

# SIGAR

Special Inspector General for  
Afghanistan Reconstruction

OCT 30  
2019

QUARTERLY REPORT TO THE UNITED STATES CONGRESS





## **The National Defense Authorization Act for FY 2008 (Pub. L. No. 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.

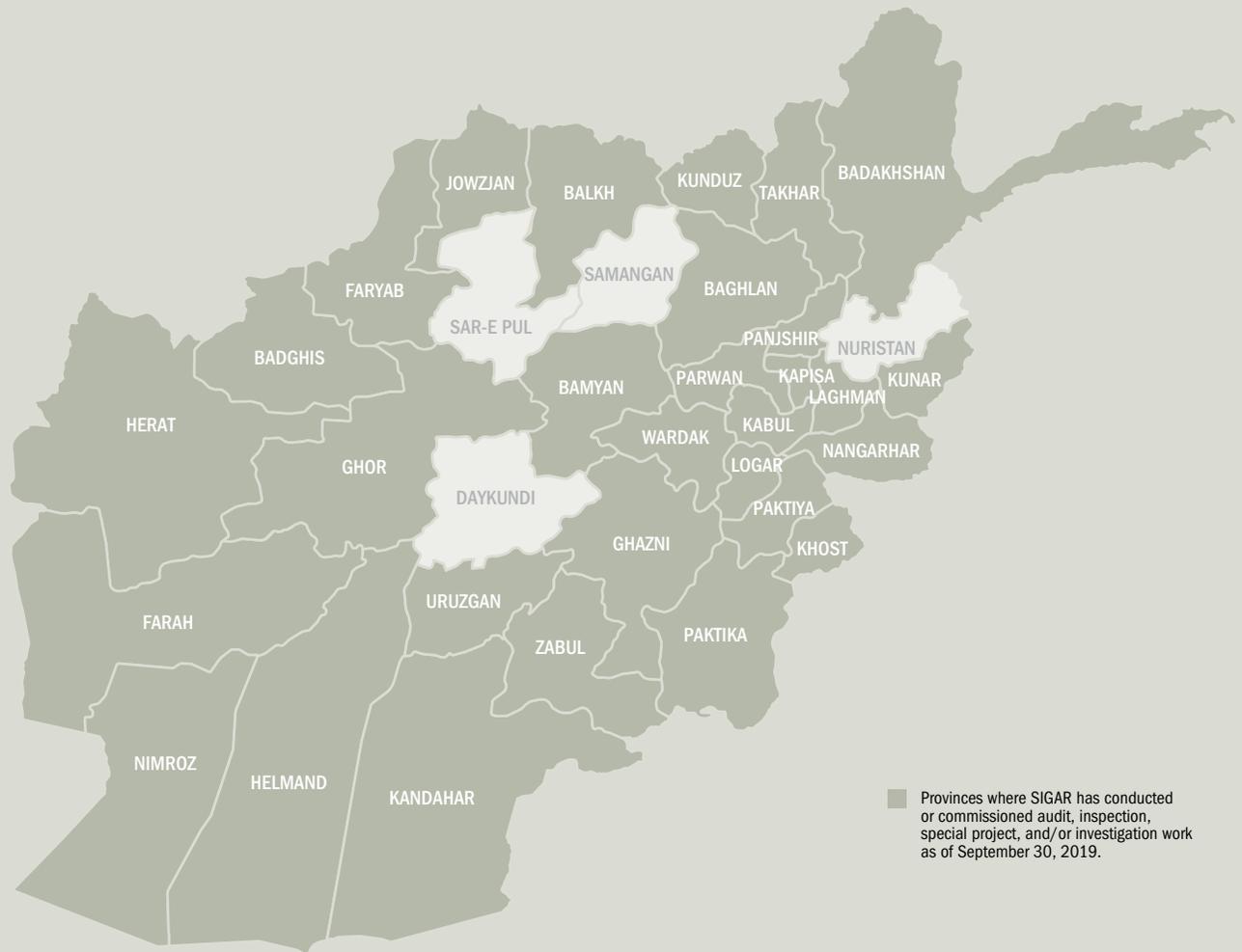
As required by the National Defense Authorization Act for FY 2018 (Pub. L. No. 115-91), this quarterly report has been prepared in accordance with the Quality Standards for Inspection and Evaluation issued by the Council of the Inspectors General on Integrity and Efficiency.

Source: Pub.L. No. 110-181, "National Defense Authorization Act for FY 2008," 1/28/2008, Pub. L. No. 115-91, "National Defense Authorization Act for FY 2018," 12/12/2017.

