SIGAR | SPECIAL INSPECTOR GENERAL FOR AFGHANISTAN RECONSTRUCTION

SIGAR Oral History Project (OHP)

Interview 17: Edited Transcript

Interview Date: 01/11/24

NAME/TITLE

INTERVIEWEE 17:
My name is [NAME]. I'm a special advisor at SIGAR.

JOB DESCRIPTION

INTERVIEWER:
And what does that job entail?

INTERVIEWEE 17:
Basically, it is a way of connecting this agency with our main audience in Afghanistan and our-- all stakeholders in and around Afghanistan. And, in a way, doing the opposite of that.

And my main focus has been trying to answer the "So what?" of what we do, and how Afghans see the work of this agency – for publishing a report, or indicting someone, or if we are going after a case that takes forever and there are a lot of questions.

People need to understand, "Why is that the case?" So, I've been trying to help people understand that side of the argument, in addition to being this connector between the agency as well as the stakeholders in and around-- out of Afghanistan.

For example, we're working on these congressional mandates after fall of the Republic.* And, obviously, you wanted to get a better understanding of what led to that collapse of the Republic. And, I was trying to help all the report-writers within the agency, not only to get to the bottom of things but also finding those voices – be it the former Afghan government officials, or civil society members, journalists, or anyone who are-- who was involved somehow in Afghanistan, or in the cause of U.S. involvement in Afghanistan.
[* Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, former Afghanistan government, 2004-2021]

So, I was reaching out to them actively and trying to convince them – to tell their stories, tell their stories in their own ways. And, obviously, there [was] some resistance in several instances. And my argument to them was, like, you know, "Hey, we're going to tell the story of Afghanistan and why the

Republic failed. And you have an opportunity here to tell your story. And if you don't, someone else will tell it on your behalf, so just use this opportunity."

So, that's kind of, like, in a nutshell what I try to do – to be a voice, for this agency, with our Afghan stakeholders, and try to relay what they say about us and about our work, to our senior leadership and other directorates here at SIGAR.

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CAREER HISTORY

From May 2015 up until December 2017, I was the chief spokesperson – acting spokesperson – for the former Afghan government.
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I was born in Afghanistan. I spent time in refugee camps in Pakistan, went back to Afghanistan, came to the U.S., studied, finished all schooling, went back to Afghanistan, and then came back to the U.S., in a nutshell, so.

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INTERVIEWER:
Are you a U.S. citizen?

INTERVIEWEE 17:
Yes.
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INTERVIEWER:
When did you become a citizen?

INTERVIEWEE 17:
2012. // The first time Taliban [was] taking over Afghanistan in 1996, I was 13. And after six months, it was impossible to live in Afghanistan, so.
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So, six months into the first time the Taliban were around, and it was unbearable for us. We could not sustain, so we had to pack and move to Pakistan. I was 13. And, when we got in Pakistan, it was just like we had to start from scratch again.

And my father got sick, so he could not work any longer. And the three of us, the brothers, in a refugee camp, started making carpets. That's how we sustained ourselves, for five years, while trying to do some schooling, informal – particularly English language, I really, really liked and I really, really loved.

So, you see kids here carrying, you know, iPads and, you know, smartphones. But my iPad and my smartphone was an Oxford pocket dictionary, and my dedication was to learn one word per day. And

not just the word, the meaning, but also, you know, the functions, whether it's an adverb or an adjective.

And, fast forward to 2002, you know, after the U.S. intervention, and [the] toppling of the Taliban, we went back to Afghanistan, where I had to restart school and restart life. Up until 2006, going to school and, at the same time, working. And then, I got an opportunity, a fellowship in Washington, D.C. as a journalist. That brought me to the U.S.
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It was with the International Center for Journalists. Scripps Howard Foundation and ICFJ* had a partnership where they would bring five local American journalists and one international. And on that year, the international one happened to be me. And, you know, I came here, got a job offer at VOA.**
[* International Center for Journalists]
[** Voice of America, international news and information service funded by the U.S. government.]
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I started journalism in 2005-- 2004, actually. It was very coincidental. I wasn't a planned thing, so I was working for a small media company, in the administration and finances part. And there was one day, you know, they had a missing person for [an] educational song that they wanted to do for-- in order to encourage kids to go to school.

