



SIGAR

Office of the Special Inspector General
for Afghanistan Reconstruction

August 5, 2016

The Honorable Ashton B. Carter
Secretary of Defense

Dear Secretary Carter,

I am writing to request information regarding your department's efforts to ensure accuracy across the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces (ANDSF) personnel accountability systems, particularly given recent reports of "ghost" soldiers and police, particularly in Helmand Province. Since 2002, Congress has appropriated over \$68 billion in support of the ANDSF, including funding for ANDSF salaries.¹ Persistent reports indicating discrepancies between the assigned force strength of the ANDSF and the actual number of personnel serving raise questions regarding whether the U.S. government is taking adequate steps to prevent taxpayer funds from being spent on so-called "ghost" soldiers.²

My office has raised concerns in the past that the U.S. government has been relying on inaccurate data when determining how much it will spend on ANDSF salaries. In January 2015 we reported that more than \$300 million in annual, U.S.-funded salary payments to the Afghan National Police were based on only partially verified or reconciled data, and that there was no assurance that personnel and payroll data were accurate.³ We found similar deficiencies during the course of our April 2015 audit of Afghan National Army personnel and payroll data.⁴

There are continuing reports of significant gaps between the assigned force strength of the ANDSF and the actual number of personnel serving. As stated in our July 2016 quarterly report, U.S. Forces-Afghanistan reported that in the quarter ending June 2016 "ANDSF assigned force strength was 319,595 (not including civilians)"⁵ However, the Associated Press previously reported an Afghan official as indicating that "the best internal estimate put the number around 120,000, less than a third of what is needed to secure the country."⁶

More recently, Afghan government officials have raised concerns about "ghost" ANDSF personnel in Helmand province. The new police chief of Helmand province has been quoted as stating that of the approximately 26,000 ANDSF personnel assigned to the province "40 to 50 percent of the force did

¹ SIGAR, *Quarterly Report to the United States Congress*, July 30, 2016, p. 208.

² The Associated Press, "Afghan Forces Struggle as Ranks Thinned by 'Ghost' Soldiers," January 10, 2016.

³ SIGAR, *Afghan National Police: More than \$300 Million in Annual, U.S.-funded Salary Payments Is Based on Partially Verified or Reconciled Data*, SIGAR 15-26-AR, January, 2015, pp.17-18.

⁴ SIGAR, *Afghan National Army: Millions of Dollars at Risk Due to Minimal Oversight of Personnel and Payroll Data*, SIGAR 15-54-AR, April, 2015, pp. 13-14.

⁵ SIGAR, *Quarterly Report to the United States Congress*, July 30, 2016, p. 93.

⁶ The Associated Press, "Afghan Forces Struggle as Ranks Thinned by 'Ghost' Soldiers," January 10, 2016.

not exist physically when we asked for help during operations.”⁷ He added that “Salaries of ghost soldiers had been received during the past eight months and the money has gone to personal accounts.”⁸ Moreover, the governor of Helmand province has recently been quoted as stating that “there are ghost soldiers within the security forces in Helmand” and that officials there have “discovered at least 400 and scrapped them from the list.”⁹

In response to our past audit recommendations, DOD outlined actions it was taking to improve the systems used for ANDSF personnel management. For example, DOD is working to automate and centralize systems across the ANDSF, as well as to develop biometric procedures to better track soldiers and police.¹⁰ These efforts are intended to help identify “ghost” soldiers and police and remove them from ANDSF payrolls. In addition, DOD continues to place financial controls on U.S. funds provided to the ANDSF through a series of financial commitment letters with the Ministry of Defense (MOD) and the Ministry of Interior (MOI).¹¹ These letters establish expectations for the responsible management of ANDSF funds and conditions under which funding can be withheld if these expectations are not met.

However, these systems will only be effective if accurate data is captured and maintained on ANDSF attendance and attrition. Given the persistent reports of absentee or non-existent personnel, my office is concerned about whether adequate steps have been taken to address this issue.

