

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives

COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND REFORM

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September 10, 2021

The Honorable John F. Sopko
Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction
2530 Crystal Drive
Arlington, VA 22202-3940

Dear Special Inspector General Sopko:

We write today to request that you conduct a review to examine the underlying causes that may have contributed to the rapid collapse last month of the government of Afghanistan and the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces (ANDSF), any potential loss or compromise of U.S. reconstruction assistance resulting from the Taliban's return to power, and the ramifications of the U.S. military and diplomatic withdrawal for U.S. national security and the people of Afghanistan.

The United States has spent approximately \$145 billion for reconstruction activities in Afghanistan since 2002, including about \$87 billion to build, train, equip, and assist the ANDSF.¹ Given two decades of U.S. and Coalition investments in Afghanistan's future, it is crucial that the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR) continue its important work on behalf of Congress and the American people to document the relative successes and failures of our reconstruction mission in Afghanistan, particularly in light of the Afghan government's capitulation to the Taliban in a matter of weeks, culminating with the fall of Kabul on August 15, 2021.²

Since its inception in 2008, SIGAR has issued 427 audits, 191 special project reports, 52 quarterly reports, and ten comprehensive lessons-learned reports.³ Altogether, these reports represent a body of work that repeatedly identified long-term, structural weaknesses in the viability and legitimacy of the government of Afghanistan, and persistent vulnerabilities with respect to the strength and capabilities of the ANDSF:

¹ Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction, *Quarterly Report to the United States Congress* (July 30, 2021) (online at www.sigar.mil/pdf/quarterlyreports/2021-07-30qr.pdf).

² *Kabul's Sudden Fall to Taliban Ends U.S. Era in Afghanistan*, New York Times (Aug. 15, 2021) (online at www.nytimes.com/2021/08/15/world/asia/afghanistan-taliban-kabul-surrender.html).

³ Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction, *What We Need to Learn: Lessons from Twenty Years of Afghanistan Reconstruction* (Aug. 16, 2021) (online at www.sigar.mil/pdf/lessonslearned/SIGAR-21-46-LL.pdf).

- In its first quarterly report to Congress after you assumed the role of Special Inspector General in 2012, SIGAR cautioned that “a decade of struggle and bloodshed—and more than \$89 billion of U.S. appropriations for Afghan reconstruction—has not cleared the landscape of serious problems.” SIGAR also noted that “[t]he Afghan government does not have sufficient revenue to pay for its security forces” and would rely heavily on the United States and international community to subsidize those costs through at least 2024.⁴
- In 2014, SIGAR released its first “High-Risk List” report warning that “limited institutional and human-capital capacity in Afghan institutions” and “widespread corruption in Afghan society and government entities” were undermining U.S. reconstruction programs in Afghanistan.⁵
- Two years later, SIGAR reported that endemic corruption in Afghanistan had “undermined the U.S. mission in Afghanistan by fueling grievances against the Afghan government and channeling material support to the insurgency.” The report continued:

The U.S. government was slow to recognize the magnitude of the problem, the role of corrupt patronage networks, the ways in which corruption threatened core U.S. goals, and that certain U.S. policies and practices exacerbated the problem.⁶

- In a September 2017 report, SIGAR found that “[c]orruption by ANDSF officials, at all institutional levels, has degraded security, force readiness, and overall capabilities” and that the U.S. and Coalition forces provided the ANDSF with “equipment that surpassed the ANDSF’s resources and capacity to maintain.” SIGAR found that these limitations “directly and negatively impacted ANDSF combat readiness and effectiveness.”⁷
- Just before the collapse of the Afghan government, SIGAR produced a “Lessons Learned” report, which concluded that the U.S. government “continuously struggled to develop and implement a coherent strategy for what it hoped to achieve” in Afghanistan; “consistently underestimated the amount of time required to rebuild Afghanistan, and created unrealistic timelines and expectations

⁴ Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction, *Quarterly Report to Congress* (Jul. 30, 2012) (online at www.sigar.mil/pdf/quarterlyreports/2012-07-30qr.pdf).

⁵ Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction, *High-Risk List* (Dec. 2014) (online at www.sigar.mil/pdf/spotlight/High-Risk_List.pdf).

⁶ Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction, *Corruption in Conflict: Lessons from the U.S. Experience in Afghanistan* (Sept. 2016) (online at www.sigar.mil/pdf/lessonslearned/SIGAR-16-58-LL.pdf).