And they didn't know how to do it, you know? They were just, you know, brainstorming. And I happened to wait for a signature of the boss of the company, and the meeting was going on, and I was sitting there waiting for her to sign [these] few documents.

And at the end of the brainstorming session, she turns to me and is like, "You know, what do you think we should do?" And I just gave her my thoughts. And it was like, "I think we put you in the wrong department. You belong here."

And, fast forward, I wrote the script for that song, and I directed it. And I would-- it just became a hit. And that's how I started journalism. And then, radio-- I had a radio show in Kabul, before going and doing a lot of public relations job[s] for the former Afghan government, which then led me to coming to the U.S. and doing journalism.

For VOA, I've done a bunch of-- like, the radio, television, online, social media. And I enjoyed it. But at one point, it was just like-- it was just not enough for me, you know? I had more thirst than what journalism could quench.
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Mainly, I stayed in the U.S. because I wanted to study. I wanted to get a proper education, because during the Taliban, before the Taliban, the civil war, I never had the opportunity to learn as much as I wanted to, or do even proper schooling.

So, "U.S.A.": the second name for immigrant Americans is "U Start Again." I started again, went to college full-time, was working for VOA full-time. And that continued for six years – from 2009 up until '15, when I went back to Afghanistan, when I did both my bachelor's and master's [degrees], back-to-back, with a couple of months' break.

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I did my bachelor's at University of Maryland and my master's at Johns Hopkins University. Political science bachelor's with journalism minor and public management at Hopkins.

INTERVIEWER:
So, when you pursued those studies, what was in your mind about what you wanted to do with your career?

INTERVIEWEE 17:
I wanted to go back to Afghanistan. I wanted to run for the Afghan Parliament. And, the reason that I accepted to go back to Afghanistan, [for] a job with the Afghan government, was precisely because of that. I wanted to go there and-- as a journalist, you know, I've been in [and on] the radio, television, print, documentary, online, all of it – and it was never enough for me in terms of bringing change. Because, as a journalist – you know this better than anybody – that you have to be someone else's voice. You cannot have your own opinion or say.

And that was the frustrating part for me. I wanted to be that agent of change in-- you know, to do good. So, I decided to go back to Afghanistan. With that in mind. I did public management. My whole thesis was about Afghanistan.
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INTERVIEWER:
What was your thesis?

INTERVIEWEE 17:
It was how to prevent ISIS encroachment in Afghanistan. Sounds ironic, very ironic now.

INTERVIEWER:
And what year was that?

INTERVIEWEE 17:
2015. Now, it was just around the time when ISIS was making its way to Afghanistan. So, I had that as my thesis. It was a policy paper. And President Ghani* – former President Ghani – got ahold of that because he used to teach at Hopkins.**
[* Ashraf Ghani, the former government of Afghanistan's president, 2014-2021]
[** Johns Hopkins University – Ashraf Ghani was a member of the JHU faculty, 1983-1991]

And I had former colleagues who worked for him, and that's how I made the connection with the former Afghan government, and that's how I was recruited to become the deputy spokesperson. And overnight, I became the acting spokesperson, for a year and half.

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INTERVIEWER:
How did you come to be the acting spokesperson for the former Afghan government?

INTERVIEWEE 17:
So, I went there to run the [former Afghanistan government's] Government Media and Information Center. But because there was a lot of political arguments over that position, which was funded by the U.S. Embassy back then, so. And it was a national unity government. They were not agreeing whose camp should have their thing-- their person running that GMIC, as it was known back then, Government Media and Information Center.

