finally, on the rule of law, I was disappointed to note that the indicators offered in the joint State/USAID response did not address two major areas of concern: high-level corruption and opium production. The letter notes that State and USAID have provided training and support to Afghan anti-corruption bodies, but unlike the prison statistics, does not give any indication of the effect, such as types and numbers of successful prosecutions. Sending 13 judges on an educational trip and putting court personnel through training courses are presumably useful activities, but such outputs need credible linkages to outcomes. Similarly, the indicators provided in reference to the drug trade note the scale of the problem, with Afghanistan accounting for roughly 90 percent of heroin worldwide, but does not connect improvements in the licit economy with decreases in the illicit economy. In 2012, the USAID Inspector General found that a key USAID alternative-development program was directed by USAID to focus only on expanding the licit economy in order to support indicators for the agriculture sector, such as those touted in the letter, and to ignore goals that dealt with assistance to voluntary poppy eradication and to farms in the aftermath of opium poppy eradication/destruction programs.[xii] The report further states that there was increased poppy growth in the provinces covered by the program, with two of the covered provinces losing their poppy-free status and five provinces increasing opium cultivation. The impact of USAID's agricultural programs on the licit economy are certainly laudable, but if they do not result in decreased opium cultivation then positive impacts are eroded.

National-level indicators *may* suggest a positive aggregate impact for U.S. programs, but individual results certainly vary within program portfolios of project, and positive aggregate outcomes may mask individual failures or sub-par performance. At times, it is even difficult to *identify* an individual result. Unfortunately the letters did not identify specific programs or the indicators and targets for those specific programs.

Just last month, the State Department's Office of Inspector General published an audit of the Bureau of Administration (A Bureau), Office of Logistics Management, Office of Acquisitions Management (A/LM/AQM), which directs Department acquisition programs and manages a 1 percent fee for its services. Those services include operations, missions, and programs of the

Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs, the Bureau of Overseas Buildings Operations, the Bureau of Diplomatic Security, as well as grants, contracts, and agreements with other nations, non-governmental organizations, and commercial entities. A portion of that State OIG audit mirrors my concerns and is worth noting here:

> A/LM/AQM was tracking some metrics to assess program performance. However, these performance metrics also generally did not tie to the goals in the Business Plan. Without measuring its performance, A/LM/AQM cannot ensure it is making progress on its overall objective of providing consistent and improved procurement services to the Department.
>
> Performance management is a systematic process of monitoring the achievements of program activities, which includes collecting and analyzing performance data in order to track progress toward a defined goal and then using the analyzed data to make informed decisions, including allocating resources, for the program. Measuring performance against program goals is an essential part of performance management.[xiii]

As for Defense, GAO has been carrying DOD contract management on its High-Risk List since 1992. In an audit of a military construction that created life-and-safety electrical and fire hazards for U.S. and other coalition personnel, the DOD IG found the responsible Air Force construction-management officials "did not develop a formal process to monitor, assess, and document the quality of work performed by contractor personnel for four projects valued at $36.9 million."[xiv] Such voids in basic data make project comparisons even more difficult.

As you know, SIGAR's own audits, investigations, and special projects have also addressed aspects of reconstruction program or project success and failure. But as the preceding citations to other IGs' work illustrate, we are not alone in spotting issues. The large body of work by SIGAR, GAO, and your agency Inspectors General—not to mention numerous agency concurrences in the findings and recommendations in that work—amply documents that many programs and projects have systematic weaknesses in framing, planning, execution, and oversight that call out for improvement. Pursuant to our statutory mandate and as part of our participation in the Joint Strategic Oversight Plan for Afghanistan Reconstruction, we are preparing additional products for release and will be launching new initiatives touching on these concerns as the reconstruction effort proceeds.

As I explained in my March 25, 2013, letter, an important part of our work is understanding how U.S. agencies evaluate and perceive both their successes and failures. That understanding is critical for formulating lessons learned from our unprecedented reconstruction effort in Afghanistan–an effort already accounting for nearly $89 billion in appropriations. U.S. government agencies need to identify and act on lessons learned from past reconstruction projects and programs. Timely action can help implementing agencies and Congress adjust reconstruction programs to protect taxpayer funds and improve outcomes before it is too late.

My letter of March 25 therefore formally requested that you provide:

- a list of the 10 Afghanistan reconstruction projects/programs funded and deemed most successful by the [agency]
- a list of the 10 Afghanistan reconstruction projects/programs funded and deemed least successful by the [agency]
- a detailed explanation of how these projects/programs were evaluated and selected as the 10 most and least successful projects, including the specific criteria used for each

Upon considering your responses to that request, I appreciate that identifying the 10 *most*- and 10 *least*-successful programs or projects in Afghanistan may entail an unreasonable benefit/cost burden of research and analytical rigor in comparisons across many initiatives. We have no wish to impose unproductive burdens upon your staff, especially when many may be inconvenienced by the impingement of sequestration-furloughs on their work hours. Therefore I will *modify* my request and now ask you to provide the following:

- a list of 10 of the *more* successful Afghanistan reconstruction projects/programs funded by your agency
- a list of 10 of the *less* successful Afghanistan reconstruction projects/programs funded by your agency
- an explanation of how you selected the projects in each list and your view of what made them more or less successful (e.g., goal framing, requirements identification, acquiring activity, agent performance, management, oversight and technical assessment, coordination) than intended

Note: In view of State's more limited program activity in Afghanistan, a reasonable response of fewer than 10 items in each category will be satisfactory.

Based on your responses, we will identify individual programs and projects for possible further examination through reviews or audits. This could lead us to look at programs or projects deemed to have achieved their objectives, as well as less successful undertakings. In addition to noting the criteria your agency used to evaluate the projects, the results of those evaluations, and any documented lessons learned, we could assess how well the projects achieved their stated objectives and whether they contributed to the larger strategic goals underlying the U.S. government's Afghan reconstruction efforts.

In addition, for each program examined, we will seek to answer the seven questions laid out in SIGAR's January 2013 Quarterly Report to Congress. These are seven questions that decision makers, including Congress, should ask as they consider whether and how best to use remaining reconstruction funds. The questions are:

1. Does the project or program make a clear and identifiable contribution to our national interests or strategic objectives?
2. Do the Afghans want it or need it?
3. Has it been coordinated with other U.S. implementing agencies, with the Afghan government, and with other international donors?
4. Do security conditions permit effective implementation and oversight?
5. Does it have adequate safeguards to detect, deter, and mitigate corruption?
6. Do the Afghans have the financial resources, technical capacity, and political will to sustain it?
7. Have implementing partners established meaningful, measurable metrics for determining successful project outcomes?

We believe our reviews and audits, by helping to understand and document how agencies are planning strategically for reconstruction spending, establishing program objectives, evaluating programs, and identifying lessons learned, will contribute to improving the efficiency and

effectiveness of critical reconstruction programs and mitigate fraud, waste, and abuse. SIGAR will continue to make every effort to see that Congress and the implementing agencies are fully informed about the progress of the reconstruction effort—including discussions of agency policy and practice that have led to *good* outcomes—and have the information they need to safeguard U.S. funds and ensure that taxpayer dollars are spent wisely.

I trust this letter clarifies the reasons for my March 25 request, and that my modification of terms fairly and reasonably addresses the concerns voiced in your previous responses. I look forward to your response and our continued cooperation in support of the national mission in Afghanistan.

Sincerely,

John F. Sopko
Special Inspector General
for Afghanistan Reconstruction

Enclosures

cc: The Honorable James B. Cunningham, U.S. Ambassador to Afghanistan

Notes

[i] Office of Management and Budget, Memorandum to the Heads of Executive Departments and Agencies, "Use of Evidence and Evaluation in the 2014 Budget," May 18, 2012, p. 2.

[ii] United States Agency for International Development, *ADS Chapter 203 – Assessing and Learning*, November 2012, p. 18.

[iii] USFOR-A, *Money as a Weapon System–Commander's Emergency Response Program SOP*, March 2012, pp. 177-178

[iv] Ibid, p. 40.

[v] CIA, "World Fact Book," online, accessed June 19, 2013.

[vi] USAID OIG, *Audit Of USAID/Afghanistan's On-Budget Funding Assistance to the Ministry of Public Health in Support of the Partnership Contracts for Health Services Program*, Audit Report F-306-11-004-P, September 29, 2011, p. 3.

[vii] Afghan Public Health Institute, *Afghanistan Mortality Survey 2010*, p 10.

[viii] World Bank, *Afghanistan in Transition: Looking Beyond 2014 Volume 2*, May 2012, p. 12.

[ix] World Bank, *Afghanistan in Transition: Looking Beyond 2014 Volume 2*, May 2012, pp. 88-89.

[x] The World Bank report further notes that the lack of operations and maintenance funds has caused education infrastructure to deteriorate, and that the current school population is also heavily concentrated in grades 1–4, with high dropout rates in higher grades. The World Bank states that widespread concerns exist over education quality, owing to the poor qualifications of some teachers, lack of a standardized

United States Department of State

Washington, D.C. 20520

August 5, 2013

John F. Sopko
Special Inspector General for
Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR)

Dear Mr. Sopko,

Thank you for your feedback on our March 25 response to your query regarding our top 10 most and least successful projects and programs in Afghanistan. We found this to be a useful exercise that sparked productive conversations and enhanced coordination both within the Department of State and with the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), with whom we answered jointly.

Our agencies chose to respond jointly to highlight our close interagency cooperation in achieving measurable results from our assistance efforts in Afghanistan in support of our national security goal of ensuring Afghanistan can no longer be a safe haven for terrorists that threaten U.S. interests. We were pleased to report on some of the accomplishments of the Department of State and USAID in Afghanistan in recent years, as well as on some of the problems that we have faced in implementing foreign assistance.

We highlighted assistance programs in the education sector, in the field of public health, in public financial management, and with respect to promoting the empowered role of women, access to electricity and good governance and the rule of law. These programs have contributed to measurable positive impacts on Afghanistan's development and stability, with achievements- based objective indicators of progress including improvement on international indices for human, economic, and democratic development. We also acknowledged that operating in a war-time environment means it is inevitable that not every program has succeeded as originally intended. Delays, fraud, poor performance, security challenges, and contractor overcharges have been an unfortunate feature of trying to achieve our national priorities in Afghanistan that we have constantly battled against. Many of the obstacles we have encountered have been well documented and have benefited from SIGAR's oversight.

In noting in the March response those areas where continuing attention is warranted given the challenges of operating in Afghanistan, we emphasized that we share SIGAR's goal of safeguarding U.S. taxpayer resources from fraud, waste, and abuse, while seeking the most effective uses of those resources in advancing our national security through assistance programs in Afghanistan. We look forward to working together to find ways to improve our oversight mechanisms.

As we explained in our March letter, however, we monitor and evaluate individual projects against the detailed standards and outcomes established in the initial performance documents. Given the wide range of assistance projects and programs our agencies have carried out, we do not compare individual projects against others, particularly over a decade of intensive rebuilding efforts, which result in constantly changing conditions for each project. We also recognize that achieving our strategic goals in any particular sector in Afghanistan requires a number of projects working together in time or over time -- including those using other donors' funds.

While we recognize the value of many of the points emphasized in your follow up letter, upon reviewing the modified request we believe we have no additional information to supplement our response to your original request. We welcome further discussion and oversight of any of our existing or past reconstruction projects and programs in Afghanistan.

Sincerely,

Jarrett Blanc
Deputy Special Representative for
Afghanistan and Pakistan

curriculum, lack of evaluation standards, and insufficiency of basic school supplies. Statistics collected in 2009–10 by a national teacher-registration system indicate that only 27 percent of the 162,000 registered general-education teachers are educated at a grade 14 level, the official minimum requirement for teaching, or higher.

[xi] Statement of Lt. Gen. William B. Caldwell IV, Commander, United States Army North, Fifth Army, before the U.S. House Subcommittee on National Security, Homeland Defense and Foreign Operations, hearing, Sept. 12, 2012.

[xii] USAID OIG *Audit Of USAID/Afghanistan's Incentives Driving Economic Alternatives for the North, East, and West Program*, Audit Report F-306-12-004-P, June 29, 2012, p. 5.

[xiii] State OIG, AUD-FM-13-29, *Audit of Department of State Application of the Procurement Fee to Accomplish Key Goals of Procurement Services*, May 2013, p. 50.

[xiv] DOD IG, Report No. DODIG-2013-052, *Inadequate Contract Oversight of Military Construction Projects in Afghanistan Resulted in Increased Hazards to Life and Limb of Coalition Forces*, March 8, 2013, i.

May 9, 2013

John F. Sopko
Special Inspector General for
Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR)

SUBJECT: SIGAR Letter to the Department of State, USAID and Department of Defense Requesting Top Most Successful and Least Successful Projects

In response to your letter of March 25, we are pleased to report on some of the accomplishments of the Department of State and the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) in Afghanistan in recent years, as well as on some of the problems that we have faced in implementing foreign assistance.

Our agencies have chosen to respond jointly to highlight our close cooperation in achieving measurable results from our assistance efforts in Afghanistan in support of our national security goal of ensuring Afghanistan can no longer be a safe haven for terrorists that threaten U.S. interests. From a society shattered by more than three decades of war, and after more than a decade of rebuilding, there is now significant statistical data outlining Afghanistan's steady progress, despite the political, economic, and security challenges presented by that turbulent past.

We monitor and evaluate individual projects against the detailed standards and outcomes established in the initial performance documents. Given the wide range of assistance projects and programs our agencies have carried out, we do not compare individual projects against others, particularly over a decade of intensive rebuilding efforts, which result in constantly changing conditions for each project. We also recognize that achieving our strategic goals in any particular sector in Afghanistan requires a number of projects working together over time -- including those using other donors' funds.

In Part I below, we highlight assistance programs that have contributed to measurable positive impacts on Afghanistan's development and stability. The achievements are based on objective indicators of progress including improvement on international indices for human, economic, and democratic development. In Part II, we highlight the problems we have encountered in ensuring the most cost-effective use of taxpayer dollars in achieving these gains and the methods we use to overcome them.

Part I: Measurable Results

In the education sector, there are clear indicators of progress. In 2002, only an estimated 900,000 boys, and virtually no girls, were in school. Now, there are 8 million students enrolled in school, more than a third of whom are girls. University enrollment has increased from 8,000 in 2001 to 77,000 in 2011. USAID has supported these gains by building 605 schools, training

teachers, and developing university teaching degree programs. Multiple implementers, donors and coordinated projects are responsible for these achievements. Additionally, the Embassy's Public Affairs Section funded the Bagch-i-simsim (Sesame Street) radio project. This project builds upon the success of the television project with the same name and targets millions of young rural Afghan children who do not have access to a television. The program's themes spread the values of tolerance, fairness, and peaceful resolution of conflict. Twenty-six different episodes of 30 minutes each in Dari and Pashto are broadcast on multiple radio stations throughout the country. Each show includes original content that is aligned with the Ministry of Education's early childhood educational framework.

Other U.S. Government-sponsored education programs target other equally important audiences and are designed to build capacity in critical government sectors and achieve foreign policy goals. In November 2012, the State Department hosted a two-week training program in Washington for 13 Afghan diplomats in partnership with the Public Diplomacy Council and the University of Maryland. Through formal training sessions, lectures, interactive simulations, and site visits, the Afghan visitors developed their practical skills as diplomats and gained better understanding of United States culture and policy, particularly the importance of women's rights and human rights. The importance of regular interaction with a free and independent media in a democracy was also highlighted.

The program was the second phase of a joint training program for Afghan diplomats; the first phase was sponsored by the Government of China and took place in Beijing in May. By building the capacity of the staff of the Afghan Ministry of Foreign Affairs, we enhanced its professionalism and its ability to work cooperatively and effectively with the U.S. government and other countries, as well as NGOs, media outlets, universities, businesses, and religious institutions.

In the field of public health, since the displacement of the Taliban, the Afghan Ministry of Public Health has been successful in rebuilding the healthcare system with low cost, high impact interventions, to improve the health of Afghans, primarily women and children. With substantial support from the United States and other donors, access to basic health services (defined as a person's ability to reach a facility within one hour by foot) has risen from 9 percent in 2001 to more than 60 percent today, and more than 22,000 health workers have been trained *through multiple projects*.

According to the Afghanistan Mortality Survey 2010, Afghanistan has seen a rise in life expectancy from 44 years to more than 60, or an increase of 15-20 years, in the last decade. The under-five mortality rate has been reduced from 172 to 97 deaths per 1,000 live births. The estimated maternal mortality ratio declined significantly from 1,600 per 100,000 births to 327 per 100,000 births. The number of functioning primary health care facilities increased from 498 in 2002 to over 1,970 in 2010.

The gains made in the health sector are due to a coordinated effort by the donor community in the early stages of the rebuilding efforts, a focus on providing low-cost basic health services, and a determination by the Afghans to strengthen the Ministry of Public Health. These are long-term

programs that span multiple donors, and various contractors and grantees over a decade of determined focus by the health teams at USAID and the international community in concert with the Afghan Government.

In public financial management, USAID's support has helped the Afghan government grow its internal revenue collection by almost 20 percent per year since 2002. Domestic revenue is critical to reduce the Afghan government's reliance on foreign assistance and to promote long-term sustainable growth through investment in infrastructure and services. In 2010/11, domestic revenue reached $1.7 billion or 11 percent of GDP, exceeding the IMF target of 9.2 percent per year. Revenue from Customs is the fastest-growing segment, increasing more than 400 percent since 2006. USAID's programs have assisted the Afghan government to develop a centralized Customs collection system, contributing to the sharp increases in annual Customs revenues. Afghan domestic revenue collection has underperformed in 2012, and USAID is working with the Ministry of Finance to identify potential reasons and remedial actions to address the shortfall.

To promote the role of women in Afghan politics, culture, and business, our work has helped Afghan women take on larger roles in society. Today, almost 20 percent of Afghans enrolled in higher education are women. Twenty seven percent of seats in the Parliament, one governor, three cabinet, and 120 judicial positions are now held by women. Hundreds of women's organizations are working to end violence and discrimination against women, and the Afghan Government has committed to ensuring that by 2013 at least 30 percent of government employees are women.

The Department of State's Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement (INL) funds Women for Afghan Women to operate Children's Support Centers (CSCs) in Kabul, Mazar-e Sharif, and Kunduz. The CSCs provide housing and educational services for children who would otherwise be in prison with their incarcerated mothers. The majority of these children have had little to no formal education prior to arriving. CSC-educated children are at the top of their classes and some have been placed in advanced study programs abroad. Children are allowed to stay at the CSC until they turn 18 years of age (even after their mothers are released), allowing their mothers to have the time needed to construct a stable home environment. INL's commitment to helping these children improve their lives has been key to the overall success of this program.

INL also supports the operations of nine women's shelters across Afghanistan and the Afghan Women's Shelter Network, which brings together Afghan shelter providers to discuss best practices and advocate for victims. INL's support has expanded the number of provinces where services are available to victims of gender-based violence and discrimination and facilitated an Afghan-led campaign to increase public acceptance of women's shelters. We have seen an increase in government referrals to and political support for the shelters, indicating that the Afghan government is starting to accept shelters as legitimate resources for women seeking legal and protective services. Shelters have been provided multi-year funding that extends into 2015. In 2012, INL-funded shelters benefited approximately 2,000 women and children in 30 of Afghanistan's 34 provinces.

To promote access to reliable electricity, USAID assistance has included hydro-electric and solar facilities, and has focused on making the Afghan national power company (DABS) self-sustaining through increased revenue collection and increased efficiency. In 2002, only 6 percent of Afghans had access to reliable electricity. Today nearly 30 percent do, including more than 2 million people in Kabul who now benefit from electric power 24 hours a day. DABS has increased revenues country-wide by roughly 50 percent from 2010 to 2012. This represents hundreds of millions of dollars saved in subsidies from U.S. taxpayers and other donors. The success of DABS over such a short period of time, four years, is a remarkable achievement.

To promote good governance and the rule of law in Afghanistan, INL has, through its implementing partner, assisted the General Directorate of Prisons and Detention Centers (GDPDC) in improving its capability to operate safe, secure, and humane Afghan correctional facilities. This is particularly important, given the sharp increases in arrests and prosecutions, which caused the prison population to grow dramatically from 600 prisoners in 2001 to more than 27,000 in 2013. Despite poor infrastructure, comparatively low staff salaries, and a 17 percent annual inmate growth rate, the GDPDC has built and maintained humane facilities, worked to separate National Security Threat (NST) inmates from common criminals, and implemented standard operating procedures in line with international standards in an expanding number of prisons and detention centers. These improvements can be attributed in part to comprehensive hands-on mentoring and training by INL's Corrections System Support Program (CSSP). CSSP advisors have trained 8,000 corrections officers since 2006, under rigorous oversight from INL's program managers and contracting personnel. INL's focus on training Afghan Government trainers not only created sustainable training capacity, but has resulted in the successful transfer of 90 percent of all corrections training activities to the Afghan government, an important milestone in the development of GDPDC's capabilities.

