



Prepared Remarks of  
John F. Sopko  
Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction

**“The 15 Year Experiment: An Update on the Afghanistan Reconstruction Effort”**

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Thank you for your kind introduction. I want to thank the University of Ottawa for the invitation to speak today, and in particular, the Centre for International Policy Studies and the Fragile States Network. Professor Banerjee and I have been sharing emails for a number of years encouraging me to speak here and I am delighted to join you here today. Likewise, I want to thank Professor Zuecher from the Fragile States Network who is kindly co-sponsoring today's event. I also want to thank both the Government of Canada and Jennifer LaLonde from Global Affairs Canada for helping to arrange my visit.

I have always enjoyed visiting Canada, first as a federal prosecutor in Cleveland and later when working for Senator Sam Nunn whose close confidant, Gordon Giffin, was our Ambassador here for a number of years. This appreciation for Canada has only grown since my wife and I acquired a little camp in Maine to escape from Washington and where I do some of my best work preparing for speeches such as this. There I have had the good fortune to surreptitiously listen in on your country via the CBC and other Canadian broadcasts.

And, it is where I became a loyal fan of Stuart McLean and his friends, Dave and Morley, and all the other characters of the Vinyl Café. So you can imagine my shock and sadness when in the course of preparing for today's event to learn of Stuart's untimely passing on February 15<sup>th</sup>. As a fan, especially from America, I want to express my condolences to his family and friends as well as pay homage to his wit and humor.

Now, you may think it a bit odd to start a speech on Afghanistan talking about one of Canada's most famous storytellers. Yet, in a way, I don't think it is. As Dave was off' to say, “we may not be big, but we are small’ – something that I sometime think can best describe my little agency.

But to me, admittedly an outsider looking into your country, Stuart highlighted those Canadian values that, in part, explained your country's outpouring of support not only to my country after the cowardly attacks of 9-11 but also your continued support to the people of Afghanistan.

As the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction my focus is, of course, primarily on what the United States is doing in Afghanistan, but my authorizing statute does require me to look at international coordination and best practices. Accordingly, first and foremost, I am here today to learn from you and your government and development community -- learn what you believe worked and didn't in Afghanistan, and perhaps collect lessons you may have learned that we have missed.

I can say from firsthand experience that during the last five years of traveling back and forth to Kabul that you have had two excellent Canadian Ambassadors to Afghanistan. The current Ambassador, Kenneth Neufeld, is very impressive and an excellent partner for the United States and other donor nations in the reconstruction effort. He, along with his predecessor, Ambassador Deborah Lyons, who is now your Ambassador to Israel, have provided me with a wealth of knowledge during my trips to Kabul that I deeply appreciate.

I can also say, without a doubt, that Ambassador Lyons did more than probably any other diplomat to further the goals of fighting corruption and nepotism in the Afghan government. I have learned a lot from Ambassadors Neufeld and Lyons. While the U.S. may be the proverbial 800-pound gorilla in the reconstruction effort, I have found it extremely useful to talk to them and other donor nations and listen to their concerns. On many occasions, they first identified matters that my agency has followed up on and found problematic for the United States as well.

In the United States, even at some levels of our government, I think there has been an unfortunate lack of recognition about how much our NATO allies and other partners have contributed to the Afghanistan reconstruction effort. For example, on the civilian side, Canadian taxpayers have provided over \$2.4 billion U.S. dollars in development assistance to Afghanistan. Canada, of course, continues to provide considerable civilian development assistance to Afghanistan. On the security side, we know that Canadian Special Forces were on the ground in Afghanistan shortly after the attacks of September 11<sup>th</sup>.

In October 2002, Canadian troops deployed to Afghanistan as part of Operation Enduring Freedom and later assumed leadership of the Kandahar Provincial Reconstruction Team, which included the deployment of approximately 350 military, police, foreign affairs, correctional services, and development personnel to one of the

most challenging locations in Afghanistan. Less than a year later, Canadian troops began conducting combat operations in Kandahar, and at the height, nearly 3,000 Canadian Armed Forces members were deployed at one time, and in total over 40,000 served in Afghanistan.

