



Stabilization

Lessons from the U.S. Experience in Afghanistan

Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction

Published on 28/05/2018

Relations internationales

"Lessons learned from the United States experience in Afghanistan" is the fourth lessons learned report issued by the Special Inspector General for the Reconstruction of Afghanistan. The report examines the U.S. stabilization effort in Afghanistan and details how the U.S. Agency for International Development and the Departments of State and Defense attempted to support and legitimize the Afghan government in the disputed districts from 2002 to 2017.

Suggested translation :

The report draws lessons to inform U.S. policies and actions to stabilize a country or region before and during an emergency operation and makes recommendations to that effect. With the rise of the Islamic state and its affiliates, making poorly governed spaces inhospitable to transnational terrorist groups remains a vital priority for U.S. national security.

Our analysis reveals that the U.S. government has greatly overestimated its ability to build and reform government institutions in Afghanistan as part of its stabilization strategy. We found that the stabilization strategy and the programs used to achieve it were not adapted to the Afghan context, and that successes in stabilizing **Afghan districts rarely lasted longer than the physical presence of coalition troops and civilians**. As a result, when all priority districts were handed over from coalition to Afghan control in 2014, the services and protection provided by Afghan forces and officials often could not compete with Taliban resurgences filling the gaps in the newly liberated territory.

SIGAR began revising its program based on lessons learned in late 2014 at the urging of General John Allen, Ambassador Ryan Crocker and others who have served in

Afghanistan. Our lessons learned reports are consistent with SIGAR's legislative mandate to provide independent and objective leadership and recommendations to promote economy, efficiency and effectiveness; prevent and detect waste, fraud, and abuse; and inform Congress and the Secretaries of State and Defense of problems related to reconstruction and the need for corrective action.

Unlike other Inspectors General, Congress created SIGAR as an independent agency and not within a single department. SIGAR is the only inspector general that focuses solely on the mission in Afghanistan and the only one dedicated exclusively to reconstruction issues. While other Inspectors General have jurisdiction over the programs and operations of their respective departments or agencies, SIGAR has jurisdiction over all programs and operations supported by U.S. reconstruction funds, regardless of which agency is involved. Because SIGAR has the authority to examine the entire reconstruction effort, it is uniquely positioned to identify and address government lessons.

Our lessons learned reports synthesize not only the work and expertise of SIGAR, but also that of other oversight agencies, government entities, current and former officials with field experience, academic institutions, and independent researchers. The reports document what the U.S. government has sought to accomplish, assess what it has accomplished, and evaluate the extent to which these efforts have helped the United States achieve its strategic objectives in Afghanistan. They also make recommendations on the challenges that stakeholders face in ensuring effective, efficient, and sustainable reconstruction efforts, not only in Afghanistan, but also in future contingency operations.

The SIGAR Lessons Learned program includes subject matter experts with extensive experience working and living in Afghanistan, supported by a team of experienced research analysts. I would like to express my deep appreciation to the team members who produced this report and thank them for their dedication and commitment to the project. I would like to thank David H. Young, project leader; Jordan Kane and Paul Kane, research analysts; Jordan Schurter, student intern; Olivia Paek, graphic designer; and Elizabeth Young, editor. In producing its reports, the Lessons Learned Program also draws on the significant skills and experience found in the Audit, Investigations and Research and Analysis branches of SIGAR, as well as in the Office of Special Projects. I would like to thank all those who contributed their time and effort to this report. It is truly a collaborative effort to not only identify problems, but also to learn from them and apply reasonable solutions to improve future reconstruction efforts.

I believe that our lessons learned reports will be a key legacy of SIGAR. Through these reports, we hope to reach a diverse audience within the legislative and executive branches, at the strategic and programmatic levels, both in Washington and on the ground. Building on our unique interagency mandate, we intend to do everything we can to ensure that lessons learned from the most significant U.S. reconstruction effort are identified, recognized and, most importantly, captured and applied to ongoing reconstruction efforts in Afghanistan, as well as to future conflicts and reconstruction efforts elsewhere in the world.

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Title :	Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction
Author (s) :	Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction
Release date	27/05/2018

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