



Prepared Remarks of
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“Afghanistan: Lessons of the Long War”

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Thank you for that kind introduction. It's a privilege to speak here today – a privilege I had once before, back in 1996, when I spoke about a congressional investigation I ran for then-Senator Sam Nunn on the use of weapons of mass destruction by terrorist groups.

Little did I know then that I would later spend six years – and counting – of my life conducting oversight on the reconstruction of a country the United States invaded to target terrorists whose committed the worst act of terrorism in U.S. history using simple airliners.

That country, of course, is Afghanistan and this morning I would like to discuss what my agency has learned over the last ten years about our reconstruction efforts there as well as what it portends for continued development and reconstruction efforts in future contingency operations there and around the world.

As you appreciate more than most, our nation is still at war in Afghanistan, a country that gave sanctuary to al-Qaeda. And nearly 17 years after the first U.S. boots were on the ground in Afghanistan, where does that effort stand?

In the words of a former American Ambassador, “if present trends continue, five years from now Afghanistan is likely to look very much like it does today: reconstruction stagnation, a weak central government starved of resources, unable to extend its influence to regions where oppressive warlords reign, opium production soars, and guerilla warfare in Afghan-Pakistani border areas generated by Pakistan-based Muslim extremists continues to inflict casualties on Afghan forces.”¹

Those comments were prescient and are as applicable today as they were when

former Ambassador Peter Tomsen spoke them in testimony before Congress 15 years ago in 2003.

While there have been undeniable successes in Afghanistan, there have also been unquestionable failures and ongoing challenges. Progress has been slow and many lessons that could have, and should have, been learned over the past 17 years.

I know many of you have served or have colleagues who have served in Afghanistan, so you are aware of SIGAR's mission to investigate and identify waste, fraud, and abuse in the now-\$126 billion U.S. reconstruction effort in Afghanistan.

But in addition to that part of our work, shortly after becoming the SIGAR in 2012, I came to realize that there was another role our agency could play – namely, identifying lessons learned from the reconstruction effort. Our hope is that by identifying those lessons and making recommendations, we may not only be able to improve efforts in Afghanistan, but also similar future operations.

SIGAR is uniquely positioned to play this role because we are one of only two Inspector General offices not housed within a single agency with has cross-agency jurisdiction. We are the only entity with the authority and capability to look at U.S. efforts in Afghanistan in a truly holistic way, as General John Allen, the former U.S. Commanding General in Afghanistan, pointed out to me when I took this job.

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

I was also frustrated that individual agencies' inability to derive any long-term lessons in Afghanistan and adjust their operations accordingly was largely because personnel in Afghanistan rotate out of country after a year or less. What I call the "annual lobotomy" – in other words, the routine loss of institutional memory – is not a new problem.

One of the earliest advisors in Vietnam, Army officer John Paul Vann, later commented 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 those remarks applied to the nearly 17 years of U.S. effort in Afghanistan.

Additionally, while each agency involved may – or may not – conduct its own lessons learned studies, they will rarely, if ever coordinate with other government agencies in preparing such lessons learned reports. The military, I must add, is particularly good at capturing lessons learned, but our civilian agencies have a less engrained culture of conducting such assessments. And those that are undertaken are often long forgotten by the time they're needed again. My staff in Kabul found a 1988 USAID-commissioned study entitled “A Retrospective Review of U.S. Assistance to Afghanistan: 1950 to 1979.” You'd be surprised how many of the report's findings are still relevant. Unfortunately, we could not find anyone at USAID who was aware the report existed, let alone knew of its findings.

Given our jurisdiction over every agency that has spent a dollar in support of the reconstruction effort in Afghanistan, and the absence of any other government effort to conduct lessons learned from a “whole of government” perspective, I decided that SIGAR should establish a lessons learned initiative.

To date we have published five lessons learned reports, each of which was based on hundreds of interviews and the review of thousands of documents, and was both externally peer reviewed and provided to the relevant agencies for input and comment.

Our reports, all of which are available on our website, www.sigar.mil, have focused on anti-corruption efforts; the reconstruction of the Afghan security forces; private sector development in Afghanistan; stabilization operations; and counternarcotics.

