



SIGAR | SPECIAL INSPECTOR GENERAL FOR
AFGHANISTAN RECONSTRUCTION

SIGAR Oral History Project (OHP)

Interview 02: Edited Transcript

Interview Date: 11/04/22

NAME/TITLE

INTERVIEWEE 02:

My name is [NAME]. I'm the former Director of Forward Operations for the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction. In 2018, when I was hired by SIGAR initially, I was hired as a criminal investigator, and worked for the Investigations Directorate. // I reported to Afghanistan in October of 2018, as an investigator.

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I was assigned while working for SIGAR initially as a criminal investigator in Kabul, Afghanistan at the U.S. Embassy. After a period of time, the director of forward operations retired from the agency. The position became open, and I applied and was selected to be the director of forward operations.

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JOB DESCRIPTION

That position included the responsibilities for representing the Inspector General, [NAME:] John Sopko*, at all [U.S.] Embassy functions, all country team meetings, all interactions between section chiefs within the Embassy.

[* former Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction, 2012-2025]

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And also to facilitate and coordinate how SIGAR could accomplish its mission utilizing contacts that I had within the Embassy and with the Afghan government. Outside of the Embassy, I was responsible to be the face of SIGAR and responsible to interact with [NAME:] President Ghani, members of his close inner circle, to include the vice president and ministers of his cabinets, the minister of interior, the minister of defense. Through those relationships, facilitating and coordinating all visits by the Inspector General and all visits and temporary-duty assignments by members of the SIGAR team.

[* Ashraf Ghani, the former government of Afghanistan's president, 2014-2021]

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My job was to identify, fix, correct everything and anything that would stand in the way of SIGAR's mission. // It was a full-time job. I will say that. It was a full-time job.

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[NAME:] Mr. Sopko's objective was to travel to Afghanistan every quarter, and that's a heavy lift. You can imagine, if a direct-hire employee comes to Afghanistan what's required – housing, food, logistics. When a presidential appointee comes to Afghanistan – someone of [NAME:] John Sopko's level – that that whole thing takes a whole new life.

It's in-step coordination with all sections within the Embassy. VIP housing, VIP personal security detail, helicopter logistics, helicopter security logistics, coordination and setting up meetings with [NAME:] President Ghani* and other members, high-ranking members within the Afghan government. [* Ashraf Ghani, the former government of Afghanistan's president, 2014-2021]

Then how do we get to those meetings, talking points, meeting records. Yes sir, they were-- that's-- that's-- it's a heavy lift, and it's-- that's a zero-sum game when it comes to any sleep. You're going to-- that's a 24-hour requirement.

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CAREER HISTORY

It's been my greatest honor to serve in my profession, and to serve my country. I started-- well, my father was a police officer. I have four cousins that are police officers. And like my cousins, we watched my father. And we felt the calling to serve as well.

So in 1979, I became a police cadet with the Palm Beach County Sheriff's Office in South Florida. And in 1981, I attended the academy and was hired as a deputy sheriff. Those-- that assignment took me to a number of positions, from patrol officer, to canine officer, to detective.

Promoted to sergeant, patrol sergeant, and, before I left, I had been selected to run one of the three homicide units at the sheriff's office. So I had five detectives – homicide detectives – that worked for me. And for 10 years, prior to my departure, I had been assigned to the SWAT team [at] the sheriff's office, special weapons and tactics team.

And I had advanced to the rank of squad leader, and was responsible for a number of officers, and deputies – responsible for conducting SWAT operations, in critical incidents. I moved from there in 1995 to the Drug Enforcement Administration [DEA].

We served in the Drug Enforcement Administration until 2018, and that service moved us from South Florida to Los Angeles, to South Florida, to the Bahamas, to New Orleans, to Washington, D.C., to Detroit, Michigan, to Afghanistan, to Dallas, and back to New Orleans where I retired.

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Post-9/11, I felt a calling to do something. And DEA was conducting an overview, and they were interested in expanding their program. Fortunately, the Drug Enforcement Administration retains authorities that allow us as federal agents to conduct investigations overseas, in partnership with host nation countries.

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I worked on that program for almost a year. Weekly meetings with the State Department, INL – International Law Enforcement, which is under the State Department – with the Pentagon, at the Pentagon, specifically with OSD [Office of the Secretary of Defense].

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And then we surged a number of folks and-- a number of agents, number of administrative folks, intel analysts, training folks to the DEA camp, which was located north of the airport in Kabul. In 2011, there was an opening for the deputy regional director position. I applied for that, and was selected. I reported to Afghanistan in 2011. And stayed there, with a few trips back home, until the summer of 2015.

I was promoted to the regional director's position, // after four and a half years, I moved from Afghanistan to Dallas, where I was the agent in charge. // In 2018, I retired from DEA. I was-- I had developed a relationship with [NAME:] John Sopko over the years while stationed in Kabul.

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And I had established an incredible appreciation for what the SIGAR agency does in their mission. And an opportunity became available, and I applied for an investigator position. And I was-- went back to Kabul, in October of 2018.

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Over the course of my career, I spent almost eight years in Afghanistan, between temporary-duty assignments, and full-time residency there, which was in itself at the eight-year mark. So just short of eight years.

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The difference between my DEA career and my SIGAR career is very little. As a DEA agent, and then as a leader within the Drug Enforcement Administration, I conducted criminal investigations, and supervised criminal investigations.

I developed partnerships and relationships that facilitated – not advantages, not opportunities, but – proper information to be successful with criminal investigations. And leading them to prosecution of cases. When I joined SIGAR, // I just carried over the same similar investigative skills.

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CONDUCTING OVERSIGHT INVESTIGATIONS IN A WAR ZONE: AFGHANISTAN

Conducting oversight anywhere is difficult. Throw in there that you're in a war zone-- yeah, the recipe is not always easy to pull together. There are multiple lanes of effort to try to bring you to a formula of success.



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And to look through an optic, a simple optic, of transparency and oversight, that's no longer a possibility. You have to understand-- have to have an understanding and an appreciation for the mission that you need to do. So if it's providing oversight – to include a visit, to include interviews, yeah, that dynamic changes drastically. And it can change overnight.

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You needed enablers, whether it was NATO forces of some type, ISAF* forces-- U.S. military forces. These are all things you had to take into consideration. And if you needed to have conversations, if you planned conversations with locals, or Afghan officials, interpreters were required.

[* International Security Assistance Force]

Not an easy solution for any of it. But you throw it all in a hat, and this agency has demonstrated many, many times that the product they pull out of that hat is success. It is constantly challenging in a war zone, but not impossible. Not impossible, and this agency proved that.

