

EXAMINING THE TRUMP ADMINISTRATION'S
AFGHANISTAN STRATEGY

HEARING

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

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

ONE HUNDRED SIXTEENTH CONGRESS

SECOND SESSION

JANUARY 28, 2020

Serial No. 116-83

Printed for the use of the Committee on Oversight and Reform



Available on: <http://www.govinfo.gov/oversight.house.gov>

U.S. GOVERNMENT PUBLISHING OFFICE

WASHINGTON : 2020

COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND REFORM

CAROLYN B. MALONEY, New York, *Chairwoman*

ELEANOR HOLMES NORTON, District of Columbia	JIM JORDAN, Ohio, <i>Ranking Minority Member</i>
WM. LACY CLAY, Missouri	PAUL A. GOSAR, Arizona
STEPHEN F. LYNCH, Massachusetts	VIRGINIA FOXX, North Carolina
JIM COOPER, Tennessee	THOMAS MASSIE, Kentucky
GERALD E. CONNOLLY, Virginia	MARK MEADOWS, North Carolina
RAJA KRISHNAMOORTHY, Illinois	JODY B. HICE, Georgia
JAMIE RASKIN, Maryland	GLENN GROTHMAN, Wisconsin
HARLEY ROUDA, California	JAMES COMER, Kentucky
DEBBIE WASSERMAN SCHULTZ, Florida	MICHAEL CLOUD, Texas
JOHN P. SARBANES, Maryland	BOB GIBBS, Ohio
PETER WELCH, Vermont	CLAY HIGGINS, Louisiana
JACKIE SPEIER, California	RALPH NORMAN, South Carolina
ROBIN L. KELLY, Illinois	CHIP ROY, Texas
MARK DESAULNIER, California	CAROL D. MILLER, West Virginia
BRENDA L. LAWRENCE, Michigan	MARK E. GREEN, Tennessee
STACEY E. PLASKETT, Virgin Islands	KELLY ARMSTRONG, North Dakota
RO KHANNA, California	W. GREGORY STEUBE, Florida
JIMMY GOMEZ, California	FRED KELLER, Pennsylvania
ALEXANDRIA OCASIO-CORTEZ, New York	
AYANNA PRESSLEY, Massachusetts	
RASHIDA TLAIB, Michigan	
KATIE PORTER, California	
DEB HAALAND, New Mexico	

DAVID RAPALLO, *Staff Director*

DAN REBNORD, *Chief Counsel*

AMY STRATTON, *Clerk*

CHRISTOPHER HIXON, *Minority Staff Director*

CONTACT NUMBER: 202-225-5051

SUBCOMMITTEE ON NATIONAL SECURITY

STEPHEN F. LYNCH, Massachusetts, *Chairman*

JIM COOPER, Tennessee	JODY B. HICE, Georgia, <i>Ranking Minority Member</i>
PETER WELCH, Vermont	PAUL A. GOSAR, Arizona
HARLEY ROUDA, California	VIRGINIA FOXX, North Carolina
DEBBIE WASSERMAN SCHULTZ, Florida	MARK MEADOWS, North Carolina
ROBIN L. KELLY, Illinois	MICHAEL CLOUD, Texas
MARK DESAULNIER, California	MARK E. GREEN, Tennessee
STACEY E. PLASKETT, Virgin Islands	CLAY HIGGINS, Louisiana
BRENDA L. LAWRENCE, Michigan	

C O N T E N T S

Hearing held on January 28, 2020	Page 1
WITNESSES	
The Honorable John F. Sopko, Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction Oral Statement	5
<i>Written opening statements and statements for the witnesses are available on the U.S. House of Representatives Document Repository at: docs.house.gov.</i>	

INDEX OF DOCUMENTS

Documents entered into the record during this hearing and Questions for the Record (QFR's) are listed below/available at: docs.house.gov.

- * Letter to Secretary Pompeo; submitted by Rep. Maloney.
- * Report to Congress offered by the Department of Defense in coordination with the Department of State; requested by Rep. Lawrence (to be submitted).
- * Letter to the editor of the Washington Post; requested by Rep. Sopko for the record (to be submitted).

EXAMINING THE TRUMP ADMINISTRATION'S AFGHANISTAN STRATEGY

Tuesday, January 28, 2020

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

The subcommittee met, pursuant to notice, at 10 a.m., in room 2154, Rayburn House Office Building, Hon. Stephen F. Lynch (chairman of the subcommittee) presiding.

Present: Representatives Lynch, Welch, Kelly, Plaskett, Lawrence, Maloney, Hice, Foxx, Cloud, Green, and Jordan.

Also present: Representative Massie.

Mr. LYNCH. The subcommittee will come to order.

Without objection, the chair is authorized to declare a recess of the committee at any time.

This hearing is entitled, examining the Trump Administration's Afghanistan Strategy, and I now recognize myself for five minutes to give an opening statement.

Good morning, everyone, and welcome to the subcommittee on national security's first hearing of 2020. We begin this year as we did in 2019 with an examination of the U.S. war in Afghanistan. After 18 years of war in Afghanistan, this is now the United States' longest running conflict and has taken the lives of 2,400 of our brave men and women in uniform and come at the cost of hundreds of billions, if not a trillion, in taxpayer dollars. Unfortunately, after almost two decades of fighting, al-Qaida and the Taliban, the situation in Afghanistan has continued to deteriorate and today is, at best, a stalemate.

Today the Government of Afghanistan lacks control over about half of the country and it is estimated that the Taliban now has about 60,000 full-time fighters compared to 20,000 in 2014. Meanwhile, ISIS-Khorasan, the Afghanistan branch of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria, today compromises between 2,000 and 4,000 fighters and continues to plot terrorist attacks against the United States and western democracies.

Today's hearing comes after The Washington Post last month published hundreds of documents that revealed long-standing policy failures by multiple administrations in Afghanistan. These so-called Afghanistan papers were originally compiled by the special inspector general for Afghanistan reconstruction, or SIGAR as part of the agency's lessons learned project and they demonstrate how successive administrations, Democrat and Republican, have misled the American people about the conflict in Afghanistan. For exam-

ple, Doug Lute, the, quote, “war Czar” for President Bush and Obama told SIGAR, the U.S. was, quote, “devoid of a fundamental understanding of Afghanistan. We didn’t know what we were doing,” close quote.

Other interviewees described efforts to distort statistics in order to hide a lack of progress in Afghanistan. U.S. military adviser and retired Army Colonel Bob Crowley told SIGAR that surveys were a, quote, “totally unreliable, but reinforced that everything we were doing was right and we became a self-licking ice cream cone,” close quote.

The Trump Administration stated objectives in Afghanistan are, to quote, to achieve peace—excuse me—“to achieve a peace agreement that ensures Afghan soil is never used again by terrorists against the United States, its allies, or any country and allows American troops to return home” close quote. And in August 2017, President Trump stated that, quote, “conditions on the ground, not arbitrary timetables, will guide our strategy,” close quote.

The purpose of today’s hearing is to examine the strategy. Unfortunately, despite repeated invitations, the Department of State and the Department of Defense refuse to make witnesses available to testify before the committee today, so we have nobody from state, we have nobody from DOD.

That’s very disappointing, because I’m concerned that rather than implementing a coherent Afghanistan strategy, U.S. policy in the region is instead being driven by the latest impulse of the Commander-in-Chief. For example, in September 2019, just days after Ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad announced the U.S. was nearing an agreement with the Taliban, President Trump abruptly and publicly canceled the secret meeting with the Taliban leadership at Camp David. He subsequently declared negotiations with the Taliban, quote, “dead,” only to restart them months later.

President Trump and officials in this administration have also publicly acknowledged the United States’ intent to withdraw from Afghanistan with or without a deal with the Taliban, which undermines our diplomats’ leverage at the bargaining table.

Earlier this month, National Security Adviser Robert O’Brien said in an interview, and I quote: “I think we’ll be in a position at some point soon whether it’s with a deal or without a deal to reduce our military footprint in Afghanistan,” close quote.

In December 2019, Secretary of Defense Esper Stated that the U.S. would lower its force presence in Afghanistan, quote: “With or without a political agreement.” I think everyone can understand how that decreases the sense of urgency on the part of the Taliban to reach any agreement with the United States if we’re going to withdraw anyway, which is one of their demands.

While we all desire to bring our sons and daughters home from nearly two decades of war, we must do so in a way that promises—excuse me—that promotes our national security objectives. To echo Special Inspector General Sopko, who is our guest today, when he testified before our subcommittee last year, we must plan not just for the day after a U.S. withdraw from Afghanistan, but for the months and years that follow. Only by doing so can we ensure the gains we have made for democracy and women’s rights, in par-

ticular, in Afghanistan are not lost and that the sacrifices of our men and women in uniform have not been made in vain.

It is, therefore, all the more urgent for Congress to exercise its constitutional responsibility to conduct oversight of the Trump Administration's strategy in Afghanistan, and for the administration to come here before Congress and explain its conduct and its strategy to the American people. Their refusal to do so today is extraordinarily troubling.

By failing to appear, the Trump Administration is obstructing Members of Congress of both parties from evaluating U.S. policy in the region and denying the American people the answers they deserve about the war they have already sacrificed tremendously for.

