



SIGAR | SPECIAL INSPECTOR GENERAL FOR
AFGHANISTAN RECONSTRUCTION

SIGAR Oral History Project (OHP)

Interview 16: Edited Transcript

Interview Date: 12/06/23

NAME/TITLE

INTERVIEWEE 16:

My name is [NAME]. I am a SIGPRO at SIGAR. SIGPRO is a prosecutor who works with a special inspector general. I'm on detail from SIGAR to the Fraud Section of the Department of Justice, DOJ.

JOB DESCRIPTION

INTERVIEWER:

And so what does that job entail? First of all, generally, a SIGPRO – and then, more specifically, your specific detailee work.

INTERVIEWEE 16:

There's two parts of it. One is that I handle cases. I bring cases that are-- that have been investigated by the Inv-- being investigated at SIGAR and at other agencies. And I handle those cases under the supervision of people at the Fraud Section of the Criminal Division of DOJ. That's one part of it, but [the] biggest part.

The second part is that I also give legal training and legal advice to investigators and others at SIGAR. I've often done yearly trainings for all the investigators on evidence and the printing of reports, things like that. I have occasionally answered questions concerning criminal prosecutions with [the] General Counsel's Office or others, and the administrative structure here at SIGAR.

CAREER HISTORY

INTERVIEWER:

So I want to go back through your career history, but I want to start at the beginning. So you're obviously an attorney. What degree do you have?

INTERVIEWEE 16:

I have a JD from Harvard Law School. That's a way's back. That was in 1979. I was in private practice in New York City for 10 years. And then I got a job as an AUSA – which is an Assistant United States



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Attorney – in the Federal District of Vermont. So I was a prosecutor in Vermont from 1989 until a couple years ago.

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When I was in high school and college, my biggest intellectual interest, if you want to call it that, was history. And my second biggest interest was economics. I was also interested in the law, interested in politics. At the time I was graduating from college, there were essentially no teaching positions open in history.

And I was interested in the law, and I applied to law schools. And I, by some fluke, got admitted to a very good one. And so that's where I went. Once I was in law school, I decided that I wanted to be a litigator, as opposed to being a corporate-type attorney.

And I became-- I was hired in New York law firms as a litigator at mostly civil practice, very little criminal practice. I wanted to get into criminal law, and I wanted to work as a prosecutor-- where you have more choice of what you-- what cases you want to work on, rather than whoever can pay the bill.

And that's why I applied to the United States Attorney's Offices in different places. And the place I got the job was in Vermont. I thought I would stay there for a few years. I stayed there until-- I was officially working there at least until 2022.

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While I was there in-- I went on what they call a detail, which is, you know, a job outside of Vermont, outside of anything the U.S. Attorney's Office there does-- but I went on a detail. For 15 months I worked in Afghanistan, for the Department of Justice.

I was working not as a prosecutor, but as a mentor and trainer for Afghan prosecutors. It was a great job – particularly dealing with young prosecutors there who really wanted to do things right and had very little training. Some of their superiors were interested in doing things right.

More of them were interested in making sure things weren't done right. But it was a fascinating job. We had a lot of independence in the way we did the job. We drove around Kabul and its environs and traveled some to other places. And I got to see a part of world that I never would have seen otherwise.

And there are lots of people, including me, have often said that there are too many lawyers in the United States. What I saw was a place in which there clearly were not enough lawyers. It was a fascinating job.

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The opportunity to take the mentoring job in Afghanistan was offered within the Department of Justice to criminal prosecutors. And they wanted to see how many people would be crazy enough to volunteer for that. And I jumped at the opportunity, and was selected to go.

INTERVIEWER:

Why'd you jump at it?

INTERVIEWEE 16:

Well, my children were grown. My youngest had just finished college. I was maybe a little bored with what I had been doing for a long time. I always been fascinated with that part of the world, with Central Asia. I'd oft-- I'd read quite a lot about it.

And I had closely followed the-- what-- well, the revolution, and the civil wars, and the-- that had been going on in Afghanistan from what had happened in the '60s and '70s there – really in the '70s there, with the Russian invasion – and then the civil war that happened after the Russians finally left, and when the Taliban took over.

So I think an awful lot of people didn't know anything about Afghanistan until after 9/11. And then, of course, I was very interested in that. But I was-- I had been very interested in it and following it for long before that. And so this was a chance to see that area, learn more about it, and to take some small part in, you know, what we were trying to do.

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At the end of that, though, I went back to Vermont, worked there, the same sort of work I had done before, but then I got recruited by people working at SIGAR, or working with SIGAR, to take on this job with SIGAR, which was obviously involved with Afghanistan and which gave me the opportunity to travel back to Afghanistan several times a year. And that was something I was very interested in doing.

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SIGAR recruited me because, a), I was an experienced prosecutor who could handle fraud ca-- who could handle complex fraud cases. Second, because I was familiar with Afghanistan. I was familiar with the things that went wrong in Afghanistan.

And so I-- and handling any prosecutions based in Afghanistan requires understanding of how corrupt the system there was, how widespread corruption was, and how poor the record-keeping there was, both-- primarily by the Afghans, but also by NATO, and the U.S.

But I understood that, at least to some extent. And I was interested in going back there. Part of the job, as I said, was doing training for investigators, that includes the investigators at SIGAR. So one of the things I would do is give training every time I went to-- back to Afghanistan. And, unlike some people who wouldn't want to go, I really wanted to go back there.

INTERVIEWER:



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So how many trips did you make to Afghanistan for SIGAR?

INTERVIEWEE 16:

I can't give you a precise number, but I started at SIGAR in, I think, May of 2016. And I made at least several trips per year until-- yes, into 2020, I think, and certainly not, obviously, after August of '21.

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SIGAR DEPLOYMENT TO AFGHANISTAN

INTERVIEWER:

When you arrived in Afghanistan for the first time with SIGAR, it was not your first time being there. Did it help you in the job that you took with SIGAR to have been in-country before, dealing with the nuts-and-bolts parts of the Afghan former government's justice system, such as it existed?

INTERVIEWEE 16:

It did help. It helped being familiar with the atmosphere of the place. It helped being familiar with part of the organization at the U.S. Embassy. And it helped that I had worked with-- I had extensively worked with the Afghan Attorney General's Office, and the Afghan Supreme Court, and some of the Afghan trial courts when I had been there previously.

So I had a pretty good idea of how that worked. And I'd worked with parts of the NATO bureaucracy where the money flowed -- obviously, at the much greater focus of being a SIGPRO than it was in the job I was in previously. But you still saw it in the previous job. So that was a big help. Yes.

CONDUCTING OVERSIGHT INVESTIGATIONS IN A WAR ZONE: AFGHANISTAN

INTERVIEWER:

So, when you hit the ground in Afghanistan that first time with SIGAR, when you started on the work of trying to build and pursue cases for SIGAR, what things did you realize right off the bat about the kind of difficulties and complexities doing that work in a conflict zone, in a combat zone, would bring?