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Criminal investigations, as an example, requires collecting evidence. Very similar to [the] United States, there's a judicial process. So you need to collect evidence. You need to conduct interviews. What you can't do is surveillance. What you can't do are "trash pulls."

What you can't do are set up pole cameras. These are all things that would come natural in the United States. In a war zone, you have to rely on other pieces of equipment that can collect that evidence for you. You might say, you want to use a drone to provide surveillance, and that's an excellent question.

Except that drone may be classified. So there's another lane that you would have to try to figure out to negotiate through. How can you get that feed from a drone to be used as evidence? Is it a helicopter that can provide security?

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Obtaining documents, certified documents. Is it the right documents? Are they properly certified? If not, how do you know? How do you-- how can you ensure that those documents can be used in a court of law in Afghanistan, or in the United States?

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SIGAR DEPLOYMENT TO AFGHANISTAN

When I arrived at the Embassy and saw that island that's been created by the U.S. government, I thought: there was a disconnect. I thought the reality inside the walls is absolutely different from the reality outside of the walls. // There were some sections – very few – where their staff and personnel never left the wall, never stepped outside of it.

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Every summer there is a complete rip, complete turnover of staff at the Embassy – for the State Department, for USAID, and in all sections. The institutional knowledge would jump on the plane with them and depart country.



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And then the “good idea” fairy would come in behind 'em. Many times over the years, I would be involved in meetings where we would have to blow the-- I would blow the dust off of a PowerPoint presentation or off of papers that I had written, to demonstrate to this new staff member why that idea wasn't going to work.

Now this isn't-- this isn't a negative on them. Kudos to the State Department, USAID, and all sections within the Embassy. I witnessed some of the-- some of the most incredible decisions. I witnessed and I had an opportunity to be involved in meetings with some of the smartest people I'd ever been around in my life.

Everybody wanted to do the right thing. But you have multiple lanes of effort that reset every summer, on a single, focused objective.

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Every September 11th, something was going to happen. They were going to chuck a rocket into the Embassy compound, or they were going to fire some rounds into the air, or something was going to happen. The Taliban's way of reminding all of us what 9/11 meant for them.

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I was there for a number of attacks on the Embassy. And inevitably, after the attacks – I don't know the number – a number of personnel assigned to the Embassy would immediately ask to leave country. // It was a reality check. It was a, "Here you are, no kidding."

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There was a pattern-- // --that we had learned over the years, that the attacks would come on generally Sunday evening. And a theory behind it was, because we were eight-and-a-half hours ahead, the American public was waking up Sunday morning, having their coffee. And the first thing they would see is "Breaking News, something happened in Kabul."

They were indirect fire incidents, the majority of 'em. I don't-- we used to jokingly talk about, "Somebody must've found our RPG and put it on their shoulder and just cranked a round off towards the Embassy." And it landed somewhere. Our comfort came in knowing that the Embassy had an incredible security protection program through the regional security office.

Every RSO, Regional Security Officer, that served in Kabul, absolutely the highest of professionals. In the U.S. military, or ISAF, International Security Assistance // Forces, their headquarters was connected to the Embassy.

So they had very high-ranking personnel there. As a matter of fact, the four-star generals, their headquarters and their residence was on that compound. So we had a lot of security. There was a



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military security on one side. There was contract and RSO security, within the Embassy and around the Embassy itself.

We had the Marines inside the Embassy. So there was-- although there was indirect fire incidents, it really rattled our families more than it rattled us. Not saying they weren't significant, but our families would see it on the news, and become upset about it.

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For us, more often than not, if it was locked down in the Embassy, we continued to work. You were at your desk, you were in the Embassy. If you were in your residence, and if it was a hardened structure, you continue to work, you continue to make the phone calls.

The mission never took a hiccup. It was seven days a week. It was 24 hours a day. And success was always the goal line.

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At any given time, if you did not believe and have an understanding and appreciation that you were working in a war zone, it could absolutely cost you your life, and the life of your colleagues. And as important as that is, the life of the Afghans, the many Afghans that we partnered with, and asked them to do things – which were absolutely outside of any comfort zone that culturally they had – they had to learn to live with.

So every decision, every ask, had a secondary effect. And you had to know that. You had to have an understanding and appreciation of that. If you asked an Afghan that you were partnered with to go and look at something, and put their eyes on that something, and conduct an inspection of that something, or talk to that person about conducting an interview, you had to have an appreciation that you were putting that Afghan's life at risk.

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SIGAR OVERSIGHT WORK

SIGAR was very successful with a number of criminal investigations. Not all of 'em. Listen, it's not always roses.

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But the cases that made it across the finish line were always impactful cases. They were the right violators, and it was the right message to send – back to everybody and anybody that wanted to consider breaking the law – that they could be prosecuted in Afghanistan or prosecuted in the United States.

When it comes to the audit section of SIGAR, kudos to those many, many auditors // and the work that they needed to accomplish. When I talk about collecting documents, certified documents for criminal investigations, I'm talking about documents that you could probably put in a three-ring binder.



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When you're talking about the hard work of auditing, oh, you're talking about binders and binders filled with information. And all of those documents required certification. They required the auditor needed and had to know where that information was coming from.

Auditors are not printing hearsay information. They're drilling down, and they're trying to get absolutely to the nuts and bolts. And then when you take a look at auditors working through all of those documents, well, how do you know the product itself, the piece of equipment that they're looking at actually exists?

And SIGAR has an inspection section. And those inspectors, some of the smartest people I've ever met. They needed to go out. It required them putting their hand on a product, touching it physically, looking at it, and having an understanding of how that product functions, from the wiring to the flip of the switch. And they were successfully able to do that. Imagine that – all of that – in a combat zone, for 20 years. Absolutely speaks volumes to the talent that this agency hires, and their focus on getting it right.

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To witness the incredible work performed by our inspectors that were assigned there. To witness and read the products of our auditors, our lessons learned, our quarterly report(s) – those were all wins for me.

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The reality of SIGAR is that, when it needs to happen, this agency will put their foot on the throat of whoever they need to, to get their attention. And, witnessing that firsthand was always a success for me, always brought a smile.

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SIGAR OVERSIGHT WORK: INVESTIGATIONS: PARWAN PRISON CASE

There were many moments while working for SIGAR that we accomplished something where I said, "If not for us, this would not have happened." Initially, when I was stationed there as an investigator, the Parwan Prison is the only prison in Afghanistan that // was run by the Afghan military.

There was a general that ran that prison-- Lieutenant General [NAME:] Safi. Information we had developed was that he was very corrupt. Information in evidence that we went on to collect, and I say we, my partner, [NAME:] John Balkovatz and [NAME:] Norm Kelly.

