SIGAR | SPECIAL INSPECTOR GENERAL FOR AFGHANISTAN RECONSTRUCTION

SIGAR Oral History Project (OHP)

Interview 01: Edited Transcript

Interview Date: 10/27/22

NAME/TITLE

INTERVIEWEE 01:
My name is [NAME]. // I am the [SIGAR] Deputy Assistant Inspector General for Investigations.

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JOB DESCRIPTION

INTERVIEWER:
What does that job entail? What are your job responsibilities?

INTERVIEWEE 01:
My job responsibility is that I oversee the investigative unit. I have a boss above me, that is the assistant IG for investigations. And, basically, we're the ones that supervise the agents that work in the United States as well as, when we were in Afghanistan, the agents that were assigned to the various locations in Afghanistan.

INTERVIEWER:
So nitty-gritty, day in/day out, what is the task in terms of managing all those people?

INTERVIEWEE 01:
Let me just say the agents are the ones that are going out there conducting the investigation. They're looking for fraud, waste, abuse, criminal investigations. And my job is to make sure those investigations are proceeding along the correct path, that we are looking at the right things and making sure the agents have whatever they need to accomplish their mission.

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CAREER HISTORY

INTERVIEWER:
When did you first start at this agency? And how long have you been in this type of work?
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INTERVIEWEE 01:
I started at this agency in March of 2012. So I have been with this agency for 10 years, a little over 10 years. Prior to that, I had 28 years in federal law enforcement.

INTERVIEWER:
You've seen a lot.

INTERVIEWEE 01:
Yes. Yes, I have.
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INTERVIEWER:
Do you have special training that equips and qualifies you to do the work that you do at this agency? And if you do, can you tell us a little bit about that?

INTERVIEWEE 01:
Yes. Initially, I started my career at Naval Criminal Investigative Service [NCIS], which I did basically general crimes, you know, the base-level crimes. Did drug investigations. Then I switched to another agency, the Defense Criminal Investigative Service [DCIS]. That's part of the DoDIG [Department of Defense Inspector General].

And there I got a lot of experience working contract fraud, working technology transfer, a wide range of investigations. Became a supervisor. We had agents assigned to Iraq, Afghanistan, and Kuwait. So, when I came to this agency, I'd had probably a good 10 years of supervising agents that were working in war zones.
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When I first started, I was 25 years old – 24, actually, turned 25 during my basic training. I was at an office in San Diego, California. And there were about 15 men. I was the only female, other than-- female agent, other than the administrative ladies.

So it was really hard. It was really difficult. I had not planned for a career in law enforcement. It was kind of—[I] kind of fell into it, so I really wasn't sure what I was getting into.

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It was difficult when I first started out because the other male agents had no desire to have me there. They wanted another male agent.

So I got a lot of pushback. But I had to make a decision: either I'm going to go home every night, and cry, or I'm going to show these men that I can do the job. And so eventually, I did. Had some really funny times and stories, and I kind of won them over and continued from there.

When I switched to the Defense Criminal Investigative Service, once again, for 10 years, I was the only female agent – so it was unusual. And when I would go to other agency meetings, there might be only one or two women in the room. So-- [female] agents in the room.

So it was very difficult. I actually had some good offices, so I didn't endure a lot of harassment like some of my other friends, but it was difficult. And it was hard to kind of get these guys to understand that we can do the job. And that we can help – and we're an asset and a bonus.

INTERVIEWER:
So you said there were some funny stories. Without going into what those were, what did you have to do to prove yourself in a general way? What did you have to convey about you, and your ability to do this work with those guys?

INTERVIEWEE 01:
Well, part of a funny story-- like I said, I joined Naval Criminal Investigative Service. I was 25 years old. I had just gotten married, or I got married while I was in Basic school [Federal Law Enforcement Training Centers (FLETC)]. And, the men said to me, "We really don't want you around, because you're young.