Our intent is not to criticize for the sake of criticizing, but to identify lessons and make recommendations to improve the ongoing reconstruction effort. No less a figure than General Dwight Eisenhower, who attended this institution, told his command staff on the eve of D-Day that he had “no sympathy with anyone, whatever his station, who will not brook criticism. We are here to get the best possible results.”²

Fortunately, the response to our lessons learned reports has been positive – especially from the military and Defense Department. While our report on the reconstruction of the Afghan security forces was being finalized, we briefed its findings to a number of senior Pentagon leaders, including Chairman Dunford, CENTCOM

Commander, General Votel, Commandant Neller and Resolute Support Commander, General Nicholson, to name a few, as they were finalizing the president's revised South Asia strategy. SIGAR subject matter experts were subsequently asked to serve on the Joint Staff's Afghanistan "failure analysis" team.

Our report on stabilization efforts was also well received. The State Department, DOD, and USAID asked for our input as they completed their own Stabilization Assistance Review, which they recently finalized. We've also been told that the report has been made mandatory reading for at least one bureau at State and just last week my Deputy met with over 90 senior interagency officials of the British Government to discuss our findings.

Congress has also incorporated a number of our recommendations into the National Defense Authorization Act, particularly focusing on improvements to anti-corruption and security sector assistance efforts.

I believe our lessons learned program is conducting important work and it is not done. Additional report topics are being researched that current and former military, civilian and congressional officials have suggested including lessons from the prior reintegration of insurgents; best practices for fair and impartial elections; and oversight and monitoring in a conflict zone, to name a few.

But what I am here to discuss today are some of the common threads shared among the first five areas our lessons learned program has examined thus far.

Among the common themes we have identified have been:

- Faulty assumptions and the pervasive negative effect of ongoing insecurity;
- The importance of controlling spending, and the impact on corruption if you do not;
- The need for comprehensive strategies and the negative impact of artificial timelines;
- The challenges posed by constant personnel rotations in general and specifically to contracting;

Theme #1: Faulty Assumptions and the Negative Effects of Ongoing Insecurity

The first common thread that SIGAR has identified has been too many faulty assumptions and a resultant negative impact on security over time. To be fair, on September 11th, 2001, there were few plans, if any, on the shelf for a military intervention in Afghanistan, let alone a follow-on civilian mission. While the military operation largely succeeded in disrupting the Taliban and al-Qaeda, the challenge was what to do the day after.

Afghanistan was not, in fact, the post-conflict state that many assumed it was in early 2002. The Taliban may have been pushed to the sidelines to wait for another day, but powerful Afghan individuals and groups that the Taliban themselves had shoved aside were waiting in the wings, and making Afghanistan the next great capitalist democracy was not necessarily high on their agenda.

The White House proposed only \$151 million in assistance to Afghanistan for 2003, a demonstration both of its reluctance to engage in national building as well as a lack of understanding of the true security situation on the ground. Included was a proposed \$1 million for the Afghan National Army, a number which then-DOD official Dov Zakheim has called “laughable.”³

While Congress increased aid to just under \$1 billion, in the words of the then-Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, “we did not go [to Afghanistan] to try to bring prosperity to every corner of Afghanistan.”⁴ His Pentagon colleague Zakheim, conversely noted that “the Administration squandered an opportunity to manage a post-conflict environment properly.”⁵

The U.S. and coalition underestimated the ability of the Taliban insurgency to return – and under-resourced and under-emphasized the need to rebuild Afghanistan’s security forces and government institutions as a result.

Accelerating that return was America’s reliance on warlords that had been pushed out of power during the Taliban years. The U.S. and coalition paid them not only to provide security, but also, in many cases, run provincial and district governments. One senior U.S. official recalled a pragmatic willingness to work with unsavory powerbrokers in order to pursue U.S. counterterrorism objectives, with the assumption that eventually, the United States would hold the powerbrokers to account – only that rarely, if ever, happened. Similarly, a former senior State Department official

told us, “If you want to get bad guys, you work with anyone and everyone to help you do that – even if they fundamentally act against your economic goals.”

The U.S. government did not adequately understand or mitigate the influence of politically connected strongmen who discouraged reforms, suppressed trade, and otherwise quashed competition. Many of the jihad-era commanders and strongmen became politically influential businessmen who were able to use their connections with Afghan government officials and international civilian and military aid officials to obtain contracts, loans, tax exemptions, land rights, and other advantages.