To assist us in better understanding DOD’s current efforts to deal with the problem of ghost soldiers and police, please provide the following information:

1. A detailed update on all DOD efforts to strengthen the use of electronic tracking and biometric systems, to identify and eliminate the problem of “ghost” soldiers and police nationwide, and specifically in Helmand Province.
2. According to the 1395 MOD and MOI Commitment Letters, DOD will not fund salaries for personnel who, among other things, do not possess a unique id number linked to a complete biometric record. To what extent have the MOD and MOI met DOD requirements outlined in the 1395 Commitment Letters for implementing biometric records to ensure that ANDSF soldiers and police are real, valid, and active?
3. To what extent has the use of commitment letters improved the accuracy of DOD’s estimates of ANDSF assigned force strength?
4. In the 1395 commitment letter between DOD and MOI, DOD details requirements for the Afghan Uniform Police (AUP) commander to schedule random inspections of Afghan Local Police units to ensure that there are no salary payments going to “ghost” personnel, and

⁷ TOLONews, “Helmand’s Ex-Police Chief to Be Investigated Over Ghost Soldiers,” June 9, 2016.

⁸ *Id.*

⁹ TOLONews, “Governor Claims 400 Ghost Soldiers Found on Helmand Payroll” July 13, 2016.

¹⁰ SIGAR, *Afghan National Army: Millions of Dollars at Risk Due to Minimal Oversight of Personnel and Payroll Data*, SIGAR 15-54-AR, April 2015, pp. 14-15; SIGAR, *Afghan National Police: More than \$300 Million in Annual, U.S.-funded Salary Payments Is Based on Partially Verified or Reconciled Data*, SIGAR 15-26-AR, January, 2015, pp.17-19. See also, Combined Security Transition Command-Afghanistan, *Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, 1395 Financial Commitment Letter, Ministry of Defense*, January 15, 2016, pp.32-33; Combined Security Transition Command-Afghanistan, *Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, 1395 Financial Commitment Letter, Ministry of Interior*, December 28, 2015, pp 31, 38, 65.

¹¹ DOD and the Afghan government sign annual agreements called Bilateral Financial Commitment Letters (commitment letters) that commit DOD to fund specified portions of the MOD and MOI budget. These commitment letters do not bind DOD and the Afghan government, but serve as bilateral agreements intended to assist in implementing the necessary management and controls needed to enhance the transparency and accountability of U.S. direct assistance (see, DOD Office of the Inspector General, *The Government of Islamic Republic of Afghanistan’s Controls Over the Contract Management Process for U.S. Direct Assistance Need Improvement*, DODIG-2015-082, February 25, 2015).

provide an assessment schedule to the NATO Special Operations Component Command - Afghanistan by January 31, 2016. In addition, the AUP commander must develop a plan and take action to address any instance where an assessment identifies "ghost" personnel. The MOI may have up to 5 percent of funding withheld for failing to comply with these requirements.

- a. Did the AUP commander provide the assessment schedule on time?
- b. Has the AUP commander begun the required inspections? If so, what was the outcome?
- c. Has any funding been withheld from MOI for failing to comply with the requirement?
- d. Have similar requirements been adopted for the entire ANDSF?

Please provide the information requested with supporting documentation where appropriate, no later than August 19, 2016. I am submitting this request under the authority of Public Law No. 110-181, and the Inspector General Act of 1978, as amended. Should your staff have any questions about this inquiry, please have them contact Mr. Matthew Dove, Director of Special Projects, at [REDACTED] or [REDACTED].

Sincerely,



John F. Sopko
Special Inspector General
for Afghanistan Reconstruction

Encl: I - DOD Response, Dated October 3, 2016



ASIAN AND PACIFIC
SECURITY AFFAIRS

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2700 DEFENSE PENTAGON
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OCT 3 2016

The Honorable John Sopko
Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR)
1550 Crystal Drive, 9th Floor
Arlington, VA 22202

Dear Mr. Sopko:

I am responding on behalf of the Secretary of Defense to your August 5, 2016, request for information concerning Department of Defense (DoD) efforts to eliminate "ghost" personnel from Afghan National Defense and Security Forces (ANDSF) systems. The enclosure responds to your specific questions.

DoD appreciates SIGAR's efforts to ensure effective use of the Afghanistan Security Forces Fund in support of our national objectives in Afghanistan.

