



Prepared Remarks of
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“Lessons from Afghanistan: The Need for a Whole-of-Government Approach”

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Columbia University
New York, NY
October 16, 2017

Thank you for that kind introduction and thank you all for taking time to be here today.

Some of you are likely wondering what an Inspector General is, let alone what a Special Inspector General is. Don't feel bad, I've learned over the last five years that many senior government officials don't know either. The concept of an Inspector General is not a new one – most executive branch Offices of Inspectors General were created by Congress in 1978. Ancient history, no doubt, to most of you, but the history of IGs in the United States actually goes back 200 years prior to that – to May of 1778, when George Washington convinced the Continental Congress to appoint a former Prussian military officer named Friedrich von Steuben to the new post of inspector general of the Continental Army.

Despite limited English proficiency, Baron von Steuben standardized the Continental Army's training, which included convincing soldiers of the need to, for example, stop using bayonets as cooking skewers and start using them as weapons. Like many an Inspector General since, von Steuben noted “administrative incompetence, graft, and war profiteering,” and his inspections reportedly saved the financially stretched army an estimated loss of five to eight thousand muskets, similar to how SIGAR has reported on the lack of weapons accountability in Afghanistan. Von Steuben was also assigned the duty of trying to improve sanitation by relocating latrines – fortunately, I've avoided that assignment so far in Afghanistan.

I mention all of this to highlight that when motivated and utilized properly, an Office of Inspector General can be a significant force for change. Few government employees, Congressional staff, journalists, and academics understand the impact that an effective

IG can have on improving the government, and yes, even the conduct of wars.

Every executive branch agency has an IG – and like the other 70-plus Offices of Inspectors General, SIGAR issues audits, inspections, reports, and conducts both civil and criminal investigations, all intended to combat waste, fraud, and abuse, and improve efficiency in the government. We are the eyes and ears of the taxpayer. But I'm guessing most of you did not come here today to hear me wax poetic on the history of Inspectors General – after all – there's probably a phone book somewhere that's just dying to be read, or perhaps one of your professor's scholarly tomes. So how does this apply to you?

Most of you already know that the war in Afghanistan is our nation's longest continuous military engagement. You may also know that it is USAID's largest development effort. But more importantly, what our government has faced in Afghanistan over the past 16 years represents the type of conflict that the United States is likely to see more of in the decades to come. Conflict and reconstruction efforts in failed and weak states that lack institutions, where rule-of-law is non-existent, and that face massive corruption problems are what our government will have to contend with. These contingency operations must be addressed as “whole of government” efforts among U.S. agencies as well as take a “whole of governmentS” approach where the U.S. works with coalition partners.

The reason that SIGAR was created, which was an inspired move by Congress, is because they recognized that the effort in Afghanistan is a “whole of government” mission. U.S. objectives in Afghanistan are achieved by programs of the Department of Defense, the Department of State, USAID, and any of the other dozen or so agencies that have had a role in America's longest war and reconstruction effort. Each of these agencies have their own IGs, but by 2007, well after our post-9/11 engagement in Afghanistan was underway, Congress realized the agency IGs weren't getting the job done and that massive tax dollars being spent on reconstruction in Afghanistan were at risk.

As I stand here today, the total amount of funding appropriated for reconstruction in Afghanistan, just by the United States, has reached nearly \$120 billion, far eclipsing any such effort in our nation's past, including the entire cost of the post-World War II Marshall Plan, when adjusted for inflation.

My little agency of roughly 200 people – roughly 30 of whom are based in Kabul – is

unique among IG offices because we are not housed within any single agency. Instead, I'm responsible to the President and Congress. That independence and SIGAR's broad jurisdiction over every dollar spent on the reconstruction effort was granted to us because the U.S. is engaged in a "whole of government" mission in Afghanistan. The Department of Defense is helping to build, train, and equip the Afghan national security forces. The Department of State is focused on maintaining our diplomatic presence, running rule of law and governance programs, and leading the counter-narcotics effort. USAID is supporting health, education, and gender initiatives. The Department of Justice is working on anti-corruption efforts. And we've run across programs sponsored by entities as diverse as the Department of Treasury, the Department of Agriculture, the Department of Commerce, and the Department of Transportation.

There's only one problem, and it's one that SIGAR has consistently identified in our work. These agencies routinely fail to coordinate with each other at the strategic level, let alone at the project level. This, to say the least, is problematic. If our long-term strategy in Afghanistan is to increase battlefield pressure on the Taliban, while at the same time helping the democratically elected Afghan government increase its legitimacy, then it would seem that DOD, State, USAID, and every other agency need to be working together.

Let me share two of the many examples SIGAR has come across. First, it's no secret that a great deal of opium comes from Afghanistan, perhaps as much as 80 percent of the world's total supply. The United States has spent over \$8.5 billion since 2001 trying to combat narcotics production and trafficking in Afghanistan. Despite that massive expenditure, Afghan is producing opium at or near all-time record levels.

