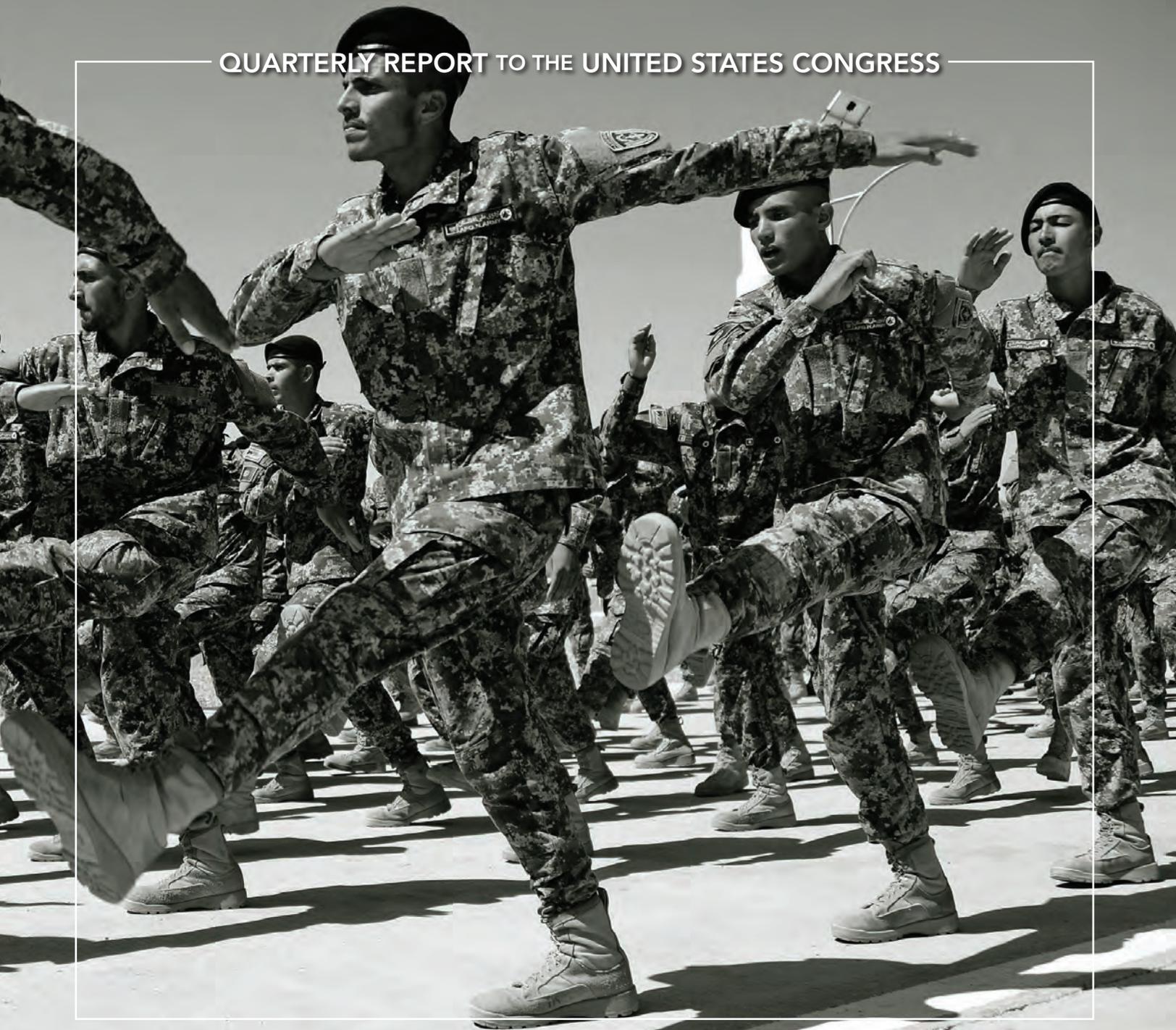


SIGAR

Special Inspector General for
Afghanistan Reconstruction

OCT 30
2017

QUARTERLY REPORT TO THE UNITED STATES CONGRESS





The National Defense Authorization Act for FY 2008 (P.L. 110-181) established the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR).

SIGAR's oversight mission, as defined by the legislation, is to provide for the independent and objective

- conduct and supervision of audits and investigations relating to the programs and operations funded with amounts appropriated or otherwise made available for the reconstruction of Afghanistan.
- leadership and coordination of, and recommendations on, policies designed to promote economy, efficiency, and effectiveness in the administration of the programs and operations, and to prevent and detect waste, fraud, and abuse in such programs and operations.
- means of keeping the Secretary of State and the Secretary of Defense fully and currently informed about problems and deficiencies relating to the administration of such programs and operation and the necessity for and progress on corrective action.

