

OVERVIEW OF 16 YEARS OF INVOLVEMENT IN AFGHANISTAN

HEARING

BEFORE THE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON NATIONAL SECURITY
OF THE
COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT
AND GOVERNMENT REFORM
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
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OVERVIEW OF 16 YEARS OF INVOLVEMENT IN AFGHANISTAN

Wednesday, November 1, 2017

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

The subcommittee met, pursuant to call, at 10:30 a.m., in Room 2154, Rayburn House Office Building, Hon. Ron DeSantis [chairman of the subcommittee] presiding.

Present: Representatives DeSantis, Russell, Duncan, Gosar, Foxx, Hice, Comer, Lynch, Welch, Demings, and DeSaulnier.

Also Present: Representatives Massie, Jones, and Issa.

Mr. DESANTIS. The Subcommittee on National Security will come to order. Without objection, the chair is authorized to declare a recess at any time.

I appreciate the members accommodating the 10:30 start. It is supposed to follow a tax reform unveil, but I would note for the record that the mysterious tax reform bill is still not unveiled to us, so we are waiting breathlessly for that.

I note the presence of our colleague, Mr. Issa from California. I ask unanimous consent that Mr. Issa be allowed to fully participate in today's hearing.

Without objection, it is so ordered.

On September 11, 2001, radical Islamic terrorists attacked our country and killed thousands of innocent men, women, and children. These terrorists, aided and abetted by the Taliban, used Afghanistan as a safe haven and refuge. These terrorists spent years in Afghanistan plotting, waiting for the chance to strike us at home.

Throughout the 1990s, the American people watched as the United States suffered terrorist attacks in New York City at the Khobar Towers, at our embassies in East Africa, and against our USS Cole.

The failure to act in the run-up to 9/11 emboldened Al Qaeda to attempt a far more devastating attack. By 9/11, 2001, Afghanistan had become a jihadis' paradise and a useful staging ground for Al Qaeda's malevolent designs.

American forces responded to the 9/11 attacks with a rout of both Al Qaeda and Taliban forces. Yet, today, after more than 16 years in Afghanistan, it is not clear that things are much better than they were after the Taliban first fell.

Is Afghanistan on the brink of becoming a terrorist dream all over again? Are we making the same mistakes over and over

again? Should we be just done with this entire godforsaken place? Or should we be concerned that Isis now has a dangerous affiliate, ISIS-K, in Afghanistan that aspires to reach out and strike the U.S. homeland?

How do we get this right? Or can we? We are here today to explore whether or not the United States has adapted to the hard lessons we have learned in this long war.

We are also holding this hearing today to follow up on a number of projects this committee has investigated over the past several years. It is important to keep a spotlight on these projects and to make sure that our tax dollars are spent effectively and efficiently.

Having served on Active Duty in Iraq, I want to make sure we get this right and ensure Afghanistan does not descend into chaos.

Today, we are fortunate that before the subcommittee we have Mr. John Sopko, the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction, to testify on the recent work his team completed regarding systemic corruption and waste in Afghanistan. He has done outstanding work to ensure our taxpayer dollars are well-spent.

Mr. Sopko will also speak on the recent report about AWOL Afghan soldiers here in the United States. Thirty-nine of the 152 Afghans who went AWOL ended up being granted legal status. Twenty-seven were arrested or removed, and 13 are still unaccounted for as of today. These figures are deeply troubling, and I am interested to hear how this happened.

I had a chance to sit down with Mr. Sopko last week, and I can tell you that he is a dedicated public servant who has fought corruption and waste for decades.

We value your time and appreciate all you have done to help us in this endeavor.

So I would like to thank him for coming and look forward to hearing his testimony. With that, I will yield to the ranking member, the gentleman from Massachusetts, Mr. Lynch, for 5 minutes.

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

And thank you to our witnesses for helping the committee with its work.

Mr. Chairman, this is an extremely timely hearing on our ongoing military involvement in Afghanistan. I also want to thank the Special Inspector General Sopko for Afghan Reconstruction for appearing before us today to help this committee carry out its oversight mandate.

The title of this hearing rightly notes that the U.S. has been at war in Afghanistan for over 16 years. This war has spanned a generation at a cost of about \$714 billion, between \$714 billion and \$2 trillion in taxpayer dollars, and over 2,400 U.S. casualties.

While our mission has narrowed to focus on train, advise, and assist of the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces, and our force levels have sharply dropped from a 2011 peak of over 100,000 to the current estimate of 9,800, it is just as critical that we have a clear strategy.

This is why I requested this past June and then again in August with my colleague Mr. Welch that the Oversight Committee hold a hearing on U.S. strategies for Afghanistan and Iraq.

Regrettably, the President's recently announced plan for Afghanistan fell far short in providing the details necessary to understand this purported new direction. He said nothing about how many more forces will be needed to carry out this mission or how success will be measured. Our forces need a clear strategy and guidance from their leaders, and the President's plan does not do that.

Mr. Chairman, without a clear strategy and plan to carry it out, it becomes difficult to measure success. And our current mission to train the Afghans has been very difficult extremely difficult to gauge.

For years, I have been seeking numbers of how many Afghan Security Forces have been trained, and for years SIGAR has had difficulty in getting those figures. This is because the training program was set up without much metrics, and they are still not in place today. A lack of information keeps us from conducting oversight, from knowing what we are doing right and what we need to improve. I would urge the President to bring to Congress a clear and detailed strategy for how he intends to get this mission done.

This brings me to a disturbing development, namely the Department of Defense recent decision to retroactively classify certain Afghan National Defense and Security Forces-related force levels in Afghanistan. Members of Congress need to be able to get on the ground, hear from the Americans there, and see with their own eyes what is happening.

As a Member of Congress and ranking member on the National Security Subcommittee, I have a duty, as does every Member of this House of Representatives, to carry out the oversight required by the U.S. Constitution. These kinds of travel restrictions that are in place currently are inappropriate and highly concerning.

In addition, the classification measures have become much more tightly prescribed in terms of what Mr. Sopko and his team can report to Congress in an open forum. I will ask some questions about that to determine what information is being kept from the American public with respect to our progress or lack thereof in Afghanistan.

With that, Mr. Chairman, I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. DESANTIS. I thank the ranking member.

The chair notes the presence of our colleagues, the gentleman from Kentucky, Mr. Massie, and the gentleman from North Carolina, Mr. Jones. I ask unanimous consent that they both be allowed to fully participate in today's hearing, although I will be very lenient in accepting any objections to Mr. Massie's attendance.

[Laughter.]

Mr. DESANTIS. But without objection, it will be so ordered.

I am pleased to introduce our witnesses, the Honorable John Sopko, Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction. He is accompanied by Mr. James Cunningham, senior analyst for the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction. Welcome.

Pursuant to committee rules, all witnesses will be sworn in before they testify, so if you can please rise and raise your right hand?

[Witnesses sworn.]

Mr. DESANTIS. Please be seated. All witnesses answered in the affirmative.

In order to allow time for discussion, please limit your testimony to 5 minutes. Your whole written statement will be made part of the record. As a reminder, the clock in front of you shows your remaining time. The light will turn yellow when you have 30 seconds left and red when your time is up. Please also remember to press the button to turn your microphone on before speaking.

With that, the chair recognizes Mr. Sopko for 5 minutes.

WITNESS STATEMENT

STATEMENT OF HON. JOHN SOPKO

Mr. SOPKO. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Lynch, and members of the subcommittee. It is a pleasure to be here to testify today.

As you know, in my written statement, I discuss in the great details the findings, lessons, and recommendations of SIGAR's new report on America's 15 years of security sector assistance to rebuild the Afghanistan Security Forces.

With the Afghan conflict in a stalemate, and with a new strategy for U.S. security sector assistance getting underway, the time is ripe for seeking every opportunity for improvement.

In that spirit, I appreciate this hearing, which I think is an opportune time to look for recommendations for improvement. That is something I would like to offer to you today in my oral presentation.

The first recommendation we have is how to utilize, better utilize and align, our capabilities with the needs of the Afghans. So the first things I would recommend, Mr. Chairman, is that DOD should establish and lead an interagency fact-finding mission to examine the Afghan Security Forces' current and future needs, and realign our advisory mission to ensure that the right adviser and units are partnered correctly with the Afghan soldiers and police.

The second thing is we need to have someone in charge. So DOD and NATO should create designated leads for the Afghan army and police responsible for coordinating the training and advisory missions from the ministerial to the operational level. Now the Afghan special forces and the Afghan Air Force have proponent leads right now as part of a comprehensive team in place. That is one of the reasons why both of those forces are more successful than their peers, and we highlight that best practice in our report.

The third thing is we need to learn from success. So with the introduction of more than 150 UH-60 Blackhawk helicopters for the Afghan Security Forces, we recommend that you recommend that the Army should immediately reach out to the U.S. Air Force to capitalize on their best practices from their training of Afghan fixed-wing pilots.

The fourth recommendation, sir, deals with the fact that our trainers in Afghanistan need help, and they need help back here in the United States. So we recommend that, to ensure persistent and comprehensive training while preserving institutional knowledge, we recommend that DOD create an element in the United States staffed with representatives from all of the military and ci-

vilian agencies who are specifically trained for Afghanistan as advisers to provide additional support to the training mission in Afghanistan.

It is also critically important that those who are assigned view this as career-enhancing. Right now, such an assignment would be career-ending for many of our military and civilians.

The fifth point I would focus on is we need to use NATO better. To optimize NATO's participation in Afghanistan, we recommend that DOD and NATO should thoroughly analyze Afghanistan's current advisory needs and each NATO country's capabilities as well as their limitations.

We also need to better understand NATO's decision-making process and better synchronize our policymaking with NATO's force generation schedules.

The sixth point I would like to make is we cannot forget the important role that State, USAID, the Department of Justice, and other U.S. Government and civilian agencies play in our fight in Afghanistan. To ensure an effective whole-of-government approach in Afghanistan, we must support not only our U.S. military but also the civilian agencies such as State, AID, and Justice, in their missions, which are highly critical for accomplishing our national security objectives there. The administration and Congress should ensure the civilian agencies have the resources they need to make important contributions to this mission.

Lastly, most civilian agencies need to get out of the Embassy. In order to support the civilian agencies' ability to conduct their important work in Afghanistan, Congress should encourage DOD and State to immediately finalize an agreement that permits civilian agencies, including SIGAR, to travel outside the Kabul Embassy under U.S. military protection without second-guessing the U.S. military's well-established capacity for providing adequate security.

Failure to increase freedom of movement for civilian personnel will hobble a whole-of-government approach to reconstruction and oversight, thus putting the entire mission at an unnecessary disadvantage.

In conclusion, I would urge you that every minute the U.S. military has to fill in for a missing civilian agency is 1 minute that the military is not allowed to do their job.

Thank you very much.

[Prepared statement of Mr. Sopko follows:]



Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction

Testimony
Before the Subcommittee on National Security
Committee on Oversight and Government Reform
U.S. House of Representatives

**Actions Needed to Improve
U.S. Security-Sector Assistance
Efforts in Afghanistan**

Statement of John F. Sopko,
Special Inspector General
for Afghanistan Reconstruction
November 1, 2017

Chairman DeSantis, Ranking Member Lynch, Members of the Subcommittee:

Thank you for inviting me to testify. Today, I will be discussing the findings, lessons, and recommendations of SIGAR's new report on America's 15 years of security-sector assistance to rebuild the security forces of Afghanistan. Importantly, the lessons in our report have relevance to the scores of other countries in which the United States is conducting train, advise, assist (TAA) security assistance missions. These countries include hot spots like Iraq and Niger, but also others that could emerge in the near future.

Our report offers recommendations that, if implemented, might produce immediate benefits while other measures generate longer-term gains in policy, planning, and practice.

A brief introduction to SIGAR and its work

I have served as the inspector general in charge of SIGAR since July 2012, but the agency predates me. Congress created SIGAR in 2008,¹ with the mandate to investigate and report to Congress and the Administration on U.S. reconstruction efforts in Afghanistan, including making recommendations for improvements. We are uniquely independent—not housed within any one agency, and we are the only Inspector General authorized to report on *all* aspects of reconstruction in Afghanistan, regardless of federal departmental boundaries.

As of October 30, 2017, SIGAR has issued 37 quarterly reports to the Congress and the Secretaries of State and Defense. We have also issued 265 audit and inspection reports and 139 special projects reports. SIGAR's audits directorate has saved nearly \$1 billion for taxpayers. And our investigations directorate has identified cases of wrongdoing that have led to 114 plea agreements or convictions, has helped secure fines and recoveries of more than \$1.2 billion, and has referred 872 individuals or organizations for suspension or debarment from federal contracting. In total, our agency has recovered over \$2 billion for American taxpayers.

Our attention is not, however, narrowly focused on finance or misconduct. We also invest a great deal of time and effort into assessing and reporting on the *effectiveness* of U.S. reconstruction programs in Afghanistan, and upon recommending *improvements*.

SIGAR products like our performance audits have long featured recommendations, but they tend to focus on specific programs, projects, and contracts. With regard to the ANDSF, we have documented and reported on cases such as:

- Unreliable and inconsistent assessments of ANDSF capabilities

¹ Pub. L. 110-181, §1229.

- Ineffective management of ANDSF fuel and equipment
- Inadequate literacy-training programs for ANDSF personnel
- Thousands of “ghost” soldiers and police on the rolls, distorting readiness assessments and allowing corrupt commanders to pocket the salaries paid from U.S. taxpayers’ funds
- Nearly a half-billion dollars wasted on transport planes bought second-hand from Italy that could not operate in Afghanistan’s harsh environment and that were scrapped for pennies on the dollar
- \$3 million on patrol boats that were never used—a “navy” for a land-locked country
- Shoddily constructed, unsafe, and unwanted buildings
- Unnecessary spending of up to \$28 million from purchasing proprietary camouflage uniforms that may also be inappropriate for most Afghan terrain
- An inordinately high number of Afghan military personnel training in the United States since 2005 going AWOL or being unaccounted for
- The Afghan Ministry of Defense being unable to account for small arms or account for lost weapons

But it was clear to us that our work also touched on longer-term and broader-reach issues that also deserved attention and reporting. Others in government felt the same way. So late in 2014, with the support of Ambassador Ryan Crocker, General John Allen, and others, I created the SIGAR Lessons Learned Program to make research-based findings, extract critical lessons, and devise actionable recommendations for improving the results of the U.S. effort to rebuild and develop Afghanistan. The program has issued two detailed studies, and has five more currently under way.

The program’s aim is to pursue longer-range, broader-scope, and more whole-of-government analysis of issues than appear in our tightly focused audits, inspections, and investigations. The first Lessons Learned report was released last year. Titled *Corruption in Conflict*, it is a detailed look at the ways corruption in Afghanistan creates obstacles toward executing reconstruction programs—and the unfortunate truth that the massive influx of U.S. and other international aid into a small, poor country magnified the rewards of corrupt behavior, provided windfalls for patronage networks and insurgents, and created new opportunities for corruption. As numerous SIGAR reports have documented, those opportunities were often seized upon—not only by Afghans, but also by American contractors, military personnel, and federal civilian employees for personal gain and enrichment.