Given that the U.S. military has estimated that as much as 60 percent of the Taliban's funding comes from the narcotics trade, one would think they would make the counter-narcotics mission a priority. Yet, in Afghanistan, the Department of State has responsibility for counter-narcotics programs but is doing little. The U.S. military has so distanced itself from the counter-narcotics effort that within the past two years, it even stopped directly reporting statistics on Afghanistan's drug trade, and the DEA's presence has shrunk from hundreds down to a handful of agents.

If the goal is to drive the Taliban to the point of desperation, where negotiation seems like their best recourse, then common sense would seem to dictate that all elements of U.S. and coalition power should be brought to bear to eliminate their funding sources. Another example of our inability to approach Afghanistan reconstruction in a

coordinated “whole of government” manner revolves around an ill-fated effort by the Department of Defense to try and jumpstart Afghanistan’s economy, something that normally would be the responsibility of the Department of State and USAID.

Unsurprisingly, DOD didn’t have much expertise in economic development and many of its projects failed. Failure is unacceptable enough, but DOD also routinely failed to coordinate with State and USAID. This caused enormous problems, not the least of which occurred the day an Afghan official came up to the U.S. Ambassador to thank him for an economic development project that the Ambassador had no knowledge of, because DOD hadn’t bothered to tell our Embassy about it.

Many of these lapses are driven by competition between agencies over influence or resources. But much is also simply cultural. Some of you, I hope, are thinking of careers within the government or already have government experience. I would ask you – in your classes, how much time do your professors or colleagues spend talking about how to work with your counterparts in another agency?

I feel a responsibility to raise these issues because of the unique vantage point SIGAR has. There is no other entity with the authority and capability to look at U.S. efforts in Afghanistan in a holistic way. General John Allen, a former U.S. commander in Afghanistan, and Ryan Crocker, a former U.S. Ambassador to both Afghanistan and Iraq, raised this issue with me shortly after I was appointed to this post in 2012. They told me that SIGAR was the only government agency that could come up with cross-agency lessons learned to benefit both the ongoing effort in Afghanistan, as well as future reconstruction efforts.

This struck a chord with me because while SIGAR was finding waste, fraud, and abuse nearly everywhere we looked in Afghanistan – from the \$488 million worth of aircraft that couldn’t fly to the navy we bought for a landlocked country to the buildings the U.S. paid for that literally melted in the rain – I was constantly asked, what does it all mean? I was also frustrated that the agencies’ inability to derive any long-term lessons in Afghanistan and adjust their operations accordingly was largely because DOD and Embassy personnel in Afghanistan rotate out of country after a year or less. What I call the “annual lobotomy” – in other words, the routine loss of institutional memory – is unfortunately not a new problem.

Some of you may have seen the recent Ken Burns’ documentary on the Vietnam War – if you haven’t, I highly recommend it. As a demonstration of how little some things

change despite having had decades to absorb lessons, one of the earliest advisors in Vietnam, a distinguished Army officer named John Paul Vann, commented that “we don’t have 12 years’ experience in Vietnam. We have one year’s experience twelve times over.” I can’t begin to tell you how many times I’ve heard some version of that statement applied to the 16 years of U.S. effort in Afghanistan since 9/11. For example, the current head of our Embassy in Kabul recently acknowledged that fully 90 percent of Embassy staff is new this year due to State and USAID’s annual rotations.

The encouragement I received from General Allen and Ambassador Crocker, combined with the fact that it seemed like I was being introduced to a new ambassador or new general every time I traveled to Afghanistan, convinced me to establish SIGAR’s lessons learned program. This enables us to answer the question of “what does it all mean” that I inevitably get asked after we report on some egregious waste of taxpayer dollars or secure another conviction of an American government employee taking bribes in Afghanistan.

Key to making these lessons learned projects worthwhile is to leverage SIGAR’s unique ability to look at the entirety of the coalition effort in Afghanistan. We’ve published two reports so far, with several more on the way. The first, on anti-corruption efforts in Afghanistan, noted the lack of an interagency strategy between State, USAID, and DOD to combat corruption in Afghanistan. While our diplomats were chastising the Karzai regime for its unethical behavior, the military was busy paying off warlords in areas where USAID was trying to improve governance. All were trying to accomplish their respective missions, but they were working at cross purposes. This lack of coordination severely hampered efforts to fight corruption in Afghanistan.

Our second lessons learned report, released just last month, focuses on the training of the Afghan security forces. One of the key findings was that because the Department of State, which ostensibly has responsibility for training foreign police units, was unable to scale up to the size necessary to train the Afghan National Police, that responsibility fell to the Department of the Defense, which had more resources. But DOD has little experience training a traditional police force and turned the Afghan National Police into a paramilitary force to fight the Taliban, rather than training them to fight crime. But the government in Kabul needs to be seen as legitimate and effective – and nothing undermines that faster than when crimes go unpunished and uninvestigated because the police don’t consider that their job, demand a bribe, or are nowhere to be found.