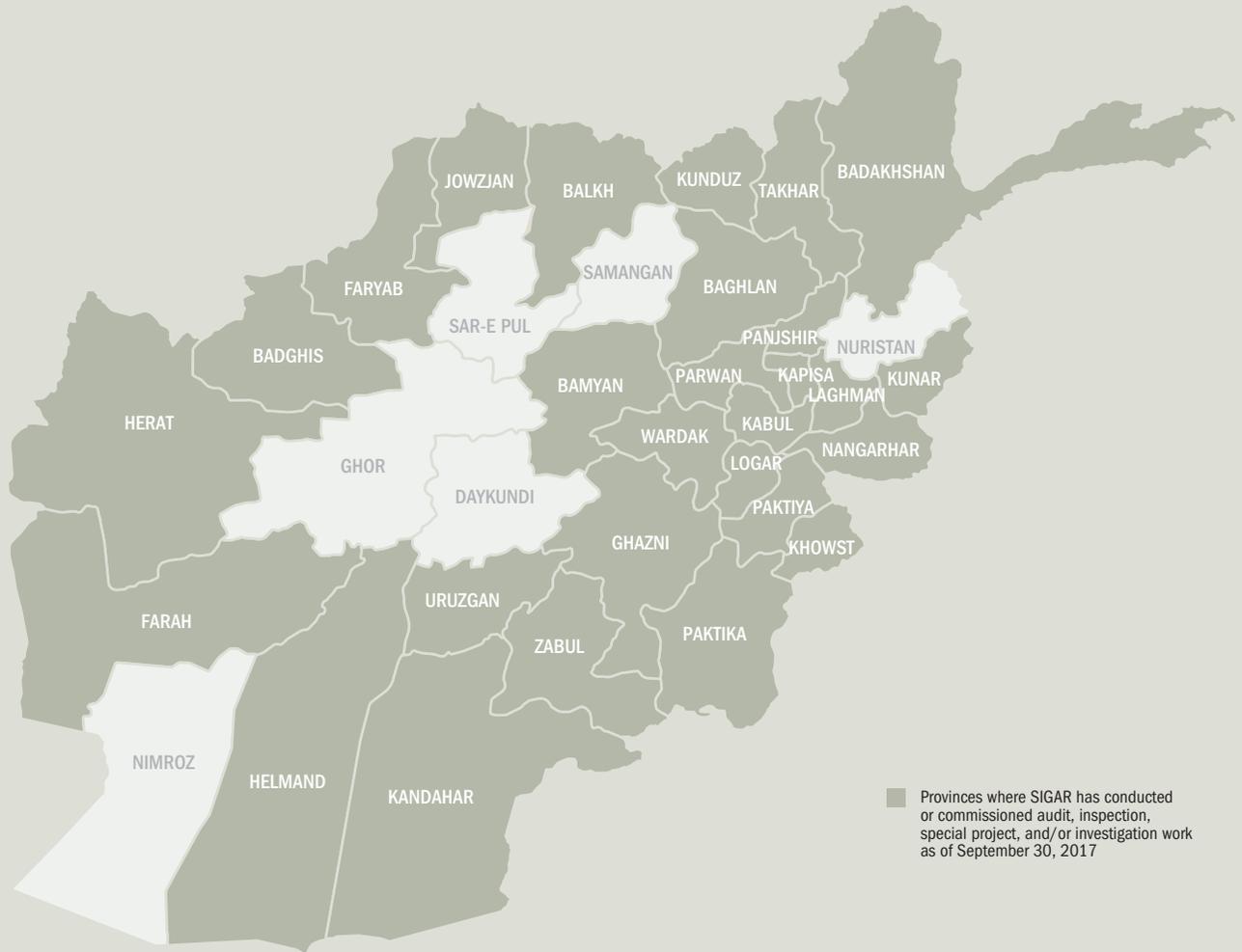
Afghanistan reconstruction includes any major contract, grant, agreement, or other funding mechanism entered into by any department or agency of the U.S. government that involves the use of amounts appropriated or otherwise made available for the reconstruction of Afghanistan.

Source: P.L. 110-181, "National Defense Authorization Act for FY 2008," 1/28/2008.

(For a list of the congressionally mandated contents of this report, see Section 3.)

Cover photo:

Soldiers of the Afghan National Army (ANA) soldiers march in review in Herat as they complete their 10-week training program. (AFP photo)





SPECIAL INSPECTOR GENERAL FOR
AFGHANISTAN RECONSTRUCTION

I am pleased to submit to Congress, and the Secretaries of State and Defense, SIGAR's 37th quarterly report on the status of the U.S. reconstruction effort in Afghanistan.

Afghanistan is at a crossroads. President Donald Trump's new strategy has clarified that the Taliban and Islamic State-Khorosan will not cause the United States to leave. At the same time, the strategy requires the Afghan government to set the conditions that would allow America to stay the course.

One such requirement is effective action against corruption. The National Unity Government recently adopted an ambitious anticorruption strategy as pledged at the Brussels Conference in 2016. Congress has asked SIGAR to play a special role in evaluating the Afghan government's performance against the goals they have set for themselves. This quarter I traveled to Afghanistan to meet with President Ashraf Ghani and Chief Executive Abdullah Abdullah, as well as Afghan ministers, U.S. officials, and ambassadors from other donor nations to discuss this critical process. President Ghani promised to give SIGAR access to his ministries and their books and records in order to assess their internal controls over U.S. budget assistance. He also promised to issue a presidential decree ordering Afghan officials to cooperate fully with the SIGAR assessment. Chief Executive Abdullah pledged his support for both measures.

The anticorruption strategy and other Afghan reforms dominated discussion at the Senior Officials Meeting in October; at a Kandahar ceremony marking the U.S. delivery of UH-60 Black Hawk helicopters for the Afghan Air Force; and at a meeting I attended of the High Council on the Rule of Law and Anti-Corruption. On each occasion, President Ghani noted the National Unity Government's close cooperation with SIGAR and thanked us for our help fighting corruption. At the Kandahar ceremony, President Ghani vowed to account for every penny of American assistance to his government.

President Ghani has nominated or appointed an impressive group of younger, reform-minded officials to help advance his agenda, but the road ahead for his team will be hard, as entrenched interests work to stymie change. SIGAR is following the concerns raised by some members of the international community and Afghan civil-society organizations about the new anticorruption strategy. In particular, outside observers have questioned the need for or practicality of consolidating most Afghan anticorruption bodies under the Attorney General's Office, and the fact that there is no strong and independent anticorruption commission established to monitor progress.

SIGAR will keep abreast of the implementation of the Kabul Compact, an Afghan-led initiative announced in August to "demonstrate the government's commitment to creating a peaceful, stable, and prosperous society." The compact process consists of four U.S.- and Afghan-chaired working groups covering governance, economic development, peace and reconciliation, and security issues. Each working group has a matrix of benchmarks—subject to change—to chart reform progress for the next three years. However, the compact is not a strategy, not a signed or legally binding document and, unlike some other agreements, sets no conditions linking benchmarks to U.S. aid. U.S. officials describe the compact as a useful compendium or scorecard of commitments already made by the Afghan government.

Section 1 of this report discusses SIGAR's Lessons Learned Program report released in September, *Reconstructing the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces: Lessons From the U.S. Experience in Afghanistan*. The report examines U.S. security-sector assistance to Afghanistan over 15 years, drawing lessons and recommendations for the future. The Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Joseph F. Dunford Jr.; his NATO colleagues; and Congressional staff are receiving briefings on the report.

In a significant development this quarter, U.S. Forces-Afghanistan (USFOR-A) classified or otherwise restricted information SIGAR has until now publicly reported. These include important measures of ANDSF performance such as casualties, personnel strength, attrition, capability assessments, and operational readiness of equipment. (A more detailed description of what has been classified or restricted may be found in the Security chapter of Section 3 of this report.) USFOR-A said the casualty data belonged to the Afghan government, and the government had requested that it be classified. More than 60% of the approximately \$121 billion in U.S. funding for reconstruction in Afghanistan since 2002 has gone to build up the ANDSF, so the increased classification of ANDSF data will hinder SIGAR's ability to publicly report on progress or failure in a key reconstruction sector. In Appendix E of this report, SIGAR has published a list of the nine questions it provided to USFOR-A whose precise answers can no longer appear in the public report.