In 2011, Canada ended its combat mission in Kandahar, but continued to assist with the NATO-led train, advise, and assist mission to the Afghan security forces. And to this day, Canada is contributing significant sums to multilateral trust funds which support those security forces, including \$330 million Canadian dollars over the past three years split equally between the Afghan National Army Trust Fund and the UN-administered Law and Order Trust Fund for Afghanistan, which supports the Afghan National Police. And Canada has pledged an additional \$195 million over the next three years to support the Afghan security forces.

But, of course, more important than any of those dollars and cents, are the lives lost, whether Afghan, Canadian, American, or otherwise. Canada lost 159 soldiers in Afghanistan, with nearly 1,900 more wounded. While the terrorist threats emanating out of the region have affected many countries, including this one, the United States is in your debt for responding to the attacks of September 11<sup>th</sup> and supporting the mission in Afghanistan. These numbers are significant and something I never forget as I do my job overseeing the reconstruction mission.

As the mission enters its 16<sup>th</sup> year, there are three critical questions that will be the subject of my talk today -- whether reconstruction is succeeding or failing in Afghanistan; whether we have learned the right lessons over the past 15 years of the reconstruction effort; and as Canadian and American taxpayers continue to fund the civilian reconstruction effort, whether we are using those dollars wisely.

### **Introduction to SIGAR**

And that is where my agency, with that tobacco sounding acronym comes into play. I have the honor of being the head of a little agency called SIGAR – the Office of the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction.

As one of over 70 Inspectors General in the U.S. federal government, it is my mission to identify waste, fraud, and abuse in government projects and programs, while also recommending ways to improve government efficiency.

Unique among other IGs in the U.S., we are not housed within a single agency, and our jurisdiction crosses agency boundaries. Our statutory jurisdiction covers any U.S. government agency supporting the reconstruction effort in Afghanistan. The need for holistic, cross-agency oversight was one of the primary reasons Congress created a

special agency to monitor the reconstruction effort. That is because a multitude of agencies – from the usual suspects like the Department of State, the U.S. Agency for International Development, and the Department of Defense, to agencies such as the Departments of Agriculture and Commerce, have had a hand in the Afghanistan reconstruction effort.

The other reason Congress created SIGAR comes down to dollars and cents – cents with a “c.” To date, over \$117 billion dollars have been appropriated by the U.S. Congress for the Afghanistan reconstruction effort. That amount, adjusted for inflation, is more than the United States spent on the entire Marshall Plan to rebuild Western Europe after World War II, and does not include the costs of war fighting in Afghanistan. Of that \$117 billion, over \$8 billion is in the pipeline ready to be spent, and the U.S. has committed to providing an additional \$5-6 billion a year through 2020. So Congress, in 2008, decided that they needed a truly independent pair of eyes monitoring this massive amount of spending.

Since SIGAR’s establishment and mostly since I was appointed in 2012, we’ve published over 250 audit and inspection products, made nearly 700 recommendations to U.S. government agencies, approximately 85% of which have been addressed, and identified nearly \$1 billion in questioned costs and funds that could be put to better use.

SIGAR also has law enforcement powers, and out of our total staff of just under 200, we have roughly 50 law enforcement officers, with nearly 1,000 years of combined experience between them. They have arrested 105 individuals, charged or indicted 144 individuals, and obtained 109 convictions. We have recovered an additional \$1 billion for the U.S. taxpayer in fines, restitution, and recoveries.

### **High-Risk List**

With that in mind, let us turn to the state of affairs in Afghanistan. Early this year, in recognition that there was a new Congress and a new presidential administration assuming responsibility for the reconstruction effort, I decided to update our 2014 High-Risk Report. The goal of the High-Risk Report is to highlight the most pressing reconstruction challenges in 2017 and beyond.

As much as I wish I could say much has improved in Afghanistan over the past three years since our previous High-Risk Report was released – I cannot. Although there have been some successes which I will mention today, a lot more still needs to be done. The High-Risk Report outlines eight key areas of concern. While all eight high-risk areas represent matters that could fatally undermine the reconstruction mission in Afghanistan, I want to focus today on the critical nexus between Afghanistan’s security

sector, corruption, counter narcotics, on-budget assistance, and sustainability.