During the Afghan strategy review ordered by President Trump, I briefed General

Dunford, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff on our findings, along with General John Nicholson, the U.S. commander in Afghanistan, and others in the military and on the NSC. Tomorrow, I head for Brussels where I will be briefing NATO commanders and European Union officials on our findings and how to improve coalition security sector reform efforts. And upon my return, SIGAR is co-hosting, with the Department of Defense, a seminar at the National Defense University on how the lessons we've learned in Afghanistan can inform future security sector reform efforts. This is how SIGAR's long experience and hard work in Afghanistan can make a difference to future initiatives in Afghanistan and beyond.

Because of this, SIGAR takes a different approach than other IGs when it comes to publicizing our work. Three decades of experience running congressional investigations taught me that publicity is the difference between whether a report creates change or ends up at the bottom of a circular filing cabinet.

So, unlike a lot of IGs, SIGAR's policy is that unless it is classified or a security risk, we publish our work. And if it is worth publishing, it's worth publicizing. This, at times, hasn't won me a lot of friends from those who would prefer decisions that led to gross waste of taxpayer dollars or were just plain stupid not end up in the *Washington Post* or *New York Times*. Publicity brings problems to the attention of senior leaders who otherwise might not be made aware of bad news. And if you're not aware of mistakes or bad decision-making, you can't take the corrective action necessary to fix the problem. The Vietnam-era military officer I mentioned earlier, John Paul Vann, recognized this, and worked with the *New York Times* to reach the American public with his concerns when he was ignored by the military brass, in an era when that was even less acceptable within the military than it is now.

So, yes, SIGAR gets its share of press, but the point of it all is to be "change agents" to improve government operations. We are a temporary agency – we have to make our time count. And so it is with that in mind that we publicize our lessons learned reports and all our other work which consistently highlights the need for a more integrated, "whole of government" approach in Afghanistan.

Publicity is not a magic bullet, however. Vested interests in Washington always resist change. There are some instructive past examples of success – the National Security Act of 1947 rationalized the national security-decision making structure in light of the emerging Cold War, and the Goldwater-Nichols Act of 1983 re-organized the Department of Defense to emphasize joint operability by taking absolute power out of

the hands of the heads of the Air Force, Army, and Navy – which refused to work together. Unfortunately, it took the abject failure of the 1980 attempt to rescue U.S. hostages in Iran and the disjointed 1983 invasion of the island of Grenada to highlight serious problems with joint communications and intelligence sharing that pushed a major military reorganization through Congress over the objections of entrenched interests at the Pentagon.

The reason I've come here to share all of this with you is to encourage you to be aware of the dangers of stove-piping as you go about your careers in diplomacy, development, and national security. As I said earlier, the inability to fully employ a “whole of government” approach in Afghanistan – or anywhere else for that matter – is largely a problem of culture. State Department officials need to stop seeing DOD as the competition and vice-versa. Afghanistan is but one challenge that the U.S. faces, but in all of our challenges, if our government is at odds with itself we will not be nearly as effective as we can be.

I am more convinced than ever that if the U.S. cannot effectively execute a “whole of government” strategy in Afghanistan, all our nation's sacrifice of blood and treasure will have been for naught. SIGAR is committed to leveraging all of its resources, experience, expertise, authority, and messaging to highlight this issue.

Recent events have reinforced my belief that SIGAR has an important role to play in this effort, while continuing our day-to-day mission to combat waste, fraud, and abuse. In multiple Congressional hearings earlier this month, Secretary Mattis and General Dunford emphasized how closely DOD has been working with SIGAR and utilized SIGAR's “corporate memory” during the recent strategy review.

In addition, I was particularly heartened to see that something I've been harping on for years – the need for DOD, State, and USAID to “rack and stack” their programs and evaluate which ones are working and which aren't, was raised in a question to General Dunford. In response, he pointed to the importance of SIGAR staff serving on his “failure analysis” team that looked back at the past 15 years of America's experience in Afghanistan.

This is remarkable for a number of reasons, including that IG shops rarely, if ever, play this sort of role – but also that it was not so long ago that our military and civilian leadership in Kabul complained that our work highlighting waste, fraud, and abuse was hurting the mission, rather than helping to improve it. This change is due, in no small

part, to our longevity, our continuum of expertise, and the fact that our work gets noticed.

The same is true in in the Afghan government. I just returned from my most recent quarterly trip there where I met, as I usually do, with President Ghani, Chief Executive Abdullah, and over 30 Afghan ministers and senior policymakers. Every one of them was aware of SIGAR's work and told me they use it to improve their own efforts. As a matter of fact, one Afghan general told us, SIGAR is the most feared and respected entity in Afghanistan next to the U.S. military.

In conclusion, SIGAR is uniquely equipped and positioned to continue to support the mission in this way – if we succeed, we may bring lasting benefit to not only the taxpayer, but to our soldiers, diplomats, and development professionals in Afghanistan and beyond. And if we don't, well, I can always follow Baron Von Steuben's example and try to figure out the best placement for the latrines.

Thank you and I welcome your questions.