"You're going to – you just got married. You're going to start having babies." And one guy even said, "You're going to kind of push them out like little puppies. And we should give this job to a man who really needs it, so why don't you become a kindergarten teacher or a nurse?"

And, you know, that's where-- I was just appalled that he said that. So I had to make a decision that, from that point on, I had to show them that I would be there. So I volunteered for everything that I could – every operation that they were working on.

"You want me to get into that dumpster and root around in the trash? I'll do that." "If you want me to come out middle of the night, I'll do that." "If you want me to get on top of that roof and sit there and surveil somebody, I'll do it." And over time, the guys understood – and I proved to them – that I could do basically what they were doing.

So it took me a while, but I got there. And then once that happened, you know, I had really good working relationships. And these guys showed me what they were doing, or explained, and I think helped me become a good agent.

INTERVIEWER:
So sort of about earning trust and—

INTERVIEWEE 01:
Yes.

INTERVIEWER:
--establishing your own reputation.

INTERVIEWEE 01:
Yes.

INTERVIEWER:
You had earned a place to be right there with everybody else doing that kind of work.

INTERVIEWEE 01:
Yeah. Yes.

INTERVIEWER:
So that was in the United States. Now, my understanding is you've been to Afghanistan.

INTERVIEWEE 01:
Yes.

INTERVIEWER:
What was it like to then carry this kind of work into a culture where it's not the United States, and the way in which women fit into the work culture is different than it is here?

INTERVIEWEE 01:
Well, I'd like to explain. When I was with Defense Criminal Investigative Service, that's where I first started going to Afghanistan, went to Iraq and Kuwait. I was a supervisor. I was the deputy, and then I became the director. And it was difficult when I would go over there because I would travel with the male agents that were assigned over there.

And I'd go to these meetings with these high-level Afghans, or high-level Iraqis, or Kuwaitis, and a lot of them did not want to talk to me. They did not-- I'd walk into a room, and they couldn't believe that I was the boss, that I was telling people what to do.

And a couple-a times when I would go over and do office visits, I would sit in on interviews. And the other Kuwaitis or the Iraqis or the Afghans would not want me to sit in there. And when I came to work for this agency, I went over to Afghanistan a couple of times and I would meet with our agents.

And while they were doing interviews, I would do the same thing. And sometimes they would-- the Afghans would just flat-out say, "We don't want her in the room. We don't want her. We don't understand why she's here. We cannot believe that she's the boss."

And so it was-- you know, it was a culture shock in a sense that, in the United States, I could do interviews – interviews with men – and it didn't seem to be a problem. So that was a bigger eye-opener when I would go over there.

And, this agency, we did send one or two female agents over there. So it was interesting to listen to their experiences, that they had to kind of power through it to make them understand, "I'm here. And you have to talk to me. I'm the-- I'm the case agent."
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Several times, when I was traveling around Afghanistan – like we'd travel up to Mazār-e-Sharīf or other locations – we would have to go and meet with, like, the-- in Mazār-e-Sharīf, we met with the attorney general for that location.

And I'm traveling around with five or six male agents. But when I go into the meeting, I have to put a headscarf on, you know? That happened quite frequently. That I'm the boss, but-- you know. I've been working with these guys. I have 30 years' experience. But because I'm a woman, they want me to wear a headscarf.
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INTERVIEWER:
So you're the boss, but not in their country can they perceive you that way?

INTERVIEWEE 01:
Correct.

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CONDUCTING OVERSIGHT INVESTIGATIONS IN A WAR ZONE: AFGHANISTAN

INTERVIEWER:
Is it correct that you only were deployed to Afghanistan pre-SIGAR? When you were here, you were just in an oversight role of other agents who went from here? Or did you also go to Afghanistan for SIGAR?

INTERVIEWEE 01:
No, I went in an oversight capacity—

INTERVIEWER:
You did.

