

October 5, 2020

The Honorable James Inhofe
Chairman
Senate Armed Services Committee
228 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Jack Reed
Ranking Member
Senate Armed Services Committee
228 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Adam Smith
Chairman
House Armed Services Committee
2216 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Mac Thornberry
Ranking Member
House Armed Services Committee
2216 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairmen Inhofe and Smith and Ranking Members Reed and Thornberry:

The undersigned organizations urge you to preserve the ability of the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR) to evaluate and audit spending decisions related to reconstruction efforts in Afghanistan by rejecting section 1532 in the Senate version of the National Defense Authorization Act for fiscal year 2021 (S. 4049).

The Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction has been one of the most effective inspectors general in recent history, and continues to perform an essential mission as Congress assesses the administration's plans to draw down troops in Afghanistan.¹ Its work has been pivotal in informing Congress's debate about the war in Afghanistan, and the watchdog's "Lessons Learned" series showed the many occasions Congress and the public were misled about government operations.² Other SIGAR investigations and audits uncovered "ghost soldiers" undermining the capacity and effectiveness of Afghan forces; instances when the U.S. was contracting with the enemy supporting insurgent troops; and counterdrug programs led and supported by the U.S. that failed to result in "lasting reductions in poppy cultivation or opium

¹ Danielle Brian and Neil Gordon, "What is Going on Behind the Attacks on SIGAR?" Project On Government Oversight, May 6, 2016. <https://www.pogo.org/analysis/2016/05/what-is-going-on-behind-attacks-on-sigar/>

² Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction, "Lessons Learned Reports." <https://www.sigar.mil/lessonslearned/lessonslearnedreports/index.aspx?SSR=11&SubSSR=60&WP=Lessons%20Learned%20Reports>; Craig Whitlock, "At War With the Truth," *Washington Post*, December 9, 2019. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/graphics/2019/investigations/afghanistan-papers/afghanistan-war-confidential-documents/>

production.”³ Another report found that weaknesses in end-use monitoring of weapons under Afghan control created “a real potential for these weapons to fall into the hands of insurgents.”⁴

Congress created SIGAR due to concerns that billions of dollars were being spent with insufficient oversight to identify and prevent waste, fraud, and abuse.⁵ Those concerns were well-founded. SIGAR has identified over \$3.3 billion in opportunities for savings for the American taxpayer.⁶ And as we consider withdrawing our troops, the need for oversight of spending in Afghanistan only increases. Now, according to the Combined Security Transition Command-Afghanistan, our operations in that country have been “perhaps the most complex and challenging period in the last two decades.”⁷ This is the wrong time to shift primary authority of SIGAR’s work to the Department of Defense Inspector General, an office that is already overburdened as it assesses not only its regular workload but also the department’s response to the coronavirus pandemic.⁸

³ “Assessing the Development of Afghanistan National Security Forces”: Hearing before the House Armed Services Committee’s Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations, 115th Cong. (February 12, 2016) (Testimony of Special Inspector General John F. Sopko, Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction).

<https://www.sigar.mil/pdf/testimony/SIGAR-16-17-TY.pdf>; Letter from Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction John F. Sopko to Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and others about immediate actions needed to stop contracts, grants, and cooperative agreements with individuals and entities actively supporting the insurgency in Afghanistan, October 17, 2012. <https://www.sigar.mil/pdf/investigations/2012-10-17-alert-12-3-ndda841.pdf>; Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction, *Counternarcotics: Lessons from the U.S. Experience in Afghanistan*, June 2018, iii. <https://www.sigar.mil/pdf/lessonslearned/SIGAR-18-52-LL.pdf>

⁴ Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction, *Afghan National Security Forces: Actions Needed to Improve Weapons Accountability*, July 18, 2014, 12. <https://www.sigar.mil/pdf/audits/sigar-14-84-ar.pdf>

⁵ Laura Strickler, “White House Delays Appointing Afghan IG,” *NBC News*, May 5, 2008. <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/white-house-delays-appointing-afghan-ig/>