That being said, I'd like to thank our witness, Special Inspector General John Sopko for being here today; although, Mr. Sopko is not an administration witness nor does he represent the views of the Trump Administration, he has served a critical oversight function for many years.

Identifying waste, fraud, and abuse across U.S. reconstruction programs in Afghanistan and I look forward to his continued insights as our subcommittee examines the potential national security consequences of an anticipated withdraw from Afghanistan.

Before I return to the ranking member, I'd like to acknowledge that yesterday, military officials confirmed that a U.S. aircraft crashed earlier this weekend in Taliban controlled territory near Kabul. Although initial reports about the cause and extent of the damage are still coming in, I certainly hope that all passengers and crew are safe and accounted for.

I now yield to the Ranking Member, Mr. Hice of Georgia, for his opening statement.

Mr. HICE. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman, and thank you Mr. Sopko for being here with us today. We appreciate you being available to provide testimony and I share disappointment, Mr. Chairman, that the Department of State and Defense cannot be here today. It's a challenging job before them, but a very important one for all of us to be involved with and to provide oversight, and I hope we'll be able to hear from them soon.

It's been nearly 19 years since the United States began its efforts in Afghanistan after al-Qaida attacked our country, killed nearly 3,000 Americans in New York, the Pentagon, and Pennsylvania. Yet every time we talk about oversight of our efforts in Afghanistan, I believe we sound like a broken record.

It's America's longest war and it's held that title for a long time now. To date, American taxpayers have spent \$780 billion on combat operations, 137 billion on reconstruction efforts since 2002, so we're pushing a trillion dollars here.

During that time and in spite of that money, we've lost 2,400 courageous American servicemembers during the conflict and one stat that often is overlooked is over 20,000 who have been wounded in action. Many of them very seriously.

The United States has drawn down our military presence from a peak of about 100,000 under the Obama Administration to less than 14,000 to date. President Trump and his administration are trying to achieve a positive and enduring outcome in Afghanistan. In fact, on August 21, 2017, President Trump announced a strategy

for Afghanistan and South Asia that included taking tougher positions with Afghanistan, further developing a strategic partnership with India, and not setting arbitrary timetables.

Moreover, President Trump enabled Secretary of State Mike Pompeo to appoint a special envoy, Ambassador Khalilzad, to negotiate peace talks with the Taliban and the Afghan Government.

Mr. Sopko, the last time you were here, we discussed the 2019 high-risk report, and in that report, of course, it's released at the beginning of each new Congress, it identified eight high-risk U.S. reconstruction program areas that are vulnerable to waste, fraud, and abuse.

So, I hope today that we're able to get some updates on how the administration and Afghan Government are making progress in those areas. A month or so after the 9/11 attacks, the U.S. mission in Afghanistan was clear. That was to root out al-Qaida and those that harbor and protected them and then to ensure that Afghanistan would not be a safe haven for future terrorist attacks. Obviously, that's not a very easy task. It required the U.S. to invest in the Afghan national defense and security forces so that they can protect their people and their Nation.

My understanding is that the majority of the money appropriated for reconstruction has been for training and equipping the Afghan Defense Forces, and I would appreciate an update from you on how effective that money's been spent. I think it's important that we add some context to your testimony here today.

As the chairman referred to last December, we saw the release of the Afghanistan papers from the lessons learned project that your office conducted in 2014. This investigation was a serious departure from your usual oversight, so today I'd like to learn a little bit more about the beginning of that project and just to hear some more about it. During that investigation, your team conducted interviews with over 600 people, including NATO allies and Afghan officials, and I think what, at least, one thing that we all learn from the Afghanistan's papers is that war is complicated. We know that, and it's especially true with the protracted and dynamic situation that we all are very much aware of in the Middle East.

People disagree. I get that. In a war that lasts nearly two decades, obviously strategies change along the way, but I believe President Trump is making real progress and we should let that progress play out. If it means that we can bring an end to this conflict, then we should all welcome that.

So, again, Mr. Sopko, I want to thank you for appearing before our subcommittee today. You're a dedicated public servant and we are grateful for your service. We appreciate your time today. I look forward to your testimony.

With that, Mr. Chairman, I yield back.

Mr. LYNCH. The gentleman yields. Once, again, I'd like to welcome our witness. Today we are joined by the Honorable John F. Sopko, the special inspector general for Afghan reconstruction. It is the custom of this committee to swear all witnesses. Could I please ask you to rise?

Mr. Sopko, do you swear or affirm that the testimony you're about to give is the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth so help you God.

Mr. SOPKO. I do.

Mr. LYNCH. Let the record show—please be seated. Let the record show that the witness has answered in the affirmative. The microphones are sensitive, so please speak directly into them. You’ve done this before on multiple occasions, I’m sure you know the routine.

Without objection, your written statement will be made part of the record. Before I turn to you, though, I would like to make a motion, without objection, that the gentleman from Kentucky will be permitted to join the subcommittee on the dais and be recognized for questioning the witnesses. Without objection, so ordered.

With that, Special Inspector Sopko, you are now recognized to give an oral presentation of your testimony.

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

Mr. SOPKO. Thank you very much. Chairman Lynch and Ranking Member Hice, thank you for inviting me here today.

This is the 23d time I have provided testimony to Congress since I was appointed the special inspector general in 2012. It may well be the most important hearing to date as you both are examining that very critical question, and that is: If there is to be sustainable peace in Afghanistan, are we prepared for the day after the signing?

We are at a pivotal juncture in our over 18-year involvement in Afghanistan. The potential for a peace agreement with the Taliban is greater than at any time in recent history. While reaching a settlement will be challenging, sustaining it will be equally difficult.

It will require coordination and deconfliction among the U.S. and Afghan Government agencies as well as our coalition allies and donors, but most importantly, it will require addressing the serious risks that we set forth in the 2019 high-risk list that we testified about last year.

That report identified, as you noted, eight key areas of the \$137 billion reconstruction effort that we believe to be at a high risk of waste, fraud, mismanagement, or mission failure.

As I explained last year, those risks do not miraculously disappear when the ink dries on any peace agreement. Moreover, if not addressed, they may threaten the sustainability of any peace agreement.

Now, SIGAR is not taking a position on whether a peace agreement is achievable or practical, although, we hope for both. Nor do we speculate on what provisions it should include. Those decisions we leave to the administration, Congress, and the able negotiators.

But what SIGAR’s report does do is highlight areas that policy-makers should be planning for now because, as I testified last April, failing to plan is planning to fail.

Now I am heartened that under your leadership, Chairman Lynch and Ranking Member Hice, this subcommittee has attempted to get to the crux of our high-risk report; namely, what is our administration planning to do to address these serious threats?

I am encouraged that you appreciate every effort must be taken to ensure that the progress purchased with the ultimate sacrifice of over 2,400 U.S. members of the armed services and over 2,000

contractors and nearly a trillion dollars in taxpayer dollars is not lost because we failed to adequately plan.

Unfortunately, since my last appearance not much has changed on the ground in Afghanistan to diminish our concerns. The military situation is still a deadly stalemate. The Afghan economy extremely weak, corruption rampant, narcotics production growing, reintegration of ex-combatants problematic, women's rights threatened, and oversight restricted by widespread insecurity.

Our newest quarterly report, which will be released in a few days, discusses all of these threats and, in particular, highlights that if peace is to be sustainable, financial support from donors will need to continue and may need to continue for years to come.

Let me end with one additional observation, and I just came back from Afghanistan at Christmas time and I expect to go within a month, again. As Congress and the administration thinks about how much money should be spent on reconstruction, they need to consider how those expenditures will be monitored, and evaluated, and overseen.

Now more than ever, I caution that if there is a peace agreement and continued assistance provided to the Afghan people, oversight needs to remain mission critical, otherwise you might as well pile up all the dollars in Euros in Massoud Circle in downtown Kabul and burn them for whatever good they can accomplish.

I'm happy to, again, be here and answer any questions and particularly about the Afghan papers at appropriate moment. Thank you.

Mr. LYNCH. Thank you, Mr. Sopko.

I recognize myself for five minutes for questions. Why don't we start with that. One of the key takeaways from the documents released by The Washington Post last month, the so-called Afghanistan papers, discloses how data and information has been repeatedly distorted to paint a rosier picture for the American people about the war in Afghanistan.

For example, to U.S. military adviser and retired Army Colonel Bob Crowley, his statement: Every data point was altered to present the best picture possible. Surveys, for instance, were totally unreliable, but reinforced that everything we were doing was right.

This stood out to me because you got a person on the ground that is, you know, giving actionable intelligence, in a way, to the Congress in terms of the progress of how things are going there, also misleading the general public as well as its representatives, and so when we have that going on, we also have a heightened classification of certain documents that I and we have been getting for years and the American public have been getting for years in your report.

So, just to amplify that a little bit. You used to send us in your reports a heat map of sorts where you showed the map of Afghanistan, you showed the areas where we were—or the Government of Afghanistan was basically in control of certain provinces and regions, it showed in a different color the areas where the Taliban was in control, and it showed areas where we were contesting or they were contesting government control.

That stopped. That stopped with this administration. That was new and different, but so on top of the fact that we're getting inconsistent information, they're also concealing in some regard the in-

formation that we previously relied upon. According to the DOD, they stopped releasing this information because the indicator of success in Afghanistan was no longer the percentage of territory under government control, but rather, quote, "U.S. and Afghan forces support of Ambassador Khalilzad's diplomatic effort." That's a different metric.

