SIGAR | SPECIAL INSPECTOR GENERAL FOR AFGHANISTAN RECONSTRUCTION

# SIGAR Oral History Project (OHP)

## Interview 03: Edited Transcript

### Interview Date: 11/09/22

**NAME/TITLE**

**INTERVIEWEE 03:**
**My name is [NAME]. I was the Assistant Special Agent in Charge for the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction, in Afghanistan.**

**//**

**JOB DESCRIPTION**

**INTERVIEWER:**
**And in that role, what did you do for the agency?**

**INTERVIEWEE 03:**
**The purpose of my role was to oversee the other investigators that were assigned to Afghanistan, throughout Afghanistan. We had more people in Kabul. But we also had people in other areas. Bagram* is one of the other areas.**
[* 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 we had oversight of them, as far as managing to make sure that first of all they were safe, and second of all, that the investigations they were conducting were-- met the standards that we needed to, and were progressing as they needed to.**

**Sometimes they needed a little bit more assistance. We would give them more assistance. If they needed-- sometimes they needed more direction. We'd give 'em direction. And-- but the main thing was to make sure that the job they were doing was done in a safe manner.**

**//**

**CAREER HISTORY**

**INTERVIEWER:**

**You came to the agency with previous experience. Do you have special skills that you think particularly equipped and qualified you to do this work at SIGAR?**

**INTERVIEWEE 03:**
**Well, my previous career was with the Drug Enforcement Administration [DEA], which I had been with for-- 24 years. And then went through retiring from that. My last posting was in Afghanistan, with the Afghan Threat Finance Cell, which looked at the money that was being supplied to the insurgents.**

**So we targeted that money. And that money was done-- was gathered through stealing of fuel, of extortions, of kidnappings, of drug money. There was so many different areas. It's much like the insurgents are the-- the insurgents would gather money, just-- much like a drug cartel does.**

**Any way they can to make money, they're going to make money. And that's what they did, which helped support their war effort against ISAF,* against the U.S. military.**
[* International Security Assistance Force]

**So that was my previous experience. And I was able to roll that right into SIGAR, to-- again, Investigations. That's what I did.**

**//**

**INTERVIEWER:**
**Give me just a little summary of the trajectory of your career and some of the most significant achievements that you were a part of, at your previous place of employment.**
**//**

**INTERVIEWEE 03:**
**When I was in college, I worked for the Texas Department of Corrections as a prison guard. And-- that was not the area that I thought I'd be going. I thought I would be an ag[riculture] teacher. And-- but life changes your trajectory many times.**
**//**
**Upon graduation from college, I started working in the oil field. Well, the oil field is one of these ups-and-downs types of environments, where you could get laid off in a moment-- when the jobs aren't out there.**

**And when that happened, I decided it was time for me to get into something that it was more secure. And so I started working for the sheriff's department. // And from sheriff's department, went and became a narcotics agent. And the narcotics agent, then started working for the Drug Enforcement Administration.**

**The Drug Enforcement Administration, they assigned me to Oklahoma starting off, which was Southeast Oklahoma. I was able to start doing judicial wire intercepts, learning how to do that, so you-- which is a legal wiretap. We worked in Oklahoma, then in Texas.**
**//**

**From there went to D.C. and started working with the southwest border, looking at all the nar-- heavy narcotics coming across the border, from the Mexican cartel and the Colombian cartels. From there, I was reassigned to New Orleans and worked in New Orleans with a task force group, which was my first time working with a task force group, of being a supervisor over a task force group, which was very beneficial.**

**Because it helped to prepare me for later on working with military as well as other types of law enforcement groups. From New Orleans, I became the country attache for Moscow, Russia. And-- which was my first time being overseas. And, [it] was a unique experience working in the [U.S.] Embassy and the surrounding-- Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan was my responsibility. But working with the Afg-- with, excuse me, the Russian police, the federal police and the narcotic police.**
**//**
**And from Russia, then ended up going to Afghanistan. And-- where I was the director of the Afghan Threat Finance Cell for three-and-a-half years. And that was an interesting, challenging time.**
**//**
**Our focus with the Afghan Threat Finance Cell was going after the insurgents' funding and financing-- by all legal means available, and the military options available as well.**

**//**

## SIGAR ASSIGNMENT

**INTERVIEWER:**
**So why do you think that the agency was particularly interested in hiring someone like you?**

**INTERVIEWEE 03:**
**I was very fortunate in that John Sopko*, the IG, had been over to Afghanis-- he made regular trips to Afghanistan. // And, I was able to brief him on what we saw from the Afghan Threat Finance Cell that was impacting the U.S. – money that was being furnished to the U.S. – against the U.S. troops by the insurgency.**
[* former Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction, 2012-2025]

**They were-- I looked at it. And they saw the value of that type of investigation. And, again, when we started showing how much of what SIGAR was doing at the time, trying to combat the money that was being diverted from the money that was given to Afghanistan, and being diverted to the insurgency, they saw the value in that.**