INTERVIEWEE 16:

The two biggest differences: one is-- well, you might easily get [that] you can't just go out and talk to people. As a fellow prosecutor in the United States, you normally send investigators out to talk to witnesses. But I often want to talk to the witnesses myself. You go talk to them. Obviously, in Afghanistan you're not doing that.

And by 2016 and 2017 it was harder and harder for the investigators just to travel within Afghanistan. And that was a significant and a growing problem, in my opinion. There are often allegations of things not being where they were supposed to be, or things that hadn't been built, or things that hadn't been built properly.



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You know, cases – without going into specifics – where the government's buying parts, are the parts really being delivered? If a project like that was being handled in the U.S. or in any place in Europe, for instance, the agencies would have people on-site, checking off everything that gets delivered.

Doesn't happen in Afghanistan. You get occasional visits, and that's it. So that's a being difference. It makes you suspect that there's more fraud going on, because it's so much harder for anyone to check. But it's harder to prove that the fraud is going on, because it's so hard for anyone to check.

This other half of problems-- particular problems there-- well, I shouldn't say the other half. There are probably 10 halves. But, the other part of it is that you can't easily get Afghan government, or Afghan bank, or other financial institution records in any way that's admissible in U.S. court.

We – other SIGPROs and I – worked on that, attempted that for years. We succeeded in one or two cases. But, that's about it, in terms of getting records that are certified because they are admissible in the U.S. court. So you're always going around the back door trying to figure out ways of getting things admissible. Sometimes they are, with a lot more work, and sometimes they're not, [but] you're just not going to make certain cases.

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When I was in Afghanistan, I was there to talk about cases with the agents, specific cases with the agents who had been working on them, also to do training for the agent-- for all the agents, and to answer questions about legal issues, and also to have meetings with people from some of the agencies that worked at the [U.S.] Embassy.

On occasion – and this is the part I like the best – on occasion, I got to meet-- to go back to some of the-- a couple of the Afghan agencies that I'd worked with-- a couple times got to see again people that I worked with before.

But I wasn't-- when I was in Afghanistan for SIGAR, because it was relatively short periods of time, I wasn't spending a lot of time preparing cases. When I was back here in the States, that's when I was working on cases, on preparing, you know, indictments or, you know, obviously there's a lot of investigation that goes on before you can really start preparing an indictment.

So-- but that's kind of work I was doing here. And one of the things you should know is that every case, every SIGAR case, once it came to a SIGPRO, once it was at that-- it was decided by SIGAR that it was worth pursuing, it would be [a SIGAR] agent in Afghanistan and [a SIGAR] agent here, so that, among other things – because you can't sit down with a person in Afghanistan-- also there was an eight-and-a-half hour time difference, so you were working on a day-to-day basis more with the agent here in the U.S. than you were with the agent over there.

What you do with them is you talk to them. You find out what the case is about. And you suggest ways to further that. And you also need to figure out-- the agents will know the facts of the case better than I will. They should. They[d] better.



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But, I need to know them well enough-- know the facts well enough, to know whether what is suspected would constitute a crime, and also whether the facts, as the agents now know them, is sufficient to prove the crime. And if it's not yet sufficient to prove the crime, which is usually the case, what we can do to try to learn more that can make it sufficient to either prove the case, or to learn enough to realize that you're never going to be able to prove that. And maybe it didn't happen, or maybe you just decide that we're never going to be able to talk with the evidence on that, and so we better drop that. Move onto another case.

INTERVIEWER:

How important were the trips into Afghanistan in terms of how they helped you figure out if you've had enough to make a case or not?

INTERVIEWEE 16:

It varied a great deal. Sometimes-- for instance, I was part of an interview of witnesses over there. And in those cases, I was dealing with people who were never going to come or never going to willingly come to the United States -- who were very much afraid of what might happen to them and wanted things to be very secretive.

So getting to see them, getting to interact with them, getting to see how they-- what I thought about their trustworthiness, and what I thought about the possibility of them ever being a witness was crucial in those cases. In other cases -- and it's true of many of the cases that we brought -- most of the cases that we bring don't involve Afghan witnesses.

When they did, it was crucial for me to be there and see them. But otherwise, a lot of the cases, a lot of the big fraud cases, they're primarily paper cases. So you're working with agents to make sure that you understand what the paper is, where the paper came from, what-- how good the records are.

And, you know, then there are, of course, witnesses who produced these papers, or compiled these papers, or perhaps tried to destroy these papers-- and so you need to talk to the agents about that. But you can talk to them about that because that's not something-- that's not something that is going on in Afghanistan.

So it was-- it was very important to me to have a chance to talk to the agents, to sit down and talk with them face-to-face, at the least. Also because of my age, I do better talking to people, you know, across the table than just always on the phone. So it was important to do that.

But it was not as important as it was to sometimes actually see a witness who was not going to be coming to the United States anytime soon. Other than that, you'd be-- it was good to talk to the [SIGAR] agents. It was good to be reminded of the atmosphere in which people can't travel around, in which people are very frustrated by their attempts to get information from the Afghan Attorney General's Office, or Afghan banks, or even from NATO.



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And seeing that atmosphere gave me a much better understanding of some of the reasons that cases didn't necessarily go smoothly. And many of them did not go very smoothly. But there are good reasons for that. I would say a very solid reason. It wasn't an investigator's fault that he wasn't getting certain information. People were working hard. People were working under very-- often very unpleasant circumstances. And it was good to see that, being—be reminded of, you know, their life as opposed to-- their life there as opposed to my life here.

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INTERVIEWER:

What is it that makes doing criminal prosecuting work in a conflict zone, a combat zone like Afghanistan, such a challenge? Just bottom-line. The crux of it.

INTERVIEWEE 16:

The crux of-- well, the crux of the problems of working as a prosecutor in a combat zone is that, as a prosecutor in the United States, you are used to having authority. You can serve grand jury subpoenas on people, and they have to show up.

You go to banks, and you get the records. When you're dealing with other government officials, they understand that criminal prosecutions are important and take priority. When you're in a combat zone, none of that is true. You can't subpoena people into any place because there's no place to subpoena them into.

You can try talking to other people, but they have other things going on. And in a combat zone, the people fighting the combat take priority. You don't. And that's different from being in the United States, and you have to accept that. If you can't accept that, you shouldn't be there.

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INTERVIEWER:

So if you were speaking with somebody who had a similar criminal prosecutor history to you, who was considering taking those skills and bringing them to a conflict zone, to a combat zone, for the federal government, what would you say to them about how the job is different in a conflict zone, a combat zone than it is in, you know, sort of day-to-day, the practice that you had as an Assistant U.S. Attorney in Vermont pursuing cases? How is it different in a combat zone, in a conflict zone?

