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Inspector General Confirms Government Lies About Afghanistan

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Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction John Sopko, in testimony before the House Foreign Affairs Committee, confirmed the [Washington Post's December report](#) that the government has routinely lied about the progress it has made in its 18-year Afghanistan war and reconstruction efforts.



“There’s an odor of mendacity throughout the Afghanistan issue ... mendacity and hubris,” Sopko [testified](#) Wednesday. “The problem is there is a disincentive, really, to tell the truth. We have created an incentive to almost require people to lie.”

That incentive arises not just from the desire to please one’s superiors in Washington but from the fact that most personnel are only deployed to Afghanistan for short periods, leading to what Sopko [called](#) an “annual lobotomy” that forces new people virtually to start from scratch.

“You create from the bottom up an incentive because of short time frames — we’re there for six months, nine months, or a year — to show success,” Sopko [said](#). “That gets reported up the chain and before we know it the president is talking about success that doesn’t exist.”

According to the [Post](#):

As an example, Sopko said U.S. officials have lied in the past about the number of Afghan children enrolled in schools — a key marker of progress touted by the Obama administration — even though they “knew the data was bad.” He also said U.S. officials falsely claimed major gains in Afghan life expectancy that were statistically impossible to achieve.

In addition, Sopko criticized the Trump administration for classifying information that shows the war is going badly, including data on Afghan troop casualties and assessments of the Taliban’s strength.

“When we talk about mendacity, when we talk about lying, it’s not just lying about a particular program. It’s lying by omissions,” he said. “It turns out that everything that is bad news has been classified for the last few years.”

After the hearing, Sopko told [Task & Purpose](#) that, in his opinion, most of the falsehoods from those in Afghanistan aren’t the result of bad intentions. “It’s not that people are evil and they’re lying,” he said. “They actually believe they accomplished something. But if you don’t have good metrics and you never check them out, what do you expect?”



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One might reasonably expect more than has been achieved over nearly two decades at the cost of more than \$132 billion — more than the United States spent rebuilding Europe after World War II, even after adjusting for inflation — and over 2,300 American (and [tens of thousands](#) of Afghan) lives.

According to Sopko, however, the United States has made little progress. In his congressional testimony, he gave America a “D-minus” grade for its efforts. “You showed up for class, that’s it,” he said.

Part of the problem, he argued, is that the United States has tried to impose its own ways on Afghanistan, such as building courthouses and appointing judges to dispense justice. But the judges often fail to appear out of fear, and people have to pay bribes to get anything done.

“As much as you hate the Taliban, and I do,” he said, “to the average Afghan it’s better than the justice provided by the national unity government.”

The Afghan military and police, meanwhile, have been a “hopeless nightmare and a disaster,” he declared. Washington has sent servicemembers, not peace officers, to train police. The military, below the officer level, is a hotbed of corruption.

“You have a lot of corruption, a lot of incompetency and it’s seriously hurting the Afghan military,” he said. “The biggest problem is not casualties; it’s desertions. It’s people disappearing or it’s people who never existed and we’re paying their salaries.”

“Overall,” reported [Fox News](#), “it was a grim picture that Sopko painted, leading Rep. Gerry Connolly, D-Va. to suggest there were ‘shades of Vietnam.’ Sopko replied, ‘True.’”

The solution, as with Vietnam, is to bring the troops home and let the native population sort out its own problems, something President Donald Trump suggested he would do when running for office but has thus far failed to accomplish. Otherwise, America will continue to waste dollars and lives on an unconstitutional, unwinnable, and unending occupation of the “Graveyard of Empires,” and Afghans will continue to suffer under it.

Michael Tennant is a freelance writer and regular contributor to The New American.



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