**//**

## LESSONS LEARNED:
## U.S. AFGHAN COUNTERNARCOTICS PARADOX: POPPY PRODUCTION

**INTERVIEWER:**

**What were the specific circumstances of Afghanistan that were particular to that country and different than what you'd seen in other postings?**

**INTERVIEWEE 03:**
**Well, the sheer volume of narcotics. It was my first opening-- eye-opening experience when I arrived in Afghanistan. Sure you can read about it. But when you actually get there and you see the poppy fields.**
**//**
**When I first got there, and took a tour, by helicopter, and I saw the huge areas of poppy fields, my first question is: Why are we allowing them to be there? And it was given back to me that we can't destroy them.**
**//**
**What we wanted to do is go in there and just spray 'em, which is-- which would kill them right away, because poppy is very easy to kill. But the government, the Afghan government was against that, because it would-- the farmer, the one out there growing the poppy, is being forced, in a lot of cases, to grow that poppy for the Taliban, for the insurgency. And if we destroyed it, well, they still-- the way the taxing system worked over there was the Taliban would give them money to buy seed. And give-- and once they bought the seed, they'd plant it.**

**And then they would start raising it. And they still owed that to the insurgency, that money. And so if you destroyed their product, then they would have no way of paying that. And they were worried that it was going to cause harm to the farmer as well as the public turning against the Afghan government and the coalition forces.**

**So that's one of the reasons that was given to me that-- why we wouldn't do it.**
**//**

**INTERVIEWER:**
**Did it, over time, seem to you like an insurmountable problem, a catch-22 situation?**

**INTERVIEWEE 03:**
**It did. because you look at it in a holistic manner. The U.S. government, the coalition force, where it was in Afghanistan, and they were trying to rise-- raise the people, the Afghan people, to a higher level, through trying to educate them, trying to help them better themselves through business, and through agriculture.**

**So we dug wells for them. We supplied 'em with tractors. We supplied them with resources so they could help-- to take their, what they grew, and sell it throughout the world. All these things looked good on the surface. But what we did was gave the insurgency and the farmer a better ability to grow poppy and marijuana and then sell it to all the countries, throughout the world.**

**The water wells were being used for areas that was-- that were arid before, that couldn't grow any poppy were now being used. The water wells were being used to furnish that water, to grow it. So what was started as a great concept was turned by the insurgency against us. Those that grew wheat,**

**or those that grew different good products, they benefited as well. But it seemed like it was overly against us.**

**INTERVIEWER:**
**So the average U.S. citizen of, you know, fairly average awareness of current events might, at this point, hearing this interview, say, "What?--**

**INTERVIEWEE 03:**
**Mm-hmm.**

**INTERVIEWER:**
**--We made it easier for the Taliban and farmers to grow poppy crops?"**

**INTERVIEWEE 03:**
**Yes. We did.**

**INTERVIEWER:**
**And so that person might say, "How does that make any sense?"**

**INTERVIEWEE 03:**
**It doesn't really make sense in that you would think that what we would do is destroy it. But // you can look at images around military installations in Afghanistan that had poppy all around them. And they were not destroyed. They were left because, again, the hearts and minds of the people, we didn't want to turn them against the coalition. We didn't want to hurt them against the insurgency. So we were taken advantage of.**

**//**

## CONDUCTING OVERSIGHT INVESTIGATIONS IN A WAR ZONE: AFGHANISTAN

**INTERVIEWER:**
**And during your time with this agency, you were primarily based in the compound at Kabul?**

**INTERVIEWEE 03:**
**I was. Our office was on the [U.S.] Embassy side. But we dealt a lot-- well, most of our time would be over on the ISAF side, which, if you're not aware, all that it was, was a gate between the two compounds.**

**//**

**INTERVIEWER:**
**What kind of ballpark number were you supervising when you were there?**

**INTERVIEWEE 03:**

**Each investigator would most likely be working six to 10 cases himself/herself. So then you multiply that by 12, 14 agents. So you can just see the number. And then, if it was a large case, I would get involved in it as well, to help them do the investigation, help do the interviews.**
**//**
**Your investigations here – and when I say here, in the United States, domestically – // don't take near as long as what they would in a war zone. To be able to pull records, to be able to pull-- be able to go to the county seat and pull records doesn't exist. Trying to find land // if you're doing a financial investigation, find out what that person owns is really tough in a war zone, when you don't have access to records.**
**//**
**Some of these interviews, when you're looking at a large problem set, you've got-- usually it's got interviews, a large number of interviews, and not just one location. You've got them spread out throughout Afghanistan, when it's a large investigation.**

**So, the logistics of moving people in a war zone, to do these interviews, setting up in a safe place, those were challenges. But the guys were all – and the girls – were all great to overcome those challenges, and do those investigations.**

**INTERVIEWER:**
**So it's the same work that you would be doing inside the United States. But it's under very different conditions.**

**INTERVIEWEE 03:**
**Correct. // When I came back stateside and started doing the investigations for SIGAR, those were so much easier, because you could just call somebody up. You could take a commercial flight, go visit with them. Sit down over coffee. And you didn't have to worry about a security force to keep you-- you know, and so, yeah.**