⁶ Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction, *Quarterly Report to the United States Congress*, July 30, 2020, iv. <https://www.sigar.mil/pdf/quarterlyreports/2020-07-30qr.pdf>

⁷ Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction, *Quarterly Report to the United States Congress*, July 30, 2020, iv. <https://www.sigar.mil/pdf/quarterlyreports/2020-07-30qr.pdf>

⁸ Announced coronavirus-related projects include an audit of the Army Corps of Engineers’ contract oversight of alternative care sites, an audit of military installations’ public health emergency readiness, an audit of reimbursement for Northern Command and supporting components for coronavirus response assignments, assessing the response of the Armed Forces Retirement Home to the coronavirus pandemic, and an audit of the implementation of provisions to reimburse federal contractors for coronavirus-related expenses. Department of Defense Office of Inspector General, “Evaluation of the Armed Forces Retirement Home Response to the Coronavirus Disease–2019 Pandemic (Project No. D2020-DEV0PC-0158.000),” July 27, 2020.

<https://www.dodig.mil/reports.html/Article/2289283/project-announcement-evaluation-of-the-armed-forces-retirement-home-response-to/>; Department of Defense Office of Inspector General, “Audit of U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Contract Oversight Over the Construction of Alternative Care Sites for the Coronavirus Disease–2019 Response (Project No. D2020-D000AV-0144.000),” June 15, 2020.

<https://www.dodig.mil/reports.html/Article/2225960/project-announcement-audit-of-us-army-corps-of-engineers-contract-oversight-ove/>; Department of Defense Office of Inspector General, “Audit of the DoD Military Installations’ Public Health Emergency Readiness (Project No. D2020-D000RG-0146.000),” June 10, 2020.

<https://www.dodig.mil/reports.html/Article/2221519/project-announcement-audit-of-the-dod-military-installations-public-health-emer/>; Department of Defense Office of Inspector General, “Audit of the Department of Defense Mission Assignments for Coronavirus Disease–2019 in the U.S. Northern Command Area of Responsibility (Project No. D2020-D000AU-0143.000),” June 8, 2020. <https://www.dodig.mil/reports.html/Article/2213297/project-announcement-audit-of-the-department-of-defense-mission-assignments-for/>

Department of Defense Office of Inspector General, “Audit of DoD Implementation of Section 3610 Authorized by the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act. (Project No. D2020-D000AH-0137.000),” May 27, 2020.

The proposed language could also hamper SIGAR’s criminal and civil law enforcement function. SIGAR regularly uncovers criminal conspiracies and corruption, leading to millions of dollars in restitution payments.⁹

Lastly, we are concerned that the language of section 1532 would reduce the frequency of SIGAR reports provided to Congress from quarterly to semiannually. This is a time when Congress and the public need to be kept as informed as possible on the outcomes of our reconstruction and training efforts.

The Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction has been seminal in documenting corruption related to U.S. spending in Afghanistan. It is crucial that SIGAR continue to do its work for the American and Afghan people.

Sincerely,

Accountability Lab
The Center on Illicit Networks and Transnational Organized Crime
Coalition for Integrity
Concerned Veterans for America
Demand Progress
Friends Committee on National Legislation
Government Information Watch
Global Witness
International Lawyers Project
Massachusetts Peace Action
National Priorities Project
National Taxpayers Union
Open The Government
Partnership for Transparency Fund (PTF)
Project On Government Oversight
Quincy Institute for Responsible Statecraft
Shadow World Investigations
Supporting Organization for Afghanistan Civil Society
Taxpayers for Common Sense
Transparency International, U.S. Office
Win Without War

<https://www.dodig.mil/reports.html/Article/2213285/project-announcement-audit-of-dod-implementation-of-section-3610-authorized-by/>

⁹ Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction, “Recent Criminal Cases.”

<https://www.sigar.mil/investigations/criminalcases/index.aspx?SSR=3&SubSSR=20&WP=Criminal%20Cases#RecentCriminalCases>