INTERVIEWEE 16:

Well, there's-- there are a lot of ways it's different from being in a combat zone, from, you know, sitting in an office in the U.S. Attorney's Office. A couple of the more obvious differences that someone should understand before they get into it are, as I said before, the difficulty of just doing the things you normally do is going out and talking to witnesses, being able to find witnesses whenever you want to find them.



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Expecting-- well, in a normal situation, you would expect that the records would be kept and the records will be in the normal places that records are. And that's kind of what you base the admissibility of records on – and it's called “the business record exception” – to their same goals.

In a combat zone you may not have that. Or you're certainly not going to have it in the same way. And I think naturally enough, the people that are handling the combat – you know, like soldiers – they don't think that keeping their proper records, and keeping them in the proper place, and having them available whenever some, you know, some stupid lawyer from the States wants to see them, they don't think that's really-- that's a real high priority.

And you can't blame them. I don't blame them, but you have to expect that, and not be frustrated by that, and not give up the investigation where you might investigate it someplace, you know, who are not cooperating with you. So I think that's important.

The other fact is, and this is unfortunate from the point of view of a lawyer, or even a prosecutor, is that you have to realize that sometimes the records simply aren't going to be there, or [they] aren't going to be kept, and you aren't going to talk to people in a timely fashion.

And you can't-- that's not an excuse you can really use in court. A defense attorney is not going to say, "Oh, well, you-- Judge, you should let that evidence in, because really it was a tough situation." A defense lawyer is not going to let it in if it doesn't meet the normal criteria.

So there are times when you have to decide, well, this case simply isn't going to be made. And you have to, you know, decide you're going to cut the cord on something, and move on to the next one. You're not going to win this case. It's not going to happen. Drop it and move on. And that's quite different from the way you would approach things in a normal prosecutor's role.

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Some of the smaller cases that were brought – which, you know, were soldiers or contractors, the kickbacks or selling stuff to, you know, to Afghans. Some of that-- most of that sort of thing was happening not in Kabul, not where the headquarters were, and not where most of the records were being kept, and where people were moving in and out on a regular basis and where people were in significantly more danger than they were in Kabul. So if you were trying to gather that kind of information, the evidence for that kind of crime, the witnesses-- if they said that the witnesses were Afghans, well, we weren't going to use them as witnesses probably. Almost certainly.

To the extent the witnesses were other contractors, or [U.S.] soldiers, they weren't going to be there for very long. And you can't-- you don't have any control over that, unlike in the United States. You know, somebody works for a law enforcement agency in the United States and you need to talk to them on a federal case, they'll talk to you – or their bosses will talk to you.

And if you want them to show up, they'll show up. When you're talking about soldiers in a firebase* in Afghanistan, they're not going to. If you talk about soldiers who were on a firebase and have now



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been reassigned, and they're now in Somalia, or they're back in the States, or they're wherever – well, again, they're not going to show up.

[* temporary U.S. military facility supporting troops with artillery or other fire support]

You need to talk to a senior officer. Good luck with that. And you try to schedule an interview of a general, it may take months to get an interview. And then at the last minute, something comes up, and you don't see him anyway. I mean, that – without out going into a case name – that happened on a couple of actually more significant cases.

It's—[it] was not that high a priority for them. They were fighting a war. And, I wasn't arguing with that. But that's not generally something that you're dealing with in the normal course of events back in the States. And that changes what you can do. And it changes the timeline on when you can get things accomplished.

On big fraud cases, which is what I thought our focus should be and what I think any-- in this sort of situation the focus should be on larger, long-term investigations. It's difficult to-- well, big, longer term fraud investigations are primarily “paper” investigations.

What do the records show? What did they say they were going to do? What did they actually do? What got delivered? What didn't get delivered? How did stuff get delivered? Those cases are brought on the records. You call them a “paper” case even though it's all electronic now.

But those cases are based on records. They're based on [U.S.] Army records. They're based on business records. They're based on government records. And in the United States we assume that those records will be available. If they are not available, we investigate why they're not available.

And sometimes the records-- sometimes the reason records are not available is just because there was a screw-up. But we are very suspicious when the records are not available. In a combat zone, the records are very often not available.

There's often good reasons for that – because things are being done in a hurry. So they're not kept as perfectly as they should be. And, as in the previous set of cases, the people who are responsible for keeping those records – to the extent they're Americans, or they're [U.S.] soldiers, or contractors – they're moving on. They're there for a year.

And then they're someplace else, someplace very different, and someplace where you can't just call them back. You know, if a soldier was in Afghanistan and now he's in someplace NATO-related, in Europe or elsewhere – we have soldiers in a lot of places – they don't just show up at your office because you want to talk to them.

So—and, in the longer term, the bigger cases, the cases that take time – before people realized there was a fraud, and then it could take years to put a case like that together – in that period of time, if you're dealing with corporations in the United States, most of those people are still going to be there.



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The record is still going to be there. When you're dealing in a combat zone, the people are not still going to be there. The records may not have ever existed in proper form. Even if they did, it may be very difficult to find them. Or that the people that file them in the first place are no longer there.

It's not a setup like a corporation has, and it's very difficult to put back together what was happening four years previous. That's something you have to be-- you have to expect. You have to try to understand that. But that's a continuing problem there.

And, again, you have to realize that for the people that are involved in the combat, you are not the highest priority. You're never going to be the highest priority. And, you know, you shouldn't. If somebody even has to talk to me, or worries about what I want, or worries about getting shot – they're going to worry about getting shot.

INTERVIEWER:

What proportion of suspects, defendants were American? And what proportion of suspects, defendants were Afghan?

INTERVIEWEE 16:

The proportion of people we suspected of doing things crookedly was certainly-- the high proportion of those people were Afghans. But our job was not primarily to prosecute Afghans. Our job was to prosecute Americans, or other Westerners, the people that involved in the-- sort of in the U.S. or the NATO, I should say, chain of supply.

But it was not primarily Afghans. Now if they were dual citizens, they were Afghans who had made a lot of money – again, I'm not naming any names, but there were Afghans who had made a lot of money, more money than really was justified by their salaries, or what else they were legally doing.

And if they had gotten out of Afghanistan, or if they had gotten a lot of money out of Afghanistan, if they had become citizens in the U.S., or had gotten Green Cards* to the U.S., we would certainly investigate them. But we were not investigating Afghans who were, you know, obviously making some money out of the whole thing, but they were still in Afghanistan.

[* U.S. Permanent Resident Cards, allowing living and working permanently in the U.S., obtainable through application through U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS)]

So certainly, of the people that were being prosecuted, more of them were – many more of them – were Westerners in one form or other. Usually U.S., but others. Other people-- you know, the U.S. and other NATO countries have contracts with all sorts of, you know, companies, contractors, from a lot of different places around the world. So people like that get investigated. Their Afghan employees, much less so.

