SIGAR | SPECIAL INSPECTOR GENERAL FOR AFGHANISTAN RECONSTRUCTION

SIGAR Oral History Project (OHP)

Interview 13: Edited Transcript

Interview Date: 07/20/23

NAME/TITLE

INTERVIEWEE 13:
My name is [NAME]. // I am currently the Assistant Inspector General for Investigations.

//

JOB DESCRIPTION

INTERVIEWER:
What essentially is your job under that title?

INTERVIEWEE 13:
Well, I am responsible, on behalf of the inspector general of SIGAR, for all the investigations conducted – both criminal and civil investigations – on behalf of the agency. I interact with all the partners – the prosecutors, and the various teams of special agents who are engaged in the activity of criminal investigations and civil investigations.
//
It adds up to-- every organization, in particular in law enforcement organizations, there has to be a manager, a leader who is responsible for overseeing the proper conduct of investigations, ensuring that the proper policies are followed.

And there's policies galore, from the [U.S.] Department of Justice. We follow all of the laws. We follow all the internal policies of SIGAR. And I have the responsibility of ensuring that that is conducted on a regular basis, and that our investigations have the integrity and the eventual proof of being able to stand up in a court of law in the United States.
//
INTERVIEWER:
How long have you been in this role at this agency?

INTERVIEWEE 13:
I've been in this role for about 10 and a half years. It's kind of shocking to me, but, for that period of time. I came here from-- I had worked for a contractor before that for several years. And prior to that,

I [was a] retired FBI agent. Was serving as the Special Agent in Charge of the Minneapolis Field Office for the FBI at the time I retired.

//

CAREER HISTORY

INTERVIEWER:
Tell me a little bit about your trajectory – from what you first studied, to your career in law enforcement, and then how you came to this job.

INTERVIEWEE 13:
Following high school, where I was very active in sports and the like, and I had an opportunity to meet a special agent of the FBI. I was committed at that point that that seemed to me to be the ideal job, my dream job, and one I never lost sight of.

I went from graduation of high school, to college. I graduated from the University of Illinois. And I had studied an area of management that was dealing with, at the time, complicated systems were the requirement –-submarines and the like.

And my field of study was ensuring that all those pieces came together in a timely way. So it was a large organizational management task. And I graduated with a science degree. // I went on to graduate school. I attended graduate school for management at DePaul University in Chicago.

I went on, and had one course remaining when the FBI invited me to a New Agents Class. And I left my education and went to Quantico, Virginia in 1976 and became a special agent, with the FBI. My first office of assignment was the Cleveland Division, where I just worked general criminal matters.

And-- from that moment on, I had a full career, 25 years in the FBI, serving in a variety of field offices, both domestic and international. And, from there, retired to move onto the business world. And then I got a call to come join SIGAR, which I really didn't even know what SIGAR was at the time.

But I found that what I was expected to continue doing was very similar to what I had done in the FBI, and for a leader that I knew from my FBI days as well. So [NAME] John Sopko* was the IG. He invited me to come serve as his assistant and to head up the investigations for SIGAR.
[* John Sopko, former Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction, 2012-2025]

INTERVIEWER:
So a minute ago when you were talking about getting the call to go on the track to become a field agent with the FBI, you kind of lit up a little bit. So you said that was your dream job. And my first question about that is why was it your dream job? What was it that appealed to you?

INTERVIEWEE 13:

It again had a lot to do with the first person that I really noticed, who was a special agent. And that person spoke with authority. He had a sense of integrity. And people that were in my circle of friends respected the FBI and had a great admiration for the work that they did, that they were in there helping people.

And I always had that belief. From my college days, the term of-- the fact that unions and others were attempting to sometimes intimidate people, I thought that a role in a job in law enforcement was something I was well-suited for. So, I sought that. And I thought, "Why not the best?" And I targeted the FBI as being that, again, that dream job.

//

INTERVIEWER:
What are some of the accomplishments that you brought to this agency from that previous career?

INTERVIEWEE 13:
Well, my field office experience in Cleveland, where I had met the inspector general, [NAME] John Sopko*, John was working for the Strike Force, which was a group of dedicated prosecutors who were looking at traditional Cosa Nostra*** crime. And I was serving on the organized crime squad, in Cleveland.**
[* John Sopko, former Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction, 2012-2025]
[** formally and formerly, U.S. Organized Crime Strike Force program]
[*** *La Cosa Nostra*, criminal "Mafia" organization]

And I was assigned to the Teamsters union.* There was a great deal of corruption and criminality-- dealing with the various Teamster officials that were part of the Cleveland scene. In fact, Cleveland at the time was considered the bombing capital of the world because of the way that justice was served within the Teamsters union.
[* International Brotherhood of Teamsters labor union, aka "the Teamsters"]

So my cases began with the president of a [Teamsters] local [union]. It was the beer drivers' union. [NAME:] [John J.] "Skippy" Felice was his name. He had ran several different Teamsters unions, different locals. And he had quite a stranglehold on the businesses that he-- his people were serving, as well as on the organized crime groups that were within Cleveland that were profiting from a variety of illegal scams, be it gambling or prostitution.

At that time as well, Las Vegas was serving up huge pots of money to various crime families throughout the United States. And Cleveland had a bit of that action. And, not surprisingly, the Teamsters were likewise engaged and involved in those activities as well.

So my beginning, the way I made my bones in the FBI was through organized crime investigations. And I had a number of successful investigations which resulted in prosecutions and persons going to jail for some five years, some for a lifetime.

In the course of those investigations, I also had the opportunity to investigate one of the major organized crime cases of Cleveland's history, which [NAME:] Mr. Sopko again was the chief prosecutor. And I testified for him, on a number of issues involving that case.

[NAME:] Mr. Sopko eventually got a successful prosecution from that. And from that experience, I moved onto FBI Headquarters. In the course of my service in Cleveland, I had a number of various responsibilities. Not only my casework and investigating organized crime, but also I was a technical agent who was involved in a variety of activities, to include providing microphones, court-authorized wiretaps and the like.

And that was a part of my job which I thoroughly enjoyed. For one way, getting it over the wise guys – the organized crime people – being able to develop evidence that would serve in court, through various technical ways. I also worked a number of kidnapping cases.

So my entire experience in Cleveland was extremely exciting. Very rewarding from a professional standpoint. And I'll always remember it. Many books have been written of some of those cases, which I have a good collection of. And I've enjoyed that work, immensely.
//
I had other experiences as well. When I left Cleveland, I immediately went to the Organized Crime section at FBI Headquarters. I was engaged in the Organized Crime Information System. It was at a time where, again, technology was just coming into its fullness.

And it was a program dedicated to memorializing the various organized crime chieftains and individuals, and collecting information about their pedigrees, as well as their partners, their friends, their criminal activity, their criminal histories.

And it was a ground-up, building of a system that would provide future FBI agents and other law enforcement individuals an opportunity to see, firsthand, what these individuals were involved in. And it also helped to identify movement of organized crime people, where you had the wherewithal to make inquiries over a computerized system of a person, and you could do it through a description, and their personal information was contained in that system.

And they could come up with a potential candidate of who may have traveled from Cleveland to Chicago or-- and had been engaged and involved in a crime.

So that job lasted a couple [of] years. And I was invited back to the Cleveland Division, by the then Special Agent in Charge. His name was [NAME] Joe Griffin. And he asked me to head up the Toledo office of the FBI. Was about 20 FBI agents that served there, as well as a smaller office in Sandusky [Ohio] and Lyme, Ohio.

And I went back and oversaw that operation, for a period of about four years. And then I had an enviable position of being sent to London, England, where I served for five years as the American representative of the FBI, and dealt and interacted with MI5*, MI6, as well as New Scotland Yard.*** Clearly, the pinnacle of my career.**

[* United Kingdom's Military Intelligence, Section 5, aka "the Security Service," domestic counter-intelligence and security agency]
[** United Kingdom's Military Intelligence, Section 6, aka "the Secret Intelligence Service," foreign intelligence service]
[*** official name of the headquarters of the United Kingdom's Metropolitan Police territorial police force]

I had four children at the time. Able to bring my daughter to meet royalty. Met the Queen myself. But the types of cases that I was engaged in were, again, unique and one of a kind, where law enforcement from throughout the U.K. would come to me, as the FBI representative, and provide information on fugitives as well as on crimes, local crimes, that the FBI may have had some information or knowledge about.