This is the second time the U.S. military has sought to classify information on ANDSF capabilities. In 2015, NATO-led Resolute Support classified the answers to some 31 SIGAR questions, only to declassify the bulk of them a few days after SIGAR published its January 30, 2015, quarterly report. Since 2015, SIGAR has published a classified annex to each of its quarterly reports concerning the information that remained classified. The classified annex for this quarterly report will also contain the new types of information classified. The classified annex will be made available upon request to Congress, DOD, and the Department of State.

This quarter, SIGAR issued a variety of audits, inspections, reviews, and other products. One performance audit found that the Departments of Defense and State, and the United States Agency for International Development, failed to assess the effectiveness of six Afghanistan Infrastructure Fund projects initiated in 2011 and worth about \$400 million. SIGAR work to date has identified about \$2.1 billion in savings for the U.S. taxpayer.

During the reporting period, SIGAR investigations resulted in one indictment, one criminal information, two guilty pleas, two sentencing, nearly \$500,000 in restitutions and forfeitures, and over \$134.9 million in savings for the U.S. government. These results raise the total cost savings and recoveries from investigations to the U.S. taxpayer to more than \$1.2 billion. SIGAR initiated 11 new cases and closed 47, bringing the total number of ongoing investigations to 231.

SIGAR's suspension and debarment program referred two individuals and four companies to cognizant officials for possible suspension or debarment from federal contracting based on evidence developed as part of investigations conducted by SIGAR in Afghanistan and the United States.

My staff and I look forward to working together with Congress and other stakeholders to continue to provide comprehensive oversight for the most ambitious reconstruction effort the United States has ever undertaken.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'John F. Sopko', with a long, sweeping horizontal stroke extending to the right.

John F. Sopko
Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report summarizes SIGAR’s oversight work and updates developments in the four major sectors of Afghanistan’s reconstruction effort from July 1 to September 30, 2017.* It also includes an essay on the reasons for the successes and failures of the U.S. security-sector assistance mission in Afghanistan, and extracting usable lessons from them. During this reporting period, SIGAR published 16 audits, inspections, reviews, and other products assessing the U.S. efforts to build the Afghan security forces, improve governance, facilitate economic and social development, and combat the sale and production of narcotics. During the reporting period, SIGAR criminal investigations resulted in one criminal indictment, one criminal information, two guilty pleas, two sentencings, nearly \$500,000 in restitutions and forfeitures, and over \$134.9 million in savings for the U.S. government. SIGAR initiated 11 new cases and closed 47, bringing the total number of ongoing investigations to 231. Additionally, SIGAR’s suspension and debarment program referred two individuals and four companies for suspension or debarment based on evidence developed as part of investigations conducted by SIGAR in Afghanistan and in the United States.

SIGAR OVERVIEW

AUDITS AND INSPECTIONS

This quarter, SIGAR published one performance audit, five financial audits, and four inspection reports.

The **performance audit** found:

- DOD, State, and USAID have not assessed whether six fiscal year 2011 Afghanistan Infrastructure Fund projects, worth \$400 million, achieved their counterinsurgency objectives.

The **financial audits** identified \$1,215 in questioned costs as a result of internal-control deficiencies and noncompliance issues. These deficiencies and noncompliance issues included ineligible travel costs and a misinterpretation of a federal acquisition regulation.

The **inspection reports** found:

- Phase 2 of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers’ construction of Ministry of Interior headquarters experienced lengthy delays, increased costs, and construction deficiencies.
- A U.S. Army Corps of Engineers’ award to MegaTech Construction Services to complete Phase IV of the Kabul Military Training Center resulted in the potential waste of \$4.1 million due to poor design and construction, and contractor noncompliance.
- Eleven of 13 State and USAID reconstruction projects that SIGAR assessed between July 2009 and March 2017 did not meet contract requirements. Additionally, seven of 13 met neither contract requirements nor technical specifications.
- An Air Force Center for Engineering and the Environment award to Innovative Technical Solutions to construct

* SIGAR may also report on products and events occurring after September 30, 2017, up to the publication date.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Ministry of Defense headquarters generally met contract requirements, but four safety-related deficiencies needed to be addressed.

SPECIAL PROJECTS

This quarter SIGAR's Office of Special Projects wrote nine reviews, inquiry letters, and alert letters expressing concern on a range of issues including:

- USAID's implementation of an electronic payment system to improve customs revenue collection
- observations on site visits to health facilities in Nangarhar Province
- the prevalence of Afghan foreign military trainees in the U.S. going Absent Without Leave
- structural damage at health and educational facilities in Khowst and Kapisa Provinces

LESSONS LEARNED

This quarter, SIGAR's Lessons Learned Program issued *Reconstructing the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces: Lessons from the U.S. Experience in Afghanistan*, which examines how the U.S. government—primarily the Departments of Defense, State, and Justice—developed and executed security-sector assistance programs to build, train, advise, and equip the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces.

INVESTIGATIONS

During the reporting period, SIGAR investigations resulted in one indictment, one criminal information, two guilty pleas, two sentencing, nearly \$500,000 in restitutions and forfeitures, and over \$134.9 million in savings for the U.S. government. SIGAR initiated 11 new cases and closed 47, bringing the total number of ongoing investigations to 231. SIGAR's suspension and debarment program referred two individuals and four companies for suspension or debarment based on evidence developed as part of investigations conducted by SIGAR in Afghanistan and the United States.

Investigations highlights include:

- the National Procurement Commission, chaired by President Ashraf Ghani, suspending the award of a \$134.9 million contract due to corruption exposed by a bribery investigation
- a U.S. military member indicted on two counts of receiving and agreeing to receive bribes
- a former employee of U.S. Army Corps of Engineers charged in a criminal information with one count of seeking and receiving bribes as a public official
- a former U.S. soldier sentenced for theft and conversion of \$289,276 worth of government property
- SIGAR special agents intercepting \$1.6 million in smuggled gold, transferring it to the Afghan national bank, and beginning a joint investigation with a special working group formed by President Ashraf Ghani

TABLE OF CONTENTS



SECTION 1

1 LESSONS LEARNED POINT WAY TO STRONGER AFGHAN SECURITY FORCES

- 4 SIGAR's Lessons Learned Program
- 5 Fresh Look at a Formidable Undertaking
- 6 Overview of Lessons Learned Report
- 8 How the Report was Prepared
- 8 What SIGAR Found
- 10 Findings Yield Tough Lessons
- 15 Needed Now: Whole-of-Government Approach
- 17 From Lessons to Recommendations
- 18 Conclusion



SECTION 2

21 SIGAR OVERSIGHT ACTIVITIES

- 24 Audits and Inspections
- 50 Special Projects
- 60 Lessons Learned
- 61 Investigations
- 62 Quarterly Highlight: SIGAR Intercepts \$1.6 Million in Smuggled Gold at Bagram Airfield
- 71 Other SIGAR Oversight Activities
- 72 SIGAR Budget
- 73 SIGAR Staff