INTERVIEWEE 01:
--because when I went to SIGAR, I was a supervisor. So I'd always been a supervisor at this agency. By the time my other agency-- we were going to Afghanistan, Iraq, or Kuwait, I was also a supervisor. So I never actually deployed as a working agent in those locations.
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I went to Afghanistan several times with this agency. I went, initially, because I was in investigations. And so we have agents that were assigned over in Afghanistan. So it was my job, as one of-- as the deputy – to go over and to meet with them, to supervise what they were doing over there, to check on them, to check on their investigations. And then to attend to meetings.
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INTERVIEWER:
When you went over there for this agency, what was it like? What would you do?

INTERVIEWEE 01:

When I had to go over to Afghanistan for this agency, I would fly in, to Kabul. I'd meet with-- usually go immediately to the [U.S.] Embassy, and I would meet with the agents that were assigned to the Embassy. Sit down with them. Go over their cases. Talk to them. Meet with various people at the Embassy, our counterparts. But then I would also go to the locations.

We had people in Mazār-e-Sharīf, we had people at Kandahar. We had a couple [of] outlying offices in Kabul, so I would travel there to meet with them. I'd meet with our investigative counterparts.

And then I would meet with a great many Afghans, that worked with our agents over in Afghanistan. So early on, when I came to this agency, and I'd go to Afghanistan, I would travel to-- on a trip, I'd usually travel [to] two or three locations during the 10-to-14-day period of travel.

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It's very difficult doing investigations in a war zone. There's a lot that goes into it, the unique things. But then just the day-to-day-- getting through the day.

And I'm not even talking about being away from your family, but just having to deal with Afghanistan.
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Can you handle it? Some people can. Some people it's, like, not a problem. // You're just covered with dirt half the time, and you just kind of accept, "O.K. This is what life is going to be like for a while." So-- and you move on. And you figure out how to do the job.
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INTERVIEWER:
Anyone who does investigative work, audit work – deep-dive law enforcement work, deep-dive oversight work – knows that that work can be very, very laborious, time-consuming, exhausting. But you're describing something that puts another layer on top of that, and that's when living conditions are also challenging. How does that--

INTERVIEWEE 01:
Yes.

INTERVIEWER:
--affect the being able to do the work, having the right sort of mindset to do the work? What did you see and what did you feel about that when you went over there to oversee your teams?

INTERVIEWEE 01:
It is very difficult for some people. Some people get over there and they can thrive in that environment. There are some people that, they think they're going to go over to this foreign country, they're going to stay in a Marriott, they're going to have their beds made every day. It's going to be, you know, just like going to Atlanta or some other location.
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It's different than conducting an investigation in the United States. // It can be very difficult. And it can take longer than normal.

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It's very difficult to do investigations in a war zone. And the reason why it's very difficult is, in the United States, if you're going to try to interview individuals, you're pretty confident that you can figure out where those people are, where they live, where they work,
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how to find them so that you can interview them, that you can find the documents, that you can talk to the people that are going to help build the case.
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In the United States, we can find out people's Social Security number, so we know what their dates of births are. Over in Afghanistan, they don't really have a system like that. Sometimes they go by family names that aren't really their name.

So trying to figure out, "Is this the correct person?" Got to get over the language barrier. But then, part of the problem is, with Afghanistan, we don't have a mutual legal assistance treaty. So other countries, if we wanted to bring somebody back to testify, we could be able to do that. Here-- or, in Afghanistan, we don't have that.

So if you're going to be talking to somebody, or going to try to get evidence, the agent is always thinking, "How can I get them back? Can they come back to testify?" Most of the time, they can't. And the biggest thing is trying to get people into a U.S. court. Is there a U.S. nexus?

Over in Afghanistan, it was very difficult to do that. If they were a dual citizen, a U.S. citizen, or a dual Canadian or another country, that helped, because we can work with those other countries. But if they were just not a dual citizen in any way whatsoever, it becomes very, very difficult.