//
I moved from there to the Assistant Special Agent in Charge in Dallas, Texas.
//
And I was responsible for white-collar crime and all of the fraud that was occurring. And the timing of that was such that there were a number of bank failures resulting from land flips and bad mortgages. Money was being loaned, hand over fist.

And a number of times, it was through criminal activity that-- where the bankers were just engaged in these frauds in order to build up their business, their reputation, and then try and move on. And one of the ways they did that was a land flip, that they would sell a parcel of land for building – sell it for 20, sell it to a friend for 40, and until you would have the property worth millions of dollars, and banks assuming loans for this property that had nothing near that value.

So a number of bank failures – resulting in a special task force. We had over 100 agents that were working with prosecutors-- that were set up from the Department of Justice, just to investigate the bank failures. And that was a big part of my responsibility, along with other-- white-collar crime is the category that that all fell within.
//
That "savings and loan crisis" had a tremendous impact on the whole of the economy. But it was most dearly felt in the Texas area there.

//

I was asked to again come back to FBI Headquarters and become the program manager for a technology project, which was unheard of at the time, where we were electrifying fingerprints and finding an automated way of fingerprint detection.

And that project had been ongoing at the FBI, with considerable failure and a lot of money spent, and an unhappy Congress. When I arrived, the project was spending about $300,000 a day, with contractor support, and a marching army that was really headed nowhere.

They had not even resolved how the-- what the solution towards this automated fingerprint system would be. And it was, again, right at a time where automated fingerprint technology was just coming into its own. So I took over that project.

Within months, [I] was named the assistant-- deputy assistant director, and was overseeing the project for five years, until its eventual success. And that system, which is still in place at the FBI, picked up on every law enforcement office in the United States.

And that was-- people would scratch their heads at how we're going to do that. My approach to all this was, I wasn't a technology expert in fingerprints, but I knew enough about management, and again from my education, as well as managing people in the FBI – in a limited way – but I knew how to deal with people, make people responsible.

And I knew also how to deal with the contractors. We eventually had a three-way game of seeing who could come up with the technology the quickest, and the most comprehensive way. And we paid a substantial amount of money just to-- for people to participate in that raffle, if you will.

And we identified a company. And, as I said, within five years, had the system built. The change in law enforcement as a result of being able to use that technology and really benefit from the time savings--

There was a time, when I first came into that project, where an office would send in a fingerprint card. They would send in one card to the state central authority. They'd send one to the FBI. And it may take the FBI at that time 60 days to turn around a fingerprint card. And if you consider what the result of that might be, if somebody is a wanted fugitive, and you turn that card over in 60 days, the trail's cold. Where you may have had an opportunity to put hands on somebody and arrest them for a crime, that opportunity was gone.

By the time IAFIS – as it was referred to, the Integrated Automated Fingerprint Identification System – by the time that was online, we did that in less than 30 minutes.

And the significant advantage to law enforcement of being able to check fingerprints remotely through an electronic means of capture, and then have them go through a database of some 32 million records in the course of 30 minutes, was unheard of.

And part of my responsibility also was to interje-- introduce the standards of fingerprint technology internationally, and get everybody playing off the same way of developing this information, so it could be at some point in time an international system.

Towards that end, I had a number of meetings with the international community. We created a three-country, expert working group – U.K., Australia, and the United States. And the standards that we drove into the process at that time now enabled that international exchange of information.

INTERVIEWER:
Is it fair to say that you were responsible for basically landing that project?

INTERVIEWEE 13:
I was.

INTERVIEWER:
That's a big deal.

INTERVIEWEE 13:
I got a presidential award for it, which included cash at the time, which was unheard of. We're talking the '90s. Today, it's incentive of-- you know, within its own organization. The money's used towards incentivizing individuals. But back then, it was unheard of. That was, like, $25,000. It was a big deal.

INTERVIEWER:
Have you gotten recognition for that in, you know, the histories of the FBI? Do you get credit for that?

INTERVIEWEE 13:
No. No. No. You went unnamed in the FBI. And I was perfectly content with that. I had the thrill of you know, receiving the award. And that was plenty of recognition at the time. But, you know, there's so many people that are a part of that success.

I was part of overseeing it. And I was part of pushing it. I was-- there were so many scientists and people that I depended on for information. I ran a daily "standup" – as I called it – at 7:00 in the morning, and to identify, you know, the kinds of problems that we were encountering.

And getting over those hurdles was monumental, every day. Every day. And there was something else that was going to cost money, or Congress was unhappy with.

My proudest day in that job was-- the Congress was very unhappy because the cost-- the costs kept getting driven up. And the way they determined the costs of what this project should be was just a complete swag. It was, somebody said, "Well, let's say it'll cost $300 million." And they put it out there because, "Well, it's going to be five years or 10 years before it's developed. But let's get some figure that we'll work at."

And that figure changed from $300 million to $400 million. And when it was changing, Congress was very unhappy. This was at a time where there were several of these huge projects. One was dealing with air controllers and they were trying to develop a new technology for that, and also for the IRS in handling taxes.

And then the third big project was the FBI's with the fingerprint and the fingerprint technology. So when I had told them, you know, a cost increase – they all went bananas. And they decided they were going to punish the FBI for having a cost overrun.

And they took away I think it was $10 million from the project. And that was going to teach us a lesson how to get straight with doing this. And I had a one-on-one with Senator Byrd* from West

Virginia, who was kind of the person that oversaw the FBI getting this money and developing this technology in West Virginia, his home state.
[* the late U.S. Senator Robert Byrd (D-WV)]

And he was kind of shepherding the whole thing. And I went and had a one-on-one meeting with him, and convinced him to restore the money and to give it back to the FBI. So I figured I earned, like, a $10 million check that day. So it was very rewarding to me that he could see we were on a path toward success.

//

I left that job with IAFIS*, and moved onto the Special Agent in Charge, which was my goal of my whole career, of wanting to have my own command, my own office, with responsibility for the FBI. And that ended up in Minnesota, with three states. I had the Dakotas as well as Minnesota, and served there for about two years, a little over two years, and ended my career then, with the FBI, in Minnesota.
[* FBI's Integrated Automated Fingerprint Identification System]

INTERVIEWER:
And were you ready for your FBI career to end when it did?

INTERVIEWEE 13:
Absolutely not. I would've worked that day, every day for the rest of my life, in the FBI. But it was a time where we had, as I said, four kids. And two of them were in college. And my wife smartly told me, several times, [NAME:] "Doug, do the math here."

And it was time for me to leave. So I didn't leave the first day I was eligible. I spent a couple more years. And then I decided it was time to make the move. And I still live it vicariously. I have two boys that are FBI agents. And-- one serves in Boston. One serves here in the Washington area. So I still get my fill of FBI stories and tradition and success. So it-- I'm satisfied that way.

INTERVIEWER:
Was there law enforcement in the generation previous to yours in your family?

INTERVIEWEE 13:
There was not, no. The-- my dad served in the military, but no law enforcement.

//

When I transitioned from the FBI to the business world, I was assigned to matters dealing with law enforcement and had an international role with handling law enforcement problems in Canada, as well as in the U.K.

When various bids for work from the Metropolitan Police* would appear, I was tasked with going and attempting to describe what that contract was all about, if the company I was with had the wherewithal to deal with all the technology issues, as well as the subject-matter experts and the like, and provide some counsel in terms of, "Is this the type of project that this company should go after? And give us your opinion--" again, based on my experiences during my career with the FBI.
[*** United Kingdom's Metropolitan Police territorial police force, based in London]

//
I went to work for a contractor. I did that for a number of years. And then got a call one day from [NAME:] John Sopko, the inspector general. And [NAME:] John said to me on the phone, "I'm putting the band back together."
[* John Sopko, former Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction, 2012-2025]

And explained that he had been appointed by the President* to the position at SIGAR as Inspector General, and said that he was looking for an individual to assist with investigations of the work that SIGAR was engaged in. And, quite honestly, I jumped – due in large part to my respect for [NAME:] Mr. Sopko, as well as this type of work, the camaraderie of this type of work, and – anxious to get back into, at least rubbing shoulders with law enforcement in a meaningful way, still carrying a badge.
[* President Barack Obama in 2012]

//

I took on the challenges of law enforcement in being a part of a solution again. That was the reason that I was anxious to sign up.