On September 21 of this year, we issued *Reconstructing the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces: Lessons from the U.S. Experience in Afghanistan*. Our latest report concerns the vital matter of security-sector assistance to Afghanistan, which has cost more than \$70 billion since fiscal year 2002—fully 60 percent of all the money Congress has appropriated for reconstruction there.

Why did SIGAR study security-sector assistance to Afghanistan?

SIGAR's report is important and timely, coinciding as it does with the implementation of a new strategy for the U.S. train, advise, and assist (TAA) role there. Its lessons and findings also coincide with growing interest in U.S. security-assistance missions in conflict-ridden venues like Iraq, Somalia, and Niger which might benefit from the results of our study of 15 years of train, advise, and assist work in Afghanistan.

In December 2001, two months after the U.S. military intervention in Afghanistan, a UN-sponsored international conference in Bonn, Germany, resolved to rebuild the largely vanished national army and police forces of Afghanistan.² That work formally commenced in 2002, so has now been under way for 15 years.

By 2005, the United States had already committed \$4.3 billion to develop the Afghan security forces, and one official estimate was that the rebuilding programs could take years and “could cost up to \$7.2 billion to complete.”³ As we can see now, that cost estimate was off by a factor of ten, and the work is still not complete.

The Afghan National Defense and Security Forces—the ANDSF for short—are fighting hard, and have posted some success stories. As our report highlights, their successes include making good use of the A-29 Super Tucano aircraft to provide close air support for their ground troops, and creating an effective Special Forces branch within the Afghan National Army. However, the Afghan government struggles to provide security and governance, the ANDSF are suffering high casualties, insurgents have increased their control of districts, and large parts of the country are off limits for foreigners.

The Department of Defense summarized the current situation in its last semiannual report to Congress on the U.S. mission in Afghanistan:

The ANDSF are at a critical point in the fight against the insurgency. The plan to modify the force structure and develop into a more agile and lethal force is under

² “Agreement on Provisional Arrangements in Afghanistan Pending the Re-Establishment of Permanent Government Institutions,” conference text of 12/5/2001, published inter alia at <https://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/world/texts/bonnagreement.html>.

³ GAO, *Afghanistan Security: Efforts to Establish Army and Police Have Made Progress, but Future Plans Need to Be Better Defined*, June 2005, GAO-05-575, unnumbered ‘Highlights’ page.

way, but 2017 is a year of setting conditions to build momentum. The ANDSF must weather the storm from the insurgency and deny the Taliban strategic victories on the battlefield, fight [ISIS], grow and train the Afghan Special Security Forces, conduct planning to realign forces within the Ministry of Defense [for the army] and Ministry of Interior [for the police], and posture itself to become a more offensive force in 2018.⁴

General John Nicholson, commander of U.S. forces in Afghanistan, said in Congressional testimony earlier this year, “We assess the current security situation in Afghanistan as a stalemate where the equilibrium favors the government.” He added, however, that “Leadership and countering corruption are two areas in which the ANDSF must improve to reduce casualties and increase military capability.”⁵ To tip the balance, the Administration has adopted a new strategic approach to the conflict in Afghanistan, and has ordered some 3,000 additional U.S. military personnel to deploy there in support of the train, advise, assist mission with the ANDSF.

Adding more trainers below the corps-level and adopting a conditions-based rather than time-based strategy for engagement are positive steps and recommended in our report. But they may not produce a decisive change if the underlying assumptions and structures of security-sector assistance remain unchanged. SIGAR’s body of work, including the new Lessons Learned report, compellingly indicate that some fundamental changes in approach to security-sector assistance are still needed to produce decisive results.

SIGAR is not alone in that judgment. The new issue of *Foreign Affairs* contains an essay by Professor Mara Karlin of Johns Hopkins University and the Brookings Institution. In her essay, “Why Military Assistance Programs Disappoint: Minor Tools Can’t Solve Major Problems,” Professor Karlin notes that Afghanistan is only one of more than 100 countries where the United States is conducting military-assistance programs. Overall, she judges, “The returns have been paltry,” for reasons including poor execution, inadequate conditionality and accountability, unclear objectives, and failure to deal with political complications.⁶

Nor is that view new. In 2005, the RAND Corporation released a study of efforts to improve internal security as part of nation-building missions. Of nine countries studied, only Timor-

⁴ DOD, *Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan*, report to Congress per Pub. L. 113-291, 6/2017, p. 5.

⁵ General John W. Nicholson Jr, “The Situation in Afghanistan,” statement for the record before the U.S. Senate Armed Services Committee, 2/9/2017, p. 2. https://www.armed-services.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/Nicholson_02-09-17.pdf

⁶ Mara Karlin, “Why Military Assistance Programs Disappoint: Minor Tools Can’t Solve Major Problems,” *Foreign Affairs*, November/December 2017, pp. 111-120. The essay is adapted from her book, *Building Militaries in Fragile States: Challenges for the United States* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2017).

Leste and Kosovo were deemed successful operations in terms of reducing violence and expanding the rule of law. The two worst cases were Iraq and Afghanistan; RAND tagged each as “unsuccessful.”⁷

The literature on reconstruction in conflict zones reflects a consensus that internal security is the sine qua non of success. A government that cannot provide reasonable security against insurgents, terrorists, and criminals is a government unlikely to enjoy popular support—or to be able to deliver the basic services, economic development, and political stability that might build support and a perception of legitimacy. SIGAR staff, U.S. military members, federal agency employees, partner-nation personnel, and nongovernmental organizations working in Afghanistan know from day-to-day experience that Afghanistan above all needs to gain the upper hand on the security front if reconstructions are to be preserved and nurtured.

For these reasons, a fresh attempt to extract lessons learned from our 15 years of security-sector assistance in Afghanistan is a timely and important undertaking. Given the timeliness and importance of better security outcomes in Afghanistan, and the great number of previous attempts to identify problems and improvements, SIGAR’s Lessons Learned team knew that a real contribution would require more than another survey of research and a desk-bound stint of drafting.

How did the Lessons Learned team proceed?

Our report, our Lessons Learned staff, guided by Senior Analyst and Project Lead James Cunningham, consulted hundreds of public and nonpublic documents, within and outside of government agencies. They interviewed and held discussions with more than 100 people including U.S., European, Afghan, and other experts from academia, think tanks, NGOs, and government entities along with current and former U.S. civilian and military officials deployed to Afghanistan.

This report also relied upon the experience and advice of General Joseph Dunford, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff; CENTCOM Commander General Joseph Votel; Resolute Support Mission Commander General John Nicholson; former Combined Security Transition Command-Afghanistan Commander Major General Richard Kaiser and other subject-matter experts. We are grateful for their help.

We are also encouraged by the positive responses to drafts of the report from many DOD officials, senior military officers and national-security policy officials. Their reactions do matter. Because, no matter how ironclad and compelling a report may be to its authors, it is

⁷ RAND Corporation, “What Have We Learned About Establishing Internal Security in Nation-Building?” research brief, 2005, p. 1.

useless if decision makers don't accept the accuracy of its findings and the logic of its recommendations. The initial reactions to drafts of our report bode well for the value of the final product.

Our report contains a detailed array of findings, lessons, and recommendations. It comprises:

- Twelve researched and documented findings,
- Eleven lessons drawn from those findings, and
- Thirty-five recommendations for addressing those lessons: two for Congress to consider, seven that apply to executive agencies in general, seven that are DOD-specific, and nineteen that are Afghanistan-specific and applicable to either executive agencies at large or to DOD.

What did SIGAR find?

Full details of the findings of the SIGAR Lessons Learned report appear on our website. I will summarize a few of the most significant findings here:

1. The U.S. government was ill-prepared to conduct security-sector assistance programs of the size and scope required in Afghanistan, whose population is about 70 percent illiterate and largely unskilled in technology.

Secretary of Defense Robert Gates said in 2010 that "America's interagency toolkit" for building the security capacity of partner nations was a "hodgepodge of jerry-rigged arrangements constrained by a dated and complex patchwork of authorities, persistent shortfalls in resources, and unwieldy processes."⁸

Interagency coordination and planning is still a problem. And even today, the U.S. government lacks a deployable police-development capability for high-threat environments, so we have trained over 100,000 Afghan police using U.S. Army aviators, infantry officers, and civilian contractors. The only ministerial advisory training program is designed solely for civilians, but in Afghanistan mostly untrained military officers are conducting that mission. For example, we learned that one U.S. officer watched TV shows like *Cops* and *NCIS* to learn what he should teach. In eastern Afghanistan, we met a U.S. Army helicopter pilot assigned to teach policing. We found one U.S. police-training unit set up as a military unit, and another set up like a police unit. Afghan police training has suffered because of this misalignment of U.S. advisors.

⁸ DOD, "Remarks as Delivered by Secretary of Defense Robert M. Gates," delivered at The Nixon Center, Washington, DC, 2/24/2010.

2. U.S. military plans for ANDSF readiness were created under politically constrained timelines, rather than based upon realistic assessments of Afghan readiness. These plans consistently underestimated the resilience of the Afghan insurgency and overestimated ANDSF capabilities. Consequently, the ANDSF was ill-prepared to deal with deteriorating security after the drawdown of U.S. combat forces.

3. The United States failed to optimize coalition nations' capabilities to support security-assistance missions in the context of international political realities. Partner nations' restrictions on the use of their troops, disparate rationales for joining the coalition, their own resource constraints, differing military capabilities, and NATO's force-generation processes led to an increasingly complex implementation of security sector assistance programs. For example, the NATO training mission for the ANDSF was chronically understaffed by more than 50 percent. Gaps existed even in positions identified as mission-critical.

4. The lag in Afghan ministerial and security-sector governing capacity hindered planning, oversight, and the long-term sustainability of the ANDSF. Insufficient attention to Afghan institutional capacity meant that the personnel, logistical, planning, administrative, and other functions vital to sustaining the fighting forces remained underdeveloped—as they do to this day. Creating inventory systems for equipment, fuel, and personnel began in earnest only in the past few years.

5. As security deteriorated, efforts to sustain and professionalize the ANDSF became secondary to meeting immediate combat needs.

Tough lessons based on solid findings

These and other findings provide the bones and connective tissue of the report. But the heart of any lessons-learned report consists of—naturally—*lessons*. SIGAR's Lessons Learned Program extracted 11 lessons from its research:⁹

Lesson 1. The U.S. government is not well organized to conduct Security-Sector Assistance (SSA) missions in post-conflict nations or in the developing world. Furthermore, U.S. doctrine, policies, personnel, and programs are insufficient to meet SSA mission requirements and expectations.

The United States does not lack the capability to conduct effective SSA programs; it lacks a comprehensive interagency approach to implement these programs. Most U.S. SSA programs focus on improving fighting capabilities of partner-nation security forces, with

⁹ The lesson paragraphs are presented as they appear in the LLP report; the commentary paragraphs have been slightly edited for concision and clarity. Full texts of the lessons appear on pages 175–179 of SIGAR, *Reconstructing the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces: Lessons from the U.S. Experience in Afghanistan*, a Lessons Learned Program report, 9/2017.

limited efforts to improve the *institutions* necessary for security, governance, and sustainability.

Lesson 2. SSA cannot employ a one-size-fits-all approach; it must be tailored to a host nation's context and needs. Security-force structures and capabilities will not outlast U.S. assistance efforts if the host nation does not fully buy into such efforts and take ownership of SSA programs.

From 2002 to 2015, senior U.S. and NATO officials took ownership of ANDSF development, with little to no input from senior Afghan officials. Afghan buy-in largely occurred through the process of U.S. and NATO officials briefing Afghan leaders on military plans and training programs for the ANDSF. In just one example of "cut-and-paste" program applications from other settings that negatively impacted the overall effort, the U.S. military employed PowerPoint-based police training curricula previously used in the Balkans that were a mismatch given the high levels of illiteracy within the Afghan police force. Additionally, the lack of Afghan ownership of force development, operational planning, and security-sector governance prevented the Afghans from effectively overseeing and managing the ANDSF following the security transition at the end of 2014.

Lesson 3. Senior government and nongovernment leaders in post-conflict or developing-world countries are likely to scrimp for control of security forces; SSA missions should avoid empowering factions.

U.S. officials should expect host-nation leaders to compete for control of the military and police, including attempts to manipulate U.S. efforts to advance their own personal and political agendas. In Afghanistan, the United States largely ignored the transitional security forces operating throughout the country, as well as the political imbalances throughout the rank-and-file that were eroding security, both of which were often supported by host-nation elites. As a result, major social and political imbalances remain within the ANDSF today.

Lesson 4. Western equipment and systems provided to developing-world militaries are likely to create chronic, high-cost dependencies.

Many developing-world security forces have military and police personnel with far lower rates of literacy than their Western counterparts. Advanced weapons systems and vehicles, demand-based supply systems, and high-tech personnel and command and control systems that work for Western militaries could be inappropriate for many developing-world forces. These systems have proven to be a mismatch because we did not provide the institutional backbone to professionalize the Afghan forces: expanding literacy, establishing adequate technical schools, providing manuals in native language, etc.

Afghan forces have not been developed to the point where they can meet the requirements of new systems, whether weapons, management techniques, logistics, or computerized recordkeeping. Even if some personnel at higher echelons can master these systems, such

capabilities might not be realistic in tactical units. Those with such skills are also more likely to seek higher-paying (and safer) employment in the private sector or senior civil service. Western advisors, therefore, are likely to step in to perform the jobs themselves rather than see the tasks done poorly or not at all. In Afghanistan, this reliance on U.S. support created a chronic dependency within the ANDSF on foreign partners. Greater attention to professionalizing the force would have lessened the impulse toward dependency.

Lesson 5. Security force assessment methodologies are often unable to evaluate the impact of intangible factors such as leadership, corruption, malign influence, and dependency, which can lead to an underappreciation of how such factors can undermine readiness and battlefield performance.

Assessment methodologies used to evaluate the ANDSF measured tangible outputs, such as staffing, equipping, and training status, but were less capable of evaluating the impact of intangible factors, such as battlefield performance, leadership, corruption, malign influence, and changes in systems and equipment. DOD forecasts and targets for force readiness were largely based on the U.S. military's capacity for recruitment and training, and not based on battlefield performance and other factors corroding the Afghan force. Issues such as ghost soldiers, corruption, and high levels of attrition were more critical than training capacity to measuring true ANDSF capabilities.

Lesson 6. Developing and training a national police force is best accomplished by law enforcement professionals in order to achieve a police capability focused on community policing and criminal justice.