Why would we—what's the reasoning for that, if you can shed some light on that in terms of going from objective evidence to something far more subjective and less evident? I guess, you know, if you're talking about whether people supported Khalilzad, that's a rather amorphous and subjective standard.

It's difficult to follow, and I just—I'm troubled by it. It shows a rather diffuse and lack of focus target in terms of something that's driving, you know, a measurement or a metric that's driving our effort in Afghanistan.

Mr. SOPKO. You're right on point on changing the metrics. I can't give you an answer because there never was a real good explanation given to us for why district control and population control was no longer relevant. I think the point you make, chairman, is apropos of a broader problem we have. Every metric that we use to provide you, the Congress, and the American people in our quarterly reports, every metric that you would find useful is now either classified or no longer available.

Now it's available some of it in a classified setting and I know chairman, you and I spent some time there briefing on it. You know how difficult it is to use that, but this was information that we had been providing publicly for years and then it's been taken away, so that is a problem. But I can't answer why they eliminated that.

Mr. LYNCH. So, when I was there in October, you've been there more recently, we asked General Miller why that was the case, why we were not getting that information in a form and in a context that I could actually talk to my constituents about because something like that is classified, even though I can go down to the—and I do.

I go down to the SCIF and look at the heat maps and look at the other information, I can no longer discuss that with my constituents at town meeting or even among Members of Congress who don't have the necessary clearance, so that's problematic.

But in October I did ask General Miller, you know, why—I pushed back and I know Speaker Pelosi did as well about denying us those maps and that information, and he acknowledged the difficulty that that presented to Congress and to the public.

I want to know, to your knowledge, having been there more recently, are they still abiding by that policy of not giving the U.S. Congress that information in a public format? Have they still excluded it from your quarterly reports?

Mr. SOPKO. It's still excluded from our quarterly report. And you'll see in another—I think we've actually sent up the embargoed copy. I think it's released in two days, you'll see all of the material that's still classified. No, they're not collecting that information.

Mr. LYNCH. OK. Thank you very much. I'll yield to the ranking member, the gentleman from Georgia, Mr. Hice, for five minutes.

Mr. HICE. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Sopko, I know we've discussed this issue that I want to bring up really quickly too before hitting a couple of others things.

But there was something like 36, I believe, of the 1,900 Afghan trainees have claimed asylum. We've got an estimated 83 Afghan trainees who have gone AWOL, some are believed to be in Canada, who knows where else. But it's very high numbers and alarming numbers, and I know we've talked about this, but we're all aware now of the recent shooting at the naval air station in Pensacola and it just continues to raise concerns regarding the training of foreign nationals here on U.S. military bases.

Can you give a quick update on the Afghan training program?

Mr. SOPKO. The best update I can give you is that the Department of Defense made a decision some time ago that they were no longer bringing Afghans into the United States for training. I don't know exactly where that is, if there's still some more coming in, but we did highlight and I think you and I had this colloquy last time, I know you were very concerned because of Moody Air Force base, which was doing a wonderful job, actually.

It was the premier training center for our air program and they did a wonderful job, and they had no AWOLs from there, but apparently we've thrown the baby out with the bath. Rather than following the Moody approach to protecting and making certain these people don't go AWOL, the Defense Department just says we're not bringing any of them.

So, I don't know if that's good or not. We've never equated it, but I think the Moody may be the last group that is still having some Afghans coming through and then that'll be done.

Mr. HICE. To your knowledge, is that under way to where no more Afghan trainees are coming? Has that—

Mr. SOPKO. That is to the best of my knowledge.

Mr. HICE. That is mine too. I just wanted to have it confirmed if we could get that. And those who have gone AWOL, do we have any update? Have they been located? Do we know where they are or are they still missing?

Mr. SOPKO. I don't think we have any information on that because that really gets into the Department of Homeland Security and what they've done with it. We have not—I can check with my staff, but I don't think we've done any followup on that.

We checked, but we have no additional information since last time we chatted.

Mr. HICE. OK. That's concerning still, and I would like to get some answers. We'll continue looking on that as well.

Let's move on. In your written statement you mentioned that insurgent attacks on the Afghan National Defense at security forces and coalition forces are increasing. What is the reason for the increase? Have you all been able to determine?

Mr. SOPKO. The biggest problem, I think, General Miller and his predecessors have complained about is that the Afghan military and police, even though we train them not to do it, they stay in static positions and they're easy to pick off. The biggest problem we've seen with—and our trainers have seen with the Afghan militaries, they're not aggressive, they're not moving out.

The only units that are really good at that are the special forces who are uniquely trained by our people, but the problem is they're

in these small, static positions out in the middle of the interland and they usually get attacked and wiped out by the Taliban.

Mr. HICE. There are some who believe that some sort of peace agreement with the Taliban, No. 1, would be possible, and No. 2, that if it did come about that it would decrease some of these attacks. What are your thoughts on that?

Mr. SOPKO. Well, we hope if there's an agreement, the attacks will go down. We're hoping there would be a reintegration of the 60 to 80,000 Taliban into the economy, but the concern that has been expressed to us is that the Taliban is not a monolithic organization, and the Taliban is also not ISIS and there are many other terrorist groups, so you may see a splintering.

So, even the best analysis we have is, even if there is a peace agreement, there's going to have to be a robust Afghan military and police force to handle these other terrorist groups and other illegal groups that are armed roaming around the countryside.

Mr. HICE. Yes. That's my last question. If that were to happen, what do you do with all these Taliban individuals integrating back in? Is there a plan for that?

Mr. SOPKO. Member Hice, that is so important. That's why this hearing is so important and what you're doing. We have to plan for that and we have a whole "lessons learned" report on reintegration and we explain how difficult it is, how expensive it is.

So, you can't just all of a sudden overnight say, well, we're going to reintegrate 80,000 Taliban who are armed plus their families. You've got to start planning for it and that's why we totally support the efforts of this committee in trying to find out what is our government doing.

Mr. HICE. Thank you. I yield back.

Mr. LYNCH. The gentleman yields.

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

Mr. WELCH. Mr. Hice, you're asking the right questions. We need answers to those questions. Mr. Sopko is not the one who can answer them. We really have to have State and Defense here to answer those questions.

So, I appreciate you asking them, but I would advocate for us as, you and our chairman too, pursue getting the state in here to answer them.

Second, it's good to see you, Mr. Sopko. I've been working with you and your predecessors, and there's a couple of things that come up. No. 1, you have documented—your office has documented over the years the abject failure of the nation-building enterprise. You have to be careful in your language. It's not your job to give political opinions or to give advice to this committee or the Congress as to what our policy should be.

But what comes through very clearly is that the policy that we've had—by the way, a bipartisan basis with Presidents, I mean, Republican and Democratic Presidents, has been nation building in Afghanistan total, total and complete failure, pipe dream, wishful thinking.

You don't say that, but the examples of the pipe dream policies and the unwillingness to come to the appropriate conclusions is evident. Just in the course of my time, Mr. Chairman, remember,

there was—there were folks in the State Department who were only there for nine months, so they had to go around and they had to spend their money before they went out and they wanted to get books to libraries and they couldn't spend the money within the time before they left, so they had to order like expensive books from Amazon and a lot of these included art books with nude photos on them or depictions that just don't quite fit into Afghani libraries.

The dam that we spent hundreds of millions of dollars on that basically didn't operate. The planes that were urgently needed that were sold for scrap at six cents a pound, millions of dollars it cost the taxpayers, all of that reflected the inability of this country to succeed on this wild notion that from here in Washington, we could build a nation in Afghanistan.

The evidence you've provided is the one thing that has, at least, forced many in Congress, again, on both sides of the aisle to ask the question, does this policy work or is it a pipe dream? So, I just, No. 1, want to thank you, and, No. 2, it's on Congress to demand of the administration what is the policy, how is what your policy now different than what's failed before, and what are the decisions that we have to make? So, thank you for that.

Do you have any recommendations for this committee about how we can get access to more information because it does appear Mr. Lynch was asking about this, that a lot of the classification system is based on whether it's good news, not classified; bad news, classified?

Mr. SOPKO. Again, thank you, Congressman Welch for those kind comments and you basically stole my thunder. Those findings we did lay out in the lessons learned report, so I think anybody who read The Washington Post articles would realize that there was nothing new there.

We've been reporting problems, including mendacity, hubris, shaving records, the lobotomy, everything else that you mentioned. It's tough for me to tell you, Congress, how to do oversight. I mean that's, you know, what you're doing right now is what you need to do.

Visiting the country is what you need to do. I think when the chairman goes—and I know it's a very difficult trip and it's a very dangerous trip and I don't, you know, lightly say it's an easy trip, but when you go out and you start talking to people, you talk to the troops, you talk to the AID people, you meet them in the dining hall, or you meet them after hours, it's amazing what you can learn. That's the way to do it.

If you're not getting the records from Congress and you're not coming from the administration, I can't really tell you what more to do, so—

Mr. WELCH. Thank you.

Mr. LYNCH. The gentleman yields.

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

Mr. GREEN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. As a guy who's deployed to Afghanistan, I think folks will be a little surprised with my questioning today, but first let me start by thanking you for being here.