INTERVIEWER:

And why was that not the job?

INTERVIEWEE 16:



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Going after the Afghans? Well, I-- from my point of view, that was not the job because those were the smallest of the fish. And those were the people who were still there. They were there. Most of them were desperately poor to start with. Afghanistan is a desperately poor country.

Most of those people were not making much money. They may have been stealing a little bit of money, but it didn't-- in the overall scheme of things, it didn't matter very much. And it was much more understandable. But if you have an Afghan-- I mean, to give you [a] for instance, an Afghan prosecutor's basic salary was something like \$250, \$260 a month.

If by any chance any of the prosecutors I ever worked with was making a little extra money, well, they shouldn't be doing that. But it was pretty understandable. If you had a contractor there, and now-- we are still talking about a relative small fry, but a contractor there who was making six figures -- and he's stealing money, he's getting big kickbacks--

This is a guy who, you know, in the States maybe he'd be making \$50,000 here. And he's over there making \$200,000 a year, and then he's getting a bunch of kickbacks on top of that. That to me is much more worth prosecuting than the Afghan. What I preferred to work on was cases that were bigger than that, contractors or the contracting companies that had significant contracts -- and were making a lot of money and adding onto that.

So-- but the-- you know, the Afghans who were, you know, getting ahold of, you know, a truckload of fuel-- so once in a while that just didn't strike me as worth my time. I should add this: there were a lot of investigations, by SIGAR, into larger-scale fraud and corruption in-- by people in the Afghan government or in the Afghan military. And a lot of those investigations were really well-done. But a lot of them did not lead to prosecutions. At least, they didn't lead to U.S. prosecutions.

And [there was] a couple reasons for that. One is that to make a case there, you would need a lot of Afghan witnesses. And we did not want to be bringing a lot of Afghan witnesses to the United States. Secondly, although a lot of the money was American, a lot of the money was actually sort of-- was given by the U.S. to the Afghan government, then being stolen by people from the Afghan government.

That's not as easily prosecutable as money being stolen directly from the U.S. government. So a lot of those investigations, it is my understanding, led to information being given to the Afghan government to-- that could have led to Afghan prosecutions. Without naming any names or anything of the sort, the record of the previous Afghan government in prosecuting internal corruption was very poor, remarkably poor. [LAUGHS]

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INTERVIEWER:

Given all these other factors that you've mentioned, were there pressures of any kind to not pursue prominent Afghan figures, from anywhere?



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INTERVIEWEE 16:

When I was working there for DOJ – not for SIGAR, but – when I was in-- in 2010, 2011, yes. There clearly were. Without naming names, there were investigations going on, into high levels – people in-- high administrators in the [former] Afghan central government, and into the Afghan governors of several of the provinces.

Cases were made, by U.S. investigators working with Afghan investigators. And those cases pretty routinely got quashed. I was working with Afghan prosecutors who convicted a number of people. And those people – even after conviction – were then released from jail.

Sometimes people who'd been arrested while an investigation was being finished, which is sort of the Afghan procedure, would then be released. And the case would go away. Successful prosecutors sometimes got transferred to dangerous places.

That was very common. And I have no reason to believe that that had stopped after I finished working there. There was nothing that had continued, but that doesn't mean that I had the same kind of personal knowledge of it that I did when I was there in 2010, 2011 – because then I did.

INTERVIEWER:

So the quashings that you observed – the quashings were occurring within Afghanistan, not—

INTERVIEWEE 16:

Yes.

INTERVIEWER:

--from other pressures elsewhere.

INTERVIEWEE 16:

No. I didn't see-- I was not aware of-- I mean, obviously I can't promise that things happened that I didn't see. The quashing of corruption inquiries that I saw were within the Afghan government. I think there's a reasonable question as to the extent to which the U.S. government intervened, or should have intervened, or could have intervened more vigorously to make sure that those investigations didn't get quashed.

There's been a lot of back-and-forth about that ever since. But I don't think it was-- I didn't see the U.S. government intervening on behalf of people who were-- who were corrupt. It was internal Afghan intervention. And as I say, I think that the U.S. government probably didn't do enough to stop that. But they-- but if it-- but it was internal pressure, not external.

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INTERVIEWER:

What was the success rate in bringing cases, and pursuing cases, and closing cases, and winning cases – as it compares to what you would have experienced in your stateside career?



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INTERVIEWEE 16:

That's a difficult question to answer. // You've asked sort of what the difference is between the batting average on cases in the U.S. as opposed to the batting average on cases originating in Afghanistan. And that's a very difficult question to answer – because it's not a matter of winning or losing a case.

It's a matter of which cases you can develop, or which investigations you can develop, so that you wind up with enough admissible evidence that you think you could bring the case. So it's not that we were, you know, bringing a lot of cases and losing.

But there are investigations that start and then stop because you're not developing evidence. So, some of them certainly would be cases where you would expect that you could get that evidence, if the activity had happened in the United States.

It's possible that the activity wouldn't have happened in the United States because people would have been more afraid of getting caught, particularly some of the smaller stuff that happened. Some of the, like, the kickbacks-- you know, kickbacks being somebody gets a contract to do something, to provide a service, to provide supplies of some sort, and they kick back part of profit to whoever awarded the contract to them – that was so common there.

It was more-- much more common than I think that it is in the United States because it was hard to prove. There weren't many investigators. And it just became part of the way that things got done. But a lot-- there were so many cases, so many opportunities for smaller-scale investigations, that people – the investigators – I think, had to pick and choose.

So investi-- suspicious circumstances that would have led to a fuller investigation if it had happened in the United States, or probably even if it had happened in Western Europe, just-- they couldn't all be investigated. And there were some – many – in which the activity happened, you know, off on a base someplace, or near a base, out in the boondocks someplace, and people would just shrug their shoulders, and, you know, “Well, we know that's going on.”

And, you know, we try to find some, and make an example out of some, and hope that it has some deterrent effect, but you know you're investigating a much smaller percentage than you would investigate if it was happening in the States.

And you know that a significant number of those investigations get dropped because people get moved. The locals aren't-- you know, we-- as I said, we very rarely used Afghan witnesses. The other soldiers who might be witnesses, they get moved around. They get sent back to the States.

So there's all sorts of reasons that investigations sort of stopped and st-- you know, they were started, and they would stop. So that's a much, a much lower percentage of investigations got-- a much lower percentage of suspicious circumstances got fully investigated. And a much smaller percentage of investigations wound up as cases. I can't put numbers on that, though.



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SIGAR INVESTIGATIONS: SUCCESSES?

INTERVIEWER:

At the end of the day, when you look back on everything, what were your biggest success stories?

