## **QI Panel: Lessons Learned from Oversight of War and Reconstruction Efforts in Afghanistan**

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12-1 PM EST

**Kelley Beaucar Vlahos (**[**01:17**](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/f6NHEnDy3TSuOYm5rw6htiLykXdmDsJ0wRlHvboug7shoCMru_wAhEXI8xOzUAiaOhiGzQ1Y_XX6Hm_DkN8P_C8J4Bg?loadFrom=PastedDeeplink&ts=77.22)**):**

Good afternoon. My name is Kelley Vlahos and I am a senior advisor at the Quincy Institute and editorial director of our online magazine, Responsible Statecraft. And I am honored today to be moderating our panel about the lessons learned from our 20 year reconstruction of Afghanistan and the oversight, or lack thereof, of the billions of dollars that went to that effort from the US Treasury.

([01:43](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/f6NHEnDy3TSuOYm5rw6htiLykXdmDsJ0wRlHvboug7shoCMru_wAhEXI8xOzUAiaOhiGzQ1Y_XX6Hm_DkN8P_C8J4Bg?loadFrom=PastedDeeplink&ts=103.77))
According to the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction, John Sopko, who joins us today, the US poured a little more than $146 billion into Afghanistan reconstruction since 2002. Since Russia invaded Ukraine in February, 2022, Washington has allocated 113 billion in aid to Ukraine. Let that sink in for a moment. The assistance to Ukraine has been fast and furious and by all reports it is running out, leaving Congress to debate another aid package this fall. The aid has not at all been for reconstruction of course, it's mostly for weapons, humanitarian and economic aid, but the red flags are still there.

([02:27](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/f6NHEnDy3TSuOYm5rw6htiLykXdmDsJ0wRlHvboug7shoCMru_wAhEXI8xOzUAiaOhiGzQ1Y_XX6Hm_DkN8P_C8J4Bg?loadFrom=PastedDeeplink&ts=147.87))
In Afghanistan we know, thanks to Sopko's efforts, that at least 19 billion in US dollars were lost to waste fraud and abuse. He was able to expose that. That is just from a portion of the total aid dollars that the Special IG's office was able to comb through. The real total is likely just more. If that much was lost over the course of 20 years, what happens when billions are injected into the bloodstream of a country that is rife with war over the course of a year and a half? What can we be doing to prevent its corruption and loss?

([03:05](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/f6NHEnDy3TSuOYm5rw6htiLykXdmDsJ0wRlHvboug7shoCMru_wAhEXI8xOzUAiaOhiGzQ1Y_XX6Hm_DkN8P_C8J4Bg?loadFrom=PastedDeeplink&ts=185.22))
I am very excited to have some of the best watchdogs and war analysts here to talk with us today about this. I'm going to introduce each, and then we can start off with our discussion. First, john Sopko, as I mentioned, was sworn in as a Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction on July 2, 2012. His staff is committed to uncovering fraud, waste and abuse and providing policymakers with independent analysis that they need to make informed decisions on the complex foreign policy issues facing the United States. Mr. Sopko's government experience includes over 20 years on Capitol Hill where he held key positions in both the Senate and House of Representatives. He served on the staffs of the House Committee on Energy and Commerce, the Select Committee on the Homeland Security and the Senate Permanent Committee on Investigations. His most recent congressional Post before taking over SIGAR, he was Chief Counsel for Oversight and Investigations for the House Committee on Energy and Commerce.

([04:12](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/f6NHEnDy3TSuOYm5rw6htiLykXdmDsJ0wRlHvboug7shoCMru_wAhEXI8xOzUAiaOhiGzQ1Y_XX6Hm_DkN8P_C8J4Bg?loadFrom=PastedDeeplink&ts=252.33))
Next we have Danielle Brian. Danielle is the executive director and president of the Project on Government Oversight or POGO. POGO's work in the past has resulted in the passage of major reforms, exposing and resolving conflicts of interest between various government entities, saving the Office of Congressional Ethics and Congressional Budget Office and eliminating the overseas contingency operations as well as other victories in this realm.

([04:42](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/f6NHEnDy3TSuOYm5rw6htiLykXdmDsJ0wRlHvboug7shoCMru_wAhEXI8xOzUAiaOhiGzQ1Y_XX6Hm_DkN8P_C8J4Bg?loadFrom=PastedDeeplink&ts=282.15))
And last but not least, my colleague Andrew Bacevich, who was a co-founder of the Quincy Institute, which was founded in 2019 and he's now the chairman of the institution's Board of Directors. He is Professor Emeritus of International Relations and History at Boston University, a graduate of West Point and Princeton. He served in the army before becoming an academic. He is the author of several bestselling books, including most recently On Shedding an Obsolete Past: Bidding Farewell to the American Century, which came out in 2022.

([05:18](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/f6NHEnDy3TSuOYm5rw6htiLykXdmDsJ0wRlHvboug7shoCMru_wAhEXI8xOzUAiaOhiGzQ1Y_XX6Hm_DkN8P_C8J4Bg?loadFrom=PastedDeeplink&ts=318.45))
With that, I would like to ask each of the panelists to deliver a few moments of brief remarks on the issue of looking back at Afghanistan reconstruction and aid and oversight and lessons that we can learn for oversight today on Ukraine aid. And I'd like to start with John. Oh, just unmute, please. There you go.

**John Sopko (**[**05:58**](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/f6NHEnDy3TSuOYm5rw6htiLykXdmDsJ0wRlHvboug7shoCMru_wAhEXI8xOzUAiaOhiGzQ1Y_XX6Hm_DkN8P_C8J4Bg?loadFrom=PastedDeeplink&ts=358.32)**)**:

I apologize for that.

**Kelley Beaucar Vlahos (**[**06:00**](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/f6NHEnDy3TSuOYm5rw6htiLykXdmDsJ0wRlHvboug7shoCMru_wAhEXI8xOzUAiaOhiGzQ1Y_XX6Hm_DkN8P_C8J4Bg?loadFrom=PastedDeeplink&ts=360.24)**)**:

No apology necessary.

**John Sopko (**[**06:03**](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/f6NHEnDy3TSuOYm5rw6htiLykXdmDsJ0wRlHvboug7shoCMru_wAhEXI8xOzUAiaOhiGzQ1Y_XX6Hm_DkN8P_C8J4Bg?loadFrom=PastedDeeplink&ts=363.21)**):**

Thank you for those kind comments. And also, I want to thank Andrew and the Quincy Institute for bringing us here today. It's an important issue on lessons learned from Afghanistan. If you think about it, in this century, the most notable US reconstruction efforts were made in Iraq and Afghanistan. I think the next one is the Ukraine, and I think you highlighted the numbers. We are spending more money in Ukraine now, and I'm not opposed to spending that, I just want to make certain it's done correctly and there's oversight, but we're spending more money in the Ukraine now in one year than we spent in about 12 years in Afghanistan, and by the end of this year, we'll have spent more money in Ukraine than we did to do the entire Marshall Plan after World War II. So it's really an important time right now. I think the time is perfect to sit back, take a look at what happened over the last 20 years in Afghanistan and look for similarities and look for differences that policymakers should keep in mind as going forward.

([07:33](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/f6NHEnDy3TSuOYm5rw6htiLykXdmDsJ0wRlHvboug7shoCMru_wAhEXI8xOzUAiaOhiGzQ1Y_XX6Hm_DkN8P_C8J4Bg?loadFrom=PastedDeeplink&ts=453.03))
Now, as many of you may know, I came on board in 2012. Almost immediately, I was approached by a number of generals and a number of senior state department officials and aid officials who said there was a need to learn some lessons and to create a lessons learned program that was independent of the agencies, but also had the ability to look at the whole of government and the whole of governments. And they warned me that when Congress created my little agency, we're the only agency that had hold of government authority, which meant we could look at any US government agency that was spending money in Afghanistan for reconstruction, which is very similar to how we're spending money in Ukraine, to be honest with you. It's not just humanitarian, it's not just laying concrete. It's not just rebuilding things. It's also a train, advise and assist mission, which was one of the biggest bulk of the Afghan expenditure, and that's what we're doing in Ukraine, train, advise and assist the host government's military. So it's important to keep in mind.