//

SIGAR TRAVEL TO AFGHANISTAN

When I took the job, I anticipated that I would be traveling to Afghanistan. I had no idea how often, but I expected that, soon after I arrived in SIGAR in Washington, that there'd be an occasion to visit Afghanistan, in order to see what the operation looked like and to meet the people that were part of the investigations effort in Afghanistan.

And the IG* invited me to travel with him. So after joining on-- in December [2012] and becoming a sworn-in member of the SIGAR team in January [2013], I was off to Afghanistan, on my first trip. I made, on average, while the war was still going on, three to four trips a year.
[* John Sopko, former Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction, 2012-2025]

//

In the course of my work, while Afghanistan was a viable place for the United States to be, I traveled there approximately 25 times.

//

And I had a team over there that, when I first arrived, was in the-- it's 25 – including analysts, and special agents. And by the time the operation ended and the United States departed, we had a very small crew of four to five agents that were still assigned there.

So my travels as I went over to Afghanistan, I-- it was a learning experience. Every single trip was a learning experience. And I had an opportunity to learn about the country, but also learn about the people that were not only the heads and the leadership of Afghanistan, but also the day-to-day people that were a part of the town.

When I first arrived in Kabul, driving through the city was permitted. Traveling to the airport was done by taxi or by car. And it just was not as vicious a place as it later became, when travel was limited to helicopters or limited to having a group of soldiers actually protecting you, or security officers, protecting you wherever you went outside of the safe zone.

That really didn't have an impact other than limiting what we could do – "we" being SIGAR investigators, on-the-ground. While we had the ability to travel and move freely, we had the opportunity to develop informants, which was key to the success of the work that we were going to do.

//

CONDUCTING INVESTIGATIONS IN A WAR ZONE: AFGHANISTAN

INTERVIEWER:
Conducting this kind of work in a war zone, how challenging and difficult is it, and why?

INTERVIEWEE 13:
The work to be conducted, that we conducted within Afghanistan, posed a number of obstacles as well as issues, dangerous circumstances that we wouldn't want our agents to be involved in – be that from a bombing, be that from terrorism that's going on, the kidnappings that go on in the country.

So, the number one challenge is certainly the safety of the investigators. Nonetheless, they're very anxious and willing to leave the fence, get outside the barrier of the Embassy, to conduct criminal investigations.

//

We had a responsibility to interact with our law enforcement partners, who were assigned at the [U.S.] Embassy. And we also had the responsibility of interacting with the military. And the number of criminal violations that were identified, and under day-to-day work, were considerable.

The docket was fairly large, dealing in the main with those areas charged with fraud, waste, and abuse – and corruption being a big part of that fraud and waste. So the number of cases that we had presented a problem from the standpoint of just having enough agents to attend to them.

So the work was overwhelming. But in addition to that, the prosecution of the work was likewise frustrating. We had – "we" being the United States – entered into agreements where it was an "Afghan First" [policy] [to] select their [Afghanistan] vendors before the United States vendors, which didn't permit us the latitude of prosecutions – later, at the end of the trail.

So if we were to investigate a crime that was committed by Afghans, out of an Afghan company with no association or nexus to the United States, at the end of that investigation, there was nowhere to bring it and to charge it. We were frustrated by that.

I certainly was frustrated by that. And we decided, at that point in time, to provide the details of those investigations to our Afghan counterparts, in the prosecution office in Afghanistan, to see if justice could be served through their courts.

That met with a modicum of success. But it enabled us to at least, after we had the fruits of our investigation, give that to someone who had the authority to move forward if that was their choice, and ensure that justice was served.

The individuals that SIGAR charged in Afghanistan with the United States nexus, a much different story. And we had the ability to conduct our investigation in Afghanistan, charge it in the United States, and it would be prosecuted from either Washington, D.C. or from a venue that made sense to the particular crime and person that we were charging.

So from again the standpoint of the ongoing war, it kept us from being as successful as things started to close in. And as restrictions were put forward of not allowing us to travel off the Embassy grounds, and not allowing people to come into the Embassy who we wanted to interview, it had a chilling effect on-- [it being] as productive an investigation that we could be.

And, very frustrating to me. Frustrating to the agents that were over there. But you do the best that you can do. And we continued in that way, as things became even tighter and more controlled as to what we could do. It limited us, though. And that was my greatest frustration.

//

INTERVIEWER:
So you've mentioned doing criminal investigation work and having nowhere to place it for prosecution. That was probably the first time you'd experienced that in your career, correct?

INTERVIEWEE 13:
Without question. And that was-- I had to do something. I had to tell somebody about an individual who may have committed a crime or was engaged in ongoing fraud or corruption. And that was the

solution of presenting the information to the local [Afghanistan] prosecutor and attempting to see if they would be interested in actually bringing that case into [Afghanistan] court.
//
It was very much a challenge to conduct a criminal investigation focused on some sort of crime which SIGAR was charged with, and not being able to bring it to a full circle, to a fruition where you would have a prosecution that would be responsible to ensure that an individual who had committed a crime is brought to justice.

And not having the end part of a long-term or even a short-term investigation – criminal investigation – was something completely unusual, something that I was not familiar with. And the only recourse that we had, other than reporting it and ensuring that SIGAR was aware of what activities had been conducted and what our conclusions were-- the only other alternative was to provide that information to the local prosecutors in Afghanistan.

Much to my dismay, the courts are conducted much differently than the United States in Afghanistan. The differences – in the terms of punishment and, quite honestly, corruption of those courts – resulted in the end result not meeting up with what an individual had been responsible [for], and the crimes that they had committed. So that again was something frustrating. And I was not familiar with dealing with that issue.

INTERVIEWER:
You mentioned, in your FBI experience, having had the experience of-- [it] sounded as if you were sort of mapping the structure and organization of a criminal entity, // figuring out the roles, the relative hierarchies.

Did you have an opportunity to bring any of that experience to bear in Afghanistan where, you know, I'm thinking about the kind of universe that's been described to an extent in some of SIGAR's Lessons Learned reports. The warlords, the different entities functioning in different parts of the country. Did this agency have an opportunity to do that mapping? Or did you work in conjunction with other U.S. government entities who were doing that?

INTERVIEWEE 13:
We certainly considered, you know, the entire problem of Afghanistan, and were not focused only on Kabul problems. At the time I first came onboard at SIGAR, Afghanistan had many offices, that were located on bases outside of the Kabul area.

So our influence was the whole of Afghanistan. And the crimes that were being committed impacted that particular region. We had intelligence that we collected on a regular basis that enabled us to share that information with our law enforcement partners, who may or may not have been in other offices throughout Afghanistan.

The comprehensive way of really mapping criminal enterprises takes several parts. It takes informants. It takes law enforcement partners. And it takes intelligence. And unfortunately, we didn't have all of those parts – particularly informants.

In order to be successful with developing informants, you have to be on the ground, and you have to be there on a regular basis. You have to develop and have people trust in you and the type of person that you are, and for them to understand that you're going to do the best you can on their behalf in the course of the relationship you have with them.

And we weren't-- we hadn't been there that long. We weren't allowed to develop those kind of long-term relationships. Certainly, the law enforcement – the local law enforcement – is almost non-existent. And interacting with them was – challenging.

From a national level, we had law enforcement partners that were Afghans. But in the regions and outside the regions, our only dependable partners were other U.S. entities who were serving in those same offices. So it was not a matter of being able to examine the crime problem the way it would be studied and structured in the United States. It just was not available to us. We did depend upon [the U.S.] military. And they had some sense through their intelligence collection. But it was not what we were, again, accustomed to.

INTERVIEWER:
You mentioned not being allowed to do it. Were you referring to the former Afghan government not giving permission, or did you mean something else?

