



Prepared Remarks of
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“Divided Responsibility: NATO in Afghanistan”

“Building Local Forces – Insights from Afghanistan and Beyond” Conference

North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)

Brussels, Belgium

June 20, 2019

Thank you very much for that introduction. I want to thank Secretary General Stoltenberg, my friend Deputy Secretary General Gottemoeller, and Assistant Secretary General Manza, for putting together this important conference. I would be remiss if I did not also thank Ambassador Hutchison, General Wolters, and Lieutenant General Love for their interest and support.

SIGAR and “Divided Responsibility”

I was asked to speak about SIGAR’s most recent lessons learned report – our sixth – which looks at the divided responsibility for the security sector assistance effort in Afghanistan, as well as briefly introduce my agency.

SIGAR was created by the U.S. Congress in 2008. Unlike most inspectors general in the United States, SIGAR is not housed within any single department or agency. We are also the only inspector general’s office focused solely on the Afghanistan reconstruction effort, with whole-of-government jurisdiction that allows us to audit, investigate, and report on any aspect of the nearly \$133 billion U.S. reconstruction effort, regardless of which U.S. agency or department is responsible

As a result, SIGAR is uniquely positioned to identify whole-of-government lessons. We began our lessons learned program at the urging of former ISAF Commanding General John Allen, former U.S. Ambassador Ryan Crocker, and other senior government officials who noted that our agency was the only U.S. government agency with the mandate to look at the “whole of government” and “whole of governments” approaches to reconstruction. Our lessons learned reports synthesize not only the body of work and expertise of SIGAR, but also that of other oversight agencies, government entities, current and former officials with on-the-ground

experience, academic institutions, and independent scholars.

Our prior reports have examined U.S. anti-corruption efforts in Afghanistan; the reconstruction of the Afghan security forces; private sector development initiatives; stabilization activities; and counternarcotics. Forthcoming reports include a soon-to-be released look at past programs to reintegrate ex-combatants; an examination of efforts to strengthen the rights of Afghan women; an evaluation of monitoring and evaluation programs; and a review of electoral assistance to Afghanistan.

These reports document what the U.S. government sought to accomplish, assessed what it achieved, and evaluate the degree to which these efforts helped the United States reach its reconstruction goals in Afghanistan. They also provide recommendations to address the challenges stakeholders face in ensuring efficient, effective, and sustainable reconstruction efforts in Afghanistan and elsewhere.

NATO has played a vital role in supporting U.S. efforts in Afghanistan over the past 17 years – from invoking Article 5 of the NATO Charter for the only time in its history – to continuing to deploy forces to train, advise, and assist the Afghan security forces.

As a result, it was impossible for us to ignore the relationship between the U.S. and NATO in the security sector assistance effort in Afghanistan. Additionally, General Dunford personally encouraged us to look into this issue, because he saw value in an independent, thorough, and balanced review of the NATO effort and how the U.S. could optimize NATO's contributions to improve security sector assistance activities.

While much of the 188-page report we are discussing today focuses on the divided nature of responsibility for security sector assistance efforts within the U.S. government, we also evaluated the “whole-of-governments” effort undertaken with NATO.

SIGAR has no authority to audit or investigate NATO, but this report may be useful to you because it is the first effort to evaluate the entire security sector assistance mission in depth. At a minimum, the Afghanistan experience provides a unique case study to examine lessons learned from conducting security sector assistance while simultaneously engaging in large combat operations, as well as lessons on how to conduct security sector assistance as a coalition.

Overall, we found that conducting the security sector assistance mission in Afghanistan as a multilateral effort, rather than the more traditional bilateral U.S. approach, had both benefits and drawbacks.

By, With, and Through NATO – Benefits

Let me start with the benefits.

First, NATO's multilateral approach mitigated some of the challenges that bilateral security sector assistance missions often face. For example, bilateral missions often face difficulties coordinating with similar missions being undertaken by allies in the same country or region. This is something that operations in Africa have faced. Conversely, conducting security sector assistance under the NATO umbrella improved coordination of such efforts.

In Afghanistan, where NATO countries operated alongside one another, and often in small units, the need for interoperability became much more significant than it had been during the Cold War. This was critical for the train, advise, and assist mission, where national military doctrines often determined how NATO members trained their Afghan counterparts.

This is not to say there weren't challenges. At one point, the United States was training the Afghan National Army's enlisted soldiers, the United Kingdom was training non-commissioned officers, and France was training officers. As one advisor noted, these countries' military doctrines differ in significant ways. But over time, NATO's interoperability improved through innovations like the Afghanistan Mission Network, which has increased information sharing and improved situational awareness.

The second benefit of the NATO mission in Afghanistan was that its continuing existence over nearly 18 years has demonstrated NATO's dedication, political will, and cohesion. Few would have predicted in October 2001 that the U.S. and NATO would be in Afghanistan in June 2019, but there we remain, and recent commitments from the coalition make clear that the effort will continue.

The third benefit of the multilateral approach was that individual NATO Members brought capabilities to the table that the U.S. military alone did not have. In particular, the U.S. military sought to leverage NATO nations with expertise on Soviet-style aircraft and weapons and with experience in police advising.

Czech Air Force advisors were relied upon to provide training on Mi-35 helicopters. Czech and older Afghan airmen spoke Russian, which eliminated the need for linguists and helped build rapport. Likewise, Lithuanian and Hungarian air advisers were valued for their experience with Mi-17 helicopters.