INTERVIEWEE 16:

The biggest success stories were if anyone running a significant fraud got caught and got convicted. I think also to the extent that you could – I could, any SIGPRO could – corroborate what the investigators were doing so that, even if no one got prosecuted, that a way that money was being taken from the U.S. government or from NATO was stopped – because once it was, once they realized that money was being taken wrongfully, if something wasn't being-- I mean, that there was a way the money was leaking out that hadn't been seen previously – so money was saved that way.

So I think that those were successes and, you know, a more significant kickback – individuals getting more significant kickbacks – you know, I think those were those were successes.

I think that the things that didn't work out as well was a couple of long-term investigations into sort of internal Afghan corruption, where we developed a lot of evidence, but did not have enough in the way of what we considered reliable Afghan witnesses to make a prosecutable case against significant abuses of U.S. finance.

So, some-- you know, some cases went well. And some, particularly the ones involving sort of internal Afghan corruption, did not. And that was very frustrating.

In general, I thought that we needed to focus on the biggest corruption involving outside contracting companies – because that's where huge amounts of money were being spent, and misspent.

And it was relatively easy, as I said, to perform services, or not to perform services, or not to provide exactly what the supplies that were supposed to be supplied, because it was so difficult to check on things. Part of the reason that it was so difficult to do that was it was a combat zone.

You couldn't get around and do it. And partly we didn't really have – in my, you know, ever-humble opinion – we didn't have enough investigators. And by we, I mean the U.S. government in general. I don't mean SIGAR.

And we didn't have enough prosecutors. I think that, you know, SIGAR had more prosec-- and more investigators in Afghanistan than the rest of the government put together, which I think frankly was nuts. I mean, not to knock the SIGAR investigators in the slightest, but, you know, DCIS*, Army CID**, the FBI – they had very few investigators there.

[* Defense Criminal Investigative Service (DCIS), U.S. Department of Defense Office of Inspector General]

[** U.S. Army Criminal Investigation Division]



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And I think that they-- all of them should have had more investigators there looking into not the small corruption, the-- you know, the soldiers selling a tank of fuel-- I mean, they shouldn't be doing that, of course.

But not that – people should have been looking at how money was flowing to NATO. They should have been looking at, you know, how the troops were being fed, how the transportation was being organized, the security. There was a certain amount of investigation of all that. I think they-- there could have and should have been more. I'm not knocking SIGAR on that, but SIGAR was sort of the lone-- a lone voice in the wilderness on that. And it-- I can't for the life of me figure out why that was allowed to be.

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BEST QUALITIES FOR OVERSIGHT-IN-A-WAR-ZONE PROSECUTORS?

INTERVIEWEE 16:

As a career prosecutor – and at my current age I'm not likely to start another career – you expect that when you start investigating very suspicious circumstance, when a good investigator, a trained investigator, is bringing you evidence that makes you think that some crime was to-- had been taking place, and the investigator wants to pursue it, and you want to pursue it, and it stalls out because you can't get the bank records, or it stalls out because all the possible witnesses to it, you know, have been dispersed to a million different places, that's very frustrating. Sure.

INTERVIEWER:

Do those obstacles make it difficult to do this work in a conflict zone, a combat zone, compared to doing it in the States?

INTERVIEWEE 16:

Yes. Very much so.

INTERVIEWER:

Can everybody – who's a prosecutor – do it? Or does that weed out some people who just can't-- it's too daunting to not have the ability to bring cases?

INTERVIEWEE 16:

I think that if you're easily frustrated or if you're a perfectionist – and that's not the same thing – it would-- if you're easily frustrated, you would throw up your hands. And if you're a perfectionist, you would be-- [LAUGHS] you might shoot yourself, or someone else.

It's-- you have to-- well, when I was there, I remember talking to other prosecutors there – this is when I was working for DOJ, not for SIGAR, but I remember them, you know-- people were complaining about how corrupt the place was and how inefficient investigations were.



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And I remember just saying to them, "Well, you know, we're in Afghanistan. If this were Belgium, we wouldn't be here." It was a very imperfect place. But if you're going to have any effect there, you had to understand that, the unintended difficulties of it, and realize that it's not like bringing a case in the United States.

But, yeah, we were there because of the difficulties. We were there because the system there was screwed up. And to the extent that we were dealing with Americans there, like things with the [U.S.] military, well, the military is not there to serve as investigators for criminal cases.

The [U.S.] military was there to fight a war. And their priority was fighting the war. And you had to understand that. And that was very frustrating to us, and I'm sure we were very frustrating to them. But if you let that get to you, you really couldn't do your job.

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WHAT DID SIGAR DO WELL?

INTERVIEWER:

[NAME:], what things do you think that this agency has done well, in terms of conducting oversight in a combat zone, a conflict zone, a war zone?

INTERVIEWEE 16:

Well, I think what it did well was to-- first of all, was to keep agents on the ground there. And the other agencies weren't doing that. And I-- that's-- the first and main thing that I give SIGAR credit for, is that they stayed there.

They kept doing it and kept doing their best, even as the ability of the [SIGAR investigative] agents to do their job was dwindling, because of the fact that the agenc-- that the Afghan agencies and institutions were not getting more cooperative. If anything, they were getting less cooperative.

The country was getting much more dangerous. It was much more difficult for the SIGAR agents to get out and travel around. But I give them great credit for the fact that they were still there, they were still trying.

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WHAT COULD/SHOULD SIGAR HAVE DONE BETTER/DIFFERENTLY?

INTERVIEWER:

Now I'm going to ask you, were there things that, from your vantage point, you think SIGAR should have done differently, than what they did – things that they could have improved upon?

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INTERVIEWEE 16:



I do have a belief on that. Yes. And I think this would be appropriate for anyone trying to do oversight in a confused situation or a confused situation involving combat and large-scale, very large-scale, rapid spending of public money – because obviously the money was flowing through Afghanistan, you know, like a river in flood.

I think that the investigators and, well, SIGAR as a whole, the investigators and the prosecutors should have focused much more on the biggest chunks of – I was talking about the flood – the biggest tributaries, the biggest parts of the money flow.

It was easier and quicker – and I'm not criticizing anybody in particular here – but it was easier and quicker to see relatively small, “make-able” cases, involving relatively small amounts of money. And it was-- and I just think that was a waste of time.

When there are contractors stealing millions, tens of millions, sometimes more than that, and there are soldiers or, you know, individual contractors who were stealing \$10,000-- even \$50,000, I think you should focus on the big contractors who were stealing the tens of millions.

It's a lot harder to make those cases, and particularly in a combat zone, as I said before, there are reasons that it's even harder to make those cases in Afghanistan than it would be back here. But it's all the more important. So I think that that's something that SIGAR could have done better.