SECTION 3

75 RECONSTRUCTION UPDATE

- 81 Status of Funds
- 97 Security
- 147 Governance
- 150 Quarterly Highlight: U.S. and Afghan Governments Launch the Kabul Compact
- 181 Economic and Social Development
- 219 Counternarcotics

TABLE OF CONTENTS



SECTION 4

235 OTHER AGENCY OVERSIGHT

- 238 Completed Oversight Activities
- 242 Ongoing Oversight Activities



APPENDICES AND ENDNOTES

- 250 Appendix A: Cross-Reference of Report to Statutory Requirements
- 254 Appendix B: U.S. Funds for Afghanistan Reconstruction
- 248 Appendix C: SIGAR Written Products
- 261 Appendix D: SIGAR Investigations and Hotline
- 269 Appendix E: SIGAR Data Call Questions That Received Classified or Otherwise Restricted Responses
- 271 Appendix F: Abbreviations and Acronyms
- 279 Endnotes

“The truth is sometimes a hard pill to swallow. It sometimes causes us difficulties at home and abroad. It is sometimes used by our enemies in attempts to hurt us. But the American people are entitled to it, nonetheless.”

—*Senator John McCain*

1 LESSONS OF 15 YEARS



LESSONS OF 15 YEARS CONTENTS

SIGAR's Lessons Learned Program	4
Fresh Look at a Formidable Undertaking	5
Overview of Lessons Learned Report	6
How the Report was Prepared	8
What SIGAR Found	8
Findings Yield Tough Lessons	10
Needed Now: Whole-of-Government Approach	15
From Lessons to Recommendations	17
Conclusion	18

Photo on previous page

An Afghan commando provides security during a patrol training exercise in Kabul Province. (U.S. Army photo by Spc. Ryan DeBooy)

LESSONS LEARNED POINT WAY TO STRONGER AFGHAN SECURITY FORCES

U.S. government agencies have long recognized that reconstruction in Afghanistan depends above all on Kabul's ability to deploy effective security forces. Assessing the first three years of U.S. and allied efforts to build such forces, the Government Accountability Office cautioned in 2005 that “establishing viable Afghan army and police forces will almost certainly take years and substantial resources.”¹

And so it has. When the United States intervened in late 2001 to overthrow the al-Qaeda-harboring Taliban regime, the Afghan army and police had effectively dissolved.² By 2005, the United States had already committed \$4.3 billion to develop the Afghan security forces, and one official estimate was that the rebuilding programs “could cost up to \$7.2 billion to complete.”³

That estimate proved optimistic. As of 2017, congressional appropriations for the Afghan security sector total more than \$70 billion—more than



A U.S. Army staff sergeant helps an ANA recruit zero in his M16 rifle. (U.S. Army photo by Guy Volb)

LESSONS OF 15 YEARS

60% of all reconstruction funding—and an undertaking lasting four times as long as U.S. participation in World War II remains incomplete.

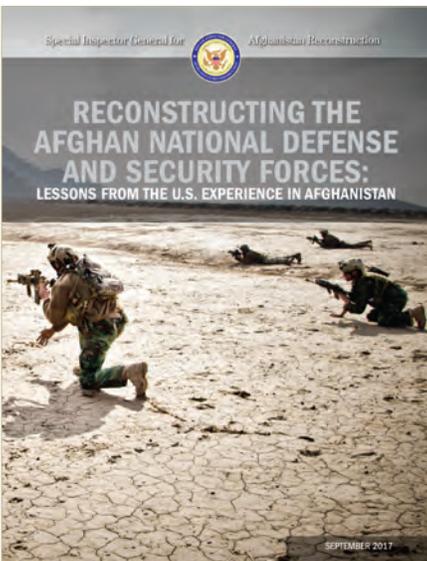
In its June 2017 semiannual report to Congress, the Department of Defense (DOD) said, “The Afghan National Defense and Security Forces (ANDSF) began the third year of full responsibility for their nation’s security [starting January 1, 2015] with a new plan to end the stalemate with the Taliban and restructure the force to become more agile and lethal over the next four years.”⁴ Since the DOD submitted that report, the new Administration in the United States has announced a revised strategy for Afghanistan and is adding several thousand U.S. troops to bolster the train, advise, assist (TAA) mission there.

Meanwhile, as SIGAR has reported, the ANDSF is suffering unsustainable casualty rates, Taliban insurgents and terrorist groups operate in much of the country, and large areas of Afghanistan are no-go zones for foreigners. According to DOD:

The ANDSF are at a critical point in the fight against the insurgency. The plan to modify the force structure and develop into a more agile and lethal force is under way, but 2017 is a year of setting conditions to build momentum. The ANDSF must weather the storm from the insurgency and deny the Taliban strategic victories on the battlefield, fight [ISIS], grow and train the Afghan Special Security Forces, conduct planning to realign forces within the Ministry of Defense [for the army] and Ministry of Interior [for the police], and posture itself to become a more offensive force in 2018.⁵

Without the enormous personal and financial sacrifices already made by Afghans and their international partners, the country might have relapsed to control by extremists and terrorists. That has not happened, and as DOD has noted, insurgents have been stymied in all their attempts to take and hold major population centers. Still, the continuing lack of a fully effective ANDSF undermines the viability of the Kabul government and impedes U.S. efforts to disengage from combat operations in Afghanistan. Clearly, the time is ripe to ask why an undertaking begun in 2002 and costing \$70 billion has—so far—not yielded bigger dividends.

Understanding the reasons for the successes and failures of the U.S. security-sector assistance mission in Afghanistan—and extracting usable lessons from them—is the focus of a new report from SIGAR’s Lessons Learned Program (LLP).



SIGAR’s new LLP report.

SIGAR’S LESSONS LEARNED PROGRAM

The Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction established the Lessons Learned Program at the urging of former U.S. Ambassador

to Afghanistan Ryan Crocker, General John Allen, and several members of Congress.

LLP aims to pursue longer-range, broader-scope, and more whole-of-government analysis of issues than appear in SIGAR's more tightly focused audits, inspections, and investigations. Its first report, *Corruption in Conflict*, was released in fall 2016.

LLP operates under the direction of Joseph Windrem, former deputy director of SIGAR's Research and Analysis Directorate. James Cunningham was lead research analyst for the security-assistance report, with editorial and writing support from LLP Acting Deputy Director Kim Corthell and Writer-Editor Elizabeth Young. Additional members of the research team included Samantha Hay, Clint Hougen, Kristin Pettersen, and Ashley Schortz.