In Afghanistan, two different U.S. government agencies led police-development activities. Each of these efforts alone was insufficient. State, mandated by legislation and supported by funding, is responsible for foreign police development. However, State's Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs (INL) is staffed by civilian program managers, not law-enforcement professionals. Therefore, State largely relied on contracting with DynCorp International to conduct police training and development programs in Afghanistan. U.S. civilian police trainers were largely restricted from operating in high-threat environments and therefore could not provide follow-on field training to new Afghan National Police (ANP) recruits. The mission was eventually transferred to DOD, which was largely inexperienced and improperly prepared to provide rule-of-law training to foreign police forces. As a result, training and development of the ANP was militarized and resulted in a police capability focused more on force protection and offensive operations than on community policing and criminal justice.

Lesson 7. To improve the effectiveness of SSA missions in coalition operations, the U.S. government must acknowledge and compensate for any coalition staffing shortfalls and national caveats that relate to trainers, advisors, and embedded training teams.

The ANDSF training mission suffered from chronic understaffing. Even during the surge from 2010 to 2011, required trainer billets at the NATO Training Mission-Afghanistan were staffed at less than 50%. Due to the operational restrictions imposed by some NATO countries, deployed trainers could not be appropriately assigned throughout Afghanistan. In late 2011, ANP trainers in Kabul were overstaffed by 215%, while police trainers in hostile and non-permissive areas of eastern Afghanistan were 64% understaffed. Chronic understaffing persists.

Lesson 8: Developing foreign military and police capabilities is a whole-of-government mission.

Successful SSA missions require whole-of-government support from the civilian and defense agencies with expertise in training and advising foreign countries in both security operations and the necessary institutional development of the security forces' governing institutions. Within DOD, SSA is a defense enterprise mission, not strictly one to be executed by the military chain of command. Deploying military combat commanders in this role results in over-prioritizing development of the fighting force at the expense of governing and sustainability missions. For police-related missions, the United States lacks a deployable rule-of-law training force that can operate in high-threat environments; in Afghanistan, this limited the U.S. ability to develop the ANP.

Lesson 9: In Afghanistan and other parts of the developing world, the creation of specialized security force units often siphons off the conventional force's most capable leaders and most educated recruits.

In post-conflict nations and the developing world, where human capital for a professional military and police force is limited, it may be necessary to create smaller, specialized forces. In that case, however, the U.S. military must analyze the impact that removing the potential cadre of promising leaders will have on the conventional forces. Creating the Afghan National Army (ANA) commandos and special forces entailed removing literate and proficient soldiers from the ranks of the conventional forces and assigning them to the elite units. Within the Afghan National Police, creation of the Afghan National Civil Order Police and special police units likewise removed the most literate and capable police recruits from the regular force. While the elite units have performed admirably, the conventional units have struggled.

Lesson 10: SSA missions must assess the needs of the entire spectrum of the security sector, including rule of law and corrections programs, in addition to developing the nation's police and armed forces. Synchronizing SSA efforts across all pillars of the security sector is critical.

Successful security-sector development is often achieved when all aspects of the security sector are developed in concert with one another. Developing a national police force without

also developing programs and reforms of the nation's judicial and corrections systems will create perverse incentives for the police to capture and release criminals for bribes or be involved in extra-judicial activities. In Afghanistan, the 2002 division of security-sector reform into the five independent "silos" of military reform (United States), police reform (Germany), judicial reform (Italy), counternarcotics (UK), and disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (Japan) undermined each individual program's success, as the process lacked necessary coordination and synchronization.

Lesson 11: U.S. SSA training and advising positions are not currently career-enhancing for uniformed military personnel, regardless of the importance U.S. military leadership places on the mission. Therefore, experienced and capable military professionals with SSA experience often choose non-SSA assignments later in their careers, resulting in the continual deployment of new and inexperienced forces for SSA missions.

The career path of a U.S. Army officer, for example, relies on commanding U.S. soldiers. Outside of joint military exercises, experiences partnering with a foreign military have little positive impact on an officer's promotion-board review. Although U.S. military commanders publicly emphasized the importance of the train, advise, and assist missions in Iraq and Afghanistan, their statements did not improve the way the military rewarded members who volunteered for or were deployed in support of SSA missions.

SIGAR's report goes into detail on these lessons. They spring from our findings about security-sector assistance in Afghanistan to date, but are also prudent points to bear in mind for future efforts in Afghanistan and elsewhere.

The need for a whole-of-government approach

One critical lesson of our report has particular resonance for me based upon my agency's special mission. That lesson is that a whole-of-government approach is necessary to successfully develop foreign military and police capabilities.

I believe Afghanistan is the definitive case study for that judgment. As our report notes, "While the U.S. government has a number of individual department and agency initiatives to improve security sector assistance programs, it currently lacks a comprehensive, whole-of-government approach and coordinating body to manage implementation and provide oversight of these programs."¹⁰ Secretary of Defense Mattis told Congress last spring that the new Administration had "entered a strategy-free environment, and we are scrambling to

¹⁰ SIGAR, *Reconstructing the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces: Lessons from the U.S. Experience in Afghanistan*, a Lessons Learned Program report, 9/2017, p. 4.

put one together.”¹¹ Joint Chiefs of Staff Chairman General Joseph Dunford has said the new strategy will reflect “a whole of government approach requiring important contributions from other non-DOD departments and agencies, most notably the State Department.”¹² We will watch with great interest to see how the strategic rethink plays out, for the long-standing failure to proceed under a strategy embedding a whole-of-government effort has been a serious impediment to success in Afghanistan, and if uncorrected could be the Achilles’ heel of future contingency operations.

Even if the United States has a well-conceived whole-of-government approach, poor execution can undermine it. For example, embassy understaffing and tight restrictions on travel can add to the burden on our military, undermine the ability of civilian implementing agencies to perform their reconstruction tasks in Afghanistan, and hinder the work of SIGAR and other oversight entities.

For example, I was able to visit the coalition’s southern training headquarters in Kandahar this spring. The senior military leadership there told me they had not met or seen anyone from our Embassy in Kabul since deployment, so our military had to deal with the local governor and other Afghan civilian officials on development and reconstruction matters that should have been conducted with Embassy expertise. Just last month, I visited our military team again in Kandahar and they confirmed they *still* had not seen anyone from our Kabul embassy, which is a mere one-hour flight away. Their comments do not bode well for Secretary Mattis and General Dunford’s drive for a strategy based on a whole-of-government approach.

Similar troubling observations come from Major General Richard Kaiser, who until recently led the Combined Security Transition Command-Afghanistan (CSTC-A). He noted that, “A lack of embassy manning is a huge challenge for us. They are understaffed, because of a lack of funding and the lack of an ability to hire people.” Consequently, some tasks for which State is supposed to have the lead, such as counternarcotics and ministry coordination, are performed by the U.S. military. General Kaiser also noted, “I often meet with the [Afghan] minister of finance, then I collaborate with the embassy and tell them what has occurred.”

¹¹ Quoted by Federal News Radio, “Lawmakers critique Mattis for presenting Defense budget without a defense strategy,” 6/14/2017. <https://federalnewsradio.com/defense/2017/06/lawmakers-critique-mattis-for-presenting-defense-budget-without-a-defense-strategy/>

¹² Quoted in transcript, Senate Committee on Armed Services Hearing, “U.S. Central Command and U.S. Africa Command,” 3/9/2017, p. [4]. <http://www.centcom.mil/Portals/6/Documents/Transcripts/9MAR%20GEN%20Votel%20SASC.pdf?ver=2017-03-31-093905-833>

He adds, "This then is a real gap that can/will cause fractures along the lines of communications."¹³

As we noted in SIGAR's July 2017 quarterly report to Congress, Embassy Kabul's severe restrictions on travel have increased the difficulty of carrying out SIGAR's oversight mandate in Afghanistan. Other federal civilian agencies are similarly burdened. As far back as 2009, however, USFOR-A has agreed to provide security for SIGAR investigators and auditors traveling outside the Kabul Embassy. SIGAR renewed these agreements in 2013, 2015, and most recently in January 2017. This has been a workable, cost-effective, and cooperative relationship among SIGAR, USFOR-A, and the Embassy for years. It acknowledges the Chief of Mission's control and legal responsibility for the safety of nonmilitary U.S. nationals in country, while compensating for the fact that State security resources may not be adequate or available to protect all who have valid requirements to move about the country.

I was therefore greatly surprised when CENTCOM notified SIGAR on October 18 that USFOR-A was terminating that agreement in 90 days. We have since learned that USFOR-A took this action at the request of the State Department. We have been told that the State Department and Department of Defense are negotiating a new agreement. We are not privy to the negotiations or their draft proposals. But we have been told that State's demands include requiring that USFOR-A provide security guards, weapons, protective equipment, and vehicles similar to those that would otherwise be provided by the State Department. In short, the Embassy has evidently concluded that the security provided by the U.S. military to SIGAR and other U.S. civilian agencies for all these years is not adequate.

Frankly, Mr. Chairman, this smacks of old-fashioned, bureaucratic turf fighting. I wrote to Acting Ambassador Llorens on May 5, 2017, after the Embassy began to object to SIGAR travel under military protection. In that letter, I said we do not understand why he has decided to second-guess the U.S. military's assessment that they can provide adequate security—an assessment that I and my staff have repeatedly found to be accurate as we travel for our work in Afghanistan.

To be blunt, the U.S. whole-of-government approach in Afghanistan suffers from a gap, a *hole in our government approach*, and that is particularly obvious when discussing civilian advisors who fall under Chief of Mission protection protocols. The high-threat environment in Afghanistan and the embassy's risk-avoidance posture impedes U.S. advisors from engaging regularly with their Afghan counterparts. Their tasks include important work like training Afghan judicial and police staff, giving technical support to Afghan ministries and monitoring the progress of USAID projects. Their limited access hinders building working relationships,

¹³ Center for Army Lessons Learned, "An Interview Summary with MG Richard Kaiser," *News from the Front*, 8/1/2017, p. 10.

trust, and follow-through on critical missions, with direct negative impact on our military and reconstruction efforts.

In a way, however, this disturbing situation is not surprising. With the civilian advisory mission mostly stuck behind embassy walls in Kabul, even with an expanded “Green Zone,” there are limits on what can be achieved—unless Congress and the Administration quickly address the highly risk-averse posture that the State Department appears to have adopted in Afghanistan.

Accepting risk is a critical element in our work in the challenging environment of Afghanistan and my sense from nearly quarterly visits over the past five years is that our front line civilian personnel understand these risks and want to be untethered so that they can do more.

From lessons to recommendations

Offering lessons, no matter how carefully researched or compellingly presented, does little good if you can’t provide practical solutions for improvement.

That takes us to our report’s recommendations. Our report provides thirty-five recommendations, comprising thirty-three general and Afghanistan-specific recommendations for executive agencies and DOD, plus two for Congress to consider. We think they are timely, sensible, and actionable, especially as the Administration rolls out its new strategy.

If adopted, our recommendations for executive agencies would lead to outcomes including:

- Better matching of U.S. advisors to the needs of the ANDSF and the Afghan Ministries of Defense and the Interior
- A stateside entity providing persistent and comprehensive support to the U.S. military and to the train, advise, and assist commands in Afghanistan
- Stringent conditions attached to U.S. funding to eliminate the ANDSF’s “culture of impunity”

Our DOD-specific recommendations would bring about:

- Improved training and equipping for the Afghan Air Force
- Extending the reach of the U.S. military’s train, advise, and assist mission below the Afghan corps level to allow for better observation and mentoring of maneuver units
- Taking into account the need for more military “guardian angels” for trainers and advisors who need to travel in insecure areas

SIGAR also offers two recommendations for the U.S. Congress that could:

- Provide a systematic review of authorities, roles, and resource mechanisms of major U.S. government stakeholder in security sector assistance
- Identify a lead agency for foreign police training in high-threat and post-conflict environments, resolving the current misalignments among Justice, State, and DOD.

The recommendations for Congressional consideration

In this venue, SIGAR's two recommendations for Congressional consideration deserve a bit of additional comment.

The first of these is that we believe Congress should consider (1) establishing a commission to review the institutional authorities, roles, and resource mechanisms of each major U.S. government stakeholder in SSA missions, and (2) evaluating the capabilities of each department and military service to determine where SSA expertise should best be institutionalized.¹⁴

In the FY 2017 NDAA, Congress mandated the Secretary of Defense undertake a study of DOD security cooperation activities, to be led by an independent organization of experts. This is a step in the right direction; however, we recommend that the mandate be expanded to include State, Justice, and other key SSA stakeholders. Our recommended study should include an analysis and evaluation of the authorities-based relationships and coordination mechanisms of U.S. government departments and agencies, and suggest ways to improve their effectiveness. Additionally, because the reliance on contractors to meet the needs of the U.S. SSA program in Afghanistan was not effective, the U.S. government should formalize and institutionalize SSA expertise within its military and civilian elements.

Our second suggested recommendation for Congressional consideration is that Congress should consider mandating a full review of all U.S. foreign police development programs, identify a lead agency for all future police-development activities, and provide the identified agency with the necessary staff, authorities, and budget to accomplish its task.¹⁵

The Department of Justice's International Criminal Investigative Training Assistance Program (ICITAP) is staffed with law enforcement professionals experienced in the design, delivery, and management of foreign police development programs and security sector construction.

¹⁴ SIGAR, *Reconstructing the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces: Lessons from the U.S. Experience in Afghanistan*, a Lessons Learned Program report, 9/2017, p. 182.

¹⁵ SIGAR, *Reconstructing the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces: Lessons from the U.S. Experience in Afghanistan*, a Lessons Learned Program report, 9/2017, p. 182.

While ICITAP uses federal and non-federal police advisors and trainers, it does not contract out the responsibility for program management and accountability. ICITAP has no independent budget and is fully dependent on State or DOD for funding and guidance. State does not have a staff of law enforcement professionals, but does have the required authorities and funding. In high-threat environments, DOD will by default assume a significant role in police development programs and, therefore, elements within DOD must be considered in the congressional review.

During this review, the U.S. government should identify the lead agency for training both foreign police units involved in civil policing and also paramilitary police forces similar to the European gendarmerie. The U.S. government would benefit from having deployable experts capable of conducting training in both facets of policing.

Opportunities for near-term improvements

The two recommendations SIGAR has offered for Congressional consideration, even if adopted tomorrow, would obviously take substantial time and effort to yield measurable results. That does not mean they are not worth considering, for our Afghan engagement will continue for years to come, and other contingencies already on the horizon could rapidly develop into new demands on already stretched U.S. military resources.