Trying to get documents-- in a normal course, if you were to go to a bank, or if you were going to go someplace to get documents, you want to be able to have somebody testify in a court that says, "These are official documents. These are the verified bank statements, and this is how the bank system work[s]."

In Afghanistan, you can't do that, because you don't have anybody that can come to the United States, or can testify and say, "I worked at this bank. I can verify this is a bank statement for this individual," or, "This is a contract." So, it's difficult.

Agents, when they go over to countries in the war zone, they think that they're going to be doing an investigation along the lines that they do in the United States. But then, once they get over there and they start realizing these roadblocks-- there are some roadblocks, but they're things that you can get over. You can get around. You have to really think these things through.

Over in Afghanistan, you have to think a little bit more. You have to strategize a little bit more.
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INTERVIEWER:

Given everything that you just told me, it sounds like doing an investigation, auditing, whatever kind of oversight work you're doing in a war zone, is exponentially more difficult. Would you agree with that?

INTERVIEWEE 01:
Yes, I would. // It's very difficult doing investigations in a war zone. It's not impossible, it's just difficult. It takes time. It takes the understanding of the simple things that you can do in the United States are going to take more time. You're going to have to think about it.

You're going to have to work very closely with the U.S. attorneys that you're working with. And you're just going to have to plan for that. You're going to have to understand. And you have to have agents that understand that. That, you know, they're not going to get in there, or go to that location and have a very quick case. They're going to have to plan, and think, and understand that – and understand the environment and understand how you work in a war zone.
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INTERVIEWER:
As a supervisor, what do you have to do to prep your teams for that?

INTERVIEWEE 01:
I think it starts with when you try to hire people, I think it starts then. You need to talk to the people and look at their skill set. You need somebody that can understand contracting. That's very important. You need to understand-- or they need to understand that it's not going to be a very quick, "I'm just going to go in there, round up a whole bunch of people. I'm going to get a stat."

It's going to be, "This could take some time." What I was going to say is, Afghanistan was a little harder, because, when we worked investigations in Iraq, a lot of the companies that were building or providing services were U.S. companies. And so you always have that hook that, if they're doing something, they have a U.S. presence back in the United States.

Afghanistan, if you're giving it to an Afghan company, there is no presence back in the United States. So when you're looking for these agents, you're looking for people that can deal with the difficulties of living in another country where the living conditions might not be that great.

But you also have to get the people with the skill set that they understand contracting, they understand, I think – what, I think, is very important, is – the military. Some people just have never worked with the military. And understanding how they work, understanding their mindset is very important.

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Iraq, most of the contracts were either U.S. contracts or they were with a Canadian or European contracts companies.

In Afghanistan, they did not do that so much. They decided to go—[with] something called "Afghan First." They wanted to build up the Afghan economy. And that, I think, has caused problems for investigators in the sense, in Iraq, it was very easy.

If somebody did not build the building, or they did not build the bridge, we had that hook. In Afghanistan, if it was an Afghan company, we couldn't really do anything. We could try to get the money back, we could try to prosecute them, but sometimes it just didn't work.

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PROTECTING U.S. MILITARY THROUGH OVERSIGHT INVESTIGATIONS

INTERVIEWER:
Have you ever had a specific experience working at this agency that drove home for you the actual highest risks that could exist in conducting oversight in a war zone like Afghanistan?

INTERVIEWEE 01:
[PAUSE] I'd like to go back and answer that question by-- my father was in the Army. My brother was in the Army. Had two grandparents that were in the Army. Uncles and aunts that were in the military. So I've always been very, very aware of the military.