**It's-- the challenges are just the difference between night and day. When you get over in Afghanistan, sometimes // we would be investigating somebody and we'd be doing an interview. And you know that they're part of the insurgency. But you need to interview 'em. So, yeah. You have a higher level of security with you, because you know that. They don't know you know that. But we did that on many occasions.**

**INTERVIEWER:**
**So you'd be going into certain interviews with danger to life and limb for you and the people under your supervision.**

**INTERVIEWEE 03:**
**Yes. Did that not only with the Drug Enforcement Administration, but with SIGAR as well. That was inherent of working in a war zone. Those are the challenges you overcome. You try to do a background on the people you're going to interview. You try to see what type of-- what their history is.**

**But not being-- it's not the United States, it's not Europe, so you're not able to get a lot of the information on those individuals that you would like. It's not like you can pull up their LinkedIn account and see who they are. It's-- the challenges are definitely a lot higher.**

**INTERVIEWER:**
**So it sounds like there's a whole other layer in addition to the investigation. There's a whole other layer of "sussing out" war zone risk.**

**INTERVIEWEE 03:**
**Exactly.**

**//**
**INTERVIEWER:**
**How often did it seem daunting?**

**INTERVIEWEE 03:**
**Some days it was worse than others, of course. When you-- like, when the Embassy was-- they tried to overrun the Embassy back in the-- I don't remember what year it was. But what-- we were at lunch. And then all of a sudden, you have several incoming. And then it-- it just-- it goes crazy. And-- so people-- a lot of people left.**

**I won't say from SIGAR, and I won't say from the Drug Enforcement Administration left, because they were-- they knew what they were getting into. But you have a lot of people from the State Department and such. And when that first round came in and they were-- had to go underground, then, all of a sudden, a lot of 'em wanted to go home.**

**And they wondered why they were there. So, yeah. Some days it's more daunting than others. // When we were driving, we were self-drive. And, we would drive down the streets. And, sometimes you would have a mob that would try to overrun you, and try to open your doors, and stuff like that.**

**I've had that happen on several occasions where-- and it wasn't the general public of the Afghans. O.K.? It wasn't them that were doing that. It was those that were instigating it, because they can tell that you were-- you were maybe not U.S. but you were coalition.***
[* part of the U.S.-led military coalition in Afghanistan]

**Because we all drove vehicles that were-- that they knew were coalition vehicles, whether they-- whether it belonged to ISAF or whether it belonged to the U.S. Embassy, or one of the other embassies. So they knew. And they would target those and come after you. So those were days when you-- when you got finished, you're like, "Tough day."**

**//**

**INTERVIEWER:**

**Can you tell me about some of the moments of challenge that you experienced while working for this agency, that really drove home the difficulties of working in a war zone, and this type of work?**

**INTERVIEWEE 03:**
**Challenges-- well, it always drove home any time that we would have an insurgent [attack] – whether it was a rocket fire, or whether it was an actual attack. So those always brought the challenges of being overseas, being in a war zone, and then just the sheer magnitude of making sure the people that work for you are safe.**

**INTERVIEWER:**
**How often did you experience rocket-fire attacks? How often did that happen to the people under your supervision?**

**INTERVIEWEE 03:**
**Over in Bagram [Air Base],* it was almost a regular occurrence that there would be-- they would just inadvertently fire a rocket to the headquarters there in Bagram. And for us, in Kabul, it wasn't as prone, because of-- I guess more patrols.**
[* 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]

**I'm not real-- I can't tell you why it wasn't, but when it did, it was usually significant, that they would try to hit in the compound. They would sometimes miss. Sometimes it would come in. So the-- just making sure that you were always safe, that your people were safe, that was a challenge. And, of course, as soon as one of those incidents happened, immediately, you're on the phone. You're-- everyone has to check in to make sure that they're good, you know, that they're not hurt.**
**//**
**INTERVIEWER:**
**And how many people under your supervision would be at Bagram?**
**//**
**INTERVIEWEE 03:**
**Bagram is the location that was-- where they had an airbase. So it was a military unit, or military coalition location. So it's Bagram Air Force Base, what it is.**
**//**
**I believe there was six that were assigned there, total. And it varied from time to time. We have investigators. You have intel analysts. So up to six.**
**//**
**INTERVIEWER:**
**And what was their experience like?**

**INTERVIEWEE 03:**
**They were all very experienced. They were like myself, in that they had-- already had a career in another agency, and then came to work for SIGAR. So they knew what they were doing. We just**

**needed to, again, make sure that they didn't do anything that wasn't safe. When I say safe, the best you could do in a war zone.**

**//**

**There was times we would have an area that we would-- that was supposed to be a safe zone, that we could walk from ISAF headquarters to one of the other bases, and get a different variety of food.**

**So we'd walk from one to the other. And we would meet some of the young kids that would be selling something they made, or their parents made, little trinkets. Did you need them? No. But did you buy 'em? Yeah. You bought them just because these are just precious little kids.**