The State Department and USAID also provide training to the judicial sector and other elements of Afghan criminal justice institutions, for example, through the State Department's work with the Justice Center in Parwan (JCIP). The JCIP is a special Afghan court for the adjudication – under Afghan law, and by Afghan judges, prosecutors and defense counsel – of criminal charges filed by Afghan authorities against former U.S. Law of Armed Conflict (LOAC) detainees. The JCIP is a partnership of the Afghan Supreme Court, Attorney General's Office, Ministry of Justice, Ministry of the Interior, National Directorate of Security and Ministry of Defense, with support from Combined Joint Interagency Task Force 435, the Australian Agency for International Development, and INL.

Coordinated U.S. Government support enables the JCIP to hear thousands of cases and builds both the adjudicative capacity of the court and its personnel. The JCIP did not exist three years ago: it heard its first case in June 2010. The JCIP tried 31 primary court cases in 2010; 288 in 2011; 974 in 2012; and 780 in just the first four months of 2013. Even with its growing caseload, Afghan defense attorneys who have worked at the JCIP consistently describe the court as providing among the fairest trials in Afghanistan. INL provides formal training, daily mentoring, and operational support to nearly 100 Afghan judges, prosecutors, defense counsel, and investigators in evidence-based criminal investigations and prosecutions. In addition to

strengthening the Afghans' ability to try the important national security cases at the JCIP, INL's capacity-building support allows these legal professionals to take the skills, experiences, and lessons learned from the JCIP to their next assignments, expanding the impact of INL's support across the Afghan justice system.

The Department of State's Anti-Terrorism Assistance (ATA) program has built and developed the Presidential Protective Service (PPS) into an effective dignitary protection unit. Beginning with the inception of the unit a year after 9/11, the ATA program has provided training, equipment and mentorship to several hundred PPS officers at the unit's camp facility. Not only has PPS received extensive training in tactical skills such as protection of national leadership, counter-assault, and defensive marksmanship, it has also institutionalized the wealth of information in those courses into its own training structure. Through participation in instructor development courses and ongoing work with ATA advisors, PPS has developed the ability to train its own officers in these specialized protective skills. In addition, Department of State-funded implementing partners have cleared more than 343,414,869 square meters of land and removed or destroyed approximately 8,049,260 landmines and other explosive remnants of war such as unexploded ordnance, abandoned ordnance, stockpiled munitions, and home-made explosives.

Part II: Problems and Solutions

The programmatic achievements noted above represent just part of the progress achieved by Afghanistan with the support and sacrifice of the United States and other donors over the past decade. Operating in a war-time environment means it is inevitable that not every program has succeeded as originally intended. Delays, fraud, poor performance, security challenges, contractor overcharges have been a too-constant feature of doing business in Afghanistan—and many of the obstacles we have encountered have been well documented and have benefited from SIGAR's oversight.

To fight corruption, we have worked aggressively to provide training and pressed the Afghan government to address corruption on a systematic basis. USAID is supporting the fight against corruption both in the way we do business, such as encouraging the use of mobile money to ensure wages are paid directly into personal accounts, and through projects like the Assistance for Afghanistan's Anticorruption Authority (4A), which supports the High Office of Oversight in the Afghan government to combat corruption.

To improve the rule of law and fight criminal activities, USAID and the Department of State work together in several areas. Afghanistan's role in the international drug trade – accounting for roughly 90 percent of heroin worldwide – contributes to increased crime, degrades the establishment of governance and the rule of law,, undercuts the licit economy, and undermines public health. USAID and Department of State are working to reduce poppy cultivation by strengthening the Afghan Government's capacity to combat the drug trade and countering the link between narcotics and the insurgency. USAID's agricultural programs have helped establish 314,268 hectares with alternative crops, increased sales of licit farm and non-farm

products by $273,333,642, benefited 2,519,420 families, and created 192,686 full-time equivalent jobs between FY 2008 - 2012.

Growth of the nation's licit economy is impeded by a largely illiterate workforce that lacks vital technical skills, as well as credit and banking systems that are underdeveloped and fragile. Meanwhile, porous borders encourage unlawful trade. These challenges, plus corruption and security concerns, continue to hinder physical and capital investment, especially by the private sector.

Inadequate security and a shortage of skilled technicians, engineers and construction workers hinder the construction and maintenance of critical infrastructure. Construction supplies often have to be imported, significantly increasing project costs.

Across sectors, a persistent insurgency and difficult security environment have made the mission much harder, despite the strong presence of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF). As an example, on one USAID road project, 19 people were killed while working on construction, and 364 security incidents were reported. Security dangers often slow progress, and daily activities are made more complicated by an atmosphere of opportunism, corruption and lawlessness.

To effectively monitor the use of taxpayers' funds where there is a lack of capacity, USAID and State employ numerous oversight mechanisms at every project phase —from awarding the contract to reviewing payment claims, to overseeing the performance of our implementing partners. The Afghanistan mission uses these and more. In remote, insecure areas, USAID's monitoring and evaluation efforts are supplemented by third-party evaluators. As you are aware, in addition to our work with your office, we also work with a variety of independent oversight entities, including the State and USAID Offices of the Inspectors General and the U.S. Government Accountability Office and share the goal of ensuring U.S. funding is not wasted or abused.

In addition, by monitoring and evaluating outcomes, we are constantly seeking new ways to ensure taxpayer dollars are being used most effectively, focusing on the return on our project investment. Administrator Shah issued Sustainability Guidance to ensure that every USAID program supports increased Afghan ownership, contributes to stability, and makes the most of limited funds. Department of State programs conduct similar analyses in developing projects.

In Afghanistan, USAID is strengthening award mechanisms, vetting, financial controls and project oversight, working closely with our Afghan and ISAF counterparts. On an interagency level, databases such as FACTS Info and Afghan Info allow USAID and the Department of State to share project information, metrics, best practices and more. With Afghans, we have also launched the Assistance for Afghanistan's Anti-Corruption Authority series of initiatives to encourage transparency and accountability. This includes helping the Afghan government develop a strong anti-corruption policy and establishing a joint committee with U.S. Forces-Afghanistan and ISAF on contractor vetting and corruption.

To ensure accountability, some projects are drastically altered or funding stopped. USAID's rigorous emphasis on evaluation led us to take a hard look at the Strategic Provincial Roads project in eastern and southern Afghanistan. After three years, project outcomes were falling far short of project objectives. To avoid continued investment of taxpayer funds into an under-performing program, USAID ended the project in fall 2011.

In other cases, program benefits merited continued investment-with strategic recommendations for improvements. The National Solidarity Programme in Afghanistan had reached thousands of communities, but payment delays and operating risks in insecure areas threatened to limit future outreach. Today, the program tracks indicators of good governance, such as transparency and accountability, and an inter-ministerial committee is exploring the role existing community development councils can play for expansion into insecure areas.

In June 2009, after the Afghan Government took back control of its central prison from insurgent inmates, INL began a comprehensive renovation. Poor contractor performance and corruption led the Department to halt renovations and terminate the contract.. The problems with this project highlighted the need to have an adequate number of Contracting Officer Representatives (CORs), Governmental Technical Monitors (GTMs), engineers, and program officers on the ground to provide oversight. Recognizing the need to improve oversight of construction projects, INL has significantly increased the number of U.S. and locally engaged (LE) engineers in Afghanistan and has strengthened its review and management policies.

To promote dialogue among tribal elders and the Ministry of Border and Tribal Affairs, a State public diplomacy project planned to conduct jirgas and shuras with government and local leaders. However, the implementing partner, Afghan Community Consulting, was unable to obtain adequate cooperation from the Ministry of Border and Tribal Affairs, particularly with regard to oversight of funds, or evidence of the number of participants and outcomes. When it was determined that adequate oversight could not be achieved on spending or outcomes, PAS Kabul terminated the grant, suspended future jirgas, and determined the amount of funds owed to the embassy for incomplete work, which were all returned.

We appreciate this opportunity to highlight a number of our programmatic achievements with the Afghan government and people over the past decade, as well as to note those areas where continuing attention is warranted given the challenges of operating in Afghanistan. We share SIGAR's goal of safeguarding U.S. taxpayer resources from fraud, waste, and abuse, and advance while seeking the most effective uses of those resources in advancing our nation's national security through assistance programs in Afghanistan. We look forward to working together to find ways to improve our oversight mechanisms.

Sincerely,

Daniel Feldman
Deputy Special Representative
for Afghanistan and Pakistan

J Alexander Thier
Assistant to the Administrator
for Afghanistan and Pakistan

OFFICE OF THE ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF DEFENSE
2700 DEFENSE PENTAGON
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20301-2700

ASIAN AND PACIFIC
SECURITY AFFAIRS

June 18, 2013

Mr. John Sopko
Special Inspector General for
Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR)
1550 Crystal Drive
Arlington, VA 22202

Dear Mr. Sopko,

In response to your letter of March 25, 2013, the Department of Defense (DoD) reviewed reconstruction activities in Afghanistan and prepared the enclosed overview of successes and challenges. The U.S., Coalition, and Afghan partners have reached a decisive milestone in the campaign. Later this month, the Afghan government and the ANSF will formally assume lead security responsibility across all of Afghanistan. This is the Afghans' greatest demonstration to date of real progress towards stability and sovereignty. The enclosed response provides an overview of what we have done to get to this point and some of the things we are focused on to sustain these gains.

The DoD reconstruction efforts in Afghanistan aim to expand security and stability in order to achieve our core objectives: to ensure al Qaeda never again uses it as a safe haven to conduct international terrorists attacks and to ensure the Taliban do not overthrow the Afghan Government. Since the initiation of the campaign in Afghanistan, the DoD has provided support to a wide range of reconstruction activities with impact on the security, economic, and governance sectors. Many reconstruction programs are conducted together with other U.S. agencies and Coalition partners as part of the integrated civil-military campaign. Typically, reconstruction programs are evaluated on an individual basis according to program-specific criteria and their contribution towards our broader objectives in Afghanistan. Our main metrics for how we are achieving these objectives are specified in statute and are reported on in our semi-annual "Report on Progress Toward Security and Stability in Afghanistan." We also provide extensive information for your quarterly reports to Congress on these efforts.

The enclosed information on the DoD priority reconstruction activities highlights progress and challenges experienced in the development of the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) and select infrastructure programs. The response reviews the positive impact of DoD efforts to grow, train, and equip the ANSF and identifies capability shortfalls that persist. It also highlights the social, economic and security benefits that accrue from a multitude of DoD-funded infrastructure projects while acknowledging the challenges that remain, including growing the capacity of the Afghan government to sustain critical infrastructure.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide this assessment of ongoing reconstruction projects and programs in Afghanistan. We want to ensure that American taxpayers are getting the results they expect from our reconstruction efforts in Afghanistan. We appreciate the important role that the Special Inspector General plays to promote the efficiency and effectiveness of those programs and operations, and we will continue to work together to ensure proper oversight and accountability of government funds.

Sincerely,

Mike Dumont
Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense
Asian & Pacific Security Affairs

Attachments: Department of Defense Response to SIGAR March 25 Inquiry

Department of Defense Response to SIGAR March 25 Inquiry

Security Sector Reconstruction

Among the multiple lines of effort in Afghanistan, the Department of Defense's central effort has been the development of the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) into a force capable of assuming lead security responsibility throughout Afghanistan and providing for its own internal security. As a result of the concerted effort by the Afghans, U.S. and Coalition partners, we have seen a significant turnaround in the security sector in Afghanistan.

As of late 2002, the Afghan government did not have legitimate control of any of the security elements in Afghanistan. The Afghan National Army (ANA) was established in early 2003, followed in 2005 by the Afghan National Police (ANP), but for years both suffered from poor leadership, low training standards, inadequate equipment and the absence of a sustainment system. As of 2009, the ANSF still lacked combat capability to meet its internal security requirements. The combined military and police forces totaled approximately 200,000, and the mission was largely confined to guard duty at static check-points. The ANSF lacked hardened vehicles, possessed limited fire support with no indirect engagement capability and had rudimentary aircraft with no casualty evacuation capability. They were further constrained by insufficient ammunition, small arms and a minimal ability to resupply. The ANSF throughout Afghanistan were understrength, fragmented, and devoid of the basic skills necessary to coordinate operations at echelons above the kandak or battalion level. The ANSF were not capable of securing Afghanistan, and U.S. and Coalition forces bore almost all the burden—and casualties—of this mission.

In late 2009, with President Obama's announcement of the U.S. troop surge, a concerted Coalition effort to grow the ANSF was initiated, with the goal of generating and fielding trained and equipped Afghan combat elements capable of pushing back the Taliban and establishing security in populated areas. A combined ANSF and International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) partnership established training programs and an equipping plan to rapidly develop ANSF combat capabilities. Unit partnering between Afghan and ISAF forces, enabled by the troop surge, provided the space to develop ANSF capabilities and leadership skills from the tactical level up. This resulted in a current force of over 340,000 military and police personnel with proven capabilities in counterinsurgency operations with increasing coordination across the Army, Police, and intelligence personnel. Although nascent, the ANA has demonstrated an emerging ability to conduct more complex combined arms operations by synchronizing infantry, artillery and other combat capabilities at the Corps/Brigade level. In some areas, the ANSF have implemented a layered security concept that decreases vulnerabilities in any single arm of the force by leveraging the capabilities of the entire force (e.g., Afghan Local Police (ALP), ANA Special Operations Forces (ANASOF), ANA, ANP, Afghan Border Police (ABP), National Directorate of Security (NDS), etc.), providing security to the Afghan people with minimal or no assistance from the Coalition.

The ANSF, and especially the ANA, have made remarkable progress, particularly since early 2012. In late 2012, the ANA had no corps/division headquarters and only one of the 23 Afghan National Army (ANA) brigade headquarters capable of conducting independent operations. Today the ANA

has one corps/division headquarters, five brigade headquarters and 27 battalions capable of operating independently. Another six ANA Corps/Divisions, 16 ANA Brigades and 71 battalions are rated as "Effective with Advisors." ANP units have also improved, with 44 units rated as "Independent with Advisors" and a further 86 units rated as "Effective with Advisors."[1] The growing ANA Special Operations Command (ANASOC) has also made strides towards becoming an independent and effective force – with the vast majority of ANA special operations forces (SOF) missions, to include night operations, being Afghan-led. The ANSF are now leading over 80 percent of total operations and carrying out many unilaterally. ISAF unilateral operations account for less than 10 percent of total operations nationwide, and in many provinces, ISAF unilateral operations account for less than 1 percent. The Afghan government will soon announce Milestone 2013: recognizing the Afghan assumption of security lead for 100 percent of the population and the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) will shift to an advisor-support role.

A few areas of development are highlighted below to show the impact of the combined U.S. and Coalition forces security force assistance programs to the ANSF:

- **Build.** The ANSF have grown 73 percent in overall numbers since 2009. This growth is extraordinary given that the ANSF have been actively engaged in combat operations while building the force. In addition, the Afghan Local Police, a village-based security program administered by Ministry of Interior (MoI) and aimed at expanding security and governance, has also grown at a steady pace from 3,100 in January 2011 to over 21,000 in March 2013. An emerging ANSF maneuver capability is the Mobile Strike Force (MSF), an armored, wheel-based platform conceived to rapidly reinforce infantry units. The fielding of seven MSF kandaks has begun and is projected to be complete by December 2014.

- **Equipping.** The total Afghan security forces consist of six ANA combat corps, an ANASOC, which includes an Afghan Special Mission Wing, hundreds of ANP units, and an ALP equipped with more than 14,700 up-armored vehicles; 68,900 other combat support vehicles; half a million pieces of weaponry, including more than 1,500 indirect-fire weapons; 193,000 pieces of communications equipment; 10,500 night-vision devices; and a growing counter-IED capability consisting of 24 Route Clearance Company units with 457 mine rollers.

- **Training development.** Through professional development branch schools, including the National Military Academy of Afghanistan, and institutional training centers, including the premier Kabul Military Training Center (KMTC), the ANSF have received leadership and technical training to develop the capabilities needed to sustain the force. To augment training capacity, the ANA and ANP are using mobile training teams to provide professional training to personnel fielded without training at branch schools. In accordance with the overall Transition, the ANSF developed a self-training capability, via the "Train the

[1] "Independent with Advisors" is defined as the unit being able to plan and execute its mission and, if necessary, can call for and integrate joint effects from Coalition forces. "Effective with Advisors" means that the Coalition provides only limited, occasional guidance to staff and may provide enablers that are missing from higher or lower ANSF units.

Instructor" program and have grown their number of instructors by 60% since 2010. The ANSF now conducts 85 percent of all training, including all basic courses.

- **Sustainment.** The ability of the Afghan forces to supply and sustain themselves remains a significant challenge and is a focus of current DoD assistance. As their capabilities develop, the ANSF are gradually taking responsibility for combat service support and sustainment responsibilities, including distribution, maintenance, ammunition management, fuel and other classes of supply at the national and regional logistics nodes and institutions. Several classes of supply including Class I Subsistence (food and water), Class II Individual Equipment (clothing), Class IV (construction materiel), and Class VI (personal items) have already been fully transitioned to ANSF control. For the MoD, the Central Movement Agency (CMA) conduct monthly resupply missions to the ANA forces on their own from the Central Supply Depot (CSD).

- **Literacy.** Widespread Afghan illiteracy also poses a challenge for developing the ANSF into a sustainable force with the requisite technical and leadership skills. Literacy training efforts for the ANSF have been expansive to tackle this issue. Between November 2009 and April 2013, over 194,000 ANSF personnel passed some level of Dari and/or Pashto literacy and numeracy training, including over 57,000 who have achieved Level 3 literacy. As of April 2013, over 73,000 ANSF personnel are in some form of literacy training.

- **Ministerial development.** The Ministries of Defense and Interior must have the capacity to organize, resource, train, and sustain their forces, and to exercise command and control over them. With the ANSF force structure nearly complete, the DoD is focused on ministerial development and is adjusting an existing program to deploy DoD functional experts to help develop crucial ministry capabilities, such as: resource management; acquisition; contracting; strategy and policy development; and human resources management.

While the ANSF have demonstrated remarkable progress, shortfalls persist in some enabler areas, including command and control, intelligence fusion, logistics, counter-IED, fire support, and air support. Having realized the goal of growing and equipping the ANSF into a force capable of assuming the lead security role, we have shifted emphasis to increasing the quality and professionalism of the ANSF. As we move beyond combat operation capability to more technical areas, we are building off the literacy improvement to increase professionalism, upgrade intelligence capability and improve the sustainment systems (including logistics and maintenance). Many of the units that remain to be fielded are specialty units and critical enablers and will require more time to receive training that is more technical in nature. The DoD developed a plan to accelerate the development of enabler capabilities, including expanded training in logistics, maintenance, engineering, and intelligence. The FY14 DoD budget request for Afghan Security Forces Fund includes $2.6B to support this effort.

The progress made by the ISAF-led surge has put the Afghan government in control of all Afghanistan's major cities and 34 provincial capitals. ISAF's focus is now shifting from directly fighting the insurgency to supporting the ANSF in holding these gains. Through the ISAF Security Force Assistance Team (SFAT) concept of train, advise, and assist, we expect the

ANSF will take full security responsibility for Afghanistan while simultaneously gaining proficiency in combat enablers and combat service support systems.

Construction and Infrastructure Development

The Department of Defense has also provided support to numerous projects and programs focused on developing civilian and military infrastructure that enable social, economic, governance, and security improvements that bring stability to Afghanistan. These efforts help strengthen the connection between the Afghan population and the district, provincial and national governments, facilitate access to security, healthcare and commerce, and help maintain security and stability gains. Below are some illustrative project and program highlights of the impact these activities have had and the benefit they provide to the overall mission:

Security Sector Infrastructure

ISAF is nearing completion of its infrastructure building program for the ANSF, which will deliver the final 429 projects by December 2014 and result in a program end state of more than 3,900 separate structures, valued at $9.4 billion, built for both the Ministry of Defense and Ministry of Interior. These include national and regional headquarters, military hospitals, training centers and schools, and forward operating bases, and have helped expand the reach of the security, governmental, and medical services. This program is continuously reviewed to ensure that the current infrastructure projects are still valid requirements, and has resulted in the reduction in total cost of the ANSF program from the originally planned $11.38 billion to $9.41 billion. As these projects come to completion, facility maintenance will be a challenge. Both ANSF organic capability and contracting support to maintain facilities are still nascent and the number of assigned facility engineers for both MoD and MoI are below targets. As a bridging strategy, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) provides facility maintenance and training for a period of up to six months following construction completion, allowing time to build the capabilities of assigned Afghan engineers.