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[NAME:] Norm Kelly was the SIGAR agent stationed at Bagram Air Field* -- where Parwan Prison is located. They share-- they share a wall. Information that we had developed indicated-- and evidence we had collected indicated-- that this general was involved in a number of corruption schemes. Or as the head of the office, corruption schemes were occurring.

[* Bagram Air Base, aka Bagram Airfield, aka Bagram Airfield Base, located in the Parwan Province of Afghanistan, north of the capital city, Kabul – formerly the largest U.S. military base in Afghanistan, used by the U.S. military until U.S. withdrawal in 2021]



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They included food. The food was terrible that they were giving prisoners and soldiers. The good stuff was being sold out the back door. That included fuel, stealing fuel before it reached the generator.

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Everything's run on generator in Afghanistan, including the Embassy. So it requires constant fuel. The Parwan Prison was no different.

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What they would do is they would cut down on the times the generator was running.

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So instead of running a generator for 24 hours a day, they would scale it back – depending on the fuel supply that they were receiving, minus the cut that they were taking. So when you're talking about not running a generator in the winter in Afghanistan – where it's as cold in the winter as it is as hot in the summer – you're talking about human decency.

You're talking about-- I don't know how to describe it. Who puts people through that type of misery – when they don't have to? But the criminal element is always driven by the greed and corruption in the dollar bill. So they weren't going to stop stealing it.

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We collected all of this. We put it all together. And although we did not get a criminal prosecution, after presenting this to the U.S. military, they finally removed that general. That wasn't an easy thing for them to do. That general had been there and had served for many, many years.

Relationships had developed. And considering the criminals that are housed in that prison, and considering the logistics required for U.S. agencies to interview those prisoners, we were asking the U.S. military to remove the head of all of that. And they did.

My two partners and I, we high-fived each other for days, and we just absolutely-- we took on a monster. We understood what may or may not happen. But after continuing to work on it – and all three of us are former federal investigators – we recognized that a prosecution was not going to happen.

But a win for us, a win for us was when they removed him from that position. And-- that was absolutely an incredible event and time period for me.

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

I believe, after almost eight-plus years in Kabul, in a war zone environment, it takes a special person to do the job that the Drug Enforcement Administration has asked its personnel to do, as well as SIGAR.

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Not everybody can serve in Kabul, Afghanistan. There's no cookie-cutter for this. You need an individual that has an understanding of the environment, has an appreciation for their own personal



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security and what may be called upon them to do. Is not afraid to open doors, is not afraid to cross lanes of effort, is not afraid to step out of bounds on their comfort zone. And can find a niche.

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DEPLOYING CIVILIAN OVERSIGHT PERSONNEL TO WAR ZONE

The risks associated with bringing noncombatants into a war zone to do oversight sounds like a disaster. Sounds like a recipe for disaster and failure. // If you have that right person and you enable them, through providing security – and I mean providing protection from the time they go wheels-down, till the time they're wheels-up – and you can take that stress off of their shoulders, and you allow them to do their job, it's a beautiful thing. And I witnessed it many times.

Now mind you, they're wearing a helmet, they're wearing a vest, they're not carrying a weapon. But they're doing their job. And when you can witness that, and then hear of the success of that particular product-- yes sir, it can be accomplished. And this agency has proved it.

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Basic human instincts: We're driven. We're Class-A personalities. We don't do half things halfway. When we take it on, we take it all the way. And, it doesn't mean that there aren't hurdles ahead of us. It doesn't mean that the initial conversation, and the thought about the good idea is going to come to many dead ends. But we can maneuver around 'em, as long as we have that right person. And this agency has demonstrated over the years that they can find that person, and they can cultivate that person and let 'em go.

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LESSONS LEARNED: CORRUPTION AND COUNTERNARCOTICS

I don't believe when we went into Afghanistan full-time, boots-on-the-ground in October of 2001 – that any of us had a notion or a thought on how deep corruption could go and how bad corruption could get. And how life-changing, for many, that the acceptance of corruption could become.

I think over the course of 20 years, while we were in Afghanistan, there were two things that were neglected. No one wanted to talk about it. Number one was corruption. And number one was counternarcotics -- narcotics.

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One drives the other. The amount of money that's produced through narcotics efforts in that country.

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As a government, the U.S. government – we built the best irrigation system in Afghanistan. It's the best irrigation system throughout the country – than anywhere else in the world, for that type of environment.



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LESSONS LEARNED:

AFGHANISTAN POPPY->HEROIN PRODUCTION

And what did we find over the years? By producing that product, and spending millions and millions of dollars, that they produced the best poppy plants in the world. Some have reported 80% to 90% of all opium is produced from Afghanistan. And it's a cash crop.

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So you have the farmer, that's producing a cash crop. In Afghanistan's case, it's poppy – to get the opium. And then what's he going to do with the money? Well, I guess the best part about opium is it-- it has a shelf-life of forever. So you take kilos of opium. You put 'em up on the shelf. And now you have a savings account. Well, you're not going to sell it, because you don't want to sell it.

You're not a drug trafficker; you're a farmer, trying to raise a family. One of your children takes ill. They need medical care. Your son wants to get married. You as a father are responsible for paying for that marriage. Well, I need to go to my savings account.

Go to the closet, pull down a kilo of opium, or dig it out of the ground – wherever I happen to be stashing it – walk down to the local bazaar, sell it. Now I have cash. We fly my children [to] wherever country they need to [go] – India or Turkey – to get the proper medical attention they need. And we pay for the greatest wedding our sons have ever seen. We continue to produce poppy to do just that.

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Corruption and narcotics, in my observation – in my experience, after eight-plus years – we as a country turned a blind eye. We didn't fail to identify it. SIGAR's products identified this early on. We just turned a blind eye. It was sitting right there in front of us – the whole time. And we did nothing about it. And we kicked the can – we kicked those two cans – down the road, as long as we could. And unfortunately, both of 'em came back to bite us.

The Taliban made money – and continue to make money – off of narcotics trade. // But we did not want to address narcotics in Afghanistan. I have been told when asked, "We don't want to upset the farmer. We need the votes. We don't want to change the culture in that manner." The second thing we've learned is, because we didn't address that, is the corruption grew to a point where even today it's been suggested that [NAME:] President Ghani,* on his way out, took millions of dollars.

[* Ashraf Ghani, the former government of Afghanistan's president, 2014-2021]

A credit to SIGAR, I know they're investigating that. And they're looking into that. It's both of those reasons why SIGAR as an agency at no time in the future should be considering turning the lights off. Corruption from Afghanistan will be continuing for years.

We're going to hear years from now that somebody is sitting in a mansion somewhere, somehow from the money they've made through corruptions in Afghanistan. No other agency's working that. No other agency's going to look at that, within the U.S. government.