The Washington Post article detailed some potential deception. Are we investigating to find out who exactly deceived and is something happening to hold those people accountable for that deception?

Mr. SOPKO. Congressman, no, I don't think anybody is, and maybe if I could just take 50 seconds or 30 seconds to explain The Washington Post article and I know the ranking member alluded to that. First of all, we, meaning SIGAR, did not issue a report.

Mr. GREEN. Understood.

Mr. SOPKO. We have been doing lessons learned reports since 2014, actually at the recommendation of Members of Congress, also General Allen, Ambassador Crocker, and others who, when we issued these reports that identified airplanes that didn't fly and buildings that melted, they wanted to know what does this mean, you know? What does this all mean, Mr. Sopko? You keep finding failure after failure, so we decided to embark upon trying to learn some lessons from those 18 years.

What happened is, in the course of that, we got a lot of information, reviewed a lot of cables, interviewed a lot of people. Some of the people we interviewed were reflective of what happened 10 years ago and they basically were saying, like, I think, General Lute and others, that you know, we didn't know what was going on, but that was sort of after the fact they're reflecting. It was very useful information in some areas, but a lot of the information was also talking about the war fighting and none of our reports deal with the war fighting.

We deal with reconstruction and the training. We don't look at whether we should be in Afghanistan or not. So, when Ambassador Lute or General Flynn say we shouldn't be there, that's nice. It's his opinion. It's their opinion, but it doesn't help us do these lessons learned reports, which we've done seven. So, I think that explains it. It's not that these people were evil, they're just reflecting on what they saw and observed seven, eight years ago.

Mr. GREEN. So, there were no falsified documents? There was no intentional deception to give a perception that was inaccurate?

Mr. SOPKO. I testified last week before the House Foreign Relations Committee and I mentioned that there is this—we've almost created a system that forces people in the government to give happy talk, success stories because they're over there on very short rotations. They want to show success.

The whole system is almost geared to give you, and it goes up the chain of command, all the way to the President sometimes, he gets bad information from people out in the field because somebody's on a nine-month rotation. He has to show success and that goes up. Is it criminal? No. Is it wrong? Yes. What we need to do is, that's why you need to reach over and actually go out there and kick the tires yourself because that's what I discovered the first time I went over there.

Mr. GREEN. I think I get your point that there's this, you know, people want to be successful, they put a rosy spin on it. We, in Congress, don't like to hear negative stuff. We don't seem to tolerate it very well, even despite the fact that that may be the only answer. I got it.

I'm sure you're aware that an Android app can't run on an Apple operating system. Are we trying to run systems over there? Are we trying to create ways of doing business when the operating system won't ever allow us to do it? Meaning, are we wasting our time and if so, what happens to both Afghanistan and the United States if we just walk away?

Mr. SOPKO. Well Congressman, I don't know if I can answer the bigger question about whether we're wasting our time or not. I'm going to leave that to you and the President to decide, but we are giving them systems, whether it's military hardware or other systems that they can't use.

One of the questions we asked early on is, do the Afghans know about what we're giving them? Will they use it? Do they want it? We couldn't even get government agencies to ask those questions. I have run across Afghans who said, 'I didn't know that clinic was being built until it was given to us by the donors.'

Mr. GREEN. In your lessons learned that you provide us, do you list those efforts of ours that have failed or that will continue to fail if we continue to push those?

Mr. SOPKO. Throughout all of our reports and the lessons learned as well.

Mr. GREEN. They're in there.

Mr. SOPKO. We're happy to brief you on other reports coming out about that.

Mr. GREEN. Thank you.

Mr. LYNCH. The gentleman yields back.

The chair now recognizes the gentlelady from Illinois, Ms. Kelly, for five minutes.

Ms. KELLY. Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you for calling this hearing today. As you noted earlier, the recent reporting by The Washington Post and the continued work of the special inspector general of Afghanistan reconstruction has shown that the American people have repeatedly been misled about the conditions in Afghanistan.

Mr. Sopko, when you were with us before in April, you told the committee that you believed, and I quote: That transparency is the best policy for everybody. When it comes to Afghanistan, why does transparency matter so much?

Mr. SOPKO. Well, I think for two apparent reasons; No. 1, American lives are on the line. And if you just tell Congress the good news and not the bad news, Americans will die.

Second, we have spent more money in Afghanistan on reconstruction than we did on the entire Marshall Plan to rebuild all of Europe, so it's a lot of taxpayers' dollars.

And if you add the 700 million on the war fighting, we're close to a trillion dollars, so I think it behooves administration witnesses and IGs to speak truth to power and tell you what's going on and what's not going on.

Let's be honest to ourselves. That is the real dishonesty. We have been dishonest to ourselves. I think a number of people coming here and testifying have tried to paint the good story. I don't know if it's for getting a promotion or it's just the American way. We also have this hubris, which I think was identified before, that we think

we can turn Afghanistan into little America or another Norway. We can't. That's the hubris.

Ms. KELLY. I would believe that you think part of that transparency is the ability for us to hear directly from the Department of Defense and the State Department?

Mr. SOPKO. Well, look, I worked 24 years in Congress working for Sam Nunn, John Dingell, and other people. I believe in openness and I believe that Congress has a right to know, but maybe I'm a minority these days.

Ms. KELLY. I hope not.

Earlier this month you testified before our colleagues on Foreign Affairs and were asked how Congress would stem the flow of inappropriate amounts of money to Afghanistan. Your answer, hold more hearings, specifically, hold more hearings with the Defense Department, the State Department, and USAID where we ask them to justify their budgets based on outcomes. At that hearing, and I quote, again, you said, Congress has to weigh in and say hold it and we want to know the truth as gory as it is and you continue to stand by that?

Mr. SOPKO. I do and if I can add—there's one other thing I did mention: there is, maybe incentivize honesty. One of the proposals I gave at that time, because I was asked by the staff to come up with proposals, is put the same requirement on the government that we impose on publicly traded corporations.

Publicly traded corporations have to tell the truth otherwise the SEC will indict the people involved. They have to report when there's a significant event, so put that onus, call it the truth in government act if you want that you, in the administration, are duty bound by statute to alert Congress to significant events that could directly negatively impact a program or process, so incentivize honesty.

Ms. KELLY. OK. Well, we've tried to get the Defense Department and the State Department, but they've been no-shows. What kind of signal do you think that sends if representatives from the administration don't respond to congressional requests?

Mr. SOPKO. You know, that's difficult for me to answer. I think you have to ask them. I showed up when I got called, so—

Ms. KELLY. OK. I don't know, do you think they have something to hide or they don't want to share the bad news?

Mr. SOPKO. I think you're walking me into trouble on this. I can't—

Ms. KELLY. I'm not trying to do that.

Mr. SOPKO. I can't impose. I think, again, you have to go back to the people you're trying to get in here.

Ms. KELLY. OK. And just another set of questions, Mr. Sopko. In its 2019 high-risk list, SIGAR included instances of restricted oversight as a hindrance to reconstruction efforts. The report stated that, quote: With or without a peace settlement, the U.S. mission in Afghanistan and the reconstruction effort will continue to require vigorous oversight. Why is that the case?

Mr. SOPKO. Well, I think now more than ever because there are fewer State Department, AID people, and DOD people there, you need somebody watching the store and there will be a tendency, because of the security situation, decreased staffing to give the money

directly to the Afghan Government or to give the money through third-party monitors, such as the World Bank and U.N. and other international organizations. We have reported in the past that, first of all, the Afghan Government's incapable of handling the money. We really need to do a ministerial assessment, ministry by ministry to determine whether they can handle our taxpayer money.

Then, second, we have some real questions about some of these international organizations. The U.N. and the World Bank we've already identified have serious problems with monitoring it. So, what we're saying is, don't just focus on the troop level, don't just focus on the amount of money, focus on how we are going to protect the U.S. taxpayers' dollars. That's why I think now more than ever we have to keep our focus on that.

Ms. KELLY. Thank you so much.

I yield back the time I don't have.

Mr. LYNCH. The gentlewoman from Illinois yields.

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

Mr. MASSIE. Thank you, Chairman Lynch.

I'd like to start out by agreeing with my colleague from Vermont, Mr. Welch, that what we're doing here is nation building. This is—I mean, we're calling it reconstruction, but maybe that's because nation building, people understand what nation building is and they don't appreciate all the money that has been spent on it because they know, commonsense tells them, that it's not working.

This feels like Groundhog Day, again, Mr. Sopko. I don't know how many hearings I've been in with you. You're consistent, I will say that, about uncovering the waste, fraud, and abuse. By the way, if there was ever any doubt whether we needed a SIGAR special inspector general for Afghan reconstruction, today's hearing hopefully clears that up because we invited the Department of Defense and the State Department to also give us answers and they're not here.

If you didn't exist, if your department didn't exist, we would have nobody at this hearing today to give us any answers, so I appreciate you coming here.

I want to start out in this hearing as I start out in all the other hearings where you show up and ask about the money. Let's start with the money. In 2015, I asked you how much we have spent. The number was 113 billion. You graciously came back in 2017, the number was 121 billion.

Last year you were here, the number we spent was 132.3 billion with 10.8 billion in the pipeline.

Can you tell us how much we have spent on Afghanistan reconstruction at this point?

Mr. SOPKO. Congressman Massie, I can. The latest figure is 136.97 billion as of December 31, so 136, you can round it off to 137 billion.