Civil Sector Reconstruction

The DoD recognizes education as a priority for increasing security and stability and continues to use the Commander's Emergency Response Fund (CERP) to advance development in this area. The DoD has obligated more than $230 million in CERP funds to support more than 4000 projects aimed at improving the education of Afghan students, including building and refurbishing schools, and the purchase and distribution of millions of textbooks for math, science, language, civics, history, and cultural studies.

CERP projects in Farah highlight these contributions. A series of schools were built in Farah province over the past few years and are successfully staffed and maintained by the Afghan ministry of education, including Zehken School, Lash Juwain High School, Qala Zaman High School, Mirman Nazo High School, Runaakha School, and the Pir Kunder School.

- Zehken Girls School Project. A school built specifically for the education of girls in the northwestern district of Anar Dara in Farah province was completed in July of 2009 and has

been educating girls in Anar Dara ever since. Teachers and building maintenance are supplied by the Ministry of Education.

- Lash Juwain High School Project. This secondary school built in the southwestern district of Lash Juwain is one of the few High Schools in the region. It was completed in 2008 and has continuously educated students since then.

- Runaakha Girls School Project. This girls' school was built in the First District of Farah City in 2006 and has been continuously used and maintained since then.

In the first quarter of 2013, the DoD funded the procurement and delivery of desks and chairs for students in Mazar-e-Sharif who would otherwise sit on classroom floors due to overcrowding. As the operational environment has matured with more emphasis on stabilization and enabling governance, support for education programs is even more critical, especially for increasing the role of women within the Afghan government and society.

The DoD has also provided substantial support to building and refurbishing healthcare facilities throughout Afghanistan, and recently completed the construction of a small district hospital in Shindand that brings a higher level of medical care to over 240,000 Afghans.

The DoD has played a key role in providing increased electrical power to the restive areas of Kandahar and Helmand provinces. The Kandahar Bridging Solution, initiated through CERP, and maintained with the Afghanistan Infrastructure Fund, rapidly provided additional electricity to the Kandahar City area helping to increase stability and security in the area. The power project increased the availability and reliability of electricity to hundreds of thousands of residents and facilitates employment, communication, healthcare, education and industry. While in 2010 there were only three factories in the Shorandam Industrial Park powered by their own small generators, there are now roughly 66 factories in Shorandam with the additional power made available through the Kandahar Bridging Solution.

Finally, the DoD supports the development of road infrastructure. Improving the Afghan's ability to move freely around the country (both civilians and military) via paved road network is an important part of establishing and maintaining stability and security, enhancing economic development and improving the lives of the Afghan populace. The DoD has successfully built and refurbished a number of roads throughout Afghanistan. One prime example is the Nawa to Lashkar Gah road paving project in the southwest, funded by the Afghanistan Infrastructure Fund, which provides an important link between Nawa and the provincial capital of Lashkar Gah. The highly successful paved road has increased security for the population, and improved access for many residents to the more sophisticated health care offered in Lashkar Gah. The road is also bolstering commerce between the two cities, decreasing the delivery time for perishable goods, and facilitating increased overall economic activity throughout the region.

While the Afghan government continues to develop the capability and capacity to sustain transportation networks and power infrastructure, the ministries responsible for maintaining this critical infrastructure still require continued training and assistance to adequately execute an Operations and Maintenance plan on the scale required for Afghanistan. Identification,

budgeting, and financing of externally financed assets will be a challenge facing transition. The Afghan government will have to maintain the political will for reforms to grow internal capacity in order to sustain existing infrastructure. Improvements in capacity will support both the budgeting processes for O&M costs, as well as the disbursement of the budget throughout the year, increasing the likelihood of sustainability for assets and service delivery.

Mr. ENGEL. Good morning. Our nation has been at war in Afghanistan for more than 18 years. Eighteen years. And let that sink in. More than 2,000 American lives lost and thousands more wounded, more than 60 thousand Afghan deaths, and more than $900 billion spent on a war that has dragged on for almost two decades, and this does not include what we will spend to take care of our veterans in years to come. And where are we after all that time? We are in a military stalemate.

In 2001, the United States invaded Afghanistan with a clear objective: defeat al-Qaeda and its Taliban hosts and prevent a repeat of September 11th. By December of that year, American and coalition partners defeated the Taliban government. Many of its senior leaders were dead, others fled into hiding. The following year, in 2002, President George W. Bush said, and I quote: The history of military conflict in Afghanistan has been one of initial success followed by long years of floundering and ultimate failure. We are not going to repeat that mistake. Unquote.

And yet here we are today, 18 years later, having made precisely that mistake. So what happened? There is a lot to unpack when we look at what went wrong, but some things are clear. We got distracted by the war in Iraq under an administration whose priority was defeating Saddam Hussein, not an end game in Afghanistan. We entered into a questionable alliance with Pakistan which continued to arm and support the Taliban, providing the group safe haven and allowing it to strengthen its hand in Afghanistan. We changed missions, changed priorities, and lost sight of what was once considered "the just war".

So our role in Afghanistan constantly evolved as we plodded along year after year until what now feels like a never-ending war. In 2008, Congress established a Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction, what we call SIGAR, to conduct oversight of the American war effort in Afghanistan. And in 2014, we called on SIGAR to do something that had not been done, conduct deep-dive, original research into the war to look at its successes, its failures, and lessons learned. So today, we focus on those lessons learned.

This past December, the Washington Post published a review of hundreds of interviews and documents SIGAR collected for the Lessons Learned Program after obtaining them through the Freedom of Information Act. These documents and the Post's excellent reporting help fill in some significant gaps in our understanding of the U.S. war in Afghanistan. They show a years-long campaign of misrepresentation by our military officials.

Year after year we heard, "we are making progress." Year after year we were "turning a corner." Three successive administrations of both parties promised that we would avoid falling into a trap of nation building in Afghanistan. And while presidents and military officials were painting a rosy picture, the reality on the ground was a consistently deepening quagmire with no end in sight. It is a damning record. It underscores the lack of honest public conversation between the American people and their leaders about what we are doing in Afghanistan and why we are doing it.

Yet even in the light of this new information, the Trump Administration is not righting the ship on our Afghanistan policy.

SIGAR's Lessons Learned reports have confirmed the longstanding view that there is no military solution to the conflict in Afghanistan. Nevertheless, the Trump Administration, in 2017, announced it would send more troops to Afghanistan and waited 18 months before naming a special envoy to focus on Afghanistan reconciliation. That is a heck of a long time when our troops are in the field coming under fire.

Just this past September, this committee held a hearing after President Trump derailed peace talks with the Taliban over Twitter, as we have come to expect from the President. The announcement came after over a year of the administration blocking key information from Congress and the American people about the status of the war. Secretary Pompeo has, still to this day, refused to let the top State Department negotiator in Afghanistan, Zalmay Khalilzad, testify in an open hearing about the status of peace talks despite a subpoena from this committee.

There is so much more for us to understand about how we wound up here and how we move forward in Afghanistan so, Inspector General Sopko, I am pleased you are here to discuss your findings and share your perspectives. I will recognize you to make an opening statement.

Oh, that you already gave; okay, pending which I will call my friend, Mr. McCaul of Texas, for any further statements. No, Okay.

So our witness this morning is Inspector, Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction John Sopko. Inspector General Sopko, I now recognize you for 5 minutes. And you have done that. Okay.

So now it is time for questions.

Okay. Despite SIGAR's very well documented and detailed account that the U.S. intervention in Afghanistan was failing, the Trump Administration made no real change in strategy. The President's 2017 South Asia strategy suggested the war would be won on the battlefield or that it would use military power to force the Taliban to the negotiating table under favorable terms. He even dropped the mother of all bombs to shock and awe the Afghans into bending to our will and it did not work. So my first question is, did you make your reports available to the White House and other parts of the Trump Administration, and when presented with evidence that this war would not be won militarily, why do you think the President sent even more troops to Afghanistan?

Mr. SOPKO. Mr. Chairman, thank you for that question. It is not really my jurisdiction to evaluate strategic-level policy, so I cannot really comment directly on why the President did or did not do. We did brief senior staff. I spent over 2 hours briefing with my staff the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff on our Lessons Learned reports. We briefed senior officials at the State Department as well as those at the NSC and elsewhere.

So we advise them on what has worked or what has not worked on military policy and our report has highlighted a number of things that have worked. I leave it up to them to make the decision as to how to proceed on that, so I do not think I can really comment further on it.

Mr. ENGEL. OK. In April 2002, President George W. Bush said, and I quote: The history of military conflict in Afghanistan has

been one of initial success, followed by long years of floundering and ultimate failure. We are not going to repeat that mistake. Unquote.

Looking back at this statement, President Bush was right, except his administration and subsequent administrations did repeat that mistake. After the initial military victory over the Taliban, there have been long years of floundering and failure. There are many, including those your office interviewed, that thought we lost focus in Afghanistan because of the Bush Administration's focus on Iraq.

So let me ask you, do you agree with that and to what would you attribute this failure?

Mr. SOPKO. I am sorry, Mr. Chairman. I did not quite hear your full question. Do I agree with what? That President Bush's statement or?

Mr. ENGEL. Well, President Bush said, and this is a quote: The history of military conflict in Afghanistan has been one of initial success followed by long years of floundering and ultimate failure. We are not going to repeat that mistake. That is the end of the quote.

And I am saying, looking back at this statement, the President was right, President Bush, except his administration and subsequent administrations did repeat that mistake, subsequent administrations in both parties. After the initial military victory over the Taliban, there have been long years of floundering and failure and there are many, including those that your office interviewed, that thought we lost focus in Afghanistan because of the Bush Administration's focus on Iraq.

So I am asking you if you agree with any of those and to what would you attribute this failure?

Mr. SOPKO. We have reported in our Lessons Learned programs that we did lose focus on Afghanistan and we allowed the Taliban to basically come back and there was a resurgence of the Taliban. We have noted that that was obviously a mistake. We have also noted as a result there was a surge under the Obama Administration of troops as well as a surge on reconstruction or development aid. So that was in response to that not focusing on the Afghanistan issue, sir.

Mr. ENGEL. Let me ask you a final question. I understand from your letter to the editor of the Washington Post you feel that the newspaper mischaracterized your effort, but how would you respond to some of the observations of the interviewees? For example, this quote from Bob Crowley, an Army colonel who served as a senior counterinsurgency advisor to U.S. military commanders in 2013 and 2014, and this is a quote from Mr. Crowley.

"Every data point was altered to present the best picture possible. Surveys, for instance, were totally unreliable, but reinforced that everything we were doing was right and we became a self-licking ice cream cone." Could you comment on that, please?

Mr. SOPKO. I am happy to do that. That quote is similar to what we have been reporting almost since I have become the Inspector General. I noticed and it is not just in the military side, it is also in the development side. And again, I do not focus on the warfighting. I am the Inspector General for Reconstruction, not for

how well of a job we did on the warfighting, but on the training of the military we look at.

But there was a disconnect almost from my first trip over there between what AID, State, and DOD were saying what was going on and what I saw and what my staff were seeing on the ground. That is one of the reasons why we performed or came about to do the Lessons Learned reports. The problem is there is a disincentive, really, to tell the truth. There is an incentive and it is for many reasons, and we can go on.

I know my time is up, sir, but there are many reasons we can discuss. We have created an incentive to almost require or for people to lie. I do not want to sound like something from Burl Ives in Cat on a Hot Tin Roof, but there is an odor of mendacity throughout the Afghanistan issue.

And I know Congressman Connolly has heard me talk about this years ago, mendacity and hubris. You create from the bottom up an incentive because of short timeframes, you are there for 6 months, 9 months, or a year, to show success. That gets reported up the chain and before you know it, the President is talking about a success that does not exist. And I think that is a good issue to look at. Not whether there was lying, but why, and what does that tell us about the way we do business, whether it is in Afghanistan or maybe here in the United States.

Mr. ENGEL. Thank you.

Mr. McCaul.

Mr. MCCAUL. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I remember visiting with General Wald who led our forces in Tora Bora. He said if I just had a few more men, we could have taken them out. And Ioften think about that because had we taken out bin Laden in the early days, who knows, it would have changed history. We would not have been talking about this two decades later, $130 billion later. Who knows if we would have even gone into Iraq had we taken out the perpetrator of 9/11.

And I have always thought that was our No. 1 mission in country was to stop terror threats from attacking the homeland, and maybe we got a little mission—maybe we got into things that perhaps we should not have. I do think the days of occupying nations and reconstruction with the hope that Jeffersonian democracy is going to plant its seeds and roots in retrospect, it may have been a little naive. It is a very primitive country, Afghanistan, and I have been there many times.

So to my question, as I would advise the President on Syria, a residual force to protect the homeland, I do not think we can afford to stay in these countries forever and occupy them forever. I think the most important thing we can do though is to have a residual force of some sort to take out terrorist threats to the homeland and a counterterrorism mission, and maybe we lost sight of what our mission really was in the first place.

And so, I guess, and I know you are not here to report on policy, per se, but I would like your comments on that. And to that end, what programs have been most effective at counterterrorism in that mission?

Mr. SOPKO. Congressman, I think that is an excellent question. And I can bring you up to the line to policy and I leave the policy

to you. You have to remember, going back to that time the initial reason we went in there were to find the people who killed our people. Find them, punish them. But the second point was to make certain that country, Afghanistan, was not a place where terrorists could breed and attack us again.

So we were trying to create or help create a government that could manage their country; up to then they could not. So that is where, we call it nation building. I do not know. That is a word that I think is abused more than actually defined. It is always defined in the negative. We do not do nation building, somebody else does. But we were trying to make certain that an Afghan Government could keep those terrorists out, so that is why we did build roads, we did do training. We are doing train, advise, and assist right now. So those were the two points of that goal, of our goal in going into Afghanistan.

Taking it to what has worked and what has not worked, we identify, and this is one of the things we were briefing Joe Dunford and his team on, on this one Lessons Learned report, which I think may have helped the President in his decision on what to do in Afghanistan where we have consistency in our training and we bring people over there for more than 6 months. And you see that particularly with the Special Forces training, excellent training.

And if you look at the Afghan military right now, the best units that are fighting are the Special Forces, that our teams are connected with them, they live with them, they work with them. The other area where we had great success has been with the Afghan Air Force. Again, the U.S. Air Force has done a wonderful job particularly with a couple of platforms, the A–29, I think is the best one, where the Air Force, our mentors, worked for 4 years, 4 years they spend working with the Afghan Air Force. And that is tremendous; that is one of the best programs we have and we were advising the President and his team that is what you should do.

So it goes back to we should have actually done a more of a racking and stacking of what worked and did not. The Afghan military, and particularly the Afghan police, has been a hopeless nightmare and a disaster and part of it is because we rotate units through who are not trained to do the work and they are gone in six to 9 months.

I do not blame the military, but you cannot bring in a Black Hawk pilot to train an Afghan policeman on how to do police work. And that is what we were doing, we are still doing.

Mr. MCCAUL. Well, this has been very insightful and it will help us in making our recommendations to the administration. It seems to me in conclusion that really training their Special Forces, their Afghan National Defense and Security Forces and their Air Force with the appropriate people may be the best strategy.

I know the President hopes he can negotiate with the Taliban. I am a bit skeptical, sir, that you can never negotiate with the Taliban. I know a complete withdrawal would involve an overrun by the Taliban, for sure. They would probably take the country over and then we would have a real mess. So this is very complicated, but something needs to change. The status quo is not acceptable here.

Yes, sir.

Mr. SOPKO. In response to that, Ranking Member, I agree totally. But the important thing is you have to be given the facts.

Mr. MCCAUL. Yes.

Mr. SOPKO. To make that decision. And one of the concerns I have raised for almost, again, the seven or eight or 9 years I have been doing this—I cannot remember, they kind of merge after a while—is that a lot of the facts that you need, you are not being given. They are overclassified or they are not being collected or they are just ignored.

So to this day, you do not have unless you go into the classified briefing, and you know how difficult it is to use that, but you are not told some of the basic facts that you need to make your decision of whether you should fund programs or not. And I can go through those lists at some time. That is a still a problem.

And when we talk about mendacity, when we talk about lying, it is not just by lying about a particular program, it is lying by omissions by saying, oh, I cannot tell you about the casualties; oh, I cannot tell you about how good the Afghans are of its weapons; or I cannot tell you this and that. It turns out that everything that is bad news has been classified over the last few years.

Mr. MCCAUL. Well, we appreciate your hard work on this. Thank you, sir.

Mr. ENGEL. Thank you.

Mr. Sherman.

Mr. SHERMAN. We cannot deny terrorists a few acres here or there, after all, they plotted against us in an apartment building in Hamburg, we need to prevent terrorists from getting a whole State or a training facility as large as Tora Bora was in early 2001. In evaluating our Afghan policy, I think we have got to get away from looking at the sunk costs, the exhaustion of the last 18 years, and look only at the future and see what are the future costs of being involved and what future benefits, if any, are available.

The one lesson I have learned over the last 20 years is we are very good at breaking things. We broke the Taliban and entered Kabul. We broke Saddam Hussein's army and entered Baghdad. We are not very good at fixing things and at nation building and so we should restrict our future military involvements to those where our case for involvement is so strong that we are not morally obligated to go in and fix it. The Pottery Barn rule should not apply.

The worst example of our behavior was Iraq. We invaded even a few days after Saddam Hussein said he would allow all the international inspections. We found no weapons of mass destruction. And then to justify our behavior, we had to announce that we were going to turn Iraq into a democracy with rule of law. I wonder how well that is working out.

Mr. Sopko, you have shown us that our Afghan nation building was not done well. Foreign Policy—Foreign Affairs magazine gives our efforts there a D-minus, but going forward we are going to be confronted with similar situations. Let's say we had done a B job, go with the Federal Government long enough not to expect an A job. We did a B job.

One view is, we can do nation building at reasonable cost if we learn from the lessons of Afghanistan and do it about as right as

the government can do it. Another lesson is, we cannot do nation building. Would a B job from the Federal Government had done the job in Afghanistan?

Mr. SOPKO. I used to teach in college. I think if you even did a D job—D.

Mr. SHERMAN. D.

Mr. SOPKO. It would have been OK in Afghanistan.

Mr. SHERMAN. So you are saying if we would had just—if——

Mr. SOPKO. D-minus and it would have worked a lot better.

Mr. SHERMAN. So you have given—what we did was an F, F-minus, something like that?

Mr. SOPKO. E. You showed up. You showed up for class. That is it.

All kidding aside——

Mr. SHERMAN. So you are saying that we can do nation building if we do a good, the kind of good job that the Federal Government is capable of doing?

Mr. SOPKO. Absolutely. And what we tried to do is we tried to give the Afghans—and I think one of your staff asked us about misassumptions that we have identified and there is a whole list of them. One was trying to give the Afghans what we had when they only wanted a little bit of peace and a little bit of justice. And if you look at our report on stabilization, we talk about that.

Mr. SHERMAN. Got you.

Mr. SOPKO. The whole stabilization program was coming in after our military cleared a district to try to bring in a government services so that the locals would go back and support the central government. Well, they wanted a little bit of justice. What did we do? We built courthouses. They were not looking for courthouses. They were not looking for something that looked like this. They were looking for just simple justice. And as much as you hate the Taliban, and I do, and I hate their brand of justice, to the average Afghan it is better than the justice provided by the National Unity Government.

And that was one of my trips was the most shocking thing where, and I believe, well, Congressman Connolly has left so I can repeat the story so no one of you will be bored, but I came back as so depressed because I met three, separately, three Afghans who I had been working with, smart, young, brave Afghans who risk their lives every day, and for some reason we all started talking about their families. And their families lived in the countryside in Afghanistan and every one of those young, smart, bright Afghans told me a story where they recommended to their mothers and fathers that if they had a justice problem, and all of them did, go to the Taliban. Do not go to the local government.

Mr. SHERMAN. So instead of creating a government similar to what Afghanistan had some time in the last 50 years, we tried to create the kind of government we have in the United States.

Mr. SOPKO. We tried to create a little America. We tried to create I call it Norway. What they wanted was fair justice. And what happened is if you went to the National Unity Government justice, first of all, the judges weren't there because they were afraid to go there. You had to pay bribes, and it is the bribes that determined

wherever you got the land or wherever the dowry was recognized or whatever.