With the Afghan conflict in “stalemate” and with a new strategy for U.S. security-sector assistance getting under way, the time is ripe for seeking every opportunity for improvement. As we briefed the report to senior government and military officials, we identified some opportunities that can augment the recommendations already in our report. In that spirit, I suggest for your consideration seven additional steps that could pluck some low-hanging fruit and process the harvests into near-term gains:

1. Establish a DOD-led interagency fact-finding mission (perhaps under the aegis of the Joint Staff) to examine the ANDSF’s actual current and coming needs against U.S. and NATO capabilities. This examination could create a common operating picture of the U.S. advisory mission to better understand how each command and each unit is conducting its train, advise, and assist functions, and with what results. If DOD does not take the initiative in this matter, Congress could of course mandate the mission. The findings of the fact-finding mission would enable the United States to realign its advisory mission to ensure that the right advisor and unit is partnered correctly with the Afghans: police training police, governance specialists advising ministries, etc. As the SIGAR Lessons Learned report has documented, this basic alignment is often absent in our conduct of train, advise, and assist.
2. Create proponent leads for the ANA and ANP. Right now there is no central body responsible for overseeing the advisory mission for the entire force to ensure that the right advisors and units are partnered correctly with the Afghans—police training

police, governance specialists advising ministries, etc. We have ministerial advisors in Kabul and operational advisors at the regional commands, but no one is synchronizing the needs and requirements of the force and ensuring that the advisory mission supports those objectives. The Afghan Special Operations Forces and the Afghan Air Force have proponent leads that do this type of comprehensive analysis—one of many reasons that those forces are more successful than their peers.

3. With the introduction of more than 150 UH-60 Blackhawk helicopters for the Afghan security forces, the U.S. Army should reach out to the U.S. Air Force to capitalize on their best practices from training Afghan fixed-wing pilots. Helicopter crews operate highly complex flying machines—and the Blackhawks are also very different from the Russian helicopters that many Afghans are accustomed to— and can be simultaneously tasked with missions ranging from ammunition resupply and casualty evacuation, to VIP transport and air-to-ground rocket and machine-gun fire. The training mission for these crews requires careful attention to structuring the advisor mission, conducting pre-deployment training, and documenting operational and tactical lessons learned.
4. We recognize that rotational schedules of U.S. military and civilian personnel cannot change overnight. So to apply best practices—including persistent and comprehensive train, advise, and assist efforts—we recommend that DOD create an element in Washington, DC, staffed with representatives from all military services, departments, and other interagency partners involved in train, advise, and assist. Staff assigned to this element would serve for four-year tours with regular rotations in Afghanistan. Operating such an interagency element would do much to preserve institutional knowledge, align efforts, and detect gaps or cross-purposes in doctrine, planning, and operations. It is also important that these assignments be career-enhancing for the people involved, and not seen or treated as a sideshow or an interruption in their career path.
5. Optimize NATO's participation in Afghanistan. This requires a thorough analysis of the current advisory needs and of each NATO country's capabilities. We need to better understand the role of U.S. policy in NATO's decision-making process. For instance, this past spring, the forthcoming details of the new U.S. strategy were vague about how many additional U.S. soldiers might be deployed. This vagueness prevented NATO leadership from securing solid commitments from our alliance partners. Setting up the process for deploying NATO forces was delayed until October's force-generation conference. Even with commitments being made in October, additional forces are unlikely to deploy in Afghanistan for at least six months.
6. We must consider the increased security requirements for advisory missions. With our recommendation for an increase in civilian advising, there must be a parallel increase in security personnel to support the mission.

7. DOD and State should immediately finalize a memorandum of agreement which permits federal civilian agencies, including SIGAR, to travel outside the Kabul Embassy under USFOR-A protection, without second-guessing the U.S. military's well established capability for providing adequate security. This will help ensure that oversight agencies can continue to carry out their missions. Failure to fill the gap between the security needs of federal personnel under Chief of Mission authority and State's available security resources will prevent applying a whole-of-government approach to reconstruction and oversight, thus putting mission, lives, and money at unnecessary risk.

Conclusion

To put it plainly, as our report does, the United States failed to understand the complexities and scale of the mission required to stand up and mentor security forces in a country suffering from thirty years of war, misrule, corruption, and deep poverty. We still need to address the problems of defining mission requirements, and of executing these missions adequately.

The ANDSF is fighting hard, and improving in many ways. But we have to do a better job of assisting their growth. Smarter and more appropriate security assistance is vital, now in Afghanistan, and later in whatever new contingencies arise in the future.

"The future," Harvard University historians Richard Neustadt and Ernest May wrote 30 years ago, "has no place to come from but the past." Therefore, "what matters for the future ... is departures from the past, alterations, changes, which prospectively or actually divert familiar flows from accustomed channels."¹⁶

As SIGAR's Lessons Learned Program report has found, the accustomed channels of U.S. security-sector assistance have been, until recently, meandering and clogged. They need more dredging and straightening. Resolving to do better in security-assistance missions, and absorbing even some of the lessons in SIGAR's new report will offer a better way forward for the Afghan people—and ultimately, a more successful way to hasten the end of America's longest war.

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

¹⁶ Richard E. Neustadt and Ernest R. May (both of Harvard University), *Thinking in Time: The Uses of History for Decision Makers* (New York, 1986), p. 251.

Mr. DESANTIS. Thank you, Mr. Sopko.

The chair now recognizes himself for 5 minutes.

Mr. Sopko, how long have you been SIGAR?

Mr. SOPKO. It is going on 6 years.

Mr. DESANTIS. So how has Afghanistan improved and/or how has Afghanistan worsened in your time being the Inspector General for Afghanistan?

Mr. SOPKO. It is mixed, Mr. Chairman. The security situation has deteriorated dramatically over those 6 years. On the other hand, we have had some positive results. I think, in particular, the Afghan military, despite the loss of more casualties, is actually doing a better job. But they are up against very serious opponents. So it is mixed.

I think the problem now is, with the new strategy, we really do not know what State and AID are supposed to do as part of that strategy. So we are still observing and hoping we can get a better idea on the new strategy going forward.

Mr. DESANTIS. Now you recently returned from Afghanistan. You got to meet, I think as you alluded to, a lot of the folks on the ground. If just the average American were to come up to you and say, "What is going on in Afghanistan?" what is that elevator speech you would give them?

Mr. SOPKO. It is a stalemate, and the big question is, is it a stalemate going down or is it a stalemate going up? And I do not have a good answer for that, sir.

Mr. DESANTIS. SIGAR's security assistance lessons learned report is very extensive. What would you say the bottom line of that report is?

Mr. SOPKO. The bottom line is the U.S. Government was ill-prepared to conduct the security sector mission. They did not understand the size and scope of what they were facing. Our normal security sector assistance is to a developed country. We are helping, let's say, the Turks with a new weapons system. We are helping the Koreans with a new personnel system. This was designing and building an entire military and entire police force.

The other problem is we were totally misaligned in our capabilities with their needs, disorganized, did not fully understand and utilize NATO for the things that they could provide. And we have detailed a number of problems with giving too complicated systems, having military officers in the U.S. trying to teach police, having Air Force pilots teaching police, having people who know nothing about personnel systems teaching ministries on how to develop personnel systems.

So that was the big problem that we found. Those are the findings and lessons of the report.

Mr. DESANTIS. So I think that you were able to brief this report to the administration during their Afghanistan strategy review. So does the new strategy announced by the administration reflect any of your recommendations?

Mr. SOPKO. Yes, it does. I cannot say we can take credit for that, but at least they agree with many of our recommendations.

I think one of our recommendations is, for train, advise, assist to work, you have to drive it down below the corps level. So you

have to get down to the kandak or below. That is one of the provisions.

There are a number of other provisions. I think Mr. Cunningham maybe can give you more details. He participated in all the briefings. If it is okay, sir?

Mr. DESANTIS. Yes. Sure.

Mr. CUNNINGHAM. Yes, sir. So we participated in that failure analysis with the chairman of the joint staff, General Dunford. One of the big things we talked about was the realignment of our advisory capabilities to the Afghan needs in the military and police.

The current units that are going out were already in pre-deployment training prior to the release of our failure analysis. What we were told is that the new units will have the proper training going forward. We just have not yet seen that put into practice.

So cautiously optimistic, but we do know our recommendations did go forward to both the Secretary of Defense and to the White House.

Mr. DESANTIS. Great.

Mr. Sopko, how will we know if DOD and State have acted on your recommendations? And what outcomes can we expect to see on the ground if they follow them?

I guess the issue is we have things being identified—I mean, do I have to hold another hearing? I mean, are we going to get a sense in the Congress in relatively short order that some of these changes are being made, particularly with the State Department, because I think there has been a lot of frustration with how they have handled some of this stuff?

Mr. SOPKO. I think there are some low-hanging fruit that you can pluck right now. And I think and I hope the administration will pluck those and, to draw out that analogy, press them into some good policies.

I think I have touched on five or six of them. We can go into more detail on those. There are number of things that can be done right away, short-term turnaround.

The simplest is have the Army pick up the phone and call the Air Force on the lessons learned, the best practices from training A-29 pilots. It was fantastic. But as far as we know, the Army has not even picked up the phone yet.

I think things like that are just silly. This stove-piping is going to be our death. That is one of the things.

And I am happy to provide and discuss, and I know Mr. Cunningham, who wrote the report, we can give you more of those examples of—these are fast turnaround things that you should be seeing the administration do immediately.

Mr. DESANTIS. Great. My time is up.

I recognize the ranking member, Mr. Lynch, for 5 minutes.

Mr. LYNCH. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Again, Mr. Chairman, I want to give you great credit for holding this hearing and drilling down on this issue. I really do appreciate it.

Again, thank you, Mr. Sopko.

Thank you, Mr. Cunningham, for your good work.

Mr. Sopko, 5 years, going on 6 years now, there is an institutional memory that I think you offer us that is very, very helpful during our investigations.

I want to talk about the limitations on your travel. So I have been to Afghanistan maybe a dozen times. I know that Mr. Russell and Mr. Issa and others here have been frequent flyers to Afghanistan and Pakistan on the other side of the border.

In the past, we have had no problems getting into Lashkargah, Kandahar City. They put us in Strykers. We were able to drive right down to the Pakistan border, a place called Spin Boldak.

So we have had wide access in our past oversight investigations in Afghanistan. But, of course, at that time, we had 100,000 troops or thereabouts, so the assets were plentiful. And we had great cooperation from General Dunford and other generals, going back to General Petraeus.

What is the situation there now, in terms of your own travel?

Mr. SOPKO. Ranking Member Lynch, our travel has been restricted. Some of this is because of the point you make. We no longer have 100,000, 120,000 coalition forces.

Part of it is also because of the problem with insider attacks. That is something I think even General Dunford recently spoke about publicly, that this is a serious problem. And I know President Ghani has tried to do something about that.

My concern—and I will say this. You are a high-visibility target, sir, when you travel. When the chairman travels, even somebody as lowly as I am a high-visibility target. So you cannot use the restrictions on your travel the same for the average diplomat or SIGAR employee.

But even with them, there has been a growing reluctance by the State Department to let the people go outside of the Embassy, even to the Green zone. I think the classic—I will cite you two examples, sir, and I do not want to take too much of your time, but one was the U.S. military wanted me to see an Afghan base and to see how they were protecting the taxpayers' dollars by setting up a system to protect fuel. I was to walk 100 feet with my staff with a U.S. military-assigned protection detail that goes over multiple times a day, and the Ambassador refused to let us go, even though General Kaiser and General Nicholson wanted us to see that.

That is the problem.

Mr. LYNCH. Okay. I get the sense of that. I will tell you what, I am sure that this committee will be having codels over in Afghanistan fairly soon. If you could just, not now, but make a list of sites that you need to get out to, I have had great cooperation from General Dunford and Secretary Mattis, for that matter, in terms of travel. So maybe we can combine our resources and plan ahead and make sure you get out to where you need to go.

Mr. SOPKO. And, Mr. Lynch, the important thing is there is an MOU that was in place.

Mr. LYNCH. You are eating all my time. I am sorry.

Mr. SOPKO. Okay.

Mr. LYNCH. We are going to have to deal with that off-line.

The other question I had was, so we have classification issues that were in place for the last 14 or 13 years, and now we have some new classification issues. What am I being denied? What is

the American public being denied access to under the new classification regime?

Mr. SOPKO. I would ask to be made part of the record—we have a seven-page document laying out everything that has been classified. It is basically casualty, force strength, equipment, operational readiness, attrition figures, as well as performance assessments. That would mean, using the new test, it looks like the Afghans can classify anything that is embarrassing.

So I have a list of reports here, that I think all of you have probably read, dealing with the Afghan navy that did not exist, dealing with the camouflage that did not exist, and dealing with an airplane that cost nearly \$500 million that couldn't fly. Using the new test, I would not be able to tell you in a public setting or the American people how their money is being spent. So this is a slippery slope, sir, that we are now on.

Mr. LYNCH. Mr. Chairman, I would make a motion that we accept the reports offered by Inspector General Sopko regarding the effect of the new classification regime instituted recently.

Mr. DESANTIS. Without objection.

Do you have copies that you can provide to us?

Mr. SOPKO. I can give you the whole list of the reports, as well as the copies. But I am happy to give you also this memo, which my staff prepared as to what specifically is now classified.

Mr. DESANTIS. Okay. Without objection.

Mr. LYNCH. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I yield back.

Mr. DESANTIS. The gentleman yields back.

The chair now recognizes the vice chairman of the committee, Mr. Russell, for 5 minutes.

Mr. RUSSELL. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you for holding this hearing.

I guess I have one basic question to begin with, and then we will take the discussion from there.

First off, thanks for what you do, and I mean that with all sincerity. But what are the consequences of quitting?

Mr. SOPKO. That is hard for me to describe. The consequences for quitting in Afghanistan?

Mr. RUSSELL. Sure.

Mr. SOPKO. The administration's statement is that, if we do, the country will turn into a terrorist haven.

Mr. RUSSELL. Okay, and I agree with that assessment, and I think that ought to frame really everything, Mr. Chairman, that this hearing focuses on, because it will be very easy to talk about time, money, many other things, and we will hear from many members on that. But I am the only Member of Congress in this hearing that actually served in Afghanistan. What I would take exception to is the notion that the design of the military was not thought through.

I would be happy to talk with you off-line about how it was designed, how the Soviet forces made a complete disaster of it, where they were not able to retain soldiers, they were not able to train them technically, which you have pointed out in the hearing today that we actually have had great success with that with special forces, with Blackhawk pilots, with a number of other things.

There is a multitude of problems in the country, corruption being first and foremost, and everyone on this committee would agree that we need to try to curtail that. But I, sir, remember when large portions of the country were not even occupied by any central government.

How many warlords occupy Afghanistan today?

Mr. SOPKO. Quite a few, sir.

Mr. RUSSELL. Where they are in total control of regions, Herat, Mazar-e Sharif, maybe 40 percent of Kabul as they are turning it into rubble? How many warlords occupy Afghanistan today?

Mr. SOPKO. Sir, let me just clarify. We are not talking about ultimate success. As I said, I think there has been success.

The report that we released had to do with the training mission and training —

Mr. RUSSELL. Well, let's visit that, because one of your critiques was that the police are not properly trained, and the military has no business training the police.