(For a list of the congressionally mandated contents of this report, see Appendix A.)

**Cover photo:**

Workers at Afghanistan's Independent Election Commission tabulate results from the September 28 presidential election. (UNAMA photo)



■ Provinces where SIGAR has conducted or commissioned audit, inspection, special project, and/or investigation work as of September 30, 2019.



SPECIAL INSPECTOR GENERAL FOR  
AFGHANISTAN RECONSTRUCTION

I am pleased to submit to Congress, and to the Secretaries of State and Defense, SIGAR's 45th quarterly report on the status of reconstruction in Afghanistan.

This quarter marked the 18th anniversary of the U.S. intervention to ensure that Afghanistan is never again used as a haven for terror attacks on the United States as it was on September 11, 2001. International reconstruction efforts in Afghanistan have been underway since 2002.

After months of talks between U.S. and Taliban negotiators, Special Representative for Afghanistan Reconciliation Zalmay Khalilzad on August 31, 2019, reported that the two sides were "at the threshold of an agreement" for moving forward to intra-Afghan negotiations and a peace agreement. However, on September 7, President Donald J. Trump suspended further talks after the Taliban admitted to an attack in Kabul that killed a U.S. soldier. Meanwhile, on September 28, Afghanistan held its fourth presidential election.

Since 2011, SIGAR has raised concerns that inaccurate and unreliable personnel data for the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces (ANDSF) puts U.S. taxpayer dollars at risk. To its credit, the Combined Security Transition Command-Afghanistan (CSTC-A) at that time took steps to develop the Afghan Personnel and Pay System (APPS), a new, computerized system to more accurately count, track, and generate payroll information for ANDSF personnel. For the second consecutive quarter, CSTC-A is reporting ANDSF assigned force-strength numbers to include only those ANDSF personnel who have been biometrically enrolled and have other required identifying information in APPS. SIGAR is encouraged by CSTC-A's confidence that the new force-strength numbers reflect what they say is the most accurate count of ANDSF personnel to date. In light of our longstanding concern over this issue, we look forward to working with CSTC-A over the coming months to fully understand the ramifications of the new force-strength numbers for past and future expenditures.

As discussed in Section One of this report, SIGAR released its seventh Lessons Learned Program report, *Reintegration of Ex-Combatants: Lessons from the U.S. Experience in Afghanistan*. The report examines the five main post-2001 reintegration efforts in Afghanistan and assesses their effectiveness. Further, it examines several past local security agreements and whether they provided an opening for reintegration. The report found that none of the reintegration programs succeeded in enabling any significant number of ex-combatants to socially and economically rejoin civil society. Programs specifically targeting Taliban insurgents did not weaken the insurgency to any substantial degree or contribute meaningfully to parallel reconciliation efforts. SIGAR also initiated a new lessons-learned report this quarter on U.S. efforts to advance and empower women and girls in Afghanistan.

This quarter, SIGAR issued 14 products. SIGAR work to date has identified approximately \$2.6 billion in savings for the U.S. taxpayer.

SIGAR issued two performance audit reports this quarter, reviewing the United States Agency for International Development's (USAID) Power Transmission Expansion and Connectivity (PTEC) project, and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' (USACE) Local National Quality Assurance Program. SIGAR also issued three inspection reports that examined USACE-funded projects: the \$39.5 million Pul-e Alam power substation in the North East Power System (NEPS), the \$6.9 million Afghan National Army garrison at South Kabul Afghanistan International Airport, and the \$4.5 million Ghulam Khan road project in Khost Province.

SIGAR completed six financial audits of U.S.-funded contracts to rebuild Afghanistan. They identified \$498,840 in questioned costs as a result of internal-control deficiencies and noncompliance issues. To date, SIGAR's financial audits have identified more than \$428.5 million in questioned costs, plus interest, and other amounts payable to the U.S. government.

SIGAR's Office of Special Projects issued two reports. They reviewed the Afghan Children Read Program, and inspections of USAID-funded schools. The office also issued one inquiry letter on equipment acquisitions.

During the reporting period, six defendants investigated by SIGAR in the United States were sentenced to a total of 120 months' prison time, 240 months' supervised probation, and \$18.1 million in criminal forfeitures and restitutions. In addition, one criminal information and two indictments were obtained. SIGAR initiated nine new cases and closed 17, bringing the total number of ongoing investigations to 158.