**And-- but on several occasions, when they-- you'd have a suicide bomber come in and blow themselves up and kill these kids. I mean, you were just there. And you just saw these kids. You just bought something from 'em. And then-- now they're dead. [EMOTIONAL]**

**//**

**INTERVIEWER:**
**What's the most challenging experience that you endured during your work for this agency?**

**INTERVIEWEE 03:**
**In regards to the work?**

**INTERVIEWER:**
**Conducting oversight in a war zone.**

**INTERVIEWEE 03:**
**O.K.**

**INTERVIEWER:**
**What was the biggest challenge?**

**INTERVIEWEE 03:**
**Well, the biggest challenge is when all your people are not in the same office with you, and you know that there has been an attack on a location that you have people. One of your biggest challenges is making contact with them. Well, the person on the ground that's in the middle of an attack, their first reaction is not, "I need to call the supervisor and let him know I'm safe."**

**So those are challenges. And, you know, you have to work through those. You've got to have several channels to be able to contact that person, whether it's contact that person directly, or contact the military that's at that location, somebody there that can tell you the casualties, tell you what's taken place, so that it'll either put your mind at ease or elevate you to where you find out what's your next step.**

## SIGAR OVERSIGHT WORK: INVESTIGATIONS: FUEL THEFTS CASES

**INTERVIEWER:**
**Has there been a moment or moments when you found yourself thinking to yourself, "This is really good, what we've done here"?**

**INTERVIEWEE 03:**
**Yes. I can say there was a number of investigations that were done there that made a difference, that brought it to the foresight – all the way up to the White House, to let them know the sheer volume of the problem.**

**//**

**INTERVIEWER:**
**Was there one category that was of particular predominance in your oversight, for you personally?**

**INTERVIEWEE 03:**
**Well, the fuel thefts were huge, that took place in Afghanistan.**

**INTERVIEWER:**
**So just give me a little bit of background.**

**INTERVIEWEE 03:**
**O.K.**

**INTERVIEWER:**
**For those who don't know.**

**INTERVIEWEE 03:**
**O.K. // ISAF was the combined effort of all of the countries that were involved – military-wise – in Afghanistan. They came and they had built a coalition, which they called ISAF.**
**//**
**ISAF – the International Security Assistance Force – was-- had many bases throughout Afghanistan. And those bases relied on fuel being brought in to run the military equipment as well as the airplanes, and such like that. So all that was brought in.**

**Afghanistan didn't have its own repository that they could draw from. So it was coming in from outside of Afghanistan, through pipelines and also through trucks. The trucks, when they were brought in, they would, of course, make sure that they had the full amount of fuel on board.**

**And then they would come in, and deliver it. Oftentimes, we've found where they were siphoning off a lot of fuel from the trucks, before they got delivered. And that was of great concern, because the**

**U.S. taxpayer is paying for a full load of fuel. And yet we're not getting that delivered to the end customer, which was ISAF.**
**//**
**INTERVIEWER:**
**When you first went in-country, were you already aware of that situation? Or did that become known to you when you were in the job?**

**INTERVIEWEE 03:**
**I already had known that-- there had been some cases. But I was not aware of how rampant it was – the great, or the large amount of volume that was being stolen – until I got in-country.**
**//**
**It was greater than 10% – at the time that we were looking at it. And when you're looking at the large amount of fuel that was being brought into the country, and the amount that we were consuming, it's a staggering amount of fuel that was being taken.**

**The-- and we never knew the sheer volume of how much was actually being diverted, I would say. I would-- but the investigations were numerous-- with the contractors. Not only that. Then you would get into others where they were price-gouging the ISAF, where the contractors themselves would get together. And they're not supposed to, of course. But they would get together outside of Afghanistan and decide – who was going to get the bid, and who was going to be able to-- and what price you'd be able to charge.**

**INTERVIEWER:**
**Do you remember a moment at which the magnitude of this became clear to you? Maybe at a meeting where you all were hashing stuff out all together, you know, whether virtually or in-person. Do you remember a moment when it just kind of-- it impacted that, "This is the magnitude of this?"**

**INTERVIEWEE 03:**
**Sure. I remember we were just looking at independent cases. And then we started putting those together. because when we had several investigators who were working on independent cases. And when you started looking at it, being the ASAC [SIGAR Assistant Special Agent in Charge], you would see all of those cases.**

**And you would be able to start looking and going, "My goodness. We got a major problem here." So the SAC [SIGAR Special Agent in Charge] and the other ASAC all de-- we all got together, with the investigators and then started putting it all together. And it was like building blocks started coming together and built this wall.**
**//**
**We saw that we had a major problem. And then we were able to take that to the ISAF commanders and show them that there is a major problem that we're going to have to deal with. And we've got to deal with it together. We can't deal with it independently. You know, yeah, we can put-- we can try to find the drivers that are doing this and such like that.**

**But it's-- I take this much like my previous career when I was with the Drug Enforcement Administration, where you'd take off drug traffickers. Well, you're taking off one trafficker. You're not doing anything. You need to take off the whole supply chain. And that's what I would say this was much like.**
**//**
**The companies that were supplying the fuel were getting together and deciding on the fuel price, which was illegal. And, once that was brought to light, that was something that we're very proud of.**