Are you aware, sir, that when we first began the mission, that NATO took on, many voluntarily, the training of the police, which was welcomed? In fact, I was a delegate to the United Nations Afghan security conference in 2002 that met and discussed these very issues in Geneva, Switzerland, after pulling my jeans and shirt to try to get to Geneva out of a duffel bag after sitting cross-legged on a carpet in Afghanistan.

But we understood the security issues there. And one of the problems, sir, was infiltration. They made a disaster of it when you had police forces coming in, goodwill, all of this, no vetting. And they said: Please come on in, and let's do this. We will train you to be police.

If you go back and examine the blue on green incidents, most of them come from law enforcement, not the military.

NATO, I agree, could be used better in that regard, but we have to look at the things for infiltration.

And with regard to the Army not talking or cooperating, I find that very striking since most of our headquarters are fully integrated in the Armed Forces there on the ground.

To point to this fact, you stated that the special forces have been quite successful and quite reliable. I would point out that the Army trained those, so they obviously know something about training to technical ability and giving all of that.

I guess my point is this. While I applaud efforts on corruption, what is hard for me as a warrior for most of my adult life is it is always people sitting here talking to people sitting there pointing bony fingers with red faces saying, "Why is this a failure? Why did this go wrong? We should quit. We should pull out."

And I will tell you what. For the record, Mr. Chairman, I cannot be one of those today. I just cannot. There will be follow-on testimony that we will hear from our colleagues, and I respect that. But quitting is going to have disastrous effects.

And the more that we feed this narrative that our Nation does not have the will and the resolve to get things done is part of the problem. Having been a warrior and veteran of several wars, I can tell you this, that when we have this confusing message coming from Congress and coming from others where: We are going to

have commitment; no we are not going to have commitment. Oh, we are going to have a timeline; no, we are not going to have a timeline. Oh, we are going to be here for this long with this many troops; no, we are not going to be there for this long with this many troops.

Does that have an impact on how the Afghans see resolve and commitment from the United States?

Mr. SOPKO. I do not know, sir.

Mr. RUSSELL. Well, I do. It has a big impact.

Mr. SOPKO. But, Congressman, let me just tell you, we support the mission in Afghanistan. The reason we issued the report is to try to draw lessons learned —

Mr. RUSSELL. And I favor that.

Mr. SOPKO.—and best practices. So we state the facts as we found them. I think you probably would agree in reading the report with 90 percent of what we found and what works.

The whole reason we issue these reports are not to say “gotcha” to the military. And as General Dunford and others have been very happy, they confirm and help them in designing and implementing better programs for the future.

So this report is not an attack on our military. It is not an attack on our mission, sir. It is trying to help the mission.

Mr. RUSSELL. And I am glad that you established that, because that is the foundation that we need to be on, and I am grateful for that.

I thank you for your indulgence, Mr. Chairman. I am out of time.

Mr. DESANTIS. The gentleman’s time has expired.

The chair now recognizes Ms. Demings for 5 minutes.

Ms. DEMINGS. Thank you so much, Mr. Chairman. And I echo the ranking member’s comments about this particular hearing. I am definitely glad to see it. As a new Member of Congress, my first codel was to Afghanistan for the purpose of really developing a better understanding of the mission there and also the overall strategy.

I also want to take a moment to commend my colleague Mr. Russell, as he leaves, for his service.

I do think, as a law enforcement officer, a career law enforcement officer, our overall strategy and exit strategy is also very important. So thank you to both of our witnesses for being here with us today.

Mr. Sopko, you said in the quarterly report to Congress from SIGAR notes that the military’s retroactive classification of important information about the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces will “hinder” your work. I know my colleague Mr. Lynch spoke somewhat about the classification system, the retroactive classification system.

Do you believe, and I think you answered in the affirmative on this, but do you believe that the American public should continue to have access to at least basic data on the Afghan National Security Forces?

Mr. SOPKO. Yes, I do, since they are paying for it.

Ms. DEMINGS. Earlier this week, the New York Times reported that Navy Captain Tom Gresback defended the decision to classify

the information, saying that it was done at the Afghan Government's request.

Do you think that it is an appropriate justification for DOD to classify previously unclassified information based on a request from the Afghan Government? Why or why not?

Mr. SOPKO. I do not because I believe in transparency, and I think the loss of transparency is bad not only for us, but it is also bad for the Afghan people.

Truth, the Bible says that truth will set you free. I think somebody else said, "But it will be uncomfortable in the beginning." And that is what I told President Ghani. "Your people want to know the truth."

Ironically, the stuff that was classified, you know, the Taliban know this. They know who was killed. They know all about that. The Afghans know about it. The U.S. military knows about it. The only people who will not know are the people who are paying for it. That is your constituent. That is every one of you who pays taxes.

And I think the American taxpayer has a right to know how their money is being spent and whether it is succeeding or not. If you classify this, the only people who will not know what is going on in Afghanistan are the people who are paying for it.

Ms. DEMINGS. Has DOD provided you with any other justification for classifying metrics that were previously unclassified? If so, what was it?

Mr. SOPKO. The only justification was that the Afghans did not want it released. The second justification was a reinterpretation of some policy on classification, but they never gave us a copy of the policy.

I think the other telling thing is that they will not identify who classified the material.

Ms. DEMINGS. Just last week, Secretary Tillerson visited Afghanistan with a heavy security detail and met with the Afghan President at Brigham Air Force Base, largely because of security considerations. How can SIGAR and congressional committees conduct effective oversight of U.S. Government programs in Afghanistan if personnel are confined to the most secure environments?

Mr. SOPKO. It is extremely difficult, Congresswoman. But as I said before, we are high-visible targets. The average USAID, DOD, SIGAR official is not that visible.

But only if we have an MOU with the military providing us that protection or with the State Department providing protection can we do our jobs. And that can be done. And we had an MOU for 6 years with DOD, but now, we have been told, in 90 days, it disappears.

Ms. DEMINGS. What sort of support is SIGAR provided in Afghanistan by the U.S. military as it carries out its oversight responsibilities?

Mr. SOPKO. Actually, we have had great support from the U.S. military, and we still have great support from the State Department security officials. They have been very good. It is just a decision was made by the Ambassador there, and it may have been by main State, we do not know, to abrogate our MOU and not let us follow that through.

That is the confusing thing, and we do not think that is really helpful to the mission.

Ms. DEMINGS. Thank you so much.

Mr. Chairman, I yield back.

Mr. DESANTIS. The gentlelady yields back.

The chair now recognizes Mr. Duncan from Tennessee for 5 minutes.

Mr. DUNCAN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Georgie Anne Geyer, the very respected foreign policy columnist, wrote several years ago that Americans “will inevitably come to a point where they will see they have to have a government that provides services at home or one that seeks empire across the globe.”

We all have seen very many articles, and there have been hearings over the years, which have described Afghanistan as the graveyard of empires.

Backing that up, it was interesting to me, on September 4 of this year, a couple months ago, the New York Times international edition carried a story entitled, “The Empire Stopper,” which said foreign powers have tried to control Afghanistan since the 19th century. But the story had a very interesting first paragraph. It said, “When the American author James Michener went to Afghanistan to research his work of historical fiction, ‘Caravans,’ it was 1955 and there were barely any roads in the country. Yet there were already Americans and Russians there jockeying for influence.”

Continuing the Times quote, it said, “Later, the book’s Afghan protagonist would tell an American diplomat that one day both America and Russia would invade Afghanistan, and that both would come to regret it.”

Michener wrote that 62 years ago, yet how true it is still today.

Then, finally, I will refer to something that William F. Buckley, the icon of conservatism, wrote several years ago. He wrote it about Iraq, but it certainly applies to Afghanistan even more so. Mr. Buckley started out as a strong supporter of the war in Iraq, but before he died, he became a strong opponent. He wrote this. He said, “A respect for the power of the United States is engendered by our success in engagements in which we take part. A point is reached when tenacity conveys not steadfastness of purpose but misapplication of pride.”

Let me repeat that. “A point is reached when tenacity conveys not steadfastness of purpose but misapplication of pride.”

Buckley continued. He said, “It can’t reasonably be disputed that if in the year ahead the situation in Iraq continues as bad as it has done in the past year, we will have suffered more than another 500 soldiers killed. Where there had been skepticism about our venture, there will then be contempt.”

I can tell you that I do not really understand how any true fiscal conservative can be in favor of dragging this war on forever. We have been there 16 years.

And I think it is a huge understatement to say that I do not agree with the New York Times many times or very often. But the New York Times editorial board on October 22nd, just a few days ago, published an editorial entitled, “America’s Forever Wars,” pointing out that the U.S. “has been at war continually since the attacks of 9/11 and now has troops in at least 172 countries.”

The board wrote that, so far, the American people have seemed to accept all this militarism but, "It is a very real question whether, in addition to endorsing these commitments, which have cost trillions of dollars and many lives over 16 years, they will embrace new entanglements."

The Times added that the Congress has spent little time considering such issues in a comprehensive way or debating why all these deployments are needed.

So I do appreciate the chairman being willing to have this hearing, but it is very sad that we have allowed all these trillions of dollars to have been spent, and all of these lives that have been lost needlessly. I think it is very, very sad. And it is something that I think we are long past the time when we should have gotten out of Afghanistan, and we should not keep continuing to drag this out.

I would like to say, in conclusion, that, Mr. Sopko, I really appreciate the work that you have done pointing out the billions and billions of dollars' worth of waste over there.

And I would like to ask unanimous consent that a story from the Washington Post dated August 22nd of this year entitled, "Here are six costly failures from America's longest war. No. 1: Cashmere goats"—and this story ran in the Washington Post. I would like to ask unanimous consent that this story be included in the record at this point.

Mr. DESANTIS. Without objection.

Mr. DUNCAN. And I thank you for yielding me this time.

Mr. DESANTIS. The gentleman yields back.

The chair now recognizes Mr. Welch for 5 minutes.

Mr. WELCH. And I am sorry Mr. Russell is not here, because I, too, would like to pay respect for his service.

I want to say to SIGAR that your office has been the "just the facts, ma'am" approach to what is happening to taxpayer dollars, and I believe that it has allowed those who believe the policy in Afghanistan is the right direction but it is not necessarily being implemented right, and those who question the wisdom of the policy, basic information about how so much of our spending essentially has evaporated or been transferred to Swiss bank accounts by corrupt officials in Afghanistan.

So, Mr. Chairman, I really want to thank you for this hearing, because this office is absolutely essential, whether you take the point of view of Mr. Russell or Mr. Duncan about what is the right policy.

Second, the questions about what our policy should be are not the responsibility of your office, so I just want to acknowledge that.

Mr. SOPKO. That is correct, sir.

Mr. WELCH. You are looking at where the dollars we have appropriated are going. Are they going into the mission or are they vanishing into thin air?

Number three, I have major questions about our policy, and I thought Mr. Duncan had an excellent quote. This is not about our military. I have been to Afghanistan four times, and it is extraordinary, extraordinary to me, to see what our soldiers are accomplishing under extraordinarily, extraordinarily difficult circumstances.

But the challenge for us, Mr. Chairman, is it is our job to give them a policy that gives them a shot at success. That is our job. When Mr. Russell is there as a soldier, he has to carry out the mission, but we are the ones that have to give it to him.

So looking back at all the SIGAR reports, our dollars are being wasted in pretty gross ways, starting with shrink-wrapped pallets of cash being flown out of the airbase, starting with contracts to deliver water to our soldiers in forward operating bases that have to go through Pakistan and where there are firefights basically used as negotiating ploys by warlords that want to extract much more money in order to allow safe passage for that water to get through, to the recent episode of buying uniforms that had camouflage designs that are suited for Tahiti but not Afghanistan.

So I really appreciate your recommendations, and they all make immense sense to me. And I would endorse those, and perhaps our committee could as well.

But the fundamental question is the policy that is going to be advocated by the Congress of the United States and whether this thing is working at all.

In your investigations, can you make some general comments about the reliability of accountability systems within the Afghani partners that we have, Mr. Sopko?

Mr. SOPKO. Yes, I can, sir.

Basically, we have serious questions about most of the internal accountability capabilities. I actually had a conversation with President Ghani on that on my last trip, and he acknowledged that there are problems in certain agencies or ministries. We actually came to an agreement. He promised to issue a presidential decree giving us access to the internal books and records and individuals of all the ministries, so we can do an in-depth analysis of their internal controls.

Mr. WELCH. Let me ask one question on that. The last trip I took to Afghanistan, we had some of our Justice Department folks who were there, and they were teaching Afghan Government officials about how to detect corruption. And they had to stop that program because they were teaching people about how to detect corruption who became the people who then implemented corruption. Has that changed?

Mr. SOPKO. That is still a serious threat. And that is why there was an attempt to set up a vetted anticorruption unit of the Afghan police, their prosecutors and judges. And we are looking into that.

The problem is that quite a few of those people were supposed to be polygraphed. They were polygraphed, and a good number failed the polygraphs. But we have never followed through with removing those people.

So those are some of the questions that we are looking at. If you are setting up a vetted unit, by definition, you have to follow through with the vetting. You do not polygraph people and then let them stay when they fail a polygraph on corruption.

Mr. WELCH. I want to thank you and Mr. Cunningham for your service.

I yield back.

Mr. DESANTIS. The gentleman yields back.

The chair now recognizes the gentleman from California, Mr. Issa, for 5 minutes.

Mr. ISSA. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Good to see you again. I have the greatest respect for our Inspector Generals, but particularly those who operate in a combat zone, as you have for so many years. And it is interesting that one of the complaints you bring to us today, one of the very valid ones, is that you are not being given enough access in the combat zone to do your job. That is something, hopefully, that the committee can help right.

Every Friday night for most of the year on HBO, Bill Maher, a very controversial figure, has his show, and he always has a section called, "New Rules." "New Rules" always sort of mocks, if you will, some of the most egregious things.

But let me just go through new rules for a moment. New rules: Should the United States Government have an absolute policy of not paying bribes or other corrupt things in order to get border crossings, including, obviously, the delivery of water that was just mentioned? Should that be something we will not do, period?

Mr. SOPKO. I agree with that.

Mr. ISSA. Okay. But we are doing it. We continue to do it in country after country. Isn't that true?

Mr. SOPKO. Sir, I only look at Afghanistan. That is a problem that bribes are being paid. But we try to look into that if we can and stop it.

Mr. ISSA. I know you do, but when I talk about new rules, this is new rules for the Trump administration. This problem did not begin with this administration or even the last administration.

So one of the new rules should be that the convoys turn around, they report to us, and we deal with either Pakistan or Afghanistan and tell them that one of the conditions of our forces doing what we do for them is, in fact, that we do not pay bribes. We do not do it on the foreign corruption act. We should not have our vendors doing it in order to get their convoys to our troops. That is a fair statement under what should be a new rule, if you will.

Mr. SOPKO. I think the U.S. military is trying to enforce that rule right now. Under the current regime there as well as the prior one, I think they have been trying to do that as much as they can, using conditionality.

Mr. ISSA. Now you transcend two presidential administrations, the end of the last one and now this one.

Mr. SOPKO. That is correct.