Mr. MASSIE. That's staggering to me, but just for reference, the entire Federal budget for roads and bridges is 50 billion, 50 to 60 billion. It's gone up a little bit. We could double our spending on our Nation's infrastructure for two or three years for what we spent in Afghanistan.

You know, when the Afghanistan papers came out, the so-called Afghanistan papers in The Washington Post, I think it was a shock to everyone, everyone except for the people who had read your reports because literally what they reported was what you have been bringing to Congress year after year for five, six, seven years in your lessons learned publications. I guess people just haven't been reading those.

One of the problems we get and maybe this is why State Department and DOD didn't show up today is we get too much happy talk from them. I feel like we get the real talk from you, but let me give you an example of some of the happy talk we got in this committee when DOD did show up and you probably remember this, Mr. Sopko.

Christine Abizaid, deputy assistant Secretary of Defense for Afghanistan and Central Asia, I asked her how effective our drug interdiction programs were and this is the happy talk I got. She said, well, it went down—the drug production went down one year. It had gone up all the years, but it had gone down one year. And somebody had the good wisdom to lean and whisper in her ear, there was a drought that year. So, that's why it went down that year, but it's consistently gone up.

Then I said, how do you measure your success? And she started touting the amount of money they had spent and the number of flights and the fact that the Afghanistan was flying. So, that's the kind of happy talk we've gotten. We need more of the real talk that you've been giving us, but here's what I want to focus on.

You've got eight high-risk areas here in this document that you gave us today and it's—I encourage my colleagues to read it. He's made it really thin. Most of these reports are thick because there's a lot of waste, fraud, and abuse. He's reduced it to eight things you can read now, okay, but the eighth one is the one that concerns me the most and that is restricted oversight.

I mean, you're the only one here today, yet what I'm hearing you say is, some of the numbers that need to be reported are being classified and some of the numbers aren't even being monitored any more. Can you talk about that in the little remaining time we have?

Mr. SOPKO. Well, that is a problem. We're not getting the data, but the other problem we're starting to see—and every time I go over there now for the last year, people at AID, at State, and DOD say, oh, we don't have any people anymore who can answer your audit requests and please don't do another lessons learned report because we have nobody who can answer the mail.

This is the concern I have and I believe Congressman Welch was leaning toward that and I didn't get a chance to answer, but the problem is as we reduce the number of troops, are we going to be reducing the people who are doing oversight over the 80 some billion dollars that the Defense Department has spent there? If we reduce like we did, the number of USAID officials, who's going to be around to monitor the money we're going to spend?

You know the World Bank has predicted, even if there's peace, we're going to have to spend more money if there's peace. So, who's going to be there if you, quote/unquote, right size the embassy and

right size the Department of Defense out there? There is nobody there to monitor.

By the time an inspector—just so you know about IGs, there is a limitation to us. By the time we show up on a program, it's gone. It's like the TV detective serial, you see a white chalk outline of the body. The first line of defense is that soldier who's monitoring the contract or monitoring the Afghan Government, but if he comes back because there's talk now to reduce the 8,600, where are those 4,000 troops coming from? Are they gun toters or are they the people who are actually trying to answer the mail and oversee how we spend the money?

This building of this empire you talk about that you don't want to see, well, there is a soldier or somebody from the Pentagon who is trying to oversee that. If he comes back in the first traunch, who's going to be protecting your money? That's my concern. That is the big concern.

Getting out is a concern, but we've kind of worked our way around that. But you can't cut the oversight capabilities of AID, State, and DOD in this drive for what they call right sizing.

Mr. MASSIE. My time is expired and the chairman's been very gracious, but I would just like to say before I yield back, we shouldn't spend a dime if we can't track a dime over there, and that's the way I feel about it.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. LYNCH. The gentleman yields.

Now the chair now recognizes the gentlewoman from the Virgin Islands, Ms. Plaskett, a very energetic and focused member of this subcommittee for five minutes.

Ms. PLASKETT. Oh, dear. The pressure.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman, and thank you Mr. Sopko for coming here to speak with us and to share your thoughts and your concerns. We all, as you can hear, on this committee are concerned with our Afghan strategy. I think that across the board you have heard that it's one of the few times I feel like on this committee we've all had some agreement going on. It's a welcomed feeling.

But one of the things I also have noticed and have a concern about is that under President Trump it seems that our policy now is geared more toward withdraw of U.S. forces and initially it appears that the administration's stated objective in Afghanistan was to achieve a peace agreement that ensures Afghan soil is never used again by terrorists against the United States, its allies, or any country, and allows American troops then to return home. You know, I think that that is what you were talking about - about national security.

So, when you talk about the—when we talk about the Trump Administration's stated objective and our own national security, would you say, Mr. Sopko, that those are inextricably tied to one another?

Mr. SOPKO. I believe if I can answer—you're absolutely correct, ma'am, but also that has been our goal from the beginning is that, kick the Taliban out and try to help create an Afghan Government to keep the bad guys out from attacking us, so that's been a constant goal of all the administrations.

Ms. PLASKETT. However that goal seems to be very far in the distance. I mean, we have great difficulty in achieving that, correct?

Mr. SOPKO. Well, I think the obvious answer is that we got 80,000 or 60,000 Taliban, plus you have 5 to 10,000, I think, ISIS members and you got 20 other terrorist groups there so obviously we have not succeeded in keeping the bad guys out or creating a government that can keep them out.

Ms. PLASKETT. So, then it would appear to me that the Trump administration, the administration's now goal is just to remove ourselves from the situation because we believe that we cannot meet the objectives that were originally stated. Do you have a sense of what that is?

Mr. SOPKO. I really don't have a good sense of what the strategy is other than we're looking for sustainable peace. I don't know exactly what that specifically means, so I'm not really the witness for that. The State Department witness could do that.

Ms. PLASKETT. Well, you know, unfortunately, we don't have either the State Department or the Defense Department here. It seems to be now a goal or a belief on the part of this administration that when Congress tells them to come to something, they don't need to follow that.

But I know that you're not able to state what the stated policy is, but you had these eight high-risk areas that you thought were key to being impediments to us meeting those peace agreements, but I wanted to ask you, I know that you can't comment on what a potential peace deal with the Taliban should include or would look like, but assuming U.S. military withdraw is based on a timeline rather than meeting any of those high-risk conditions, do you think that these risks you've identified in high-risk report would be greater or lesser?

Mr. SOPKO. If there is a precipitous withdrawal, is that what—

Ms. PLASKETT. So, if we have, as the administration has done, by stating specifically the time and the numbers through various sources, in October, General Austin Miller Commander of U.S. Forces in Afghanistan confirmed that the United States had already reduced its footprint in Afghanistan by 2,000 despite the fact that we have yet to reach a peace agreement with the Taliban—or at different points where a former administration talked specifically, Secretary Pompeo, his directive from the President, it has been unambiguous: End the endless wars, draw down, and reduce. So, with the Taliban understanding that, that our removal of troops is based on a timeline of the President, rather than the meeting conditions, do you think that the risk that you've identified will be greater or lesser?

Mr. SOPKO. I think the risk would be greater. I mean, if the U.S. pulled out all of its troops tomorrow—I'm talking about all of them. I can't make a distinction if we go down to 8,600. If we pulled out all of them, the conflict would obviously continue as a stalemate; it would just be a lot bloodier stalemate. I think a number of people have said that eventually the Afghan Government would deteriorate.

The worse thing that could happen to the Afghans—because they will continue to fight, the Afghan Government, but if the funding—remember: 70 percent, over 70 percent of the Afghan budget comes

from the United States and the donors—if that money ended—I have said before, and I will stand by it—then the Afghan Government will probably collapse.

Ms. PLASKETT. Thank you for your assessment of that.

With that, I just think—I can only think of those soldiers, those USAID individuals who have been there all these years, through their rotations, risking life, supporting the Americans' objective, to have that thrown away because we need to withdraw or troops at this point is just such a slap in their face.

I yield back.

Mr. LYNCH. The gentlelady yields.

The chair now recognizes the gentlelady from North Carolina, my colleague Ms. Foxx, for five minutes.

Ms. FOXX. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I want to thank our witness for being here today.

Let me give a quick follow-up to the gentlewoman from the Virgin Islands. Isn't the Trump administration trying to neutralize the Taliban to make them a nonbelligerent group?

Mr. SOPKO. I believe that's part of our use of more munitions. That is one thing to drive them to the—that's the stated goal of driving them to the negotiating table.

Ms. FOXX. Thank you.

According to SIGAR's October 2019 quarterly report, the U.S. appropriated approximately \$4.74 billion to efforts in Afghanistan in 2019. Is that correct?

Mr. SOPKO. I don't have the exact number, but that sounds about right.

Ms. FOXX. OK. So, it is my understanding this money goes toward a variety of things, such as security efforts, government assistance, humanitarian aid, civilian operations. And you indicated that most of the money going to the government is coming from the U.S. So, is that right?

Mr. SOPKO. That's correct.

Ms. FOXX. So how important is it that this money is being spent for its intended purpose, such as to support migration and refugee assistance, international narcotics control, and the Afghan Security Forces Fund?

Mr. SOPKO. It's very important, ma'am. That's the concern I think everybody has about corruption and diversion of funds.