They said, you know, "You have to wait, or you could become the deputy spokesperson." I'm say-- and I said, "Well, let's do the deputy spokesperson." And, two days later, my boss, which was the spokesperson, he became-- he got another job at the National Security Council.

And they didn't have anybody to beco-- to be the spokesperson. And I guess I was there at the right time, so they had no option but to pick me. And, I became the spokesperson, the acting spokesperson. Even though I spent a year and half, I never got the actual title of spokesperson – even though I was doing all the things that the spokesperson was doing, and sometimes even more. But that did not happen, so.

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INTERVIEWER:
So, you were in that position for how long?

INTERVIEWEE 17:
A year and half.

INTERVIEWER:
And why did you choose to leave it?

INTERVIEWEE 17:
Because it became too much politically in terms of not having sufficient political backing, and always drama. You know, it was-- if someone asked me back then, you know, like, "How-- what does your job entail," it was like, you know, 30 percent work, 30 percent taking care of your own self -- not to go into political dramas – and the other 30-35 percent was just, you know, seeing your surroundings and trying not to entangle yourself with bad stuff that was happening. So, it was too much.
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That proximity, that being close to center of gravity of Afghan politics, seeing the decision-making process and seeing the politics and all the goods and bads of Afghanistan kind of made me work in a different field, come back to the U.S. Because it was just unbearable for me. I could not take it anymore. And when I came back to the U.S., obviously, I was still connected with Afghanistan. And there was no better place than SIGAR.

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SIGAR HIRING AND ROLE

INTERVIEWER:
And so, did you go directly from that position to this agency?

INTERVIEWEE 17:
No, I transitioned to the Afghan Embassy in Washington, D.C. That was my transitioning-- you know, my chance of transitioning back to the U.S. And it was a three-year mission, but I-- at the end of first year, I was like-- I got the opportunity to work for SIGAR, and that's how I started with SIGAR in 2018.
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I always respected SIGAR. And it was not just me as someone who cared about Afghanistan and someone who was involved in the work of Afghanistan, but also as a former Afghan government official, and as someone who devours, you know, SIGAR's reporting.

It's a small agency, but there's a lot of respect and authority, when you see it from the outside. Not only just stakeholders inside Afghanistan, but you talk to European officials, you-- everywhere you go, if the topic of discussion is Afghanistan, SIGAR surely will come, and it always comes with respect.

So, I had that in the back of my mind. And I saw this senior analyst position, at USAJob[s].gov, and I applied for it. And back then, when I was at the Embassy [of Afghanistan in Washington, DC], I was the point of contact for SIGAR. And I would have a normal interaction with them, but I never told them that I have applied for this position and I'm interested, because I just wanted it to be as transparent and merit-based as possible.

Had a couple of rounds of interviews. And, I got the job. When I came on board, the people that I used to work with as my counterparts from the Afghan Embassy to SIGAR, I saw-- you know, I saw them here, and it was like, "What are you doing here?" And I'm like, "I work here." So, that's how I got into SIGAR, so.

INTERVIEWER:
So, you came in as a research analyst?

INTERVIEWEE 17:
Right.

INTERVIEWER:
And what did you do in that position, when you first started? What was your job?

INTERVIEWEE 17:
So, there was this department called Special Projects. And we were doing these small, you know, not full-fledged audits but, you know, small projects, looking into different projects and programs of the U.S. government in Afghanistan.

And, a few of them that I got the opportunity to do [were], like, really meaningful and kind of, like, shaking-- making a lot of news, one of them [was] the-- installing the-- installation of these cash-counting machines at Kabul Airport. And I broadened the scope of it, and we looked also into how money smuggle-- you know, was smuggling out of Afghanistan, how officials were taking money out without even caring to declare it. And that got a lot of attention and a lot of news.

The other project that I did then was evaluating a USAID project that was helping carpet-makers in Afghanistan become more independent and self-sufficient and not rely on Pakistani middlemen, which-- noble cause, but it did not work very well, in the Afghan context. So, some-- those were some of the projects that I used to work with as a senior analyst.