FRESH LOOK AT A FORMIDABLE UNDERTAKING

The report, *Reconstructing the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces: Lessons from the U.S. Experience in Afghanistan*, was released on September 21, 2017, during a speech by SIGAR's Inspector General John F. Sopko at the Center for Strategic and International Studies in Washington, DC.

In his remarks, Inspector General Sopko said:⁶

Considering the duration and cost of our effort in Afghanistan, and the increasing likelihood of demands on our military and our resources emanating from North Korea, the Middle East, and elsewhere, three things are clear from today's report:

1. We need to help the Afghans stand on their own in order to reduce the need for international military support over time;
2. Building an effective Afghan security forces is and has always been the keystone of that effort; and,
3. We need to do a better job of building them.

SIGAR is uniquely positioned to take a fresh look at the security-assistance effort and to extract lessons from its long history. SIGAR's statutory mandate is to investigate and report to Congress and the Administration on the entirety of U.S. reconstruction efforts in Afghanistan, to highlight problems, and to offer recommendations for improvements.⁷ SIGAR is also a uniquely independent oversight agency, able to investigate, inspect, audit, and report on any aspect of Afghanistan reconstruction regardless of federal departmental boundaries.

SIGAR's mandate, however, does not extend to second-guessing national policy. SIGAR oversight focuses on seeking out waste, fraud, and abuse; assessing effectiveness and identifying problems; and suggesting

LESSONS OF 15 YEARS

improvements in the programs devised to implement policy. Our settled national policy is that Afghanistan must not again become a launching pad for international terrorist attacks. From that standpoint and other considerations, Afghanistan is important to U.S. national security, and improving security-assistance efforts there is a high-priority mission.

OVERVIEW OF LESSONS LEARNED REPORT

SIGAR's analysis revealed that the U.S. government was not properly prepared from the outset to help build an Afghan army and police force that was capable of protecting Afghanistan from internal and external threats and preventing the country from becoming a terrorist safe haven. SIGAR found the U.S. government lacked a comprehensive approach to security-sector assistance and a coordinating body to successfully implement the whole-of-government programs necessary to develop a capable and self-sustaining ANDSF.

As then Secretary of Defense Robert Gates said in 2010, "Our military was designed to defeat other armies, navies and air forces, not to advise, train and equip them." America's "interagency toolkit" for building the security capacity of partner nations, Gates said, was a "hodgepodge of jerry-rigged arrangements constrained by a dated and complex patchwork of authorities, persistent shortfalls in resources, and unwieldy processes."⁸

Ultimately, the United States designed a force that was not able to provide nationwide security, especially as that force faced a larger threat than anticipated after the drawdown of coalition military forces. But the



Afghan National Army drivers train on vehicle preventive maintenance. (U.S. Army photo by Mike MacLeod)

LESSONS OF 15 YEARS

Afghan National Defense and Security Forces, the ANDSF, remain vital to everything the United States hopes to achieve in Afghanistan. Without an effective ANDSF, insurgents and terrorists will increase their control of provinces and populations. The Kabul government will struggle to build popular support and provide basic services. And reconstruction advisors and oversight personnel will be constrained in getting around the country to do their jobs.

Unfortunately, as SIGAR has documented, U.S. security-sector assistance in Afghanistan has suffered from serious problems, many of which persist. Numerous examples, documented in SIGAR reports over recent years, include:

- Unreliable and inconsistent assessments of ANDSF capabilities
- Ineffective management of ANDSF fuel and equipment
- Inadequate literacy-training programs for ANDSF personnel
- Thousands of “ghost” soldiers on the rolls, distorting readiness assessments and allowing corrupt commanders to pocket the salaries paid from U.S. taxpayers’ funds
- Nearly a half-billion dollars wasted on transport planes bought second-hand from Italy that could not operate in Afghanistan’s harsh environment and that were scrapped for pennies on the dollar
- Shoddily constructed, unsafe, and unwanted buildings

Despite the massive U.S. commitment to build the ANDSF, the forces continue to struggle with the external threats of terrorism and a resilient insurgency, as well as internal issues such as gaps in military capabilities



Afghan recruits fall in at the Kabul Military Training Center. (Photo by Jason Howk)

LESSONS OF 15 YEARS

like intelligence gathering, casualty evacuation, administrative skills, and over-reliance on static checkpoints.

So with a revised U.S. strategy under way, SIGAR's report comes at an opportune time to improve chances of success in Afghanistan. Now, more than ever, it is necessary not to dwell upon failures, but to learn lessons from and improve our security-sector assistance efforts.

HOW THE REPORT WAS PREPARED

In preparing the security-assistance report, SIGAR's Lessons Learned staff consulted hundreds of public and nonpublic documents, within and outside of government agencies. They interviewed and held discussions with more than 100 people including U.S., European, Afghan, and other experts from academia, think tanks, NGOs, and government entities, along with current and former U.S. civilian and military officials deployed to Afghanistan.

The report also drew upon the experience and advice of General Joseph Dunford, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff; CENTCOM commander General Joseph Votel; Resolute Support mission commander General John Nicholson; former Combined Security Transition Command-Afghanistan commander Major General Richard Kaiser; and other subject matter experts such as Dr. Anthony Cordesman of the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS).

SIGAR has also been encouraged by positive responses to drafts of the report from many DOD officials, senior military officers and national-security policy officials. Their reactions matter. No matter how ironclad and compelling a report may be to its authors, it is useless if decision makers do not accept the accuracy of its findings and the logic of its recommendations. Their initial reactions to the draft report bode well for the practical value of the final product in preventing a repetition of mistakes made in Afghanistan.

The Lessons Learned report is posted on SIGAR's website, www.sigar.mil, for reading and downloading. The website also offers an interactive version of the report that gives users quick and easy access to a summary embedded with imagery, graphs, and responsive content. SIGAR is not aware of any other federal IG office that produces such whole-of-government lessons-learned reports with interactive Web versions. The website also hosts SIGAR's September 2016 Lessons Learned report on corruption—another serious and complex threat to the viability of the Afghan state. Additional reports are in preparation.

WHAT SIGAR FOUND

The \$70 billion U.S. effort to create an effective ANDSF has been under way since 2002. From the outset, however, this effort has been a coalition

LESSONS OF 15 YEARS

operation, with the United Kingdom, Germany, Italy, Canada, Australia, Turkey, Japan, and other partner nations contributing, as well as the United States.

Not surprisingly, such a long and costly undertaking has attracted a great deal of attention to the lessons that might be extracted from it. Such lessons are generally not very cheerful reading, for as a British military historian observed, “History is ... a record of how things usually go wrong.”⁹ The work of SIGAR, other federal inspectors general, the GAO, CSIS, and others strongly supports that judgment. But not everything goes wrong, and our report also highlights some encouraging successes in security assistance that may augur well for the future.

