



Prepared Remarks of
John F. Sopko
Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction

***“The End of the Afghanistan Mission – Perspectives of the Partners in the
Western Alliance”***

Deutscher Bundestag
Paul-Löbe Building (PLH), Room 4.900
Konrad-Adenauer Strasse 1
10557 Berlin

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Mr. Chairman, Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the invitation to speak before you today.

Let me start by saying that—as an American—I have tremendous gratitude for the German government and people for their unwavering partnership over more than 20 years of assistance to Afghanistan. We are also especially grateful for the support of many German officials to SIGAR’s mission to oversee U.S. assistance.

Just as our countries tried to rebuild Afghanistan together, we feel it is equally important that we learn lessons together, which is why we are honored to be here today.

Since its founding, SIGAR has sought to protect the U.S. government’s massive investment in reconstructing Afghanistan’s institutions and infrastructure by combating waste, fraud, and abuse. During that time, through nearly 700 reports over the last 15 years, SIGAR identified a staggering list of systemic challenges.

These challenges meant that the decision by two U.S. presidents to withdraw U.S. forces from Afghanistan started a chain reaction that revealed just how vulnerable the Afghan government and its security forces were. But as SIGAR has documented, these vulnerabilities go back many years and they raise one of the most critical questions I suggest your committee may wish to contemplate – was a different outcome even possible given the decisions that were previously made?

For example, the exclusion of Afghan officials from negotiations with the Taliban weakened the Afghan government. But their exclusion reflected just how little legitimacy the government had accrued to that point. Over two decades, the international community spent \$1.2 billion on Afghan elections, yet the credibility of those elections was always suspect and decreased over time. The U.S. also spent billions of dollars helping the Afghan government provide Afghans with education and healthcare, but this assistance did not meaningfully improve Afghans' support for their government.

The collapse of the Afghan security forces (ANDSF) was likewise rooted in decades of poor choices by the U.S and its NATO partners in how the ANDSF was rebuilt. The U.S. attempted to build a technically sophisticated, modern, and expensive military in its own image, rather than building on what worked for Afghan forces in the past. This approach created long-term dependencies on advanced logistics and equipment which the Afghan army simply could not sustain.

Above all else, corruption in Afghanistan's civilian and military institutions grew so prevalent that it put the government on a path to eventual collapse. The recurring U.S. impulse to pump too much money, too fast, into a country that could not absorb it only poured fuel on the fire that fed the corruption that alienated not only the Afghan citizenry, but also the donor community.

In the end, there was not much that the U.S.-Taliban withdrawal agreement could do to change those dynamics. U.S. decisions around the Doha agreement accelerated a downward spiral in the morale of the ANDSF, by effectively ending U.S. air support and facilitating the release of thousands of Taliban prisoners.

Once the final withdrawal began, the departure of U.S. advisors and contractors meant ANDSF logistics and air force operations came to a grinding halt. Lacking air and ground support, as well as food, supplies, and ammunition, many Afghan troops spent the summer of 2021 abandoning their posts as the Taliban encircled them.

I believe the lessons we have identified in Afghanistan are still relevant for major reconstruction efforts in conflicts around the world. While the U.S. government and its allies are understandably preoccupied with the defense of Ukraine, we cannot help but think about future efforts to rebuild that country, its institutions, and its infrastructure through the lens of our experiences in Afghanistan.

Although the countries are very different, the way donor governments attempt to rebuild institutions and infrastructure around the world is often the same. Therefore, I believe it is vital to study these lessons before the reconstruction of Ukraine truly begins in earnest. After spending 20 years and \$146 billion trying and mostly failing to rebuild Afghanistan, it would be tragic to have to relearn these lessons the hard way, again, in Ukraine – a country far more relevant than Afghanistan to Germany, Europe and my country's ultimate security.

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