Ms. FOXX. The word "corruption" appears 80 times in SIGAR's October 2019 quarterly report. Is it safe to assume corruption is a significant problem plaguing Afghanistan?

Mr. SOPKO. I am sorry, ma'am, for interrupting you. It's a very serious problem. Everyone has acknowledged that.

Ms. FOXX. OK. So, now can the American people be sure the money being spent—sent to Afghanistan is being spent for legitimate purposes and not being used for corrupt purposes?

Mr. SOPKO. As hard as we all try, I don't think I have a warm fuzzy feeling about the money being spent in its intended purposes. And I don't mean to be facetious, ma'am, but the former head of CSTC-A is an example. That is the Combined Security Training Command—Afghanistan estimated at one point that 50 percent of the fuel that we purchase for the Afghans disappears—50 percent. So, we're talking billions. So, it is a significant problem, ma'am.

Ms. FOXX. So, what are the dangers if the U.S. were to turn a blind eye to this corruption?

Mr. SOPKO. One of the dangers?

Ms. FOXX. What are the dangers?

Mr. SOPKO. Well, the danger is that—first of all, it would be a waste the taxpayers' dollars. But, second, I think the concern is that the money is being used—that it will actually hurt our security arrangement with the Afghans. I mean, some of the units may not be able to fight as well as they did because they are not getting fuel, they are not getting paid, et cetera. Actually, the biggest concern I think everybody has is not so much the casualties, but it's the number of troops who are quitting or disappearing from the Afghan military, and part of it is because of pay and leadership problems.

Ms. FOXX. So, do you want to talk a little bit about how the United States has been involved in the anticorruption efforts in Afghanistan? What are some of the things that we are currently doing?

Mr. SOPKO. Well, what we are doing, and I must say the former Ambassador who just left probably summed it up best when he told the Afghans—and I don't think they liked to hear this as he was going out the door—that “your future donations from the West will probably depend on how well you fight corruption.” That was Ambassador Bass. But what we're trying to do is create a separate anticorruption justice center, and to goad the Afghans to use that, it is almost like creating the untouchables that we did in the 1930's here to focus on the big fish. The problem has been and we have documented this two years in a row because Congress—the Appropriations Committee asked us to assess their corruption capabilities. Their corruption capabilities leave a lot to be desired. So, we're being asked again by Congress to take a look at it. But we are trying to beef up their prosecutive capabilities, but you got to have a political will, and that's the problem we're all worried about.

Ms. FOXX. Thank you very much.

I yield back, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. LYNCH. The gentlelady yields.

The chair is now pleased and honored to recognize the full committee chair of this committee, Chairwoman Maloney of New York, for five minutes.

Mrs. MALONEY. Thank you so much, Mr. Chairman.

And I want to thank John Sopko for your service and also the chairman for holding this important hearing.

I'd like to focus my questions on the importance of women in Afghanistan and the differences it has made with America allowing them to participate in the economy and in education.

I recall, when we first went to Afghanistan, women were murdered and killed if they went to school. Now I'm told that they have made a tremendous progress over the past 18 years. They make up 14 percent of kindergarten to 12th grade, and 30 percent of university students now are women, and there are more than 170 public and private higher education institutions across the country, even in the most difficult parts of Afghanistan. And I am told that women are the majority of teachers at these schools, which is important.

According to some government reports, women make up to 27 percent of government employees. Before, they were not even allowed to work. And they serve as ministers, deputy ministers, judges, and in many other positions.

According to the United Nations, maternal mortality rates, they used to be second in the world, and they have fallen substantially. That is because there are so many women that are trained as midwives and health professionals now and are working to help other women. I understand there are over 530 public and private hospitals and hundreds of health and subhealth centers. Even if these numbers are exaggerated, women appear to be an important part of the success that is happening, certainly in education and healthcare. So, wouldn't that alone make up our investments? Wouldn't that alone justify our investments in the country? I know the United Nations has made several reports that when women are educated and empowered and respected, the amount of terrorism in that country or in that village goes down. So, investing in women and allowing them to be part of the country and not killing them if they go to school, I think we've made a tremendous impact in that country. And I'm afraid, if we retreat and leave, that it will go back to the way it was before.

So, my question is, you know, do you believe women have made a significant contribution to successes in education and healthcare? Also, if we left, as some politicians are proposing, wouldn't it fall back to the other way where they were so—where being a woman meant you were almost not alive in what you were allowed to do. Can you—

Mr. SOPKO. I'm happy to, Madam Chairman. I think you hit a good point and one of the successes that we have had in Afghanistan.

But you've also raised a concern. And I must admit for all the trips I've gone there and all of the Afghan women I have talked to, I have not met one Afghan woman who trusts the Taliban. The concern is, if they are excluded from the negotiations or if the negotiations are done by men and they ignore the advances, it is going to be very bad for women in Afghanistan. So, that is a serious concern I think we all have.

Mrs. MALONEY. I would like unanimous consent to place in the record a letter that I've written to Secretary Pompeo expressing the same concern as the IG that women need to have a seat at the table in the peace talks so that their rights aren't traded away and lost.

You mentioned the amount of corruption. Do you think it would be a way of addressing corruption if you had a certain percentage of the contracts, which are numerous coming from USAID and American-led efforts to help the country, that they go to women-led organizations so that maybe the gas would get into the automobiles for the military, maybe the money would get to the place that it was intended? Do you think if we required that certain amount of the money go to women-led organizations? Certainly any ideas that you have, I know that the women's movement here in America and around the world was pleading with the United States to have a seat at the table for women in the peace negotia-

tions. Any of your ideas that you might have on how we can include women in the peace negotiations?

Mr. SOPKO. I would have to get back to you on that. I know we've had set-aside programs in the past. And Congress has actually designated a significant amount of money to the Afghan police and the Afghan military to recruit women in that area. I think there has been money set aside for women's programs by USAID, but I don't know how successful that has been.

We reported on that in relationship to the military, and then the Defense Department classified that information—so the amount of women that were being recruited. And that was—they reversed themselves, but still there is a serious problem that, even though you have set aside money for certain things in Afghanistan, it is not spent. We're going to have a report coming out soon, ma'am, on the number of buildings we built for women in the Afghan military and police that are now vacant. You have to have a will on the Afghan men's side, and that's the problem we're facing.

Mrs. MALONEY. Mr. Chairman, may I ask another question and a request?

Mr. LYNCH. Of course. I do want to, without objection, order that your letter be entered into the record.

Mrs. MALONEY. Thank you.

Mr. LYNCH. And now you are recognized.

Mrs. MALONEY. But my question really was not more women in the military and more women in the police. My question was more women organizations being put in charge of the finances so it gets to the people and not to corruption.

Years earlier I passed a bill that was part of the Appropriations Committee that \$60 million going to Afghanistan had to be spent with or given to a women-led organization. I can get a copy of that legislation to you. And I would like to request, with the chairman's permission, a meeting with you and the Women's Caucus, if you could go over what happened to that \$60 million. If the problem is corruption—and then I would say I represent a district that is a business district in New York City. It is the business capital of many different businesses. The stories that I hear from businessmen are just horrible, that all you of their contracts are let through corruption and payoffs and this kind of thing. If American business felt like they could be treated fairly, they would invest in Afghanistan. Maybe we need to look at any of the assignments and contracts because I hear they are incredibly corrupt. Business people now go around the country giving speeches: Don't go to Afghanistan; they are not going to treat you fairly, which is a horrible situation to be in.

If American business felt that it was secure and honest, you'd have a lot of people coming in to help and to work and help the country.

In any event, I want to thank you for your service and your leadership, it is an incredibly important assignment. I look forward to meeting with you again on what happened to that \$60 million, whether it was spent honestly and if it helped the people.

Thank you.

Mr. SOPKO. Madam Chairman, I would be very happy to followup.

And I think, apropos of that, we have actually embarked upon a new lessons-learned program specifically dealing with the gender issue. So, I know my staff who are working on that would love to meet with yourself and other interested parties up here as to how we should shape that lessons-learned report. So, I look forward to that conversation.

Mrs. MALONEY. Just giving it back to you, I would put women in charge of certain things. Being a police officer you're not in charge, unless you're Val Demings, who is a Member of Congress now. But running distribution of food or distribution of gasoline or distribution of assets for the country, I think that the numbers speak for themselves, that the women have made an incredible contribution to education and healthcare and improved the country. They could possibly improve the management and honesty of getting the money to the people and to a democracy and to a stronger country. You know, as we say in Congress, when you empower women, you empower the country. Maybe we should use that same motto in Afghanistan and see if given contracts to manage and do it honestly—that's the problem: You're saying money is going to situations, and it's all corrupt. But the men are all in charge.

If you try it, try a few sample cases. I know that we created the human rights commission there. I've had some meetings with the people that run that, men and women. Maybe they could be empowered to help honestly move goods and services to the extent for the purposes that they were allocated.

I want to thank you for your service. I just represent New York, and I know that the attack on New York was planned and put in place in Afghanistan. I hope and pray that we do not go back to a situation where elements of evil are there that can plot and kill people around the world as they did. They killed 3,000 of my neighbors and constituents in New York City in their attack on 9/11. One of reasons we are there is to try to prevent that. So, I hope you're making that your priority, too. Thank you.

Mr. SOPKO. You're welcome.

