



Prepared Remarks of
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Thank you for that kind introduction.

It is an honor to be here, even if only virtually. I regret not being able to be with you in person. The last time I was in Prague was in 1995 working for Senator Sam Nunn to assist your new government’s efforts to prevent the escape of loose nuclear material in the wake of the Soviet Union’s collapse.

While much has changed since then, the bonds formed in those early days between our two countries have only strengthened, as demonstrated by our partnership in Afghanistan where we both have spent much blood and treasure to rebuild that war-ravaged country.

Today, I want to discuss international reconstruction efforts in Afghanistan and the need for continued oversight to protect the progress made over 19 years.

SIGAR was established in 2008 to protect the billions of dollars being spent on reconstruction in recognition that much of it was being wasted.

At \$137 billion and counting, Afghanistan has become the most expensive reconstruction project in U.S. history.

We have produced more than 600 audits and other reports, issued over 1,000 recommendations to improve reconstruction efforts, secured nearly 150 guilty pleas and convictions, and saved the U.S. government over \$3 billion.

But the reconstruction effort is much broader than just the U.S. contribution.

Today, 38 countries provide troops for NATO’s mission in Afghanistan, including nearly 100 from the Czech Republic.

This international cooperation among allies has benefited the reconstruction effort in two important ways.

First, it has led to burden sharing. America's NATO partners have deployed personnel, shared in reconstruction costs, and sadly, lost citizens to the horrors of war—including, tragically, 14 Czech soldiers.

Second, while the U.S. has significant military capabilities, we do not have a monopoly on knowledge. Our NATO allies have been able to contribute specialized expertise that the United States does not have.

One example SIGAR has highlighted is the Czech Air Force's training of Afghan pilots to fly Soviet-made helicopters. Czech expertise, Russian fluency, and ability to maintain advising continuity over many years was critical to Afghan Air Force development.

In addition, the Czech embassy is one of more than 30 diplomatic missions in Kabul supporting Afghanistan's reconstruction. My staff and I have worked closely with successive Czech ambassadors in Kabul, each of whom has played an important role in working with coalition partners, including in the critical fight against Afghan government corruption.

While much has been happening in Afghanistan—including the U.S.-Taliban peace deal, a domestic political crisis, and a raging pandemic—one thing has not changed: Afghanistan's continued need for international financial support.

Without continued donor support, much of what has been accomplished in Afghanistan—standing up a government, developing its security forces to fight terrorism, and improving health care, education, and human rights protections for everyday Afghans—could be reversed or lost.

This is not a trivial matter. Nearly 75% of the Afghan government's budget is provided by international donors, according to the World Bank.

Afghan security forces, while increasingly capable, cannot stand on their own and still rely on the NATO mission for training, equipment, and funding.

And if the Afghan government and Taliban someday reach a peace agreement—something we all hope for—international support will likely be required to implement and sustain any deal.

But we cannot collectively ask our citizens to continue to pour billions of dollars into Afghanistan without necessary safeguards. The oversight provided by organizations like SIGAR and others will be necessary to protect funds from waste, fraud, and abuse.

The people of the United States, Czech Republic, and other NATO member countries have sacrificed and contributed much in the effort to help the Afghan people know lasting peace for the first time in generations.

But we know the job is not finished. Ongoing international reconstruction efforts continue, and strong oversight can only improve chances for success—a success that our shared national security interests and Afghanistan’s future depend upon.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak today. I look forward to your questions.