Compounding matters, DOD, State, and USAID implemented programs without sufficient knowledge of local institutions, sociopolitical dynamics, and government structures, which often exacerbated local conflicts, empowered insurgents, and created unnecessary enmity between the population, government, and coalition.

As a former senior U.S. official told SIGAR, “in a conflict environment, oversight is difficult, but our systems of accountability are also poor. So when you push large amounts of money through and there’s no way to pull it back, it creates an incentive for corruption. The environment in which you’re operating shifts and corrupt actors create ways to bleed the system for all it’s worth, because they know the money will keep flowing no matter what they do, and they can make more by being corrupt than non-corrupt.”

And as a member of a local Helmand council described “there [was] lots of extortion and people were killed...people got fed up with the Afghan government and welcomed the Taliban back into their districts.”⁶

American insistence on an early light footprint, its under-resourcing of efforts to reconstitute the Afghan security forces, and over-reliance on predatory Afghan strongmen opened the gate to the Taliban’s return.

Once the brief window of opportunity for the coalition to strengthen the Afghan government and military before the Taliban resurgence closed, all parties found themselves in a hot war against a determined insurgency. The deterioration of security that followed negatively impacted virtually every U.S. initiative in Afghanistan. Our research has found that security is the critical foundation for reconstruction to succeed. The recent Stabilization Assistance Review completed by DOD, State, and USAID, concurred, finding that stabilization programs are likely to fail if implemented in areas

under incessant attack or insurgent control.

As security deteriorated, efforts to sustain and professionalize the Afghan security forces become secondary to immediate combat needs. As Taliban-initiated violence skyrocketed, decisions concerning the size and capabilities of the Afghan security forces were focused, perhaps understandably, on countering violence and insecurity, with limited concern for the Afghan government's ability to sustain the force over time. We built – or tried to build – the Afghan force that the U.S. needed at the time, with little concern for what the Afghans would be left with once we departed. As a result, a decade and a half later, we continue to spend billions to build a self-sustaining Afghan military.

The need to quickly address Taliban violence drove the U.S. military to focus on politically-driven milestones, which reduced the level and quality of the training Afghan forces received. Unfortunately, this situation continues today as senior U.S. officials highlight the significant stress placed on the Afghan security forces due to increased operational tempo, and describe sustainment and operational readiness of Afghan soldiers and police in the field as a significant weakness.

Over time, SIGAR has seen a consistent lowering of the bar by the U.S. train, advise, and assist mission when assessing their Afghan counterparts. Over the course of the Afghan National Army reconstruction effort, the assessment methodology changed at least three times. The most recent assesses the ANA only at the headquarters level and, as noted by the U.S. military, is not intended “to be used as an assessment or evaluation of the entire [Afghan security force].”

Such a methodology and lack of coverage of the Afghan National Army below the corps level suggest that any evaluation is capturing only superficial details of their current battlefield readiness.

Deteriorating security also impacted counternarcotics efforts. Without a stable security environment lasting reductions in opium poppy cultivation and drug production could not be achieved – and until security is established and maintained, high levels of cultivation and production are likely to persist. It is no surprise that as U.S. forces drew down, opium cultivation and narcotics production shot up.

As our counternarcotics report notes, opium poppy has been grown across Iran, Afghanistan, and Pakistan for centuries. Historically, poppy production increases in

times of instability. The ten-year Soviet occupation of Afghanistan crippled the Afghan economy and illicit activity and criminal networks flourished. While millions of Afghans fled as refugees, many of those who remained turned to poppy cultivation, and opium production doubled several times over that period.

Likewise, opium production soared under Taliban rule, nearly doubling between 1996 and 1999, enough to make Afghanistan the world's largest supplier of illicit opium. While the Taliban carried out a ban on poppy cultivation in 2000, it drove Afghan farmers into debt and was short-lived given the impending coalition invasion in 2001.