INTERVIEWER:
Were you able to bring projects to the group and say, "Hey, I think this is happening," things that you were hearing? Did you have the ability to suggest—

INTERVIEWEE 17:
Those were all my suggestions. Yes, yes. // These were all projects that I was, you know, reading the [SIGAR] Quarterly Report[s], or talking to the people in Afghanistan, and talking to sources. And so, those ideas came off of those interests.

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While I was at the Special Projects end, I w-- and during my interviews, I told them straightforward: "I'm not an investigator. I've been a journalist, and I'm definitely not an auditor." So, what I could bring on the table is the-- a different perspective, because oftentime when we were there-- even as a government spokesperson, you always have to rebuke a report that is critical of your government.

So, we would always see SIGAR being criticized for not having, you know, its footing on the ground, not knowing the context of Afghanistan. And I told them, "This is the area that I could help you, to answer that 'So what?' part of the equation."

And even as-- when I was working for the Special Projects, oftentime I would get these questions and inquiries or a request from the front office, the senior leadership of the agency, like, "What does this mean?" You know? "Can we get the signatures so that we could have our auditors go to these places?" "What do you think of this guy?" "What do you think [of] this guy [who] says that?"

So, I was informally advising the front office on and off, until the front office decided to suspend operations of the Special Project after a year I worked in there. And then, I transitioned to becoming a special advisor, so that became my official job and official title.
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INTERVIEWER:
So, it formalized what you had already started?

INTERVIEWEE 17:

Right. And that was exactly my intention when I had decided to work for SIGAR, because I saw an opportunity in there. And also, I thought I could help the agency answer some of those questions it gets.

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One of my main responsibilities as special advisor, especially when I just transitioned, was to find, identify, verify, and then connect sources to SIGAR senior leadership, as well as different [SIGAR] Directorates who are looking into different projects on Afghanistan.
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So, convincing-- finding, convincing, and encouraging a lot of Afghan stakeholders to cooperate with SIGAR at different levels – whether it is the, you know, helping them get connected with the investigators, or sitting in meetings with them because they trusted me and they were not as scared of an-- you know, like, an investigator with a badge and a gun, to helping with the congressional mandates to find out if, indeed, President Ghani* and his team took $150 million out of Afghanistan, to collapse of the Afghan government and the Afghan Security Forces.
[* Ashraf Ghani, the former government of Afghanistan's president, 2014-2021]

Or, you know, having the inspector general* go to a conference in London hosted by Afghan civil society [entities], or arranging meetings for him to get firsthand update[s] as to what's going on in Afghanistan after [the] collapse of the Republic, or having the Afghan diaspora not only in the Washington, D.C. area but also across the U.S., and even in Canada, and in Europe talk to SIGAR, talk to SIGAR officials to get a fresh perspective, especially now that we don't have an embassy in Kabul.
[* John Sopko, former Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction, 2012-2025]

So, it's important to get an Afghan perspective. And I think I've been happy and delighted to be that connection for the agency with the Afghan diaspora in Afghan-- still inside Afghanistan.

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INTERVIEWER:
It almost sounds like you're describing an ambassadorial kind of role, between this agency and the Afghan diaspora, Afghanistan, its former government. I mean, it sounds like you were very much a main point of contact for SIGAR to all those points, while you were in that role.

INTERVIEWEE 17:
That's what I tried to do, yeah. And also, sometimes, you know, when our senior officials go to different meetings, you know, they talk to people, they connect with people. And then, people reach out, because they want to talk to SIGAR officials.

And, oftentime, what happens-- I am either a point of contact for that-- for those interactions, or the senior leadership asks me if they should meet – or [if] they should or should not meet – so-and-so. And when I look at them, I, you know, oftentime, I know exactly who the person is, what their background is, if there is an issue that the senior leadership needs to be aware of. So, kind of, like, act

as a filter as well, or a vetting person to make sure that, you know, we're not associating ourselves with questionable individuals or entities that claim to be so-and-so about Afghanistan.