INTERVIEWEE 13:
Both. // By not being "allowed," I'm referring to the [U.S.] Embassy had an expectation of how the law enforcement personnel were expected to conduct themselves, how we would-- how the U.S. law enforcement personnel would interact, locally. There were restrictions from the Afghan side as to who we could talk to, or who we could meet with, and just the safety issues of not being able to go to a residence, knock on a door, and and chat with somebody, concerning their knowledge of a person or an event that could be useful in the course of an investigation.

So the restrictions and not being allowed really applied to the circumstances of the ongoing conflict, as well as the rules of engagement from the Embassy, as well as our interaction with the local community was extremely limited.

//

SIGAR does not work in a vacuum. It's required to interact with a whole host of partners, to ensure that our mission is coordinated and understood by those partners that are in Afghanistan, have problems and issues in Afghanistan, and have responsibility, as well, in Afghanistan.
//
For criminal investigations, SIGAR has to interact with its FBI partner, who is full-time located in Afghanistan, and with others. They varied. Other law enforcement agencies who were initially a part of Afghanistan, left the country, through the years, every year that SIGAR was there.

And it resulted in us taking on, sometimes a larger role. An example of that is the [U.S. Department of the] Treasury office had an agent that worked there. We depended largely on that person for interaction of the various matters of mutual interest. And that person would change out, and a new person would show up, or that position may be vacated for a number of years.

So, it was necessary for us on the ground here, in the domestic side of SIGAR Investigations, to interact with a whole host of folks.
//
The main authority that SIGAR Investigation[s Directorate] has in ensuring the prosecution of our cases is with the Department of Justice. They have the warrants that enable us to prosecute our cases in federal courts throughout the United States.

So, the interaction with DOJ – as the big DOJ, Department of Justice – is considerable. And it's refined further in the model that we have for our prosecutions, which is termed the SIGAR Prosecutor, the "SIGPRO." We have dedicated SIGPROs. "We" – being SIGAR – has dedicated prosecutors which take our cases to federal court and bring them to some conclusion.

In dealing with the SIGPROs, they're a part of a framework at the Department of Justice that's the Fraud section, which is part of the Criminal Investigation Division for the Department of Justice. And there are varying rules, regulations, and policies that are flowing throughout the Department of Justice that we have to follow, and, because of that, have frequent interaction with various parts of the Department of Justice.
//
The FBI was, indeed, our largest partner. And the FBI would take on those crimes which SIGAR would identify in Afghanistan but were not part of our bailiwick. The crimes that I particularly would bring attention to [were] security issues and security matters, terrorism issues.

That was not on SIGAR's plate, but it was the purpose for FBI serving in Afghanistan. So, as we came across information through sources and through other methods, we would ensure that was coordinated and passed on correctly. The day-to-day interaction that we have with the Department of State with their inspector general shop is considerable.

And we may determine that a case that we're looking at where the venue is shared by both the State Department and SIGAR is worked together, jointly, and is progressed jointly through prosecution as well as the investigative phases of it.

And that would apply to virtually every [U.S. government] department that operates in Afghanistan as part of the U.S. Embassy. It could be that we are jointly engaged in prosecutions and investigations of federal crime.

//

SIGAR worked extensively with the Drug Enforcement Administration and interacted on a variety of criminal matters – not necessarily on the "dope" side of the fence, but on the money side of the fence

– where there would be money-laundering investigations that impacted large shipments of drugs leaving Afghanistan as a source country and going to various international cities throughout the world, and then the money aspect of, "Who's going to pay for that?" "Who's purchasing it?" – and following the money.

So, our role as SIGAR would go-- would be of great interest of watching the money movement. The Drug Enforcement Administration – or DEA – was very sophisticated in the ways and means that they had of watching money and tracing money and assisted in a number of investigations with SIGAR, in order to follow funds out of Afghanistan and into the United States or other countries of interest to SIGAR at the time.

When it came to the Department of [the] Treasury, Department of [the] Treasury dealt on a number of large financial transaction matters, dealing, again, with money-laundering, but also with the banking issues, where the restrictions of that are imposed on bank secrecy and the like needed to be penetrated, and we needed a partner in order to follow the protocols necessary to obtain information pertaining to large transactions or banking transactions.
//
The Department of [the] Treasury was a member of large international organizations that shared information with various countries, including Afghanistan, and enabled us to, working in the correct processes and legal methods, and roles, and the like, [obtain] information that was pursuant to our ongoing investigations. We had the experience with Customs* agents, as well as inspector generals from Department of State and quite regularly worked with those agencies in the conduct of our investigations.
[* U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP)]
//
Our main role with dealing with other investigative services, for DCIS*, Army CID, [ICE***], a variety of – and I'm using letters again – we interacted on a regular basis, both in Afghanistan and in the United States.**
[* Defense Criminal Investigative Service, U.S. Department of Defense Office of Inspector General]
[** U.S. Army Criminal Investigation Division]
[*** U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement]

And the opportunity to work in Afghanistan with these agencies was sometimes limited by their availability-- their assignments to the [U.S.] Embassy. Whereas, in the United States, we always had access to those partners where we could at least begin the course of the investigation here with local agents-- local partner agents, and discussing various cases. DCIS – the Department of Defense's main investigative agency, was a constant partner on matters pertaining to not only contracting matters, but other matters.

//

The IG community has an oversight board that coordinates matters of interest to IG shops, across the board. So, we had that group. // CIGIE is an organization created on behalf of all of the inspector generals' offices through our government. // CIGIE stands for the Council of the Inspectors General on Integrity and Efficiency. // And the purpose for that is to create an executive council that considers,

reviews, and follows the policies, and regulations, and laws that are created overseeing the CIGIE inspector general process.
//
There's a special, dedicated investigations group that is part of CIGIE that we participate with. We attend the regular meetings that we depend upon for various types of education and training, and have frequent communications and interaction with them.

//

We also have the Interstate-- I'm sorry, the International Contract Corruption Task Force, the ICCTF. That's a group of various federal law enforcement organizations, from IG shops as well as just pure law enforcement organizations, who have regular contact, regular interaction – not on the agent-in-charge level but on an operational level – where we're able to deconflict matters that, otherwise, could spin out, where you'd have two agencies working the same crime, and bringing it to an unsuccessful solution because of that lack of coordination.
//
We have an agent full-time that's been assigned to that organization and is part of the ICCTF, that group, which meets on a very regular basis. Other than that, we format and formulate regular task forces and working groups.

Depending upon, perhaps, a crime, there is a special type of-- it's referred to as a "SIV"* – deals with-- Afghans being able to come to the United States for their purposes of settling down here. And we have a number of investigations that are conducted on regarding the SIV violation.
[* Special Immigrant Visa program, U.S. State Department]

And we have a group of-- a task force of Department of State['s] Department of Diplomatic Security, and others who participate in those kinds of cases. So, they're tailor-made to whatever the particular crime or issue might be. And those are created on the spot, in real time, as needed.

//

SIGAR's expectation of, you know, conducting its mission depended, largely, upon a coordination of communications and interactions with our partners. And I use that term "partners" quite frequently to talk about the success of SIGAR Investigations, as well as the coordination of all matters law enforcement that existed within Afghanistan.

And we had regular meetings with these persons. What's really essential is the effective relationships that us – a tiny little organization like SIGAR – is able to maintain with its partners. And as an example of that, we have, for the most part, all former law enforcement – federal law enforcement – officers who serve in the Investigations Directorate.

This enables them to, first, start up the relationship with the DEA, or the FBI, a number of-- Secret Service – a number of law enforcement organizations. And it also enables a "reach-back" to those

organizations by those guys, those people that have retired from those law enforcement organizations.

That was critical to our success. And it provided an opportunity or a window – if there was an issue or a problem, or we anticipated an issue or a problem – to be able to get to other persons at various levels throughout an organization and resolve them, before they became difficult to overcome.

Our-- all of our agents, with their considerable law enforcement background and experience, enabled us to hit the ground running. And all of the law enforcement officers at SIGAR have the ability to interact, from those experiences, with partners across the board. That's a theme of law enforcement in these days, and we're all quite adept at that.

//

INTERVIEWER:
From a management perspective, at your level and the role that you had, what are some challenges that you experienced that are worth conveying to future generations of people who may find themselves in similar roles?

