

From the Office of the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction

Transcript for: Operation Oversight – Episode 4: October 30, 2018 Quarterly Report to Congress

Description: Hear about some highlights of SIGAR’s latest Quarterly Report to Congress

Related SIGAR Work: October 30, 2018 Quarterly Report to Congress

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[Background Music]

[Phil LaVelle] Hi, welcome to Operation Oversight, the SIGAR podcast. I’m Phil LaVelle with SIGAR’s Office of Public Affairs. Today we’re going to talk briefly about SIGAR’s newest Quarterly Report to Congress. In this new report, SIGAR provides updates to various elements of the reconstruction effort in Afghanistan from security to counternarcotics, from governance to the Afghan economy. Today we have with us Deb Scroggins, Editor-in-Chief of our Quarterly Report to Congress. Thanks for joining us, Deb.

[Deborah Scroggins] Glad to be here, Phil.

[Phil LaVelle] So, tell us, what are some of the key points in your latest Quarterly Report?

[Deborah Scroggins] Well, in every Quarterly Report we report on the control of the country between the government and the insurgents and this quarter we found that control of Afghanistan’s districts and territory, overall, has become more contested. The Afghan government’s control and influence over districts is at its lowest point since SIGAR began tracking district control data in November 2015.

[Phil LaVelle] Things are unchanged though in terms of their control over population.

[Deborah Scroggins] That’s correct, and part of the reason that they’re losing control of districts, a little bit, is because they have a strategy of trying to maintain control over population rather than territory.

[Phil LaVelle] And the report also updates civilian casualties, tell us about that.

[Deborah Scroggins] So, the UN recorded 649 civilian casualties due to aerial operations by progovernment forces in Afghanistan during the first nine months of 2018. That’s a 39% increase compared to the same period in 2017. It’s also a record number of civilian casualties caused by air strikes since the UN began tracking this in 2009. But Resolute Support, the NATO-

led operation, reports far fewer civilian casualties due to airstrikes than the UN. They only record 102 civilian casualties due to air strikes; that's less than a sixth of the total reported by the UN.

[Phil LaVelle] That's a big discrepancy. What about the Afghan national security forces – the army and the police? We're seeing a drop in their numbers?

[Deborah Scroggins] That's right. They have struggled to maintain their personnel strength this quarter. The ANDSF strength was at the lowest level recorded in the third quarter of a year since 2012. They're about 40,000 personnel below their 352,000 level, authorized strength. That's about 11% below what they're authorized to have.

[Phil LaVelle] And, we touched on counternarcotics again.

[Deborah Scroggins] Yes, we've got an essay in the Quarterly Report about counternarcotics which makes the point that although the United States has committed an average of \$1.5 million per day on counternarcotics, despite this, poppy cultivation in 2017 broke all new records and was more than four times as high as that reported in 2002. The U.S. government reported to us this quarter that they are not going to be issuing a new counternarcotics strategy, that it's simply going to be woven into their larger strategy for Afghanistan.

[Phil LaVelle] Speaking of crops, there's a very severe drought that's having an impact on the people of Afghanistan.

[Deborah Scroggins] That's right, there are more people displaced in Afghanistan due to drought at this time than to the conflict.

[Phil LaVelle] Well, that's an amazing fact. Well, thank you Deb. The Quarterly Report really is a valuable source of information for the American Congress, for the press, and really, for anyone interested in Afghanistan in general and reconstruction in particular. So, if our listeners would like to read the report for yourselves, please check it out at our website www.sigar.mil and click on the Quarterly Reports tab.

Thanks for listening and thanks for coming, Deb. We appreciate it. We'll catch you all next time on Operation Oversight.

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