**//**

**Other cases like the-- we had "ghost" Army, or "ghost" military people that we were paying their salaries, when how many millions of dollars were spent before that came to light? You have schools and such that supposedly were built, but yet you go out there and it's a vacant lot.**
**So those are all great investigations, showing that – the oversight works.**
**//**
**Sometimes [it] looked like we were picking on, like, the military or something. But it wasn't that. It was trying to protect the taxpayer dollars that were being spent overseas.**

**//**

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

**INTERVIEWER:**
**Given your experience, are there characteristics that someone like you brings to service at SIGAR that is particularly valuable? And are there characteristics that made you good at conducting oversight in a war zone, part of a team that this agency had conducting oversight in a war zone, that might not be the case had an individual not had your depth and breadth of experience and expertise?**

**INTERVIEWEE 03:**
**Yes. I would say when you first go into a war zone, you need to realize-- you need to take the advice of those that have already been there. You come in with preconceived notions and ideas. You think because there's nothing going on today, that that's always going to be, and that you-- that you're safe and you could do things, not knowing that they're-- your enemy is watching you.**

**Your enemy is trying to take all the advantages they can of your regular trips, and stuff like that, so they can use it against you, to try to either hurt you, kill you – or impact you. So same way with the investigations. The investigations that you would do stateside are different than what they are over there.**

**You can't just call somebody up and drive out there and meet them on a road somewhere, because they want to be anonymous. Those are-- those are things that'll get you killed. So an investigator coming over there that doesn't have that kind of experience of working in an area as dynamic as that just needs to be-- make sure that he has oversight. And that's where people like myself, people that had been there for a while could give.**

//

## SIGAR'S OVERSIGHT MODEL IN AFGHANISTAN

**I think the way SIGAR did it was-- should be a model, in that they took people that have already been in that environment for a while to-- so it's not – they're not waking up in a new area and can't-- and have to learn how to function. We just took our skill set and then applied it in-- with a different agency.**

**Which-- and I'm not talking about just for the Drug Enforcement Administration. There was people from U.S. Customs. There was a lot of good individuals that worked in the war zone – Homeland Security and such – that were brought over to SIGAR, that they took their model and just applied it. And it worked well.**

**INTERVIEWER:**
**And in your perspective, that was a deliberate strategy by this agency to do that?**

**INTERVIEWEE 03:**
**Yes. It was. [NAME:] Mr. Sopko*-- when I was still employed with the Drug Enforcement Administration, and the director of the Afghan Threat Finance Cell, when he would listen to these briefings, he would ask people if he was-- if he thought that they-- this [particular] person – had the right skill set to come work for him. So I say, yes, that it was definitely deliberate.**
[* former Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction, 2012-2025]

//

## CONFLICTS BETWEEN OVERSIGHT INVESTIGATIONS AND MILTARY/POLITICAL CONCERNS

**INTERVIEWER:**
**What advice would you give to somebody who might end up in the same-- in your shoes, doing that in a future war zone, that, you know, you came out of that experience, thinking, "Well, if I ever had the chance to tell a successor, I would"?**

**INTERVIEWEE 03:**
**You want to do the best job you can do. Being in investigations, you want to make sure that you get those people that you're investigating. But you can't put your people at risk. You-- there's a level of that you have to accept. But don't put them in in the environment that you are not sure they're going to come back. The investigation is not worth that.**

**So immediately once you arrive in country, assess your environment. Get with your military counterparts, if you're not already working with them directly. Make that contact. Let them know what you're doing. Let them know the type of investigation you're doing, how it's going to help them, as well.**

//

**Those investigations, you're taking money off the battlefield. When you take money off the battlefield that's paying for the salaries of the insurgent, paying for the weapons, paying for the bullets, when you take that off, and you decrease the amount that's going to be out there against that military force, they see the benefit of it. Not that they won't help you. I'm just saying, if you-- it's a mutually beneficial area that we can help each other.**

**INTERVIEWER:**
**Do you think that that, you know, typically has happened in going back through time? Has there been that level of cooperation and cross awareness? Or has there not been?**

**INTERVIEWEE 03:**
**Yes and no. Yes, there's been cooperation back and forth. The military definitely wants to make sure that you're safe. They don't want to see anybody killed, you know? I don't-- you know, they may have acceptable losses. We don't. So-- but with what I saw with the poppy being grown and such, and they didn't go after the poppy, even though it was growing around their base, to me was a challenge.**

**Because they didn't see the value in what we were trying to deliver to them. They didn't see that as dollars going against buying weapons, buying other insurgents, paying their salaries, paying the-- that type of items out there that goes against them, that would-- them trying to kill them. So with that being said, yes, there was great cooperation. But sometimes it took-- it takes a little more effort to get them to realize why you're trying to help them.**