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

Mr. CLOUD. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you for being here. Thank you for your work and attention to Afghanistan.

Just for the record, could you—what's your opinion of why we're in Afghanistan? Why do we have a U.S. presence in Afghanistan? Why did we go there originally?

Mr. SOPKO. The stated goal was to punish the people that—the chairwoman just noted—attacked the United States and then to help build a government or help develop a government there and its military and police that could keep the Taliban or other terrorist groups that attacked us from coming back in.

Mr. CLOUD. How far would you say we are in that process? Are we having success?

Mr. SOPKO. Mixed success, as I mentioned to one of the other members. The problem, obviously, we haven't succeeded totally if there are 60-some thousand Taliban reportedly working in Afghanistan and fighting there. And there is a war going on, as we unfor-

tunately just saw recently one of our planes just went down. So, obviously, we have not had total success.

Mr. CLOUD. Right. As been noted a number of times, corruption is all throughout your report in Afghanistan. One of the big issues here in Congress is we—you know, you can say the road to \$23 trillion is paved with good intentions. We allocate money based on good intentions, but then we don't followup to make sure it is going to the right places. You talked about—I believe the U.N. agreement had us at—we were supposed to have 51 percent of the share, and supporting Afghanistan was supposed to be by other countries. You mentioned it's at 70 percent. What part of that is the U.S. share?

Mr. SOPKO. When I mentioned the 70 percent, what I'm referring to is the actual budget of Afghanistan; 70 percent of it is supported by donors. I don't have the actual breakout. We give the majority of that, but other donors do participate.

Mr. CLOUD. All right. And we have spent \$133 billion in the reconstruction efforts so far?

Mr. SOPKO. That's how much has been appropriated, yes.

Mr. CLOUD. You talk about 50 percent of the fuel going to other countries or other uses than intended. What percentage of that would you say is actually going to its intended use, if you had to guess or estimate with your—

Mr. SOPKO. Well, we actually, at the request of former Congressman Walter P. Jones and others, we did an analysis on how much money was wasted in Afghanistan. It was a very difficult and long-term project. So, we looked at all of our contracts that we have reviewed, and so \$52 billion of that \$136 billion we looked at. And we basically determined that up to \$15 billion—so about 30 percent—was either wasted or stolen. Now that was just of the universe that we had already looked at.

Mr. CLOUD. Right.

Mr. SOPKO. So, I believe—as a result of that, I believe number of Congressmen have sent a similar request to DOD, State, and AID IGs to have them do the same type of analysis so as to get a better picture.

Mr. CLOUD. If we are not funding what it was intended to do, what are we funding then in that roughly 30 percent?

Mr. SOPKO. Well, that money is either being stolen outright, or it went to programs that are a total waste. For example, if you look at our counternarcotics program—again, how do we define waste? There are three variables that we as IGs look at: inputs, outputs, and outcomes. We look at the outcome that the administrations told Congress they were supposed to resolved. Like in counternarcotics, it was the lessen the amount of opium; it was to end that scourge. Well, it has been a total waste. None of our programs have led to any reduction in opium in Afghanistan. As a matter of fact, opium is the largest export of Afghanistan. It's more than the licit crop. I think it is \$1.2-to \$2 billion in export. The licit, the pine nuts and everything else they sell, comes to less than a billion. So, we looked at that program and said that's a waste. We wasted \$9 billion. We've accomplished really nothing.

Mr. CLOUD. What recommendations do you have for us in holding that to account? What things can we put in place to make sure the money gets to where it is supposed to go?

Mr. SOPKO. I think strictly asking people upfront in the administration: What are you trying to accomplish? And I'll go back to a letter that I sent—and I know Congressman Lynch knows about this—back in 2013, I sent a letter to the Secretary of Defense, Secretary of State, and to Administrator of USAID and I said: Can you list your top 10 successes and your bottom 10 failures and why? This would have forced the administration to rack and stack their programs, list what works, what doesn't, and try to understand what works there. They refused to answer the mail in 2013. So, in 2014, we basically came up with the lessons-learned program; I was trying to answer my mail to you. You have got to force the administration to be honest. It's not political. It's Republican, Democrat. The administration has to come in and tell you specifically: Why are you spending this money? What do you expect to accomplish at the end? Are you going to spend \$9 billion on counter-narcotics, and the end result is that there is actually more opium being grown? Are you going to spend \$500 million on airplanes, and they can't fly? You're going to spend millions of dollars on buildings that melt? I mean, you need to hold people accountable. You need to bring in the head of those programs and say: What were you thinking? And don't be negative about it. Just say: Look, if it doesn't work, stop; do something else.

But I am certain, Congressman, and I don't want to go over—I am already over. I apologize Congressman Lynch. Every commander I've met—I've met six of them. I've been doing this now for God knows how many years. Every one of them has said the summer fighting season we won. Well, if we won, what's defeat look like? And the AID Administrator was pumping out happy talk for years, so much so that we actually had the CIA come in and said what USAID is saying about the life expectancy is impossible arithmetically. It is impossible to double the life expectancy. People were coming in and giving you kites and balloons. They weren't telling the truth. You are the last bastion protecting the taxpayers' money. You have got to ask the tough questions. You can't just look at inputs. That's how much money you give them. You can't just look at outputs, how many shoes they bought for Afghans. What was the outcome? Can the Afghan military fight? Well, you don't know because they took all of the metrics for success. So, we don't know, and that's the problem.

Mr. CLOUD. Thank you.

Mr. LYNCH. The gentleman's time has expired—a long time ago.

I now want to recognize one of the hardest working members of this committee and an exceedingly patient Member of Congress, the gentlewoman from Michigan, Mrs. Lawrence.

Mrs. LAWRENCE. Thank you to an amazing chair.

I'm here today as co-chair of both the Democratic Women's Caucus and also the entire bipartisan caucus for this Congress. I'm committed to strengthening the rights of women.

Under the Taliban's regime, from 1996 to 2001, they brutally oppressed women and girls. Girls were banned from the workplace, denied healthcare, barred from education, and restricted from earning a basic livelihood. In fact, in 1997, one women's group called conditions in Afghanistan, and I quote, "inhumane gender apartheid."

After the United States had disbursed almost \$1 billion, talking about outcomes in Afghanistan for programs aimed at improving the health and status of women, millions of Afghan women have voted, and some now occupy prominent positions in society. I'm here today because I'm deeply concerned that if a peace agreement is reached, the Taliban will revert back to its old ways of repressing women and girls.

Today, sir, you wrote in your opening statement that an important question for the State Department would be, and I quote, what can the United States do to ensure that women's rights, as currently enshrined in Afghan law are protected in a post-peace agreement environment in which the Taliban may become part of the political system?

Unfortunately, the State Department isn't here, refused to appear. I can't ask them. So, I'm going to ask you, sir. Can you give me any assurances or provide an explanation of how we plan to protect women rights in Afghanistan's following a potential peace deal?

Mr. SOPKO. I can give you no assurances that we will—that the peace deal will protect women. I don't know what's going to be included in the peace deal. A lot of this is also relying on the Afghans negotiating with the Taliban, the Afghan Government and people. So, I personally can't give you any assurances because I don't know where that's going to end up. If this is important to Congress and to the administration—

Mrs. LAWRENCE. That's my next question.

Mr. SOPKO. If it is important—and, again, that's a policy decision that only you and the administration can make. But if you decide this is important, then the biggest shtick you have for the Afghans as well as the Taliban because the Taliban wants foreign assistance too; that is what has been reported—is that 70 percent of the budget, those billions of dollars that they will want, and you have to hold their feet to the fire. It's called conditionality: So, if you want assistance, you can't go back to your old ways?

That would be the way I would bargain this. But that's a policy decision that Congress and the administration has to make, and then somebody has to stick with it. We have to be brave enough to say "no" to people. Now the answer then, what happens? If you pull the money, then the thing falls into civil war. So, you have to negotiate it very carefully.

Mrs. LAWRENCE. Mr. Chairman, I am constantly confronted in America how we have policies and laws that even in 2020 create obstacles and barriers for women, and we have been very successful in addressing those in the past and have so many more to address. I want to make sure that I'm on the record saying that we need to ensure that we use every level of influence and power and to ensure incorporate in this peace deal is the protection of women in Afghanistan.

I thank you. And I yield back.

Mr. LYNCH. That's on the record.

Let's see, before we go to the second round, I do have a procedural matter here, I'd like to enter into the record a report to Congress offered by the Department of Defense in coordination with

the Department of State, dated December 2019, so a month ago, entitled “Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan.”

Without objection, so ordered.

Mr. LYNCH. Let’s see. We’re beginning the second round. So, let’s see—I understand—Mr. Green is going to take your time first.

I now recognize the gentleman from Tennessee, Mr. Green, for five minutes.

Mr. GREEN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I’m still kind of stuck at this 100,000-foot view because I think, if we get that wrong, everything else we do down below is a waste of time. Clausewitz, I don’t know if you studied much. I’m an ex-military guy. So, a lot of us were taught about Clausewitz and his strategy, his appreciation of strategy. One of the things that he sort of came up with is this concept of the center of gravity. So, if you were fighting a war, a military battle, you would look for, what is the center of gravity? What is the one thing that, if you turn that, you win the day; victory is at the end? It might be the terrain. If you hold the terrain or if it is the defeat of the military itself or if it is controlling the cities, what is the center of gravity?