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INTERVIEWER:
You mentioned that you had a lot of respect for SIGAR before you were affiliated with it as an employee, as a staffer. Did your perspective on SIGAR change once you started working in it? Did you end up having the same view of it that you had had from the outside? Or was it different?

INTERVIEWEE 17:
To a degree, yes. Not in a negative way.
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Before joining SIGAR, you know, you only read it. And because it's a very close-knitted, you don't see a lot of its-- a lot of its interaction with the public. You only see, most of the time, reports coming out and making a big news splash.

So, you think it's a massive organization with a lot of big operations all over the place. But, once I joined in, I figured that it's not as big of an agency. At the peak of it, I think it had 200 staff at most. And a lot of people think, when you say "special inspector general," that the IG is a military guy, which is not the case. It's-- he's a civilian.

And, in terms of meaningful work that the agency does, still, I believe in it. I think it's noble cause. It's just-- it's-- the-- it has its limits. People want more, because, they expect that this agency is the only agency with that institutional memory, authority, and independence to carry out proper and sufficient oversight of the taxpayer dollars that go into Afghanistan.

And, oftentime, when I interact with Afghans – Afghan diaspora – their complaint is that, "Why we're not going after known criminals who have stolen money?" And it's really difficult to answer that question. You know, there is this due process. You need the evidence and all of that. But, you know, at-- our operations have been limited, I think. We could have been bigger and better in terms of, you know, going after bad actors and prosecuting them, more often.

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INTERVIEWER:
What's the biggest challenge that you experienced in that role?

INTERVIEWEE 17:
Generally speaking, you know, since my time-- since I started with SIGAR, it's always difficult-- to-- that you ha-- you feel like [you] likely have to prove yourself over and over again, in different instances. I don't know whether it's because of my background or, you know, where I came from, but it's, you know, like, there's always this notion of, "Maybe there's a risk involved, and we have to be super careful."

So, things that I've done in my life, like my experience, like, you know, decades of involvement with the case of Afghanistan, oftentime, I find myself that-- still that's not enough.
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INTERVIEWER:
Meaning that-- not enough for whom? In what way?

INTERVIEWEE 17:
I'll leave it there.

INTERVIEWER:
What were some of the things that you felt like you helped accomplish?

INTERVIEWEE 17:
I think being – like you put it, very eloquently – being that unofficial ambassador of this agency, to the stakeholders in Afghanistan and vice versa, being the kind of-- like, the ears and eyes of Afghanistan, particularly after [the] collapse of the Republic, and us shutting down our [U.S.] Embassy [in Kabul] and not having eyes and ears in Afghanistan.

So, I saw the requests that I was getting about information, about questions, and about sources dramatically increase after [the] collapse of the Republic, and closure of our [U.S.] Embassy and our operations in Afghanistan. So, I think it has been pretty rewarding to see that – whether we [SIGAR] needed [to contact] the former Afghan minister, or [to obtain or evaluate] some documents, or [to contact] a journalist to rectify a story, I've seen that, you know, volume of requests coming to my desk increase significantly. So, I think I'll let the work speak for, you know, what it is.

WHAT DID SIGAR DO WELL?

INTERVIEWER:
So, and as someone who grew up in Afghanistan, who's had firsthand experience as a refugee, firsthand experience living under Taliban, and who has worked for this agency for a period of time, did this agency work well as an oversight entity, as far as Afghanistan's concerned? Do you think it accomplished what it was set up to do? While you were working in it, did you feel that it was effective?
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INTERVIEWEE 17:
I think SIGAR as an agency proved to be very effective, especially from an Afghan context, because the people of Afghanistan were frustrated with the former [Afghan] government, and the level of corruption, and the involvement of corrupt officials.

And, obviously, they did not have a voice to raise their concerns with the American officials and American taxpayers. So, SIGAR acted as their ambassador, because whenever there was a report out

that talked about corruption, oftentime very obvious, you know, cases that people knew about but no one was really talking about, at least in Washington.