Increasing insecurity also negatively impacted the Afghan economy by discouraging investment, trade, and other economic activity, and increasing the difficulty of building government institutions needed to support the private sector. The insurgency posed a threat to overland trade, and the U.S. government's announcement of the military drawdown and emphasis on sustainability – given the prediction of dramatic aid reductions – reinforced the existing uncertainty and pessimism about the drawdown that fostered a “last call” mentality that encouraged Afghans to make money while they still could.

Theme #2: The importance of controlling spending, and the impact on corruption if you do not.

While failing to take steps that may have prevented the Afghan insurgency from returning perhaps had the most severe impact on the Afghan reconstruction effort, there were other decisions made by coalition governments that contributed to the current state of affairs in Afghanistan. Many of the origins of the endemic corruption which Afghanistan is criticized for lie in spending decisions made in far-off foreign capitals.

The injection of billions of dollars into the Afghan economy by international donors, particularly the United States, when combined with the limited ability of the Afghan government to expend funds, poor donor oversight and contracting practices, and incentives to spend money quickly increased the risks of corruption. We spent too much, too fast, in too small an economy, with too little oversight.

Transparency International ranks Afghanistan as the fourth most corrupt country in the world – ahead of only Syria, South Sudan, and Somalia. But it had help getting there. The \$126 billion the U.S. has spent on Afghanistan reconstruction – more than we spent on the entire Marshall Plan – flooded the Afghan economy, particularly during

the surge of U.S. military forces and civilian personnel.

The generally accepted amount of foreign aid a country's economy can absorb is 15 to 45 of the country's gross domestic product, or GDP. Anything more than that is beyond the government's capability to absorb and often spills over into the illicit economy. By 2004, aid to Afghanistan consistently exceeded that 45 percent limit, and aid totaled more than 100 percent of Afghanistan's GDP in both 2007 and 2010. This created significant distortions in the Afghan economy, fueled corruption, and filled up bank accounts in Dubai.

As former Secretary of Defense Robert Gates put it, ““For all our handwringing and hectoring on corruption we seemed oblivious to how much we were contributing to it and on a scale that dwarfed the drug trade. Tens of billions of dollars were flooding into Afghanistan from the U.S. and our partners and we turned a blind eye or simply were ignorant of how regularly some portion was going to payoffs, bribes, and bank accounts in Dubai.”⁷

The U.S. government's inclination to think that throwing more money at a problem automatically leads to better results exacerbated the problem. Unrestricted funding can fuel local conflicts and distort local economies, particularly if compressed timelines drive spending. The stabilization effort in Afghanistan was derailed as money spent, rather than the outcomes of those expenditures, became the metric of success. Donor funds drove wedges between communities – and between communities and the government – rather than between insurgents and the population.

The over \$8.6 billion the U.S. has spent to fight narcotics in Afghanistan can be considered a success only if our goal was for Afghanistan to produce more poppy and opium than ever before. Without greater buy-in from Afghan officials, and improved security, no amount of money could have made a dent in the narcotics trade.

By 2013, the U.S. military recognized corruption as a critical threat to U.S. security objectives in Afghanistan – including the effectiveness of the Afghan security forces that we were spending billions to train. It wasn't until 2014 that the military placed any conditions on funding for the Afghan security forces at all. Since that time, there have been improvements and increased conditionality, but as the collapse of the Afghan 215th Corps in Helmand in 2016 demonstrated, the placement of non-existent “ghost soldiers” on the payroll by corrupt commanders led individuals higher up the chain of command to overestimate the corps' effectiveness.

Afghanistan undoubtedly had a corruption problem prior to 2001, but U.S. spending acted as gasoline thrown on an already burning fire. Money cannot solve all the world's problems and where we do choose to spend it, we must be aware of the environment and ensure that the proper controls are in place to protect it.

Theme #3: The need for comprehensive strategies and the negative impact on corruption if you do not.

Questionable decision-making exacerbated Afghanistan's corruption problem, which is perhaps no surprise given that one of the most consistent failures SIGAR has identified in all of our work has been the lack of coherent, whole-of-government strategies to address challenges facing the reconstruction effort. The lack of such strategies has inhibited not only anti-corruption efforts, but also the development of the Afghan security forces, economic development, stabilization operations, and counternarcotics initiatives.

Strategies are critical to ensuring that all parties move in the same direction, and are especially important when missions, like Afghan reconstruction, require multiple government agencies to coordinate.