([08:45](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/f6NHEnDy3TSuOYm5rw6htiLykXdmDsJ0wRlHvboug7shoCMru_wAhEXI8xOzUAiaOhiGzQ1Y_XX6Hm_DkN8P_C8J4Bg?loadFrom=PastedDeeplink&ts=525.99))
Since 2012, we've been the only agency with a dedicated staff looking at lessons learned and what it could mean for improving Afghanistan development, but also anywhere else around the world. We've issued 12 Lessons Learned reports, and I think as a result of our work, we've been tasked, recently, by a number of senators who I think are thinking ahead, Senator Grassley in one case, and then Senators Kennedy, Sinema, Kramer and Braun, asked us to pull together everything we've done in Afghanistan and see if there's any warning lights going on, any things that they should know about, congress should know about, and also the administration to prepare in Ukraine.

([09:36](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/f6NHEnDy3TSuOYm5rw6htiLykXdmDsJ0wRlHvboug7shoCMru_wAhEXI8xOzUAiaOhiGzQ1Y_XX6Hm_DkN8P_C8J4Bg?loadFrom=PastedDeeplink&ts=576.63))
So we prepared a response which is available on our website. We highlighted a number of actions that should be considered. It's based upon our 12 years of experience in Afghanistan, 1300 audits, 140 recommendations to the various agencies just from our 12 Lessons Learned reports, as well as 27 actions that we recommended the administration take as we go forward. And so again, you can see the entire letter, both letters, one to Senator Grassley and the other to the four senators, on our website. But I don't have time to go into all of them, but I just want to highlight some of the key lessons we identified in those letters.

([10:25](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/f6NHEnDy3TSuOYm5rw6htiLykXdmDsJ0wRlHvboug7shoCMru_wAhEXI8xOzUAiaOhiGzQ1Y_XX6Hm_DkN8P_C8J4Bg?loadFrom=PastedDeeplink&ts=625.92))
The first one, which is obvious, but one that was a serious problem in Afghanistan is we really didn't develop a workable and coherent strategy. It kept changing. And as a result, if you had no strategy, if you don't plan a strategy, you're running into problems because you don't know where you're actually going. As many generals and I think aid officials said, "What's winning in Afghanistan?" We really didn't know. That was a problem and it may be a problem in Ukraine, but we wanted to highlight that. That you got to have a strategy that's coherent that involves the entire government as well as all the other donors involved in it.

([11:11](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/f6NHEnDy3TSuOYm5rw6htiLykXdmDsJ0wRlHvboug7shoCMru_wAhEXI8xOzUAiaOhiGzQ1Y_XX6Hm_DkN8P_C8J4Bg?loadFrom=PastedDeeplink&ts=671.85))
The second point we wanted to make is you definitely need to have a coordinated approach to reconstruction in the country. We did not in Afghanistan. Nobody was really in charge. And for the Ukraine, it's going to be even a bigger problem because there are more players involved, not only US agencies, but also the international donor community, as well as international organizations. And you really need to coordinate those. I think if we look at how we responded during the Marshall Plan, if we look at how we responded after the collapse of the former Soviet Union, we had and we designated one entity or one individual in the case of the former Soviet Union, in charge, to coordinate all of the assistance that's important to make certain it actually works.

([12:16](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/f6NHEnDy3TSuOYm5rw6htiLykXdmDsJ0wRlHvboug7shoCMru_wAhEXI8xOzUAiaOhiGzQ1Y_XX6Hm_DkN8P_C8J4Bg?loadFrom=PastedDeeplink&ts=736.35))
The other thing to keep in mind is the amount of money we're pouring into the Ukraine. And I'm not here to question whether we should spend all of that money, but it is phenomenal what we are spending. One example of that is, in Afghanistan we were usually spending 375 million per month for security assistance. Since we started in Ukraine, we are spending $2.5 billion per month on security assistance. I'm not questioning whether we need to spend that money, but if you're spending that money, you have to realize that there are unanticipated consequences. One, you can just overload the host government, there's an absorptive rate. Can they absorb all that money? The second thing is if that much money's coming in, you know some of it is going to be stolen. And that leads us to another issue that we highlighted, and that is the problem of corruption.

([13:25](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/f6NHEnDy3TSuOYm5rw6htiLykXdmDsJ0wRlHvboug7shoCMru_wAhEXI8xOzUAiaOhiGzQ1Y_XX6Hm_DkN8P_C8J4Bg?loadFrom=PastedDeeplink&ts=805.74))
In Afghanistan, corruption was the existential threat. I think it was General Allen or Ambassador Crocker who testified about that. It wasn't the Taliban, it was corruption that did us in, and we confirmed that. Now the unfortunate thing, and there are big differences between Ukraine and Afghanistan. I don't want to say they're exactly the same, but corruption was a problem in Afghanistan and there's a history of endemic corruption in Ukraine. And that corruption can not only divert money, waste money, but it also can hurt the morale of the people, whether soldiers or civilians, it did in Afghanistan, but it could in Ukraine. And that's an important thing to deal with.

([14:13](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/f6NHEnDy3TSuOYm5rw6htiLykXdmDsJ0wRlHvboug7shoCMru_wAhEXI8xOzUAiaOhiGzQ1Y_XX6Hm_DkN8P_C8J4Bg?loadFrom=PastedDeeplink&ts=853.8))
The important thing to recognize also is, turning around a country that has endemic corruption is a multi-generational effort. You don't expect it to happen, to go away, to win the war on corruption in a matter of a few years. And although I can say that Ukrainian President Zelensky has taken very positive steps with fighting corruption, but because of the urgency of the spending, the secrecy of the spending, it only adds to the possibility of money being diverted to oligarchs and other nefarious individuals.

([14:55](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/f6NHEnDy3TSuOYm5rw6htiLykXdmDsJ0wRlHvboug7shoCMru_wAhEXI8xOzUAiaOhiGzQ1Y_XX6Hm_DkN8P_C8J4Bg?loadFrom=PastedDeeplink&ts=895.71))
Now SIGAR also identified a number of lessons dealing with training, advising and assisting military in Afghanistan, which I won't have time to go into, it's in the letters, but it was a serious problem because of the lack of training, because of the lack of abilities in the military in Afghanistan and the police, and also because of their history of predation on the people. Those are issues to keep in mind as you move forward in Ukraine.

([15:28](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/f6NHEnDy3TSuOYm5rw6htiLykXdmDsJ0wRlHvboug7shoCMru_wAhEXI8xOzUAiaOhiGzQ1Y_XX6Hm_DkN8P_C8J4Bg?loadFrom=PastedDeeplink&ts=928.32))
Two final points to make, following the equipment. Following money was a problem in Afghan, but being able to track the equipment, particularly highly expensive and highly dangerous equipment in Afghanistan was a serious problem. And we're starting to see that in Ukraine. Most of the monitoring and evaluation programs for equipment were not designed in a war zone. And I think you're already starting to see reports by the DODIG and others about equipment not being... Nobody knows what's going on. I just happened to talk to some people who were actually working in Ukraine recently and they said, it's the wild, wild west. Stuff is going everywhere and there's nobody on the ground, US people, very few people on the ground, to follow it.

([16:31](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/f6NHEnDy3TSuOYm5rw6htiLykXdmDsJ0wRlHvboug7shoCMru_wAhEXI8xOzUAiaOhiGzQ1Y_XX6Hm_DkN8P_C8J4Bg?loadFrom=PastedDeeplink&ts=991.83))
Let me end by one other point, and that is monitoring evaluation. Sounds like a boring thing, but if you're running a government program or you're an industry, you want to monitor and evaluate what you're doing and not only measure inputs, the amount of money being spent, or outputs, the amount of shoes you bought or the amount of howitzers you bought or tanks you bought, but what was the end result of spending all that money? And that was a serious problem in Afghanistan. The US government, whether it's USAID or DOD or State, have horrible records on effective monitoring and evaluation. Actually the title of our Lessons Learned report on that was, Doing the Wrong Thing Perfectly. We set up monitoring evaluation programs that checked the box and we felt really nice, wow, we're doing the right thing, but it turns out they were doing the absolute wrong thing and we didn't have the accomplishments we wanted. So let me end with that.