SIGAR’s report contains a detailed array of findings, lessons, and recommendations. It comprises:

- Twelve researched and documented *findings*,
- Eleven *lessons* drawn from those findings, and
- Thirty-five *recommendations* for addressing those lessons: two for Congress to consider, seven that apply to executive agencies in general, seven that are DOD-specific, and nineteen that are Afghanistan-specific and applicable to either executive agencies at-large or to DOD.

The full report elaborates on a dozen findings of fact, richly researched, and presented with full discussion and numerous examples.¹⁰ A few of the most significant findings:

1. The U.S. government was ill-prepared to conduct security-sector assistance programs of the size and scope required in Afghanistan, whose population is about 70% illiterate and largely unskilled in technology. In particular, the U.S. government lacks a deployable police-development capability for high-threat environments, so training of more than 100,000 Afghan police has been performed by a variety of U.S. Army aviators, infantry officers, and civilian contractors. The only ministerial advisory training program is designed solely for civilians, but in Afghanistan mostly untrained military officers are conducting that mission. One U.S. officer watched TV shows like *Cops* and *NCIS* to learn what he should teach. In eastern Afghanistan, SIGAR met a U.S. Army helicopter pilot assigned to teach policing. Afghan police training has suffered because of this misalignment of U.S. advisors.
2. U.S. military plans for ANDSF readiness were created under politically constrained timelines, rather than based upon realistic assessments of Afghan readiness. These plans consistently underestimated the resilience of the Afghan insurgency and overestimated ANDSF capabilities. Consequently, the ANDSF was ill-prepared to deal with deteriorating security after the drawdown of U.S. combat forces.

LESSONS OF 15 YEARS

3. The United States failed to optimize coalition nations' capabilities to support security-assistance missions in the context of international political realities. Partner nations' restrictions on the use of their troops, disparate rationales for joining the Coalition, their own resource constraints, differing military capabilities, and NATO's force-generation processes led to an increasingly complex implementation of security sector assistance programs. For example, the NATO training mission for the ANDSF was chronically understaffed by more than 50%. Gaps existed even in positions identified as mission-critical.
4. The lag in Afghan ministerial and security-sector governing capacity hindered planning, oversight, and the long-term sustainability of the ANDSF. Insufficient attention to Afghan institutional capacity meant that the personnel, logistical, planning, administrative, and other functions vital to sustaining the fighting forces remained underdeveloped—as they do today. Creating inventory systems for equipment, fuel, and personnel began in earnest only in the past few years.
5. As security deteriorated, efforts to sustain and professionalize the ANDSF became secondary to meeting immediate combat needs.

FINDINGS YIELD TOUGH LESSONS

These and other findings provide the bones and connective tissue of the report. But the heart of any lessons-learned report consists—naturally—of lessons. SIGAR's Lessons Learned Program extracted 11 lessons from its research:¹¹

Lesson 1. The U.S. government is not well organized to conduct Security-Sector Assistance (SSA) missions in post-conflict nations or in the developing world. Furthermore, U.S. doctrine, policies, personnel, and programs are insufficient to meet SSA mission requirements and expectations.

The United States does not lack the capability to conduct effective SSA programs; it lacks a comprehensive interagency approach to implement these programs. Most U.S. SSA programs focus on improving fighting capabilities of partner-nation security forces, with limited efforts to improve the *institutions* necessary for security, governance, and sustainability.

Lesson 2. SSA cannot employ a one-size-fits-all approach; it must be tailored to a host nation's context and needs. Security-force structures and capabilities will not outlast U.S. assistance efforts if the host nation does not fully buy into such efforts and take ownership of SSA programs.

From 2002 to 2015, senior U.S. and NATO officials took ownership of ANDSF development, with little to no input from senior Afghan officials. Afghan buy-in

LESSONS OF 15 YEARS



Afghan National Police train in controlling and cuffing suspects. (IJC photo by Sandra Arnold)

largely occurred through the process of U.S. and NATO officials briefing Afghan leaders on military plans and training programs for the ANDSF. In just one example of “cut-and-paste” program applications from other settings that negatively impacted the overall effort, the U.S. military employed PowerPoint-based police training curricula previously used in the Balkans that were a mismatch given the high levels of illiteracy within the Afghan police force. Additionally, the lack of Afghan ownership of force development, operational planning, and security-sector governance prevented the Afghans from effectively overseeing and managing the ANDSF following the security transition at the end of 2014.

Lesson 3. Senior government and nongovernment leaders in post-conflict or developing-world countries are likely to scrimp for control of security forces; SSA missions should avoid empowering factions.

U.S. officials should expect host-nation leaders to compete for control of the military and police, including attempts to manipulate U.S. efforts to advance their own personal and political agendas. In Afghanistan, the United States largely ignored the transitional security forces operating throughout the country, as well as the political imbalances throughout the rank-and-file that were eroding security, both of which were often supported by host-nation elites. As a result, major social and political imbalances remain within the ANDSF today.

Lesson 4. Western equipment and systems provided to developing-world militaries are likely to create chronic, high-cost dependencies.

LESSONS OF 15 YEARS

Many developing-world security forces have military and police personnel with far lower rates of literacy than their Western counterparts. Advanced weapons systems and vehicles, demand-based supply systems, and high-tech personnel and command and control systems that work for Western militaries could be inappropriate for many developing-world forces. Even if some personnel at higher echelons can master the systems, such capabilities might not be realistic in tactical units. Those with such skills are also more likely to seek higher-paying (and safer) employment in the private sector or senior civil service. Western advisors, therefore, are likely to step in to perform the jobs themselves rather than see the tasks done poorly or not at all. In Afghanistan, this reliance on U.S. support created a chronic dependency within the ANDSF on foreign partners.

Lesson 5. Security force assessment methodologies are often unable to evaluate the impact of intangible factors such as leadership, corruption, malign influence, and dependency, which can lead to an underappreciation of how such factors can undermine readiness and battlefield performance.

Assessment methodologies used to evaluate the ANDSF measured tangible outputs, such as staffing, equipping, and training status, but were less capable of evaluating the impact of intangible factors, such as battlefield performance, leadership, corruption, malign influence, and changes in systems and equipment. DOD forecasts and targets for force readiness were largely based on the U.S. military's capacity for recruitment and training, and not based on battlefield performance and other factors corroding the Afghan force. Issues such as ghost soldiers, corruption, and high levels of attrition were more critical than training capacity to measuring true ANDSF capabilities.