INTERVIEWEE 13:
It's a great question, and it-- I think the greatest challenge that I faced was being an absentee manager of my troops, the investigators who lived and worked in Afghanistan. I had the one challenge of ensuring that all of the investigators – both the domestic as well as the Afghan investigators – felt a single sense of purpose, of mission, and of accomplishments. And I worked hard to avoid the "us versus them" mentality.

There's no buddies like war buddies, and there's no issues that are more vivid to individuals than serving in a war zone, threatened daily with the various issues of war – incoming bombs, alarms, reacting to that, the denial of electricity for a long period of time, or for an extended period of time, communications systems not working effectively.

That's a frustration, certainly, for investigators. And it was something that we lived with and dealt with. But also, we had [SIGAR] investigators working specific crimes unique to the Kabul experience that investigators in the United States couldn't really relate to.

They didn't appreciate the-- they didn't always appreciate the pain and suffering that the [SIGAR] agents in Afghanistan were going through in order to collect and report on information. And vice versa, the [SIGAR] Afghanistan investigators didn't always appreciate the pain and suffering the [SIGAR] domestic agents had to go through in order to take their product, their written product, and provide meaningful documents to prosecutors and other investigators here in the United States.

So, maintaining the equilibrium between both of these very different investigative experiences and ensuring that people are all still marching to the same beat was a tremendous challenge. It also had personality issues of-- the investigators in Afghanistan felt that they weren't appreciated, and that the

agents in the United States were able to leave and go home at 5:00. They had to still deal with the war, and with the long hours, and the travel that would take them in and out of Afghanistan, which can be very demanding. And that sense of "one" was very difficult to maintain.

What I thought would overcome that to some extent, and it did, was the frequent visits – not to check up on anybody, but to simply sit with them, drink coffee with them, talk about the cases, and making sure that people saw the holistic part of what Investigations was doing and not just their little piece of the pie.

That enabled me to interact with each individual agent, to learn about them, to learn about their expectations of how long they were going to continue to work there, and, likewise, sharing those experiences once I got back with the domestic agents and talking about the challenges and the hardship that our agents – our same agents from Investigations – were experiencing from the war zone, and keeping that alive and keeping people aware of the fact that we're all in this together, even though it was under different circumstances and-- very trying for the Afghan group.

But equally, the [SIGAR] agents here in the United States faced the same issues in a different format. It wasn't easy. It wasn't just going home at 5:00. You still had to work your cases and develop the information that [SIGAR] Afghanistan was initially collecting and then providing to you.

So, I find that to be clearly one of the lessons I learned of trying my best to ensure that there was this fairness. The other issues became just simple travel. If an agent was sent over there for a year, there was a lot of various travel and leave that was embedded into that, so you can't calculate their work product to be the same as somebody who isn't faced with a home leave, and the challenges of getting medicine, and the like.

That takes away from their workday, and it impacts their workday. Ensuring that that was clearly understood and communicated was, again, a new experience to me. It wasn't all on the same level. It was-- there's challenges on both sides.

//

I think lastly is-- it's just the issue of communication: communicating with people far away, and using all of the technology available to you – be it a cell phone or a video conference. It's an important element, and you can't allow people, just because they're miles away, to feel isolated or to feel like they're in it by themselves. Keeping them as part of the organization was a great challenge for me.

//

When I first came to SIGAR, I expected that, at some point, there was a likelihood that I would work full-time in Afghanistan. As I learned more about the job and the role, we had clearly two different matters to oversee and to manage. And, they were locations, but they came with a bundle of their own problems, challenges, and issues you had to overcome.

I always felt that the [SIGAR] agents in Afghanistan-- my heart went out to them, and I tried to react almost immediately to a manager's call. I trusted implicitly in the managers that we had serving for Investigations. And we had two such positions there, of a Special Agent in Charge and the Assistant Special Agent in Charge.

I tried to touch one or the other with a phone call every day. And I did feel, always, that I'd be on the phone, and I'd hear an alarm, you know, "Attention on the compound." And it-- it was chilling to me that-- "What were they going through?"

Now, I experienced that myself when I would visit there. And I did-- I didn't find it particularly frightening. But, I found that to be a hell of a way to work, and to be faced with the dangers that they faced on a continuing basis. It never ended. There was always something else popping up.

And what made it, perhaps, a little bit worse is we weren't on a track of getting better. We were on a track of getting worse. Things were becoming more dangerous. Things were becoming more challenging. And the-- I thought that was unfortunate, as well. And to try and manage to that, it was a greater challenge than I ever expected.

So, the place, Afghanistan, a war zone – I was aware of that 24 hours a day. And safety was the number one issue. The troops here, just as I experienced in my FBI days, they're still wearing guns. They're making arrests. They're doing searches. They still are exposed to dangers beyond what the normal going-to-work kind of guy is exposed to.

So, I felt, at the same time, these are still law enforcement officers that can come upon a crime or can experience danger, at a moment's notice. So, balancing that and understanding that, "Hey, these guys are working in a war zone and face some of these law enforcement challenges, but so do the domestic guys" – keeping that in mind, and keeping that security number one – and security is the first issue and always the first issue – was a great challenge for me.

INTERVIEWER:
So, it sounds, from your answer, that, at some point, you were thinking that you might be working there full-time. But then, when you got into the job, you realized that it really is kind of a double job.

INTERVIEWEE 13:
Precisely. I thought that, you know, the work had to be firsthand and-- but there was so much impacting Afghanistan that then flowed right here to the United States that we even organized as such, that a case opening would result in a case agent from Afghanistan being assigned and a case agent from the United States being assigned. And they collectively would worry that case and have oversight and responsibility for that case. And that-- it was kind of an inefficient way to go about the business of law enforcement. But it was an effective way given the circumstances. So--

INTERVIEWER:
And it was a necessary way, structurally.

INTERVIEWEE 13:
Absolutely. // And it was clear to me that the benefit that I brought to the table included my interactions with the front office, here at SIGAR. So, my daily ability to talk with and interact with SIGAR's leadership, senior leadership, participate in senior leadership meetings to let them know what I thought was important and what, importantly, was happening throughout [the SIGAR] Investigations [Directorate], and sharing that, I saw as a role that no one else could be involved in but me.

So, I needed to be in both places, but here in the United States most importantly, for the reason of communications, again, within the organization and understanding where the organization was headed and what we were going to need to adjust to that maybe new priority that the organization was experiencing.

//

INTERVIEWER:
When you would land in Afghanistan each time, you'd get off the plane, and you'd probably be thinking about, "O.K., here's what I have to do while I'm here. Here are my goals." What would you be thinking about? What-- you'd come with what kind of agenda as a manager, overseeing all these people? When you got off that plane, what were the things that were foremost in your mind about what you wanted to accomplish, right off the plane?

INTERVIEWEE 13:
On every single trip to Afghanistan, I'd be prepared from the standpoint of obtaining just the case reviews of each one of the agents, understanding, you know, the productivity of the agent, understanding some of the human factors – their wife's pregnant, they're moving – sensitized to that, and keeping track of that from trip to trip.
//
My first opportunity to then, see someone-- despite it being a long flight, I would make sure I made it into the office, usually tired, but the first day, I wanted to-- the troops to see me there, energized by them, ready to deal with them, ready to talk to them, kind of set up a little office – remote office there in Afghanistan – and then begin interaction immediately.

I would schedule the next day an all-hands meeting where-- it would last for six, seven hours, of talking about, "This is what's happening in SIGAR Investigations," and going through not only their cases, but matters that were unique to the United States.

Also, just, kind of the kibitzing that-- what was happening within the organization: "How long is SIGAR going to be here?" "How long is somebody planning on working?" "This person is considering quitting."
//
By the third day, I was interviewing every single person. And those interviews would take as long as they wanted, and we'd talk as long as they wanted. And I did my best to understand, "Are you O.K.

here? Are things O.K. at home? What's your longer-term plans? Are you going to spend another year here?"

"What would your preferences be? Would you like to come back? And if you did come back to the U.S., are you interested in working for SIGAR in the United States?" Just finding out more about the person and then, also, dealing with their cases.

But I think I spent more time, probably, on the interaction, and then, commending the good behavior that-- which dealt with accomplishments and the like that they had achieved, recognizing that and also recognizing that in a public setting of, "That was a good job that, you know, So-and-So's doing here."