SIGAR's suspension and debarment program referred two individuals for suspension or debarment based on evidence developed as part of investigations conducted by SIGAR in Afghanistan and the United States. These referrals bring the total number of individuals and companies referred by SIGAR since 2008 to 975, encompassing 535 individuals and 440 companies.

My staff and I look forward to working with Congress and other stakeholders to protect U.S. tax dollars as the U.S. mission in Afghanistan continues to evolve.

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

Respectfully,  
John F. Sopko

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

**This report summarizes SIGAR’s oversight work and updates developments in the five major areas of reconstruction efforts in Afghanistan from July 1 to September 30, 2019.\* It includes an essay highlighting the findings in SIGAR’s recently released Lessons Learned Program report, *Reintegration of Ex-Combatants: Lessons from the U.S. Experience in Afghanistan*. This reporting period, SIGAR issued 14 audits, inspections, reviews, and other products assessing U.S. efforts to build the Afghan security forces, improve governance, facilitate economic and social development, and combat the production and sale of narcotics. During the reporting period, SIGAR criminal investigations produced six sentencing, two indictments, one criminal information, 120 months’ prison time, 240 months’ supervised probation, and a combined total of \$18.1 million in criminal forfeitures and restitutions.**

## SIGAR OVERVIEW

### AUDITS AND INSPECTIONS

This quarter, SIGAR issued two performance audits, six financial audits, and three inspection reports.

The **performance audit reports** examined:

- the effectiveness of USAID’s implementation and oversight of the \$861.7 million Power Transmission Expansion and Connectivity (PTEC) project from August 2011 through March 2019
- the impact of the more than \$90 million spent by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) on a personal-services contract with Versar Inc. to hire Afghan engineers and specialists to help oversee construction projects.

The six **financial audit reports** identified \$498,840 in questioned costs as a result of internal-control deficiencies and noncompliance issues.

The **inspection reports** found:

- construction deficiencies, contractor noncompliance, and poor oversight at the \$39.5 million Pul-e Alam power substation in the North East Power System, including increased safety risks to residents living near transmission lines
- safety hazards and maintenance issues at the Afghan National Army Garrison at South Kabul International Airport, including elevated manholes that could damage vehicles driving over them
- five construction deficiencies posing safety hazards to motorists, pedestrians, and cyclists on the Ghulam Khan road project.

### SPECIAL PROJECTS

This quarter, SIGAR’s Office of Special Projects issued an **inquiry letter** concerning equipment acquisitions, in addition to two **reviews** concerning:

- textbooks and materials distributed to primary schools through USAID’s Afghan Children Read (ACR) program
- observations from SIGAR site visits to 171 USAID-funded Afghan schools across 10 provinces

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## LESSONS LEARNED

SIGAR's Lessons Learned Program released its seventh **lessons-learned report**, *Reintegration of Ex-Combatants: Lessons from the U.S. Experience in Afghanistan*. The report examines and assesses the five main post-2001 reintegration efforts in Afghanistan. It also examines several past local security agreements for efforts on reintegration. The report found that none of the reintegration programs enabled any significant number of ex-combatants to socially and economically rejoin civil society. Programs targeting Taliban insurgents did not substantially weaken the insurgency or contribute meaningfully to parallel reconciliation efforts.

The Lessons Learned Program has four projects in development: U.S. government support to elections; monitoring and evaluation of reconstruction contracting; advancing and empowering women and girls; and police and corrections.

## INVESTIGATIONS

During the reporting period, SIGAR investigations resulted in six sentencing, 120 months' prison time, 240 months' supervised probation, and a combined total of \$18.1 million in criminal forfeitures and restitutions. In addition, one criminal information and two indictments were obtained. SIGAR initiated nine new cases and closed 17, bringing the total number of ongoing investigations to 158. SIGAR's suspension and debarment program referred two individuals for suspension or debarment based on

evidence from investigations conducted by SIGAR in Afghanistan and the United States. **Investigations** highlights include:

- The former owner of a now-defunct marble mining company in Afghanistan, Adam Doost, was sentenced to 54 months' imprisonment, 36 months' supervised probation, and 250 hours' community service. He was further ordered to forfeit \$8,940,742 and pay \$8,940,742 in restitution. Doost was found guilty in September 2018 for his role in defrauding the Overseas Private Investment Corporation (OPIC) and defaulting on a \$15.8 million loan from OPIC.
- A former U.S. Army Special Forces member, Joseph Russell Graff, was sentenced to 52 months' imprisonment and three years' supervised probation, in addition to \$150,000 forfeiture from the proceeds of the sale of a house he purchased with questionable funds. Graff smuggled illegally obtained weapons from Afghanistan during his 2012–2013 military deployment, and smuggled an additional estimated \$350,000 in illegal proceeds.
- A former CEO of two U.S. government contractors, James O'Brien, was sentenced to six months' imprisonment, four months' home confinement, and three years' supervised release. O'Brien pleaded guilty in June 2019 for making false statements that increased his companies' competitiveness.