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The narcotics trade in the-- and the funding for Al Qaeda, and the funding for Haqqani and their global partners, they'll continue to look for funding resources. And Al Qaeda's in a position right now where they can provide that. Those two points right there, narcotics and corruption will live with us as a legacy.

And I say us – the U.S. government – as a legacy, unfortunately, for many, many years to come.

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WHAT DID SIGAR ACCOMPLISH IN AFGHANISTAN?

SIGAR is critical and plays an absolutely vital role in mission because of its products that it produces.

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This agency, in particular – the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction, under the specific leadership of [NAME:] John Sopko* – has hit very few foul balls. Very few foul balls. Very few swing-and-misses. Under his leadership, what this agency has demonstrated – and unfortunately the U.S. government fails to do this – institutional knowledge. We believe-- for some reason every election cycle there's a whole new reset.

[* John Sopko, former Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction, 2012-2025]

And to [NAME:] John Sopko's credit, and his leadership, he has demonstrated the absolute need to institutionalize something, to capture something, to make it relevant and to keep it on the books, for the next agency to pick up and use as a blueprint. So, if SIGAR can conduct investigations, conduct audits, inspections, lesson learned report, quarterly reports from speaking to the people in combat zones, why can't anybody else?

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Institutional knowledge is critical. It's critical because it demands respect, and it demands accountability, and it demands the person to have an understanding and knowledge of what's gone before them. The chapter before 'em. Afghanistan's a book, of course.

But it's a 20-year book. It's a 20-year book. We have to remember that. We spent 20 years there, under a number of presidents, that were trying to get it right. To their credit, they were trying to get it right. But to have an oversight agency that would not look at institutional knowledge and understand and respect the products that have been laid down before 'em.

Listen, in 2014, SIGAR got it right when they said, "Absolutely the Afghan government will fail—will fail – if these things aren't in place." And sure enough, and sure enough, seven years later – because no one followed that product, and no one had an appreciation of institutional knowledge – it was a contributing factor, in my mind, as to how the Afghan government failed.

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SIGAR never went back as an agency and reinvented a wheel. They continued their mission focus through all lanes of effort – investigations, audits, and inspections. Just because that one individual wasn't there anymore, the mission continued.

That will be a critical piece to the recipe for the next agency, for the next oversight agency, is identify the right person, identify the mission, and the scope of the mission, and what's required of that mission to reach success, to reach that final line.

And then, as importantly, identify the partnerships that you have to develop to complete whatever success might look like. The next agency, the next special inspector for somebody – and there will be others, we know that, it's inevitable – should take, I would hope they will take, all of those components that we have discussed and put 'em together to push toward success.

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WHAT ARE YOUR OWN LESSONS LEARNED?

What I have learned – while working for SIGAR, conducting oversight in Afghanistan – is that I cannot reverse the clock. I took eight years away from my family, from my marriage, from my children // to answer my calling to serve. There isn't anything easy. [EMOTIONAL]

It's not going to be easy. I can't get that time back. // The only thing I can hope that I accomplished was setting an example for my family that this is critical work. I would not have done any of that, if I did not believe it was critical. So there was nothing simple about conducting oversight and be a part of an agency that does just that. Excuse me. [EMOTIONAL]

These are things you take for granted. These are things that you think are simple. See, initially you think, "Piece of cake, not a problem." And then you take a breath and you think about it. But see, you're working so hard. You're running down this lane of effort at 110 miles an hour.

There's nothing slowing you down, because the mission is the bar. Anything short of that bar is failure, in my mind. So I demanded a lot of myself. I expected a lot from others. My colleagues – who had never let me down. None of 'em ever let me down.

What I lost focus of in eight years was what I missed, living in my house. And-- that was successful because I have a strong wife, and because of her commitment to this family. That dawned on me almost immediately, during one of my first trips home, when my son came out and asked, "Hey, can I run down to the tennis court, Mom?"

And I recognized immediately that I was no longer the head of this household. And although our life and our marriage together had always been a partnership, I was in fact a visitor in my own home. So to answer your question, there's nothing simple. You don't understand that, and have an appreciation of that – until you're no longer in that type of culture and that type of environment.

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There's a saying, "Afghan withdrawal." For me, I started to experience that early on-- almost immediately when I would come home on leave.

And tried to disconnect. There was never a disconnect. It really wasn't until maybe four or five months ago that I really told myself, "I need to really just push away."

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The things that'll keep you up at night when you're stationed there-- are the unknowns, the things that you can't control. When you're stationed there in any position, it's the well-being and the care of your colleagues. When you're stationed there in a leadership position, quite candidly, everything keeps you up at night. And may be why I have a body clock that still gets me up after a couple hours of sleep. I don't remember having a night-- I don't remember going to bed at night after reading my Bible where it was a good night's sleep.

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I could hear the cars driving by. I could hear the change in the guards. I could hear footsteps in my hallway. It's a level of sleep I guess you work your way through. And it's a chapter of the day, actually now that I'm sitting here thinking about it.

Because it was easy-- it was very easy to just get up. It was very easy. You're restless at 1:00 in the morning, 2:00, it's very easy for me to just get up, take a shower, go into the office. See what emails I could get ahead of or maybe answer some calls during duty hours of folks back here in the U.S.

Many, many sleepless nights. Many sleepless nights. When there was an event, we had a phone tree, and of course, it was a responsibility of everybody to call in immediately. And then it was my responsibility to report to the tactical operations center in the Embassy that "All staff were accounted for." And if anybody was outside-- wherever location they might be.

That call was followed up with a call to the chief of staff, [NAME:] Jaryd Bern, or the deputy IG, [NAME:] Gene Aloise,* with, "Hey, this has happened." And the reason why that call was as important – not the most important, but as important – is because inevitably some reporting would come out.

[* Gene Aloise, former Deputy Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction 2012-2025; Acting Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction 2025]

The U.S., all of a sudden, sees on media-- there's been an event in Kabul. The Embassy's on lockdown. I will tell you, sometimes getting to the conclusion, getting to the end of that call tree was the new definition of eternity. Because time stops. It absolutely stops.

And then you look at when you report – so you report by email and you report by phone call. And on the emails, more often than not, I would report back that "All were accounted for, 100% accountability." And I would look at the time-stamp, and recognize it had only been a couple of minutes. A credit again to our staff in understanding the importance of "drop everything." The very first thing you do is make that phone call.

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I must say, I don't remember getting a good night's sleep until sometime around August 30th. And that's when I was back home and trying to decompress everything that-- that we had just experienced and—stop[ped] trying to wrap my head around things I couldn't control.

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I think service to our nation, service to this great country, service to the citizens of this great nation is absolutely a priority. And it has been for me. I was blessed to-- throughout my career, to have a father that could show me the lanes and the importance of law enforcement.