//

For the most part, we had some tremendous talent over there, and self-starters, and people that, you know, wanted to get the job done.

//

SIGAR OVERSIGHT WORK: INVESTIGATIONS: FUEL PRICE-FIXING CASES

In the course of the work that we did in Afghanistan, there were several cases that come to mind that were particularly satisfying, and challenging, in the course of conducting our investigations. One dealt with the price-fixing of fuel that was being used in the war effort by the United States.

And there came a time where several different individuals and several different companies had come together, in the UAE, to actually-- the United Arab Emirates – in order to fix the price of fuel, which was outrageous. But it's an important commodity that, without fuel, there is no effort that can be conducted, from the standpoint of the war.

We came up on this information from a number of sources that SIGAR maintained, dealing with fuel and the challenges of fuel-dealing in a war zone, as well as in a corrupt country that focused on fuel as gold. And in the course of that investigation, were able to actually bring to the attention of the president of Afghanistan the fact that there had been collusion engaged in fixing these prices for the fuel.

The president, Ghani*, took immediate action, where individuals were fired, eventually, and we had hoped should be prosecuted. But Ghani chose not to prosecute them. But it had such a severe impact on the fact that there was this corruption and cheating that was engaged in attempting to profit from the war, and profit from Americans having no other recourse but to purchase at these inflated prices.
[* Ashraf Ghani, the former government of Afghanistan's president, 2014-2021]

That case really set a standard for SIGAR and for SIGAR investigations, in showing the country-- in showing the leadership of the country, of Afghanistan, what SIGAR was all about and our capabilities in determining and ferreting out criminal activity.

This also impacted the [U.S.] military and the senior leadership in the military that never really worried about fuel, other than its availability. But now, for the first time, they were impacted by the fact that the fuel, and the corruption engaged in the fuel purchase and acquisition, was having a severe impact on not only their operation, but on the country of Afghanistan as well.

//

WHAT DID SIGAR DO WELL?

INTERVIEWER:
Is the batting average of success different doing this work in the United States than it is in doing this work in a conflict zone like Afghanistan? And, if it is, how do you deal with that?

INTERVIEWEE 13:
The results and accomplishments are judged in varying ways in-- within any organization. The DEA, Drug Enforcement Administration, may use the tons of drugs seized as an accomplishment and an indicator of success, or compare it with 10 years ago. The FBI may use the amount of money seized from the course of bank robberies, and given back. There's all varying indicators that people use in order to judge success.

I believe that, in Afghanistan, our batting average was probably less than 50%. The crimes that we identified, the crimes that came to us through a hotline* complaint, or from an informant, or from a partner agency – it wasn't that we couldn't resolve that crime and figure out who'd done it. The problem was having access to get out there and to find that information.
[* SIGAR Hotline = mechanism to report to SIGAR waste, fraud and abuse relating to U.S. spending for Afghanistan reconstruction, via SIGAR's dedicated phone line, fax, email, and/or website.]

In the United States, that's not a barrier. In Afghanistan, it was clearly a barrier. So, the success rate that is enjoyed in the United States, [is] considerably higher than what would be experienced in Afghanistan, in the war zone. And it was really limited by the ability to get around.

//

I think SIGAR was particularly effective with its persistence and its ability to track information, to record information, and to follow the ball and to follow where it leads to and to take the next step. As a part of that, the number of months or years a person spent in that job gave them a historical perspective that was critical to an investigation.

Quite honestly, most investigations aren't going to take a year. So here's a case. You spend a year in Afghanistan. You wrap it up. And you go and it's done. It doesn't work that way. Our investigations –

SIGAR's investigations for the most part – were longer-term and required several years of persistent criminal investigation, then sent to the United States-- packaged to the United States, where considerable other time would be engaged in completing the package to be offered for prosecution.

Overall, that requirement-- for a person to expect to spend a year or two years was almost a minimum. And in the course of interviewing candidates for the position, they had to know their job. And then they had to be well-rounded. And they also could live in that type of war zone for an extended period of time.

//

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

INTERVIEWER:
What are some of the characteristics that in your mind make for the best candidates to do this type of investigative work in that type of conflict zone?

INTERVIEWEE 13:
I think the most successful people are not the toughest, and aren't necessarily militarily trained. Our success was largely based upon the investigator who was well-rounded in understanding what their job was, understanding the importance of developing information, be that through informants or from talking to some office within the [U.S.] Embassy that had that information.

Going where the information was and obtaining it, finding a way to be successful to interacting with people and ensuring that they understood that you were there to try and evoke some sort of a response, dealing with a crime or dealing with a particular issue.

And that was the successful person. So, somebody that had the gift of gab, somebody that had the ability to interact. There's also some pomp and circumstance of dealing with the Afghan government folks, where there's an obligation to recognize the fact that they're doing a good job, that, you know, SIGAR's in awe of what they bring to the table.

And we understand they're important people in trying to get that same relationship moving along, so that they're in a position to help SIGAR is as much as SIGAR is there not just meeting them and drinking tea, but in fact getting something done.

I think the best agent is the well-rounded agent who is-- expects a lot from themselves and is able to take on any situation, and kind of, on-the-spot, figure out what this calls for, and how to deal with it. But being a people person is important.

INTERVIEWER:
How about previous experience working in other federal law enforcement entities? How much of a prerequisite is that?

INTERVIEWEE 13:
The importance of a specialty associated with the selection process is, number one, a person has to understand the subject matter. So fraud, waste, and abuse – knowing what the criminal violations are, and what it means to collect evidence and what it takes to prove a case and to make a case.

The order of proof is-- one would refer to, "I need a witness statement. I need a photograph. I need documentation." The challenges with getting documentation from Afghanistan continue to this day. The record-keeping, the officials that are supposed to be in the know of maintaining records – it's not simple. It's a real challenging job.

So knowing what to pick from requires that skill set of, "What is-- what will it take if I get to court with this? What will it take to convince a prosecutor that this person is guilty of a crime?"

So clearly that-- number one, when I recruited people, ensuring they were competent, from the standpoint of their specialty, but, number one, making sure they were a good investigator – well-rounded, but knew that particular area that they were going to be conducting investigation of.

//

WHAT COULD/SHOULD SIGAR HAVE DONE BETTER/DIFFERENTLY?

SIGAR has had an opportunity to conduct itself, its investigations, in a very comprehensive way in Afghanistan. And in that regard, we had a number of cases that were frustrated because there was nowhere to bring an investigation when it was concluded, because of the lack of a U.S. nexus.

Perhaps, in retrospect, had we identified those cases, or the likelihood of a case not being successfully brought to a conclusion, and ignored those, it would have saved energy, effort, and the like.

The issue that we dealt with is that things are coming in. And you're drinking from a fire hose and trying to sort out, "Well, what's going to happen in 18 months? You know, what will be the conclusion? What will be the criminal violation? Will the United States chose to send this person to the United States to stand trial?"

You're not thinking in those terms. You're thinking in terms of the crime. And that's an appropriate way of considering, you know, the crime problem in a specific crime.

But if there could be more done towards a better triage of information, coming in and saying, "This isn't going to-- it won't be concluded with a successful prosecution, if that's what you want to look for."

"So let's just put this to a side. Or let's give this to another group." Some way of disposing of this work that comes in, that's just clutter, that-- you're going to spin a lot of wheels and, at the end of the day, not have anything to show for it.

Example of that: In our [SIGAR] Hotline* process, every IG has a number you can call and report crime. And it's so far now that you could even do it over a database. And you can make an inquiry, through a database. In order to round out that complaint, there's a series of processes that we go through. And we-- contacting the person and the like.**

[* SIGAR Hotline = mechanism to report to SIGAR waste, fraud and abuse relating to U.S. spending for Afghanistan reconstruction, via SIGAR's dedicated phone line, fax, email, and/or website.]

[** inspector general]

And where SIGAR over the years has received probably an excess of 4,000-5,000 Hotline complaints, mainly in Afghanistan, the fact is we've only opened 20% or less of those as actual investigations. There-- so there's a lot of ["chaff"] in there.

There's a lot of stuff that comes in that doesn't necessarily need us-- our attention. And we should probably save on our attention and devote it to areas that really are in need of a clear, investigative 100 percent attack.