\* As provided in its authorizing statute, SIGAR may also report on products and events occurring after September 30, 2019, up to the publication date of this report. Unless otherwise noted, all afghani-to-U.S. dollar conversions used in this report are derived by averaging the last six months of exchange-rate data available through Da Afghanistan Bank ([www.dab.gov.af](http://www.dab.gov.af)), then rounding to the nearest afghani. Data is as of September 24, 2019.

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“If there is ever to be a true, sustainable peace in Afghanistan, reintegration of the Taliban and other combatants will be a necessary component of that process, whether that process begins days— or years—from now.”

—*Inspector General John Sopko, SIGAR*

# 1 REINTEGRATING FORMER FIGHTERS



## ESSAY CONTENTS

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A district governor in Uruzgan Province meets with a reintegrated Taliban commander to provide supplies for the former fighter's village as part of the Afghanistan Peace and Reintegration Program, 2012. SIGAR's new lessons-learned report concludes that none of several such programs achieved long-lasting or significant results. (NATO Special Operations photo by Petty Officer 1st Class Matthew Leistikow)

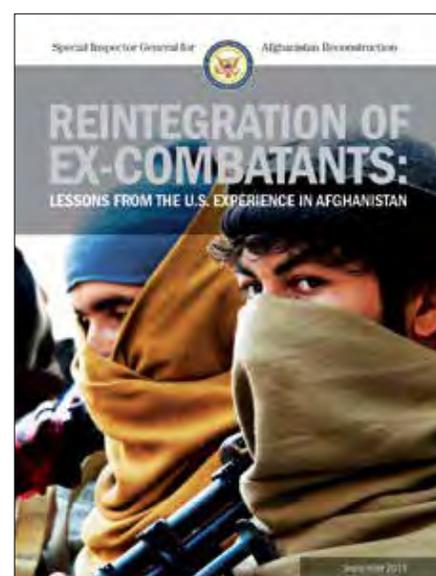
## REINTEGRATING FORMER FIGHTERS

The United States' goal in Afghanistan is a comprehensive peace agreement between the elected Afghan government and the Taliban. If the parties to the conflict succeed in this critical and daunting task, then Afghans will face the need to reintegrate thousands of former fighters into a society torn by decades of war; riven by ethnic, tribal, and ideological strife; beset by corruption, poverty, high unemployment, sluggish economic growth, weakness in the rule of law and respect for human rights; and hobbled by limited institutional capacity for carrying out basic tasks of governance.<sup>1</sup>

Reintegration has proven a challenge in other conflicts, and seems certain to be a challenge for Afghanistan as well. A new 136-page report from the Lessons Learned Program (LLP) of the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR), *Reintegration of Ex-Combatants: Lessons from the U.S. Experience in Afghanistan*, explains the issues, reviews lessons from previous reintegration efforts, and offers recommendations to lawmakers and policy makers for boosting prospects for success.

The new report defines “reintegration” as the long-term process of an ex-combatant gaining acceptance from his or her community and finding a sustainable livelihood. It notes that the stakes are high: “If the Afghan government and Taliban reach a peace agreement, an estimated 60,000 Taliban fighters—or possibly up to 150,000—will need to find a new livelihood. Any efforts to demobilize and reintegrate members of other armed groups who have been fighting the Taliban, or to reform the Afghan army and police, would further add to the pool of ex-combatants. If ex-combatants are not able to reintegrate, they may be more vulnerable to recruitment by criminal groups or terrorist organizations like the Islamic State Khorasan (IS-K), the local branch of the Islamic State active in eastern Afghanistan.”<sup>2</sup>

Reintegration of former fighters into society therefore must entail a complex and long-term process with social, economic, political, security, humanitarian, and financial dimensions if Afghanistan is to achieve lasting peace and stability.