I say it's easier in those cases, the cases that get prosecuted that way – it's not that somebody says, “Ah, I'm just going to go for this one,”— it's that those cases pop up in front of you, and as an investigator, as a prosecutor, when somebody, something, a case pops up in front of you and the evidence is there, you're supposed to do that, right?

I mean, you are. But-- so it's difficult to say, “No – even though that's a case that should be made, somebody should investigate that guy, somebody should prosecute that guy, but I'm not going to do it because there's a case over here that might involve \$50 million, and could turn into a prosecution a year-- a year from now.”

It's very hard to turn away from the guy that's right in front of you that you can do now, because you might be able to make a really big, important case a year from now, two years from now. But I still think that's what you should be doing. And I don't think we did enough of that.

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INTERVIEWER:

Why didn't that happen?

INTERVIEWEE 16:

I don't know the answer to that. I think that that had been going on for a significant period of time. When I started this – and I don't think that anyone made the decision, “Oh, we're just going to go after these little, fast cases. We're not going to do that.” I think it just happened.



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I think it's sort of natural that, as I said, as an investigator, if you see someone just stole \$25,000, you're supposed to do something about that. As a prosecutor, an investigator comes to you and says, "Look, we've got a case. We've got this guy cold, you know. He stole \$25,000. He stole \$50,000. He did this. He did that. Look at the evidence here. We can get this guy, right?"

And you look at it and you say, "Yeah. We can." So you do. So I don't think anybody said, "Don't look at this other stuff. Go after these smaller cases." It's just that you fall into that. And it looks good, too.

You know, you're getting-- you're making a lot of cases. "Oh, this is great. We got an indictment-- now we got another indictment -- isn't that wonderful?" Well, you look back at it, after a while, you say, "No, it's not wonderful." Because while we got these four guys, this company got away with \$50 million. [LAUGHS]

But I don't-- like I say, I don't think somebody decided that was what we were going to do. It just-- it happened. And we sort of-- we fell into that, I think. And, of course, I wasn't there for the whole time, obviously. But I think we all did. But I think that's a problem.

The second thing that I think we spent more time on than probably we should [have] was these investigations into Afghan corruption. And, again, without going into-- without naming names, there were-- there were instances in which-- just as a for-instance, there were Afghan generals who were getting paid to feed [Afghan] troops.

And some of those troops were what they call "ghost" soldiers. They were-- they were getting money to feed 10,000 soldiers, but they maybe had 6,000, O.K.? Shouldn't be doing that. If we could have made those cases in some places where these gentlemen were really going to be prosecuted, it could have been very useful.

It could have been a deterrent to other generals from doing the same thing -- or at least doing it on quite as wide a scale, quite as blatantly, because if people are comm-- you know, people are committing fraud or any kind of crime that blatantly and getting away with it, it encourages other people to do the same thing.

However, after a certain period of time, I think it became obvious that those generals were not going to be prosecuted, that investigators who did a good job, a difficult job, in coming up [with] the evidence of what was really going on, but they weren't being prosecuted.

They weren't being, you know, being brought back to the U.S. They weren't being prosecuted in Afghanistan. So we had these very interesting cases -- they're fascinating cases to see, you know, the facts of what was going on -- but they weren't leading to prosecutions.

And if they're not leading to prosecutions, well, maybe it's to say, those investigators who were good enough to make that great case, let's put them on something else -- where they can make a great case that's going to get prosecuted.



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So I think that we-- we're supposed to be looking at corruption and the waste of U.S. money. And that was corruption, and it was a waste of U.S. money, a lot of U.S. money. But, if it wasn't leading anyplace, I think that we should have essentially steered away from that and, again, back to the places where really large-scale money was moving and off-- a big proportion of it was being stolen.

But with Westerners, or at least non-Afghans, that could be prosecuted, and where a lot of the documents, a lot of the proof of the misdeeds, was going to be on paper that was being kept someplace where paper normally gets kept – that is, in other countries, in the U.S., in the U.S. government records, the way we make cases, the way I've made a couple of, you know, big cases from there – but not relying on, you know, Afghanistan military records.

You know, the chances of that being produced, the chances of that being admissible anyplace, and the chances of the generals being held to account was just so low that I think we wasted a lot of investigative and some prosecutorial time on that.

INTERVIEWER:

Talk to me a little bit about the relationship between SIGAR prosecutors and DOJ. You were working together on many cases, it's my understanding. Can you talk about that a little bit?

INTERVIEWEE 16:

We-- it varied significantly.

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In essence, working as a SIGPRO, as-- a big part of my job was bringing prosecutions. And in those circumstances, I was acting primarily as a DOJ prosecutor.

So the other SIGPROS and I – we were working within the Fraud Section of the Criminal Division of Department of Justice, so we had supervisors within the Fraud Section. And we sometimes had additional trial attorneys from the Fraud Section working with us on a case, not usually, but occasionally.

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The cases that we wanted to bring might be best prosecuted – have the best venue, as we say – in lots of different places. So I had cases – whether they went to court or not, because – in Oklahoma. I had cases in Atlanta, a couple of other states. One of the other SIGPROS, a guy named [NAME:] brought a case in Alaska. He had a case in Puerto Rico.

So when you went to these other places, you would have at least some interaction with the AUSAs. These are the [Assistant] U.S. Attorneys in those districts. And sometimes they became part of the case team. And sometimes they really didn't.

They'd show you where the courthouse was, introduce you to the secretaries, and the recorders, and so forth. And that was it. So, we were bringing cases-- to a large extent, we were bringing cases as if we were part of the Fraud Section and sometimes working with other-- some-- always with the supervision of the Fraud Section, sometimes with the assistance of someone in the Fraud Section. And



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then we'd bring cases in different places around the United States – again, sometimes with some assistance from the local AUSA, and sometimes really just on our own.

INTERVIEWER:

Overall, did the relationship work?

INTERVIEWEE 16:

I think it mostly did. I think that, to a significant extent, it worked because SIGAR was providing the prosecutor. So, if you-- the way agencies – in general – investigating agencies get cases prosecuted, so they go to a prosecutor's office and try to convince the prosecutor's office that this is a good case, a case that that prosecutor's office should bring.

And sometimes they succeed in convincing them to do so, and sometimes they don't. In the case of SIGAR and the SIGPROs, the advantage that SIGAR had was that the SIGAR – the SIGAR investigators weren't going to the Fraud Section, saying, "This is a good case. You should put one of your prosecutors on it."

They were-- the SIGAR investigators were coming to the [SIGAR] SIGPROs and saying, "This is a case that we think you should prosecute. Take a look at it." And if we agreed, then we were going to our supervisors in the [U.S. Department of Justice Criminal Division's] Fraud Section, saying, "This is a case that should be prosecuted, that we [SIGAR] should prosecute, that you should allow us to prosecute, under your supervision."