//

The issue is: being able to sort the wheat from the chaff – immediately, as it's coming in – would be very useful in finding the appropriate way of handling that as we do our Hotline complaints. All of the complaints that come in and going through this extra effort to say, "Is this really something that we want to devote time to?" would be a good, efficient way of working in the future.

//

I think the clearest way you could implement it is not necessarily with more manpower, but definitizing from the top:

In order to ingest or to bring this information into our work area, it needs to be qualified in these three or four ways. And, if we find that it's not, we put it to the side. It's not to say it's to the side forever. But as additional information comes in, or may not come in, but if it does come in, we're able to put that together and say, "O.K., now this is-- has these three or four factors that I need before I can open a case."

It takes a skill. It takes a real understanding of the law and how these will proceed. And, is there another office within Afghanistan that we could provide these to, at this early stage where they can conduct some investigation? Answer is probably "no."

But again, it's getting towards what is the specific-- what is this rich area here that will result in pay dirt? What can I do to be as efficient as I can. And I guess that's-- at the end of the day, it's all about efficiency. If I could do [it] over again, I would like a more efficient operation, a purely efficient operation, and using some determination as to whether or not I look at this further, I assign this to anybody at this time.

It could result in being through a data system. But, unfortunately, there was no available-- computerized system or database that I could look at. They simply don't have such a thing in Afghanistan. So we'll have to come up with a clever way of sorting out the wheat from the chaff.

//

I would focus in on those biggest impact items – and not the smallest of issues and not the $1,000 crimes, but the $10 million crimes.

You know, proportionality should be considered. And within Afghanistan I think everything was treated the same way. And it was across the board as opposed to just the big-ticket items. When you have limited resources, you go after those things that have the biggest return.

//

SIGAR Investigations was stymied because of our inability to move around as freely as we would like. And I understand that a lot of that was based on the safety of persons and all the rest.

I think that law enforcement officers might be able to deal in that environment, a war zone, little differently than your average person. And I don't think the SIGAR investigations should have necessarily been limited in so many ways as it was, to do our job in Afghanistan.
//
The framework for the SIGAR Investigations Directorate suffered as the country became smaller. Because the United States kept removing various offices throughout the region, and consolidating them into a Kabul-centric country.

The effectiveness of a law enforcement organization is to understand the whole map. It's not to understand the one city and what's occurring in that one city. Because what's occurring 500 miles east may have a very significant impact on the city. But you have no pre-warning of that. You have no ability to predict that. You don't see it coming.

So as the United States limited its access to the country, and did so in an area that was probably focused more on safety, and then couldn't provide safety for persons in different parts of the country. I think that needed to be re-designed and reconsidered.

In order for SIGAR investigation to go back and impact the country in ways greater than what we did achieve, it needed to have a greater breadth of the country and a better understanding of the country. And I think that applies across the board to law enforcement efforts.

The Drug Enforcement Administration, there was the issues and the problems they faced throughout the country. And the success of the drug dealers was reinforced by the fact there was no one really in an oversight role that was able to see what was going on or what was happening.

And, as I said, I think it would apply across the board. And it would keep the country larger and [us] understanding it better, by interacting with war lords and interacting with the local population in various areas. Seeing what good is achieved through the creation of a medical center, and then encouraging that type of growth across the whole of the country. And watching the contracts develop

that are going towards that type of aid, on a firsthand basis, and not hiring others to give reports as to how it's going – to me that would have been a more sensible way.

And if I were asked to make recommendations on how to improve the law enforcement aspects of oversight for fraud, waste, and abuse, it would be to spread them out. Don't-- don't contain them. Don't confine them. But give them a better vision of what's happening [in] a macro sense, as opposed to in one particular part of the country.

//

WHAT ARE YOUR OWN LESSONS LEARNED?

Investigators, investigation, those that have spent a career in it – they're very closed-mouth[ed] about cases, [and] success. I mean, we can blather on about quite a bit and, you know, what we did in these cases. But there is a reluctance, for a lot of reasons.

Ongoing investigations are simply not shared with anyone outside the law enforcement arena. So there's that expectation of communication across SIGAR that isn't our world, isn't an investigator's comfort level. And we generally collect information – and it's a "need to know it," who you tell it to.

And I find that there was always an expectation in SIGAR that, "No. We share this information far and wide." Where we [investigators] are limited. Investigators are limited to do that. And I think that was a challenge. That was hard to convey, and get a sense of appreciation from everyone that we just can't provide that information.

In the recent-- since the U.S. left Afghanistan*, the challenge has been from Congress. Congress has been asking SIGAR, "What about this? What about that?" And, in the form of reports, SIGAR is responding to those inquiries. And [the SIGAR] Investigations [Directorate]'s role has been such that we will be partners in obtaining and providing information to the Congressional inquiries.
[* August 2021]

We're still limited in a lot of ways that-- I can't call up somebody in Canada and get information. I can't go up into Canada without getting a number of approvals through the State Department, through the Department of Justice. And an auditor in SIGAR can do that, and isn't under any kind of requirement.

So, being less than candid, or being able to provide as much information as we can is – has always been – an odd role for [the] Investigations [Directorate] within SIGAR. And some people think, "No, no, share it all." We're limited. And we can't do that. The Congressional [post-U.S. withdrawal] period of time has enabled us to share quite a bit of information that otherwise we wouldn't.

But, because the mission is now not for establishment of a prosecution, but for obtaining intelligence, obtaining information, background, facts – which we're very good at – and then sharing that back with the whole of SIGAR, it's-- it's been a different period in SIGAR's history for [the SIGAR] Investigations [Directorate] to be forthcoming.

INTERVIEWER:
Has that been a tough adjustment to make that--

INTERVIEWEE 13:
Oh, yeah. Absolutely. // Investigators do not have a comfort level talking to the press. There's always a suspicion that, "You know, I can't tell that part." Or, "They shouldn't know that part."

And it's because the courts and the Department of Justice hold us accountable for that. That you're not allowed to release that information. And you're not allowed to just openly share that information for a variety of reasons.

Privacy issues: you can ruin somebody's career, by speaking, "You know, yeah, they're under investigation." So there's limitations as to what the law allows investigators to convey. So that's been challenging. And making sure just internally people are all sensitive to that.
//
Everybody thinks, "Well, why wouldn't you share that information?" We're-- we're restricted from it. It's against the law to provide it – is the bottom-line answer. But when we're on another mission, for Congress to get details of things, we've been able to be much more open.

And it's been a good-- it's been good because we are incredibly capable of, you know, getting this information that others are looking for – through again, the same sources and sources of information, from partners and sharing that across the board, which we've been doing.
//
We're trained and we have the skill sets to do that, to obtain all this information. So not relying upon the database that's created, but relying on just the wherewithal of an investigator to go forward, and get this information, get an answer to this question – [we're] extremely capable of doing that.

INTERVIEWER:
So it's not making use of the investigative raw material that were part of other criminal investigations and prosecutions. It's applying the skills to do new digging.

INTERVIEWEE 13:
Clearly. There is a body of knowledge that exists on closed cases that we're in a position to share with. So-- but a lot of those previous cases really tie into existing cases, or individuals from existing cases. So, it restricts us from saying, "Everything closed is available to all of SIGAR."

Some of it is. And we can go through that, review it, and then share that information. But it's not the whole body of work that has been created. It's a part of that. But the new work, as you pointed out, and the wherewithal to go get it, that skill set I think is important to the mission of SIGAR. And as a changing mission, as we've seen with the Congressional inquiries, has given us that opportunity to kind of open the spigot and be more forthcoming with things that the whole of the organization are keen about and interested in.

//

The only way to be successful in taking on an assignment or a tasking such as overseeing Afghanistan or overseeing a criminal activity within Afghanistan is to design some form of mapping that does identify the leadership, the areas of the country that are most prone to specific types of criminal activity – the historical purposes for that criminal activity being a part of that area.

Being-- understanding the leadership, the informal leadership as well as the government's leadership, being able to understand what parts of the country are most productive, have the greatest investment by the country and have the greatest expectation of growing crops, of building universities.