Sincerely,

Jedidiah P. Royal
Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense (Acting)
Afghanistan, Pakistan and Central Asia

Encl: As stated



DoD Response to SIGAR-16-51-SP Inquiry Letter Dated August 5, 2016

DoD submits the following responses to the questions posed in the August 8, 2016, inquiry letter regarding DoD efforts to eliminate “ghost” personnel from Afghan National Defense and Security Forces (ANDSF) systems.

1. *A detailed update on all DOD efforts to strengthen the use of electronic tracking and biometric systems to identify and eliminate the problem of “ghost” soldiers and police nationwide, and specifically in Helmand Province.*

DoD Response: There are five DoD efforts being implemented by the Combined Security Transition Command-Afghanistan (CSTC-A) to strengthen the use of electronic tracking and biometrics systems to account for ANDSF personnel:

- *Data “cleaning.”* CSTC-A is assisting the Afghan Ministry of Defense (MoD) and Ministry of the Interior (MoI) in “cleaning” and completing the Afghan Human Resource Information Management Systems (AHRIMS) database, the automated system for tracking Afghan Soldiers and Police, by fixing errors and completing data fields. This effort alone, however, cannot solve the problem of inaccurate data; maintaining accurate records requires a continual process of checking and cleaning data as, for example, personnel depart the Army or are killed in action and are removed from the rolls or are promoted or reassigned and new personnel join the Army, as well as verifying the actual status of personnel.
- *Personnel Asset Inventory (PAI).* To address the limitations of cleaning data without verifying the actual status of personnel, which results in persistent errors in records, CSTC-A advisors indicate that on August 7, 2016, MoD teams began visiting Afghan National Army (ANA) units to support a person-by-person verification and AHRIMS enrollment/record review. These teams will review AHRIMS records in person with individual Soldiers and ensure that the Soldier is enrolled in the biometric database and has a valid identification card.
- *Biometric Enrollment.* CSTC-A has provided the MoD and MoI with biometric enrollment capabilities, which are being established at training locations to ensure enrollment of new personnel. To ensure all ANDSF members are enrolled, teams travel to different locations for both the MoI and MoD to conduct biometric enrollment operations. This effort is scheduled to be completed in July 2017.
- *Afghan Pay and Personnel System (APPS).* The principal project to improve transparency, auditability, and accountability in the pay process is the Afghan Personnel and Pay System (APPS) for the Ministries of Defense and Interior, which is currently scheduled to be operational in 2017. Personnel will have to be in authorized billets in the APPS in order to be paid. The automation of payroll computation and coupling payroll with personnel data will significantly reduce errors in payroll. The APPS is currently scheduled to be operational

with the MoI in April 2017 and with the MoD in August 2017. The APPS program office is currently working with the contractor to develop business processes, establish a training/test laboratory, and procure hardware and software for data centers. Even when the APPS is deployed, it will be important to continue to validate personal status and data in the APPS to ensure it pays the right amount to the right person.

- *Commitment Letters.* For 2016, the commitment letters that Commanding General, CSTC-A and the Ministers of Defense, Interior and Finance sign on conditions the Afghan government must meet to receive funding from the international community include requirements for recording biometric data for MoD and MoI personnel and meeting goals for a percentage of personnel whose data has been entered into the AHRIMS database. If these requirements are not met, the Commander of CSTC-A could withhold funding.

To address the continued problem of MoI "ghost police" in Helmand Province, Commander, Resolute Support (COMRS), sent a letter to the Minister of Interior on July 28, 2016, stating that as a condition of support, the MoI would need to provide the coalition with a viable action plan to address personnel accountability and "ghost police" in Helmand Province and nationwide. The plan must provide mechanisms for the MoI Inspector General to verify accountability for 100 percent of individual personnel; the General Directorate of Personnel needs to verify accurate AHRIMS records; the MoI Biometrics Center must link an individual biometric file to each issued MoI identification card and AHRIMS entry; and the MoI Finance director and CSTC-A will have to verify that all MoI employees are paid through the Web-based Electronic Pay System (WEPS) and Electronics Fund Transfer/Mobile Money.