The High-Risk Report is directed at an American audience, but given that other governments, including Canada's, continue to provide significant funding to the reconstruction effort, the challenges we have witnessed and documented, are not solely American problems, but ones that face the entire donor community – whether they provide their assistance directly or indirectly, such as through a multilateral trust fund administered by a third-party such as the World Bank or United Nations.

### **Positive News**

Let me first start though, with a bit of positive news. Compared to 2014 when we released our first High-Risk Report we now have an encouraging track record with President Ghani and Chief Executive Abdullah that demonstrates their commitment to do the right thing for their country. Both have been cooperative with the donor community, appreciate of our efforts, and in particular, SIGAR's efforts to prevent waste, fraud, and abuse of U.S. taxpayer money in Afghanistan.

Second, I want to highlight the strong and well informed leadership of the commander of the NATO Resolute Support mission, General John Nicholson who, while ably leading our soldiers and the coalition in Afghanistan, is also insisting on major reforms from the Afghan government. He knows that such reforms are necessary for the Afghan security forces to win and is also aware that the patience of the donor community is growing short for such reforms to be implemented. And in both regards, he is vigorously conveying those messages to the Afghan military and leadership.

### **Security**

But all is not positive. The most basic challenge that bedevils Afghanistan today is continued insecurity. For any country to function, it needs to do at least two things:

- (1) Provide for the security of its people; and
- (2) Pay for that security and the other non-security needs of its people.

Right now, unfortunately, Afghanistan has problems doing both. To combat the Taliban and other threats, the United States alone has provided more than \$70 billion since 2002, including \$3.45 billion in fiscal year 2016 alone, to support the Afghan National Army, the Afghan National Police, and the Afghan Air Force. These funds pay for salaries, equipment, weapons, base infrastructure, fuel, food, clothing and pretty much anything else a military force would need.

President Ghani called 2016 the “year of survival” and although Afghanistan did survive, what did that actually mean? According to the U.S. Defense Department, “the [Afghan

security forces] are generally capable and effective at protecting major population centers, preventing the Taliban from maintaining prolonged control of specific areas, and responding to Taliban attacks.” The Taliban made clear that their goal for 2016 was to take and hold a provincial capital – something they did not achieve despite several major attempts.

But let’s think about that for a second. The Afghan security force is a reportedly 320,000 strong force, and is basically playing a deadly game of ‘whack-a-mole” following the Taliban around Afghanistan and cleaning up the mess afterwards.

The Defense Department reiterates this point by noting that the vast majority of the Afghan National Army has little offensive maneuverability, so the best spin the Afghan security forces can put on their operations is that they are able to re-take strategic areas after they fall. We may be defining success as the absence of failure. At a minimum, they’re playing defense and are not taking the fight to the Taliban.

Unfortunately, this situation could be continuing in 2017 in light of recent press reports of the abandonment of the critical Sangin district center in Helmand province – an area that both Canada and the US expended much blood and treasure to seize from the insurgents during the surge.

This failure is not for lack of brave Afghans. More than 5,000 Afghan security personnel were killed in action in the first eight months of 2016 alone, almost double the number of U.S. personnel killed in action in 15 years.

So what does this mean for the international donor community’s reconstruction efforts?

### **Leadership**

My agency, along with many other observers, believes the insidious combination of poor leadership and corruption is the root cause of the problem. For example, the New York Times recently reported that the Afghan security forces have over 1,000 generals – more than the entire U.S. active-duty military. Oddly, the Afghans don’t have many colonels.

Undoubtedly some of these generals deserve the epaulets on their uniforms – but others bought their positions, and others received them through either ethnic or family patronage networks. Whatever the reason, it does not make for an effective fighting force.

General Nicholson’s predecessor, General John Campbell, testified in 2016 that leadership was the biggest challenge facing the Afghan national security forces. For example, when the Afghan 215<sup>th</sup> Corps, responsible for security in volatile Helmand

province, disintegrated in late 2015, the NATO Resolute Support mission oversaw an effort to overhaul its leadership.

The failure of this Afghan army corps, which seemingly caught everyone by surprise, was in large part due to the number of non-existent, or “ghost” soldiers on its payroll and the resultant overestimation of its capabilities. Resolute Support had to rush military advisors and support personnel to the region to shore up the force in the face of sustained Taliban pressure.