([17:40](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/f6NHEnDy3TSuOYm5rw6htiLykXdmDsJ0wRlHvboug7shoCMru_wAhEXI8xOzUAiaOhiGzQ1Y_XX6Hm_DkN8P_C8J4Bg?loadFrom=PastedDeeplink&ts=1060.11))
And let me just say one important thing. No matter who is doing the oversight, it's important to do it, start now, not eight years from now. Like when they created my office in Afghanistan, it was eight years after we started pouring the money in. By that time a lot of mistakes were made, a lot of money was wasted, and a lot of problems that we could correct had already started. So I'd like to keep that in mind. And I'm looking forward to the other speakers and answering some questions. Thank you.

**Kelley Beaucar Vlahos (**[**18:13**](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/f6NHEnDy3TSuOYm5rw6htiLykXdmDsJ0wRlHvboug7shoCMru_wAhEXI8xOzUAiaOhiGzQ1Y_XX6Hm_DkN8P_C8J4Bg?loadFrom=PastedDeeplink&ts=1093.56)**):**

Thank you, John. I just want to say again how much I appreciate all of the work that your office has done since 2012. As a reporter, I used to pour over your reports and try to get them out to the public as much as possible. And I invite all of the listeners today to take a look at your Lessons Learned and the points that you're making as those lessons apply to Ukraine. And I also want to remind folks, if you do have a question for any of our panelists or in general, please start putting them in the Q&A and we'll try to intersperse those into the conversation as we move along for the next 40 minutes or so. Danielle, you're next up.

**Danielle Brian (**[**18:58**](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/f6NHEnDy3TSuOYm5rw6htiLykXdmDsJ0wRlHvboug7shoCMru_wAhEXI8xOzUAiaOhiGzQ1Y_XX6Hm_DkN8P_C8J4Bg?loadFrom=PastedDeeplink&ts=1138.8)**)**:

Thanks, Kelley. That was fabulous, John. Thank you so much. And I do want to start because I think it's a great topic to be talking about the lessons learned, but it is important to emphasize the point John made, which is there are important differences, not only in Afghanistan where we the occupying force, and there was a civil war before and after we were there, and in Ukraine there are a victim of an invasion and we're supporting sovereignty. But equally important, and John started to touch on this, Ukraine does remain at the bottom of Transparency International's list of corruption perceptions in Europe. But for the past decade, Ukraine has developed an enviable anti-corruption infrastructure. It's an ecosystem that was largely lacking in Afghan government or civil society. So unlike in Afghanistan, it's going to be essential for the US to be partnering with those Ukrainian government and civil society anti-corruption institutions to ensure success.

([19:52](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/f6NHEnDy3TSuOYm5rw6htiLykXdmDsJ0wRlHvboug7shoCMru_wAhEXI8xOzUAiaOhiGzQ1Y_XX6Hm_DkN8P_C8J4Bg?loadFrom=PastedDeeplink&ts=1192.77))
That is not to say that there aren't important oversight lessons that we do need to apply wherever we're spending enormous sums of money quickly. And as both Kelley and John, you've pointed out, the velocity of US spending in Ukraine is dwarfing that in Afghanistan. So first it's, I believe, is essential that when there is a surge of funding that we need a commensurate surge in resources to conduct the necessary oversight. Not only is the supplemental oversight budget for Ukraine spending paltry, it is already straining the agencies that were already under-resourced.

([20:28](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/f6NHEnDy3TSuOYm5rw6htiLykXdmDsJ0wRlHvboug7shoCMru_wAhEXI8xOzUAiaOhiGzQ1Y_XX6Hm_DkN8P_C8J4Bg?loadFrom=PastedDeeplink&ts=1228.17))
So as USAID administrator Samantha Powers noted, each USAID contracting officer manages four times as many as their counterparts at DOD. And we all know that DOD is not the gold standard. They continue not to have proper systems in place to track assets. They've still not passed a financial audit, this is their fifth failure, and they cannot identify and locate two thirds of their assets. And as we've seen in Afghanistan, the DOD remains vulnerable to price gouging by contractors as they are routinely prevented, the DOD is prevented from accessing certified cost and pricing data. Just recently it was established that DOD had miscalculated the value of replacement weapons due to transfers to Ukraine by over $6 billion. Now, that was an error in our favor, but that's a great example of weak systems in place.

([21:24](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/f6NHEnDy3TSuOYm5rw6htiLykXdmDsJ0wRlHvboug7shoCMru_wAhEXI8xOzUAiaOhiGzQ1Y_XX6Hm_DkN8P_C8J4Bg?loadFrom=PastedDeeplink&ts=1284.63))
The US also has weak systems in end use monitoring. So the DODIG just reported that early in the Russian invasion, criminals got their hands on small arms and bulletproof vests. In general, the state and Pentagon end use monitoring systems are not designed to monitor the actual use of the technologies, but instead are focused more on their location. So those systems need to be improved as well. It's important to note that the DODIG only learned about those crimes because Ukrainian intelligence uncovered them. In fact, Ukraine has a far better and more transparent system of tracking public procurement contracts than the US does because they have something called their ProZorro database.

([22:06](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/f6NHEnDy3TSuOYm5rw6htiLykXdmDsJ0wRlHvboug7shoCMru_wAhEXI8xOzUAiaOhiGzQ1Y_XX6Hm_DkN8P_C8J4Bg?loadFrom=PastedDeeplink&ts=1326.93))
But rather than learning the lessons about what systems need to be improved, the Pentagon is busy promoting the idea that the most important lesson learned is the need for more multi-year contracts. What a surprise. Their focus is not on how to better hold themselves accountable, but more on how to keep the gravy train running. And as my colleague Julia Gledhill just wrote for Responsible Statecraft, thank you Kelley, this week, lawmakers cannot allow the war in Ukraine to become another pathway for contractors to pursue excess profits at the expense of the Pentagon and taxpayers. More money does not solve acquisition issues. It exacerbates existing ones and clears the path to more waste, fraud and abuse. Unfortunately, by passing emergency procurement powers in the NDAA, that is exactly what the Congress is doing.

([22:56](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/f6NHEnDy3TSuOYm5rw6htiLykXdmDsJ0wRlHvboug7shoCMru_wAhEXI8xOzUAiaOhiGzQ1Y_XX6Hm_DkN8P_C8J4Bg?loadFrom=PastedDeeplink&ts=1376.49))
But perhaps the most salient lesson we've learned from Afghanistan is that Congress and the President need to pay attention to the red flags raised by IGs. If they had listened to John Sopko, they would not only have known they should have withdrawn from Afghanistan years earlier, they also would not have been surprised by the speed of the collapse after our withdrawal.

([23:19](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/f6NHEnDy3TSuOYm5rw6htiLykXdmDsJ0wRlHvboug7shoCMru_wAhEXI8xOzUAiaOhiGzQ1Y_XX6Hm_DkN8P_C8J4Bg?loadFrom=PastedDeeplink&ts=1399.2))
The second lesson is when DOD and State start withholding information from an IG and/or Congress, it likely means there's embarrassing news they would rather not share. So for many years, both DOD and State have been withholding important information, oh and AID as well, from the SIGAR and Congress and the President have not done enough to support the IG's access to that information.

([23:42](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/f6NHEnDy3TSuOYm5rw6htiLykXdmDsJ0wRlHvboug7shoCMru_wAhEXI8xOzUAiaOhiGzQ1Y_XX6Hm_DkN8P_C8J4Bg?loadFrom=PastedDeeplink&ts=1422.72))
We've also learned that vacancies in inspector general shops often lead those agencies to avoid politically sensitive topics. The red flags raised by Sopko and the SIGAR were not raised by the agency inspectors general. And currently there are vacancies both at the state and USAID Inspector General shop. After years of those offices, years, remaining vacant, President Biden just nominated people to fill those positions yesterday, and the Senate should consider those nominations promptly.