And being a principled person in providing security for our citizens. Whether it's through the rule of law, or community outreach. Speaking at town hall events, providing interviews to local media – these are important pieces for a comfortable society, for a society to feel safe and secure. And I felt-- I felt the calling to do just that.

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The Afghan friends of mine, that are still there, and that are in hiding. // I get those calls all the time. I get those text messages. I get those friend requests on social media. These folks, these people, these fathers, these husbands, these grandparents – they're you and I. Just through luck of birth we're born in the greatest nation in the world.

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Through luck of birth, we're Americans. Having interviewed hundreds of Afghans, if I had [been] born in Afghanistan, I don't know that I would be any different. We all have basic requirements. Be a man, be a father, be a grandfather, be a provider. And that's what they're trying to do and accomplish. So when you have an understanding and an appreciation for just that, the burden of doing your job is not a burden. It's an honor and a privilege to have these positions.

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For the last three years, I taught an English class two days a week, one in Gardez over Zoom and one in Herat. The one in Herat was co-ed. To see these young faces of these Afghans, these young people in Gardez – which has always been a combat zone; Herat's always had problems – to see these young faces and their will and want to learn the English language so they could come to our beautiful country, that was inspiring.

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U.S. WITHDRAWAL / AUGUST 2021

August 15th, 2021 is the last day that I was at the U.S. Embassy in Kabul, Afghanistan. I departed Kabul, Afghanistan at roughly 4:30 p.m. And at 6:00 p.m. the Embassy was completely abandoned.

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We needed to leave. Twenty years, 2,400 service members, 20,000 wounded or injured. Countless other service members with injuries that are not visual. \$2 trillion-plus dollars spent – as a government and as an international community. Thousands and thousands of Afghans killed.

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We needed to leave. How we left on that day was a complete embarrassment, a failure of our government, and an absolute disaster. Driven by policymakers, in that particular space and time, that, quite candidly – for us on the ground in Afghanistan – abandoned us.

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Left us on an island to fend for ourselves.

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And I say, “shame on the policymakers that put Americans in that position.” I mean, really, after 20 years, that's the best we can do? That's how we close the curtain? It was a failure. And I can only hope, and pray, that those leaders have as-- had as many sleepless nights as I have – reliving that experience.

The chain of events leading up to August 15th really started with the U.S. government taking aggressive action in identifying that there needed to be a path correction, a path change. Continuing to serve-- surge troops and spending money in a country that was overwhelmed by corruption was not going to lead to success.

President Trump started negotiations or directed the start of negotiations with the Taliban. And on February 29, 2020, there was a peace agreement signed between the U.S. government and the Taliban.* Not at that table, or involved in those conversations, were members of the Afghan government.

[* “Agreement for Bringing Peace to Afghanistan between the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan which is not recognized by the United States as a state and is known as the Taliban and the United States of America,” February 29, 2020 <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/GOVPUB-S-PURL-gpo132866/pdf/GOVPUB-S-PURL-gpo132866.pdf>]

I would say that was a mistake. I would say that we're talking about a sovereign nation, a government that's empowered, a democratic government that's been elected. And we were painting a path for them. Having them at the table probably would've been a better idea.

However, we signed an agreement with the Taliban. That chapter, that day, was a game-changer for us as a government, as well as a nation. That day became the first time in the history of our nation where we were now relying on our archenemy, the Taliban, to protect our homeland.

Because they agreed they would not allow Al Qaeda to come back and attack the United States. So we're relying on our most-hated archenemy to make sure we can sleep at night as a nation. As we move forward on a calendar clock, we look at April 15th of 2021.

The Secretary of State, there's a change in the White House in January. We know that. The Secretary of State comes to Afghanistan. Prior to his arrival, the spring offensive was a disaster. During the spring offensive, the Afghans who were leading counterattacks against the Taliban and Al Qaeda and ISIS unfortunately were failing tremendously.



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Their casualties were extremely high. I personally was involved in meetings three times a week where those casualty numbers would be reported. And I remember in one particular meeting, it was reported as high as 358 casualties of Afghans.

In the United States, unfortunately, a police officer is killed every 52 hours. Absolutely unacceptable. As a nation, we mourn for that officer and that officer's family. The thought of losing 300-plus police officers or soldiers in a year is unacceptable.

The thought of losing that number in 48 hours, it's-- I-- it's-- yeah, it takes you to places where you can't wrap your head around a solution. In many cases, those casualties did not need to occur. They did not need to happen. They were at checkpoints. Whether they were hardened structures or vehicle checkpoints.

SIGAR as an agency to their credit demonstrated years ago that there was a significant problem with "ghost" policing, "ghost" soldiers – through corruption. Now why is that the case? The international community has paid the salaries of Afghan police officers. The United States has paid the salaries // for the Afghan military defense forces.

Because of that, if a soldier's killed or a police officer's killed, because of the acceptance of corruption, the culture of corruption, the last thing if I'm your first-line supervisor that I want to do is report your death. I'm going to continue to collect your salary. My supervisor's going to get piece of the action, because I don't want them reporting it either. And it's going to go up to the highest levels. And it's going to flood the HR system as well. So that little tiny salary you're collecting, we're going to piecemeal that out to everybody and anybody we can that's involved in this conspiracy for as long as we can.

Now, that starts with one. Start adding thousands. Through some of the interviews conducted by SIGAR, the number never was as high as 150,000 military and 150,000 police. What's frightening is it's been suggested that it's been half that number.

Imagine the millions of dollars spent on salaries. So there was a false sense of security for the Afghan public, and a false sense of understanding for the American taxpayer, believing that there was this force. So the spring offensive was a disaster. We knew that. U.S. military commanders were reporting that. I heard 'em reporting it. But we continued this path. We continued this path to total withdrawal. //

April 15th when the Secretary of State traveled to Kabul, Afghanistan and assured the commitment of President Biden and the U.S. government to remain as a partner, and to continue to support the Afghans in the country itself, while he was saying those words, I couldn't help but scratch my head and wonder, who wrote those talking points, who wrote that speech?

That was a lie. I knew it was a lie. Everybody else knew it was a lie. And sure enough, 10 days later, the State Department issued an order of departure and ordered all sections to trim their staff



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immediately. Now I don't know how many times in the history that's happened, but I think that's a big deal.

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After that meeting and we were ordered to reduce our staff because of security problems and security concerns, that's what I reported back to SIGAR senior leadership. When the State Department produced a cable capturing what was discussed in that meeting, and the word "security" did not appear, and it was suggesting that sections were reviewing mission objectives that can be pushed "over-the-horizon" – or OTH – a number [of] folks, including myself, were absolutely offended.