In July of last year, General Nicholson indicated that all senior Afghan military leadership in Helmand had been replaced, and a new commander had been selected to lead the Afghan 215<sup>th</sup> Corps. But just three months later, Resolute Support announced that the 215<sup>th</sup> Corps Commander was again being replaced. And just last week, it was reported that he had been arrested and charged for his corrupt behavior while he was in command.

This is not to blame coalition military forces – they’re working with what they have. But it is troubling to know that the commander hand-picked to clean up the security forces’ act in Helmand had to be replaced just months after his appointment.

The Defense Department also has noted that “poor leadership and leader accountability, lack of casualty and martyr care, lack of timely and accurate pay, and inadequate living and working conditions,” all contribute to [security force] personnel leaving their assignments. When commanders act in this way, how can we be surprised when 75 percent of all personnel losses in the Afghan security forces are due to soldiers simply going AWOL?

### **Corruption**

Corruption and poor leadership go hand in hand in Afghanistan. General John Allen, the former head of the NATO mission in Afghanistan, highlighted this problem when he testified before the U.S. Senate in 2014 that corruption – not the Taliban – was the existential threat to Afghanistan. Reinforcing the point, his successor, General Joseph Dunford, now the highest ranking military official in the United States, commissioned a study that determined that “corruption directly threatens the viability and legitimacy of the Afghan state.”

As SIGAR’s 2016 lessons learned report on U.S. anti-corruption activities in Afghanistan confirmed, the donor community, led by the United States, contributed mightily to the corruption problem by dumping too much money, too fast, into too small an economy, with too little oversight. And we did so with too little understanding of Afghan political and social realities which led us to make false assumptions about what was possible in

the unrealistic timeframes we tended to establish. We and the Afghans are now dealing with the consequences.

One of those consequences is that Afghan commanders often pocket the paychecks of non-existent “ghost soldiers” for whom the U.S. or other donors are paying salaries. I am encouraged to report that, as of this past January, General Nicholson is doing something about this. Afghan security forces are being paid based on a Department of Defense-developed verification system that relies upon ID cards embedded with biometric information to demonstrate that the name on the pay register matches an actual Afghan soldier.

U.S. forces in Afghanistan have struck over 30,000 presumed “ghost soldiers” off the rolls, and given the Afghan security forces a deadline by which to prove that those individuals actually exist. Unfortunately, the system is not as foolproof as one might like; for instance, the biometric cards will not be used to measure daily attendance, but rather used every three years to verify identity. Problems will no doubt still exist.

In addition to the “ghost soldier” challenge, there is also evidence that the Taliban have instructed their field commanders to simply purchase U.S. supplied weapons, fuel, and ammunition from Afghan soldiers because to do so is both easier and less expensive for the insurgents.

Fuel purchases by the Afghan security forces are also another area of significant concern. Poor contract administration by the Afghan government has provided suppliers with opportunities to substitute lower grade fuel for the Afghan security forces and/or to provide less fuel than ordered while selling the amount skimmed off the top on the open market tax free. This, and the widespread use of counterfeit customs exemption forms, deprives the government of significant tax revenue.

Recently while I was in Kabul, U.S. forces informed me that they had to move the purchase of fuel out of the hands of the Afghan government, which was using U.S. funds, and ramp up the U.S. military’s role in contract administration, both actions which could help curb abuses. This will remain an area of particular concern, however, even with these reforms. There are reports that when fuel reaches the front lines, some commanders refuse to go on patrol so that they can reserve that fuel to sell on the open market.

Multiple credible sources have told our staff in Afghanistan that a significant portion – perhaps as much as half – of U.S.-purchased fuel is siphoned off at various stages of this compromised system, wasting taxpayer dollars and handicapping Afghan security forces.



## **Narcotics Production and Trafficking**

Another security challenge that must be addressed is the bleeding ulcer that is the narcotics trade. General Nicholson, NATO's Resolute Support's commander, has warned that as much as 60 percent of the Taliban's funding comes from poppy production and cultivation, which of course is converted into opium.

To date, the United States has spent roughly \$8.5 billion to fight the narcotics trade in Afghanistan. Unfortunately, we have little to show for it. The Coalition is not directly engaged in combating the poppy problem, despite the fact that poppy proceeds and taxes are a major source of Taliban funds.