Fighting in Afghanistan, I think our guys got it right in the beginning: finding the centers of gravity of the warlords, et cetera, and taking control of the train. People, hearts and minds as a center of gravity, the government as a center of gravity: now we’re trying to win the peace as opposed to win the war. My question to you is, what is that center of gravity, what is that one thing we’ve got to get, people’s hearts and minds, value systems, ideology, what is it we’ve got to flip in order to be successful there?

Mr. SOPKO. Boy, that’s a very good question, Congressman. I’ll try to take a stab at it. And this comes out of our lessons-learned report on stabilization, which is that period between our military coming in and clearing out the bad guys; we reinsert the Afghan Government with certain development programs to try to win the residents over. That’s that period, stabilization period, to summarize it. We need to have a government that the Afghan people trust and believe in, and it offers a modicum of services that those people want because the difficulty we have is that, for example, Afghan people want a little bit of justice; they don’t want to have to pay a bribe to get it. What we gave them were a bunch of courthouses that look nice, that would fit in any American city. But that’s not what the Afghan people wanted; they wanted a modicum of justice that they didn’t have to pay a bribe. So, I would go back, if we are going to win over there, it goes back to winning the hearts and minds, but it is not going to be a U.S. soldier winning the hearts and minds. We have got to have a government that is trusted and believed and supported by the average Afghan. And the majority of the Afghans don’t live in the cities. They live out in the hinterland, and out in the hinterland, it is bandit country.

Mr. GREEN. You know, you talk about corruption and all those things—we gave them a courthouse, but we didn’t give them the system that—

Mr. SOPKO. We didn’t give them justice; that’s what we didn’t give them.

Mr. GREEN. Right. So, what’s the barrier to keep—I mean, okay. We built a building and thought we did a great job, but what has

to get fixed for them to get that justice? Is there some ideology? I mean, what pushes corruption in that space or in that place? I mean, corruption comes from an ideology; corruption comes from value systems. Is there something there that we can flip, that we can turn, that we can change that will be successful?

Mr. SOPKO. I don't believe—and I know what you're reaching for. I can't give you a silver bullet. I really don't know. I'll think about, and I am happy come back and talk to you more about it.

Mr. GREEN. Let's get coffee or lunch. If we don't fix that piece of it, we can layer everything about America over top of it and it will never work. That's my concern.

Mr. SOPKO. A number of people agree with you on that. And it isn't just cultural. I mean, I spent—I grew up fighting organized crime with the Department of Justice, and they had a different morality the Mafia and what Cosa Nostra did, but it was a subgroup of the broader U.S. culture. But there, corruption is not just taking a bribe; it's endemic. It's tribal. It is part of that society, and it is extremely difficult to overcome. It is how the system works. In part, one of the findings we have of our lessons-learned program is you really have to understand the Afghan people, their way of life, their culture, and all of that before you go in. I don't think we really did. We didn't appreciate that, and so we contributed a problem by just pouring a lot of money too fast around there.

But I don't have an answer, and I'll be honest with you: I would love to sit down and chat with you, and I'll bring smart people, people a lot smarter than me. I just have the big mouth; I don't have the brains so.

Mr. GREEN. I doubt that.

I yield back.

Mr. LYNCH. The gentleman yields back.

So, we do not have the State Department and Defense Department witnesses, as we had requested, but we do have their report from December of last year, a month ago. Are you familiar with this 12/25 report?

Mr. SOPKO. Yes, I am, chairman.

Mr. LYNCH. So, this is a report to Congress required by the Levin and McKeon National Defense Authorization Act back in 2015. We get this report every year. One of the important parts of this is it discusses the role of the Special Representative for Afghan Reconciliation, Zalmay Khalilzad. He's the one that is doing the negotiation with the Taliban. And during June, July, and August of last year, the Taliban and our special representative engaged in negotiations, in nine separate rounds of negotiations, and they came up with four elements of an agreement. And I just want to recount those. Some of them are not surprising, three of them anyway. No. 1, the assurance that the Taliban will not be allowed to foster—excuse me, the Taliban would not allow terrorists to occupy the country, as happened before, concerns raised by the chairwoman. They wanted a timeline for U.S. withdrawal. They wanted a commitment by the Taliban to meet with the government of Afghanistan because they are not on negotiations right now. No. 4 surprised me, and one other section I think should become No. 5: No. 1, they didn't talk about the status of women. That's not a major component of their agreement. That's a huge problem, for the reasons

that have all been stated here, especially by Ms. Lawrence, and the chair, and also by Ms. Plaskett. The other is, instead of having a cease-fire, which was our original request, they are now saying they want—and I'm quoting, a reduction in violence around the areas from which the United States is withdrawing. So, I mean, as I read that, we were asking for a cease-fire, cessation of violence in the country, a peace agreement. Now we're saying: Just don't shoot at us while we're leaving. That's the way I read this.

I am just curious. You have followed these negotiations and the terms of what we were trying to negotiate.

Mr. SOPKO. But Mr. Chairman—

Mr. LYNCH. Is that how you understand that last section?

Mr. SOPKO. Mr. Chairman, I am not involved in the actual negotiations, but I am aware of this. This is an official Department of Defense document.

Mr. LYNCH. Right.

Mr. SOPKO. And I read it the same way you do. I mean, it just basically—this is what the Department of Defense says was the deal presented to the President, and thank goodness he didn't agree to it. It just basically says: Don't shoot at us while we're going out the door.

It sounds a lot like what the Brits did back in the 1800's when they left Kabul, and they all got wiped out. Yes, I mean, I don't think anybody should trust the Taliban to secure our peace or the peace of our soldiers.

Mr. LYNCH. The other that is deeply concerning: We went to Saudi Arabia a couple of months ago, and there has been this flow of funding from the Gulf, funding really Wahhabi, very extreme madrassas in northwest Pakistan and also southern Afghanistan, and they are pumping out—this is the farm team for the Taliban, these Wahhabi and Deobandi madrassas, very, very extreme. That's the farm team. So, these young men come up, and they become part of the Taliban. They view women as personal property; I can just say that. You know, we drove from Kandahar city all the way down to Spin Boldak on the Pakistani border, and women are, unless they are—they are not allowed out of the house unless they are in the presence of a male in their family. They have no range of movement, no freedom of movement. I have great misgivings about delivering the women of Afghanistan into the hands of the Taliban. That would reverse—that would be a disgrace. That would be a black mark on the United States of America and all freedom-loving nations if we were to allow that to happen.

I'm just very, very disappointed in the terms of these negotiations as I see them. I'm hoping that this is not the road we're down on. And one of the reasons I asked to have State Department and Department of Defense here is so that I could ask them about this, and they refused to attend. We're going to having a vote later on this week on repealing the AUMF, the Authorization for the Use of Military Force, that was agreed to back in 2003. I tell you what: The fact that the State Department and the Defense Department have refused to come before this committee and work for Congress, I'm going to vote for repealing the AUMF. That's the only power I have left. If they are not going to come in and talk to us and not give us evidence, then I have to take that away to the degree that

I possibly can. This is not the way this country was meant to operate. You know, we are supposed to be coequal branches of government and supposed to be respectful of one another and try to work for the common good of the people of this country. I just see a serious breakdown in this regard. So, that's the only way I can push back, but I'm going to do it.

So, I don't know, Mr. Chairman—Mr. Vice Chairman, sorry, ranking member, I keep going down in elevation. I don't know if you have anything further to add.

With that, let me just, first of all, thank you, our witness, for your willingness to come before the committee and help us with our work. Members will have five days during which to submit questions to the witness, and we are hopeful that you may be able to get back to us. I know you've made some commitments to the chair and to others to work with them on both sides of the aisle here.

Without objection, all members will have five legislative days within which to submit additional written questions to the witness, which will be forwarded to the witness for your response. And I please ask that you respond as promptly as you are able.

So, this committee is planning a codel to Afghanistan, and I will give you a chance to respond, and we are extremely desirous of getting you out to some areas, maybe to the training and to the TAACs, east, west, north, south, to maybe look at some of the things that you want to give further attention to, just like this Oversight Committee.

I'm sorry. Do you have it any last remarks?

Mr. SOPKO. Mr. Chairman, I'm happy to help you and any other member of the committee in preparing for that trip and also identifying places to see.

Could I ask just one thing to be introduced into the record?

Mr. LYNCH. Of course.

Mr. SOPKO. I know there were some questions by the ranking member about the Afghanistan papers in The Washington Post. I did a letter to the editor trying to correct the record on that report. Could I ask that that be submitted as part of the record?

Mr. LYNCH. Without objection, so ordered.

Mr. SOPKO. I think that clarifies our role. I think a lot of people were confused and thought we issued a report. We answered a FOIA—by law, you have to answer a FOIA—and gave those documents to them. We are still producing lessons-learned reports, as I said to the chairman, one on gender issues. So, we think they are very useful, and they are very helpful.

Mr. LYNCH. Again, we thank you very, very much for your great work. You've been doing it for a while, and we are extremely grateful for all you do and your staff as well, both here and in Afghanistan. Thank you.

Mr. SOPKO. Thank you.

Mr. LYNCH. The hearing is now adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 11:46 a.m., the subcommittee was adjourned.]