So, to me, the only way you can reasonably go into any job as big as the outdoors is to have a logical mapping of all of the issues that I have just raised, and a lot more. And taking then from there and creating from that a strategy of trying to overcome the problems and the issues that you're faced with.

INTERVIEWER:
Did that happen in Afghanistan? Should it have happened in Afghanistan? What entity should have done it if it didn't happen? Or, what entity did it, if it did happen? Should that entity be SIGAR or shouldn't it? What are your thoughts about all that?

INTERVIEWEE 13:
The U.S. military certainly has a responsibility to have created a mapping of its own in Afghanistan, understanding just the geographical differences, the leadership differences. All of that information should have been developed by the [U.S.] military when first entering Afghanistan.

The CIA and agencies such as that certainly should have been engaged in breaking down the geopolitical scene, which would also include the understanding of the culture, the development of culture, the significance of the culture, the hot buttons to-- the political strife that's existing, and internally what issues are impacting friendships and alliances and being able to conduct business in the country.

Is there a stable economy there? All of those issues and questions certainly should have been available from day one, when the [U.S.] military entered and was prepared to engage in conflict in the country. And I can't help but think that there was that information, but it wasn't available.

And the agencies, the individuals that needed that information, such as a SIGAR, weren't-- the information wasn't shared. And it wasn't shared for reasons that-- again, it's, "You're going to gore my ox," and, "I have my agency, and I'm going to worry about my issues."

"They're all local. And-- but I'm going to focus in on those. And everyone else be damned. This is my important work. That's what I'm going to be judged on. That's what I'm going to be able to be awarded, and [get] a recognition for, is how successful I am at this little bit of Afghanistan."

And I think that hurts. And I think that attitude impacts all of the U.S. efforts. // It affects us being able as a country, as the United States, to go in there with one mission and with one expectation of success. And defining success for everybody – as opposed to individuals and individual entities and agencies that go about doing an effective job in that one little area of responsibility that they have.

//

I think the public would benefit from understanding more of the challenges that are faced with-- in our own way of doing business. The United States has some awkward and difficult bridges to pass that, to the public, it's confusing. "Well, they're all part of the United States government. Why isn't this easier?"

And I think that needs to be changed. And I think it should be easier. If there's a issue of information-sharing, it shouldn't-- there should be no question that, if one government agency requests information from another, I think there should be an expectation that that's an automatic.

And we sometimes confound ourselves by putting up these fences within our own government. And that's very unfortunate.
//
The United States should operate under one umbrella, one mission, and be able to interact seamlessly. There are some secrets. You have to keep those protected. And you don't share those across the board.

But when it comes down to an organization of the United States coming in to deal in this conflict zone with the matters of Afghanistan, it should be one voice, one effort, and everybody pulling at the same degree. And I find that incredibly unfortunate. And I find some of the reporting by some of the other agencies downright dishonest. And I think that's unfortunate as well.

//

AFTER U.S. WITHDRAWAL / AUGUST 2021

INTERVIEWER:
You've been at this work for this agency for quite a while. It's been 10 years. It's been 25 trips to Afghanistan. I've asked everyone that we've talked to, and I'll ask you. When August of 2021 happened, how did it make you feel?

INTERVIEWEE 13:
I was sick. I was-- I was worried about my guys. I had three people over there, that were trying to burn things in open pits and get rid of information. And I was unsettled by the fact that there wasn't some higher authority that had taken this into account, and wasn't dealing with it in a more manageable way.

I was concerned that people were going to get hurt. I was convinced people were going to get hurt. And I found that to really be unacceptable. I was-- I was upset. I was mad – that there hadn't been better organization of having us leave Afghanistan.

And I was at the airport when my troops came in and – hugged 'em. And, glad to see 'em – and felt, you know, relieved, at that time. But I thought for sure somebody was going to get killed. And I was surprised that the [U.S.] military – some Marines – were killed. But I thought a lot more death would be a part of that undertaking. And I was sad to see it happen like that, and see it unfold in such an unprofessional way. It was surprising and disappointing and it made me angry.

//

WHAT DID SIGAR ACCOMPLISH IN AFGHANISTAN?

INTERVIEWER:
At the end of the day, what do you think this agency accomplished for the American people? What do you think you accomplished for this agency, in all the toil, and challenge, and risk that you all have assumed, to do the work that you were trying to do?

INTERVIEWEE 13:
I don't think you can equip-- or equate return on investment from what we got out of our treasures and inputs into Afghanistan. The return was sadly different from what the investment was. At the end of the day, the United States as a leader in the world had an obligation to attempt to bring it to a resolution.

The methods used in order to achieve that goal were fraught with kind of simple issues. The transfer every year of everybody from [the] State [Department], the [U.S.] military, in and out, that brain drain that took place really didn't enable anyone to get a solid idea of what's happening.

Towards that, I don't think the U.S. understands – or understood – the mentality of Afghanistan, the warlords, the way the country was broken up. We try and apply too much U.S. experience to a foreign country that has been operating for thousands of years in a particular way.

And I don't think we collect the-- that understanding of the culture as thoroughly as we should before we begin doing things.
//
The expectation that the United States can move into a place that's foreign to us, and think that we're going to be able to establish a continuing flow of money towards a richer country and selling their jewels and-- it's-- again, it's kind of a fool's notion of, "We can do this because this is-- we're going to-- we know how-- how you achieve, you know, making wool blankets or something."

What the people need and what the U.S. was prepared to provide to them I think were on diverging paths. And, everything that the United States was trying to come up with as a solution was not a long-

term solution – and didn't take into account these long, historical, cultural issues that were-- that are a part of Afghanistan.

We gave them this technology for wells – deep wells, that provided greater agricultural farming land for the country. And we spent a lot of money purchasing the equipment as well as installing it. And it made parts of the country that were barren fertile.

And they-- they grew more opium. It just didn't make sense that we weren't considering, "Well, they-- they're the largest producers of this drug right now. Let's find a way to overcome that," as opposed to, "Oh, they'll farm with this. And they'll grow wheat." Those types of inconsistencies in policy are odd to me – that people aren't taking that into account in a bigger picture.

//

The bottom line that I learned is, in a country with corruption at the level that it was in Afghanistan, trying to get to the truth, or trying to police laws that don't have the same impact on a society and on the culture as in other countries, is a fool's errand.

I mean, there's no real purpose to trying to do that.

//

INTERVIEWER:
My last question for you is: You've spent the bulk of your professional life in public service. How satisfying was your public service at this agency relative to the sweep of the rest of your career?
//
INTERVIEWEE 13:
The opportunity to work at SIGAR enabled me to see how effectively and efficiently a small organization can be. And its ability to treat its people with the best services, from the HR standpoint, to be able to "can-do" and answer questions that are raised at the highest levels of the U.S. government in [an] efficient, forthcoming way, not being shy, ensuring that the real story is told, and ensuring that the oversight of the organization is all marching to the same beat.

I think a lot was learned-- by me in my experience serving at SIGAR in just how efficient a small agency can be, as compared to the Departments of Justice and the like, where the left hand doesn't know what the right hand's doing.

SIGAR enabled that efficient, fast-moving, almost an immediate response to any change – as opposed to steering an aircraft carrier. It was steering a speedboat. We were as an agency able to be very nimble and very effective in the assignments that we were given, the challenges that we were given, and the questions that were being asked of SIGAR.
//

The model that SIGAR worked within is, I think, a pure example of getting people to the problem in the quickest, most efficient way possible, not burdened with the bureaucracy of the government, but free-wheeling and open to change.
//
SIGAR's size and nimbleness was a real advantage to conducting oversight work in Afghanistan.
//
As the United States attends to problems throughout the world, I think the SIGAR model, to me, offers the perfect opportunity to understand what's happening on the ground as quickly as possible.

You can assess. You can pick and choose the areas based on a priority of the problem. And you can report through a single voice of SIGAR – through its IG [inspector general], who is active in the community, is active in the associations with which are impacting Afghanistan, the other countries which are impacting Afghanistan, the large agencies like the United Nations that are impacting Afghanistan, and come to the root of:

"This is a problem." "Stay clear of this." "Move forward on this."

It again served as a very nimble and quick responses to answering questions that the United States had as it ventured into this problem of Afghanistan – and never quite saw how the best to proceed and be successful.

###