The most recent report by the United Nations Office of Drugs and Crime stated that in the span of a year, opium production in Afghanistan rose by 43 percent, and the amount of territory producing opium grew by 10 percent. Afghanistan is continuing to grow poppy at near record levels. Compounding this problem, eradication efforts, which the United States has supported financially, dropped by 91 percent from 2015 to 2016. Tragically, like Europe, much of Canada's opium comes from Afghanistan.

Policy-makers should ask themselves, if they are worried about illicit oil sales funding ISIS terrorists in Syria, Iraq, and Libya, why are they not as concerned about this key source of funding for the Taliban – funding which is only serving to prolong NATO's longest war.

## **Sustainability**

While the Taliban are raking in profits from the poppy trade and other illicit sources, including mining, the lack of financial sustainability of the Afghan government is another fundamental threat to the Afghan state that, if not addressed, will undermine efforts to fight corruption and improve the security situation.

As I mentioned earlier, a government must be able to protect its citizens and pay for its security and other basic needs. Afghanistan simply cannot afford to do so and will not be able to do so in the near future. In fact, the World Bank estimates that the Afghan government will rely on donor assistance through at least 2030.

The Afghan government raises roughly two billion dollars a year in revenue; their non-security expenditures are roughly four billion and the cost of the Afghan security forces is an additional four to six billion a year, leaving a six to eight billion dollar gap for the Afghan government to fill if donor support were completely cut off tomorrow.

Given recent depreciation of the Afghan currency, the negative effect on the Afghan economy of the coalition military drawdown, and a demographic youth bulge that, as we

have seen in recent years, drove many Afghans to try to reach Europe as refugees, future prospects look bleak. In the meantime, every taxpayer in every country that is propping up the Afghan government financially, including the United States and Canada, is helping to make up the difference – to the tune of up to \$5-6 billion a year.

### **On-Budget Assistance**

Another area of the High-Risk Report highlights the challenge of protecting “on-budget” assistance to the Afghan government. On-budget assistance, which includes direct assistance and budget support, are funds provided directly to and managed by the recipient government in an effort to improve its capacity to manage and oversee funds.

The Obama Administration and many other donor countries pledged that eventually 50 percent of assistance to Afghanistan would be provided through on-budget assistance. While it remains to be seen whether the Trump Administration will adhere to that commitment, it is an unfortunate fact that the ability of the Afghan ministries to manage such funds is a long way from being adequate.

This is compounded by the endemic corruption problems that Afghanistan faces. Afghanistan ranks eighth from the bottom in Transparency International’s Corruption Perceptions Index, at 169<sup>th</sup> place. Given the corruption problems in Afghanistan, should it be any surprise that we continually hear about the palatial mansions of Afghan ministers and civil servants as well as ghost teachers, doctors, soldiers and police?

And with every report, Afghan citizens lose more patience with their own government, tempting some to join or support the insurgency, which in some cases, may prove more adept at providing community services.

The primary challenge with on-budget assistance is that once it is provided to the Afghan Ministry of Finance to be distributed under pre-negotiated agreements to target ministries, the money becomes incredibly hard to follow, let alone audit to determine whether the monies are being spent as intended.

In 2014, SIGAR raised concerns about the ability of USAID to do just that. Subsequently, USAID started shifting more of its direct assistance funds to multilateral trust funds, like the Afghanistan Reconstruction Trust Fund, or ARTF, which is administered by the World Bank. Unfortunately, this arrangement presents its own challenges. Once USAID turns over the funds to the World Bank, USAID has told SIGAR the programs and projects are no longer its responsibility – which means SIGAR has extreme difficulty tracking the funds and assessing program effectiveness.

While the World Bank states it has a program evaluation mechanism – something it put into place after SIGAR called for it in a 2011 audit – it is extremely difficult to gain

access to evaluation documentation, even for those of us within governments of donor countries. This makes it even more difficult to judge the independence and accuracy of the evaluations. This isn't only a U.S. problem. Many international donors, including Canada, contribute funds to ARTF.