"So we're not taking one of your guys to do it. We're going to do it as long as you-- as long as you let us." So that's very different from investigators going someplace and saying, "We want you to put one of your people to do the work on this."

So we had more-- the Fraud Section was more likely – much more likely, to let us bring a case, than to put somebody of their own, and take some of their resources. Now, it did take some of their resources. They were still normally paid, you know, travel expenses. They have, you know, [a] paralegal on it. They would, you know, do stuff like that. But they weren't-- they weren't putting, you know, the prosecutor on it, taking it away from some-- from whatever cases they thought were most important.

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WHAT ARE YOUR OWN LESSONS LEARNED?

A large part of what SIGAR does is not what I do. A large part of what SIGAR does has been to give-- attempt to give the country [= U.S.] an appraisal of how-- of what their [U.S.] government was accomplishing in Afghanistan. And I think that's very important. And I think it should have been done.

And I think a lot of it was done, you know? I was not part of that, but I think getting-- putting publicity on what was going well and what wasn't going well was very important. I think as to the prosecution



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part of that, I think that the gov-- the-- what the public doesn't see, to the extent that the public sees it at all – and I don't want to be, you know, inflating my importance here – I think that what the government doesn't see is the difficulty in bringing cases against large-scale corruption.

And again, I'm talking about big contracting companies and things like that. I'm not talking about soldiers selling a truckload of fuel. I don't think that the public sees the difficulty in that and the need for resources in that.

This is very large amounts of money. It's in very difficult circumstances to investigate and to prosecute. And if a case-- the kind of cases that we did bring to some extent, and that we should have brought, are the kind of cases that would be handled by multiple people in the [U.S. Department of Justice Criminal Division's] Fraud Section, or the [U.S. District Court for the] Southern District of New York, or places like that-- and the cases like that take a long time to bring.

So peop-- if the public in general thinks that, well, the company just steals the government blind, why wasn't somebody doing something about that? It's difficult, it's slow, and it takes a lot of resources. And if you don't-- if you don't give people time and resources, not that much of it is going to get done.

And I think that that's primarily what happened. And I think that's the-- that's sort of the message that I would give, is that, if you want the-- if you want to get rid of at least a significant amount of the corruption – the sloppiness, but also the theft or the fraud – then, in really large contracts being handled in a hurry, you need to put a lot of resources on – from investigators and then prosecutors.

And you have to expect that it's going to take time. You-- you're not-- you know, it's not going out there and doing, you know, doing drug busts and putting somebody in jail on, you know, on Monday morning. And I don't think that-- I don't think that's commonly understood.

INTERVIEWER:

It sounds as if you're saying you didn't think that SIGAR had enough resources or enough time to successfully bring those cases.

INTERVIEWEE 16:

I think that that's right. And I think they did have-- they had more resources than anybody else over there. But, to me, that's a sign of how the other agencies [were] starved [LAUGHS] [from doing] what they should have been doing.

I do think that, even within SIGAR, I think that sometimes there was too much concentration of resources on smaller cases and on, as I said before, on sort of internal Afghan corruption, rather than on what I think, you know, on the-- on the big flows of money.

But I also think that, you know, the Defense Criminal Investigation Services, and the FBI, and-- they should have had much, much more resources devoted to that. And they really didn't. They were sort of leaving it to SIGAR, and SIGAR's a very small agency.



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And, you know, SIGAR had SIGPROs, which other agencies-- you know, other agencies don't have prosecutors like that. But, you know, at most-- you know, SIGAR sometimes had three SIGPROs. This is not like, you know, going to the [U.S. Department of Justice Criminal Division's] Fraud Section.

You know, you get-- you know, a big case is going to-- you know, the cases can take years. Well, a couple big cases can take up all the prosecutors'-- one prosecutor's time, for years. If you really want to bring a lot of cases like that, you need investigators that are devoted to that, and you need to have more prosecutorial resources also.

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INTERVIEWER:

What -- if anything -- did you learn about the special inspector general model, as it applies to oversight or prosecutions in a combat zone, in a war zone?

INTERVIEWEE 16:

I don't-- O.K., you asked what is the-- what do I think about or what did I learn about the role of a special inspector general. It's hard for me to answer that question because, you know, I said before that, you know, one of the big philosophical questions in life is: compared to what?

I can see the virtues of having a special inspector general because he's not beholden to anybody in the other agencies. And he can look at more than one agency. So you don't get sort of "siloed," the way I think often happens in other places.

And he can't easily be suppressed by someone higher up in the organization. I mean, inspector generals aren't supposed to be silenced by people higher up. But it does happen. We know that it does happen. The possible drawback to it is that, and I think this happened to some extent in Afghanistan, was, "Well, SIGAR is looking into all that. We don't have to."

So the [U.S.] Army CID, Criminal Investigation Division-- I didn't see them doing much there, at least on the big questions, on the big amounts of money. The FBI didn't really have people there the last few years I was there. They had people there working on counterterrorism.

They didn't have people working on corruption. DCIS, Defense Criminal Investigation Service, had a couple people in-country. I think they should've had a couple dozen people in-country. And to some extent I think it was, "Well, you know, SIGAR is-- that's their job." And if having SIGAR there gave a pass to the other agencies, I think that's unfortunate.

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INTERVIEWER:

What did you learn about Afghanistan by doing this work?

INTERVIEWEE 16:



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I can't-- I start-- I can't really differentiate between what I learned of Afghanistan when I was working there, you know, sort of full-time for a long period of time [for the U.S. Department of Justice], and what I learned later on going there, you know, several times a year for SIGAR.

I learned a lot about Afghanistan in all that time sort of put together. What I also learned – and this is not necessarily about Afghanistan, but – I learned how little the U.S. knew about Afghanistan. And what was really startling to me at times – [was] how little our government knew.

I mean, DOJ was sending people like me back in 2010 – and had been, for a couple years before that – to go there and, you know, train Afghan prosecutors and judges. We'd go there, and they would tell you, "The-- these are the-- this is the Afghan law. These are Afghan criminal procedure law[s]."

Which was just not used in Afghanistan. We didn't know that. I found out. But we didn't know that half the judges, and prosecutors, and lawyers in Afghanistan were trained in Sharia law, that the only law school really in Afghanistan has-- you can go Western law, or you can Sharia law.

You have judges there who were applying Sharia law, that had nothing whatsoever to do with the law that we were being told we should be training that law. It was just-- just ignorant.

The number of people in Afghanistan who had, you know, important job[s]-- they were out dealing with Afghans and knew nothing about the tribal structure of Afghanistan, which is really important there. [LAUGHS]

They knew nothing – we knew so little about the poverty of the place. // I mean, it's a desperately poor country. People are very poor. It's very dirty. It's dusty. It's a lot of terrible things there.