But the Taliban came in, it was rough justice and I am not advocating Taliban justice. I remember I testified——

Mr. SHERMAN. Is there a period of time in Afghan's history that you would say the Afghan had the kind of government that those villages would have wanted?

Mr. SOPKO. I think it probably would have been before the Soviet invasion and it goes back to——

Mr. SHERMAN. And before the Communist regime that preceded the——

Mr. SOPKO. And the Communist regime and the horror of that.

Mr. SHERMAN. I believe my time has expired.

Mr. ENGEL. Thank you, yes. Thank you, Mr. Sherman.

Mr. Smith.

Mr. SMITH. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. And thank you, Mr. Sopko, for your tenacity. Your frustration level must be just vexing. I do not know how you do it.

Ranking Member McCaul just mentioned a moment ago about Osama bin Laden. In another part of the world I visited with Bashir in Khartoum in Sudan and I was there to talk about Darfur, and he was almost mocking. And then when I met with Salah Gosh, one of his people, was mocking as they offered us Osama bin Laden before he went to Afghanistan and the Clinton Administration would not take it.

So in terms of hindsight being 20/20, if only.

Let me just ask you a couple questions. You know, 130 convictions, a thousand investigations, criminal and civil, 600 audits, inspections, and other reports, maybe you could break out for us and maybe even do it more for the record, who were those people? Were they Americans? Were they people from Afghanistan that were convicted and what were they convicted of? Where did they go to jail when they were convicted?

Second, with regards to some examples, and I think your testimony is just amazing, you talk about how in 2014, then USAID administrator—and I know him, Dr. Shah. He was a very, very honorable man and I wonder if the information even got to him that you were trying to provide. But he had said there are three million girls and five million boys enrolled in schools compared to just 90,000 when the Taliban ruled Afghanistan, and you pointed out that that information was gotten from the government and it was contradicted by other government people and there was no attempt to verify the accuracy. And I think that is very troubling.

You also point out on the rule of law programs, a billion dollars, that in 2013 the strategy had no performance measures. I think you know that is appalling and maybe you might want to touch on that. And finally, you point out in the interviews for this Lessons Learned Program, 80 percent of the people interviewed wanted their names removed to be anonymous. Again, does that fall in—was there retaliation against anyone as far as you know?

And that is a very, very, as you pointed out, (they have) a well-founded fear of retribution from political and tribal enemies. Maybe you could speak to that. And again, thank you.

Mr. SOPKO. Those are all good questions. Let me start at the end. On retaliation, we know of no retaliation but we are concerned. One of the concerns I have is that there is a lawsuit now pending and the Washington Post wants to get the names of all of our people who asked for anonymity. As an IG, I cannot work if I cannot offer anonymity and protection to a witness or a whistleblower.

Well, you know what, whistleblowers are a lifeblood as an inspector general or any law enforcement agency. I have law enforcement credentials. You have to have them. I mean, I find it so ironic, this is the same Washington Post, if I recall, had an informant that I believe it was for 30 years they kept the identity of Deep Throat from the American people, but for some reason we have a new Washington Post where they want to know our informants.

These people who spoke to us risked a lot, and you know what this town is like. You know what is like if somebody bad mouths their old boss or whatever. These people had realistic fear and whatever. We do not give them a litmus test of whether your fear is reasonable or not. We just ask them if they want us to use their name. And so that is so important.

So—but there is no retaliation that we know of. I mean in Afghanistan the difference is that these people would be killed. Simple, OK. But I suppose the Washington Post wants their names for some reason. Why? They have the information, why do they need the name? But I do not want to go there.

The question, I believe, and I am sorry if I lost——

Mr. SMITH. The rule of law and also the education of children and 130 convictions.

Mr. SOPKO. Oh, yes. That is, it is fact versus fantasy. This is this problem that we identified early on, this odor of mendacity. There was this exaggeration after exaggeration of what we accomplished. And there is another example we give about the life expectancy, where USAID Administrator Shah, and it went all the way up to the President, were saying about how we had doubled the life expectancy. And we talked to experts in the health field. We talked to experts at the CIA that said it was statistically impossible, statistically impossible to double the life expectancy of any country over that timeframe.

But that is—and I am certain some President and some AID administrator, I must say the current AID administrator is totally different and he sticks to the records and he sticks to the facts. I am so proud of——

Mr. SMITH. That would be Mark Green?

Mr. SOPKO. Yes, one of your former colleagues. He is a tremendous person to work with. But we find this. But I think the problem is, again, we did not send liars and thieves and troublemakers to Afghanistan to work for USAID or for the Department of Defense or whatever. We sent the bravest, the smartest—I do not want to say always the smartest. But we sent the best that we had, but we gave them a box of broken tools.

We gave them—let's say if you were a contracting officer you are rated on how much money you put on contract, not if any of the contracts work. We rated not on outcomes, but on output. We sent over military officers with 9 months or less of duty and they had

to show success. You know, I have actually been briefed at one point about these shark tooth of assessments.

The Afghan—you would be assigned to an Afghan unit. You would come in and say, "The Afghan unit can't walk and chew gum at the same time." Three months later, "I am seeing success. They are getting better." At the time of the end of your tour, "They are doing very good. They are meeting all objectives." You leave. The next captain comes in, "These people can't chew gum and walk at the same time."

Why? It is not because that officer is a liar. That officer wants to get promoted. That officer wants to show success over his tour of duty. This is the problem we have. Our H.R. system is broken. Our procurement system is broken. Our rotation system is broken, you know, you go through the whole list. The problems you see in Afghanistan are the problems you see of the way the government operates here. That is the one thing I can say having spent 30 years looking at government operations, first, for Senator Sam Nunn, then for John Dingell over here in the House.

Mr. ENGEL. Thank you.

Mr. Deutch.

Mr. DEUTCH. Thank you.

Mr. Sopko, good to see you again. Thanks for all of your work and your team's work conducting oversight of our policy, our efforts in Afghanistan.

The publication of the Afghanistan Papers by the Post has elevated an important discussion, but it is not the first attempt to highlight problems with the U.S. role in Afghanistan. Congress established SIGAR to help conduct oversight of the war. SIGAR has written seven Lessons Learned reports; is that right, Mr. Sopko?

Mr. SOPKO. That is right.

Mr. DEUTCH. That touch on many of the issues covering the Afghanistan Papers. A major concern is the U.S. was dragged into a conflict in a country that it did not fully understand. There is more information we should have, Mr. Sopko. I will get to that in a second.

According to the Afghanistan Papers, in 2014 a senior State Department official said, "If I were to write a book, its cover would be, America goes to war without knowing why it does. We went in reflexively after 9/11 without knowing what we were trying to achieve. I would like to write a book about having a plan and an end game before we go in." And during a Lessons Learned interview in 2016, an anonymous USAID official said, "Taliban's presence was a symptom, but we rarely tried to understand what the disease was."

Richard Boucher, career Foreign Service Officer, who was State South Asia from 2006 to 2009, told government interviewers in 2015, "If there was ever a notion of mission creep it is Afghanistan. We have to say good enough is good enough. That is why we are there 15 years later. We are trying to achieve the unachievable instead of achieving the achievable."

All these quotes help demonstrate how a lack of cohesive strategy and clear policy undermined our efforts in Afghanistan. We did not fully understand our adversary, our strategic objectives, or the environment in which we are operating. Despite the amount of as-

sistance that flowed into the country since 2001, even the positive gains remain fragile.

So, Mr. Sopko, if we are to be honest, Congress is culpable to many of these problems. Too often we listen to officials without adequately questioning their assumptions and conclusions. But you are here today and you have told us that part of the problem is that we do not have the facts. You said, the basic facts that we need are not being given. Can you elaborate on that? What are the basic facts that all these years later that we have been at this, that you have been at this, we are still missing?

Mr. SOPKO. Well, let's start with strategy. There is a strategy for Afghanistan; it is classified. Now I have clearances. You do not need a clearance to get it; you cannot get it. There is a start.

What is our strategy? There is a strategy for—there is no strategy we think for narcotics.

Mr. DEUTCH. There is—well, let me just stop you there. So when you are referring to the strategy, you are referring to, what are you referring to? You are referring to a document?

Mr. SOPKO. Well, usually there are strategic documents.

Mr. DEUTCH. Right.

Mr. SOPKO. You have got to have a strategy and then you have got to lay out the programs, because without the strategy you don't know where your programs should be going. That is the problem we have had over 18 years. And you also have to have metrics or ways to measure success.

Mr. DEUTCH. All right. But when you—I just want to stop you for a second. But when you talk about the constant churn of new people coming in and starting over, they are all operating pursuant to that strategy, no?

Mr. SOPKO. No. They get a job assignment. They just go over there to run a program. They do not know what—that is the whole problem. They are sent over there without knowing what the strategy is and what was the objective of the overall strategy in Afghanistan, but the individual program strategy.

Mr. DEUTCH. OK. Who is the keeper of that strategy? Where——

Mr. SOPKO. Well, usually——

Mr. DEUTCH. You make it sound as if there is this document that if we all could just see it everything would become clear, if we shared it with all the military officials and USAID they would understand. Help me understand.

Mr. SOPKO. Well, I did not mean to imply that this is the silver bullet or the answer. You are just saying where are the problems of not getting the facts.

Mr. DEUTCH. Right.

Mr. SOPKO. You start with the strategy and then you look at, well, how did the programs meet that strategy? And then you look at metrics for success, then you look at the facts. Now when I talked about classification, I mean, and I can go through the list of what is still classified and I think that may help you.

You know, the way to determine whether we are doing a good job on training, advising, and assisting the Afghan Security Forces, you would want to know about the Afghan National Security Forces operation data. That is classified. The Afghan Security

Forces' casualties, I mean if they are getting killed then obviously our training has not been very helpful.

You would want to know about the RS Commanders' assessment of the Afghan security environment. That is now classified. The attrition metrics for the ANA Corps and ANA zone level, that is classified. Equipment readiness, that is classified.

Mr. DEUTCH. Right. Mr. Sopko, I appreciate it. Let me just close with this.

Mr. SOPKO. Yes.

Mr. DEUTCH. So in the seven documents that you have produced so far and all of the times that you have been up here, have we had this conversation before? I am not being flip. This notion that if we just had this information for all the years that we have been at this, have you been screaming from the mountaintops about this? Is there—help me understand.

Mr. SOPKO. I think I have been raising the issue about classification going back at least four or 5 years, and repeatedly, and I think in every quarterly report we raise it. Not the lessons learned, but the quarterly reports.

Mr. DEUTCH. Right.

Mr. SOPKO. And I raised it just, what was it, last year. The last metrics we had for success were—and General Nicholson said these are the metrics you have to focus on, the amount of territory the Afghan Government controls and the percentage of the population they control. They classified that, then they stopped collecting the data, then they said that is no longer relevant.

So you have no metrics. You as Members of Congress have no public metrics to rate the billions of dollars we are spending in Afghanistan.

Mr. DEUTCH. Mr. Chairman, thank you for holding this hearing. And for the over 2,400 American lives lost and over 20,000 wounded, we certainly owe it to every one of them to make sure that we are doing everything now to get this right. And I appreciate this, thank you.

Mr. ENGEL. Thank you, Mr. Deutch.

Mr. Perry.

Mr. PERRY. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you, Mr. Sopko, for your candor. It seems to me that your job here from the perspective of some of my colleagues is to make sure you do a good job at bashing or affirming that President Trump is pathetic and does not have a strategy and this is all his fault. And I actually applaud your efforts to kind of stay out of the fray in that regard. I don't think any of us are perfect. I think the President does want to get out of Afghanistan and it is hard to determine what the facts are. The Post's article kind of laid out the fact that we do not know the information and you have reaffirmed that.

Classifications, even in the President's own defense, when he wanted to declassify information that would buttress his own innocence in claims against him, he cannot seem to get that done. This town has a way of sequestering the information most important to it and most damning to it and the people in it. That having been said, I would like to get to some of the information.

You highlighted challenges regarding coordination of reconstruction in Afghanistan and the fact that there is no one in charge. There is no culpable, whether it is on the Afghan side or whether on the American side or some NGO, et cetera, the old adage that if everyone is in charge, no one is in charge. Have there been any improvements in this since you have continued to decry that over the course of your reporting have there been any improvements regarding culpability, regarding assignment for responsibility, so to speak, in Afghan reconstruction projects?

Mr. SOPKO. If I could have one moment.

Mr. PERRY. Sure.

Mr. SOPKO. Well, it is unanimous. No. No, we have not seen any improvements. And again, I don't want to, you know, turn this into a comedy routine. The problem is this is a very complicated—this is a NATO operation. We have multiple donors. We have multiple donors who are just doing reconstruction. Some are providing military. It is a problem and I really think it is something that Congress needs to focus on, because we will do this again and there are going to be multiple people wearing multiple hats.

And we actually have an entire report looking on, I forget the title of it is, Divided Responsibility, and that report goes into, unfortunately, gory detail of how convoluted the process is. And again, this is not meant as a criticism of any administration. This is meant as a criticism of the complexities of government. This has got over 900 footnotes highlighting, and maybe this is the difference between us and the Washington Post, you know, we go into a lot of detail on this.

And no, there is a problem and it is not just in the military field, although this report focuses on that, but it also goes to the reconstruction field. So I think this is a worthwhile area for you and Congress to focus on, divided responsibilities in Afghanistan and in these post-conflict environments.

Mr. PERRY. With the little time that I have, let me just carry you a little further on that. It is your studied opinion that that should be the purview of Congress to assign those responsibilities only in the context that look, I am a Black Hawk pilot and I do not want to teach law enforcement and I would not be any good at it. But while I am surrounded by a lot of really well-intended people that are smart, I am not sure Congress is the best answer either.

And it seems to me that somebody that can act somewhat autonomously determine the problem and see the solution set, somebody like a Mark Green or anybody in that capacity should be able to say, look, here is the project, here is the agencies involved, here is where the funding is. You are in charge. Here is the report, Tom, knock yourself out. And this is what we expect from you and if you cannot get the job done, then in 6 months we are going to look for a replacement.

Why do you think it should be Congress? I am concerned about that, but I will—I am listening to your answer.

Mr. SOPKO. No, no, no. I think part of the reason is some of these authorities and responsibilities are established by law, first of all. And what we are dealing with in Afghanistan is a whole of government and whole of government's approach and a lot of this is going to have to be done statutorily. I am not saying that any one com-

mittee up here are the best ones to decide, but it should be recognized we have a problem.

And I was going to look at the charting here.

Mr. PERRY. My time has expired, sir, but could you just do this. With the chairman's indulgence, could you give us one example regarding a statute where you think we could make a difference so I can kind of contextualize this?

Mr. SOPKO. I will definitely do it. I asked my staff to do it right now and we will get back to you.

Mr. PERRY. All right, thank you.

Mr. ENGEL. Thank you.

Mr. Keating.

Mr. KEATING. Thank you.

Let's be clear on one thing right off the bat that our greatest responsibility to get things right, we are going to be talking about billions and billions of dollars, but our greatest responsibility to get things right rests with those families that lost sons and daughters and loved ones to this war and to the people who are living with devastating injuries that they suffered in this war that forever will challenge them both physically and mentally.

Now let me zero in on one area of concern that we raised. My colleagues and I raised it. I authored with my colleagues a piece of legislation ensuring that women are a part of the peace process in Afghanistan and that they are engaged in the activity of being meaningful partners in creating a lasting peace, something I hope we will advance, Mr. Chairman, out of this committee shortly.

But you mentioned in your report that you expect, and in your testimony that you expect to issue a report on women's empowerment in Afghanistan this year or early next year. And in a recently released 2019 High-Risk List, there is a section focusing on how despite over a billion dollars spent since 2002 to advance the status of women, gains by women in Afghanistan remain fragile.

So how would you categorize the current state of meaningful engagement for women and what is a clear strategy in your mind going forward to deal effectively with these gains that not only will help women, but actually I think help the country achieve any semblance of a lasting peace going forward?

Mr. SOPKO. Congressman, that is a very good question and I am glad you highlighted our High-Risk List, because this report talks about the importance of a number of issues and this is when I refer to Congress needs to do something about ensuring that these risks are dealt with if we want lasting peace.

I cannot tell you specifically what is the answer. I can just tell you that although we have made advancements helping women in Afghanistan, life for a woman in Afghanistan is horrible. Outside of the cities, major cities, where the majority of the Afghan women live, it has not improved much. And I have not met an Afghan woman yet who trusts the Taliban. So that is something, and I know you are concerned that they have a seat at the table or somebody represents them at the table so they do not get lost in this shuffle declaring victory and leaving. That is my concern.

Mr. KEATING. We have been assured that time and time again by the Afghan——

Mr. SOPKO. By the Taliban?

Mr. KEATING. No, by the Afghan leaders, yet you are right. There is no place at the table. So, but you categorize it as fragile right now, so could you talk to us about right now and what we should have done to make it less fragile and what we can do going forward?

Mr. SOPKO. You know, I do not have specific answers to that. I will get back to you. But I think one of the critical things about that issue, and it is a delicate issue because you are talking about cultures. But one of those things is we have to focus that the problem of women's rights is men. And all of our programs have been focusing on giving certificates and things to women, who are problem is, and Ms. Ghani, the President's wife——

Mr. KEATING. I have spoken with her and had discussions with her on this matter.

Mr. SOPKO. I have spoken with her too, in the palace, and she says the women's issue is a men's issue, so the program should be focused on them. But one of the things is if you are going to design a women's program talk to some Afghan women. And Ms. Ghani was one of the first people who highlighted the problem with the Promote Program, which is one of those programs that was oversold as the greatest program on earth for women, $250 million, and there was going to be $250 million of donations from the European Union and the European allies, and I remember meeting with the European allies in Afghanistan and none of them had heard about the program.

But we had already—this is again, this odor of mendacity. We had already—OK.

Mr. KEATING. All right, I have 20 seconds left.

But there is a recurrent theme regardless whether you are talking about the judiciary system, the rule of law, whether you are talking about the narcotics system or what we are talking about with advancing women's place in the society, we are not tailoring our programs around the traditions of the host country. And I think probably with later testimony that is going to be an area you are going to highlight that that is a huge oversight on our part.

I have to yield back. My time is up.

Mr. SOPKO. We need to talk to the Afghans, sir.

Mr. ENGEL. Thank you.

Mr. Yoho.

Mr. YOHO. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Sopko, thank you for being here. I apologize because I feel it is like welcome back to groundhog days again because we have heard this over and over again, and you have done a great job of highlighting this stuff.

I remember when Rajiv Shah was here when he was with USAID. I think Afghanistan got a billion dollars through USAID and they could not account for $300 billion and this has been a continual problem. I think what you pointed out was a grand plan and I think Congress can do that and Congress should be the one that does that and it should be the appropriate committees.

I think the Foreign Affairs Committee working with DOD or one of the other committees should be able to create a policy that lives beyond a presidency so that it is something that our allies and the countries we work with can count on that this policy will not

change. Yes, the President can come in and they can tweak it as needed, but it has to survive an administration. And that is something that if we vote on it in the House and the Senate, it will be hard to change. And that all goes back to making sure we have the correct policy. I lost my train of thought.

The one thing that you picked up, and you said this in the very beginning and this is so important. Your reports come out every year and I think they are spot on. It is this body that does not act. We are the ones that are in charge of the money. We are the ones that can direct these programs or not.

And I thought what you said in the very beginning, successful reconstruction is incompatible with continuing insecurity, until we have a stable government, we can throw all the money you want, but until there is a stable government, and it does not need to be a democracy. I am against democracy building in a lot of these countries because they are not ready for it. That is something that has to come up from the top down. We cannot force feed a country that. It has to be a stable government that we can work with.

And the women programs, those are all great and I agree with you. But when you look at that culture, if you do not understand that culture, their culture is you walk behind me eight or ten feet, they are not going to have them at the seat, at the dais, unfortunately as that is. We have been to countries where they have done that because of our policies and the women are there, but when you go to ask a question of them, the men answer. And I have interrupted the men and said, I do not want you to hear from you, I want to hear from the people that are here, the women here.

We need to understand that culture and give them time to change and adapt, and I think we need to focus on stability. And when we have stability, then our infrastructure projects can start creating the economy that we need so that trade can come in a gradual change. The Taliban, we ran them out and the women went to school. But when the Taliban comes back, they are going to be out of school and we know that is going to happen. And so, I think we need to be a lot smarter in how we do this and this is a lesson learned that we should never repeat again.