**INTERVIEWER:**
**So when there was a meeting of the minds about how the growing of poppies could affect conditions on the battlefield, did they make a different decision? Or did they continue with the policy of not?**

**INTERVIEWEE 03:**
**We got them to change the policy in some regards. When they would stop a car that they thought was-- had insurgents in it, they would stop, and they would check them. And if they found a large amount of money in the vehicle, they wouldn't take it.**

**So when we started to show them why we need to take that money, why we need to let them go through the legal process with the Afghan government to try to get it back, then they saw the-- they saw the benefit of that. So those were some challenges we did get wins on. The win of the marijuana and the poppy being grown in such large volumes, we did not.**

**We got-- we got some wins later on when we could show that the labs that were-- the labs that produce the heroin were there in Afghanistan. And we could point them out to them. And that they would target those. They would see the value in that. But-- so there was small wins. And we took 'em.**

//

**Working in a war zone and trying to do the best job you can do to try to make sure that the investigations were completed, or could proceed, it became very difficult sometimes when you're working with the military leadership, and the U.S. leadership.**
**//**
**Because they're looking at it from one level of-- level plane. I'm looking at it at another. I'm trying to get an investigation done. They're looking at it on: what impact is that going to have to my relationship with the Afghan government?**

**And so we had a lot of butting of heads – not only with SIGAR, but with DEA – where we would just tell them absolutely, "What you're doing is wrong. And-- you're impeding a good investigation." Or they would tell us we can't do the investigation.**

**INTERVIEWER:**
**What would you do when that happened?**

**INTERVIEWEE 03:**
**We would do the investigation. Sometimes it was very tough, in that it would be after-- it would look at a politically exposed person. And so with the ambassador or with the military – generals, who had direct connection with the Afghan government – they didn't want that to proceed because of, if it goes against them, against that politically exposed person, then that's going to hurt their relationship with their counterparts.**

**When I said we did it anyway, I'll just say on occasion we would. It depends on the circumstance. It depends on where we were in the investigation. Sometimes if the management decided it wasn't worth // what we were going to have to endure, then we might not. But those were some of the hardest times, because you knew what needed to be done. But you were prohibited from doing it.**
**//**
**It didn't happen very often. The times that it did happen were when we were looking at financial targets that had made millions of dollars from the U.S. government. And those usually had connection all the way to the palace in Afghanistan.**
**//**
**INTERVIEWER:**
**How frustrating was that for you?**

**INTERVIEWEE 03:**
**Very frustrating-- // It was very frustrating for me because of the fact that I knew that we could get 'em. I knew that we could bring them to justice, in that either getting them sanctioned by the U.S. government, or getting them judicially prosecuted in Afghanistan. We did have successes in Afghanistan, in the judicial system. Sometimes they went in the door, and they received their sentence, and we'd check on them down the road, and they were let out. But we can't fight that battle. Alls we can do is the best we can do to get them at least prosecuted.**

**INTERVIEWER:**

**Sounds like that's another challenge for conducting oversight in a war zone: being at cross purposes – law enforcement, being at cross purposes – with government policy and politics.**

**INTERVIEWEE 03:**
**Correct. Very much so. // The challenge that you run across in a war zone is, there is-- you're looking at it from I'll just say "worker bee" [perspective]. because we're doing investigation. We're going-- we're doing what we're mandated to do. We're looking at trying to take this person off the battlefield, or take this person out of the equation where they're not stealing U.S. dollars, U.S. government dollars, or coalition dollars.**

**Those persons, if they're connected to anybody in the government, in the war zone government, then that creates a challenge because now those that you're dealing with in the U.S. or coalition side is going to express-- or going to come down on you, and ask you, first of all, "What's the investigation? Give it to me-- everything you've got – right today. And tell me where you're going to proceed. And then I'll tell you whether you can proceed or not."**

**That was a challenge. And that to me was something that would tear your heart out, if you've put your-- all these man-hours in, and the investigators worked so hard, and then you have to go back and tell them that, "Well we're not proceeding with that one."**

**INTERVIEWER:**
**And you had to do that.**

**INTERVIEWEE 03:**
**We've had to do that.**

**INTERVIEWER:**
**And when you did that, how did you feel? And how did the investigators feel?**

**INTERVIEWEE 03:**
**I felt the same way the investigator did, that we had been cheated. We had been sold out from an investigation that would've been beneficial to the overall effort. But being shortsighted – when I say "shortsighted," the military person that I would be talking to, or the U.S. government official I was talking to, was shortsighted in trying to protect somebody they shouldn't be protecting.**
**//**
**[NAME:] Ambassador Kaidanow* was somebody that shut down several investigations, due to political-- the person that was involved in the investigation was someone that she was dealing with on-- through the [Afghanistan] presidential palace. She would-- it wasn't my invest-- this one was not my investigation.**
[*the late Tina Kaidanow, Deputy Ambassador at the U.S. Embassy in Kabul 2012-2013]

**It-- [NAME] was the regional coordinator, the director – country director – at the time. And he had direct access to it, as well as [NAME:] Craig Wiles* So it was more their investigation. I know about it. And it affected us in that it was trying to shut down direct investigations we had with the Drug**