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My father spent 40 years in the Army. He did two tours in Vietnam. My mother's father was actually a surgeon, in the Army. He fought in World War I, II, and the Korean War. And he actually parachuted--
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—he jumped into France and – D-Day plus two or something like that. // That's why it's very important to me, you know, my military background. I grew up spending most of my life on military posts. I thought I was going to marry a West Point guy and be an Army wife.
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My younger brother, one of my brothers, was in the Army.
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So, I'm always keenly aware of what they go through when they're over in these war zones. But when I was going to Afghanistan a lot--
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And I would see the military – these young, you know, these young lieutenants or these young, you know, E-3s, E-4s, E-5s – and they're going out. And it was keenly aware to me I want to make sure that, if we're asking the Afghans, or we're asking a company to build a tank for them, that that tank is built correctly, appropriately.

Or if they're asking for or they need ammunition, we've got to supply them with things, that it's done correctly. I had a lot of experience – both at SIGAR, [and] my other agency – dealing with investigations where people are not providing the correct items.

And I've seen where people have been killed – soldiers, sailors, airmen, Marines – and so I'm keenly aware of that. So-- I didn't come to this agency not knowing that. When I came to this agency, it was really in my mind and it has stayed in my mind that way – that, you know, I have a responsibility as an investigator.

The agents that I supervise, they have a responsibility to get these investigations right, to make these things right, because we have a responsibility to the military, and to the civilians. That we're asking them to go over to these locations, to these war zones.

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SIGAR OVERSIGHT WORK: INVESTIGATIONS: ROAD CULVERT DENIAL SYSTEM CASE

There are several investigations that I could bring up that, every day, that was forefront. You know, we're trying to provide these soldiers, these airmen, these Marines, sailors, with what they need. And there were numerous examples.

I think the most important example that I can think of – the investigation over in Afghanistan was-- we call it the "culvert denial system" [investigation]. It's an investigation that's closed. But it was-- we paid a contractor to put a framing around these culverts, these metal rebars around these culvert openings, so people couldn't go into the culverts and put IEDs in there.

And what we found out in the investigation is that the contractor would just take the same picture of the same location, the same culvert, and he would send it in to the contracting officer. The contracting officers never checked or verified or did anything.

And one or two of the culverts exploded, and there were some people that were killed, some soldiers that were killed, maimed.
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I remember when there was that-- when one of the culverts blew up. But, at the time, we did not know the reason why. It was just another example of a horrific action that killed our troops. And it wasn't until maybe a few months later that our agency, our agents received information that explained, "This is probably how it happened."

And when you-- when you hear that, you get a hollow pit in your stomach. It's just like, "How could this happen? How could-- how could people be so cavalier?" And some of the comments were, "We just-- we were busy." "We didn't know what we were doing." "We didn't have the experience." "We couldn't get out there, so we just took the contractors' word for it."

And I think that goes to why it's important to have oversight in a war zone. Because if you just simply say, "Well, we took the contractors' word for it," or, "We took the agency's word for it," this is what can happen. You need those checks and balances, in a sense. You need an agency that can do this oversight, that says, "This is not-- this is not right. And this is why we're here. And this is why it's important that we continue this mission."

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It shows what this agency, the investigators are there for.

That they do this to make sure that nobody else has this horrific outcome. // We're asking these contractors to do something for us, to protect the military, to feed the military, to move the military. And if you don't do it right, people can die. And that's horrific. And that frustrates and angers me, and others.

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BEST QUALITIES FOR OVERSIGHT-IN-A-WAR-ZONE INVESTIGATIVE AGENTS

INTERVIEWER:
Is this kind of knowledge about what our fighting men and women go through in a war zone, about what war zones are, about the realities of war zones, is that a prerequisite for doing this kind of work?

INTERVIEWEE 01:
No, I do not think having a military background and trying to understand-- what the war zone is like, I don't think that's a prerequisite. But I think it's important that the agents understand that, come to understand that. They come to understand the military, that the military is there for a specific purpose.