I want to get your sense, do you feel that the military industrial complex that President Eisenhower forewarned us about, are they playing a hand in this or impeding a success in this, or is it more of our policies just being, you know, where it changes every—the mental lobotomy that happens with talent that we send over there?

Mr. SOPKO. Yes, I can't really comment on that. I think the problems we have you have identified. The other problem is there is a tendency, and I talk about it in the statement, of we think that just throwing money at it will answer it.

Mr. YOHO. Sure.

Mr. SOPKO. And more money is a problem. We spent too much money, too fast, in too small of a country, with too little oversight.

Mr. YOHO. Right.

Mr. SOPKO. And that created the corruption problem. That distorted the economy and distorted the culture, so smaller sometimes is better. I don't know if that has anything to do with the military industrial complex, I think it more has to do with maybe it is a tendency of American culture. We have a view as we are going to

get there with the firstest with the mostest, going back to, I don't know if it was General Sherman or something saying we are going to do that. And we have the same thing about development aid and we are going to get there with the firstest with the mostest and assume that is good.

Mr. YOHO. And what we need to do is focus on what do you need, what do you want, what we can help you achieve.

Mr. SOPKO. And what you can use.

And, sir, I would harken back to those seven questions which we posed within a year of me coming on board. I was trying to, what are the lessons we have learned and one of those questions is, do the Afghans know about the program?

Mr. YOHO. Right.

Mr. SOPKO. Do they want the program? Will they use the program? If you answered that in the affirmative that program will probably succeed more than it will fail. But if you answer in the negative, then why are you doing the program?

Mr. YOHO. Exactly. And your six conclusions and recommendations is what this body needs to do and we are the ones in charge of that and I thank you.

Mr. SOPKO. Welcome, sir.

Mr. ENGEL. The gentleman's time is—Mr. Cicilline.

Mr. CICILLINE. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you, Mr. Sopko, for your service. I want to understand a little bit about the Afghanistan Papers. What was the document that was being prepared? Was that going to be this report that you have provided to the committee or is it an internal document? Because part of what I am trying to figure out is, is there some failure also of our current model of the Inspector General in terms of getting this information in a way that will require action, because I do think sunlight on this is really important.

So what, will you tell us a little bit about what the purpose, like were you preparing a report that was going to be shared publicly or shared with Congress?

Mr. SOPKO. That is a good question, and again I think it is one of the misconceptions. We were not preparing a report. We interviewed people in preparation for these seven reports as well we are interviewing for the next series of reports. You know, we—these were raw interview notes——

Mr. CICILLINE. OK.

Mr. SOPKO [continuing]. That we had done for those reports.

Mr. CICILLINE. For the reports that you had previously prepared, OK.

Mr. SOPKO. Oh, yes. Yes. And it is up——

Mr. CICILLINE. I want to get to some questions.

Mr. SOPKO. Sure, OK. Yes.

Mr. CICILLINE. I appreciate that. I just want to, because I do think getting this information is really valuable, but I want to focus my questions very much on corruption, because I think, certainly, the absence of a clear set of objectives has to come, you know, developing an objective for our mission in Afghanistan followed by a strategy and then metrics to measure it. I think that has been our challenge.

But I am particularly disturbed about what I am learning in this most recent report with respect to the issue of corruption. The Department of Defense says corruption remains the top strategic threat to the legitimacy and success of the Afghan Government, and you quote that in your report. And your report in 2016 reported on corruption, I think all the reports have, and criticized the government's failure to recognize corruption, which was bad enough, but actually the American activities contributed significantly to the corruption.

And so, would you speak a little bit about that and also about this notion that we prioritize security over anticorruption efforts and whether that was the right judgment and how we might measure metrics in both of those areas?

Mr. SOPKO. Well, that is, I think you have focused on what some military officers told us is really the major threat to reconstruction and to the war effort and that is corruption. It is not the Taliban, it is corruption. And if you talk to General Miller, who is head of all of our troops right now, he will answer that is still a problem.

It not only saps the money we give to the Afghan Government, but it also is used as a recruiting tool by the Taliban because they can point to the corrupt officers. They can point to the corrupt warlords who are getting all of the government contracts, and they say, see, that is what the U.S. Government does. So I think you have honed in on a serious issue. It still is.

Now I will say in defense of Congress, Congress has recognized that and they have done legislation on that. They have actually asked us to assess the corruption situation three times, so you are aware of it. And we are in currently assessing the condition there, it is still a serious problem.

Mr. CICILLINE. So one of the most mismanaged pots of money was the Commander's Emergency Response Program, or CERP, I guess it was called. This is a slush fund that was reminiscent of the war in Iraq. CERP was allowed military commanders in the field to bypass normal contracting rules and spend up to a million dollars on infrastructure projects far above the normal cost of such projects. What role did CERP money play in enabling corruption and was it ever deconflicted with other foreign assistance programs to ensure that funding streams were not working at cross purposes? That seems to be an especially serious cause or a contributing factor, the corruption that we saw on the ground.

Mr. SOPKO. You have highlighted a good point. CERP money was not deconflicted. Like a lot of the military programs, they were not deconflicted. I would not say CERP was the worst, I think there were a couple of other programs I could discuss that are worse. But we have not actually done an audit on those CERP funding to the granularity that you are asking, but it was deconflicted. Good intentions, but a lot of waste.

Mr. CICILLINE. And final question, a retired brigadier general said, and I am quoting, Congress gives us money to spend and expects us to spend all of it. The attitude became, we do not care what you do with the money so long as you spend it. End quote. This sentiment is reflected throughout the Lessons Learned report.

What can Congress do to counter the view among military and civilian personnel in the field that you are just to spend money no matter what?

Mr. SOPKO. I think the best answer is for the appropriators to put language or at least do not hold the agencies vulnerable or attack them for not spending the money. I know a lot of agencies were attacked for not putting money on contract or not spending or losing it. So multiyear money may be an answer to that, but there is an incentive to spend the money.

And we saw an absurd situation down in Camp Leatherneck where we built a building that we call it the 64K, a 64,000 square-foot headquarters for the surge. They started construction as the surge was ending. The military officers, our Marine Corps general down there said, "I don't want it, I don't need it, I won't use it." His superior above him, I think it was General Allen at the time, says, "We don't want it, we don't need it, we won't use it." And it went up the chain.

But there was a general back in Kuwait who said, Well, "Congress gave it to us, so spend it." So there is a beautiful building, unfortunately, you can't get to Camp Leatherneck, but when I got there it was the most best built building I saw in Afghanistan. I think it was $36 million. As far as I know, it is empty still.

Mr. ENGEL. OK, thank you.

Mr. Wright.

Mr. WRIGHT. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Sopko, thank you for being here and thank you for what you do. It is pretty clear our experience in Afghanistan is a case of winning the war but not winning the peace or we would not still be there.

But I have a couple questions with regards to some specifics and the first has to do with deployments. There is a significant downside to long deployments in terms of the effect on our men and women in the military and their families, but as you have pointed out there is also a significant downside to short deployments.

Not from a military perspective, but from a reconstruction perspective, how do you reconcile that? How do we know when we have got it right?

Mr. SOPKO. That is a very good question. And I think what we can do is again look to where there have been successes. And what the Air Force has done is they have assigned the same people for 4 years. They do not spend the whole 4 years in Afghanistan, they basically work with the Afghan pilots, they bring them back so you are assigned to a similar task.

Special Forces has the same thing. You are assigned, but then you have been there for a certain amount of time, you come back to a pool that then it is the same pool that works very closely with the same units so there is a connectivity. So those are two examples we cite. We are actually going to be doing a Lessons Learned report on what are the best practices for doing that in with AID or State or DoD. How are you able—you do not want to send somebody over there for 18 years, that is impossible.

Mr. WRIGHT. Right.

Mr. SOPKO. My dad was drafted for World War II and he was there for the length of the war however long it lasted, but that is

a little different. But there is a way to do that so you do not lose that connectivity, you do not lose that experience, you do not lose that connection with this Afghan unit, and you work together and that Afghan feels closer to you, the American advisor, than he does to the Taliban.

Mr. WRIGHT. And I want to pick up on something Mr. Yoho was talking about earlier and that is changes in administration. And I am not asking you to judge the administrations or their policies, but we have had three Presidents during this time, both parties. To what extent does a change in administration hamper our ability to, in terms of the reconstruction efforts?

Mr. SOPKO. I have not really seen that as a problem.

Mr. WRIGHT. OK.

Mr. SOPKO. But when the new administration, the Trump Administration, came in they did a policy review we participated at and they actually were very responsive to our bringing information to their attention. A lot of the career people do not change, so obviously we are dealing with them. The Ambassadors do not change. The AID people out there do not change, so I do not see that as a problem.

Mr. WRIGHT. OK.

Mr. SOPKO. We did not really see much of a difference between the Bush Administration to the Obama Administration in that. That we have not seen as a problem.

Mr. WRIGHT. OK. My last question has to do with Iraq and based on your experience, to what extent did the war in Iraq prevent us from completing what we needed to complete in Afghanistan?

Mr. SOPKO. Well, again I have not looked at the warfighting side. Remember, we have spent $132 billion on reconstruction. We have spent close to 700 billion on the warfighting in Afghanistan. So all I can tell you is when we did an analysis on the train, advise, assist and on the reconstruction, what everybody told us was when the focus turned on Iraq we lost interest in a lot of the key issues in Afghanistan. That is all I can tell you.

And I—other than that——

Mr. WRIGHT. Would that include the establishment of civil governments?

Mr. SOPKO. Yes, to some extent.

Mr. WRIGHT. OK, great. Thank you and I yield back.

Mr. SOPKO. Yes.

Mr. CASTRO [presiding]. Thank you, Representative Wright.

Ami Bera.

Mr. BERA. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

So $132 billion on reconstruction, we have spent more on Afghanistan than we spent on the whole Marshall Plan rebuilding.

Mr. SOPKO. That is correct, sir.

Mr. BERA. After World War II, so it is pretty amazing. And when I think about that I think some of it is when we approached Europe, we had similar cultures, similar, an understanding of Europe, similar forms of government, et cetera, so that probably contributed to some of that success.

And it does seem evident from your answers and from what I have looked at, we do not have that same understanding of the values, culture, et cetera, in Afghanistan and that probably

foundationally, is one of the things that has led us to be not so efficient. I think you stated or Mr. Yoho stated our goal is to define lasting peace. But the problem is how we define lasting peace may not be how the Afghans define lasting peace. How would you say they define lasting peace?

Mr. SOPKO. I think I would use, probably, the Webster's—well, it is, will the gains that the Afghans have made continue in the future? So the women's rights, the rule of law, some of the gains they have made on corruption, I mean the question is, is will a peace treaty just end up into civil war again.

Mr. BERA. Right.

Mr. SOPKO. So its sustainability of any of the gains, and we have made some gains over the 18 years, the Afghans have made some improvements, will those continue?

Mr. BERA. So then it behooves us on the committee and, certainly, the subcommittee I chair has jurisdiction over Afghanistan and it is an area that we are going to look at, so we should define what those gains are. We should define those parameters. But we should also, you know, Mr. Perry is not here, but none of us is bashing President Trump here, or any particular administration. Each administration has got some things right, but they have also got a lot wrong.

And we know the current administration wants to consider a withdrawal/drawdown in Afghanistan and probably will proceed in that direction. Congress should insert itself into this process and it does not have to be adversarial the message to the administration is work with us on this. And if we were to do that there probably is no peace process that does not involve the Taliban. They are not just going to disappear.

So if we accept that as a reality, then we have to think about the gains within that context. And it would be my sense that some of our interests are certainly in the counterterrorism space we do not want to see a resurgence of al-Qaida and so am I thinking about this correctly in terms of, well, what would that remaining force be on the counterterrorism side.

And then the last thing that I would think about and, you know, I would love for you to comment on is it is my sense that we have created a dependency in Afghanistan on U.S. dollars. And there is going to be a big hole that is left in the Afghan economy as we exit. How do we fill that hole? I mean, and now the complicating factor is regional dynamics as well.

Obviously the Afghans have a relationship with the Indians. The Indians have an economy that could step in there. The Pakistanis do not like the Indians much of—so the whole regional dynamics are challenging as well, and how do we create that conversation as we are drawing down to create some regional, you know, am I, I guess, am I thinking about this correctly in how to engage?

Mr. SOPKO. You are absolutely. And, Congressman, again, I would ask you to go back to our High-Risk List that we issued and I think you—these are the risks to that stable, lasting peace and one of them definitely is finances. The Afghan economy is abysmal. It is reality. Seventy-percent of their budget for their government comes from the United States taxpayer and the European taxpayers and whatever, and that is not going to change once you sign

peace. Now maybe the cost of the warfighting may change, but just because you sign peace with the Taliban does not mean you are going to have peace with ISIS or the other 30-some terrorist groups and the other warlords and gangs who are operating.

So you are going to have a cost. We have to face the reality there and try to work with them. But that is one of the biggest concerns we have in here because you also have to reintegrate. Let's assume it is a successful peace. You have 60,000 talib plus their families who have to be reintegrated. That costs money. Can the Afghans do that? No. We just had a major surrender of ISIS troops. I have seen no evidence that the Afghan Government has done anything to reintegrate those ISIS troops.

And, actually, if you talk to General Miller, you talk to our——

Mr. CASTRO. You will have to give the rest of it for the record. I have to move on to another Representative.

Mr. SOPKO. I am sorry. But I think those are the conditions.

Mr. BERA. OK. We will continue this conversation.

Mr. SOPKO. I am terribly sorry. I did not hear you. I apologize.

Mr. BERA. Right.

Mr. BURCHETT. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for that recognition. I am probably not as intellectual, but I will probably be more entertaining to you, so I appreciate the time.

And I do notice how important you are. Usually we have this whole line of people up here and they get their 5 minutes and then they tweet about it and go home. You are by yourself and then you turn around to the group behind you and then they take note of whatever you are saying and make notes of it. So they are doing an excellent job behind you. I do not know if you knew that or not.

I had a couple of questions, brother, and thank you for being here. Your father was a World War II veteran. My dad enlisted shortly after December 7th, so I appreciate—my momma flew an airplane during the war, so I appreciate you, brother, and I appreciate what you have said up here.

I have actually been listening and I had a couple of good questions here. Have you seen any evidence that foreign State actors have or are currently undermining U.S. reconstruction efforts and can you expand specifically on the role Pakistan is playing?

Mr. SOPKO. I have not seen any evidence of that of foreign State actions on reconstruction. And as for Pakistan's role, obviously there is a lot of reporting about their involvement with if they are supporting various terrorist groups, but that is not within my jurisdiction so I am not the best person. I would just be reporting on what read in the newspaper too.

Mr. BURCHETT. That is all right. And that is probably wrong, so I appreciate you saying that, brother.

Should the U.S. continue to fund the counternarcotic programs even though we have thrown nine billion dollars at the problem and it seems with little success? And I say that coming to you—I was a State legislator for 16 years. I was a county mayor. And I remember when our Attorney General Randy Nichols told me, talked about the price of brown tar heroin and when it became too high the opioid epidemic would explode, and he was a prophet on that. It did.

But I know that overseas the market is flowing in and out and I was just curious of your opinion on that.

Mr. SOPKO. Well, counternarcotics is the 800-pound gorilla in the room. It is the largest export from Afghanistan. It dwarfs the licit, the legal economy. It employs more people than are in the Afghan Army. So if you ignore it, you ignore it at your peril, particularly if we are talking about developing lasting peace.

You have peace with the Taliban, but what about the drug warlords who are probably more powerful than the Taliban? They corrupt the institution. They are recognized by the Afghan people as that and if we tolerate them or if we allow the Afghan Government to tolerate them, you kick the can down the street just so far and that is a problem. So I do not know if I answered the question, sir.

Mr. BURCHETT. Do you ever see—it seems like these folks, you know, we get a new regime in or whatever and the drug warlords just seem to transcend to the next one. Is that because of their, in its power or their cash-flow or is it a combination thereof?

Mr. SOPKO. I think it is a combination of it. And again, I do not want to downplay how difficult it is to fight drugs.

Mr. BURCHETT. Yes.

Mr. SOPKO. We have a problem here in the United States.

Mr. BURCHETT. A huge problem.

Mr. SOPKO. You could look at Mexico. You look at Colombia. You look at developed countries are having a problem with it. You put it into a country like Afghanistan, it dwarfs a lot of the other problems. The sad thing is, over the last 18 years drug usage in Afghanistan has skyrocketed. And I cannot remember and I can get back to you on the data on the United Nations, I think Afghanistan may have the highest addiction rate of any developing country now, but I can double check that. I may be wrong.

Mr. BURCHETT. If you could get back to me that would be great and no big deal. But thank you so much for being here. I yield back the remainder of my time, Mr. Chairman. Thank you.

Mr. CASTRO. Thank you, Representative. I would call on myself now. I am next in the lineup.

I want to ask you, Mr. Sopko, and, first of all, thank you for your testimony. I want to ask you about our diplomatic corps and the State Department and the efficacy of our diplomatic efforts. While the United States has continued to spend billions of dollars annually, we apparently did not invest enough in our Foreign Service Officers and diplomacy to train and retrain experts.

Given that we sought to achieve peace and development in Afghanistan, more military was not always the right answer. Whether rebuilding or negotiating with the Taliban, personnel within the State Department, of course, is of the utmost importance. So here are my questions for you. What can be done to empower and strengthen the diplomatic corps?

Mr. SOPKO. I think, first of all, is I think you hit a right point on empowering and strengthening. They are essential. The problem in Afghanistan is the Ambassador has been, it is sort of de facto, his role as the senior U.S. Government official has been downplayed by the fact that there is a military officer sitting across the street.

Mr. CASTRO. What I was going to ask you about, about the interplay between——

Mr. SOPKO. He has more money.

Mr. CASTRO. Right. And the interplay between our military folks that are there and the diplomatic folks that are there.

Mr. SOPKO. The problem is that the State Department, I think you have hit it on the head, is underfunded. USAID is underfunded in comparison to the military. We are fighting a war in Afghanistan, and I am not saying we should not fund General Miller and RS the way we are doing it. But I am just saying is you cannot ignore the diplomats; you cannot ignore USAID.

You particularly saw this at the PRTs and at the regional groups when we set up, we were supposed to be AID and State and the military out there in the region. Well, military all showed up. They had the money. They had the manpower. They had the CERP funds. Where were the State and AID people? There were not enough of them to go around. And that is a problem.

I am old school. Development should be done by development experts. Those are diplomats and AID officials. They should not be done by the U.S. military. And we highlight, when we give that task to the U.S. military it almost automatically fails.

Mr. CASTRO. And that segues right into the next question that I wanted to ask you. Why does the military appear to be at the forefront of nation building in Afghanistan rather than the State Department or USAID, especially in light of the fact that this has been going on now for 18 years? So there has been plenty of opportunity to make course corrections, why do you think this is?

Mr. SOPKO. Because we have emphasized the warfighting and we have given short shrift to development and reconstruction. And the military has the weapons and they have the manpower and they have the money.

Mr. CASTRO. And what does that say or what does the portend for when our presence, our military presence is no longer there at some point?

Mr. SOPKO. It is a big issue. It is one of those risks you face. Because, for example, our military assistance program has been run by the military. We have trained the Afghans to deal with the military. They have not been trained to deal through the normal embassy functions, so there are some serious problems here and it is an area I think Congress needs to look at.

Mr. CASTRO. Thank you, Mr. Sopko.

I am going to go now to Mr. Levin from Michigan.

Mr. LEVIN. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Sopko, thank you for your public service, I really appreciate it, and for coming here today. SIGAR interviewees indicated that politics was partly to blame for the sheer amount of money poured into Afghanistan even as money from prior years was left unspent, and officials made clear that Afghanistan did not have the capacity to put so much money to proper use.

Apparently, policymakers claimed, "The political signal by a budget reduction at a turning point in the war effort would adversely affect overall messaging and indirectly reconstruction efforts on the ground. The articulation of goals for the purpose of

budgeting and programming was largely secondary to the political implications of budgeting."

In short, it seems like short-term political expediency was prioritized over long-term effective policy. No one wanted to support budget cuts and risk being blamed if things went badly. In your view, to what extent were budgeting decisions in Afghanistan made due to political expediency?

Mr. SOPKO. We have not looked at that. I think we have—because it really goes beyond my mandate, but that issue has come up of just too much money sloshing around and the motivation was to spend it and that led to a lot of the problems, but we have never looked at it back on this side.

Mr. LEVIN. Well, so here you are testifying before Congress and I really want to get your advice about what we can do here to insulate the budgeting and policymaking processes from political pressures when it comes to matters of war and peace or, just narrowly speaking, this war and peace in Afghanistan. Maybe to put it another way, how do we keep this from happening that we are spending much more, we are sending much more money than people on the ground think is appropriate?