**Enforcement Administration and also with the unit that I was director over, the Afghan Threat Finance Cell.**
[* Then-DEA Assistant Regional Director; later SIGAR Forward Operations Director/Investigative Agent – see SIGAR OHP Interview 02]

**They would want those politically exposed persons not to be investigated. And that was a challenge, and that was very, very tough. Because we had the information to take those people down. And we weren't allowed to proceed with it.**

**INTERVIEWER:**
**It sounds like it goes with the territory, whether we're talking about DEA or this agency, SIGAR.**

**INTERVIEWEE 03:**
**Absolutely. When you're in that environment, the [U.S.] Embassy personnel – which, when I say that, I'm talking about the Ambassador, or the ISAF personnel, being the general – their relationship with their counterpart government is paramount to them.**

**They want to succeed in that. And-- so I guess for them it would be just a minor inconvenience if they'd stopped that investigation. To us, it was major, because we saw what cont-- what it would do down the road.**

**I mean, these people making this kind of money, they didn't just take this money and hide it under their blanket. They put in banks. They made ties to the insurgency, because they all had to make that-- make that money-- that charitable contribution. And so that equated to more bullets, more RPGs, more mines, improvised explosive devices – paying more fighters.**

**We saw that. We saw that on our level. Why they couldn't see that on their level-- or they-- maybe they-- I know they saw it. I know they knew that it was happening. But why they could make that determination that it wasn't as beneficial as we thought it was, was tough.**

**//**

## WHAT DID SIGAR ACCOMPLISH IN AFGHANISTAN?

**INTERVIEWER:**
**What do you wish, Tim, that the public could better understand about the work of this agency?**

**INTERVIEWEE 03:**
**A lot of people have a preconceived notion that when you talk about the Special Inspector General-- Special Inspector General, any time you bring that up, they get guarded. But that is not the mission of SIGAR. SIGAR is not going trying to hurt people.**

**They're trying to see: how can we do something to benefit the holistic of government? Whether it's the USAID, as they were working in Afghanistan, trying to do their mission, and how they were failing, but yet: how can we help them to succeed?**

**So our investigations would pinpoint where they were failing, but if you look on the other side, you take those lessons of how they failed, and then they can-- you can extrapolate out: how can we succeed? So I think that those are lessons that should be taken across the board when you look at SIGAR's mission, and what we've done in Afghanistan, as a whole.**

**INTERVIEWER:**
**Bottom line, overall, what have you learned in this job?**

**INTERVIEWEE 03:**
**The experience working with SIGAR was a privilege – because when you look at the amount of money that was spent in Afghanistan by the-- not only the United States, but the coalition, if it wasn't for SIGAR, a lot of those would not have been-- a lot of those problems-- in the investigations we did, a lot of those expenditures that were-- that were spent that shouldn't have been spent, a lot of the people that benefited from that money-- would not have been identified.**

**So, with that being said, SIGAR-- the mission of SIGAR was something that had to take place.**
**//**
**This isn't – probably isn't – the only war we're ever going to be involved in. So we need to take these lessons and apply them forward, and not take each one on an independent basis, and each one we learn lessons that we should've already known.**

**//**

**INTERVIEWER:**
**Why did you choose to stay in Afghanistan after your time with your previous employer was over?**

**INTERVIEWEE 03:**
**When I left the Drug Enforcement Administration, and returned back stateside, and had the opportunity to go back to work, with the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction, I accepted that knowing I was going back to Afghanistan, because I believed in the mission, not only of SIGAR, but of DEA, what we had accomplished while in country.**
**//**
**I believed that we were making a difference. I believed that things were getting better for the people in Afghanistan. I made a lot of friends there, that risked a lot to be a friend of mine, or to be somebody that worked with us, whether it was the Afghan military, whether it was the Afghan police, or in their judicial system. There was a lot of professional people that risked a lot more than we did to be able to try to save their country.**
**//**

**I made a lot of friends while I was in Afghanistan. I made a lot of friends who were professionals, whether they were in the banking industry, whether in the judicial industry, whether they were law enforcement, or whether they were military, that I felt like I still owed them something.**

**Because they sacrificed more than what I had sacrificed, to help me, while I was there working. So I felt an obligation to continue to try to help them to try to save their country, to try to get them to where they were self-governing, and we were able to leave on good terms.**
**//**
**I felt that we were doing good while we were-- what we-- our mission was in Afghanistan. You saw that there were – people were happy again, walking on the streets. There was-- the women were being educated. They weren't second-class citizens. They were able to be elected in office.**

**They were-- you could see that the rise of the people. The young people were – we were seeing – motivated. They seemed to want to do better for the country. So I felt an obligation to help continue that.**

**//**

**INTERVIEWER:**
**What did you feel that you got to accomplish during your time at SIGAR in Afghanistan?**

**INTERVIEWEE 03:**
**I would say that I probably didn't accomplish anything. The investigators under me accomplished a great deal. I was just managing them. They did the work. They were the ones that were tenacious about doing these interviews, about getting what was being stolen, and identifying it, identifying the individuals. So they're the ones that would be getting the credit, for that work. I was able to manage them. I was able to make sure they were safe. And I was able to make sure they got home.**