([24:13](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/f6NHEnDy3TSuOYm5rw6htiLykXdmDsJ0wRlHvboug7shoCMru_wAhEXI8xOzUAiaOhiGzQ1Y_XX6Hm_DkN8P_C8J4Bg?loadFrom=PastedDeeplink&ts=1453.29))
But in the end, in order to ensure that the Ukrainian people receive the support the US are sending them, we need far stronger systems in place here in the US. The benefits of transparency and oversight and the damage caused by the lack of these accountability features are not only lessons we've learned in Afghanistan, we have learned them repeatedly here at home, for example, when COVID relief funds were wasted and misdirected into the wrong hands. I would note that in that scenario, the relevant agency inspectors general were formally organized in an inter-agency committee, but they were not successful in preventing the fraud that occurred. Their former executive director has just come out with a book detailing how they failed. A primary reason, and this is something that you can learn from the SIGAR's approach, is that agency IGs cannot take a whole of government approach, but are limited to the programs and operations of their individual agencies.

([25:06](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/f6NHEnDy3TSuOYm5rw6htiLykXdmDsJ0wRlHvboug7shoCMru_wAhEXI8xOzUAiaOhiGzQ1Y_XX6Hm_DkN8P_C8J4Bg?loadFrom=PastedDeeplink&ts=1506.36))
I've really come to believe that whenever there is an unusual appropriation of funds that dwarfs department operations, that a new Special IG should be created with a sunset when those funds are expended, [inaudible 00:25:19] oversight, and can approach the success of the mission from a whole of government approach. And I understand as of last night, the Senate has failed to learn that lesson as they voted down proposals to create such an entity for Ukraine, so it looks like we all have some work ahead.

**Kelley Beaucar Vlahos (**[**25:42**](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/f6NHEnDy3TSuOYm5rw6htiLykXdmDsJ0wRlHvboug7shoCMru_wAhEXI8xOzUAiaOhiGzQ1Y_XX6Hm_DkN8P_C8J4Bg?loadFrom=PastedDeeplink&ts=1542)**)**:

Sorry, Danielle. I was reaching for the mute and couldn't find it fast enough. Thank you so much and thank you to POGO for all the amazing work that you've been doing on oversight and bringing attention to all of these issues over the years. Because I know you've been pretty dogged at it, and the dog and the watchdog for sure, so thank you. Andrew, can you give us your perspective on all of this?

**Andrew Bacevich (**[**26:09**](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/f6NHEnDy3TSuOYm5rw6htiLykXdmDsJ0wRlHvboug7shoCMru_wAhEXI8xOzUAiaOhiGzQ1Y_XX6Hm_DkN8P_C8J4Bg?loadFrom=PastedDeeplink&ts=1569.09)**)**:

I bring to the table very limited expertise with regard to Afghanistan and with regard to efforts in Ukraine. My own training was in history, and for a time, I guess I was something of a student of American imperialism. And one of the things that has struck me as a student of American imperialism is the expectations that inform our efforts to rebuild a nation, to reconstruct a state, going at least as far back, for example, as the aftermath of the Spanish American War and the US occupation of the Philippines as it became a colony. And certainly in the 20th century there are other examples of ambitious projects undertaken, in the Caribbean, for example, in the 19 teens and 1920s, vividly, expensively in Vietnam in the 1960s. And one of the things that just strikes me in terms of as a common theme is the wildly inflated expectations of what the United States government is capable of doing if it sets its mind to some task and if it's willing to expend a certain number of resources.

([27:36](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/f6NHEnDy3TSuOYm5rw6htiLykXdmDsJ0wRlHvboug7shoCMru_wAhEXI8xOzUAiaOhiGzQ1Y_XX6Hm_DkN8P_C8J4Bg?loadFrom=PastedDeeplink&ts=1656.45))
I'm struck by the extent to which the definition of the task is defined in ideological terms, usually that we're in the business of exporting democracy. That was the case in Vietnam in the 1960s. It was certainly the case in, let's say, in Somalia in the wake of the Cold War. And as far as I can tell, it was the case very much in Afghanistan and Iraq in the wake of 9/11. I would speculate, and that's all I can do is merely speculate, that the reason that the expectations and objectives in Afghanistan came to be unrealistic, at least unrealistic from my perspective, was because of the influence of Iraq.

([28:23](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/f6NHEnDy3TSuOYm5rw6htiLykXdmDsJ0wRlHvboug7shoCMru_wAhEXI8xOzUAiaOhiGzQ1Y_XX6Hm_DkN8P_C8J4Bg?loadFrom=PastedDeeplink&ts=1703.88))
We have to remember that just as the Afghanistan occupation and nation building project was beginning in the, basically in let's say 2002, at the same time, the real conversation in Washington was not about what to do about Afghanistan. The real conversation in Washington was about the forthcoming war, the one that everybody knew was coming, the forthcoming war in Iraq and what that war was expected to do. And President George W. Bush was quite clear on those expectations. We were going to war to spread democracy. The war, when the war finally commenced in 2003, he christened it Operation Iraqi Freedom. And of course by that time the ongoing conflict in Afghanistan was Operation Enduring Freedom.

([29:17](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/f6NHEnDy3TSuOYm5rw6htiLykXdmDsJ0wRlHvboug7shoCMru_wAhEXI8xOzUAiaOhiGzQ1Y_XX6Hm_DkN8P_C8J4Bg?loadFrom=PastedDeeplink&ts=1757.58))
So I guess my one comment, and I would ask my fellow panelists to respond to it if they think there's something to respond to, has to do with this ideological veneer that gets applied to our, I'll call them imperial, our imperial efforts, and my sense that the application of the ideological veneer really is a first step to the loss of realism, the loss of any realistic appreciation about what we can actually expect to accomplish, whether it was in the Philippines back in 1903 or whether it was in Vietnam in the 1960s or whether it was in Afghanistan and Iraq after 9/11. I'll stop there and look forward to any reaction that they may have.

**Kelley Beaucar Vlahos (**[**30:11**](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/f6NHEnDy3TSuOYm5rw6htiLykXdmDsJ0wRlHvboug7shoCMru_wAhEXI8xOzUAiaOhiGzQ1Y_XX6Hm_DkN8P_C8J4Bg?loadFrom=PastedDeeplink&ts=1811.67)**)**:

Thank you, Andrew, for that context, historical context as always. We're starting to get a bunch of questions in the Q&A, and a few of them have followed similar themes, and it was actually part of the question that I was going to ask John next about lessons learned. John, you noted that your lessons learned that you were able to chart out was spurred by a request from members of Congress. How receptive has Congress been in the past to all of your reports warning about waste, fraud and abuse? If we are to engage in serious oversight in Ukraine, Congress must be proactive and support the Inspector General's heading this oversight. Do you have confidence that lawmakers have learned their lessons from Afghanistan, that they are taking these issues seriously enough and providing teeth and the resolve that is necessary to track the billions we are sending in Ukraine?

([31:10](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/f6NHEnDy3TSuOYm5rw6htiLykXdmDsJ0wRlHvboug7shoCMru_wAhEXI8xOzUAiaOhiGzQ1Y_XX6Hm_DkN8P_C8J4Bg?loadFrom=PastedDeeplink&ts=1870.71))
In other words, do you feel the mandated recipients of your reports effectively used the information you produced in the years leading up to the withdrawal? And those questions come from Paul Shenkman, Al Carter and myself.

**John Sopko (**[**31:30**](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/f6NHEnDy3TSuOYm5rw6htiLykXdmDsJ0wRlHvboug7shoCMru_wAhEXI8xOzUAiaOhiGzQ1Y_XX6Hm_DkN8P_C8J4Bg?loadFrom=PastedDeeplink&ts=1890.09)**)**:

It's a very good question, and unfortunately, and I think probably Andrew can speak to this as well as Danielle, we in the United States are not very good at learning lessons, and more importantly, applying them. Because the lessons aren't learned until very actually, from the military perspective, turned into doctrine in the process and from other perspectives.