According to Global Affairs Canada, "Canada's development assistance in support of the Afghan Government's core budget is provided through the World Bank's Afghanistan Reconstruction Trust Fund. Its steering committee, co-chaired by the World Bank and the Afghanistan Ministry of Finance, includes Canada and other donor nations. Together, collective decisions are made on the trust fund's overall strategic direction. This allows Canada to influence and press for key reforms in areas such as anti-corruption, gender equality, and financial governance."

ARTF has undoubtedly supported projects beneficial to the Afghan people. However, all donors must continue to be vigilant and insist on transparency and accountability once donor dollars are handed over to the World Bank. And the World Bank and other international organizations must be responsive to donor country oversight.

In that regard, in January, the *Ottawa Citizen* reported that the Canadian government was investigating alleged corruption in connection with an aid project to help Afghan children return to school. The *Citizen* reported that, over the past decade, Canada had provided \$117.2 million Canadian dollars to increase equal access to quality education for Afghan students through the World Bank's Afghanistan Reconstruction Trust Fund. A follow-on article indicated that the World Bank was investigating the matter.

However, given that the Afghan Education Minister himself admitted in the press that a review showed that there were six million Afghan children in school – and not the eleven million claimed by the previous government – there should be ample cause for concern. This concern was just reinforced by a recent inspection report we released last Friday that highlighted significant discrepancies between reported and observed numbers of students and teachers at schools we inspected in Balkh province.

The effectiveness of ARTF's monitoring and evaluation programs will be the subject of another SIGAR audit that we plan to release this summer which I hope will help all donor countries understand the need to better oversee and control these funds.

### **Justice and Law Enforcement Efforts**

As I said before, the United States and other donor nations contributed mightily to the explosion of corruption in Afghanistan, and as such, we have a responsibility to try and help the Afghan government address it.

One recent positive step has been the establishment of the Anti-Corruption Justice

Center. The Justice Center was launched with the full support of both President Ghani and Chief Executive Abdullah, and with financial and technical backing from the US and other donors, spearheaded by the UK. The Justice Center is designed to handle high-profile corruption cases, and is supported by a group of vetted and mentored police, prosecutors and judges who, along with their families, are protected against the political and physical dangers inherent to their work.

To date, a few prosecutions have taken place – including the conviction of a senior Interior Ministry general for accepting \$150,000 in bribes related to a fuel contract. We at SIGAR are encouraged by these first steps. However, other government bodies, including the Afghan parliament, as well as Afghan civil society organizations, want the Justice Center to go after more politically powerful and corrupt officials – something that SIGAR also supports.

Time will tell whether the Justice Center is a successful and sustainable effort to root out corruption or simply another Potemkin village designed to placate the increasingly impatient donor community. SIGAR seriously hopes it is a successful effort, but we will continue to monitor its activities and assist it where we can.

SIGAR, for its part, is encouraged by our successful cooperation with President Ghani, Chief Executive Abdullah, their new Attorney General, and others to leverage our unique law enforcement presence in Afghanistan to help the Afghan government. For example, SIGAR uncovered a major fuel contract fraud case that led President Ghani to cancel the contract, which saved roughly \$200 million in U.S. taxpayer funds.

SIGAR also undertook a criminal investigation last year that uncovered bid-rigging on a \$99 million road construction contract being issued by the Afghan government and funded by the U.S., which was canceled after SIGAR presented its findings to President Ghani. We have also provided information that has assisted the Afghan Major Crimes Task Force and other Afghan agencies to make a number of successful arrests of corrupt Afghan officials.

We are also the only U.S. oversight agency invited to observe the weekly meetings of the National Procurement Council where senior Afghan officials, headed by President Ghani and Chief Executive Abdullah, personally review each major government contract. And SIGAR is the only non-Afghan entity that has officially been granted a presidential decree allowing access to Afghan records related to the Kabul bank fiasco that may allow for future prosecutions.

SIGAR is encouraged by NATO's and General Nicholson's efforts to try and combat corruption, whether by holding the Afghans more accountable, supporting more robust

anti-corruption efforts, or working with us and the international donor community, many of whom have expressed even more frustration at the corruption problem than I've heard in the United States.

Unfortunately, in the nearly five years I've been traveling to Afghanistan, I first witnessed the donor community, led by the United States, put in way too much money, way too fast. Likewise, more recently I've witnessed the donor community, and the U.S. in particular; withdraw way too many capabilities, way too fast.