Mr. ISSA. And it is fair to say that this one is less corrupt, at least at the top, than the last one, right?

Mr. SOPKO. Absolutely correct.

Mr. ISSA. So second new rule: We should not support a President, whether elected or not, that is putting hundreds of millions or billions of dollars into his and his family's pockets and tolerate that the way we did under the last administration. Fair?

Mr. SOPKO. That is music to my ears, sir.

Mr. ISSA. Okay. I am going through my lessons learned, because the argument of today is only really germane if it is the argument of the last 16 years that we do not seem to have learned.

The last one, which I think is one for this committee, we are nation-building in dozens of nations, including many of them in Africa, every day. To be candid, the Peace Corps all the way back with John F. Kennedy was part of, if you will, shedding to a people what we know that is part of building a nation from the bottom up.

Each President I can think of going back a long way has said they are not going to nation-build, if we are going to nation-build, let me ask you the most poignant question. You mentioned the problems of Active Duty uniformed military personnel trying to teach things which they are not particularly suited or trained for, correct?

Mr. SOPKO. That is correct.

Mr. ISSA. So shouldn't the new rule be that we develop capability either at the State Department and/or at the Department of Defense, presumably in the Reserve component, and/or somewhere else, that, in fact, finds the people around the United States or even outside, around the world, that, in fact, can be a productive part of nation-building?

Mr. SOPKO. That is absolutely correct, and that is what we are talking about in our latest report, sir.

Mr. ISSA. So if we are going to take away something after 16 years of—I call it the Groundhog Day in Afghanistan and Iraq, of being back at the same point that we were at previous times before we let things go awry, and now we are back fighting to a point at which we are hoping not to make the same mistake again, one of the most important things is we as a committee and we as a Nation must find a way to build those institutions, whether those countries want to fully cooperate or not, find a way to build those institutions. And that means we cannot continue to use the same people who, as well-meaning and hardworking as they have been, are not prepared or qualified to exit the country with the kind of skills—and that includes the United States military, if you will, the warfighter trying to be a trainer of mayors or bureaucrats.

Mr. SOPKO. That is correct, sir. Again, it is trying to align our capabilities. We are not saying we do not have the capabilities. The problem is they are not the ones we are sending because of the way the system was set up.

And that is the low-hanging fruit that we can start doing. That is what we talk about, do this assessment. Find out what their needs are, and then come back and find out what our capabilities are, and then make certain the right people go to the right units in Afghanistan.

Mr. ISSA. Thank you.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

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

The chair now recognizes the gentleman from Kentucky, Mr. Comer, for 5 minutes.

Mr. COMER. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Sopko, thank you so much for being here. Thank you for the work that you do. That is so important to us in explaining the complexities of what is currently going on with this conflict and helping us determine a more successful future for this mission.

I also want to make note that I am proud to represent the men and women of Fort Campbell military base in Kentucky. They have

been deployed to Afghanistan countless times over the past 16 years, so this issue is very important to me and my district.

My first question, in your testimony, you highlighted the challenge that politically constrained timelines pose to reconstruction efforts, particularly ANDSF readiness.

I think it is clear that we need to move away from the previous administration's strategy of imposing arbitrary timelines and force levels that do not reflect the situation on the ground. That being said, I have serious concerns with the prospect of an open-ended conflict in Afghanistan that could drag on for another 16 years.

So my question is, can you comment on how to balance the need to respond to conditions on the ground while still maintaining key benchmarks and goals for the transition to more complete Afghan security control?

Mr. SOPKO. I think that can be done, and part of it is being done but with oversight like this by Congress. Do not give open-ended funding. Do not give open-ended acquiescence to a mission. Calling people to task, whether it is at State, AID, or DOD, or the IG community, and tell them what it is.

That is our biggest complaint, sir, is we look at metrics, inputs, outputs, and outcomes. And we find agencies that do not even know how much they are spending. But they can maybe tell us how much they have spent it on, how many shoes they bought, how many guns they bought, or whatever. But they do not know what the ultimate outcome is.

And your job, I think, in Congress, if I can be so bold as to suggest, is to hold the U.S. Government agencies accountable, just like we are trying to hold them accountable in Afghanistan.

But I agree with you on that point, sir.

Mr. COMER. The next question, in your testimony, you also noted that U.S. security sector assistance channels in Afghanistan have been meandering and clogged until recently. Do you believe the Trump administration's new strategy is helping to remedy some of these issues? And what recommendations from your report do you think are most important to help improve our train, advise, and assist mission?

Mr. SOPKO. Congressman, can I defer to my colleague, Mr. Cunningham, who has done most of the briefings and actually helped write most of this report?

Mr. COMER. Absolutely.

Mr. CUNNINGHAM. So we have seen the new administration under General Dunford and Secretary of Defense Mattis actually embrace a lot of the lessons learned and key findings from our report. As I said, during the failure analysis, we were able to implement a lot of the recommendations in our report into that discussion.

The problem is some of those recommendations are not being implemented today, but the next units going out is where we may see some change.

One of the biggest problems we have is we do not have a deployable police capability that can operate in a non-permissive environment to develop an Afghan national police force. The Department of Defense does not have an institutionalized capability, and the civilian agencies cannot operate in non-permissive environ-

ments or high-threat environments. So we miss that capability, and that is something that needs to be discussed.

The other issue we have noticed is that, at the ministerial level, a lot of the advisers are military uniform personnel who do not receive the pre-deployment training that the civilian advisers receive. The Minister of Defense adviser program run by the Department of Defense excludes uniform military personnel even though they are conducting the mission at the top.

So, yes, I do think that there can be small steps done to realign the mission, and I know that they are under discussion. We have just not seen necessarily whether or not they are being implemented today.

Mr. COMER. My last question, your recent report found that 152 Afghans went AWOL after traveling to the U.S. for training between 2005 and 2017.

First, my question, can you explain why these soldiers are traveling to the United States in the first place? Don't we have training programs in Afghanistan?

Mr. SOPKO. Sir, the decision was made that they should be trained here. There was some training that you can only do here in the United States. I mean, that is just the way it is. I mean, I cannot really tell you specifically why certain of them were done here. Maybe some can be done back more in Afghanistan, but I think our capabilities were here.

Mr. COMER. Has the government done anything to reduce these risks in the future?

Mr. SOPKO. Yes and no. The Department of Homeland Security was very receptive. The State Department refused to even consider one of our simple considerations, and that is maybe they should personally interview everyone who gets a visa in this program, and they just brushed that aside.

That is actually something you could help us with. I think it is just ridiculous. They interview everybody else who gets a visa who comes to the United States.

Now, we have identified there is a problem with Afghan military coming here. Over half of the people going AWOL in the United States are Afghans, so, obviously, you have a problem here. The State Department just brushed it aside and said we see no reason to interview them. Well, if it is good enough to interview them for other visas, why not interview them for this?

Mr. COMER. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

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

The chair not recognize this the gentleman from Georgia, Mr. Hice, for 5 minutes.

Mr. HICE. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I think this is an extremely important issue here that we are talking about with the high numbers going AWOL. Why are there so many Afghans that go AWOL? What is the deal here?

Mr. SOPKO. We were not able to interview all of them because some of them have disappeared, but we tried to interview as many Afghans as we could and also talked to people back in Afghanistan and talked to other people.

The reasons are mixed. Some of it is they are afraid to go back. It is a war-torn country, so stay here in the United States. Others,

they were upset when they found out that to go back to their units, they would have to pay bribes to get their jobs back, and they refused to do it. Others, I think it is just the fact that they are here, and it is a good chance to stay, if they could. And they claimed asylum.

Mr. HICE. Is there any national security threat? Because you did not mention that.

Mr. SOPKO. I am certain there is a national security threat, particularly, we have some people who just totally disappeared, and we do not know where they are. And the State Department has not been very helpful to the Department of Homeland Security in tracking them down.

Mr. HICE. Why have they not been responsive to help track these individuals down?

Mr. SOPKO. I think you have to ask the State Department that. That is the question we have.

Mr. HICE. Okay. Are there specific individuals we need to ask? Have you seen obstruction? Have there been individuals at State standing in the way of getting answers?

Mr. SOPKO. No, I cannot say that. I mean, it is the bureaucracy.

Mr. HICE. Someone is running the bureaucracy.

As you mentioned, we do not know who these people are. We do not know where they are. There is a certain number that are gone. We need to get a handle on this. Where at the State Department is the bottleneck?

Mr. SOPKO. We would be happy to brief you and give you information on where the bottleneck is, sir.

Mr. HICE. Okay, I would like that.

How much money has been spent, do you know, on training these Afghans here in the U.S?

Mr. SOPKO. I do not know offhand. Let me ask my staff. We do not have that number, sir, but we would be happy to get it.

Mr. HICE. Could you get that number for me?

Mr. SOPKO. Absolutely.

Mr. HICE. All right, I would appreciate that.

Now you alluded to, a few moments ago, that it is just kind of the way it is, but is there a better way to train these individuals than to bring them back here to the United States? Wouldn't it potentially save a lot of taxpayer money if we were able to train them there in their homeland?

Mr. SOPKO. Well, Congressman, it probably would save money, but sometimes they have to do it here. I would actually cite one of the places where they do the training, and they have had few people skip town or go AWOL, is right in your hometown. It is at the Air Force Base Moody —

Mr. HICE. Right.

Mr. SOPKO.—where the best place to train those pilots is in Moody, and this is one of the success stories we highlight.

It is interesting, in that area, and I think it would be worthwhile to talk to the Air Force in Moody about why they are so successful in training those pilots and mechanics, and they go back. So that is one of the success stories.

And I think there, they have to do the training there.

Mr. HICE. Right, and I would agree. And I have been there, and I have seen what you are talking about. And it is a success story.

I guess my thoughts are going beyond Moody and some specialized places where it is succeeding and the overall potential of a national security threat when we are bringing individuals here that we do not know anything really about. They are getting military training. They go AWOL. It sounds as though there is a significant portion of this program that could, wisely, be done in someplace other than the United States. Would you agree with that?

Mr. SOPKO. I think it is worth looking into. We do discuss that. But I think a first spot is just requiring in-person interviews for these military trainees by the State Department.

Mr. HICE. And you are saying that is not happening.

Mr. SOPKO. That is not happening, and that is what the State Department refused to acknowledge as being helpful.

Mr. HICE. All right. And did I hear you correctly moments ago, too, that this does happen with others but is not happening with Afghans? Is that correct?

Mr. SOPKO. Yes. That is what is so perplexing, because for every other type of visa, they do in-person interviews, but they do not do it for these people.

Mr. HICE. So is there a specific policy where these individuals are waived from that particular part of vetting?

Mr. SOPKO. As far as I know, it is a policy of the State Department, not the policy of the Department —

Mr. HICE. Just for Afghans?

Mr. SOPKO. I cannot speak beyond that, sir.

Mr. HICE. Who can give me an answer to that?

Mr. SOPKO. I will have the staff who worked on it get back to you, sir.

Mr. HICE. Please do so.

Listen, again, I want to join my other colleagues in thanking you for the great work that you do and for your forthright answers here in this hearing.

With that, Mr. Chairman, I yield back. Thank you.

Mr. DESANTIS. The gentleman yields back.

The chair now recognizes Mr. Massie from Kentucky for 5 minutes.

Mr. MASSIE. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Sopko, thank you for your service in this capacity. I also appreciate your matter-of-fact answers.

Can you give us the total tab so far for Afghan reconstruction since we have started in, roughly, 2012? If you want to round it off to the nearest billion?

[Laughter.]

Mr. SOPKO. I should have that at my fingertips. It is \$120.78 billion for reconstruction, and that is through September 30, 2017. But that does not include the \$7.42 billion that is in the pipeline. That means it has been authorized, appropriated, but not yet spent.

Mr. MASSIE. So the last time you were here 18 months ago, it was \$113 billion, roughly. Now we are up to \$120 billion, and you say there is \$7.4 billion in the pipeline.

The reason I ask that question is that stands in contrast to something we heard our President say, that we are fighting terrorism, we are not nation-building, in Afghanistan. It sounds like another \$7.4 billion in the pipeline might go to nation-building.

I noticed in our own budget, we are not cutting the money for “nation-building.”

Something else that is a little incongruous that I would like to get out on the table here is I used to see pictures on the Internet of our soldiers standing in poppy fields, and I never reposted those because I thought they might be photoshopped, because I knew we had a war on drugs going on in Afghanistan that, ostensibly, we are eradicating poppy fields over there.

How much have we spent, to date, eradicating poppy and in the counternarcotics effort in total in Afghanistan?

Mr. SOPKO. We cannot break it down to eradication. But altogether, in fighting narcotics, it is \$8.6 billion.

Mr. MASSIE. \$8.6 billion. I know I asked this question 18 months ago, but I will ask it again.

Has production of narcotics in Afghanistan gone up or down since 2002 when we started spending that money?

Mr. SOPKO. You know, I do not have the exact, going back to 2002. I can tell you from 2015, it has gone up 43 percent.

Mr. MASSIE. Forty-three percent in 2 years, and we are still spending billions of dollars over there to eradicate poppy.

I was at a town hall-type meeting this weekend in a factory in my district, and one of the attendees was a gulf veteran. He told me he has been standing in poppy fields and marijuana fields in Afghanistan. So now I know the pictures are real that I see. Those crops are there.

He struggled, and I struggled, to try to explain to the rest of the constituents in the room how that could be possible.

How is that possible that we are spending billions of dollars, and we can see it everywhere, yet it is not being destroyed?

Mr. SOPKO. It is possible for a couple reasons.

First of all, it is very difficult because of just the security situation.

But the second reason is we have no strategy. I have complained for the last 3 or 4 years, “Where is the counternarcotics strategy?” Just like we have no strategy for fighting corruption. You need a strategy. Then when you have the strategy, as the good congressman—then you look at inputs, outputs, and outcomes. You get metrics. We have no metrics. We have no strategy.

Now, what concerns me is that General Nicholson or General Dunford testify that 60 percent of the funding going to the Taliban terrorists come from narcotics trafficking, and we have no strategy?

Now, I think we all read in the press about how we focused on ISIS and their relationship to oil production, and we bombed the heck out of that oil production to cut off that funding source.

Poor General Nicholson is trying to fight the Taliban, and no one is focusing on 60 percent of the funding going to the Taliban. Now, that is a serious problem.

That is the proverbial elephant in the room. We are never going to win in Afghanistan if we do not focus on the whole narcotics problem.

Mr. MASSIE. In my brief time left, I want to talk about what winning looks like, because I think there is also this public perception that stands in stark contrast to what I have heard from you and also from our Secretary of State recently, who I think is more of a realist here. There is this public notion that we have routed the Taliban, and if we leave, they will come back to power.

Yet Secretary Tillerson says that, basically, we are fighting to have a better negotiating position with the Taliban and.

Have we routed the Taliban? And when we leave, will they be gone?