**//**

## WHAT ARE YOUR OWN LESSONS LEARNED?

**INTERVIEWER:**
**What have you learned about Afghanistan?**
**//**
**INTERVIEWEE 03:**
**There's a lot of good people there. They are guarded in a lot of ways in that they've seen empires come and go. And they see regimes come and go.**

**And a lot of them [empires and regimes] just benefit themselves. They don't benefit the Afghan people.**

**So the Afghan people always feel like they're on their own, that they have to do it by themselves. Their tribe has to do it by themselves. Their village has to do it by themselves. They don't depend on anybody else.**

**So I don't think that's changed any. I think that's-- it's probably become more entrenched now than it was. It was starting to change a little bit. But I think it's going back to that entrenchment. The underground *hawala* system is probably going to just expand, so tracing money for the insurgency, or-- tracing money is more difficult when it goes underground.**

**So, in that respect, it's going to be harder in the future to do investigations on Afghanistan. But I think the Afghan people are resilient. And they're very strong. And they'll come through this. And hopefully not with the Taliban as their leaders.**

**//**

**INTERVIEWER:**
**What have you learned through your job about SIGAR and conducting oversight in a war zone?**

**INTERVIEWEE 03:**
**The oversight has to take place. So, in a war zone, it makes it more challenging, of course. But just as it is domestically, you have oversight domestically on the military, domestically on federal spending. When you put that in a foreign environment, in a war zone, the challenges just grow exponentially.**

**But it's something that has to take place. We have to be able to monitor how our money's being spent, how our-- everything that we put out there, whether it's vehicles, whether it's weapons, are they accounted for? Can we bring them back? You know, those are huge challenges in a war zone. But it's something that has to be done. You know, if you go in and you lose all these items, and now they belong to the opposition, now what have you done?**

**//**

## AFTER U.S. WITHDRAWAL / AUGUST 2021

**INTERVIEWER:**
**So August 2021, things changed. How did that affect your perspective?**

**INTERVIEWEE 03:**
**It affected me that there was decisions made, and I'll just say it, politically, that I wouldn't-- I may have disagreed with. There was a lot of good that was done. There was a lot of things that we can take pride in. There was a lot of lives lost, both from our military, our service members that were there that were not only killed, but some were maimed. And they have to live with that – their whole life.**

**So, with that being said, there was a lot of good that was done. The way we left there, I tell you, it hurt me greatly. Because there was a lot of people left that didn't need to be left. [EMOTIONAL]**
**//**
**We made the wrong decision of leaving them. I think we were there for the right reason. And I think that what we did – with our agency, with SIGAR and with DEA – was something that-- that I will always cherish.**
**//**
**There was a lot of people we worked with that risked everything. They came because they believed in Afghanistan. And they believed that we, as representatives of the United States, would do the right thing for them.**

**That being, support them in their endeavor to try to prosecute, try to arrest, or take out those that were inflicting such pain on Afghanistan. Those people worked with us. And we became friends with them. And then, when we left so abruptly, they were left in the lurch.**

**They-- some of them, I have never been able to contact again. Some of them have made their way out, whether it was six months down the road, or whether it's been longer than that to get out. Some of them that got on the original flights out, probably shouldn't have even come out, you know? They weren't the ones that really helped us.**

**I'm not—again, I'm not saying all of 'em. But there was a lot of them – that we saw – that weren't real well-vetted when they came out. And they were actually part of the insurgency. So the ones that we knew, the ones that we trusted, the ones that we risked our lives with, the ones that took care of us, a lot of those were left behind. And some of them, we've-- we've never heard from again.**

**INTERVIEWER:**
**And that weighs heavily on you?**

**INTERVIEWEE 03:**
**It does. // They were very close to you. When you-- when you drive down a road and people try to pull you out of the car, or just shoot at you – for no reason-- I mean, I say "no reason." They don't like Americans. Or other ways in which they're trying to kill you, the improvised explosives and such like that, those are things that you-- you'd get a special bond with those people, you know?**

**Because they're there for you. And you're there for them. You're trying to protect them, trying to protect their families. And they're protecting me, which is protecting my family, even though my family is not there. So, yeah. You become very, very close with those people.**

**And-- so when you just leave 'em, and then all of a sudden there's no contact, you can't-- I mean, all of your other sources that you try to get a hold of-- to get a hold of 'em, and you can't. Yeah. That-- that gets emotional. It-- it tears your gut out. [EMOTIONAL]**

**INTERVIEWER:**
**What's the lesson?**

**INTERVIEWEE 03:**
**What's the lesson? I wouldn't-- I wouldn't change it. I mean, I'd still want those people – as my friends. So the—you've just got to live through it. That's all.**

**There's no lesson. I mean, the lesson-- the lesson would be: don't leave 'em behind. Make sure-- make sure they have a way out.**

**###**