**SIGAR's latest lessons-learned report.**  
(SIGAR photo)

# REINTEGRATING FORMER FIGHTERS



**Inspector General John Sopko** presents SIGAR's *Reintegration of Ex-Combatants* report at a launch event at the United States Institute of Peace. (SIGAR photo)

As Special Inspector General John F. Sopko writes in his introductory letter to the new report,

U.S. policymakers must consider under what conditions the United States should support reintegration efforts, and if so, determine the best approach. U.S. agencies would also need to take into account several risks to the execution of a reintegration program, including corruption, the difficulty of monitoring and evaluation, vetting challenges, and security issues. As this report lays out, these problems have plagued Afghan reintegration efforts since 2001.<sup>3</sup>

For now, the way out of conflict and the time for and manner of reintegration efforts in Afghanistan remain uncertain.

For nearly a year, a path to peace in Afghanistan seemed to be faintly visible amid the smoke and wrath of war. Beginning in October 2018, representatives of the United States and the Taliban insurgency met repeatedly in Doha, Qatar—though without official participation by the elected government in Kabul, which the Taliban does not recognize. In their talks, the antagonists discussed a framework for intra-Afghan dialogue directed toward a settlement.<sup>4</sup> Topics included conditions for withdrawal of foreign forces from Afghanistan and for preventing international terrorists from again using Afghanistan as a platform for planning and launching international terror attacks.

In March 2019, U.S. Special Representative for Afghanistan Reconciliation Zalmay Khalilzad, a former U.S. Ambassador to Afghanistan, announced that an agreement “in draft” had been reached on those issues, and reports in late summer indicated that negotiators were “close” to an agreement.<sup>5</sup>

However, after a Taliban attack in Kabul caused fatalities including a U.S. soldier, President Donald Trump called off on September 7 what he described as planned, separate meetings with Taliban representatives and Afghan President Ashraf Ghani at the Camp David presidential retreat and said of the talks, “As far as I’m concerned, they’re dead.” He added he was still thinking about drawing down U.S. troop strength in Afghanistan from its level at the time of about 14,000.<sup>6</sup> During an October 20 visit to Kabul, Secretary of Defense Mark Esper said, “The aim is still get a peace agreement at some point, a political agreement.”<sup>7</sup>

In any case, talk about peace talks continued apart from the United States effort. Shortly after Trump’s announcement, Taliban representatives met with Russian officials in Moscow. The Russian Foreign Ministry said the Taliban had confirmed their interest in resuming talks with the United States, and that Russia thought resuming talks was important.<sup>8</sup> Secretary of State Pompeo said he hoped talks could be started up again, though “It will ultimately be up to the Taliban.”<sup>9</sup> And at the United Nations, the organization’s top envoy to Afghanistan, Tadamichi Yamamoto, called for direct talks between the Taliban and the Kabul government “as soon as possible.”

# REINTEGRATING FORMER FIGHTERS

He told a meeting of the UN Security Council that “conflict can only be resolved by direct talks between the Afghan people.”<sup>10</sup>

Even if intra-Afghan talks produce an agreement, and even if reintegration programs are undertaken, other complications can arise. For example, some Taliban fighters may decide they want no part of a peace agreement. Citing various experts, the Financial Times recently reported that “Taliban hardliners angry about negotiations with the US over a troop withdrawal in exchange for counter-terrorism pledges have joined [IS-K] in droves,” boosting its strength, already estimated at 5,000–14,000 fighters in Afghanistan. The Financial Times also noted that al-Qaeda members and other jihadists from Afghanistan and Pakistan are turning to IS-K for shelter.<sup>11</sup>

Further, even if a peace agreement covering all insurgents in Afghanistan were reached, failure to reintegrate former fighters may simply produce an interval between bouts of violence. In 2012, for example, the government of Colombia reached a peace agreement with the leftist guerilla-terrorist Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC in its Spanish acronym) to end a conflict that began in the early 1960s and left at least 220,000 people dead. In August 2019, however, FARC rebels claimed the government had betrayed them in its promises for protection from hostile groups and for reconstruction in poor, isolated rural communities, and said they would again take up arms.<sup>12</sup>



**Taliban fighters** in Herat Province. (Voice of America photo)

## SIGAR'S NEW REPORT ON REINTEGRATION

SIGAR unveiled its new LLP report on reintegration during a September 19 special event at the United States Institute of Peace in Washington, DC. USIP Vice President Andrew Wilder opened the session, saying there is much uncertainty about the outlook for peace in Afghanistan, “but what is certain is that the topic of today’s conversation on reintegration of ex-combatants is going to remain highly relevant if and when we get a peace process.”<sup>13</sup>

Special Inspector General John F. Sopko gave the keynote address at the event, followed by a panel discussion among other subject-matter experts. In his remarks, Sopko said, “If there is ever to be a true, sustainable peace in Afghanistan, reintegration of the Taliban and other combatants will be a necessary component of that process ... This is why today’s report by SIGAR is so important—it is the first independent, public, official U.S. government report on the trials and tribulations of reintegrating the Taliban and other combatants into Afghan society.”<sup>14</sup>

