



SIGAR

Office of the Special Inspector General
for Afghanistan Reconstruction

November 12, 2014

The Honorable Chuck Hagel
Secretary of Defense

General Lloyd J. Austin III
Commander, U.S. Central Command

General John F. Campbell
Commander, U.S. Forces–Afghanistan and
Commander, International Security Assistance Force

Dear Secretary Hagel, General Austin, and General Campell:

I write to request information regarding the Light Air Support (LAS) aircraft program, which is intended to help develop the Afghan Air Force's advanced flight training, aerial reconnaissance, and air support capabilities. I am concerned that this program could be affected by training and maintenance problems similar to those identified by SIGAR in prior inquiries concerning programs to provide aircraft to the Afghan military.¹

On February 27, 2013, the U.S. Air Force Material Command awarded a contract with a potential maximum value of \$950 million for the purchase of fixed-wing aircraft and related equipment and support services for the LAS program. The initial contract delivery order was for 20 fixed-wing aircraft and related equipment, at an expected cost of about \$450 million. My understanding is that the contractor began delivering the aircraft recently.

Given the important role that this program is intended to play in developing the Afghan military's air capability and the hundreds of millions of U.S. taxpayer dollars at stake, I request a briefing for my staff on the LAS program at Moody Air Force Base in Georgia, as earlier discussed with OSD officials. I also request the following information relating to the program:

¹ See, e.g., Afghan Special Mission Wing: DOD Moving Forward with \$771.8 Million Purchase of Aircraft that the Afghans Cannot Operate and Maintain; SIGAR Audit 13-13 (June 28, 2013).

1. How many Afghans pilots are currently qualified to fly the aircraft purchased under the LAS program?
2. How many Afghans have been, are being, or will be trained in connection with the LAS program?
3. How many Afghans have received or will receive LAS training in the United States? Where are they being trained and how were those locations chosen?
4. What processes and procedures does the Department of Defense follow when vetting Afghan LAS trainees to make sure that they do not pose a security risk?
5. Does LAS training in the United States include the use of live ammunition or other ordinance? If so, how are the risks associated with the use of those materials mitigated?

I am submitting this request pursuant to my authority under Public Law No. 110-181, as amended, and the Inspector General Act of 1978, as amended. Please provide this information no later than November 26, 2014, to Jack Mitchell, Director of the Office of Special Projects, at [REDACTED] or [REDACTED], and include appropriate contact information for U.S. government and contractor offices/officials associated with the LAS program.

Sincerely,



John F. Sopko
Special Inspector General
for Afghanistan Reconstruction



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2700 DEFENSE PENTAGON
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20301-2700**

**ASIAN AND PACIFIC
SECURITY AFFAIRS**

The Honorable John F. Sopko
Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction
1550 Crystal Drive, 9th Floor
Arlington, VA 22202

Dear Mr. Sopko:

Thank you for your letter of November 12, 2014, requesting information on the Department of Defense's (DoD) Light Air Support (LAS) program for the Afghan Air Force (AAF). I am responding on behalf of the Secretary.

As you noted in your letter, this is a program designed to provide the AAF with a significant enabling capability in support of the Afghan National Security Forces. The aircraft have arrived at the designated training location, and Air Advisor training has begun in earnest.

The Under Secretary of Defense for Acquisition, Technology, and Logistics (AT&L) directed that the U.S. Air Force (USAF) develop a plan, in coordination with the Office of the Secretary of Defense, to train AAF pilots and maintenance personnel on the A-29 Super Tucano LAS aircraft within the continental United States. Representatives from AT&L, Policy, the Joint Staff and the Air Force briefed this plan to congressional staffers, and received their general support.

The Secretary of the Air Force selected Moody Air Force Base (AFB), Georgia as the installation to support this mission. The 81st Fighter Squadron, tasked with this mission under the Air Education and Training Command (AETC), activated on October 1, 2014. Training for the first class of USAF Air Advisor maintenance and munitions personnel is complete, and the first class of USAF Air Advisor pilots is presently in training.

There are currently no qualified A-29 pilots in the AAF. Training for the first class of eight AAF pilots is scheduled to begin in February 2015 at Moody AFB. Training for the first class of 16 AAF maintenance personnel is scheduled to begin in April 2015, also at Moody AFB. These students are presently attending language training at the Defense Language Institute English Language Center (DLIELC) at Joint Base San Antonio (JBSA)-Lackland, Texas. In addition to English language training provided at DLIELC, AAF maintenance students will receive introductory maintenance training at the Inter-American Air Forces Academy (IAAFA) at JBSA-Lackland, Texas. Both DLIELC and IAAFA are institutional AETC training organizations. The training program at Moody AFB is anticipated to conclude in 2018 and provide baseline mission qualification training for up to 30 AAF pilots and up to 90 AAF maintenance personnel. The LAS requirements for Afghanistan additionally include four personnel to maintain aircrew flight equipment and four maintenance supervisors, the latter of whom will not receive training but will be sourced from a supervisor pool in Afghanistan.



The DoD employs extensive protocols in vetting AAF personnel selected for A-29 training in the United States. All potential AAF trainees are nominated by AAF leadership for training conducted outside of Afghanistan. These trainee candidates are vetted initially by NATO Air Training Command-Afghanistan (NATC-A) to ensure that they have met initial skill requirements before a recommendation is forwarded to the U.S. Security Assistance Office (SAO) in Afghanistan. The first classes of A-29 pilot candidates were hand-selected by U.S. Air Advisors based on the candidates' extensive background training with U.S. forces. The SAO screens the AAF students for records of human rights abuses, drug trafficking, corruption, criminal conduct, or other activities inconsistent with U.S. policy goals. If an AAF candidate's background checks do not meet standards, the individual is not approved for training. The SAO also ensures that all AAF students meet DoD Leahy Law human rights vetting requirements, meet minimum English comprehension levels for entry into DLIELC language training, and receive medical and dental clearance for entry into the United States. After the Department of State issues a single-entry visa for each trainee, the SAO collects biometric data and issues airline tickets, allowing the trainee to depart for the United States.

No live ordnance will be used in the training of AAF pilots. AAF A-29 weapons employment training will be conducted using inert training munitions for all weapons delivery profiles. Weapons will include freefall munitions, laser-guided munitions, .50 caliber target practice rounds, 2.75 inch rockets, and practice bombs with spotting charges. The use of .50 caliber ammunition will not include high-explosive rounds, and the 2.75 inch rockets will use inert target practice rounds, which also do not include high explosives. Afghan pilots are subject to the same flying rules and restrictions as USAF pilots; additionally, the training squadron will embed U.S. advisors to ensure safety in flight operations. Afghan students will always be accompanied by a USAF instructor pilot, who has command of the aircraft. The A-29 is a tandem two-seat aircraft, and a U.S. instructor pilot will occupy a seat that has its own set of flight controls; this allows the instructor to take control at any time. Additionally, the U.S. instructor pilot can inhibit any weapons drop from the aircraft through a "consent switch," which prevents drop commands from the front seat. The training program is designed to have U.S. presence at the flight controls on all Afghan training sorties.

We look forward to working with your office to schedule a briefing for you and your staff at Moody AFB in the near future. Thank you for your interest in this matter.

Sincerely,



Kelly E. Magsamen
Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense
Asian & Pacific Security Affairs