([31:54](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/f6NHEnDy3TSuOYm5rw6htiLykXdmDsJ0wRlHvboug7shoCMru_wAhEXI8xOzUAiaOhiGzQ1Y_XX6Hm_DkN8P_C8J4Bg?loadFrom=PastedDeeplink&ts=1914.81))
A lot of members of Congress over the years have been very supportive of our reports and have tried to do things about it. And a lot of people in the various agencies have. Unfortunately, probably not as many as could've, should've, would've, which may explain why, to some extent, things didn't turn out as well as we expected.

([32:26](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/f6NHEnDy3TSuOYm5rw6htiLykXdmDsJ0wRlHvboug7shoCMru_wAhEXI8xOzUAiaOhiGzQ1Y_XX6Hm_DkN8P_C8J4Bg?loadFrom=PastedDeeplink&ts=1946.55))
Part of that is if you're an IG, you're also running against a strong headwind. There are plenty of people who've made a lot of money in Afghanistan. There are a lot of people who got promotions in Afghanistan. And I would say, and you go back to Iraq, you go back to Vietnam, very few people lost their promotions by failing or by ignoring the problems in Afghanistan. So when we were writing our reports, the DOD or GAO, well you had other people going up to the Hill saying, giving what we called happy talk. Everything's going well. We're about ready to turn the corner. Give us a couple hundred million more, give us 10,000 more troops, give us whatever and things will improve. We turned the corner so often we did 360, we were backwards and whatever. I call it, a bit of hubris and mendacity.

([33:45](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/f6NHEnDy3TSuOYm5rw6htiLykXdmDsJ0wRlHvboug7shoCMru_wAhEXI8xOzUAiaOhiGzQ1Y_XX6Hm_DkN8P_C8J4Bg?loadFrom=PastedDeeplink&ts=2025.09))
And part of it is the way our system is set up with annual appropriations. You got to show success so Congress will give you more money. Part of it is the way we promote people. They're on six month, one year tours, they got to show success. So they guild the lily a little bit. Very few, and Andrew, I know you served in the military and you may want to comment on that. I mean, very few colonels and majors and generals and aid officials who were called up to the Hill during the last 12 years said, "We're losing." Or, "We got to change things." And I think it's just that they're pushed into this hubris mendacity. The hubris to think that we can actually turn a country that's in the fourth century around into little Norway, and that was Afghanistan, and the mendacity, I don't call it lying, but you kind of gilded the lily. So I'll answer it that way. But we still had a lot of people who didn't believe that and believed what we were doing, but we just didn't have enough people, I think, who felt that way.

**Kelley Beaucar Vlahos (**[**34:57**](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/f6NHEnDy3TSuOYm5rw6htiLykXdmDsJ0wRlHvboug7shoCMru_wAhEXI8xOzUAiaOhiGzQ1Y_XX6Hm_DkN8P_C8J4Bg?loadFrom=PastedDeeplink&ts=2097.99)**)**:

Well, continuing on that theme, and thank you for that, Danielle, you mentioned that the Senate polled an amendment or voted against amendment that would've created a Special Inspector General, much like John's agency in charge of Ukraine aid, mostly because the White House has resisted the idea. They came out very publicly against a Special Inspector General for Ukraine aid, and their response or their reaction to these calls for a Special Inspector General was, there are enough IGs out there, there are enough eyes on the situation, we don't need to create this overarching oversight role. Can you tell me a little bit about how POGO feels about that explanation and why you think there should be a Special Inspector General for oversight?

**Danielle Brian (**[**35:52**](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/f6NHEnDy3TSuOYm5rw6htiLykXdmDsJ0wRlHvboug7shoCMru_wAhEXI8xOzUAiaOhiGzQ1Y_XX6Hm_DkN8P_C8J4Bg?loadFrom=PastedDeeplink&ts=2152.17)**)**:

Yes, thanks Kelley. It is frustrating because that is a lesson that I think everyone can see in plain daylight is how valuable having the Special Inspector General was for Afghanistan. His team were all giving us lessons and telling truths that were not coming from those agency IGs. And I think it's really a point that is clear when you look at how John's reports have come through. To some extent that was even true with the less successful but still valuable Special Inspector General for Iraq Reconstruction as well. They also could demonstrate that their analysis was actually getting to the bigger questions that the Congress needed to know, is this working? Not, is this particular program that is run by a particular agency working, but is the mission? Where are we with that? That wasn't information that you were getting anywhere other than in Special Inspector General.

([36:44](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/f6NHEnDy3TSuOYm5rw6htiLykXdmDsJ0wRlHvboug7shoCMru_wAhEXI8xOzUAiaOhiGzQ1Y_XX6Hm_DkN8P_C8J4Bg?loadFrom=PastedDeeplink&ts=2204.97))
And I frankly think when you see presidents saying they don't like to have that oversight it's because they don't, as I sort of mentioned, they don't like the bad news. At least they don't want everyone else to know about the bad news. And it's also something that we've seen over the years, part of the pushback is from those agency IGs themselves, and this is sort of classic bureaucratic turf hoarding, where they don't want someone else crowding their space. They want to be the ones in charge. I'm not suggesting that we shouldn't have those IGs. We've been very strong and I'm very glad that there are finally nominees for those agency IGs. We need them and we also need a Special IG who's looking at that whole government, the application of all those programs.

([37:31](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/f6NHEnDy3TSuOYm5rw6htiLykXdmDsJ0wRlHvboug7shoCMru_wAhEXI8xOzUAiaOhiGzQ1Y_XX6Hm_DkN8P_C8J4Bg?loadFrom=PastedDeeplink&ts=2251.17))
I also did want to just get back to the point that Andrew was making before, I think it is so important looking at history and if we'd really studied it, of course, we would've been able to see upfront that we couldn't be exporting democracy in the way we see it in Afghanistan. But that's how I started my remarks is I'm not sure that's the lesson that I see as being the most important one with Ukraine, where there already is a thriving democracy. So I see all these other lessons as being lessons to learn from Afghanistan, but not as much that part of the lesson.

**Kelley Beaucar Vlahos (**[**38:05**](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/f6NHEnDy3TSuOYm5rw6htiLykXdmDsJ0wRlHvboug7shoCMru_wAhEXI8xOzUAiaOhiGzQ1Y_XX6Hm_DkN8P_C8J4Bg?loadFrom=PastedDeeplink&ts=2285.7)**)**:

Okay, thank you. Andy, I have another contextual question for you. I know you've watched closely since the war in a Afghanistan began how the US and its partners were training the Afghan military and later the Iraqi forces with billions of dollars of direct cash and weapons and training. According to SIGAR, the efforts to train and stand up an Afghan army was hindered by their "corruption, their predation and their dependency on the US." Washington has spent over $44 billion to date on military assistance to Ukraine as of this week. It is sending over our most sophisticated missile defense systems and has exhausted our supplies of ammunition. We are training soldiers here and paying European partners to train them over there. When you look at what is going on today and look back on our efforts in this realm in Afghanistan and Iraq, what concerns you the most about how this might potentially play out?

**Andrew Bacevich (**[**39:18**](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/f6NHEnDy3TSuOYm5rw6htiLykXdmDsJ0wRlHvboug7shoCMru_wAhEXI8xOzUAiaOhiGzQ1Y_XX6Hm_DkN8P_C8J4Bg?loadFrom=PastedDeeplink&ts=2358.78)):

The key differential here is motivation. Our efforts in Iraq and Afghanistan to build an effective army failed. Those efforts didn't fail because we didn't provide an adequate supply of weaponry, because we provided a huge amount of weaponry and there was a serious effort undertaken in both cases to train up local forces to impart competence. But in neither Iraq or Afghanistan did we and our partners, because it wasn't just a US effort, in neither case did we or our partners have the ability to inculcate motivation, to persuade young Iraqis and young Afghans that the cause, the imperial cause was worth their fighting and dying for.

