



Prepared Remarks of
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“Opening Remarks – ‘Lessons From U.S. Efforts to Develop Afghan Forces and Beyond: An NDU-SIGAR Lessons Encountered Conference’”

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Joe, thank you for that very kind introduction. I want to thank you and your team at the Center for Complex Operations for co-hosting this event with SIGAR, and for your tireless efforts to collect and analyze lessons learned from the numerous challenges and conflicts our country faces around the globe. We’re glad to partner with you in that effort.

While he couldn’t be here today, I also want to thank Vice Admiral Scott, the Director of Joint Force Development at the Pentagon. Today’s event was born out of a meeting he and I had this spring to discuss SIGAR’s lessons learned initiative. I very much appreciate his support for our work and that of his team, some of whom are here today. We look forward to further collaboration.

I am grateful that you all took time to be here today; I also want to thank all the panelists who graciously agreed to share their expertise.

For those of you who are current or former military or government personnel, it may seem odd that an Inspector General is co-hosting a conference such as this one. After all, in your day to day work, the phrase “someone from the IG’s office is here to see you” usually doesn’t fill you with glee. So yes, this is a little unique, but then again, so is SIGAR.

As you all know, we’ve just passed the 16th anniversary of the Afghanistan Reconstruction effort. The United States has now spent over \$120 billion in Afghanistan simply on reconstruction, far outpacing any similar effort, including the entire Marshall Plan. Over 60 percent of reconstruction funding has gone to building the security forces. But even as we are hosted here at the National Defense University, we all realize success in Afghanistan requires an effectively executed “whole of government” approach.

Congress created SIGAR in 2008 because it wanted an IG office that could look across all agencies engaged in the reconstruction effort. As I'm sure many of the panelists will discuss today, security sector reform requires coordination between DOD, State, the Department of Justice, and a number of other agencies.

The problem, of course, is that agencies in Afghanistan routinely fail to coordinate with each other at even the strategic level – let alone at the project level. And while my purview extends only over one country, somehow I doubt Afghanistan is the only country where interagency coordination is an issue.

Because of SIGAR's unique vantage point, I feel a responsibility to raise these issues. SIGAR is a temporary agency, and eventually the reconstruction effort in Afghanistan will end. Identifying what's gone right and what's gone wrong in Afghanistan in hopes that the lessons we observe will help inform future efforts is the best legacy those of us at SIGAR can hope to leave behind.

General John Allen, the former commander of U.S. forces in Afghanistan, and Ryan Crocker, the former U.S. Ambassador to Afghanistan and Iraq, raised this issue with me shortly after I was appointed to lead SIGAR almost six years ago. They believed that SIGAR was the only government agency that could identify cross-agency lessons and best practices from the reconstruction effort.

This struck a chord with me because while SIGAR was finding waste, fraud, and abuse nearly everywhere we looked in Afghanistan – from the \$488 billion worth of aircraft that couldn't fly, to the navy we bought for a landlocked country, to the buildings the U.S. paid for that literally melted in the rain – I was constantly asked, what does it all mean?

I was also frustrated that the agencies' inability to derive any long-term lessons in Afghanistan and adjust their operations accordingly was in part because DOD and embassy personnel in Afghanistan rotate out of the country after a year or less. What I call the "annual lobotomy" is unfortunately not a new problem.

Army officer James Paul Vann, who was one of the earliest voices challenging the prevailing wisdom guiding strategy in Southeast Asia during the Vietnam War, commented then that "we don't have 12 years' experience in Vietnam. We have one year's experience twelve times over." I can't begin to tell you how many times I've heard some version of that statement applied to the 16 years of U.S. effort in Afghanistan since 9/11. If the definition of insanity is doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results, then the reconstruction effort needs a psychiatrist because, according to our chief of mission in Afghanistan, 90% of Embassy personnel in Kabul turned over within the past year.

The encouragement I received from individuals like General Allen and Ambassador Crocker, combined with the fact that it seemed like I was being introduced to a new U.S. ambassador or new commanding general every time I traveled to Afghanistan, convinced me to establish SIGAR's lessons learned program.

Our first lessons learned report focused on anti-corruption efforts in Afghanistan. Reports underway will focus on areas such as counter narcotics efforts, stabilization initiatives, and private sector development. And we're just getting started.

