

The Afghan War and the Quarterly Report on Freedom's Sentinel: Another Mindlessly Incompetent Report by the Lead Inspector General for Overseas Contingency Operations

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Every real Monty Python fan is familiar with the Ministry of Silly Walks. In fact, you can even buy the watch. The Department of Defense has evidently decided to create a somewhat similar Under Secretary for Silly Reports, and the lead example seems to be the quarterly report on the war in Afghanistan by the Lead Inspector General for Overseas Contingency Operations.

The latest such quarterly report is available [here](#). It is the combined product of the Inspector Generals of the Department of Defense, State Department, and USAID -- although the role that the latter two inspector generals actually play is not apparent from the report's content.

As for the military content, the report serves no known purpose and has almost no meaningful content. The Lead Inspector General for Overseas Contingency Operations does not come close to dealing with any of the issues and problems raised in the Department of Defense's semi-annual report on the war -- the Report on Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan, the June 2015 version of which is available on the Department of Defense web site [here](#).

It does not analyze the course of the fighting, the effectiveness of the train and assist mission, or the effectiveness of the civil programs run by State and USAID. It does not touch upon the serious problems facing the Afghan government, the lack of a Minister of Defense, the spread of the fighting, how aid relates to the growing budgetary or economic problems faced by the Afghan government. It ignores the problem of corruption, and the lack of any meaningful and credible reporting on the effectiveness of U.S. aid efforts.

These efforts are left to the Special Inspector General for Afghan Reconstruction (SIGAR) -- which actually does provide useful and objective reporting and criticism in all of the areas. SIGAR issued its twenty-eighth Quarterly Report on July 30, 2015. It will take you no more than 15 minutes of comparing the Lead Inspector General for Overseas Contingency Operation's Quarterly Report to the report by SIGAR to see just how empty and totally vacuous the work by the Lead Inspector General for Overseas Contingency Operations really is.

The Lead Inspector General's report did list eight recent DoD reports that might have been of interest (pp. 24-25):

- *Assessment of U.S. and Coalition Efforts to Develop the Sufficiency of Afghan National Security Forces' Policies, Processes, and Procedures for the Management and Accountability of Class III (Fuel) and V (Ammunition)*, DODIG-2015-108, April 30, 2015
- *Challenges Exist for Asset Accountability and Maintenance and Sustainment of Vehicles Within the Afghan National Security Forces*, DODIG-2015-107, April 17, 2015

- *Contingency Contracting: A Framework for Reform—2015 Update*, DODIG 2015-101, March 31, 2015
- *Summary of Lessons Learned: DoD IG Assessment Oversight of “Train, Advise, Assist, and Equip” Operations by U.S. and Coalition Forces in Iraq and Afghanistan*, DODIG-2015-093, March 31, 2015
- *Information Operations in a Contingency Environment: Summary of Weaknesses Identified in Reports Issued from October 6, 2006, through November 7, 2013*, DODIG-2015-100, March 27, 2015
- *The Government of Islamic Republic of Afghanistan's Controls Over the Contract Management Process for U.S. Direct Assistance Need Improvement*, DODIG-2015-082, February 25, 2015
- *Assessment of U.S. and Coalition Efforts to Develop the Logistics and Maintenance Sustainment Capability of the Afghan National Police*, DODIG-2015-067, January 30, 2015

But, it left even a summary of their contents to future reports. While it did list “seven strategic oversight areas,” and then number of projects planned, it did not list any DoD or State future activities for FY2015 in enough content to indicate what they were. Moreover, it stated that, “USAID reported that, as of June 30, 2015, it had no programs or operations related to OFS” (p. 25), although an earlier chart had listed 110 USAID projects. (p. 23)

None of this lack of content would matter so much if things were going well, if it was not critical to develop reporting that showed what kind of U.S aid effort is really needed and how long it should be sustained, if our role in Afghanistan did not involve our allies, and if the future of the Afghan people were not at stake. This is not, however, a war we are winning, and all of these issues are critical. The insurgents are inflicting serious casualties on the Afghan forces, and the UN has reported a major increase in the areas where combat was taking place in 2014. The UN report on total annual civilian casualties issued after the end of 2014 showed the following increases in the number of ground engagements:

- From 139 in 2009 in the Central Region to 325 in 2012 and 415 in 2014.
- From 430 in 2009 in the East to 507 in 2012 and 770 in 2014.
- From 68 in 2009 in the Northeast and 56 in 2012 to 353 in 2014.
- From 100 in 2009 in the North and 60 in 2011 to 435 in 2014.
- From 289 in 2009 in the Southeast to 348 in 2012 and 413 in 2014.
- From 375 in 2009 in the Southeast to 127 in 2012 and 925 in 2014.
- From 28 in 2009 in the Southeast to 85 in 2012 and 276 in 2014.

A UN report on civilian casualties for the first six months of 2015 came out during the same time period as the Lead Inspector's reports another rise in casualties. This UN report is called *Afghanistan: Midyear Report 2015, Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict*, and is available [here](#).

The UN did not report the same kind of rises in combat activity for the first half of 2015 that took place in all of 2014, but it did still report that, “Between 1 January and 30 June 2015, UNAMA documented 4,921 civilian casualties (1,592 civilians deaths and 3,329 injured)...These figures amount to an overall one per cent increase in civilian casualties

compared to the first six months of 2014, and the highest number of total civilian casualties compared to the same period in previous years.”

The UN report also noted serious problems in the way that Afghan government security forces were fighting:

In 2015, Afghan national security forces significantly increased the number of ground operations conducted in order to support the process of government formation and counter attacks launched by Anti-Government Elements. This resulted in a rise in civilian deaths and injuries attributed to Pro-Government Forces during ground engagements. In the first six months of 2015, Pro-Government Forces caused more civilian casualties than Anti-Government Elements in ground engagements: UNAMA documented 580 civilian casualties (143 deaths and 437 injured) from ground engagements attributed to Pro-Government Forces, an 85 per cent increase compared to the first six months of 2014 and accounting for 37 per cent of all civilian casualties resulting from ground engagements.

The increase in civilian casualties attributed to Pro-Government Forces resulted largely from their use of mortar, rockets, and grenades in civilian populated areas - UNAMA observed that 88 per cent of all civilian casualties caused by Pro-Government Forces during ground engagements resulted from the use of indirect weapons¹⁴ during fighting, in particular, mortars which have a wide impact area. UNAMA documented instances where the use of indirect weapons in populated environments had an indiscriminate and severe humanitarian impact on civilians.

The Afghan War is not the Monty Python show. It involves the lives of millions of real Afghan civilians, and U.S., allied, and Afghan forces fighting a serious conflict that might well be won if the United States acts according to the right priorities, takes full account of the strengths and weaknesses of both the insurgents and Afghan government, and learns from its past mistakes.

The Lead Inspector General's report, however, has no value in any of these areas, and reads more like a public relations exercise than anything else. It also follows a pattern within the Executive Branch of steadily reducing reporting that has any negative content, eliminating meaningful reporting on the civil side of the conflict, and providing information that might affect the speed with which the United States plans to cut its efforts and withdraw. “Transparency” in government is not supposed to mean a lack of meaningful content.

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