([40:14](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/f6NHEnDy3TSuOYm5rw6htiLykXdmDsJ0wRlHvboug7shoCMru_wAhEXI8xOzUAiaOhiGzQ1Y_XX6Hm_DkN8P_C8J4Bg?loadFrom=PastedDeeplink&ts=2414.43))
And I think this is a key difference with Ukraine. We don't have to motivate Ukrainian soldiers. They have sources of motivation that are very powerful. They're fighting for the survival of their nation. And therefore the train and equip mission is fundamentally different than it was in Afghanistan and Iraq. All we need to do is train and equip, and the motivation will develop on its own. And in that sense, I think the Ukraine problem, from a military perspective, the Ukraine problem is somewhat simpler than it was in Iraq and Afghanistan. And I'll leave it at that.

**Kelley Beaucar Vlahos (**[**41:01**](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/f6NHEnDy3TSuOYm5rw6htiLykXdmDsJ0wRlHvboug7shoCMru_wAhEXI8xOzUAiaOhiGzQ1Y_XX6Hm_DkN8P_C8J4Bg?loadFrom=PastedDeeplink&ts=2461.38)**)**:

Great, thank you so much. John, just looking back a tiny bit, and not so far, because the issues of Afghan reconstruction continue today, as you have testified. Let's talk a little bit about the $8 billion in aid that I understand that you are still overseeing in Afghanistan post withdrawal. In April, you told the House Oversight Committee that the State Department and other agencies are failing to provide legally mandated information to your office that would allow you to perform your oversight duties. You said quote, "I cannot report to this committee or the American people on the extent to which our government may be funding the Taliban and other nefarious groups with US taxpayer dollars. We simply do not know, since the Department of State, USAID, the UN and other agencies are refusing to give us basic information that we, or any other oversight body, would need to ensure safe stewardship of tax dollars."

([42:06](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/f6NHEnDy3TSuOYm5rw6htiLykXdmDsJ0wRlHvboug7shoCMru_wAhEXI8xOzUAiaOhiGzQ1Y_XX6Hm_DkN8P_C8J4Bg?loadFrom=PastedDeeplink&ts=2526.72))
I ask you now, has that situation changed? As for the reticence of the government buy-in to what you're doing, how much has Congress, the White House and federal agencies hindered your work in this regard? And what does that say about their ability to prevent issues from happening in Ukraine?

**John Sopko (**[**42:27**](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/f6NHEnDy3TSuOYm5rw6htiLykXdmDsJ0wRlHvboug7shoCMru_wAhEXI8xOzUAiaOhiGzQ1Y_XX6Hm_DkN8P_C8J4Bg?loadFrom=PastedDeeplink&ts=2547.72)**)**:

Thank you. It's a good question. It has improved. And in part it has improved because of Congress's support for my mission and my agency. Just so people know, with the role of IGs, I can't force the government to answer the mail. I can't subpoena the government. No IG can subpoena a government employee, a government agency. I can only make requests. And if the requests are not responded to in a timely manner or they're refused and an IG, whoever he or she may be, that makes the determination, an independent determination of that refusal or slowness in responding is unreasonable, under the IG Act, I then am required to notify the appropriate congressional committees to act. And in the case of the problems we've had with State, mainly with State, AID to some extent, the Congress pushed and said, "Hey, the SIGAR is still in existence. You have to answer the mail." And I feel better about that.

([43:53](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/f6NHEnDy3TSuOYm5rw6htiLykXdmDsJ0wRlHvboug7shoCMru_wAhEXI8xOzUAiaOhiGzQ1Y_XX6Hm_DkN8P_C8J4Bg?loadFrom=PastedDeeplink&ts=2633.01))
Big problem we still have is with the UN. Because most of our money, that money is going through international organizations, the UN World Food Programme. And international organizations have been less than candid in explaining how they spend the money. And I will say I just spent some time talking to a number of people who have networks in Afghanistan and they're basically telling me it's not a question if money is being diverted to the Taliban, it is a question of how much. And it's extensive. And there are serious problems and we'll be discussing it more in our QR, quarterly report, that comes out next week with the UN. So we're going to be raising that.

([44:43](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/f6NHEnDy3TSuOYm5rw6htiLykXdmDsJ0wRlHvboug7shoCMru_wAhEXI8xOzUAiaOhiGzQ1Y_XX6Hm_DkN8P_C8J4Bg?loadFrom=PastedDeeplink&ts=2683.47))
I have an open request to get briefed by the UN. I think it's over a year old. I have similar requests to the State Department and to the AID administrator to get briefed on how they're operating and what are they doing. And what's troubling to me, particularly troubling, is information that we just uncovered, which shows that the problems with the UN, and it's USAID money and State money that's going through that, USAID has known about these problems for a matter of months. And our question is, what have you done AID about that information? And that concerns me.

([45:30](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/f6NHEnDy3TSuOYm5rw6htiLykXdmDsJ0wRlHvboug7shoCMru_wAhEXI8xOzUAiaOhiGzQ1Y_XX6Hm_DkN8P_C8J4Bg?loadFrom=PastedDeeplink&ts=2730.27))
There's a strange attitude among some of the bureaucrats that it's okay to ignore the reality on the ground in Afghanistan because it's only bad news. But I'm sorry, Congress has a right to know and the taxpayers have a right to know how their money is being spent and is it actually helping the Afghan people?

**Danielle Brian (**[**45:58**](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/f6NHEnDy3TSuOYm5rw6htiLykXdmDsJ0wRlHvboug7shoCMru_wAhEXI8xOzUAiaOhiGzQ1Y_XX6Hm_DkN8P_C8J4Bg?loadFrom=PastedDeeplink&ts=2758.08)**)**:

If I could add, the point you're raising, John, also is exactly why we need a Special Inspector General because so much of the funds are going to these international bodies and those agency inspectors general don't have access or authority to dig into what's going on with all those funds. And that's why you need to have some kind of Special Inspector General who can do that.

**John Sopko (**[**46:20**](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/f6NHEnDy3TSuOYm5rw6htiLykXdmDsJ0wRlHvboug7shoCMru_wAhEXI8xOzUAiaOhiGzQ1Y_XX6Hm_DkN8P_C8J4Bg?loadFrom=PastedDeeplink&ts=2780.91)**)**:

I agree with you. I mean, it's my personal opinion. It's not the opinion of my agency. The point you made, and we could cite chapter and verse of this, is where we didn't look at the individual program. We didn't look at inputs and outputs. We looked at outcomes. And I felt that we, as SIGAR, as the Special IG, this is our only country. I cannot defer my duty by saying I'm too busy looking at aid programs in Guatemala or military programs getting ready for China. I was totally responsible just for one thing, one country, Afghanistan, so we focused on Afghans. I couldn't hide my incompetency by saying, "oh, well we're busy doing someplace somewhere else." That's the difference of a Special Inspector General. You're created for a special problem, special mission, and when it ends, you disappear. I'm a firm believer in also temporary government agencies. I think we have too many government agencies that have outlived their usefulness, but that is the mission.

([47:30](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/f6NHEnDy3TSuOYm5rw6htiLykXdmDsJ0wRlHvboug7shoCMru_wAhEXI8xOzUAiaOhiGzQ1Y_XX6Hm_DkN8P_C8J4Bg?loadFrom=PastedDeeplink&ts=2850.72))
So rather than look at an individual program, I'll give you an example. There was the G.222, couple hundred million dollars to buy airplanes out of a boneyard in Italy. Problem with the airplanes is they couldn't fly. But other than that, they were great for the Italians and for the people who arranged the contract. DODIG, if I'm not mistaken, had gone in before and analyzed the availability of spare parts. It was a good audit, very good report, but they didn't ask the big question is, why did we buy the planes and why were they sitting on the runway in Kabul for over a year just with trees growing between them? And that's how we discovered them. You had somebody on the ground kicking the tires.

([48:18](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/f6NHEnDy3TSuOYm5rw6htiLykXdmDsJ0wRlHvboug7shoCMru_wAhEXI8xOzUAiaOhiGzQ1Y_XX6Hm_DkN8P_C8J4Bg?loadFrom=PastedDeeplink&ts=2898.99))
So those are the type of things we asked as a Special IG because that was our job to educate Congress and the administration, the administrations who handled it, as to what to do. And so that's the distinction I'm glad you made, Danielle.