And they were like, "Yeah, we were saying that. Thank you, SIGAR, for, you know, being our voice." So, in that front, yes, very effective, very successful, but still very limited. And I think it goes back to the magnitude of corruption in Afghanistan.

You needed a couple of more agencies like SIGAR – or at least, you know, "SIGAR-times-10" to be able to prosecute bad actors and publicize, and expose, bad situations that needed the attention of the American policymakers and-- as well as, you know, raise to the concerns of the American public who are paying for it, actually.

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WHAT COULD/SHOULD SIGAR HAVE DONE BETTER/DIFFERENTLY?

INTERVIEWER:
What should this agency, SIGAR, have done differently, have done better? What didn't work?
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INTERVIEWEE 17:
There was this-- a reluctancy on the side of the Afghan government. And we could have been more exposing of those situations. If a senior Afghan government official was not willing to take action against bad actors, then we could have been more vocal about it, not only to the American policymakers but also to the public – expose, and name, and shame them, as often as you need to.

And that would have helped a lot with this oftentime mischaracterization of SIGAR as an agency, within the eyes of Afghan public: is that, you know, SIGAR is acting as this political entity. It's being selective in its pursuit of corrupt and bad actors. So, I think that is one area that if we were more open in naming and shaming, often, it would have been better and had more authority in operations to do more oversight and prosecution.

INTERVIEWER:
So, the view among some of the Afghan public was that SIGAR was being selective in terms of who[m] it was going after?

INTERVIEWEE 17:
Right.
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INTERVIEWER:
In your experience working here, was true or not true?

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INTERVIEWEE 17:

It is not true, no, definitely. // Oftentime, it happens that-- we prosecute someone, you know, like our investigators will spend, you know, resources, and time, and years just to be able to prosecute without even caring where that guy came from. And the perception sometimes in the Afghan community was, like, "Oh, because he was a Pashtun or Tajik. That's why he got selectively prosecuted while all these bad actors are running for, you know, free without SIGAR even bothering to look at them." So, it has always been the case, among some Afghans. And I've tried to, you know, explain our limits – and our limits of what we can and what we cannot do.

INTERVIEWER:
How does that go over, when you make that argument?

INTERVIEWEE 17:
Well, you make your case, and you let, you know, them decide. But, you know, you can never please everybody.

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INTERVIEWER:
Did this agency do enough to connect with [the] people of Afghanistan – Afghan sources, Afghan officials – in pursuing its work? Do you feel that it was effective in communicating back and forth between its agency oversight aims and the sources that it was attempting to communicate with – whether media, or public, or investigative?

INTERVIEWEE 17:
The short answer is no. // In terms of connecting with Afghan stakeholders, whether it's the [former Afghan] government, Afghan civil society, [Afghan] journalists, or, particularly – which is the most important one – the Afghan public, I think SIGAR did not reach out as often and as much.

But I understand the whole model of agency is to be closed and not interact as often. But I think that's one area that we missed the opportunity, because a lot of Afghans had documentations, and sources, and, you know, like, ideas, and opinions.

And, at the end of the day, yes, we-- our main target is the U.S. Congress and the American taxpayers. But I feel like, oftentime, we forgot that half of our audience is the Afghan public. And we got a lot of support from the Afghan public.

If you see our social media feed, you know, like, whenever there is a positive reporting – positive in terms of pointing out something bad happening, or exposing a corruption case, or naming a corrupt official, this praise and pouring of positive messages to our work.

And I think we could have done more to garner that support to our policymakers and showcase that, you know, that what we do as an agency is invaluable in so many ways. And the Afghan people were very appreciative of what we're doing. So, I think we could have done more, definitely.

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Having people with the background of the country that you are involved in is vital. And, unfortunately, in case of Afghanistan, from day one, it was missing. There were only a few and limited voices who were making opinions and influencing policy decisions on Afghanistan.