And that they do have things that seem-- rules and regulations that might not seem normal to people that have not been exposed to them. But I think they-- the agents, if they don't have that background of the working for DoD*, or having the military background, that they need to understand that.
[* U.S. Department of Defense]

They need to come to accept that. And some agents we've seen, they just – I hate to say it: some of them just don't appreciate the military. They don't think they're smart. They don't think they do-- they don't think they bring value. They don't understand that. Some of them, there are-- we've had agents that have no military background, have never dealt with DoD.

They go over there and they become-- they get educated, and then they become-- they understand that what we're doing is very important. Just as important as being in the United States and making sure that somebody's not engaging in bank fraud that-- you know, over there.

So it helps, but it's not a prerequisite, because once you open-- if you're open, if you're accepting, and can come in and say, "I'd like to understand your point of view," I think it helps. I think it works well. And agents walk away with a better understanding.

And I think it also is a conversation dealing with the military. Most military have never dealt with law enforcement so they-- or if they have dealt with law enforcement, it's very basic-- // somebody has broken into the hooch, or somebody has stolen something from them, or something like that. So they

haven't had this exposure. And I think it works well because the agents can explain, "This is what I'm doing for you, for your comrades, for your-- the people that you work with."

INTERVIEWER:
So it sounds like those make the best agents?

INTERVIEWEE 01:
Yes, very much. They do.
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I think what makes the best agent is someone who is interested in what they need to do to protect the United States. And I mean protect in a very broad-- what are they doing to ensure that the United States is getting their value for the money, or their value for the contract they have?
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I think the good agents are the ones that can go in, can talk to somebody, can understand where they come from. They understand why they're doing something. They ask questions. I think a good agent, instead of looking at a situation that could have some difficulties and just kind of throwing up their hands, I think a good agent is, "O.K., there's a couple little bumps here, but I can figure out-- let me figure this out. Let me-- let me get to my goal." And I think that's the best agent is, "I have a goal, here's what I want to do. Here's who can help me. Here's how I can help you."

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If I were to give another agency guidance, or suggestions on how to conduct investigations or oversight in a war zone, it goes back to picking the right people that can potentially work in a difficult, hazardous environment. You pick the individuals, the agents that have that experience, that have a broad experience that they can deal with – not only the military – but other government agencies, the Embassy.

And that they can deal-- understand what the rules and laws and regulations are, of conducting an investigation in a foreign country. Because every foreign country is different, you have to understand that. And then, getting to know what the mission is, what exactly are we trying to do over there, is very important.

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DEPLOYING CIVILIAN OVERSIGHT PERSONNEL TO A WAR ZONE

INTERVIEWER:
What risks have you come to believe exist of bringing civilian noncombatant investigators and auditors into Afghanistan to conduct oversight work?

INTERVIEWEE 01:
I see a very minimal risk of having civilians work in a war zone –
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– on oversight. I think it goes back to, the military has their responsibility. They're going to go out, they're going to fight that fight. To conduct oversight, I believe that civilians can do a very good job, because you're not going to put them in the middle of a firefight.

Could happen. Sometimes it has happened. But the civilians – I see the risk as minimal because they know that they're there to do something. They're not there to be the soldier. They're not there to carry on the fight. They're there to gather information, to get those documents.

And for the most part, it's not-- they're not right in the middle of a firefight. So I think it's-- the risk is minimal. // The military, if they've been deployed, they've been deployed to harsh environments. They understand, "O.K., I'm going to live in a plywood hut."

I think civilians, if you get the right person, that doesn't bother them. They understand, "It's a temporary situation. I've got a job to do and I'm going to be able to do it." So I do not think there's an issue with having civilians work in a war zone on oversight.

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There were a lot of things that kept me up at night. The number one thing that I always worried about is the safety of the agents and auditors and other SIGAR employees over in Afghanistan. When I was at my old agency, there were two Office of Special Investigations agents that were killed in Afghanistan.