Certain NATO Members also had more experience with police training than did the U.S. military. Because the United States does not have a national police force, it viewed countries with gendarmeries, or paramilitary units with jurisdiction in civil law

enforcement, as particularly useful for police training. Countries like Italy, Romania, and Turkey were able to provide forces with police training experience and training tailored to police advising. One U.S. military commander told SIGAR that bringing the Italian Carabinieri to assist with the police mission was the “smartest thing [the U.S. train, advise, and assist command] had ever done.”

The fourth benefit is that the multilateral nature of the security sector assistance effort allowed for greater burden-sharing in Afghanistan, which permitted the U.S. to free up forces to meet other global demands. While the United States has repeatedly asked NATO members to contribute more troops, we found that, for several years, the number of troops committed by many NATO allies as a percentage of their overall active military force was proportional to the contribution made by the United States.

From 2006 to 2009, for example, the Netherlands contributed a larger percentage of its active force to the mission in Afghanistan than did the United States. And at various points, the same was true for other nations including the United Kingdom, Canada, Poland, and Denmark.

By, With, and Through NATO – Challenges

While there have been no end of challenges to the security sector assistance effort over the past 17 years, I will touch on a few key findings that we believe are particularly important for improving our efforts.

The first challenge is that after 17 years, there is no single person, agency, country, or military service that has had sole responsibility for overseeing security sector assistance in Afghanistan. Instead, that responsibility was divided among multiple U.S. and international entities.

While the dual-hatted U.S.-NATO commander is largely responsible for reconstructing the Afghan security forces, the commander has no direct authority over civilian actors operating within embassies, the European Union, and other international organizations.

Moreover, the commander does not have absolute authority to dictate the exact methods and activities NATO countries use to train and advise the Afghan security forces in different parts of Afghanistan. We found that this has led to uneven Afghan security force development and impeded the standardization of security sector assistance programs in Afghanistan.

NATO will not force or compel any national contingent to operate beyond its national mandate and each nation maintains full control over its deployed forces during NATO operations, which impedes unity of command. The so-called “red cards” that

each contributing country's commander holds can be used to prevent their forces from being used in certain operations or for certain tasks.

These factors created restrictions on how ISAF and Resolute Support Commanders could use subordinate forces under their command. As a result, unity of command and unity of effort were lacking, and both are required for optimal military and security sector assistance operations.

The second challenge attributable to the multilateral approach was chronic shortfalls in NATO deployments to Afghanistan. While troop commitments made at NATO force generation conferences garner impressive headlines, we found that conference commitments do not always lead to actual force deployments.

As you all know, the number of troops a country pledges must be approved after the conference by that country's relevant governing authorities. The number of troops committed may change or the government may rescind the offer altogether.

The government in question can also add caveats on the use of its forces, which brings me to the third challenge that we identified – national caveats on forces prevented unity of effort.

Public reporting in 2009 indicated that there were 58 caveats on NATO forces assigned to ISAF. The report noted that “of the 27 troop-contributing nations with caveats, 20 nations limit operations outside of originally assigned locations [and in] conducting counternarcotic operations with ISAF.” The report also noted that nearly 40 percent of the caveats are geographically based, “representing a significant challenge for [the ISAF Commander] as they limit his agility.”

The challenges caveats create was highlighted by one lieutenant colonel who stated that “the commander would have to look down [at] this matrix and say, ‘Okay, these guys can do something, but these guys can’t. These guys can fly over and observe. These guys can actually shoot at them.’” As the Lieutenant Colonel noted, over time this significantly constrained the commander.

We found that national caveats created tension within NATO. When countries were viewed as withholding their full effort, it created the perception of placing a disproportionate burden on others. In some instances, caveats affected how the Afghans perceived their coalition counterparts. One study we quoted found that almost all Afghan leaders preferred U.S. advising teams because they, unlike their ISAF counterparts, were allowed to go into combat with Afghan forces anywhere.

The final challenge that I will highlight, was the civilian-military divide within NATO mission contributors, particularly when it came to training the Afghan National

Police. Many NATO countries view police development and rule of law efforts as a nonmilitary, civilian-led mission that should be conducted by embassies or civilian-led organizations such as the European Union. In the United States, the State Department has the lead for developing foreign police departments, and similar arrangements exist in other countries, such as Germany.

However, other NATO members – such as Italy, Romania, and France – used military units trained in civil policing to develop the capabilities of the Afghan National Police. Despite the State Department’s traditional role working with foreign police forces, the U.S. also predominately used U.S. military personnel with little, if any, civilian police experience to conduct police training. Unsurprisingly, efforts to develop the Afghan National Police lacked a unified approach.

Additionally, international organizations deployed advisers to Afghanistan independent of the NATO-led training mission, further complicating unity of effort. The European Police Mission in Afghanistan, or EUPOL, deployed police experts, but did not align their efforts with NATO’s.

While there have been meetings and conferences recently to improve coordination of police training, the impact of such meetings has been hindered by their ad hoc nature and the frequent turnover of personnel – a perennial problem in Afghanistan.

Conclusion

Before I turn things over to Assistant Secretary General Manza, I want to emphasize that our intent is not to criticize NATO’s substantial efforts and contributions, but rather to identify challenges that have bedeviled the entire security sector assistance effort in order to improve future missions.

I believe SIGAR’s lessons learned reports will be one of our key legacies. But lessons are only truly learned if they’re addressed. I, along with SIGAR, stand ready to assist that effort in any way we can.

Thank you very much.