⁷ Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction, *Reconstructing the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces: Lessons from the U.S. Experience in Afghanistan* (Sept. 2017) (online at www.sigar.mil/pdf/lessonslearned/SIGAR-17-62-LL.pdf).

that prioritized spending quickly,” which in turn exacerbated corruption; and “did not understand the Afghan context and therefore failed to tailor its efforts accordingly.”⁸

In light of the collapse of the government of Afghanistan and the Taliban’s return to power, it is imperative to conduct a complete and thorough accounting of the U.S. reconstruction mission in Afghanistan.

For these reasons, we respectfully request that SIGAR examine the following matters:

1. The collapse of the government in Afghanistan, including:
 - a. The factors that contributed to the dissolution of the government of Afghanistan in August 2021, and any chronic weaknesses that undermined the government’s authority or legitimacy since 2002; and
 - b. The relative success or failure of U.S. reconstruction efforts to build and sustain Afghan governing institutions since 2002.
2. The collapse and dissolution of the ANDSF, including:
 - a. The underlying causes that contributed to the rapid dissolution of the ANDSF in August 2021, and any chronic weaknesses in the strength and capabilities of the ANDSF since 2002;
 - b. To the extent practicable, an accounting of all U.S. assistance provided to build, train, advise, and equip the ANDSF since 2002;
 - c. To the extent practicable, an accounting of the total number of ANDSF personnel trained and equipped through U.S. reconstruction programs since 2002 and the current status of these personnel; and
 - d. The relative success or failure of U.S. reconstruction efforts to build, train, advise, and equip the ANDSF.
3. Continued risks to U.S.-funded reconstruction assistance in Afghanistan, including recommendations or suggestions to address these risks:
 - a. The current status of U.S. funding appropriated or obligated for reconstruction programs in Afghanistan, including on-budget assistance and any contracts that remain active or pending;

⁸ Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction, *What We Need to Learn: Lessons from Twenty Years of Afghanistan Reconstruction* (Aug. 16, 2021) (online at www.sigar.mil/pdf/lessonslearned/SIGAR-21-46-LL.pdf).

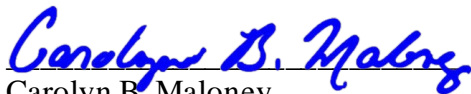
- b. The extent to which the Taliban have access to U.S. on-budget assistance or U.S.-funded equipment and defense articles previously provided to the government of Afghanistan and the ANDSF, and any mechanisms the U.S. government is using to recoup, recapture, or secure this funding and equipment; and
- c. The status of and potential risks to the Afghan people and civil society organizations, including Afghan women and girls, journalists, educational institutions, health care operations, and non-government institutions resulting from the Taliban's return to power.

Due to current security conditions, we understand that SIGAR will not have an in-country presence in Afghanistan when conducting this review, and as a result, access to relevant Afghan government records or information may be limited. However, we do not believe this should preclude SIGAR from conducting this important review, and we are prepared to work with you and your staff to adjust the scope of this request in the event that SIGAR determines it lacks access to information that is necessary to conduct this review.

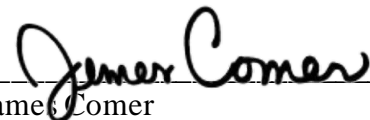
We are also grateful for the bipartisan briefing you provided to Members of our Committee on August 31, 2021, regarding recent events in Afghanistan and for your other recent testimony in hearings and briefings before the Committee and the Subcommittee on National Security. We look forward to working with you to conduct additional oversight of these issues in the weeks ahead.

The Committee on Oversight and Reform is the principal oversight committee of the House of Representatives and has broad authority to investigate "any matter" at "any time" under House Rule X. If you have any questions regarding this request, please contact Subcommittee staff at (202) 225-5051.

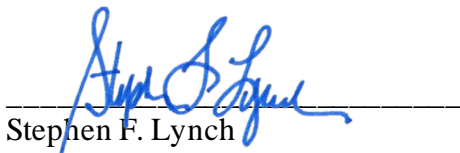
Sincerely,



Carolyn B. Maloney
Chairwoman
Committee on Oversight and Reform



James Comer
Ranking Member
Committee on Oversight and Reform



Stephen F. Lynch
Chairman
Subcommittee on National Security



Glenn Grothman
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on National Security