**Kelley Beaucar Vlahos (**[**48:37**](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/f6NHEnDy3TSuOYm5rw6htiLykXdmDsJ0wRlHvboug7shoCMru_wAhEXI8xOzUAiaOhiGzQ1Y_XX6Hm_DkN8P_C8J4Bg?loadFrom=PastedDeeplink&ts=2917.38)**)**:

John, we have a question apropos of this discussion, and I don't know if you can answer it or not, but it's from John Mueller, I believe John Mueller from the Cato Institute, asking if you have any estimates of how much USAID to Afghanistan ended up in Taliban hands?

**John Sopko (**[**48:56**](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/f6NHEnDy3TSuOYm5rw6htiLykXdmDsJ0wRlHvboug7shoCMru_wAhEXI8xOzUAiaOhiGzQ1Y_XX6Hm_DkN8P_C8J4Bg?loadFrom=PastedDeeplink&ts=2936.64)**)**:

We don't yet, but we are going to try to answer that question because the House Foreign Relations Committee specifically asked us that. And that's what we're working on now. That's one of the reasons why I've been doing some outreach with my staff to people who have connections on the ground. We're blind, and so is our agencies. We don't have any Americans working in Afghanistan. And with the exception of maybe some over the horizon radar and satellites, but we don't have people on the ground. You need somebody on the ground to kick the tires. We don't.

([49:33](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/f6NHEnDy3TSuOYm5rw6htiLykXdmDsJ0wRlHvboug7shoCMru_wAhEXI8xOzUAiaOhiGzQ1Y_XX6Hm_DkN8P_C8J4Bg?loadFrom=PastedDeeplink&ts=2973.66))
So we're trying to reach out to people who are working there. And I've talked to a number of NGOs, I've talked to dozens of Afghans, my staff has, to learn more about it. And we are hearing from the UN, but not officially. Unofficially, we're hearing from the UN. We're not hearing officially from the State Department. We're hearing unofficially. Because there are people in these agencies who are outraged, who are upset. So we're going to try to answer that question. Congress is asking it. And even if Congress didn't ask it, I felt it's my job, because the taxpayers want to know how much money so they can make a determination. Should we spend more, spend less? Should we build a system that's a better system to protect it? That's basically our job.

**Kelley Beaucar Vlahos (**[**50:23**](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/f6NHEnDy3TSuOYm5rw6htiLykXdmDsJ0wRlHvboug7shoCMru_wAhEXI8xOzUAiaOhiGzQ1Y_XX6Hm_DkN8P_C8J4Bg?loadFrom=PastedDeeplink&ts=3023.88)**)**:

Let's keep on the taxpayer and the American point of view for a second. Andy, the war in Ukraine has been marked by generous financial aid and emotional support by Americans who want to ensure that Ukrainians can defend themselves and their country to right the wrongs of the Russian invasion. To this date, a plurality of American responses in various polls say they want to continue the support. The aid in itself represents, I believe, and they believe, US backing for the Ukrainian cause. Do you think that all of this talk about oversight, the possibilities of corruption and fraud, make Americans, particularly our elected officials, a little squeamish? Because if talking like that might suggest other than a 100% support for the cause. In other words, might there be political even ideological reasons for not making oversight a top issue and just sort of putting it aside for now?

**Andrew Bacevich (**[**51:35**](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/f6NHEnDy3TSuOYm5rw6htiLykXdmDsJ0wRlHvboug7shoCMru_wAhEXI8xOzUAiaOhiGzQ1Y_XX6Hm_DkN8P_C8J4Bg?loadFrom=PastedDeeplink&ts=3095.7)**)**:

Well, it won't be put aside, but it may be undermined, postponed. I mean, one of the things we haven't talked about, I think, is domestic politics. We all understand the political calendar and that for all practical purposes the campaign for the next presidential election is now engaged, underway. And anything it seems to me that happens in Ukraine that would touch on, for example, the misuse, misdirection of funds is politically sensitive and can be used to attack a supporter of Ukraine support who is insufficiently sensitive to money being misused or diverted. So my sense is that, and my sense is certainly that that tendency is going to become more acute the closer we get to the fall of 2024. The entire issue is already drenched with domestic politics and that will continue to be the case.

**Kelley Beaucar Vlahos (**[**52:52**](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/f6NHEnDy3TSuOYm5rw6htiLykXdmDsJ0wRlHvboug7shoCMru_wAhEXI8xOzUAiaOhiGzQ1Y_XX6Hm_DkN8P_C8J4Bg?loadFrom=PastedDeeplink&ts=3172.41)**)**:

Yeah, I agree. I have a couple questions, Danielle, that I think that you might want to address. Sam Parker says the DOD, USAID and State IGs consistently say that quote, "No significant cases of waste, fraud and abuse of USAID to Ukraine have been substantiated." What do you make of this claim? And Neil Gordon asked, in what ways can Ukraine aid transparency be improved? So I didn't know if you wanted to tackle each or either of those questions?

**Danielle Brian (**[**53:28**](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/f6NHEnDy3TSuOYm5rw6htiLykXdmDsJ0wRlHvboug7shoCMru_wAhEXI8xOzUAiaOhiGzQ1Y_XX6Hm_DkN8P_C8J4Bg?loadFrom=PastedDeeplink&ts=3208.83)**)**:

Well, the first question, I think the answer is the only diversion that we're aware of is that which was discovered by the Ukrainians themselves and reported to the US by the DODIG. And that's because we don't have people on the ground there. There are some current efforts by those agency IGs, but they're talking about a handful of people, very few people. Obviously we're in a war zone, but we're talking about even people near the source of conflict and developing those sources that they need to have.

([54:03](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/f6NHEnDy3TSuOYm5rw6htiLykXdmDsJ0wRlHvboug7shoCMru_wAhEXI8xOzUAiaOhiGzQ1Y_XX6Hm_DkN8P_C8J4Bg?loadFrom=PastedDeeplink&ts=3243.36))
And I can say, having talked to some of the people who are a part of those agency IGs, they have an added complexity because of the sophisticated misinformation campaigns that Russia has been adding to the systems, which didn't really exist, I think, previously. So they're getting bombarded constantly by this through technology, bad information to the IGs to have to sift through to figure out what is actually a good source or not. So I'm not suggesting this is easy work and it's stuff that I think everyone's learning at the same time over there. So I would say the fact that they haven't found it yet doesn't mean it's not there. It's just we don't have the systems in place to help find what's going on, is essentially the first answer.

([54:50](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/f6NHEnDy3TSuOYm5rw6htiLykXdmDsJ0wRlHvboug7shoCMru_wAhEXI8xOzUAiaOhiGzQ1Y_XX6Hm_DkN8P_C8J4Bg?loadFrom=PastedDeeplink&ts=3290.85))
And then to the question of how can, Neil's question of how can outside watchdogs help? I think really it's important to uplift the really magnificent and thriving civil society that is in Ukraine. I've had the honor to be able to speak with Ukrainian civil society leaders in darkened rooms, who are there in conflict hearing conflict all around them. And they are there, along with the Ukrainian military, defending their country. They're there fighting to restore some of the systems they had in place. One example is, that Ukraine already had a requirement that all of their political officials publicly identify all of their assets so that they could ensure that, unlike with the former Soviet Union as it was breaking down, officials couldn't start capturing public assets as their own. And that system was temporarily put on hold, but apparently they're actually, I think as of this week, it is going to be restored and Ukraine is actually going to be requiring all their public officials to publicly identify all of their assets. So I think a big part of that is supporting the civil society that is pushing for those kinds of systems.

**John Sopko (**[**56:12**](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/f6NHEnDy3TSuOYm5rw6htiLykXdmDsJ0wRlHvboug7shoCMru_wAhEXI8xOzUAiaOhiGzQ1Y_XX6Hm_DkN8P_C8J4Bg?loadFrom=PastedDeeplink&ts=3372.48)**)**:

Can I just add one thing to what Danielle's saying? There are some great systems in place. The important thing is, almost every one of those systems were in place in Afghanistan. We required all the Afghan officials to file forms. The problem is there was no money given and that's why you got to pull the threads. You got to look. And the problem is there was no money given and no authority for the Afghan oversight committees to actually follow up. So yeah, there was a file. I think the president of Afghanistan listed his books as the only thing he owned. Most of his officials, no one ever followed up.