Female ANP officers train in riot control. (Kansas Army National Guard photo by Sgt. Darren D. Heusel)

Lesson 6. Developing and training a national police force is best accomplished by law enforcement professionals in order to achieve a police capability focused on community policing and criminal justice.

In Afghanistan, two different U.S. government agencies led police-development activities. Each of these efforts alone was insufficient. State, mandated by legislation and supported by funding, is responsible for foreign police development. However, State's Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs (INL) is staffed by civilian program managers, not law-enforcement professionals. Therefore, State largely relied on contracting with DynCorp International to conduct police training and development programs in Afghanistan. U.S. civilian police trainers were largely restricted from operating in high-threat environments and therefore could not provide follow-on field training to new Afghan National Police (ANP) recruits. The mission was eventually transferred to DOD, which was largely inexperienced and improperly prepared to provide rule-of-law training to foreign police forces. As a result, training and development of the ANP was militarized and resulted in a police capability focused more on force protection and offensive operations than on community policing and criminal justice.

Lesson 7. To improve the effectiveness of SSA missions in Coalition operations, the U.S. government must acknowledge and compensate for any Coalition staffing shortfalls and national caveats that relate to trainers, advisors, and embedded training teams.

The ANDSF training mission suffered from chronic understaffing. Even during the surge from 2010 to 2011, required trainer billets at the NATO Training Mission-Afghanistan were staffed at less than 50%. Due to the operational restrictions imposed by some NATO countries, deployed trainers could not be appropriately assigned throughout Afghanistan. In late 2011, ANP trainers in Kabul were overstaffed by 215%, while police trainers in hostile and non-permissive areas of eastern Afghanistan were 64% understaffed. Chronic understaffing persists.

Lesson 8. Developing foreign military and police capabilities is a whole-of-government mission.

Successful SSA missions require whole-of-government support from the civilian and defense agencies with expertise in training and advising foreign countries in both security operations and the necessary institutional development of the security forces' governing institutions. Within DOD, SSA is a defense enterprise mission, not strictly one to be executed by the military chain of command. Deploying military combat commanders in this role results in over-prioritizing development of the fighting force at the expense of governing and sustainability missions. For police-related missions, the United States lacks a deployable rule-of-law training force that can operate in high-threat environments; in Afghanistan, this limited the U.S. ability to develop the ANP.

LESSONS OF 15 YEARS

Lesson 9. In Afghanistan and other parts of the developing world, the creation of specialized security force units often siphons off the conventional force's most capable leaders and most educated recruits.

In post-conflict nations and the developing world, where human capital for a professional military and police force is limited, it may be necessary to create smaller, specialized forces. In that case, however, the U.S. military must analyze the impact that removing the potential cadre of promising leaders will have on the conventional forces. Creating the Afghan National Army (ANA) commandos and special forces entailed removing literate and proficient soldiers from the ranks of the conventional forces and assigning them to the elite units. Within the Afghan National Police, creation of the Afghan National Civil Order Police and special police units likewise removed the most literate and capable police recruits from the regular force. While the elite units have performed admirably, the conventional units have struggled.

Lesson 10. SSA missions must assess the needs of the entire spectrum of the security sector, including rule of law and corrections programs, in addition to developing the nation's police and armed forces. Synchronizing SSA efforts across all pillars of the security sector is critical.

Successful security-sector development is often achieved when all aspects of the security sector are developed in concert with one another. Developing a national police force without also developing programs and reforms of the nation's judicial and corrections systems will create perverse incentives for the police to capture and release criminals for bribes or be involved in extra-judicial activities. In Afghanistan, the 2002 division of security-sector reform into the five independent "silos" of military reform (U.S.), police reform (Germany), judicial reform (Italy), counternarcotics (UK), and disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (Japan) undermined each individual program's success, as the process lacked necessary coordination and synchronization.

Lesson 11. U.S. SSA training and advising positions are not currently career-enhancing for uniformed military personnel, regardless of the importance U.S. military leadership places on the mission. Therefore, experienced and capable military professionals with SSA experience often choose non-SSA assignments later in their careers, resulting in the continual deployment of new and inexperienced forces for SSA missions.

The career path of a U.S. Army officer, for example, relies on commanding U.S. soldiers. Outside of joint military exercises, experiences partnering with a foreign military have little positive impact on an officer's promotion-board review. Although U.S. military commanders publicly emphasized the importance of the train, advise, and assist missions in Iraq and Afghanistan, their statements did not improve the way the military rewarded members who volunteered for or were deployed in support of SSA missions.

LESSONS OF 15 YEARS

SIGAR's report goes into detail on these lessons. They spring from our findings about security-sector assistance in Afghanistan to date, but are also prudent points to bear in mind for future efforts in Afghanistan and elsewhere.

NEEDED NOW: WHOLE-OF-GOVERNMENT APPROACH

One of the security-assistance report lessons has special implications for oversight agencies in Afghanistan—especially SIGAR, the agency with the largest oversight staff and broadest mandate in Afghanistan. That lesson is that a whole-of-government approach is necessary to successfully develop foreign military and police capabilities.

Afghanistan may be the definitive case study for that judgment. As our report notes, “While the U.S. government has a number of individual department and agency initiatives to improve security sector assistance programs, it currently lacks a comprehensive, whole-of-government approach and coordinating body to manage implementation and provide oversight of these programs.”¹²

This continuing failure is not only a serious impediment to success in Afghanistan, but could be the Achilles' heel of future contingency operations.

Even if the United States has a well-conceived whole-of-government approach, poor execution can undermine it. For example, embassy understaffing and tight restrictions on travel can add to the burden on our military, undermine the ability of civilian implementing agencies to perform



Afghan troops train in room-clearing techniques. (U.S. Army photo by Spc. Ryan DeBooy)

LESSONS OF 15 YEARS

their reconstruction tasks in Afghanistan, and hinder the work of SIGAR and other oversight entities.

For example, when Inspector General Sopko was able to visit the U.S.-led Coalition's southern training headquarters in Kandahar this spring, the senior leadership there said they had not met or seen anyone from the U.S. Embassy in Kabul since deployment, so the military had to deal with the local governor and other Afghan civilian officials on development and reconstruction matters that should have been an Embassy concern. When the Inspector General returned to Kandahar in the fall of 2017 to observe the first hand-off of UH-60 helicopters to the Afghan Air Force, U.S. military leaders there said they had still not received anyone from the Embassy. Their comments suggest the U. S. Embassy still has not employed a successful whole-of-government approach.