The goal of the new report, he explained, is “to help U.S., Afghan, and other coalition policymakers and agencies as they prepare for the daunting task of assisting with the reintegration of an estimated 60,000 full-time Taliban fighters, as well as numerous other non-Taliban combatants, in the event that the Afghan government and the Taliban enter negotiations to reach a political settlement.” He said the 14-month project—encouraged by

## **SIGAR's Lessons Learned Program**

SIGAR created its Lessons Learned Program (LLP) in 2014 at the urging of former International Security Assistance Force-Afghanistan commander General John Allen, former U.S. Ambassador Ryan Crocker, and other senior government officials who noted that SIGAR was the only U.S. government agency with the statutory mandate to take a “whole of government” look at approaches to reconstruction in Afghanistan. Seven LLP reports based on SIGAR's own oversight work and input from many other sources have followed. Setting out narrative context, making findings, drawing conclusions, and offering recommendations, the reports have examined U.S. anticorruption efforts in Afghanistan, reconstruction of Afghan security forces, private-sector development initiatives, stabilization activities, counternarcotics, security-sector assistance, and now, reintegration of ex-combatants. Additional reports are in development.

The project team for the new reintegration report comprised Kate Bateman, project lead; Mariam Jalalzada and Matthew Rubin, senior analysts; and Jordan Schurter, student trainee. The Lessons Learned Program Director is Joseph Windrem. The project was also supported by staffers from other SIGAR components, and benefitted from information and guidance supplied by current and former officials, academics, and reviewers.

All of SIGAR's published LLP reports are posted on the agency's website, <https://www.sigar.mil>.

General John W. Nicholson Jr., then commander of U.S. Forces-Afghanistan, and U.S. Ambassador to Afghanistan John R. Bass<sup>15</sup>—relied on 51 interviews of current and former U.S., Afghan, and other government officials and academics; research in public and private documents, and academic material; and peer review. The final product includes 14 findings, 10 lessons, and 15 recommendations for policymakers.<sup>16</sup>

A critical conclusion of the report, Sopko said, is that “Any major reintegration effort is very likely to fail in the absence of an agreement between the Afghan government and the Taliban on terms for the reintegration of former fighters,” including high-level commitment and mutual trust that fighters will be allowed to participate.” Otherwise, former fighters and their families “face enormous risks of retribution” with likely little protection from the government.<sup>17</sup>

Apart from the difficulty of carrying out reintegration programs during wartime, he added, a weak economy has offered few licit livelihood opportunities for those who lay down their arms. In addition, the Afghan government has had limited capacity for administering programs, and the U.S. military has in the past maintained working relationships with militias that might otherwise have been disbanded. In other words, “We found that past programs did not lead to any significant number of former fighters reintegrating into society, did not weaken the insurgency, and did not reduce violence. If they had, we would be reading a lot less about Afghanistan these days.”<sup>18</sup>

The LLP report notes that five main reintegration programs have occurred in Afghanistan since the U.S. military intervention of 2001, targeting both the Taliban and state-aligned militias. Since 2002, the United States has spent roughly \$65 million on programs with reintegration objectives, while total international expenditures on disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) in Afghanistan are estimated at \$359 million.<sup>19</sup>

After the defeat of the Taliban regime in 2001, some form of an internationally supported reintegration program was in place from 2003 to 2016. Following the 2001 Bonn Agreement that established a new, internationally recognized government in Kabul, two DDR programs sought to disband state-allied militias and illegal armed groups. These early programs did not include defeated Taliban forces.

But after the Taliban regrouped and launched an insurgency against the newly established Afghan government and the foreign military forces operating under United Nations auspices, the government launched a new reintegration program in 2005 that aimed to persuade the Taliban to stop fighting. Particularly from 2009 to 2012, reintegration was a core component of U.S. military strategy and of the Afghan government's peace efforts with the Taliban.