([56:50](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/f6NHEnDy3TSuOYm5rw6htiLykXdmDsJ0wRlHvboug7shoCMru_wAhEXI8xOzUAiaOhiGzQ1Y_XX6Hm_DkN8P_C8J4Bg?loadFrom=PastedDeeplink&ts=3410.61))
So I go back to your initial question. If you don't look, if you don't pull the thread, you're never going to find the problem. I think we're starting slow. I'm glad they're doing something, but I'm certain, I don't know if any of you ever saw the movie War Dogs about those two kids out of Miami who basically went around the world buying useless hardware to sell to the Afghans under US contract. Well, I think the DODIG stumbled on something like all these weapons that they're sending over to Ukraine, a lot of them don't work. I am certain there's a war dog out there right now buying useless equipment.

([57:37](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/f6NHEnDy3TSuOYm5rw6htiLykXdmDsJ0wRlHvboug7shoCMru_wAhEXI8xOzUAiaOhiGzQ1Y_XX6Hm_DkN8P_C8J4Bg?loadFrom=PastedDeeplink&ts=3457.14))
And this is something we got to keep in mind. It's not just the Afghan, not just the Ukrainians who are corrupt. We have to look at all the other people, including US contractors, European contractors who went out and got all of these weapons. Well, what condition were they in and what did the US government pay for all those? So I really think we ought to keep... Let's not just blame it all on the Ukrainians. There's enough corruption, and I think you highlighted it, Danielle, about our procurement system. DOD procurement's been on GAO's high risk list as long as I think I've been alive, at least as long as I've been working in Washington, which goes back to 1982. It hasn't gotten off and it isn't getting any better, that's for sure.

**Danielle Brian (**[**58:25**](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/f6NHEnDy3TSuOYm5rw6htiLykXdmDsJ0wRlHvboug7shoCMru_wAhEXI8xOzUAiaOhiGzQ1Y_XX6Hm_DkN8P_C8J4Bg?loadFrom=PastedDeeplink&ts=3505.56)**)**:

To the point that Andy made, that is something that the US has seen through, I think, beginning in the Revolutionary War. False ammunition, empty boxes, this is something that's absolutely historically been part of the US system.

**John Sopko (**[**58:44**](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/f6NHEnDy3TSuOYm5rw6htiLykXdmDsJ0wRlHvboug7shoCMru_wAhEXI8xOzUAiaOhiGzQ1Y_XX6Hm_DkN8P_C8J4Bg?loadFrom=PastedDeeplink&ts=3524.85)**)**:

I mean, I'm told in Ukraine right now, you don't want to come anywhere near a food contract. I was told this by people working over there because the food contracts are basically for the military are all totally corrupt. USAID said that every major construction project, I believe every one is 30% higher than normal and that's because of the kickbacks.

([59:06](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/f6NHEnDy3TSuOYm5rw6htiLykXdmDsJ0wRlHvboug7shoCMru_wAhEXI8xOzUAiaOhiGzQ1Y_XX6Hm_DkN8P_C8J4Bg?loadFrom=PastedDeeplink&ts=3546.93))
So there's a lot going on and if nobody's reporting it, I'm a little concerned. I think the Ukrainians may want to report it, but they are under the gun too. Remember, they're not totally independent. They're Ukrainians. They don't want to feed the Russian propaganda. So it's got to be independent, US, oversight. We can't, I mean, we could, we may have to, I don't think the US taxpayer should rely on Ukrainian press reports. They got to do it. We have to do it, I think, to safeguard the US taxpayers money.

**Kelley Beaucar Vlahos (**[**59:51**](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/f6NHEnDy3TSuOYm5rw6htiLykXdmDsJ0wRlHvboug7shoCMru_wAhEXI8xOzUAiaOhiGzQ1Y_XX6Hm_DkN8P_C8J4Bg?loadFrom=PastedDeeplink&ts=3591.6)**)**:

We are about out of time. I wanted just to give the last question to John, and it's a question from Ambassador Thomas Pickering, who is in the chat and he asks, and this is a real take it home question. Shouldn't we put together now an act based on our accumulated experience that can be used for all future needs for Inspector General's work in regards to situations like Ukraine, Iraq, Afghanistan? Has there been any effort or any request of your office to actually put together some processes that would allow for this unique type of oversight, beyond the systems we have in place for day-to-day in each of the agencies?

**John Sopko (**[**01:00:46**](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/f6NHEnDy3TSuOYm5rw6htiLykXdmDsJ0wRlHvboug7shoCMru_wAhEXI8xOzUAiaOhiGzQ1Y_XX6Hm_DkN8P_C8J4Bg?loadFrom=PastedDeeplink&ts=3646.2)**)**:

I think that's a wonderful suggestion from the Ambassador, Ambassador Pickering, but I don't know of any effort, at least in the United States. Now, we have been approached by the Germans. We've been approached by the Brits. I just came back from briefing the UK Parliament members on this. The Europeans are very interested in issues like that. I think the EU is very interested in that, but I haven't seen any movement by any agency in this administration for that. But I think that's a great idea.

**Kelley Beaucar Vlahos (**[**01:01:27**](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/f6NHEnDy3TSuOYm5rw6htiLykXdmDsJ0wRlHvboug7shoCMru_wAhEXI8xOzUAiaOhiGzQ1Y_XX6Hm_DkN8P_C8J4Bg?loadFrom=PastedDeeplink&ts=3687.72)**)**:

We can only hope. One last question, and this is a practical question from someone in the chat. Where can we find the actual point by point that you make in response to the senators for lessons learned? Do you have it living somewhere that you can tell people on this call, on this webinar to find it?

**John Sopko (**[**01:01:50**](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/f6NHEnDy3TSuOYm5rw6htiLykXdmDsJ0wRlHvboug7shoCMru_wAhEXI8xOzUAiaOhiGzQ1Y_XX6Hm_DkN8P_C8J4Bg?loadFrom=PastedDeeplink&ts=3710.61)**)**:

Well, it's on our website. The letters you mean to Senator Grassley and to the other four senators, that's on our website, www.sigar.mil. It should be up there. And likewise, the quarterly report will come out at the end of next week, I believe. And we'll be talking about it in more detail.

**Kelley Beaucar Vlahos (**[**01:02:15**](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/f6NHEnDy3TSuOYm5rw6htiLykXdmDsJ0wRlHvboug7shoCMru_wAhEXI8xOzUAiaOhiGzQ1Y_XX6Hm_DkN8P_C8J4Bg?loadFrom=PastedDeeplink&ts=3735.12)**)**:

Wonderful. Well, thank you John, Danielle, and Andy for joining us today. My head is spinning with all of these thoughts and I've been writing down notes and I know this was particularly fruitful for those on the call. Sorry we couldn't get to all of the questions in the Q&A, but I know we'll see your faces hopefully again on another panel on this issue, so thank you very much.

**John Sopko (**[**01:02:39**](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/f6NHEnDy3TSuOYm5rw6htiLykXdmDsJ0wRlHvboug7shoCMru_wAhEXI8xOzUAiaOhiGzQ1Y_XX6Hm_DkN8P_C8J4Bg?loadFrom=PastedDeeplink&ts=3759.48)**)**:

Thank you.

**Andrew Bacevich (**[**01:02:39**](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/f6NHEnDy3TSuOYm5rw6htiLykXdmDsJ0wRlHvboug7shoCMru_wAhEXI8xOzUAiaOhiGzQ1Y_XX6Hm_DkN8P_C8J4Bg?loadFrom=PastedDeeplink&ts=3759.48)**)**:

Thank you.

**Danielle Brian (**[**01:02:39**](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/f6NHEnDy3TSuOYm5rw6htiLykXdmDsJ0wRlHvboug7shoCMru_wAhEXI8xOzUAiaOhiGzQ1Y_XX6Hm_DkN8P_C8J4Bg?loadFrom=PastedDeeplink&ts=3759.48)**)**:

Bye bye. Thank you.