Unfortunately, as Steve Coll has noted, "Both [the Bush and Obama Administrations] tolerated and even promoted stove-piped, semi-independent campaigns waged simultaneously by different agencies...the easiest way for the National Security Council and the president to resolve policy conflicts among the CIA, the Pentagon policy offices, DEA, CENTCOM, DIA, and the State Department was to tell each agency: Do it your way, but follow our broad guidance."⁸

This may have made things easier for White House officials but the results of not insisting on inter-agency cooperation severely impacted the reconstruction effort. Stabilization efforts were impaired by frequent battles between DOD and USAID. In the absence of an anti-corruption strategy, security and political goals consistently trumped anti-corruption actions.

Counternarcotics efforts suffered from the absence of a narcotics strategy that empowered the State Department's Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs to direct other agencies to provide the resources needed to ensure that U.S. security, development, and governance efforts accounted for how the drug

trade impacted the those efforts and, conversely, how those efforts might impact the drug trade.

Security sector assistance missions require integrated, “whole-of-government” support from civilian and defense agencies with expertise in training and advising foreign countries in security operations and the development of security force governing institutions. The training of the Afghan National Police offers a cautionary tale for what happens when coherent strategies that reflect reality do not exist. While the State Department has statutory authority for training foreign police forces, it does not have the ability to operate in non-permissive environments like Afghanistan’s. Police training was assigned to the military. The military, however, is not trained in civilian policing. As a result, U.S.-led police advisory missions are led by U.S. conventional army units that may or may not have the required training or expertise in police advising or rule of law. Ministerial-level advising teams also remain under the command of U.S. Army units. To augment deficiencies in policing experience, contractor specialists are deployed to augment U.S. military units. While the military is doing its best to carry out its mission, the situation is far from ideal, particularly when it comes to civilian policing.

Our research has also found that the challenges posed by the lack of comprehensive strategies were compounded by timelines for progress that were politically driven rather than conditions-based.

Because U.S. military plans for Afghan security force readiness were created in an environment of politically constrained timelines – and because these plans consistently underestimated the resilience of the Taliban insurgency and overestimated the capabilities of the Afghan security forces – those forces were ill-prepared to deal with deteriorating security after the drawdown of U.S. combat forces. As General Allen, the commanding general at the time, said to us, “we went from an end state to an end date.” The effects of the drawdown before the Afghan security forces were truly prepared can perhaps be seen in the temporary fall of Kunduz City and the failure of the Afghan 215th Corps in Helmand in 2015, after the vast majority of U.S. forces had left the country and had ceased most offensive operations.

Timelines also negatively impacted efforts to develop the Afghan economy. Overly ambitious targets and unrealistically short timeframes compromised program performance. The Defense Department – feeling that USAID’s economic development plan would not provide quick benefits that could weaken support for the insurgency – created its own \$675 million task force to jump start the Afghan economy.

Unfortunately, the Task Force for Business and Stability Operations, or TFBSO, achieved very little for that \$675 million, spending more than half on overhead, making both minimal economic impact and quite a few questionable decisions, to put it charitably. Among some of TFBSO's more novel ideas was a \$2.3 million program to fly in imported Italian goats to mate with native Afghan goats in an effort to improve the quality of their cashmere. Unfortunately, things did not turn out as planned. There was an outbreak of disease that necessitated culling a portion of the herd, and the project manager hired by the implementing partner quit over the poor management and unrealistic timelines of the project. Adding insult to injury, as of April of last year, we could find neither hide nor hair of the remaining goats.

TFBSO also spent millions to construct a compressed natural gas station in Sheberghan. There was apparently little realization that there were no other CNG stations in Afghanistan, so cars really couldn't leave the immediate city environs, and since Afghanistan did not have any cars that could run on CNG – and the conversion cost was steep – the U.S. taxpayer helpfully converted a number of taxis to CNG to produce a market. The fueling station began operations in 2012, but, to the best of our knowledge, remains the sole CNG filling station in all of Afghanistan. Additionally, as I mentioned, over half of TFBSO's expenditures went to overhead, so the costs of both the cashmere and CNG projects were likely considerably higher than the numbers I just provided. An outside consultant hired by DOD estimated that the CNG project alone could have cost up to nearly \$43 million. TFBSO expended funds on a large number of projects and programs, but their penchant for ignoring the need for projects to be sustainable and for not conducting adequate risk and market analysis resulted in a lot of poor decisions.