Similar troubling observations come from Major General Richard Kaiser, who until recently led the Combined Security Transition Command-Afghanistan. He noted that, "A lack of embassy manning is a huge challenge for us. They are understaffed, because of a lack of funding and the lack of an ability to hire people." Consequently, some tasks for which State is supposed to have the lead, such as counternarcotics and ministry coordination, are performed by the U.S. military. General Kaiser also noted, "I often meet with the [Afghan] minister of finance, then I collaborate with the embassy and tell them what has occurred." He adds, "This then is a real gap that can will cause fractures along the lines of communications."¹³

SIGAR's July 2017 *Quarterly Report to the United States Congress* noted that U.S. Embassy Kabul's severe restrictions on travel have increased the difficulty of carrying out the U.S. government's oversight mandate in Afghanistan. Other federal civilian agencies are similarly burdened.



ANA soldiers train on use of walls as cover. (U.S. Army photo by Spc. Ryan DeBooy)

To be blunt, the U.S. whole-of-government approach in Afghanistan suffers from a gap, a *hole in* our government approach, and that is particularly obvious when discussing civilian advisors who fall under Chief of Mission protection protocols. The high-threat environment in Afghanistan and Embassy Kabul's risk-avoidance posture impedes U.S. advisors from engaging regularly with their Afghan counterparts. Their tasks include important work like training Afghan judicial and police staff, giving technical support to Afghan ministries and monitoring the progress of USAID projects. Their limited access hinders building working relationships, trust, and follow-through on critical missions with direct negative impact on our military and reconstruction efforts.

With the civilian advisory mission mostly stuck behind embassy walls in Kabul, even with an expanded "Green Zone," there are limits on what can be achieved—unless Congress and the Administration quickly address the highly risk-averse posture that the State Department appears to have adopted in Afghanistan. That posture may in fact be inconsistent with the policy guidance in the State Department's own *Foreign Affairs Manual*, which states:

Advancement of U.S. foreign policy objectives inherently involves diverse types of risk, and the Department recognizes that taking considered risks is essential to creating value for our stakeholders. ... Department leaders, including Chiefs of Mission, should require the best possible assessment of risk, identification of mitigation measures, and evaluations of any remaining residual risk before making decisions. Decisions should include judgments on whether the benefits of a proposed activity or course of action outweigh the residual risks.¹⁴

Accepting risk is also critical to oversight work in challenging environment as Afghanistan. SIGAR believes, based on 17 visits to that country by Inspector General Sopko over the past five years and on the observations of SIGAR staff deployed there since 2009, that front-line U.S. civilian personnel understand these risks and want to be untethered so that they can reach more areas of Afghanistan more often to perform their assigned duties.

FROM LESSONS TO RECOMMENDATIONS

Offering lessons, no matter how carefully researched or compellingly presented, does little good without some idea of what to do about them. SIGAR's LLP report offers 35 recommendations, comprising 33 general and Afghanistan-specific recommendations for executive agencies and DOD, plus two for Congress to consider. SIGAR believes these recommendations are timely, sensible, and actionable, especially as the Administration implements its new strategy for Afghanistan.

The full set of recommendations is detailed in the Lessons Learned report. For purposes of this essay, the focus is on some of the end states or outcomes that would result if they were adopted.

LESSONS OF 15 YEARS

SIGAR's recommendations for executive agencies would, if implemented, lead to outcomes including:

- Better matching of U.S. advisors to the needs of the ANDSF and the Afghan Ministries of Defense and the Interior
- A stateside entity providing persistent and comprehensive support to the U.S. military and to the train, advise, and assist commands in Afghanistan
- Stringent conditions attached to U.S. funding to eliminate the ANDSF's "culture of impunity"

DOD-specific recommendations would, if implemented, bring about:

- Improved training and equipping for the Afghan Air Force
- Extending the reach of the U.S. military's train, advise, and assist mission below the Afghan corps level to allow for better observation and mentoring of maneuver units
- Taking into account the need for more military "guardian angels" for trainers and advisors who need to travel in insecure areas

SIGAR also offers two recommendations for the U.S. Congress that could:

- Provide a systematic review of authorities, roles, and resource mechanisms of major U.S. government stakeholders in security-sector assistance
- Identify a lead agency for foreign police training in high-threat and post-conflict environments, and resolving the current misalignments among Justice, State, and DOD.

CONCLUSION

SIGAR's new lessons-learned report includes well-documented findings, compelling lessons, and practical, actionable recommendations to improve strategic outcomes in Afghanistan and in operations yet to come.

Improving those outcomes requires taking a fresh, bolder look at the Afghan security forces and their well-documented problems with morale, literacy, drug use, corruption, leadership, and technical skill. But it also requires recognizing that the U.S. approach to security-sector assistance in Afghanistan over the past 15 years may have actually *contributed* to the ANDSF's inability to secure the country from threats and prevent the re-establishment of safe havens for terrorists.

As our report puts plainly, the United States failed to understand the complexities and scale of the mission required to stand up and mentor security forces in a country suffering from 30 years of war, misrule, corruption, and deep poverty. The United States still needs to address the problems of defining mission requirements in Afghanistan, and of executing these missions adequately.

LESSONS OF 15 YEARS



A U.S. Air Force senior master sergeant mentors an ANA military-police officer at the Kabul Military Training Center. (USAF photo by Cecilio M. Ricardo Jr.)

The ANDSF is fighting hard, and improving in many ways. But the United States has to do a better job of assisting their growth. Smarter and more appropriate security assistance is vital, now in Afghanistan, and later in whatever new contingencies arise.

Based on SIGAR's discussions with key leaders in our military, in DOD offices, and at the National Security Council, there are grounds for cautious optimism that a properly resourced, persistent, and comprehensive train, advise, and assist operation can pay big dividends.

Two good examples of where the United States has succeeded—noted in the security sections of previous SIGAR quarterly reports to Congress—are in building the core competency of the Afghan Special Security Forces and providing the Afghan Air Force with A-29 close-support aircraft and training for their pilots. There is still time to make a real difference in the capabilities and performance of the rest of the ANDSF.

“The future,” Harvard University historians Richard Neustadt and Ernest May wrote 30 years ago, “has no place to come from but the past.” Therefore, “what matters for the future ... is departures from the past, alterations, changes, which prospectively or actually divert familiar flows from accustomed channels.”¹⁵

As SIGAR's report has found, the accustomed channels of U.S. security-sector assistance have been, until recently, meandering and clogged. They need more dredging and straightening. Resolving to do better in security-assistance missions, and absorbing even some of the lessons in SIGAR's new report will offer a better way forward for the Afghan people—and ultimately, a more successful way to hasten the end of America's longest war.

“Our nation must seek an honorable and enduring outcome worthy of the tremendous sacrifices that have been made.”

—*President Donald Trump*