Unfortunately, the LLP report observes, “None of these reintegration programs succeeded in enabling any significant number of ex-combatants to socially and economically rejoin civil society,” while “programs

# REINTEGRATING FORMER FIGHTERS



**Taliban fighters** in Herat Province, 2016. (Voice of America photo)

specifically targeting Taliban insurgents did not weaken the insurgency to any substantial degree or contribute meaningfully to parallel reconciliation efforts.” In fact, the Afghan government found that violence and insecurity had increased during its most expensive and ambitious peace-and-reintegration program.<sup>20</sup>

British experience about midway through the current war illustrates some of the difficulty of attempting reintegration while fighting continues. According to a 2012 report by London’s Sunday Telegraph newspaper, British officials said an 18-month, £7 million (nearly \$9 million in current U.S. dollars) reintegration effort had attracted only 19 insurgents in Helmand Province, while 200 insurgents were dropped from the program in Sar-e Pul Province “because checks subsequently found they were not genuine fighters but instead imposters seeking cash handouts.” The article also quoted Major General David Hook, who led NATO support for the Afghanistan Peace and Reintegration Program, saying some insurgents who might genuinely wish to reintegrate “don’t want to come in, because they are afraid that coming in to us exposes them to the threat of the Taliban” taking revenge.<sup>21</sup>

At the time of its release, the LLP report notes, “There is no established formal reintegration program in Afghanistan.” An equitable and sustainable peace agreement could greatly reduce the violence that threatens the international reconstruction effort in Afghanistan—and by extension, any new reintegration program. The report adds, “And yet, as highlighted by SIGAR’s *2019 High-Risk List*, a peace agreement would not in itself end insecurity, corruption, or weak government capacity, nor would it magically produce the economic growth needed to create jobs for ex-combatants and thousands—if not millions—of Afghan refugees who are expected to return to the country.”<sup>22</sup>

The current lack of a reintegration plan and the documented and prospective difficulties of executing a plan underscore the importance of understanding the background of earlier efforts.

# REINTEGRATING FORMER FIGHTERS



**The LLP report team:** from left, editor Tracy Content, program manager Nikolai Condee-Padunov, project lead Kate Bateman, senior analyst Mariam Jalalzada, and Lessons Learned Program Director Joseph Windrem. Not shown: senior analyst Matthew Rubin and student trainee Jordan Schurter. (SIGAR photo)

## WHAT THE REINTEGRATION REPORT FOUND

The LLP report makes 14 major findings from analyzing prior Afghan reintegration efforts, case studies from Colombia and Somalia, and the broader literature on reintegration.<sup>23</sup> Some of the most critical findings are:

- The absence of a comprehensive political settlement or peace agreement was a key factor in the failure of prior Afghan reintegration programs that targeted Taliban fighters.
- Other important factors in the failure of Afghan reintegration programs were insecurity and threats facing program participants, a weak economy offering few legal economic opportunities, and limited government capacity for program implementation.
- The U.S. government saw prior reintegration efforts targeting the Taliban primarily as a tool to fracture and weaken the insurgency, which undermined the potential for those efforts to promote peace and reconciliation.
- Prior monitoring and evaluation systems were inadequate for measuring the outcomes or effectiveness of reintegration programs in Afghanistan.
- The current environment of ongoing conflict is not conducive to a successful reintegration program.

The report's 10 lessons to inform future reintegration efforts in Afghanistan include the "high risk of failure in the absence of a political

# REINTEGRATING FORMER FIGHTERS

settlement or peace agreement,” the need for physical security to induce former combatants to participate, the importance of extensive monitoring and evaluation systems, and the importance of community participation.<sup>24</sup>

The last two points cited deserve special notice. Without effective monitoring and evaluation protocols, previous reintegration programs in Afghanistan could not assess whether former insurgents gained acceptance from the communities to which they returned, or what happened to them over time. In turn, the lack of baseline data and program evaluation prevented tailoring assistance to the individual, adjusting strategies midcourse, and gauging long-term impact.<sup>25</sup> Meanwhile, failing to involve communities in planning and executing a reintegration program that benefits both former combatants and the communities that receive them can create perceptions of favoritism, fueling community resentment and derailing the reintegration process.<sup>26</sup>

## WHAT THE LLP REPORT RECOMMENDS

SIGAR’s reintegration report concludes with recommendations—four for the undesirable situation in which reintegration is attempted without a peace agreement between the Afghan government and the Taliban, five recommending steps to be taken for reintegration after a peace agreement, and six “matters for consideration for the Afghan government.”<sup>27</sup> The U.S.-focused recommendations are intended for Congress; the Departments of Defense, State, and Treasury; and the U.S. Agency for International Development.