2. According to the 1395 MOD and MOI Commitment Letters, DOD will not fund salaries for personnel who, among other things, do not possess a unique id number linked to a complete biometric record. To what extent have the MOD and MOI met DOD requirements outlined in the 1395 Commitment Letters for implementing biometric records to ensure that ANDSF soldiers and police are real, valid, and active?

Approximately 90 to 95% of the Afghan National Police (ANP) and 70 to 80% of the ANA are biometrically enrolled. To improve ANA compliance, on August 7, 2016, teams began visiting ANA units to support a person-by-person verification and AHRIMS enrollment/record review. This effort is expected to be completed in July 2017. Other efforts include establishing biometric enrollment capabilities at initial entry training locations to ensure enrollment of new personnel at the beginning of their service in the Army or Police.

3. To what extent has the use of commitment letters improved the accuracy of DOD's estimates of ANDSF assigned force strength?

Commitment letters require measures that, if fully implemented, will result in all Afghan Soldiers and Police having an identification card with biometric data that identifies each individual (such as fingerprint, photo, and blood type), and the MoD and MoI will enter that data and responses by each individual to five biographical questions into a biometric database that is linked to the AHRIMS. This will enable the MoD and MoI to have accurate records of personnel

on hand by, accurately recording personnel losses due to combat casualties, end of enlistments, resignations, etc., as well as personnel gains due to assignment of new personnel, and verifying this information through periodic personnel asset inventories and record reviews. DoD advisors will be able to obtain this information from the ministries to gain more insight into actual force size; currently, DoD relies on MoD and MoI data for assigned force strength because, with limited exceptions (such as Afghan special forces, the Air Force, and Special Mission Wing), U.S. and coalition advisors are not physically located at the brigade and police district level or below to enable them to count personnel.

Commitment letters do not specifically require that the Afghans provide an accurate personnel count to DoD; instead, they require a count of how many people have been issued an identification (ID) card. This number would be adjusted by subtracting gains of new Soldiers and Police who are added to force strength based on establishment of a biometrics record, issuance of a linked ID card, and establishment of an AHRIMS record when the new personnel enter initial training. Losses of personnel due to combat casualties, retirements, resignations or end of enlistments should be reflected in notifications through personnel channels, which would result in AHRIMS data updates. The personnel asset inventories of all personnel that are now being conducted will help to verify that such actions are being properly initiated and that Soldiers and Police are not being kept on the rolls as "ghosts." When the initial inventorying is completed in July 2017, DoD and the Afghan MoD will have a more accurate representation of actual force strength. This inventorying process will have to be conducted on an ongoing basis to account for personnel who leave the force, and because their units may not have reported the information to update that Soldier's record in the AHRIMS.

4. In the 1395 commitment letter between DOD and MOI, DOD details requirements for the Afghan Uniform Police (AUP) commander to schedule random inspections of Afghan Local Police units to ensure that there are no salary payments going to "ghost" personnel, and provide an assessment schedule to the NATO Special Operations Component Command - Afghanistan by January 31, 2016. In addition, the AUP commander must develop a plan and take action to address any instance where an assessment identifies "ghost" personnel. The MOI may have up to 5 percent of funding withheld for failing to comply with these requirements.

a. Did the AUP commander provide the assessment schedule on time?

No, the suspense for the assessment was January 31, 2016, and the AUP commander provided the 1395 Afghan Local Police (ALP) assessment on February 28, 2016, approximately four weeks after the suspense date.

b. Has the AUP commander begun the required inspections? If so, what was the outcome?

Yes, the AUP commander directed four assessments. Two were conducted in 2015, between June and July 2015 and during October 2015; two were also conducted in 2016, between January and February 2016 and April 2016 to the present. The fourth 1395 ALP assessment is ongoing, with 138 of 175 ALP districts assessed during this time. No additional "ghost" personnel were identified during the completion of the February assessment. All assessments must be completed by December 2016.

c. Has any funding been withheld from MOI for failing to comply with the requirement?

Yes, funding was withheld temporarily for not complying with the commitment letter agreements, but once requirements were met funds were reinstated.

d. Have similar requirements been adopted for the entire ANDSF?

No, similar requirements have not been adopted across the ANDSF; however, COMRS has placed similar requirements upon the ANP in response to the media reports of "ghost" policemen. This plan is being developed by the MoI.