Mr. SOPKO. I am under oath. We have not routed the Taliban. But I am not the best person to answer the questions on how well we have done on the warfighting. I do reconstruction.

But, you know, I just have to be honest with you. We have not routed the Taliban.

Mr. MASSIE. I yield back my time.

Mr. DESANTIS. The gentlemen's time has expired.

The chair now recognizes Ms. Foxx for 5 minutes.

Ms. FOXX. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. And thanks to the witnesses who are here today.

Mr. Sopko, are you optimistic that the security situation will improve enough to allow your team out to survey and oversee the reconstruction efforts?

Mr. SOPKO. I believe the security situation will improve, and I believe, if the MOU with the Department of Defense and the State Department on security is written and is carried out, we will be able to get out, not as much as we would like, but we would at least be able to get out.

Ms. FOXX. And what is your view on the President's proposed troop increase impacting your ability to conduct oversight?

Mr. SOPKO. I think it can only help, ma'am. Although most of the advisers in the troop increase will be on advising and training. We hope there will be an increase in what we call guardian angels, not only for them but also for others who need their protection. So we think it is a positive step.

Ms. FOXX. And you have may have said this before I came in, but how has the DOD performed in the last year in getting facilities built quickly and at a much fairer price to taxpayers?

Mr. SOPKO. I cannot give an assessment on that yet. We are actually looking at that right now, and I cannot really tell you what the conclusions are. They are trying. Let's just say that. I think this military team here under General Nicholson has done more than anyone on trying to hold the Afghans accountable on corruption and other things. But I just cannot just give you an estimate on overall success.

Ms. FOXX. Let me ask you a couple specific areas. What is the status of the Ministry of Defense building? Last year experienced some significant, lengthy construction delays. Could you give us an update on the status of that building?

Mr. SOPKO. Well, we made six inspection visits to that building and identified a number of deficiencies. And they accepted our recommendations, DOD did, and I think they have implemented, in that case, all of our recommendations.

Ms. FOXX. Thank you very much.

I yield back, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. DESANTIS. The gentlewoman yields back.

The chair now recognizes the gentleman from North Carolina, Mr. Jones, for 5 minutes.

Mr. JONES. Mr. Chairman, thank you very much. I appreciate you holding this hearing.

I wrote to President Trump on July 18 of this year asking him if he was going to increase the number of troops, to please come to Congress first and let us have a debate on the future of Afghanistan, since we all know we have been there 16 years.

In that letter I wrote to the President, I noted that he had made 30 comments before he became a candidate and while he was a candidate about the waste in Afghanistan. I am just going to use one of four that I put in the letter.

"In 2013, you tweeted, 'Let's get out of Afghanistan. Our troops are being killed by the Afghans we train, and we waste billions there. Nonsense. Rebuild the United States of America.'"

That is just one of 30 comments he made about the waste, fraud, and abuse in Afghanistan.

The next sentence, I said, "Mr. President, I agree with those remarks and so does the 31st Commandant of the Marine Corps, my friend and unofficial adviser, General Chuck Krulak. As he said in a recent email to me, no one has ever conquered Afghanistan, and many have tried. We will join the list of nations that have tried and failed."

Mr. Sopko, I met with you many times officially and unofficially with other Members of Congress. When I listen to what you have shared today and what you shared many times before, and the waste, fraud, and abuse continues to go on, it is a tribal nation. Everyone who has ever been to Afghanistan, from the Russians to Alexander the Great and the British, have never changed one thing in the world.

I know there are people who do not appreciate you and your staff and what you do, because many of them are in Congress, not here on this committee today, that would like to cut your funding. That was a story in the newspaper a year ago. This MOU issue probably is because they are dragging their feet, but that is neither here nor there. I do not know that as a fact.

Because when the American people see the stories that come out from your report, every Member of Congress gets that same report, these stories, I have a handout, front and back, that I have a list of 50 stories about waste, fraud, and abuse that I give to my constituents back in the district.

And I guess what I want to try to get to is that, at some point in time, someone like yourself, General Nicholson, if he is over-seeing Afghanistan, has got to say to the American people: We have spent billions and trillions of dollars to rebuild Afghanistan, and we cannot build your bridges and your roads right here in America.

At some point in time, this Congress needs to have a debate after 16 years and let us have a new debate on the future of Afghanistan, because I will tell you truthfully that at least 90 Members of the House, both parties, that were not here in 2001. I was here in 2001. And when I hear this waste, fraud, and abuse consistently

for 16 years—I am on the on Armed Services Committee—it distresses me as a taxpayer.

I have the Marine Base Camp Lejeune in my district. I have talked to Marines, Active Duty and retirees, who have been to Afghanistan five, six, and seven times. And they say nothing will ever change.

That has nothing to do with the work that you and your staff do. You all are the truth-tellers. The problem is that Congress continues to pass bills that waste money over there, and we cannot even get a debate.

So my last point, very quickly, if you are here 10 years from now, and I will not be here 10 years from now, would you be willing to tell the Members of Congress that the American people who are now financially broke as a Nation have done about all they can do in Afghanistan?

I yield back.

Mr. SOPKO. Congressman, as you well know, and we have had this conversation, I do not to policy. I do process.

But I do promise you, the first day I am out of this job, because it is not my job to talk policy, I am happy to publicly tell you what I really think about our mission in Afghanistan. But until then, it is not my job to do that.

I support this committee, the chairman, the ranking member, for holding the hearings. I am a history buff. There is a famous quote by President Lincoln: Give the people the facts and the country will be free.

That is what our job is. We give you the facts, and you as the policymakers decide whatever you do.

I think Congressman Welch was very accurate on that. Whatever side you are on this issue, I just state the facts. You know, I am like the umpire. We had a ballgame that was last night. I am calling strikes and outs and whatever. Some people may not like me, but I am still supporting the game.

And that is what my job is. And your job is to then take those facts and handle them appropriately.

Mr. DESANTIS. Thank you, the gentleman from North Carolina.

I want to thank the witnesses. I want to thank Mr. Sopko for your service. I know you have taken trips over there. It is not an easy place to get to or get around. I think you have given us a lot of really good information. And we thank you for that.

Obviously, there is some low-hanging fruit that we want to get to, both on the congressional side but also, hopefully, with the Trump administration.

So the hearing record will be open for 2 weeks for any member to submit an opening statement or questions for the record.

Mr. DESANTIS. If there is no further business, without objection, the subcommittee stands adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 11:54 a.m., the subcommittee was adjourned.]

APPENDIX

MATERIAL SUBMITTED FOR THE HEARING RECORD

Publicly published SIGAR reports can be found at <https://www.sigar.mil/AllReports/>.


SIGAR

 Office of the Special Inspector General
for Afghanistan Reconstruction

MEMORANDUM

DATE: October 31, 2017

FROM: Research and Analysis Directorate, Office of the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction

TO: John Sopko, Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction

SUBJECT: Afghan National Defense and Security Forces Data Classified or Restricted for SIGAR's October 2017 *Quarterly Report to the United States Congress*

Mr. Sopko,

Please find attached a table describing data pertaining to the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces (ANDSF) that was provided to SIGAR classified or otherwise restricted for SIGAR's October 2017 *Quarterly Report to the United States Congress*. The table includes the types of information that have been classified or restricted; when the data was classified; the current data classification level; the classification justification that we have received up to this point; the data classification level prior to this quarter; how long we have reported on the data in an unclassified manner; and other relevant notes.

United States Forces-Afghanistan informed SIGAR of the new classifications and restrictions on the data but have yet to formally disclose what party was responsible for approving the new classifications and restrictions. The guidance on pages 23–30 of the Department of Defense's (DOD) Manual, *Subject: DoD Information Security Program: Marking of Classified Information*, 5200.01, Volume 2 (March 19, 2013), requires that DOD entities provide a "classification authority block" on each classified document identifying the document's classifier, the reason for the classification, if and when the classification can be downgraded, and when the document can be declassified. This is the case for originally or derivatively classified documents. As of the date of this memorandum, SIGAR has yet to receive this required information for any of the data described in the attached table.

A few key points:

- With the exception of some of this data being briefly classified in January 2015, most of the data in question this quarter has previously been provided to us in an unclassified, releasable format for many years.
- All of this material is historical in nature (usually between one and three months old) because of delays incurred by reporting time frames, and thus only provides "snapshot" data points for particular periods of time in the past.

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for Afghanistan Reconstruction

- All of the data points classified or restricted are “top-line” (not unit-level) data. SIGAR currently does not publically report potentially sensitive, unit-specific data.
- None of the material now classified or otherwise restricted discloses information that could threaten the U.S. or Afghan missions (such as detailed strategy, plans, timelines, or tactics).
- All of the data include key metrics and assessments that are essential to understanding mission success for the reconstruction of Afghanistan’s security institutions and armed forces.

Prepared By:

Heather Robinson
Subject Matter Expert, Security

Reviewed By:

Deborah Scroggins
Director, Research and Analysis Directorate

Data Classified or Restricted for SIGAR's October 2017 Quarterly Report to Congress

* United States Forces-Afghanistan (USFOR-A) informed SIGAR of these new classifications.
 ** Nearly all of this data was temporarily and briefly classified in January 2015. "Reported unclassified since" dates do not include this period and are approximations.
 *** "Top-line": the overall figure for that force element, not broken down to the lower corps (ANA) or zone (ANP) level.

What	When*	Classification Level	Classification Justification	Prior Classification	Reported Unclassified Since**	Notes
Afghan National Defense and Security Forces (ANDSF) Casualties (top-line,*** data 1-2 months old)	Received Classified on 9/21/2017	NATO Restricted	Afghan government classified, USFOR-A*/RS/CENTCOM concurred and restricted it as Foreign Government Information (FGI).	U.S. Unclassified or NATO Non-Sensitive Information Releasable to the Public (NSIRP)	Reported from July 2009 July 2010. No reporting from October 2010-October 2014. Reporting again since January 2015	SIGAR most recently reported ANDSF casualties cumulatively by year.
Proportion of Assigned (actual) to Authorized (goal) Strength for the ANDSF (i.e. The ANDSF are at 90% of their authorized strength) (top-line, percentage, data 3 months old)	Received: NATO Unclassified, 9/21/2017 Retroactively Classified: 10/15/2017	NATO Confidential	New interpretation based on NATO Resolute Support Mission (RS) Classification Guide	NATO Unclassified or NSIRP	January 2012	This means we cannot report on the ANDSF's progress toward achieving their goal strength.
Proportion of Assigned (actual) to Authorized (goal) Strength for the Afghan National Army (ANA) (i.e. The ANA is at 90% of its authorized strength) (top-line, percentage, data 3 months old)	Received: NATO Unclassified, 9/21/2017 Retroactively Classified: 10/15/2017	NATO Confidential	New interpretation based on RS Classification Guide	NATO Unclassified or NSIRP	January 2012	This means we cannot report on the ANA's progress toward achieving its goal strength.

What	When*	Classification Level	Classification Justification	Prior Classification	Reported Unclassified Since**	Notes
Proportion of Assigned (actual) to Authorized (goal) Strength for the Afghan National Police (ANP) (i.e. The ANP is at 90% of its authorized strength) (top-line, percentage, data 3 months old)	Received: NATO Unclassified, 9/21/2017 Retroactively Classified: 10/15/2017	NATO Confidential	New interpretation based on RS Classification Guide	NATO Unclassified or NSIRP	January 2012	This means we cannot report on the ANP's progress toward achieving its goal strength.
Proportion of Assigned (actual) to Authorized (goal) Strength for the Afghan Air Force (AAF) (i.e. The AAF is at 90% of its authorized strength) (top-line, percentage, data 3 months old)	Received: NATO Unclassified, 9/21/2017 Retroactively Classified: 10/15/2017	NATO Confidential	New interpretation based on RS Classification Guide	NATO Unclassified or NSIRP	January 2013	This means we cannot report on the AAF's progress toward achieving its goal strength.
Proportion of Assigned (actual) to Authorized (goal) Strength for the Afghan Local Police (ALP) (i.e. The ALP is at 90% of its authorized strength) (top-line, percentage, data 3 months old)	Received: NATO Unclassified, 9/21/2017 Retroactively Classified: 10/15/2017	NATO Restricted	New interpretation based on RS Classification Guide	U.S. Unclassified or U//FOUO	October 2011	This means we cannot report on the ALP's progress toward achieving its goal strength.

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What	When*	Classification Level	Classification Justification	Prior Classification	Reported Unclassified Since**	Notes
Proportion of Assigned (actual) to Authorized (goal) Strength for ANDSF Civilian Personnel (i.e. ANDSF civilians are at 90% of their authorized strength) (top-line, percentage, data 3 months old)	Received: NATO Unclassified, 9/21/2017 Retroactively Classified: 10/15/2017	NATO Confidential	New interpretation based on RS Classification Guide	NATO Unclassified or NSIRP	April 2014	This means we cannot report on the ANDSF's progress toward achieving its goal civilian strength.
Proportion of Assigned (actual) to Authorized (goal) Strength for Female ANDSF Personnel (i.e. Female ANDSF personnel are at 90% of their authorized strength) (top-line, percentage, data 3 months old)	Received: NATO Unclassified, 9/21/2017 Retroactively Classified: 10/15/2017	NATO Confidential	New interpretation based on RS Classification Guide	NSIRP	October 2010	This means we cannot report on the ANDSF's progress toward achieving its goal female personnel strength.
Proportion of Assigned (actual) to Authorized (goal) Strength for ANDSF Medical Personnel (i.e. ANDSF medical personnel are at 90% of their authorized strength) (top-line, percentage, data 3 months old)	Received: NATO Unclassified, 9/21/2017 Retroactively Classified: 10/15/2017	NATO Confidential	New interpretation based on RS Classification Guide	NATO Unclassified or NSIRP	January 2013	This means we cannot report on the ANDSF's progress toward achieving its goal medical personnel strength.

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What	When*	Classification Level	Classification Justification	Prior Classification	Reported Unclassified Since**	Notes
ANA Attrition Data (top-line, monthly percentages for the previous quarter)	Received Classified on 9/21/2017	NATO Secret	New interpretation based on RS Classification Guide	NATO Unclassified	October 2013	
ANP Attrition Data (top-line, monthly percentages for the previous quarter)	Received Classified on 9/21/2017	NATO Secret	New interpretation based on RS Classification Guide	NATO Unclassified	October 2013	
ANA Operational Readiness of Equipment at Corps Level and Higher (an operational readiness rate percentage for each corps, data 1-2 months old)	Received: NATO Unclassified, 9/21/2017 Retroactively Classified: 10/15/2017	NATO Secret	New interpretation based on RS Classification Guide	NSIRP	April 2016	USFOR-A said the same standard did not apply to the AAF. Operational readiness of airframes was unclassified.
ANP Operational Readiness of Equipment at Zone Level and Higher (an operational readiness rate percentage for each zone, data 1-2 months old)	Received: NATO Unclassified, 9/21/2017 Retroactively Classified: 10/15/2017	NATO Secret	New interpretation based on RS Classification Guide	NSIRP	April 2017	USFOR-A said the same standard did not apply to the AAF. Operational readiness of airframes was unclassified.
General ANA Performance Assessment at Corps Level and Higher (data 1-2 months old)	Received Classified on 9/21/2017	NATO Secret	New interpretation based on RS Classification Guide	NSIRP	July 2009	The only assessment provided was classified. Usually a separate, unclassified assessment is provided but USFOR-A said it was unable to do so this quarter.