I was embarrassed. I had reported to the Inspector General himself while staff needed to be reduced, and the only document that came out of the meeting suggested that it was the Inspector General that was reducing staff. Absolutely smoke-and-mirrors. Absolutely terrible.

That happened on April 25th, 10 days after the Secretary's visit. When we left that meeting and I walked outside, and I saw Afghans watering the grass and cutting the yard, I couldn't help but think to myself, "Really? Is this-- is this who we are?"

We continued on that path, and on 1 July, we transitioned the Bagram Air Base* to Afghans. I don't know how to describe it other than it was a chapter-change for us on the ground. Because at that particular point, there was no longer close air support.

[* Bagram Air Base, aka Bagram Airfield, aka Bagram Airfield Base, located in the Parwan Province of Afghanistan, north of the capital city, Kabul – formerly the largest U.S. military base in Afghanistan, used by the U.S. military until U.S. withdrawal in 2021]

And the one thing the Taliban feared – and Al Qaeda and Haqqani and all of our enemies – was that we had helicopters. And they were very good at what they did. Although they had pre-positioned a carrier group to the region to provide support, we were told that was three-plus hours away.

We were also told that they had dedicated six B-52 bombers to provide protection for Afghanistan, but they were coming out of Qatar. That was three-and-a-half hours away. So this was a game-changer for all of us, for everybody on the ground.

We move from July 1st, turning over the base, to 7 July, when we were told again to cut staff. SIGAR as an agency we reduced to three, myself, an auditor, [NAME:] Adam Bonfanti, and an investigator. On 12 July, there was a change in command, again another chapter-change for our mission focus in Afghanistan.

And on that particular day, that's the first time in many, many years there was no longer a four-star in country, a U.S. military four-star general. There were two-star-- Navy Admiral. Again, a credit to both [NAME:] General Miller* and the admiral, both career war fighters.

[* General Austin S. (Scott) Miller, U.S. Army (Ret.), final commander of NATO's Resolute Support Mission and United States Forces-Afghanistan, 2018-2021]



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The admiral was a former [U.S. Navy] SEAL. I don't know if it's former. I think he is a SEAL once you're a SEAL. But they knew what time of day it was. They knew how to conduct military operations. And the admiral would appear at our – almost, at that point, daily – meetings to talk about security.

[NAME:] General Miller's head of intelligence came in and provided us a briefing as well, prior to his turnover of command. And it was during that briefing that the level of security was emphasized, and it was stressed that things were turning terribly bad quickly.

On 13 July, a member of the foreign service-- a foreign service officer, a member of the State Department authored and sent a dissent cable. Again, from April 25th to 13 July, the meetings we were attending at that point, and which had led to two cuts in staffing, were gloom-and-doom.

“The sky is falling.” Chicken Little's running around with his head cut off. Things are terribly, terribly bad, and they're going to get much worse. But what we were hearing from the podium at the White House and what we were reading in the media and seeing on the news channels was, “peace and love, things are fine.”

There was going to be a couple hiccups, but not a problem. None of us there on the ground felt the sense of urgency on this train wreck that we could all see moving down the track. So on 13 July, this person authored a dissent cable, signed by another foreign service officer.

A draft copy of that was shared amongst all of the section heads, and it pointed out specifics. It specifically pointed out, and the cable's now been declassified, but it specifically mentioned: [READING] “GIROA – or ‘the government [of the Islamic Republic] of Afghanistan’ – cannot hold Kabul. The Taliban military takeover will require the U.S. to trust the Taliban. Relocating at-risk Afghans needed to happen immediately.”

And the number was closer to 100,000. We had been hearing from the [U.S.] President [Biden] himself [that] it was 10,000. I couldn't imagine having been in positions where I was responsible for creating talking points, I can't imagine who that person was that was writing those talking points for our President.

Absolutely embarrassing. Also in this cable there was a notation for immediate draw-down, immediate need to draw down the Embassy staff and the need to reestablish a remote Embassy, maybe not even in the country. The cable was titled, “Afghanistan: Optimistic Policy Assumptions Put Lives at Risk.”

That's 13 July. That's-- that's a month away before we're departing on helicopters. When I hear personally that it was a surprise, when I hear that come out of the mouth of policymakers, that's a lie. I've sat in policy and leadership positions.

It was always – on my watch, I was responsible, if I was in charge – to know exactly what was going on. Or I surrounded my people-- I surrounded myself with people that were smarter than me that



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knew exactly what time of day it was. And I never had a problem throughout my career saying "no" to an operation, or changing an operation.

A credit to the U.S. military. Our U.S. military can turn on the light of the sun to accomplish a mission. It without a doubt can stop the ebb-and-flows of any tide to change a course action. Why not give it to them? Why not think through this? Yeah, August 15th was a disaster.

Approaching August 15th, as a reminder, the Taliban recognized it as well. The Taliban recognized that we weren't moving fast enough. The international community was slow to move. So the Taliban, as it's been reported, directed its ground forces to up-tick the violence in Kabul.

So you could hear explosions all the time, throughout the city. There were a number of reports coming. Nothing being reported, nothing being reported back home. We couldn't understand it. We couldn't understand. As a matter of fact, the high-profile attacks continued to the point where on 14 July, the Taliban at that point controlled 200 district centers.

The Taliban had pre-positioned to take 15 to 20 provincial capitals – 15 to 20 of 'em. They controlled at that point, 14 July, they controlled six border crossings. And we still take a position of "nothing to see here"? It was hard for us on the ground to wrap our head around that.

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When I talk about the feeling of being isolated, about being on an island, I can't overemphasize that enough. To the credit of [NAME:] [then-SIGAR Inspector General] John Sopko,* to the credit of [NAME:] Gene Aloise,** to the credit of [NAME:] Bern,*** whom I spoke to constantly, it was from them I received my reassurance.

[* John Sopko, former Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction, 2012-2025]

[** Gene Aloise, former Deputy Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction 2012-2025; Acting Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction 2025-]

[*** Jaryd Bern, former SIGAR Chief of Staff]

Because you can get caught in a tunnel vision. You can get caught in a tunnel vision of "the sky is falling." And to have folks, to have true leaders like those three gentlemen – to reassure you of what you already know-- but you-- you can't understand it.

Because you can-- you don't see it on the news, you don't see it being reported. That was calm in the storm. Something they don't get enough credit for, I can assure you. 14 July, to the credit of the U.S. military, they had pre-positioned, we were told, the 82nd Airborne to the region.

And they had pre-positioned the United States Marine Corps FAST team to the region. What was troubling for us, when we had heard that, is it was just 13 days prior to that we turned over the Bagram Air Base.* And the thought that we would send young women and men, American soldiers, back into an air base that we had just turned the keys over to, I just, I couldn't understand that.