The report we launched last month, which is the genesis for today's event, is entitled "Reconstructing the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces: Lessons from the U.S. Experience in Afghanistan." It examines U.S. and coalition efforts to develop the Afghan National Army, Afghan National Police, Afghan Air Force, the Ministries of Defense and Interior, and other elements as part of the overall reconstruction effort. Effective and capable Afghan security forces will be critical to achieving the goals of the recently-announced strategy for Afghanistan.

Despite more than \$70 billion being spent to build Afghan security forces, they are continuing to suffer casualty rates that are unsustainable. Taliban insurgents and terrorist groups operate throughout much of the country, and large areas of Afghanistan are off-limits to U.S. government personnel.

The good news is that things could be worse. But, as our report shows, things could have been done better. Considering the duration and cost of our effort in Afghanistan, and the likelihood of increasing demands on our military and our resources emanating from North Korea, the Middle East, Southeast Asia, and elsewhere, three things are clear:

- (1) We need to help the Afghans stand on their own in order to reduce the need for international military support over time;
- (2) Building an effective Afghan security force is, and always has been, the cornerstone of that effort; and:
- (3) We simply need to do a better job of helping to build those forces.

Our report revealed that the U.S. government was not properly prepared from the outset to help build an Afghan army and police force that was capable of protecting Afghanistan from internal and external threats and preventing the country from once again becoming a safe haven for terrorists.

SIGAR's report also found that the U.S. government lacked a comprehensive approach to security-sector assistance and a coordinating body to successfully implement the whole-of-government programs necessary to develop capable and self-sustaining

Afghan security forces.

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

In fact, one of the major findings of the report was the complete mismatch between the abilities and expertise of U.S. military and civilian agencies when it came to training the Afghan National Police. The military could operate in a non-permissive environment but had little, if any, training on how to build an effective police force, while State and Justice had elements of the police training authorities and expertise, but no ability to operate in a non-permissive environment. Poor or insufficient training contributed to the development of an ineffective, and often predatory, police force, which is the arm of the security forces the Afghan people are most likely to engage with. And the people's lack of trust in the police undermines support for a central government the U.S. sees as a vital partner.

This is one of the twelve findings in our report. SIGAR also identified eleven lessons drawn from those findings, and makes thirty-five recommendations to both civilian agencies and DOD to improve future security sector reform efforts in Afghanistan.

The first panel of the day will focus on our report and the lessons from Afghanistan. I don't want to steal their thunder, but I know they will provide you with an in-depth review of our findings and also highlight actions that can be immediately taken to improve security sector assistance efforts in Afghanistan.

With a revised U.S. strategy now starting to be put into place, we believe SIGAR's report comes at an opportune time. While the administration's strategy review was underway this Spring, we shared our findings, lessons, and recommendations in briefings with Chairman Dunford, General Votel, and General Nicholson, top Pentagon leadership, the National Security Staff, and the responsible civilian agencies. I just returned from Brussels where I briefed SHAPE and NATO member countries on our findings, and next week I'm scheduled to brief the Marine Corps' leadership as well as testify before Congress on our report next week.

The positive response that we have received so far makes me optimistic that our Nation's national security leadership is open to not only serious reflection on our 16 year Afghan adventure, but also to change and improve efforts there and elsewhere. I was particularly heartened to see that in multiple Congressional hearings this month, Secretary Mattis and Chairman Dunford emphasized how closely DOD has been

working with SIGAR and had utilized SIGAR's "corporate memory" during the recent strategy review. SIGAR subject matter experts also served on the Joint Chiefs' "failure analysis" team that looked at the past 15 years' experience in Afghanistan.

But while SIGAR is uniquely equipped and positioned to continue to support the mission in this way, we cannot do it alone. We can identify the findings and lessons and make recommendations, but it is up to you and your colleagues to help implement them. And if you are not currently in government service, I urge you to advocate for any of our recommendations that resonate with you in whatever way you can.

For our part, we look forward to future collaboration with Vice Admiral Scott, the Joint staff, the Center for Complex Operations, our military services as well as with willing partners in civilian agencies to address the challenges our country continues to face in Afghanistan. If we succeed, we may bring lasting benefit not only to the taxpayer, but to our soldiers, diplomats, and development professionals in Afghanistan and beyond. And perhaps, most important, to the citizens of those countries we are trying to help.

Thank you very much.