I mean it is a big problem when we have domestic priorities here and peaceful priorities here that we need to take care of our babies and our pre-K kids, we need to educate them, we need to be able to afford our infrastructure.

Mr. SOPKO. Congressman, the best answer I can have for that is having more hearings like this where you bring not just me, you bring in somebody from AID, State, and DoD to explain and justify their budget and explain not just the—talk about the inputs and outputs, but what is the outcome.

And I go back to why some of you may have wondered why did I attach all of those letters from 2013 when I asked the SecDef, SecState, and AID administrator what are your ten best successes and what were your ten worst failures and why. I firmly believe that if they had honestly answered those questions, we would not be here today because what they would have done is it would force them to answer the question, why are we spending nine billion dollars on narcotics if it is a failure? They would answer the question, why are we spending $2.3 million bringing in rare Italian goats from Italy to develop the goat industry in Afghanistan over 6 months? They would have been forced to look at what—well, that is why we talk about racking and stacking.

So, Congressman, take a look at those letters we sent and many of those letters and what we are asking are the same questions you should be asking. I cannot answer those, but if you want to stop the hemorrhage of money to a place like Afghanistan it has got to start by asking people not to talk about inputs, do not bring somebody in here from AID who only talks about how much money he has gotten, or outputs how many kids he says they are training in Afghanistan, but what is the outcome? Are any of those kids still in school?

Mr. LEVIN. But in the brief time I have left, I mean you have had multiple Lessons Learned reports, right, where SIGAR identified that the approach and programs that the U.S. used to achieve Stated goals were not properly tailored to the Afghan context as you

are talking about here with goats from Italy and so forth. What contributed to this gap? What lesson do you take from reading all these letters, the gap between what the U.S. is supporting and what the Afghans needed on the ground?

Mr. CASTRO. Do you want to take 15 seconds to answer that?

Mr. SOPKO. I think I go back to the institutional hubris and mendacity that I talked about. We have incentivized lying to Congress, and by that, I mean the whole incentive is to show success and to ignore the failure. And when there is too much failure, classify it or do not report it.

Congress has to weigh in and say, hold it, we want to know the truth as gory as it is. Reconstruction takes a long time. You cannot do it in 6 months. You cannot do it in 9 months. You probably cannot do it in one administration. So if you wanted to help the Afghans, it is the long haul. Eighteen——

Mr. CASTRO. Thank you.

Mr. SOPKO. OK, that is—I am sorry.

Mr. LEVIN. Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I yield back.

Mr. CASTRO. Thank you. Yes.

Representative Connolly.

Mr. CONNOLLY. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

And welcome back——

Mr. SOPKO. Good to see you, sir.

Mr. CONNOLLY [continuing]. Mr. Sopko, and thank you for your work. I mean, frankly, that press table ought to be filled to overflowing. The story about Afghanistan and the United States' military and economic assistance to that country really deserves the kind of scrutiny you have been trying to provide and get attention to. It is shocking in some ways that the story you are telling has so little interest by the media, the public, Congress itself. We have provided at least $132 billion in development assistance that is of dubious value. Is that a fair——

Mr. SOPKO. Correct.

Mr. CONNOLLY [continuing]. Conclusion? Imagine, $132 billion.

And if I understand it, and I do not want to overstate it, almost all of the systems put in place are designed to avoid measuring progress, failure and success, and, for that matter, even accountability. So, for example, you earlier testified there are almost no metrics for how are we doing, did it work? If that did not work, let's try something else.

You cannot—and when we have metrics, they classify them so the public and the Congress and others actually cannot access them; is that true?

Mr. SOPKO. That was my—basically, I was talking about the military where the bulk of the 132 billion has been spent, right.

Mr. CONNOLLY. Speaking of the military, in the stabilization report you talked about the fact that in a sense the military stifled, suppressed USAID by bulldozing the agency into a clear, hold, build strategy and demanded that AID, despite misgivings, implement a cash-for-work program despite AID's protests as well as misgivings; is that true?

Mr. SOPKO. That is correct.

Mr. CONNOLLY. How does such a thing happen?

Mr. SOPKO. Well.

Mr. CONNOLLY. How did AID lose its independence of judgment? After all, it is the agency in the Federal Government with the main expertise and development assistance, not the Pentagon.

Mr. SOPKO. Yes, I cannot fully answer that other than to say that who you give the money to, and I suppose who you give the guns to, really calls the shots, but it is who you give the money to. If there is only one AID person at the table and there is 23 guys and gals wearing green suits, I think if there is a vote you know who is going to win.

Mr. CONNOLLY. You talked earlier, passionately, about the problems with the longest war in American history and our engagement in reconstruction and you used two words that really struck me: hubris and mendacity. Almost sounds like a potential title for a novel. We had Advice and Consent, the modern version is going to be called Hubris and Mendacity.

And I want to give you an opportunity to give us some examples of each that affected directly our efforts in Afghanistan. After all, the stakes, we invaded Afghanistan after 9/11. We worked with local militias to overthrow the Taliban and to try to expel and eliminate the presence of al-Qaida. This was a momentous decision with very high stakes for America directly. And here we are well over a decade later and we do not seem to have done a very good job of meeting any kind of objective, including a stable government accepted by the people.

So can you just give us some examples of hubris and especially mendacity?

Mr. SOPKO. Well, I think we have referred to, in my statement I talk about some of the statements made by AID about the great success on life expectancy. It was statistically impossible to double the life expectancy of the time given. I think it is a combination of hubris and mendacity that anybody can do that. I mean the next thing you know is we are going to be walking on water on an AID program.

The education where we claimed millions of children were in school and AID knew that the data was bad but they still reported it as if those millions of children, is that hubris? Is that mendacity? Probably a combination of both. I actually think the people on the ground thought they were doing a great job. They just never looked at all the data and they were not going to explain that the data was faulty.

You look at some of the successes we claimed about the power grid—I am running out of the time and the chairman is strong. So, I mean those are some of the examples. I am happy to give you a lot more of those examples.

Mr. CASTRO. Thank you.

Mr. CONNOLLY. I would just say shades of Vietnam.

Mr. SOPKO. True.

Mr. CASTRO. Representative Allred.

Mr. ALLRED. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I was in Afghanistan over the Thanksgiving holiday and while we were there we had a chance to meet with our military and State Department leaders. And I met a young Army captain who was a West Point grad and also a football player and he was tasked with training the next generation of Afghan military leaders. And he

was tired when we met because he had been out the night before leading a raid, which we are doing every single night, degrading the Taliban's ability, al-Qaida, and ISIS elements as well. And I have often thought about that captain, especially as we heard the news of the two service members who were killed this weekend, and wondered if we are serving him as well as he is serving us, as well as many of our men and women in conflict are serving us.

And I want to thank you for your work. I think this is one of the best parts of our democracy is that we can be critical of ourselves and that we can take a critical eye to our commitments and say what are we doing wrong and what can we do better. I am not here to point fingers. There are multiple administrations involved. We all know how long and how much money we put into this.

But one of my questions for you is that over the years you have released a number of overarching recommendations for various parts of the government, I want to know how receptive you found the agencies involved to your recommendations. I think I read that 13 of them have been adopted; is that correct? And maybe tell us what you think is standing in the way of some of those recommendations being adopted.

Mr. SOPKO. Well, that is in regard to, I believe we had about 130 recommendations from the first seven Lessons Learned report. Overall, from our audits and inspections, about 86 percent to 90 percent of our recommendations are adopted. The reason for the smaller number, I believe, is because many of our recommendations are conditional on events occurring such as peace or the next—many of our recommendations are if you do this again, you should do the following. So it is hard to say they have complied because it has not happened, so—but we are happy to report back on that.

Mr. ALLRED. Yes.

Mr. SOPKO. The Lessons Learned Program have been very well received by the military, the State Department, and USAID. Particularly, the military under General Dunford when he was the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, he was very receptive and we are using it—we have been asked to do it for training for them as well as the Foreign Service Institute.

Mr. ALLRED. Oay. Well, I know that this has occurred before, but while I was there, we were told that a new generation of Afghan military leaders were emerging particularly in their Special Forces and they were leading most of the kinetic fighting and doing actually a decent job. And I was wondering if you could provide you and your agency's opinion on the generation of leadership that is coming through the Afghan military, whether or not they will be able to stand up when we stand down.

And I know that some of that is a military consideration that is outside of your purview, but from the reviews you have done and over the years of your experience how you believe that is progressing.

Mr. SOPKO. Well, Congressman, it is a good point. It is in our purview because it is part of the train, advise, and assist. So as for the Special Forces, I think that is a success story. Our training and advising and assisting the Afghan Special Forces is a success. We highlight it, we continue to highlight it. I can give you more detail

if I had the time and happy to brief you on it. Just as I said with the air program, we all are hoping for a new generation of officers, senior officers in the Afghan military. I know General Nicholson spoke that this is what we were hoping for. A lot of those officers were old Soviet-trained officers and they finally got rid of them. They retired and they pensioned them off.

But it is too early to tell. We are talking about the law that pensioned all these older officers off was about less than a year old or maybe older, we do not know. But the problem is that below that corps level, maybe below that officer level you have a lot of corruption, a lot of incompetency and it is seriously hurting the Afghan military.

The biggest problem is not casualties, it is desertions. It is people disappearing or it is people who never existed and we are paying their salaries. So we all have to respect the Afghans for doing what they are doing with the current situation. It is a difficult situation. Many of them are not being paid or fed. They have to buy their own food from their officers who steal it from them.

Mr. ALLRED. Yes. Thank you. I yield back.

Mr. CASTRO. Representative Spanberger.

Ms. SPANBERGER. Good afternoon, Mr. Sopko. Thank you for being here. I, like many of my colleagues, recently visited our armed forces in Afghanistan and had the opportunity to meet with many of our men and women who are working on training special forces and Afghan pilots. So it is good as we are discussing the what is working and what is not to hear some of your discussion related to those two success stories.

And you have talked a lot today about the fact that we are spending too much money and the waste and abuse of U.S. taxpayer dollars that we have seen in Afghanistan. And as we are moving toward the congressional appropriations process, I was wondering if you might dive into that question a bit more of where are we spending too much money? Where are there places where we are witnessing these abuses, and are there things that we as Members of Congress could prioritize or should consider as we move toward appropriations to ensure that we are not seeing the continued abuse in the way that we have witnessed over the past decade or more?

Mr. SOPKO. I cannot give you specific recommendations, but what I would go back to is look at the justification for some of these programs. What has been the outcome? Ask the agencies, what has been the outcome of funding, let's say, counternarcotics. What has been the outcome of funding rule of law, et cetera. So I think that is probably the only way I can help you on that. I cannot tell you for sure.

I think—let's look—and this is what we did when we briefed General Dunford. Let's look at the successes and see if we cannot duplicate that in, let's say, the rest of the Afghan military. And we were very hopeful that we were going to do that and they proposed and I think they still have these brigades—excuse me—security forces assistance brigades where they were trying to do that. But I am not absolutely certain if the latest brigade has gone out.

Yes, it has gone out. That may be an area you want to look in. I am happy to give you and any member—we can brief you on more

particular specific issues. I am sorry I cannot answer in more detail.

Ms. SPANBERGER. No, that is a really great starting point for those of us as we move into the appropriations season, so I appreciate that.

And one next piece, as we are kind of zooming out from the challenges that we have seen in Afghanistan, one of the main findings of SIGAR's Lessons Learned studies is that the war that we were conducting in Iraq did hamper some of our efforts in Afghanistan.

And so my question is, from the experiences that you have examining what has happened in Afghanistan and looking at the range of national security challenges that we see today, do you have concerns about escalating tensions in the region particularly with Iran and how that may impact our efforts in Afghanistan moving forward?

Mr. SOPKO. I think any security issue in that region causes concern and it is concern not only for the security of our people there, remember, Afghanistan has a border with Iran. There is a lot of connections with Iran, so I think we have to be cautious about that. It is even difficult to get people in and out of Afghanistan. It is a landlocked country now and I have to deal with that because I have people over there. I was over there at Christmastime and I do not know if I could have made that trip now that I did back then.

But I cannot really speak because there is a broader issue of what is going on with us in Iran that I really do not know, but obviously that region is something we have to focus on. And, ultimately, the success of peace there is going to have to involve the region. If you read the book, The Great Game, which is a fascinating book by a British historian on it, what he says about Afghanistan is nobody wants to be there, but nobody wants anybody else there. And I think that is the same thing that is going on now.

And so every one of those countries does not want anybody else there in that—but we are there now.

Ms. SPANBERGER. But we are there. And one last question in the time remaining. You mentioned corruption and incompetency that exists at different levels in the military. Are you saying that in particular facets of where we are spending money and particular places where we are working with Afghanistan that there is a greater level of corruption and incompetency in one place or another, and would you point us in a particular place to have concerns or see room for improvement?

Mr. SOPKO. Fuel and payroll. Fuel is liquid gold. We still do not have a good way to protect it. One of the former CSTC-A commanders said that over 50 percent of the fuel we buy never reaches its ultimate base. I think that is something, and we are working very closely with them. The other one is payroll. Even after 18 years, we do not have the payroll system right and we do not even know how many Afghans we have been paying for.

Mr. CASTRO. Thank you.

Ms. SPANBERGER. Thank you. I yield back.

Mr. CASTRO. Representative Houlahan.

Ms. HOULAHAN. Thank you, Chairman.

Thank you so much for coming here today. I actually really want to commend you for being so frank. This is only my first year here, a year and 2 weeks in, but you are, literally, the first person who I have seen in front of us on any of my committees that I felt was being honest and fully honest and not just waiting for the right question to not answer it. So thank you so much for that.

Mr. SOPKO. Thank you.

Ms. HOULAHAN. Really, genuinely. And so given that you have effectively testified and talked about for the last couple hours the fact that we have basically failed all of our objectives in Afghanistan over the last 17 years or so, 18 years, can you reflect on what the implications are for efforts that we have in other unstable countries and whether there is any, I guess, lessons to be learned or cautionary tales that we should be aware of?

Mr. SOPKO. First of all, I just want to qualify not everything has failed. There have been some successes. There are more women in the economy. There are more women going to school. There are more kids going to school.

Ms. HOULAHAN. So we have an F-plus.

Mr. SOPKO. Yes. Well, D-minus, I think, is a good thing.

Ms. HOULAHAN. D-minus.

Mr. SOPKO. I think it is hard to summarize 130 recommendations in all these seven reports, but I think small may be better than large. Definitely deal with corruption, early on. Before you go in, also know where you are going in. I mean people were designing and working programs in Afghanistan like they were walking into Norway. This is not Norway. This is not Kansas, sometimes I felt I was out of a movie and this does not look like Kansas, Toto.

Our staffers were, not our staffers, but some of the people and, unfortunately, a lot were with AID, it was unbelievable where they thought they were. So train our people before we send them in—they are honest people, but they just do not know where they are—and develop an understanding of that community. Know who the warlords are and who their brother and who their seventh cousin is because you may not want to give the contract to him, but you just gave it to his cousin. We have that capability. Our intelligence people know how to do that. But if they are not told to do that and we do not follow them and follow their advice, we are going to fail.

I mean one of the other things is we have a tendency allowing counterterrorism to trump countercorruption, and when you do that you still have a security problem.

Am I over or under?

Ms. HOULAHAN. No, you are under.

Mr. SOPKO. Okay.

Ms. HOULAHAN. But I do have one more question, which you spoke——

Mr. SOPKO. You are strict.

Ms. HOULAHAN. You spoke a little bit about the importance of calendar versus condition-based timelines or vice versa. Can you give us a little bit more detail about why you thought that our strategy in Afghanistan was not successful because of improper selection of those timelines?

Mr. SOPKO. Well, it just basically goes back to decisions should be made on the reality on the facts on the ground, not an election cycle over here or a number pulled out of the air.

Ms. HOULAHAN. How do we make a difference in that we are driven by calendars and we were driven by election cycles and is there some changing funding or sources or timelines that we can be helpful with?

Mr. SOPKO. I think it is having an educated electorate and an educated Congress to say, look, we are not going to put a timeline on it because we know it didn't work in Afghanistan, or it did not work in this other and that will not work. I think it is being honest to ourselves that development takes a long time.

Hopefully that is one lesson that we have learned from Afghanistan is it takes a long time to try to build a government that is not corrupt or that can keep the bad guys out, the terrorists. And if we think we can do it in 1 year or 9 months or 2 years, we are smoking something. And I cannot—you are asking me how do we—this is common sense. So, I do not know if that answers the question. I am sorry. It could be just after 8 years of this.

Ms. HOULAHAN. Thank you. And I only have about a half a minute left and I just do want to conclude with an appreciation particularly of your emphasis on the fact that a lot of information in the classified environment is not available to us here in the Congress and that we certainly canot provide oversight or fulfill the responsibilities that we have if we do not have access to that information.

Mr. SOPKO. Well, it may be available to you, but it is going to be in a closed environment and it is going to be very difficult for your staff to work with it. And, more importantly, it is going to be very difficult for the American people to know what is going on. They are the ones paying for this and they have a right to know.

Ms. HOULAHAN. Agreed, and thank you, sir. I yield back.

Mr. CASTRO. Thank you.

Representative Malinowski.

Mr. MALINOWSKI. Thank you, Mr. Sopko. Great to see you. Thank you for your work and for your honesty. And, of course, we have been focused over the last minutes or hours of what has gone wrong in Afghanistan and there is a great deal to talk about there. In my view there are several fundamental mistakes, many of which you have touched upon.

First of all, in the early years the decision to try to do this on the cheap, the diversion of the war in Iraq which then required our people in Afghanistan to rely on the power brokers who are already there who happen to be violent, brutal, corrupt warlords, and under those circumstances building the basic system of justice that was always the Afghan people's No. 1 demand, proved impossible.

And then as you just put it very clearly, even after that, even after we recommitted, we consistently prioritized counterterrorism over countercorruption. The result of that was the terrorism flourished because terrorism is in many ways a response in Afghanistan, or least support for groups like the Taliban is a response to anger about corruption.

And then just the consistent promising of the American people that this could be done in a one-or 2-year timeframe and not being

honest about what it would take, but that is where we have been. There have also been gains. Your job is to look at the problems, but Afghanistan today is a vastly different country as I am sure you would acknowledge from the utterly failed state that it was in 2001. People do not want to go back. Anyone who has been to Afghanistan or who knows Afghans knows that.

And so let me ask you looking forward, what happens to this work that you are evaluating and urging us to improve if we precipitously withdraw, if our military were to perhaps in response to a tweet from somebody, just get up and leave?

Mr. SOPKO. We have not done an exact study on it, but just based upon all of our work and what people are telling me, and I was just there over Christmas and I have gone four times a year since I started this job, if the military, our military precipitously leaves, and I do not know how you define precipitously, but leaves very quickly, the Afghan military is going to have a hard time fighting on their own without our support. We give a lot of—we do not do the bulk of the fighting, they do it, but we do a lot of support, particularly their air. We do a lot of support of that and with the Special Forces, so you would have a very bloody stalemate continuing but probably declining.

If we precipitously cut funding, my prediction, and it is just my prediction, we have not done a study on it, the Afghan Government would fall.

Mr. MALINOWSKI. And do you see that the perception that this might happen is having an impact on choices that Afghans are making? Have we seen, for example, capital flight? People deciding, you know what, I am just going to take my money. I am going to sell my property and my business, move my money to another country, send my kids to another country because I do not have confidence that this support is going to continue over the long term?

Mr. SOPKO. Again, we have not done a study on it, but from the Afghans we have talked to, and again I have people there who have been there for years and we have dealt with people are moving their families out of the country, I assume money is going with it. We have seen a bit of an uptick in theft of fuel and all of that and that is what happened the last time when we thought there was a drawdown, everybody is stealing what they can before we leave. So that we have seen, so that is a problem.

Mr. MALINOWSKI. Do you have any confidence that there can be a peace agreement with the power sharing with the Taliban that would enable us to continue honest, corruption-free development work in Afghanistan?

Mr. SOPKO. You know, it would be difficult, but it is something you are hoping the Taliban also cares about. But that is the difficulty of this negotiation of the Taliban are involved in a lot of the illegality. Beyond killing us, they are involved in the drug trade, so what happens after that? They are involved in extortions, kidnappings, stuff like that. It is a full-service criminal organization on top of being a terrorist, so I do not know how that is going to work.

Mr. MALINOWSKI. Yes. Well, I would conclude by saying this is obviously difficult and complicated, but I think in all these years

there is one thing that we have not tried in Afghanistan. We have tried just about everything else, but the one thing we have not tried is to simply say we are committed, we are not leaving.