[* Bagram Air Base, aka Bagram Airfield, aka Bagram Airfield Base, located in the Parwan Province of Afghanistan, north of the capital city, Kabul – formerly the largest U.S. military base in Afghanistan, used by the U.S. military until U.S. withdrawal in 2021]



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These policy decisions, I couldn't understand. If we can turn on the light of the sun to accomplish a mission, what was going on in Washington? What was happening in that bubble? What was happening in that philosophy of "nothing to see here," of deflection, let's wait for the next fire, let's wait for the next spark, and then let's focus everything on that?

I get it. Leadership's not easy. But strong leadership's required to be successful.

On 3 August, now 12 days away from our evacuation, again the Taliban frustrated with the lack of speed or lack of urgency on our part – our part being the U.S. government, to get out of country – ordered and directed a sophisticated, complex attack on the Minister of Defense Guest House.

These attackers had been described as equivalent to our Special Forces. These attackers, in groups of five to 10, had been pre-positioned throughout Afghanistan for years. Sleeper cells. And this cell was turned on. To get to the Minister of Defense Guest House to conduct this attack, there were a number of security checkpoints that they had to pass through.

This attack demonstrated to all – [that] the “Green Zone” was now vulnerable. So this little island that I described early on, this inside-of-the-wall culture, this comfort zone, was vulnerable, no longer existed. It was absolutely out. If they could get to that Guest House, they could get anywhere.

So in this particular case, when you take a look at the sophistication of this team, and the fact that at this point there was a 30% increase in violence at the checkpoints, there was complex and directed assassinations on Afghan pilots at their home, I tell you what.

You want to talk about an air defense program that works? Well, there's not that many Afghan pilots that can fly a Black Hawk helicopter. Well, if you can't shoot the Black Hawk helicopter out of the sky, what the Taliban identified is you can go to that pilot's house and kill that family and kill that pilot.

And that will send a message to the other pilots. Because of the-- because of this attack, as a result of this attack, two international ambassadors called the U.S. ambassador and said, "Hey, we're out of here. 'See ya.' We're done." The U.S. ambassador reported that "The security situation was like a widespread river flooding."

This is 4 August. This is 11 days before we're getting on helicopters. This "nothing-to-see" philosophy and policy coming out of Washington was at risk of a catastrophic failure, because the wolf was breathing down our neck. There was a conversation that-- and reports that family members of Afghan political elites were fleeing the country.

There was also a conversation and reports that business owners were selling off their inventory in hopes to get more money. The U.S. ambassador himself reported that after meeting with [NAME:] President Ghani,* [NAME:] President Ghani appeared to be disengaged or hopeful – hopeful that this was a bad dream.

[* Ashraf Ghani, the former government of Afghanistan's president, 2014-2021]



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[NAME:] President Ghani's plan of action was to send in 200 to 300 Afghan commandos, reclaim a space, and then send 200 or 300 Afghan Defense Force members to retain that space and hold it.

We already talked about “ghost” soldiers and “ghost” police. I've emphasized corruption. In that same formula, some of the bravest Afghans that you'll ever meet in your life were their commandos. Absolutely incredible war fighters. And they were being pulled in 100 different directions. They were being pulled to provide security for some dignitary, Afghan government official.

They were-- they were pulled all over the place. Matter of fact, what's extremely troubling is there's a YouTube video of 22 of 'em surrendering, after calling for help running out of bullets, and being executed by the Taliban once they surrendered.

Needless to say, those observations made by [NAME:] President Ghani, when they were reported to us, that wasn't going to happen. That was never going to happen. That was-- that was a failed plan to begin with.

By 11 August, things had deteriorated tremendously. There were a number of district centers. There were a number of provincial capitals that were at risk. As a matter of fact, eight provincial capitals had already fallen to the Taliban. Well, there's only 32 of 'em. Eight's a big number.

So the Taliban were in control of those capitals and were in control of those border crossings. We walked out of that meeting, and the Afghan employees who we had told not to discuss any of this with were still watering the grass and trimming the rose bushes.

On that same day, I had an opportunity to meet with a member of the staff del[egation]. And their eyes were wide open. I said to this member of the staff del, and I'd known this person for a number of years, "We have an obligation as Americans who took an oath to serve in these positions to make sure this message is accurate and correct."

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I suggested to this person, "Whoever is writing the talking points for the President should be fired immediately." Because what we were seeing on the ground was absolutely not the truth. As a matter of fact, the President of the United States was lying when he talked about Afghanistan.

Now I get it. I get it, he's got people around him briefing him on it. I get it. He was not getting correct and accurate information. And because of that, what he was saying was an absolute lie. What's absolutely terrible and troubling to me is I believe – I'm confident – he believed what he was saying was the policy and what was happening on the ground.

A couple of observations during this staff del. It was pointed out that Congress and the White House are saying things that are completely irrelevant to the current situation. Things had changed on the ground. [NAME:] President Ghani* was completely disengaged.

[* Ashraf Ghani, the former government of Afghanistan's president, 2014-2021]



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And that had no response. And as a matter of fact, this member of the staff del pointed out what SIGAR had pointed out many, many times over the years, that to have any peace conversation, to have any change in the course of what was going on in Afghanistan, we needed to come up with things to negotiate with.

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We needed to protect the accomplishments over the years of protecting women. We need to identify structures that taxpayers had paid for, and we need to use those as points of a conversation. And this member knew the exact thing, exact same thing.

On Friday the 13th – and that's a real thing, Friday the 13, I'm absolutely convinced of it now – during a meeting we learned a couple of things that became an immediate game-changer. Because up to that point, there had been a conversation about another staff reduction.

And based on my conversations with the Inspector General and with the Deputy Inspector General, we were going to reduce our staff to one, and that was going to be me. We were going to send the investigator home. And we were going to send the auditor home. And we were going to see what happens.

On 13 August, Friday the 13th, information had been developed that the Taliban had issued a direct threat against the U.S. Embassy within 72 hours. The Taliban were in possession of Howitzers and tanks and would use them against the Embassy.

The Taliban were then 15 miles of the Embassy. They were targeting the airport shortly. And according to what was reported by the military, munitions were now being dropped by U.S. aircraft inside of Kabul to keep the Taliban back. It was on that day that it was absolutely decided everybody had to go.

On Saturday – and I mention this only as how impactful that day was to me, there was a period of time after my 40-plus years in police work of carrying a badge and a gun that I became so pissed off at myself because I had an overwhelming fear of being scared. There was a period of time where I became so emotional and so pissed.

Well, I turned that rage around. I've never run away from a fight, and I wasn't going to begin then. And I told myself then that I would not be taken. My family would not see me on CNN or some other news network with my head on my back.