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You saw-- I mean, the wintertime, it would be slush, and snow, and everything on the street, and people that don't-- there's no-- anything like central heating.

People have these little stoves. They burn wood or coal. You see people, men, harnessed and pulling these carts with all these tree trunks in them, harnessed up and pulling these carts, splashing through the snow and slush on the street, wearing these basically soccer sandals in bare feet, pulling these carts.

And at the level of poverty the young dream of in this country-- and then on top of that you saw, you know, the middle class there was still as desperately poor, by our standards. And there would be, you know, a few people at the top, you know, obviously doing very well.

You know, there would be these incredible houses, all this beautiful glass, and different bright colors, and so forth. We used to describe that as "narcotecture." [LAUGHS] But it was fascinating. It was a life-changing experience to see people in such incredibly different circumstances, from anything in the United States, or anything in most of the places I've visited around the world even.



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You know, I didn't grow up rich, but I grew up-- I grew up in the Bronx.* And, you know, there were poor people there. But not like that. Nothing like that. It was astonishing – quite astonishing – to see their government**, and how slipshod and haphazard everything there was, and how corrupt it was.

[* borough of New York City]

[** the former Afghanistan government]

Everything in Afghanistan-- all official decisions were made by paying somebody at least a little something, knowing somebody who was involved.

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AFTER U.S. WITHDRAWAL / AUGUST 2021

INTERVIEWER:

So August 2021. How did you feel?

INTERVIEWEE 16:

Fucking tragedy. Sorry for my language. I was-- I think it was a disgrace. I-- it's something that-- you ask me the question, and my blood pressure goes up immediately. It was a disgrace. It was an American disgrace. I-- I am ashamed that my government behaved that way.

There no reason that we left Afghanistan at all, in my opinion. We promised the Afghans. We promised the people that we're doing what we wanted them to do, that we would be there, that we would protect them. Hillary Clinton gave speeches to Afghan women how we would never desert them.

We deserted them. I'm not blaming this particularly on Hillary Clinton. But America as a whole promised to do certain things for the Afghan. I think we over-promised and under-delivered. But I don't think we should have left. And if we were going to leave, we shouldn't have left like-- like a thief running off, jumping out the window in the middle of the night.

And that's what we did. We abandoned the country. We abandoned the people who worked for us.

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But we also abandoned the people that had worked, like, for the Afghan government who were doing the things we wanted them to do.

The prosecutors that I worked with, they didn't work for the United States. But they were bringing cases that we wanted them to bring. We wanted them to be prosecuting the big narcotics cases. We wanted them to be prosecuting the Taliban. We wanted them to be prosecuting corruption.

And so they are the targets of the Taliban. And we walked out with making no preparations for what they can do. And we made no-- almost-- did almost nothing for them even after we left. We did-- took no steps to try to get them out of Afghanistan.



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And even the ones who managed to get out of Afghanistan, we told them that they can apply to try to get into the United States. But we give them no money to live on, and told them in advance-- told them -- because I know, I mean, I was communicating with some of them -- that it would be at least a year, and probably two years, before they heard anything.

They had to get out of the country by themselves, and then they have to go through this incredible application process. So I've been in communication with former prosecutors, who are out of the country, in Turkey and in other places. And now, you know, it's more than two years since that happened, and they're still not hearing any of this. Well, they're-- they're waiting for interviews.

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The people that did the things we wanted them to do, that have now applied to be refugees to the United States-- I'm not talking-- I mean, it's bad enough the way we treated the people that actually worked directly for the U.S. But the other people that were doing things we wanted, that we worked with, are in hiding in Afghanistan, or dead, or they're living miserable lives, desperately eking out existence in Turkey and other places, and have been for two-and-a-half years now and with no indication from the government as to when anything is going to happen. It-- it's disgraceful.

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WHAT DID SIGAR AND YOU ACCOMPLISH IN AFGHANISTAN?

INTERVIEWER:

What, if anything, does that do to, you know, your feelings about the work you did, the, you know, frustrations of that, the sacrifices you made -- time, travel? How does that affect your thinking about those things?

INTERVIEWEE 16:

It affects the way-- to answer your question -- the way it all ended there, and the way that we abandoned Afghanistan and the Afghans, affects my belief in what this country [= U.S.] did there. I don't feel that I made sacrifices.

I loved what I was doing there. I loved being there. I loved working with the Afghans. It was exciting and interesting. And at the time I was doing it, I thought there was a reasonable chance that it would have some long-term success. It didn't. And I'm sorry about that. But I don't feel that I made a sacrifice.

I thought I was-- believe me, I was living so much better. I was living in, you know, an 8 x 20 [foot] "hooch."* But I was safe. And I was getting, you know-- I was eating regularly. The Afghans were making a lot of sacrifices. The ones who were working for us, the ones who were not corrupt, were making huge sacrifices for us.

[* metal shipping container configured as housing unit at U.S. Embassy compound in Kabul, Afghanistan]



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They're the ones who should be-- who should be bitter about it. And a lot-- some of them are, and some of them aren't.

But I don't feel that it was wasted. I think I made-- you know, sometimes you bring a good case and you do everything you possibly can on a case, and it doesn't go well. That doesn't mean you wasted your time on it. You did the best you could.

I did the best I could there. And I think our government, to a significant extent, threw it away.

But I-- this may sound stupid, but I had a great time. I was enjoying it. I was excited about it. I was working very, very hard at it. But it was fascinating.

The people-- the people who lost, you know, are the Afghans. The people who lost are the Americans who got killed there, too. But, you know, nobody shot at me. I didn't shoot at anybody else. I don't feel a sense of personal loss, except for the people that I knew there that are now in hiding in different places. For them, I do, but not for me.

INTERVIEWER:

Final thoughts – about your whole experience, or about what it meant, or about what people who might be doing this same work down the road somewhere else should take from this experience?

INTERVIEWEE 16:

Well, from my own experience, I'm very glad that I got involved. I think that, you know, I've gotten involved in lots of other things in my-- you know, in my life outside of the government over the years – some successful, some not. And I've never regretted getting involved.

I'm not at all-- and I don't regret in any way getting involved in Afghanistan. It's a tiny bit that I did get involved. I think it was doing-- worth trying. And I gave it my best. So I don't have any regrets about that.

What I would say for anyone who might be doing that kind of work in-- well, in Ukraine, for instance, should it come to that, or other places – and there's always going to be other places, hopefully not huge military debacles, but anyplace foreign to the United States, things happening very rapidly, and large amounts of money being involved – I think that getting investigators and prosecutors involved early on would be very important.

I think that establishing your priorities would be very important. And I said I think that the big flows of money are where the investigations should be prioritized, and where the prosecutors should be. And I think that you have to go into it understanding that despite the imperfections of the judicial system in the United States, the imperfections where you're going are going to be a lot worse.

But it's still worth doing. So that's what I think.

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