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What	When*	Classification Level	Classification Justification	Prior Classification	Reported Unclassified Since**	Notes
General ANP Performance Assessment at Zone Level and Higher (data 1-2 months old)	Received Classified on 9/21/2017	NATO Secret	New interpretation based on RS Classification Guide	NSIRP	July 2009	The only assessment provided was classified. Usually a separate, unclassified assessment is provided but USFOR-A said it was unable to do so this quarter.
General Ministry of Defense Performance Assessment at the Headquarters Level (data 1-2 months old)	Received Classified on 9/21/2017	NATO Secret	New interpretation based on RS Classification Guide	U.S. Unclassified or NSIRP	April 2012	The only assessment provided was classified. Usually a separate, unclassified assessment is provided but USFOR-A said it was unable to do so this quarter.
General Ministry of Interior Performance Assessment at the Headquarters Level (data 1-2 months old)	Received Classified on 9/21/2017	NATO Secret	New interpretation based on RS Classification Guide	U.S. Unclassified or NSIRP	April 2012	The only assessment provided was classified. Usually a separate, unclassified assessment is provided but USFOR-A said it was unable to do so this quarter.
Exact figures for ANDSF assigned (actual) strength (top-line, data 3 months old)	Received: NATO Unclassified, 9/21/2017 Retroactively Classified: 10/15/2017	NATO Confidential (in EXACT form)	New interpretation based on RS Classification Guide	NATO Unclassified or NSIRP	July 2009	We CAN report approximate figures in our unclassified report.

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What	When*	Classification Level	Classification Justification	Prior Classification	Reported Unclassified Since**	Notes
Exact figures for ANA assigned (actual) strength (top-line, data 3 months old)	Received: NATO Unclassified, 9/21/2017 Retroactively Classified: 10/15/2017	NATO Confidential (in EXACT form)	New interpretation based on RS Classification Guide	NATO Unclassified or NSIRP	July 2009	We CAN report approximate figures in our unclassified report.
Exact figures for ANP assigned (actual) strength (top-line, data 3 months old)	Received: NATO Unclassified, 9/21/2017 Retroactively Classified: 10/15/2017	NATO Confidential (in EXACT form)	New interpretation based on RS Classification Guide	NATO Unclassified or NSIRP	July 2009	We CAN report approximate figures in our unclassified report.
Exact figures for AAF assigned (actual) strength (top-line, data 3 months old)	Received: NATO Unclassified, 9/21/2017 Retroactively Classified: 10/15/2017	NATO Confidential (in EXACT form)	New interpretation based on RS Classification Guide	NATO Unclassified or NSIRP	April 2012	We CAN report approximate figures in our unclassified report.
Exact figures for ALP assigned (actual) strength (top-line, data 3 months old)	Received: NATO Unclassified, 9/21/2017 Retroactively Classified: 10/15/2017	NATO Restricted (in EXACT form)	New interpretation based on RS Classification Guide	U.S. Unclassified or U//FOUO	July 2011	We CAN report approximate figures in our unclassified report.

What	When*	Classification Level	Classification Justification	Prior Classification	Reported Unclassified Since**	Notes
Exact figures for assigned (actual) strength of ANDSF Civilian Personnel (top-line, data 3 months old)	Received: NATO Unclassified, 9/21/2017 Retroactively Classified: 10/15/2017	NATO Confidential (in EXACT form)	New interpretation based on RS Classification Guide	NATO Unclassified or NSIRP	July 2013	We CAN report approximate figures in our unclassified report.
Exact figures for assigned (actual) strength of Female ANDSF Personnel (top-line, data 3 months old)	Received: NATO Unclassified, 9/21/2017 Retroactively Classified: 10/15/2017	NATO Confidential (in EXACT form)	New interpretation based on RS Classification Guide	NSIRP	July 2010	We CAN report approximate figures in our unclassified report.
Exact figures for assigned (actual) strength of ANDSF Medical Personnel (top-line, data 3 months old)	Received: NATO Unclassified, 9/21/2017 Retroactively Classified: 10/15/2017	NATO Confidential (in EXACT form)	New interpretation based on RS Classification Guide	NATO Unclassified or NSIRP	October 2012	We CAN report approximate figures in our unclassified report.
Exact figures for ANDSF authorized (goal) strength (top-line, data 3 months old)	Received: NATO Unclassified, 9/21/2017 Retroactively Classified: 10/15/2017	NATO Confidential (in EXACT form)	New interpretation based on RS Classification Guide	NATO Unclassified or NSIRP	July 2009	This information is unclassified on its own but classified when reported with assigned personnel strength figures. This means we cannot report on the ANDSF's progress toward achieving their goal strength.

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What	When*	Classification Level	Classification Justification	Prior Classification	Reported Unclassified Since**	Notes
Exact figures for ANA authorized (goal) strength (top-line, data 3 months old)	Received: NATO Unclassified, 9/21/2017 Retroactively Classified: 10/15/2017	NATO Confidential (in EXACT form)	New interpretation based on RS Classification Guide	NATO Unclassified or NSIRP	July 2009	This information is unclassified on its own but classified when reported with assigned personnel strength figures. This means we cannot report on the ANA's progress toward achieving its goal strength.
Exact figures for ANP authorized (goal) strength (top-line, data 3 months old)	Received: NATO Unclassified, 9/21/2017 Retroactively Classified: 10/15/2017	NATO Confidential (in EXACT form)	New interpretation based on RS Classification Guide	NATO Unclassified or NSIRP	July 2009	This information is unclassified on its own but classified when reported with assigned personnel strength figures. This means we cannot report on the ANP's progress toward achieving its goal strength.
Exact figures for AAF authorized (goal) strength (top-line, data 3 months old)	Received: NATO Unclassified, 9/21/2017 Retroactively Classified: 10/15/2017	NATO Confidential (in EXACT form)	New interpretation based on RS Classification Guide	NATO Unclassified or NSIRP	July 2012	This information is unclassified on its own but classified when reported with assigned personnel strength figures. This means we cannot report on the AAF's progress toward achieving its goal strength.
Exact figures for ALP authorized (goal) strength (top-line, data 3 months old)	Received: NATO Unclassified, 9/21/2017 Retroactively Classified: 10/15/2017	NATO Restricted (in EXACT form)	New interpretation based on RS Classification Guide	U.S. Unclassified or U.S. For Official Use Only (U//FOUO)	October 2011	This information is unclassified on its own but classified when reported with assigned personnel strength figures. This means we cannot report on the ALP's progress toward achieving its goal strength.

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What	When*	Classification Level	Classification Justification	Prior Classification	Reported Unclassified Since**	Notes
Exact figures for authorized (goal) strength of ANDSF Civilian Personnel (top-line, data 3 months old)	Received: NATO Unclassified, 9/21/2017 Retroactively Classified: 10/15/2017	NATO Confidential (in EXACT form)	New interpretation based on RS Classification Guide	NATO Unclassified or NSIRP	April 2014	This information is unclassified on its own but classified when reported with assigned personnel strength figures. This means we cannot report on the ANDSF's progress toward achieving their goal civilian strength.
Exact figures for authorized (goal) strength of Female ANDSF Personnel (top-line, data 3 months old)	Received: NATO Unclassified, 9/21/2017 Retroactively Classified: 10/15/2017	NATO Confidential (in EXACT form)	New interpretation based on RS Classification Guide	NSIRP	October 2010	This information is unclassified on its own but classified when reported with assigned personnel strength figures. This means we cannot report on the ANDSF's progress toward achieving their goal female personnel strength.
Exact figures for authorized (goal) strength of ANDSF Medical Personnel (top-line, data 3 months old)	Received: NATO Unclassified, 9/21/2017 Retroactively Classified: 10/15/2017	NATO Confidential (in EXACT form)	New interpretation based on RS Classification Guide	NATO Unclassified or NSIRP	January 2013	This information is unclassified on its own but classified when reported with assigned personnel strength figures. This means we cannot report on the ANDSF's progress toward achieving their goal medical strength.

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The Washington Post

Checkpoint

Here are six costly failures from America's longest war. No. 1: Cashmere goats.

By Andrew deGrandpre and Alex Horton August 22

President Trump on Monday announced an increase of troops in Afghanistan, taking the reins of a conflict where 8,500 personnel are mostly focused on buttressing their Afghan counterparts in the face of Taliban and Islamic State gains.

"I share the American people's frustration," he said. "I also share their frustration over a foreign policy that has spent too much time, energy, money — and, most importantly, lives — trying to rebuild countries in our own image instead of pursuing our security interests above all other considerations."

The Defense Department, the State Department, the U.S. Agency for International Development and other agencies have spent \$714 billion of war and reconstruction funding since the invasion of Afghanistan in late 2001 to bolster education programs, improve infrastructure and increase the competency of Afghan security forces.

Insurgents have deliberately targeted U.S.-led projects, including schools and roads, with hopes of dividing the population. That has come at a considerable expense to American taxpayers.

Yet America's longest war has become a symbol for wartime graft and corruption in one of the world's least governable countries rocked by conflict for decades.

John Sopko, the special inspector general for Afghanistan reconstruction, or SIGAR, has led the effort in recent years to uncover wasteful spending and boondoggled projects. Here are some of most notable examples of waste that he and others have found:

\$6 million: Cashmere goats

The aim was to jump-start Afghanistan's cashmere industry and grow its profile on the international market. A Pentagon task force funded the purchase and transport of nine rare Italian goats to breed with those native to Afghanistan, hoping that this would improve the animals' undercoats and the quality of the cashmere they yield.

As part of the project, a farm was built along with a lab facility where staff would certify the cashmere's quality. All of this was funded by U.S. taxpayers.

Speaking at Duke University in March, Sopko lamented the program's failure. "Many of the goats got sick and died, and the project director quit in frustration," Sopko said. "And I'm not sure flying Italian goats into Afghanistan was exactly what the founders had in mind when they created a standing army for the United States."

\$36 million: Unused command center

Soon after President Barack Obama ordered a surge of American combat troops into Afghanistan, plans were laid in the southern province of Helmand to erect a 64,000-square-foot command center for the Marines who oversaw military operations in the region.

The general in charge there at the time told his superiors the building wasn't necessary, that existing facilities were adequate. He was overruled by another general who, according to the inspector general's findings, felt it would be improper to tank a project for which Congress had already agreed to pay.

Obama's surge had ended before construction on the complex began, and the Marines were pulling out of Afghanistan entirely by the time it was built.

"To their credit," Sopko said during his talk at Duke, "several Marine generals tried to convince the Defense Department not to build what I consider the best built building I've ever seen in Afghanistan, but their entreaties were ignored. It now stands abandoned and empty, a testament to poor planning and accountability."

\$28 million: Afghan army uniforms

Last month, it was disclosed the Pentagon supported a decade-long effort, led by Afghanistan's defense minister, to buy a new combat uniform for the Afghan army. In its scathing report highlighting a lack of American oversight, the inspector general's audit noted that the Afghan minister chose the uniform based on his preference for the appearance, not its tactical utility.

The U.S. military could have provided the Afghans with significantly less-expensive gear that it already owns, Sopko's team concluded, and could save taxpayers as much as \$72 million over the next 10 years by switching.

The report drew a strong response from Defense Secretary Jim Mattis, who issued a memo to the Pentagon comptroller and acquisition chief admonishing the "cavalier" spending.

"Buying uniforms ... that may have wasted tens of millions of taxpayers dollars over a ten-year period must not be seen as inconsequential," he wrote. "To the contrary, these actions connect directly to our mission and budget situation."

\$1 billion: Schools with no teachers or students

A BuzzFeed report from 2015 found that \$1 billion earmarked to build schools, staff classrooms and flood key provinces with textbooks bled into the accounts of warlords and corrupt officials, leaving entire schools empty and dilapidated.

The findings came as the U.S. government for years touted education reform in the country as a successful campaign to topple Taliban ideology and empower young girls to seek education for the first time in their lives, a vital part of the plan to carve out economic opportunities for women.

Investigative reporter Azmat Khan reported 1,100 schools listed as active in 2011 by education ministry officials were not operating at all by 2015, though salaries continued to flow to teachers with no students.

She also found girls were overcounted on student rolls by 40 percent and a count of schools built or refurbished by the United States dropped from 680 cited in 2010 to 563 by 2015, despite assurances from USAID that education reform was on the right track.

"While regrettable," USAID told BuzzFeed, "it is hardly surprising to find the occasional shuttered schools in war zones."

SIGAR doubted in April 2016 that USAID and the Pentagon had a coherent strategy to improve their education programs. It also found 40 percent of primary-age children do not attend school.

\$8.5 billion: Poppy eradication

The U.S. government has spent \$8.5 billion since 2002 to eradicate Afghanistan's poppy trade, according to SIGAR.

The plants bound for worldwide drug markets not only fuel corruption but fund insurgent operations. U.S. and NATO commander in Afghanistan John Nicholson said in 2016 that poppy harvests fund 60 percent of the Taliban's war chest for salaries, weapons and ammunition.

But despite the intense focus on stripping a cash crop from the Taliban, the numbers have recently become worse.

In 2013, cultivation reached an all-time high. In 2015, the country saw a 10 percent jump in harvested land as eradication efforts plunged. While some provinces like the center of production Helmand saw harvest reductions, northwest Badghis province saw an 184 percent increase, SIGAR said.

\$486 million: Scrapped cargo planes

In 2008, a Pentagon decision to buy and retrofit 20 Italian medium-lift cargo planes for the Afghan air force at a cost of \$486 million was meant to surge the fledgling service's ability to move troops and supplies around the country — a central focus of the U.S. military's strategy to transition logistical missions to their Afghan counterparts.

The program was immediately paralyzed by poor management, a lack of spare parts and a misread on the Afghan military's ability to maintain and fly the aircraft, SIGAR said, which raised the possibility corruption rattled the program. The program was canceled in 2013.

In his Duke University speech, Sopko said the planes were "death traps," staffed only by test pilots after other Afghan pilots refused to fly them.

It cost an additional \$100,000 to turn 16 planes into scrap metal, with four sent to an air base in Germany, Sopko said. An Afghan company paid 6 cents a pound for the planes, netting only \$32,000 back for U.S. taxpayers.

In 2017, the Afghan Air Force relies on small, vulnerable Cessnas to resupply ground troops. It has become too dangerous to replenish food and ammunition by trucks.

Read more:

This is what a day with the Afghan air force looks like

'It's like everyone forgot': On a familiar battlefield, Marines prepare for their next chapter in the Forever War

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