At the very beginning of our intervention in Afghanistan, it was not Afghans, actually. They were listening to Pakistanis and Indians, to give them advice as to how things work in Afghanistan. I think one of the benefits of our intervention in Afghanistan is the rise of this new generation of Afghans, who know the country, who were educated in Afghanistan or outside, in Europe or in the U.S., but have this vast experience and understanding of the context of Afghanistan.
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I think it's important to find people from that country that you're involved in and not just listen to one or two, but to listen to people who are actually-- have disagreements about situations, and people and problems, and issues in that country. And you learn so much from their disagreements and their challenging views on certain issues. So, we should have done better on that front. And we have to do much, much better in the future if we are going to be involved in places.

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My job involved listening to the Afghan side, the Afghan stakeholders, and reporting their concerns, their take on issues, to the [SIGAR] senior leadership, but also vice versa. And, oftentime, you would find the Afghan side very frustrated because of the way we were doing things.

And, I think it was instrumental for me to be able to go there, listen to them, listen to their concerns, and find a way to channel that to the people involved in those projects or issues within our agency, whether it was [to] the front office or [to] a senior analyst doing a very technical report on some aspects of the Afghan reconstruction.

So, I was doing my part, but I certainly think it was not enough. It has to be systematic when it comes to listening to the conversation that is happening about you in places that are not comfortable or familiar to you in the first instinct. So, having those representatives, having those ears and eyes on those grounds is key and vital, I think.

INTERVIEWER:
How well did this agency listen to what you were telling them about those voices of the stakeholders?

INTERVIEWEE 17:
In some cases, very positively and, you know, even actions were taken. And, in some cases, just listening and then moving on.

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AFTER U.S. WITHDRAWAL / AUGUST 2021

We, SIGAR as an agency, did what we could do to make sure that the policymakers know what's going on in Afghanistan. And, we saw it coming. Even the American officials or the Afghan officials – the American officials put the writing on the wall, and the Afghan officials failed to see that writing on the wall. But we have been saying it all along.

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WHAT ARE YOUR OWN LESSONS LEARNED? WHAT DID SIGAR AND YOU ACCOMPLISH IN AFGHANISTAN?

INTERVIEWER:
Given everything that you experienced here, given your own background in Afghanistan, working for the former Afghan government, what are your lessons learned about this kind of oversight work, about this agency, and what the U.S. tried to do in Afghanistan, and what the U.S. Congress tried to do by setting up this agency to oversee what the U.S. was trying to do in Afghanistan?"

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INTERVIEWEE 17:
I think SIGAR did its job, as best as it could. SIGAR is the only agency that has been saying that things are not going the right way. And after collapse of the former Afghan government – the Republic* – people realized the critical role in SIGAR's reporting and SIGAR's alerts that, you know, "You need to pay attention as to what's happening in that country." And so that-- I think that speaks volumes.
[* Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, former Afghanistan government, 2004-2021]

It did what it could the best way. Obviously, it could have done better had it-- if it had more resources and bigger operations, because, again, the magnitude of the corruption in the country.
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We are going to be involved in places that we have not even imagined, either by choice or by obligation. And we are going to spend taxpayers' money. So, existence of an agency like SIGAR helps tremendously, not only prevent but also [recover] taxpayers' dollars. And they deserve that.

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INTERVIEWER:
When you joined SIGAR, I'm sure you had ideas in your mind about what you hoped SIGAR would accomplish. As much time as we now are past the fall of the former government, the withdrawal of the U.S., how do you feel about all of that?

INTERVIEWEE 17:
I tried my best, at least in my own limited capacity, with my own limited knowledge of what I know and what I can, to be as effective as possible. And, in some cases, I think I was successful, and in some cases, with limited success.

So, I feel happy that I joined the agency. I feel happy that the senior leadership listened to me whenever they needed advice, and awareness, and answers to some questions, oftentime very vague and tough. And I'm happy that I was able to be part of it.

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