I had the very sad job of representing my agency at their funeral. And that really kept me up a lot – is to make sure that my agents were safe, that the people that they were dealing with were safe. You-- you don't ever want to lose an agent. // I did not worry about them conducting investigations; it was losing one of them.
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We did have some close calls with some of our agents, and that was one of two of them, and that was heartbreaking. Because your mind immediately-- you want to get on a plane, and you want to go get them. You want to take care of them. So you have to balance making sure they're safe with them also being able to conduct an investigation. And you just, every day, say a little prayer that they're going to be O.K. You've given them what they can-- or what they need to get the job done.

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WHAT DID SIGAR DO WELL?

INTERVIEWER:
What things do you think that this agency – conducting oversight in a war zone – has done well?

INTERVIEWEE 01:
What I think this agency has done well, by conducting oversight in a war zone, is they have made a name for themselves, I think especially in Afghanistan. When you go around and you visit, everybody

seemed to know who SIGAR was, and they understood why we were there. They understood what our mission was, and they looked to us as the leader of doing oversight work over in Afghanistan.

So I think that's very well done. I think the agency has put out a lot of information. They have put out, you know-- the reports that they put out are important. Other agencies have done that, but this agency, I think, talks about it more, explains why it's very important, and I think that's a good thing. Because you can walk into a room – for better or for worse, everybody knows who SIGAR is. And we get a lot of people that talk to us because they know who we are, and they have trust in us.

INTERVIEWER:
How did that-- how did the trust come about?

INTERVIEWEE 01:
I think the trust came about because we had a lot of agents that would talk to a lot of people. We had a lot of agents that were over in Afghanistan, especially early on. They did a very good job of talking to people, but they also did a very good job of having cases where I think the Afghans could see that we were trying to hold other people accountable. And that mattered to them. And I think it just helped a great deal with our reputation.

WHAT COULD/SHOULD AN AGENCY CONDUCTING OVERSIGHT IN A WAR ZONE DO DIFFERENTLY? SIGAR'S OVERSIGHT MODEL IN AFGHANISTAN

INTERVIEWER:
What things do you think that an agency conducting oversight in a future war zone might choose to do differently?

INTERVIEWEE 01:
That's a difficult question to answer, how another agency might do something different. Because, I think, this agency has shown that we have a good model, that we-- most law enforcement, most IGs, inspector general offices, they don't like to talk about their investigations. They just like to do their investigations.

This agency is different. They talk about it, they're very vocal. For some law enforcement, it's a little uncomfortable at times. But it-- I think it's worked very, very well. And I think if there were going to be another agency that's going to do oversight in a war zone, I think they would be-- they would need to look at how we handle things.

Because I think we do a good job of, "We're here. We have a mission. We want to do something good. And we are going to do something good. And here's how we've done something good." I think it's important to get the word out. There is a balance of how much you can say, how much you can do. But I think we-- this agency has done a good job of that.

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INTERVIEWER:
What do you wish the public could understand better about this agency, if anything? The American public.

INTERVIEWEE 01:
I wish that the American public could understand that what we do is important. That we are-- it might not seem like we're doing a good job. It might not seem like we are making a difference, but we are making a difference. And I wish people would understand that.

I wish people could see that, whether it be an audit report, or a lessons learned [report], or an investigation, we are bringing important things forward. Not that other agencies don't, but we-- this agency I think, does it more vocally. And I wish people would pay more attention to that.

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WHAT ARE YOUR OWN LESSONS LEARNED?

INTERVIEWER:
Bottom line, overall, what have you learned in this job, in this role, in this agency about conducting oversight in a war zone?

INTERVIEWEE 01:
What I've learned in this job is: I've learned some things-- I knew some things, but in this agency, I've learned some things. That it's O.K. to be vocal about what you're doing, because you want people to understand why you're around. You want people to understand what you're trying to do.