And I wonder what impact it would have if we were to simply say to the Afghan people what we have said to the South Korean people, to the German people, to others that whatever the nature of our presence, we are not just going to pack up and leave. And I yield back. I think I am out of time, but.

Mr. SOPKO. I think I am out of time. Thank you.

Mr. CASTRO. Thank you.

Representative Titus.

Ms. TITUS. Thank you. As I have listened and read through some of the testimony, it seems to me a couple of things also stand out in addition to the excellent summary that was just given by Mr. Malinowski. One thing, just to use some of the jargon, instead of watering the green spots, we seem to keep rewarding bad behavior. Instead of helping those that are more secure, we keep investing in those are that are insecure, and why is that the case and how do we change that?

And the second thing is, our whole pattern seems to be just buying results. We will give you some money if you will do this. There was, I think you noticed, some religious leaders who adopted some attitudes toward women if we gave them a nice financial package. Once we have established that as our pattern, how do we break it? And are there any other kinds of incentives that are noncash that we could be using so that the commitment to the kind of things we are trying to encourage is not just short term or superficial but is really more ingrained?

Mr. SOPKO. Answering your first question about this timeline, almost of—well, this, I forget how you phrased it on——

Ms. TITUS. Watering the green spots instead of——

Mr. SOPKO. Yes. A lot of that it comes from our stabilization report when we looked at it and this was driven by the timeline of troop withdrawal, that our troops there wanted to try to get as much of the territory free of Taliban before they knew they were leaving. And that was short-sighted because they did a clear a lot of places but there was nothing to come in behind it. And that is what was driving that train, that is having timelines issued from here not based on the reality on the ground.

As for the second question, and I do not know what you are referring to on the specifics of that, but what it is, is conditionality and we are firm believers in conditionality and conditioning it in many ways. One is a carrot, the other is a stick, but we call it smart conditionality. So one thing is to say if you do this I will give you more money. The other thing is, well, if you do it I am going to take something away from you. So that is knowing who you are dealing with. So if you know the people on the other side want their kids to go to school at NYU, well, they have got to get a visa. They have got to get into the United States, and that is the conditionality you can give that is not exactly monetary. I will give you a classic example.

We rebuilt the office of, I believe it was this Minister of Defense, maybe a Minister of Interior because he wanted an office as big as the Minister of Interior. So we went in and built him an office. He

did not like it and totally ripped it out and rebuilt another one so it was comparable, so they feel happy, they look the same and all that. We spent hundreds of thousands, not a lot, but hundreds of thousands of dollars.

I remember asking the CSTC-A commander after we had done that—we built an office, ripped everything out, spent U.S. taxpayers' dollars to make it look pretty again so he was happy—I said, what did you get for that? He had no idea what I was talking about. I said, you just did a favor for him, what did you get? Did you get him, maybe he is going to fight corruption in some area?

That is smart conditionality. That is knowing who you are dealing with. And that is, I think, a way we can proceed and we have not really done that too much. As a matter of fact, we are right now asking for what type of conditions we have imposed on the funds to the Afghan military. And if I am not mistaken, they are refusing, I believe, to give us their current conditions. By "they" I mean our U.S. Government officials.

Ms. TITUS. I serve on the House Democracy Partnership and Afghanistan has been a partner since 2016, but we have a very difficult time engaging with them and I think it goes back to the point that you made that early on you said successful reconstruction is incompatible with continuing insecurity, and that is just one little example of how very true that is.

Mr. SOPKO. Correct.

Ms. TITUS. Well, thank you very much for your testimony. I yield back.

Mr. CASTRO. Thank you, Representative.

Mr. Sopko, that concludes our witnesses. Do you have any closing comments or statement you would like to make?

Mr. SOPKO. Other than to thank you very much and thank the chairman and all the members for giving us this time. This is very helpful, I think, for not only you, I hope, but also for the American people.

Mr. CASTRO. Well, thank you to our Members of Congress and also to our witness, Mr. Sopko.

Mr. Sopko, thank you for your candor and for your hard work on these issues. The hearing is concluded and the committee stands adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 12:21 p.m., the committee was adjourned.]

APPENDIX

FULL COMMITTEE HEARING NOTICE
COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
WASHINGTON, DC 20515-6128

Eliot L. Engel (D-NY), Chairman

January 15, 2020

TO: MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS

You are respectfully requested to attend an OPEN hearing of the Committee on Foreign Affairs to be held in Room 2172 of the Rayburn House Office Building (and available live on the Committee website at https://foreignaffairs.house.gov/):

DATE: Wednesday, January 15, 2020

TIME: 10:00 a.m.

SUBJECT: U.S. Lessons Learned in Afghanistan

WITNESS: Mr. John F. Sopko
Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction

By Direction of the Chairman

The Committee on Foreign Affairs seeks to make its facilities accessible to persons with disabilities. If you are in need of special accommodations, please call 202/225-5021 at least four business days in advance of the event, whenever practicable. Questions with regard to special accommodations in general (including availability of Committee materials in alternative formats and assistive listening devices) may be directed to the Committee.

COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS

MINUTES OF FULL COMMITTEE HEARING

Day *Wednesday* **Date** *01/15/2020* **Room** *2172 RHOB*

Starting Time *10:07 a.m.* **Ending Time** *12:20 p.m.*

Recesses *0* (____to ____) (____to ____) (____to ____) (____to ____) (____to ____) (____to ____)

Presiding Member(s)
Chairman Engel, Representative Sherman, Representative Castro

Check all of the following that apply:

Open Session ☑
Executive (closed) Session ☐
Televised ☑

Electronically Recorded (taped) ☑
Stenographic Record ☑

TITLE OF HEARING:
"U.S. Lessons Learned in Afghanistan"

COMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT:
See attached.

NON-COMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT:

HEARING WITNESSES: Same as meeting notice attached? Yes ☑ **No** ☐
(If "no", please list below and include title, agency, department, or organization.)

STATEMENTS FOR THE RECORD: *(List any statements submitted for the record.)*
QFR - Castro, Omar, Phillips

TIME SCHEDULED TO RECONVENE _____
or
TIME ADJOURNED *12:20 p.m.*

Full Committee Hearing Coordinator

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS

FULL COMMITTEE ATTENDANCE

PRESENT	*MEMBER*
X	Eliot L. Engel, NY
X	Brad Sherman, CA
	Gregory W. Meeks, NY
	Albio Sires, NJ
X	Gerald E. Connolly, VA
X	Theodore E. Deutch, FL
	Karen Bass, CA
X	William Keating, MA
X	David Cicilline, RI
X	Ami Bera, CA
X	Joaquin Castro, TX
X	Dina Titus, NV
X	Adriano Espaillat, NY
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X	Dean Phillips, MN
	Ilhan Omar, MN
X	Colin Allred, TX
X	Andy Levin, MI
X	Abigail Spanberger, VA
X	Chrissy Houlahan, PA
X	Tom Malinowski, NJ
X	David Trone, MD
X	Jim Costa, CA
	Juan Vargas, CA
	Vicente Gonzalez, TX

PRESENT	*MEMBER*
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	Brian J. Mast, FL
	Francis Rooney, FL
X	Brian K. Fitzpatrick, PA
	John Curtis, UT
X	Ken Buck, CO
X	Ron Wright, TX
X	Guy Reschenthaler, PA
X	Tim Burchett, TN
X	Greg Pence, IN
X	Steve Watkins, KS
X	Michael Guest, MS

RESPONSES TO QUESTIONS SUBMITTED FOR THE RECORD

Questions for the Record from Representative Joaquin Castro
U.S. Lessons Learned in Afghanistan
January 15, 2020

Question:

"Based on the lessons learned, what can Congress do to ensure deficiencies in Afghan reconstruction are detected and swiftly corrected?"

Answer:

Mr. Sopko: First, oversight must be mission critical to any successful reconstruction and development program in Afghanistan. Congress may wish to consider requiring DOD, State, USAID, and other relevant executive agencies to ensure adequate oversight, monitoring, and evaluation efforts continue and not be dramatically reduced as part of right-sizing efforts by the Department of State and USAID at Embassy Kabul, or in the wake of a potential peace agreement. Adequate personnel must be allocated to oversee programs and projects, and they must have the ability to physically inspect, monitor, and evaluate those programs and projects.

Second, to ensure Congress and the taxpayers are properly apprised in a timely manner of significant events that pose a threat to the U.S. reconstruction mission in Afghanistan, Congress may wish to consider requiring all federal agencies operating in Afghanistan to provide reports to Congress disclosing risks to major reconstruction projects and programs, and disclosing important events or developments as they occur. These reports would be analogous to the reports publicly traded companies in the United States are now required to file with the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission to keep investors informed about "material events" (major events or developments that shareholders should know about).

Third, to better detect deficiencies in the reconstruction effort, Congress may wish to consider requiring U.S. government agencies supporting U.S. reconstruction missions to "rack and stack" their programs and projects by identifying their best and worst performing activities, so that Congress can more quickly identify whether and how to reallocate resources to those projects that are proving successful. The ambiguous responses to SIGAR's 2013 request of DOD, State, and USAID to identify their best and worst performing projects and programs in Afghanistan indicate that the agencies may not routinely engage in the honest self-evaluation necessary to determine what is working and what is not.

Question:

"In order to support the Afghan people in their aspirations for peace and prosperity, in advance of an eventual U.S. force drawdown, what recommendations do you have in supporting the Afghan national government in working independently of the United States?"

Answer:

Mr. Sopko: It is difficult to imagine a scenario in which the Afghan government, in its current form, will be capable of functioning independently. Donors currently finance more than half of the Afghan government's national budget and approximately 75% of total public expenditures. Although the U.S. is attempting to bolster Afghanistan's economy, current growth (2.9% in 2019) remains too low to provide the government with adequate revenues to cover the cost of both warfighting and development. Overall, Afghanistan will require at least $4.6 billion, and perhaps as much as $8.2 billion, of donor funding, per year, through 2024, according to the World Bank.

While there is no silver bullet that will immediately increase the Afghan government's economic independence, careful attention should be paid to post-peace-agreement security and development programs to ensure that they are both sustainable and nested within U.S. strategy and objectives for Afghanistan. The World Bank has published a post-peace economic development plan suggesting that an additional $5.2 billion in economic development funds may be required to consolidate and sustain a peace settlement. In deciding whether to commit funds to such a plan, Congress might consider several of its core aspects: (i) in its current form, the Bank's plan does not contemplate a serious departure from past programming, (ii) the plan focuses heavily on poverty reduction initiatives, and (iii) the plan proposes to significantly increase the reach of Afghan government-provided services.

While none of the plan's core characteristics is inherently invalid, they raise critical questions about efficacy, purpose, and sustainability. Before committing funds to this plan or to any other post-peace-agreement programming, Congress may want to ensure that implementing agencies can adequately answer the following questions originally presented by SIGAR in its January 2013 Quarterly Report to the United States Congress to help guide decision makers as they consider how best to use remaining reconstruction funds:

- Does the project or program make a clear and identifiable contribution to our national interests or strategic objectives?
- Do the Afghans want it and need it?
- Has it been coordinated with other U.S. implementing agencies, with the Afghan government, and with other international donors?
- Do security conditions permit effective implementation and oversight?
- Does it have adequate safeguards to detect, deter, and mitigate corruption?
- Do the Afghans have the financial resources, technical capacity, and political will to sustain it?
- Have implementing agencies established meaningful, measurable metrics for determining successful project outcomes?

Question:

"Given your experience and knowledge of State Department USAID programs and personnel, what recommendations do you have to cultivate expertise within the State Department and USAID in supporting our national priorities in Afghanistan, and what are the impediments to effectively accomplishing that goal?"

Answer:

Mr. Sopko: One way of addressing this problem would be for State and USAID to create a program modeled along the lines of the now-defunct DOD Afghanistan-Pakistan (AFPAK) Hands Program, which aimed to build expertise by having personnel make a four-year commitment with periodic rotations to Afghanistan. The agencies should also be given the resources to increase the numbers of contract management personnel.

SIGAR's lessons learned report on stabilization efforts makes additional recommendations for how Congress and the agencies can address this problem not only in Afghanistan, but in preparation for any contingency operation around the world.

Question:

"Given your work as SIGAR, what recommendations do you have to improve coordination between the military, diplomatic, and development personnel in pursuit of the reconstruction effort in Afghanistan?"

Answer:

Mr. Sopko: NATO's role as the lead organization for the train, advise, and assist mission improves international military coordination—but it also creates institutional impediments to U.S. interagency coordination. There is no established command and control relationship between the U.S. military, which reports through CENTCOM and NATO, and the U.S. embassy, which reports through the U.S. ambassador, the President's highest-ranking representative for U.S. foreign policy.

SIGAR recommends that the U.S. interagency needs to create a reconstruction and stabilization plan that clearly defines executive agency roles and responsibilities, with a system for sharing agency programs, activities, and priorities. This should include a common operating picture for all reconstruction activities, similar to the U.S. military's common operating picture for military operations. This document should clearly display each agency's programs, activities, and personnel locations, as well as program intent and resources.

In Afghanistan, DOD has dramatically more funding and resources than the civilian agencies. Because of this imbalance, DOD has routinely engaged in areas that are nominally the responsibility of civilian U.S. agencies. For example, U.S. military advisors work with the Afghan Ministry of Finance and Ministry of Health, both of which are traditionally within the

purview of State, USAID, and the Department of the Treasury. After a clear delineation of responsibilities that should be outlined in the interagency plan, civilian agencies must resource these missions with deployed staff.

In general, the worst problems with interagency coordination in Afghanistan were most apparent when reconstruction funding levels were much higher than they are now. With less pressure to spend and fewer time constraints on when to spend it, these stakeholders now have an opportunity to work together more effectively. But in future contingencies, it is likely that the problem of poor interagency coordination will occur again. For this reason, SIGAR recommended (and the interagency Stabilization Assistance Review agreed) that for all reconstruction missions in fragile states, State should lead, USAID should be the lead implementer, and DOD should support their efforts. But as noted above, State and USAID cannot lead an effort that they are not resourced to lead.

Question:

"Are there any State Department or USAID programs that have been particularly effective in pursuing U.S. development efforts in Afghanistan, and are there any best-practices from those programs that should be further explored?"

Answer:

Mr. Sopko: The economic growth that occurred in Afghanistan immediately after 2001 was largely the result of USAID's work in establishing policies and institutions in the areas of financial management, macroeconomic policy, banking system rehabilitation, currency conversion, and government revenue collection. While much of this work was hindered by inefficiency and corruption, these efforts nevertheless set the stage for further development. The best practices from these programs (notably, the Afghanistan Economic Governance Program and the Private Sector Strengthening Program) included collaboration with other donors and institutions such as the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. They also benefited from early implementation, when goodwill was high and entrenched interests hadn't had time to assert themselves.

While overall counternarcotics efforts in Afghanistan did not achieve success at a strategic or national level, SIGAR's counternarcotics lessons learned report identified some effective elements of various programs. For example, State's Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs developed a Performance Management Plan (PMP) in 2014 for its drug interdiction programs in Afghanistan which better measured how programs increased the interdiction capacity of Afghan counterdrug units. This was an improvement on previous PMPs, which mainly measured success by the amount of illegal drugs seized against the amount produced—a poor indicator of successful counterdrug law enforcement.

More broadly, U.S. efforts to stand up and mentor Afghan counterdrug units are a bright spot in the counternarcotics fight in Afghanistan. The Afghan Counter Narcotics Justice Center, National Interdiction Unit, Sensitive Investigative Unit, and Technical Investigative Unit have

been regarded as some of the most honest, capable units in Afghan law enforcement—even as insecurity and corruption in the wider justice system have constrained these units' effectiveness.

Question:

"How would you assess the uncertainty resulting from the failure of the recent peace talks through Special Envoy Zalmay Khalilzad in affecting reconstruction efforts in Afghanistan?"

Answer:

Mr. Sopko: SIGAR believes it is premature to consider the U.S.-Taliban peace talks a failure.

Despite the uncertainty, donors have begun preparing for post-peace reconstruction. The World Bank assumes that the Afghan government's security costs should decrease following an inclusive peace settlement. However, this assumption may not hold if an eventual inclusive peace settlement is not reached or is not enforced. The World Bank has also argued that the costs of civilian development aid would likely increase following a broader peace settlement as existing public services expand to previously inaccessible areas.

SIGAR has not observed significant changes to the U.S. foreign assistance approach to Afghanistan beyond a general overall decline in contributions. Donors appear to be largely in a holding pattern as they await peace developments.

Question:

"What has been the impact of the decision to exclude the Afghan government from negotiations? In your view, should this decision be reconsidered?"

Answer:

Mr. Sopko: One of the principal U.S. government objectives for the ongoing U.S.- Taliban talks has been the initiation of intra-Afghan negotiations inclusive of the Afghan government. U.S. Special Representative for Afghanistan Reconciliation Zalmay Khalilzad routinely briefs senior Afghan government officials and other Afghan political and civil society leaders on the status and purpose of the ongoing talks and solicits their input. The administration has said that the eventual U.S.-Taliban agreement will include conditions tied to progress in intra-Afghan negotiations.

Question:

"How have fluctuations in the U.S. troop presence affected the possibility of diplomatic progress towards a lasting peace over the course of the war?"

Answer:

Mr. Sopko: Arguably, the best opportunity for a diplomatically negotiated peace occurred at the very beginning of the Afghan conflict in 2001–2002, when the United States had only a few hundred U.S. military personnel in Afghanistan. At that time, Afghan fighters had scattered al-Qaeda and its Taliban supporters, a fledgling but hopeful Afghan government was being built, and remnants of the Taliban leadership knew that they had been firmly beaten. Taliban Amir Mullah Mohammad Omar submitted a letter of surrender to interim president Hamid Karzai and requested the terms of surrender and peace. However, the United States rebuffed President Karzai's attempt to negotiate peace with the Taliban.

Later, when U.S. troops were at their highest level in the 2010–2014 period, the United States did not appear to make more than tentative diplomatic efforts to broker peace with the Taliban.

More recently, President Trump's 2017 South Asia strategy sought to increase U.S. and Afghan military operations while maintaining a rather low U.S. troop presence, with the objective of forcing the Taliban into political reconciliation. Since that time, DOD has said that the only solution to the conflict is through a negotiated political settlement and that the presence of U.S. troops in the country and their implementation of DOD's military strategy support that aim. However, the Afghan government has not been party to the talks between the United States and the Taliban to date. Even if the United States manages to come to an agreement with the Taliban, a lasting peace will depend on the success of intra-Afghan peace talks that have not yet taken place.

Question:

"If a peace agreement is reached, how will the approach set out in the Stabilization Assistance Review contribute to addressing some of the challenges identified by SIGAR?"

Answer:

Mr. Sopko: SIGAR provided early input into the SAR, so the document is filled with analysis borrowed from early drafts of the SIGAR's lessons learned report on stabilization.

No matter what happens with peace talks, the stabilization approach may not be relevant. State's current Integrated Country Strategy says explicitly the U.S. embassy has moved away from stabilization. If the U.S. reaches a peace agreement with the Taliban, SIGAR would not expect that to change. At that point, USAID would not need to win hearts and minds in outlying areas, but simply to convince Afghans that an intra-Afghan peace agreement—that is, between the Afghan government and the Taliban-- would be good for them.

However, if USAID in Afghanistan were to begin stabilization efforts in contested areas again, the SAR would be helpful in several ways. For example, it acknowledges that intra-Afghan peace may not come quickly and that patience is critical; that to build a community's relationship with the Afghan government, smaller projects are better, especially when provided continuously over time; and that building out from secure areas is more likely to convince communities to support the government.

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Questions for the Record from Representative Dean Phillips
U.S. Lessons Learned in Afghanistan
January 15, 2020

Question:

"Thank you for your service, Special Inspector General. The job of the inspector general is not a glamorous one, but I would say that it is one of the most important jobs for keeping our government ethically and morally straight, no matter if the administration be a Democrat or a Republican one. Thank you for taking the time to come before the committee.

As part of the SIGAR "Lessons Learned" Interviews in the *Afghanistan Papers*, officials list "Unclear U.S. Goals," "Competing Priorities," and "Organizational Confusion" as reasons why are efforts in country have been less than successful. It seems to me like we have a strategy formulation and execution problem.

What can we as a Congress do to help revolutionize the national security strategy and its execution?"

Answer:

Mr. Sopko: The National Security Strategy is authored by the Executive Office of the President. Congress would have to work with the executive branch to convey its priorities for inclusion in the final document.