Stabilization and counternarcotics efforts also suffered from unrealistic timelines. Both endeavors, by their very nature, take long periods of time to be successful – time they were not given.

Theme #4: The challenges posed by constant personnel rotations in general and specifically to contracting

In addition to faulty assumptions, the impact of insecurity, spending decisions that exacerbated corruption, the lack of coordinated strategies, and the impact of politically-driven timelines, we have also found that the most basic of things – human resourcing – has impacted the success of the reconstruction effort.

Put bluntly, short tours of duty and frequent staff turnover limited institutional memory and produced inefficiencies, particularly during the surge when the volume of needed staff made recruitment, especially of civilian staff, an almost insurmountable challenge.

Annual rotations of personnel from non-accompanied posts like Afghanistan for DOD, State, and USAID personnel have long been standard practice – and there are understandable reasons for this. But if what I call the “annual lobotomy” in Kabul is going to continue, ways must be found to avoid the routine loss of institutional memory especially as it impacts good contracting practices.

As one report succinctly affirmed and described, brief rotational deployments and frequent shifts in command contributed to a “lack of proper continuity of effort, a breakdown, or gaps in critical U.S.-host country relationships, and a mutual lack of trust. Another assessment of the situation highlighted the U.S. tendency to rotate “leaders through the country like tourists,” a policy that “explicitly short-changed the [war] effort.”⁹ Concurring, Retired Sergeant Major Robert Rush wrote that “one tenet of COIN..is to know the populace, and one-year tours...did not give organizations or the community they were supporting the time to get know one another. [One unit] leaves and another unit would come in and begin the learning phase all over again.”¹⁰

Eliot Cohen, a senior State Department official noted that “commanders starting a rotation [in Afghanistan] would say, ‘This is going to be difficult.’ Six months later, they’d say, ‘We might be turning a corner.’ At the end of their rotation, they would say, ‘We have achieved irreversible momentum.’ Then the next command group coming in would pronounce, ‘This is going to be difficult...’”¹¹ Reinventing the wheel, through no fault of their own, become the main preoccupation of U.S. commanders.

To journalist Christina Lamb, “it was as if to [officials based in Kabul] history had only started when they had arrived [in Afghanistan] a few months earlier.”¹² Likewise, British journalist and current Member of Parliament, Rory Stewart noted that individual [development] officers are never in any one place and rarely in any one organization long enough to be assessed...in fact, their very uselessness benefits them.”¹³

Annual rotations affect every aspect of the reconstruction effort. Military officials build relationships of trust with their civilian counterparts, which are then lost. Advisors to Afghan security units build bonds and then decamp. The Government of Afghanistan

must deal with a revolving door of American officials, and have learned to wait out officials they dislike, knowing the American will soon be gone. Any solution to this problem will be difficult – I know firsthand from my own staff the toll consecutive tours take, but we must find a better way to maintain continuity of knowledge.

The “annual lobotomy” especially affects contract management. Much of the \$126 billion spent on reconstruction in Afghanistan has been provided in the form of contracts, grants, or cooperative agreements. These range from operational contract support, such as providing sustainment for the Afghan Air Force that they cannot conduct on their own, to building schools, hospitals, and clinics.

Personnel rotations affect contracting since the individuals who approve projects aren't in country long enough to see them completed, and the new contracting officers may not have much knowledge of, or interest in, the project they inherited. There are two primary risks from poor contract management – one is waste and fraud – and the other can threaten the lives of our men and women in the field.

SIGAR has recovered, returned, or otherwise saved more than \$2 billion for the U.S. taxpayer and arrested over 120 American citizens for criminal activity. In the process of looking at hundreds of programs and projects in Afghanistan, we identified best practices and developed a list of seven questions that should be asked when a program or project is being considered.

The seven questions are:

- Does the project or program make a clear and identifiable contribution to our national interests or strategic objectives?
- Does the recipient country want it and need it?
- Has it been coordinated with other U.S. agencies, with the recipient government, and with other international donors?
- Do security conditions permit effective implementation and oversight?
- Does it have adequate safeguards to detect, deter, and mitigate corruption?