I've learned more about how it's more difficult to do investigations in a war zone. That you have to look at everything that goes on. That you can't just walk into a country and assume that it's going to be the same as if you're in the United States, or somewhere else. That you just have to accept, and you have to work with other partners. I think it's very important, military, other government agencies, you have to work very closely with them.

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INTERVIEWER:
Bottom line, what have you learned about Afghanistan?

INTERVIEWEE 01:
Bottom line, what I learned about Afghanistan is – it's far more complex than I thought it was. I thought that it was going to be like working over in Iraq, or Kuwait. It was more tribal than I expected, but that's not a bad thing. What I learned is that the Afghans are very invested in their country. They're very invested in doing the right thing.
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I actually went to Afghanistan the first time thinking it was going to be like dealing with a couple other countries that just had-- just did not like the United States.

I found with the Afghans that they really opened up to the Americans, to other countries. That they were very thankful, they were very interested in moving forward.
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There's a small group, I think, that they want to go back in time. But for the most part, what I learned is that the Afghans were appreciative that we were there. That they understood why we were there.

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AFTER U.S. WITHDRAWAL / AUGUST 2021

INTERVIEWER:
Have the events of the last year changed how you feel about that? Given the withdrawal, the evacuation, the fact that, you know, we're not there anymore, has it changed any of that for you?
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INTERVIEWEE 01:
What's changed over the last year is-- I'm sad that we're no longer there because I still think there was a lot that the U.S. government could do to help the Afghan people. And I'm sad that we're no longer there because, you know, I think our agency had a lot to bring to the table to help with this oversight.

So I am sad, in that respect. I feel concerned going forward what this country is going to descend into. When I think that we were making progress – and that's sad – to see that we're no longer going to be working there or helping them, at least at this point in time.
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There are some Afghans that I do think about, and I worry about, and I hope that they're O.K.

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WHAT DID SIGAR AND YOU ACCOMPLISH IN AFGHANISTAN?

INTERVIEWER:
Bottom line, what have you felt you got to accomplish during your time at this agency?

INTERVIEWEE 01:
What I feel I accomplished and what this agency has accomplished is that we have done the right thing for the U.S. taxpayer. We have tried to be a good steward of their money. We have tried to also help the Afghans build their country. And I think that's what I'm very proud of.

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ADDITIONAL MATERIAL: SIGAR CULVERT DENIAL SYSTEM INVESTIGATION "SHOW-AND-TELL"

INTERVIEWEE 01:
This poster is an example of the case that we call the culvert denial. This right here is a example picture the actual culvert that's supposed to have rebar on it – that we call the culvert denial. And so this was to prohibit anybody, any insurgent, to get into the culvert and put explosives, or an IED in – [it's] supposed to have rebar on it. As you can see, there's no rebar. So this is where they're having to go and check every single one of them.

What we found out is that the company actually only prepared or did the culvert denials on a very small number, and then what they would do in order to get paid is they'd have to take a picture of the finished product, and then had to have a geotag* – so that the contracting officers could say, "O.K.," I know that you finished this portion of it.
[* location information such as GPS coordinates added to a digital file or image]

What they found out is they would just take the same picture. Sometimes they would try to change the geo-tag numbers. Most of the time they didn't, and so the bulk of the roads, the majority of the roads, the culverts, were like this. They weren't covered. They didn't have denial systems. And that's what happened: when some soldiers went over it, there was an IED in there, [it] blew up – and killed some of them, and maimed some of them.

And so this picture – once SIGAR Investigations find out about this – we had to have the military, and we had one of our agents that had to walk along this road, to try to check to see whether the culverts had the denial system on it. So this is a picture [of them] actually having to walk out there to say "This location doesn't have one. [It] doesn't have the rebar."

And you can see there's a soldier [that's] on the other side, having to physically get down there, walk down and look. And that's what they had to do in order to clear this out, as they walked along the road. And then every time they got to a denial – a culvert, excuse me – a soldier had to go down there and say, "There's nothing wrong. There's no IED."

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