And I would fight to the end. That's the mindset I had, and I know that's the mindset of my colleagues. That was Friday that 13th when we were by ourselves. Saturday morning the 14th, the 82nd Airborne was walking around that Embassy. Now, needless to say, I hadn't slept in days myself.

We had been on “burn” assignment. Everything and anything that could be captured by the Taliban was to be burned, including American flags. Mine's sitting here. I did not burn my flag and never have and never will. You have a new appreciation for items hanging on the walls and these plaques and



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everything else when you're told to take everything off the walls, anything that could be used as a trophy. You're to burn it immediately.

And they started a number of fire pits. There was some reporting from the media that black smoke was coming over the top of the Embassy, the Embassy was on fire. No, it was us. We were burning everything. We no longer at that point had COVID concerns.

We had a mission focus, and that was to do our job. The 82nd Airborne soldiers – phenomenal, phenomenal group of war fighters, young people. My goodness gracious, they looked younger than my kids – and probably were – were walking around the Embassy.

And on Saturday evening, they went room-to-room and seized every tower computer, and Sunday morning, they destroyed every one of 'em, for any possible leakage or spillage of information. The international community had been ordered to destroy all of their equipment as well.

And there's a picture I have, and I'll share it with you, looking out of my window. I looked across, and in front of the Embassy I saw two or three men destroying U.S. passport plates with a hammer. And although I had peaks and valleys about, "Is this real? Is this really happening?" watching them destroy those plates got my attention.

That was another game-changer for me that this was really happening and we needed to go. We had been told we could bring one backpack – in a bag, a "carry" bag. So all my personal effects are in apartment 512 at the U.S. Embassy. My suits, clothing, my books, my personal book collection of over 50 or 60 books – they're all gone.

My years of research, creating a class that I teach, a graduate course I teach at Tulane, that's all gone. Yeah, it was a game-changer. Things happened quickly on Sunday. We turned over as an agency all of our weapons to the regional security officer in hopes that they would be removed.

My understanding, they ran out of time, and they were destroyed in place. It was also reported 200-plus vehicles – ran out of time. They were not all destroyed, but a number of them were turned over, as well as millions and millions of dollars in military equipment that had been turned over to the Afghans.

Yeah. Did that have to happen that way? I don't think so. I don't think so. We were evacuated at roughly 2:15, 2:30 from the Embassy after standing in a line with hundreds of Americans. We were evacuated by Chinook helicopters to the Kabul International Airport, where we were processed by the Marine Corps, U.S. Marine Corps.

Incredible operation. I mean, truly. To watch our military in action is one of my-- has been one of my greatest honors. They just get it done. They get it done. We were flown to Qatar, and we were stationed there, or pre-positioned there, on the U.S. base in Doha, in an encampment-type of surrounding after COVID test, after bunk assignment.



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And then after a couple of days, we made our way back to the United States. So, my evacuation from Afghanistan was one helicopter and six airplanes to get home. And it was worth every, every part of the ride.

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AFTER U.S. WITHDRAWAL / AUGUST 2021

My heart hurts to this day for the many, many friends and partners that we left behind. And I struggle, as a former leader within this-- within our government. Is that the best we could do? Was that absolutely-- absolutely our best day? And there is-- it wasn't.

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We can't give up on our Afghan partners. We can't turn our back to the many that have worked with us and served with us over the years. And we can't assume that things are going well. They're not. They're not going well. We have to be transparent, and we have to have a conversation about what does tomorrow look like – for Afghanistan and the citizens that worked with us and served with us.

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"SALUTING OUR MILITARY" VETERANS LUNCHEON EVENT Hammond, LA 11/03/22

[Event host introduction:] Without further ado, Mr. Wiles.

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The annual event, the annual luncheon to honor veterans in Hammond, Louisiana. I was-- honored and privileged to be their guest speaker.

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"SALUTING OUR MILITARY" VETERANS LUNCHEON EVENT Hammond, LA 11/03/22

[beginning speech:] I thank you. I thank you from the bottom of my heart, for this opportunity to speak to such a distinguished group of people.

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I'm a military brat. My father served in the Air Force. My sister served in the Air Force as a nurse. The military, I have the highest honor and respect for. Although I didn't serve with them, I worked



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shoulder-to-shoulder with them-- accompanied-- watched them and accompanied them on a number of operations where they became enablers for Drug Enforcement Administration and for SIGAR.

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When you talk about a call to service, what's in their DNA is absolutely incredible.

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"SALUTING OUR MILITARY" VETERANS LUNCHEON EVENT Hammond, LA 11/03/22

I wanted to share a journey with you this morning and talk a little bit about the evacuation of Afghanistan.

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I can tell you, there was nothing like the day of August 15.

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I have never felt more abandoned in my life. By my country, by my government.

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That was my uniform that I wore every day [wearing a suit, working for SIGAR in Afghanistan] – similar to what I have on now. That's me wearing the ear off of an ambassador, talking about two things – over the 20 years – that nobody really wanted to address. And one of them was corruption. And the other was counternarcotics.

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It was my privilege to share my congratulations on their service, my heartfelt thankfulness for their service, and to remind them that, without them, we're not the country that we are.

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We've got to continue to recognize our veterans. We've got to continue to support our military, and their families. We've got to do everything we can as a nation to roll out whatever carpets and open whatever doors for our veterans and our military.

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The demands required of this oversight work come from many different angles. Going back to my comment about having the right person, even the right person is going to struggle. The right person is going to be put in an environment to accomplish a job that is something totally outside of their comfort zone.



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My comment to the American public is, "These individuals exist. They exist. It's-- it absolutely has been my highest honor to serve with them. These individuals are you and I. They raise a family. They're trying to accomplish something."

When you have that, when you have that person that puts service above all others, and service above everything, you get out of that person's way. You facilitate whatever you can for them to accomplish their mission. And you will have tremendous success.

This nation has those types of people – millions of 'em! It's in all of us. I absolutely believe that. This nation became its strongest and its tightest after 9/11. The strongest point in the history of this nation – that we can remember – is September 12th, 2001.

You're my brother, you're my sister – period, end of story. You do you harm, you do me harm. And we have that as a nation. That's in our DNA. Every one of us has that. Every one of us has that. I don't know the trigger. I don't know the event. I don't know what happens to re-trigger that within our DNA.

But we all have it. We all have it. We're born in the greatest nation in the world. We believe in working, and providing, and making a difference. And by making a difference, I mean more often than not causing an impact. Maybe something isn't right, and we cause an impact and we change something up.

Listen, that's in all of us. And this agency, as small as it is, is just a representative sample of what we can do as a nation, as a country – when we work together.

“Burden” of service? No, sir. It's a calling to service. We should never look at any service as a burden.

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