



SIGAR

Office of the Special Inspector General
for Afghanistan Reconstruction

May 13, 2014

Mr. Stan Z. Soloway, President and CEO
Professional Services Council
4401 Wilson Boulevard, Suite 1110
Arlington, VA 22203

Dear Mr. Soloway:

Thank you for inviting me to speak at the Professional Services Council (PSC) Dialogue on February 18, 2018. I appreciated the opportunity to hear from PSC members and to learn about the challenges they face while working in Afghanistan.

As you may know, SIGAR has a statutory mandate to “provide ... recommendations on policies designed to promote economy, efficiency, and effectiveness in the administration of programs and operations funded with amounts made available for the reconstruction of Afghanistan” and to keep Congress and the Secretaries of State and Defense “fully and currently informed about problems and deficiencies relating to the administration of such programs and operations and the necessity for and progress on corrective action.”¹ We carry out that mandate through audits, inspections, investigations, and data calls that feed into a variety of reports. You can examine them at our website, www.sigar.mil.

Normally, SIGAR interacts with federal departments and agencies, notably State, Defense, and USAID, using a formal data-call process to collect information on Afghanistan. We realize, however, that other participants in Afghan reconstruction can provide useful information to improve reconstruction operations and outcomes. For example, SIGAR recently solicited observations and suggestions from dozens of nongovernmental organizations active in Afghanistan. Our request produced insightful and illuminating comments that will lead to further study and may shape our recommendations to Congress and to executive departments.

Now we are asking the contracting community to assist us in the same way. We realize that contractors have played a vital role in supporting U.S. security and reconstruction efforts in Afghanistan. Recognizing the broad role contractors have played in Afghanistan, we seek information that can help us extract useful lessons on reconstruction and development activities, and to help shape our ongoing efforts to improve agencies’ processes and practices.

At the same time, SIGAR will have an opportunity to take note of some of the important contributions that contractors are making in Afghanistan and of the challenges they face. While SIGAR is tasked by its authorizing legislation to identify matters needing corrective action, we are equally interested in

¹ National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2008, Pub. L. No. 110-181 (2008), § 1229.

identifying successful policies, programs, projects, and methods for these successes to be sustained, expanded, and publicized as best practices or models.

Gathering your member's observations and insights at this time is particularly important because the drawdown of Coalition forces, possible reductions in foreign assistance, and the uncertain political and security conditions in post-2014 Afghanistan, may substantially increase the difficulties contractors encounter in carrying out their mission.

Decision makers in Congress and in executive agencies should be informed of the challenges your members foresee in order to make sound decisions on future policies and practices. Significantly, as funding levels for Afghanistan reconstruction face downward pressure, it becomes imperative to identify those programs and initiatives that are working well and need to be sustained, in order to protect hard-earned gains in security and development.

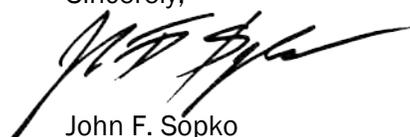
Last spring, I sent letters to the Secretaries of State and Defense, and to the Administrator of USAID, asking them to provide examples of what they judged to be both successful and less than successful programs and projects in Afghanistan, to discuss their assessment criteria, and to comment on main factors contributing to positive or negative outcomes. My letter asked for ten (10) examples in each category. Unfortunately, the agencies gave only generalized answers that shed little light on factors affecting their projects' success (see SIGAR's website, <http://go.usa.gov/WeuP>, for my letter and the agency responses).

Since then, however, I have met with a number of private sector organizations in the United States and in Afghanistan who told me they would welcome the opportunity to share their concerns and their suggestions regarding reconstruction projects and their interactions with federal agencies. I greatly appreciate your generous offer to help collect and aggregate the responses provided by PSC members, so that we can protect their confidentiality while still taking advantage of their valued assessments.

We invite you to submit in writing, by May 27, 2014 if possible, information and observations on any of the following topics that are appropriate to your circumstances and that you and your members wish to address. We encourage you to consult with your member companies, including their field personnel and their subcontractors, in preparing responses. If some members prefer not to respond in writing, we would be happy to meet with them for an informal discussion.

Please submit your comments to SIGAR's Director of Special Projects, Mr. Jack Mitchell, at john.h.mitchell161.civ@mail.mil. If you have any questions about this request, you may also call Mr. Mitchell at 703- 545-5964.

Sincerely,



John F. Sopko
Special Inspector General
for Afghanistan Reconstruction

Enclosure(s): Appendix I: Questions For Professional Services Council Members

APPENDIX I: QUESTIONS FOR PROFESSIONAL SERVICES COUNCIL MEMBERS

- 1. Factors shaping greater or lesser success:** Please identify factors that contributed to success or failure of in programs or projects that you undertook as a contractor in Afghanistan. What factors contributed to success? What obstacles did you face, and what were their root causes? What counter-measures or process changes helped you mitigate obstacles? Which obstacles were you unable to overcome?
- 2. In-country challenges:** Based on your experiences, please discuss: (a) what you regard as your biggest challenge while operating in Afghanistan, and (b) what additional challenges— if any —you foresee in the post-2014 environment in Afghanistan, and (c) your assessment of the impacts of shrinking U.S. civilian-oversight access post-2014 may have on the cost and practicability of current and future reconstruction efforts. Please cite examples or pertinent data points where possible.
- 3. Federal issues:** Please discuss any policies, regulations, or practices of the federal agencies from whom you are receiving funding that you believe have been unnecessary impediments to achieving your agreed-upon undertakings, or that entail any significant unintended consequences. Specific examples will help us focus future audits and other SIGAR oversight work.
- 4. Suggested improvements:** Please provide any suggestions you might have for improving federal entities' engagement, interaction, management, and oversight of contractors in Afghanistan. Please also describe any suggestions that you might for improving the overall reconstruction effort in 2014 and beyond.