The first two recommendations recognize the difficulty of attempting reintegration in a conflict setting. “In the current environment of an ongoing Taliban insurgency,” the report suggests, “the Congress may wish to consider not funding a program for the reintegration of ex-combatants because the Afghan government and the Taliban have not agreed to terms for reintegration.”<sup>28</sup> Similarly, “because of the difficulty in vetting, protecting, and tracking combatants who claim they want to stop fighting Afghan and coalition forces, DOD, State, and USAID should not implement a reintegration program amid the ongoing insurgency.”<sup>29</sup>

If a peace agreement is concluded, however, another recommendation is that “because a wider post-conflict recovery strategy is essential to successful reintegration of ex-combatants, the Congress may wish to consider funding broad post-settlement development programs in Afghanistan.”<sup>30</sup> This would be consistent with expressed U.S. intentions to continue reconstruction in Afghanistan near current levels for some years to come.

Under matters for Afghan government consideration, the LLP report suggests that “reintegration efforts should be directed at not only former Taliban fighters, but also members of state-aligned militias and illegal armed groups.”<sup>31</sup> The report notes that this recommendation presents a challenge for both Afghan and U.S. officials: “In a post-settlement context, major powerbrokers within and outside the Afghan government may agree to



**Taliban negotiators** in Qatar, August 2019. (Radio Free Europe photo)

# REINTEGRATING FORMER FIGHTERS



**Reintegrees in a 2010 program** enter an Afghan base. (ISAF photo)

demobilize and reintegrate their private militias. A reintegration program should be designed to accommodate these groups. Failing to do so would give the Taliban a rationale for not participating, as they would likely seek to protect themselves against former rivals.” Meanwhile, “given the fluidity of the conflict and the difficulty of determining true allegiances, it is possible that an Afghan-led reintegration program may accept a certain number of former members of terrorist groups. U.S. agencies should be thinking now about what their legal response would be to this scenario.”<sup>32</sup>

## CONCLUSION

The research on display in SIGAR’s new Lessons Learned Program report on reintegrating former combatants makes a compelling case that the time is not ripe for attempting another big program. But as no one can predict when or how the war might end, prudence demands that serious thought be given to “the day after,” when tens of thousands of former Taliban, government soldiers and police, militia members, and even terrorists may be casting about for sources of income and a peaceful role in their troubled society. Careless or ad hoc policy responses to the challenge of reintegration could invite continuing disaster for Afghanistan and the world.

# REINTEGRATING FORMER FIGHTERS



**From left,** Scott Worden, Kate Bateman, Erica Gaston, and Johnny Walsh discuss the new LLP report. (SIGAR photo)

## **Comments on Reintegration of Ex-Combatants**

Following Inspector General Sopko’s remarks at the United States Institute of Peace launch event for the new LLP report, a panel of subject-matter experts offered their initial reactions. USIP Director of Afghanistan and Central Asia Programs Scott Worden moderated the discussion.<sup>33</sup> Worden noted that the LLP report “is the only U.S. government independent report of this area,” and is a valuable resource for policy makers who have no personal experience of early efforts.

SIGAR’s Kate Bateman, project lead for the LLP report, said earlier programs that sought reintegration had three main problems: (1) vetting to determine who was actually a fighter and actually intended to stop fighting, (2) protecting reintegrees and their families, and (3) tracking and monitoring—“It’s very hard to know if they have stayed out of the fight, or indeed if they ever left the fight.”

Joining in remotely, Timor Sharan, Afghanistan’s Deputy Minister for Policy and Technical Affairs in the Independent Directorate of Local Governance, called the report “fundamentally solid,” and suggested only “some fine-tuning.” He stressed that reintegration programs must not be a resource-distribution mechanism, and that a community-based approach with local people involved was important because Afghans’ sense of honor and dignity extends collectively to the family, community, and tribe.

Erica Gaston, a non-resident fellow with the Global Public Policy Institute, also cautioned that past reintegration programs had become “just another source of aid spoils,” fueling patronage networks. She said earlier programs “had a lot of faux fighters coming in” to collect benefits, and warned that “Nobody thinks that all of the estimated 40,000 to 60,000 Taliban fighters will take part in a disarmament process. A lot of them will continue fighting on. In addition, there are any number of armed groups who are not part of that [anticipated] peace deal.”

Johnny Walsh, USIP Senior Expert for Afghanistan, observed that past attempts to use reintegration to undermine the insurgency ran into the reality that “The Taliban are an extremely cohesive movement” with great power to assassinate enemies and high resistance to attempts to divide them.

“Corruption, government malfeasance, record-high opium production, and criminalization of the economy continue to be the greatest threats to the sustainability of what Afghans, the United States, and our partners have sacrificed to achieve in Afghanistan.”

—*Acting Assistant Secretary of State Alice G. Wells*