We hope the new Congress and Administration in the United States will do a thorough review of plans and programs in Afghanistan and address any outstanding capability gaps.

### **Conclusion**

So where does this leave us? Unfortunately, there is no magic bullet.

As an Inspector General, my mission is to look at processes, and not policy. Accordingly, it's not my job to opine about whether the U.S. should stay in Afghanistan, or how many troops or how much money should be provided. My job is, rather, to point out better processes and procedures as well as highlight problems that need to be addressed in order to successfully meet those outcomes and objectives that policy makers ultimately decide upon.

With a new President and Cabinet just having assumed office in the United States, incoming officials no doubt realize that the choices ahead are not easy ones and outcomes are not guaranteed. Success may well require some boots on the ground, at a minimum, to conduct the train, advise, and assist mission to help improve the capabilities of the Afghan security forces. In addition significant financial resources will probably be needed for some time to come from donors like Canada and the United States.

However, with a new administration and a new Congress, I also think it is an opportune time for the United States, in conjunction with other international donors, to re-evaluate our efforts in Afghanistan and conduct an honest assessment of what's working – and what's not.

One smart first step would be for the United States government to do what SIGAR recommended in 2013, which is for each of the major agencies involved in the reconstruction effort – State, USAID, and the Defense Department – to “rack and stack” their top and worst performing projects so they know where to invest further and where to cut their losses.

Arguing, as one former USAID official did in a congressional hearing, that requiring him to rate his projects was unfair and would be like requiring him to pick which of his children was his favorite, not only belies common sense, but does a disservice to both the taxpayer and the reconstruction effort.

As I am reminded, this is not some episode out of a TV Sitcom like “Leave it to Beaver” or “Father Knows Best”— but rather a simple but critical exercise in good management – something that anyone who ran a small company or attended business school would understand.

Such an exercise would also force these agencies to focus on “outcomes” and not simply on “outputs.” It’s easy to count how many schools or clinics we built or how much money we put on contract – but what were the demonstrable outcomes of those schools or clinics or that funding?

At times over the last five years that seems to have been an unanswerable question, at least in Washington. In doing so, we think our country can learn from our allies. We have no monopoly on success or, as a matter of some comfort, on failure, either. Other international donor agencies may well be better able to answer these questions – after all, when your budget is smaller, you often have to make more difficult decisions and see successes or failures more easily.

Some or all of this may seem like common sense, but it’s been amazing to me how little common sense has been used when developing some of our reconstruction projects in Afghanistan. Voltaire noted 300 years ago, “common sense is not so common,” much in the same way one U.S. newspaper graphically depicted in a front page headline about one of our audits -- “What The Heck Were They Thinking?”

Such common sense would also require our new Congress and Administration to demand rigorous oversight and project monitoring as we continue our efforts in Afghanistan.

This isn’t just important because I’m an Inspector General and say it is, or because of the amount of money we’ve spent, but if you can’t oversee, monitor, and coordinate your projects, how do you know that they’re contributing to the reconstruction effort and not inadvertently having the opposite effect?

This is especially relevant now as more and more of Afghanistan falls under insurgent control and we have no assurance our assistance is not going to the insurgency or otherwise helping them demonstrate their ability to provide services to Afghan citizens.

In conclusion, you may ask, will any of what I have proposed, on its own, ensure that the insurgency is defeated by the Afghan security forces, even with potentially

enhanced support from the U.S. military?

To be honest - No. There are no guarantees – especially in Afghanistan. It may take years, or more likely, decades, for the Government of Afghanistan to succeed and achieve military and financial sustainability.

Nevertheless, I can guarantee you one thing. Based upon my nearly 40 years watching how the U.S. government works, if we don't change how we do things in Afghanistan, start to ask those tough questions, hold our agencies accountable, and hold the Afghans accountable, we will almost certainly not succeed.

Our need to change how we operate in Afghanistan reminds me of what one of America's great storytellers, Will Rogers, once noted, "even if you're on the right track, you'll get run over if you just sit there."

With that, let me end as Stuart used to do, with a "so long for now," and a heartfelt thanks for your attention and an equally hearty welcome for your questions or comments.