Question:

"From what you've seen in Afghanistan, have we entered an age where polarization has caused grand strategy to become non-existent?"

Answer:

Mr. Sopko: SIGAR is not in a position to comment on this question because a) SIGAR's jurisdiction is limited to the oversight of the reconstruction of a single country – Afghanistan, and b) as an apolitical, independent Office of Inspector General, SIGAR cannot comment on how political discourse may or may not be affecting foreign policy decision-making and planning.

Question:

"How do we combat the "End Date Paradox?" that caught President Obama? Meaning, how do we, as Members, hold administrations accountable while being as transparent as we can with the American public and without ceding ground to our enemies?"

Answer:

Mr. Sopko: One of the challenges the U.S. faces in Afghanistan is that U.S. stabilization and reconstruction activities have been conflated with a U.S. military presence in Afghanistan. Policymakers confront a false dilemma: a choice between "bringing our soldiers home" or "staying in an indefinite war," as if there is no middle ground. U.S. foreign policy interests in Afghanistan extend beyond the end of U.S. combat operations, yet many senior officials seem unable to decouple what the enduring long-term U.S. presence should be from the immediate goal of drawing down combat power.

More broadly, the "end date paradox" arises from the unwillingness of policymakers to spell out realistic timelines. One way to address this problem is for policymakers to be transparent with the American public about the current state of affairs and the challenges ahead.

Question:

"Lastly, I read in your quote in the last SIGAR quarterly report that the Taliban will need to be reintegrated into Afghan society. Whether that occurs in one year or 50 years, you surmise it must occur. Based on analysis from the last SIGAR quarterly report, it appears that NONE of the allied reintegration programs have yielded results.

How do we take this information and turn it into something productive? We know how *not* to accomplish reintegration, but how do we move forward from here?"

Answer:

Mr. Sopko: SIGAR's 2019 lessons learned report, Reintegration of Ex-Combatants: Lessons from the U.S. Experience in Afghanistan, sought to answer precisely this question. We concluded that a reintegration program runs a high risk of failure in the absence of a political settlement or peace agreement— partly because without adequate physical security guarantees, former combatants face high risks of retaliation, and are unlikely to join reintegration programs. We recommended that in the current environment of an ongoing Taliban insurgency, the Congress may wish to consider not funding a reintegration program because the Afghan government and the Taliban have not agreed to terms for reintegration. We also recommended that because of the difficulty in vetting, protecting, and tracking combatants who claim they want to stop fighting Afghan and coalition forces, DOD, State, and USAID should not implement a reintegration program amid the ongoing insurgency.

However, we also recommended that in the event of negotiations between the Afghan government and the Taliban, State should encourage negotiators on both sides to determine how

former combatants will be reintegrated—socially, economically, militarily, and politically—into society. Our report recommended that State, USAID, and DOD should each designate an advisory office on reintegration matters. These offices should develop in-house expertise on international best practices on the socioeconomic, political, and military aspects of disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) processes.

Our report included a second set of recommendations regarding reintegration after a peace agreement between the Afghan government and the Taliban, as follows:

- Because a wider post-conflict recovery strategy is essential to successful reintegration of ex-combatants, the Congress may wish to consider funding broad post-settlement development programs in Afghanistan.
- The Congress may wish to consider funding a reintegration program if: (a) the Afghan government and the Taliban sign a peace agreement that provides a framework for reintegration of ex-combatants; (b) a significant reduction in overall violence occurs; and (c) a strong monitoring and evaluation system is established for reintegration efforts.
- Treasury should ensure that State, USAID, and DOD are in no way prohibited from providing assistance to areas where beneficiaries were or are affiliated with the Taliban. This may entail removing Taliban members from Treasury's Specially Designated Nationals and Blocked Persons list or providing licenses to enable assistance to those areas.
- State and USAID should ensure that U.S.-funded development programs in Afghanistan take into account the circumstances and needs of former combatants and their families.
- The U.S. government should encourage and support an Afghan-led transitional justice process, which will be critical to underpin successful long- term reintegration.

Finally, our report identified six matters for consideration by the Afghan government, as follows:

- Reintegration efforts should be directed at not only former Taliban fighters, but also members of state-aligned militias and illegal armed groups.
- A monitoring and evaluation system should assess performance of a reintegration program, as well as the impact and outcomes of the program.
- Any information gathered as part of a monitoring and evaluation system should be shared with third-party researchers working to better understand the impact that reintegration programs have on individual ex-combatants and the communities, they live in.
- Communities receiving ex-combatants and their families should participate in the design and execution of reintegration efforts and should also receive benefits from those efforts.
- Reintegration efforts, whether pursued through targeted programs or wider development assistance, should support a long-term transition to an alternative livelihood, not just provide short-term assistance.
- During intra-Afghan peace negotiations, international DDR specialists should be consulted regarding any future reintegration effort.

Question:

"Is this something the Afghans will have to do on their own?"

Answer:

Mr. Sopko: The Afghans will need to take the lead and be accountable for a reintegration effort, but they will require the help of international donors. The reason is simple: Afghanistan remains one of the world's poorest countries, where 55 percent of people live on less than one U.S. dollar per day. On average, just $8 per capita per year is spent on health care. At the same time, we must remain cognizant of our own limitations. While reintegration programs may provide assistance specific to ex-combatants' needs, there are limits to any program's ability to improve overall economic conditions.

As discussed in SIGAR's 2019 High-Risk List, an equitable and sustainable peace agreement could end much of the violence that presents the greatest threat to reconstruction and development efforts. Following a peace agreement between the Afghan government and the Taliban, a precious window of opportunity will open for the country. There may be a significant opportunity to strengthen the gains made since 2001 in education, health care, and women's rights, and to expand development efforts to areas that have seen little investment since 2001.

The United States, other donors, and Afghan partners are already planning what economic initiatives should be prioritized after a peace agreement. The draft plan envisions directing bene- fits to people and areas on the basis of need. Broad development assistance programs—not targeting ex-combatants and not part of any formal reintegration program—can have a profound effect on an ex-combatant's ability to reintegrate into society. A rising tide lifts all ships: stimulating private sector growth and creating jobs in the legal economy means more jobs for ex- combatants, too.

In addition, as stated in the answer to the previous question, international DDR specialists should be consulted during intra-Afghan peace negotiations about any future reintegration effort. Afghan government and Taliban negotiating teams are unlikely to be familiar with international DDR best practices, but they can learn from the experiences of other countries that have reintegrated ex-combatants into society after years of war—for instance, Colombia and Northern Ireland. If both sides are educated about how DDR is conducted around the world, they may have greater trust that those standards will be applied to all sides of a conflict equitably.

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Questions for the Record from Representative Ilhan Omar
U.S. Lessons Learned in Afghanistan
January 15, 2020

Question:

"I recently joined Chairwoman Bass on a CODEL to visit several places in Africa where we're engaged in a fight against terrorist groups. At every stop, they told us about the importance of balancing diplomacy, development, and defense. But I never heard anyone clearly articulate what exactly that balance should be. It seems to me that we're repeating a lot of our mistakes in Afghanistan in our policy in Africa.

How is SIGAR's work received in the interagency? Is it being actively used to inform how we approach other operations, like the ones in Africa?"

Answer:

Mr. Sopko: U.S. agencies have generally accepted and supported the findings, lessons, and recommendations in SIGAR's lessons learned reports on the subject of security sector assistance. But we are not aware of significant action on the large-scale reforms SIGAR recommended. SIGAR is unaware of any efforts to implement security sector assistance recommendations in Africa, despite the fact that many of those aimed at Afghanistan would be also be applicable to Africa. We are aware, however, that U.S. and international training centers have used SIGAR's reports as part of its curriculum and/or part of their training programs. Some of those who attend these courses may be assigned to future positions in Africa or other regions.

SIGAR has been told on numerous occasions that its Stabilization lessons learned report on Afghanistan is being used extensively in the design and implementation of the U.S. government's stabilization efforts in other settings, including Africa. The 2018 interagency Stabilization Assistance Review (SAR) was heavily informed by SIGAR's stabilization study, an early draft of which was shared with the SAR's principal authors. In particular, it incorporated SIGAR's recommendation that in future stabilization efforts, State should lead, USAID should be the lead implementer, and DOD should support their efforts. In Iraq and Afghanistan, DOD had a tendency to lead because it had the resources and mandate to reduce violence through the use of force. Our report and the SAR both argue that this needs to change, as stabilization is an inherently political effort and should be led by political actors, not the military.

However, this consensus on the division of labor between the agencies remains theoretical. State and USAID officials face stringent security restrictions that prevent them from successfully operating in the very environments in which they are now supposed to take the lead—nor do those agencies have the money to operate in these environments. As a result, there are too few of these critical civilian officials, and they have no choice but to embed with (and come to depend on) DOD personnel and infrastructure. If DOD has all the resources, mobility, and personnel in fragile contexts, it should be no surprise that they continue to make most of the decisions.

It is important to note that DOD is not seeking to monopolize such decision-making; most senior and mid-level DOD officials recognize that DOD is not institutionally or culturally suited to be leading stabilization efforts. However, from DOD's perspective, if State and USAID are unable to take the lead by virtue of resource constraints, movement restrictions, and limited personnel, DOD is stepping up because there is no one else who can.

Question:

"When it comes to that balance of diplomacy, development, and defense - what are the dangers of relying too heavily on the military in fragile states?"

Answer:

Mr. Sopko: There are several. First, the military response to communal and political violence is to send in an overwhelming force to seek and destroy non-state actors perpetrating the violence. This is a reasonable military approach to a traditional military adversary—but an insurgency attaches itself to the population, which makes fighting over that population an inherently political challenge. This search-and-destroy mindset led the military to prioritize stabilizing the most dangerous districts in Afghanistan first. They believed that going after the worst places would create a cascading impact everywhere else. From a strictly military approach, this makes sense, but if the objective is to win hearts and minds, it is best to work outward from the most secure areas. State and USAID were advocating this for years in Afghanistan, but the military insisted on prioritizing the worst places first.

Second, the military does not have the training to measure progress on political objectives. The military can tell you with precision how effective its lethal targeting and destructive capability is, but not whether its activities are changing a population's political calculations, or if those calculations are making that country a greater or lesser danger to U.S. national security interests. State and USAID struggle with this as well, but it is within their institutional and cultural wheelhouse in ways that it is not for the military.

There is also the peril of unintended consequences. Since 2001, Congress has increased DOD's authorities to conduct security sector assistance activities outside of the traditional embassy country team-led operation. One example of this is the pseudo-FMS process, which has been in effect in Afghanistan since 2001. Traditional funding mechanisms for military sales to partner nations require the partner nation to ask for the equipment and services and either pay for those services or arrange for a loan from the United States. In the pseudo-FMS system, the services and equipment are provided at the discretion of DOD, and are paid for by the U.S. taxpayer. While the pseudo-FMS process helped to rapidly equip Afghan security forces in the early years of our involvement, it has since mushroomed into a vehicle for some $18 billion in purchases of equipment for the Afghan security forces. Altogether, security sector assistance accounts for 70 percent of U.S. reconstruction funding since 2005, and much of that money has been spent through the pseudo-FMS process. This power of the purse translates into de facto foreign policy influence on the part of DOD.

Question:

"How should we be thinking differently in future conflicts about appropriations?"

Answer:

Mr. Sopko: SIGAR encourages Congress to consider allowing USAID to use multi-year money in fragile and conflict-affected countries. As things now stand, there is considerable pressure in the agencies to spend this year's money to ensure next year's money will not be reduced—which encourages the agency to seek short-term "wins" which do not address underlying problems. In contrast, some agencies and some funding mechanisms, like USAID's Economic Support Fund and the Office of Transition Initiatives, benefit from multi-year money. This reduces the pressure to spend money quickly and allows for the long-term planning necessary to address protracted violent conflicts that threaten U.S. national security. Given the increasing number such conflicts around the world, the United States needs to be prepared for prolonged efforts, and to exercise patience and political will. No conflict that threatens the U.S. can be addressed on one-year time horizons.

Nor can it be addressed on a piecemeal basis. In Afghanistan, many programs are based on a perceived need and not on a comprehensive whole-of-government plan. Without such a plan, appropriations are allocated by each agency's independent vision and priorities, with decisions made U.S. officials who serve for six months to a year. As a result, the plan constantly changes, as do the milestones and expected outcomes.

One of the best practices from Afghanistan was the creation of the Afghanistan Security Forces Fund, which provided long-term, dedicated U.S. funding to a specific program. Traditional security cooperation appropriations are assigned to a specific authority rather than to any specific country, which means DOD winds up allocating funds to a list of countries which can change from one year to the next. Having a dedicated fund allows the Congress to ensure appropriations remain dedicated to a specific country, and to track those funds yearly.

Question:

"Human Rights Watch released their annual country reports today, and report that civilian casualties by the U.S. and U.S.-backed forces outnumbered civilian casualties by the Taliban in 2019. Why is this?"

Answer:

Mr. Sopko: The Human Rights Watch report draws its casualty figures from the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA). UNAMA's latest civilian casualty report from October 2019 reported that anti-government elements (Taliban, ISIS, etc.) continued to cause the majority of civilian casualties in Afghanistan, and they also caused slightly more civilian deaths than pro-government forces (Afghan and Coalition security forces) during the first nine months of 2019. This is contrary to the first half of 2019, when pro-government forces caused more civilian deaths, which UNAMA attributed mainly to the high number of Afghan and Coalition

air strikes. Recently the UNAMA and DOD/RS civilian casualty numbers appear to be more similar than in the past due to some coordination and deconfliction between the organizations.

Question:

"Why are DoD's numbers on civilian casualties consistently so much lower than the UN's, human rights NGOs', and independent journalists' numbers?"

Answer:

Mr. Sopko: The primary cause for the difference in DOD/Resolute Support's (RS) and UNAMA's civilian casualty numbers is that the organizations use different methodologies to determine who is a civilian and who is not.

In general, DOD/RS told SIGAR they collect reports from the Afghan government and its own chain of command. They use their broad intelligence capabilities to verify these reports, including aerial surveillance, to determine whether operations result in civilian casualties and to count those casualties. UNAMA on the other hand interviews local civilians about incidents resulting in civilian casualties and requires three independent sources for verification purposes.

RS also said that RS/DOD has a more expansive definition of what is considered to be an "enemy combatant" and not a civilian.

For example, a person working in a Taliban administrative function, like transporting weapons, or otherwise providing some level of support or allegiance to the Taliban, could be considered a legitimate target by RS/ DOD and subjected to military targeting.

In contrast, the UN only considers a person to be "Taliban" if they are actively engaged in attacking RS/DOD or Afghan government entities at the time in which they are wounded or killed. For example, if a person fires at Afghan government forces, then lays their weapon down and walks away, and then is subsequently wounded or killed, USFOR-A would consider this casualty to be an "enemy combatant" whereas the UN would consider it to be a civilian.

Question:

"When we try to learn from the experience of Afghanistan, it seems to me the biggest questions need to be asked before we invade in the first place. What kinds of questions need to be asked before we've launched an invasion of another country?"

Answer:

Mr. Sopko: Assuming that a decision to invade is taken only after non-violent, diplomatic alternatives are exhausted, the first question to ask is, "What is our primary national security objective in this country?"

The second question to ask is, "Do the current administration, the Congress, and the American people have the political will to grow and sustain this mission, even at the cost of losing U.S. troops and inflicting civilian casualties, for at least a decade?" Even under ideal conditions, counterinsurgencies and stabilization missions take a long time. Central to our failures in Afghanistan have been the constant sense among policymakers that it would only last (or be unduly taxing) for a little while. This was never the case, nor should it have been the impression.

Then the questions become more detailed. "What are our immediate, medium-term, and long-term objectives, and what is our strategy for achieving them? What will be the scope of our military and development activities? What tradeoffs might have to be made between short-term and long-term goals, and what would be the consequences? What types of local partnerships will we be able to establish in the country, and what are the characteristics of our potential partners? What are the potential long-term consequences of short-term relationships of convenience? What are the potential unintended consequences of our action and what mitigation strategies might we employ?"

On September 10, 2001, Afghanistan was not a top U.S. foreign policy priority. The U.S. had neither the time not the political inclination to plan. The Bush administration was opposed to stabilization and reconstruction missions, and had campaigned against President Clinton's involvement in post-conflict nations such as Haiti, Somalia, and the Balkans. Its preference for a light military footprint with a counterterrorism focus meant that little thought was given to the Geopolitical aspects of Afghanistan.

If in future stabilization efforts the expectation is that the U.S. will be in a place for years, possibly a decade, and U.S. agencies implementing the stabilization mission should be in a position to plan for that decade, rather than in one-year increments.

Question:

"What knowledge do we need that we didn't have in Afghanistan?"

Answer:

Mr. Sopko: The U.S. government (USG) needed a deeper understanding of the society and its history, including the webs of connections among elites and strongmen. For example, allowing some of the major commanders who participated in the destruction of parts of Kabul in the 1990s to reinstate themselves as major political and economic forces enabled them to use their power to exclude competition and simply usurp vast tracts of land. The USG also needed a better understanding of the local traditions and beliefs, to understand how activities which the United States intended to benefit society could be construed by leaders and the population as radical social change. The USG also needed some basic knowledge about the form of government most desired by the population, whether central or decentralized, and what the population expected from its government.

The United States was slow to learn its lessons about the systemic and entrenched nature of corruption in Afghanistan, which in turn delayed its awareness of how corruption threatened core

U.S. goals. The Afghan Threat Finance Cell (ATFC), put in place in late 2008, was arguably the first organization to understand the nexus of corruption, criminality, and narcotics. It did so by tracking money flows and using network analysis, taking advantage of expertise from DOD, and the Departments of Justice and the Treasury. It then communicated its findings across agencies in Kabul and Washington. This effort laid the groundwork for a common understanding of the nature of corruption in Afghanistan. In future contingency environments, this kind of analysis should be a high priority. (See answer to following question.)

U.S. policymakers also did not take into account existing expertise about how much assistance a host country can absorb without causing social, economic and political disruptions. As a result, spillover from more than $100 billion in reconstruction assistance in Afghanistan that poured into Afghanistan between 2009 and 2013 contributed to pervasive corruption that undermined state legitimacy.

The USG also did not understand how differences in Afghanistan's different agricultural regions would affect counternarcotics efforts. Policymakers assumed that a counterdrug intervention—whether eradication, rural development, or interdiction—would have the same effect in different locations, regardless of local conditions. This was not true. The destruction of drug crops in a district with few viable alternatives and where insurgent groups hold sway was likely to lead to different outcomes than eradication in areas under government control. Similarly, investments in rural development, such as irrigation, might support agricultural diversification in an area where there are opportunities to produce and sell legal crops; in other areas, they inadvertently supported increased opium production.

Question:

"What planning do we need to do that we didn't do in Afghanistan? What contingencies do we need to prepare for that we didn't prepare for in Afghanistan?"

Answer:

Mr. Sopko: From day one, U.S. agencies need to anticipate and plan for the ways in which corruption—across every sector of our engagement—will complicate and undermine our mission. That planning should entail coordination among all involved agencies to consistently put anticorruption goals and benchmarks on the agenda with the host government and other donors; developing a shared understanding of the nature and scope of corruption in the host country; assessing the absorptive capacity of the host country to inform U.S. levels of assistance; limiting our alliances with malign powerbrokers and seeking to avoid empowering those actors; incorporating anticorruption objectives into U.S. strategies and plans; and bringing to bear high-level, consistent political will when pressing the host government for reforms and ensuring U.S. policies and practices do not exacerbate corruption.

As Ambassador Ryan Crocker told SIGAR staff in an interview for the SIGAR's lessons learned report on anticorruption efforts, "The corruption lens has got to be in place at the outset, and

even before the outset, in the formulation of reconstruction and development strategy, because once it gets to the level I saw [in Afghanistan] … it's somewhere between unbelievably hard and outright impossible to fix."

In future stabilization efforts, U.S. agencies should prioritize hiring people who can learn quickly, who have experience working on the ground in complex environments and learning about conflict dynamics through interviews and research. State, USAID, and DOD all faced extraordinary challenges with staffing the Afghanistan mission. DOD training for civil affairs often consisted of four-week classroom training cycles; in some years, USAID had to hire hundreds of staff annually, most with no development training or even developing country experience.

As SIGAR's lessons learned report on stabilization recommends, it is cheaper and more efficient to hire agile, quick studies than it is to keep hundreds of country experts for every country on retainer in case war breaks out there. For this reason, SIGAR's report on stabilization recommended a revamped Civilian Response Corps to recruit, organize and eventually deploy State and USAID personnel for these missions.

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