- Does the recipient government have the financial resources, technical capacity, and political will to sustain it?
- Have implementing agencies established meaningful, measurable metrics for determining successful project outcomes?

If those seven questions are answered in the affirmative prior to project or program approval, that there is a good chance it will be a smart use of taxpayer dollars.

I know that the primary mission of the military is warfighting – not contract management or reconstruction. But poor contract management can have devastating effects on the warfighter. In 2012, a SIGAR investigation found that at least two Afghan contractors who had been paid \$1 million to install culvert denial systems to prevent insurgents from placing IEDs underneath roadways had either never installed the systems or had improperly installed them. The failure to perform the contract may have been a factor in the death and injury of several U.S. soldiers.

While SIGAR worked with the Afghan Attorney General's Office to arrest and charge the relevant Afghan contractors and sub-contractors, sought the court-martial of the responsible U.S. contracting officer, and debarred responsible parties from future contract work with the U.S. government that is little solace to those who suffered from this gross negligence. In a country where one Afghan Governor reportedly asserted that the reason people liked him was that his motto was “construction with corruption,” – there can be no substitute for eternal vigilance, even on something as seemingly inconsequential as a construction contract.¹⁴

Conclusion

SIGAR's lessons learned program may be our longest lasting legacy after we stand down. I am encouraged that many of the recommendations we have made in the five reports issued to date are under consideration in many quarters – and some have already been implemented. I'm further encouraged that senior U.S. policymakers have asked us to conduct additional reports to aid their work. By their very nature, any lessons learned report is likely to gore somebody's ox, but it is to their credit that many of those individuals are seeing the value of this work and asking for more. We learn more, after all, not from success, but from failure, and in that sense there's a lot still to be learned from Afghanistan.

I will leave you with two interlocking thoughts that sum up what we've found in the process of looking back the all the blood and treasure we've expended in Afghanistan. One comes from a well thought of former South Vietnamese General. Speaking of Vietnam, he said "History is not easy...people are still confused why a huge force like the United States was defeated. But if you don't know your enemy, you will lose every time."¹⁵

To his maxim, I would add an addendum from former cartoonist Walt Kelly – we are often our own worst enemy. My hope is that the contribution from the lessons learned program will be to help us better understand and overcome that enemy which many times is ourselves.

Thank you very much and I look forward to your questions.

¹ Tomsen, Peter, *The Wars of Afghanistan: Messianic Terrorism, Tribal Conflicts, and the Failures of Great Powers*, 1st Edition (New York: Public Affairs, 2011), p. 619, Kindle Edition.

² Atkinson, Rick, *The Guns At Last Light: The War in Western Europe 1944-1945*, 1st Edition (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2013), Prologue, Kindle Edition.

³ Coll, Steve, *Directorate S: The C.I.A. and America's Secret Wars in Afghanistan and Pakistan*, 1st Edition (New York: Penguin Press, 2018), p. 128, Kindle Edition.

⁴ Coll, *Directorate S*, p. 183.

⁵ Coll, *Directorate S*, p. 129.

⁶ Coll, *Directorate S*, p. 224.

⁷ Lamb, Christina, *Farewell Kabul: From Afghanistan to a More Dangerous World*, E-book Edition (London: Williams Collins, 2015), p. 471, Kindle Edition.

⁸ Coll, *Directorate S*, p. 665.

⁹ Dempsey, Jason, "Our Generals Failed in Afghanistan," *Foreign Policy*, October 18, 2016.

¹⁰ Rush, Robert, "What's Better to Use in Combat: Unit Replacement or Individual Troop Rotation?" *Foreign Policy*, January 26, 2016.

¹¹ Coll, *Directorate S*, p. 297.

¹² Lamb, *Farewell Kabul*, p. 375.

¹³ Stewart, Rory, *The Places in Between*, 1st Edition (Orlando: Harcourt, 2006), p. 248.

¹⁴ Lamb, *Farewell Kabul*, p. 137.

¹⁵ Bowden, Mark, *Hue 1968: A Turning Point of the American War in Vietnam*, 1st Edition (New York: Grove Press, 2017), Epilogue, Kindle Edition.