

Jim: "The federal government spent 86 million dollars on an airplane that never flew on its intended mission in Afghanistan." That's what we'll be talking about today. Hello and welcome to the latest podcast from the Department of Justice, Office of the Inspector General.

My name is Jim Mitzelfeld, and I am a senior counsel in our office.

I'm here today with DOJ Inspector General Michael Horowitz, and Christine Hinton-Martinez, the leader of a team of auditors in our San Francisco office.

We're here to discuss our new report on the Drug Enforcement Administration's aviation operations with the Department of Defense in Afghanistan.

Inspector General Horowitz, to get us started, could you briefly give us the big picture of what today's report is about?

Michael: In today's report, we looked primarily at DEA's purchase of an aircraft that was supposed to be outfitted by the Department of Defense with advanced surveillance equipment, with the goal of supporting DEA's counter-narcotics operations in Afghanistan. This became known as the Global Discovery program.

However, we found that, collectively, the DEA and DOD spent more than \$86 million over seven years for an aircraft that today remains inoperable, resting on jacks in Delaware, and that has never actually flown in Afghanistan.

Jim: That's troubling. Can you give us an idea of how this problem grew over time?

Michael: Sure. Our auditors found that while the Global Discovery Program was originally projected to cost \$22 million, it not only missed every intended delivery date, it ended up costing taxpayers nearly four times that amount. And, although the plane was purchased in 2008 and was supposed to be operable by December 2012, the DEA ended up pulling all of its aviation operations out of Afghanistan in July 2015, before the plane was even delivered.

To top it off, our auditors found that the DOD awarded a \$ 1.9 million contract to build a hangar intended to house the DEA plane in Kabul, Afghanistan. But this hangar has never housed the aircraft, and more than likely never will, particularly since the DEA has now pulled its aviation operations out of Afghanistan.

Jim: I think many of our listeners are going to find this difficult to comprehend. So let's bring Christine into the conversation. Christine Hinton-Martinez, you're an auditor who led the team responsible for today's report. Can you tell us what the team found with respect to the DEA's procedures and practices that may have led to these problems with the Global Discovery program?

Christine: Sure, Jim. We found that between fiscal years 2012 and 2015, the DEA and DOD entered into four agreements related to the DEA's aviation operations in Afghanistan and one agreement for the modification of this aircraft. These agreements are called Memoranda of Understanding, or M-O-Us.

We found that the DEA failed to ensure that the MOUs it entered into with the Department of Defense had clear objectives and deliverables. The MOUs did not contain specific goals, or any other measureable performance metrics. With these weaknesses, the DEA was unable to determine what effect its funds had on its counter-narcotics mission in Afghanistan.

Jim: What else did your team find?

Christine: Particularly troubling was that the DEA failed to establish an accurate method to track and report performance. Without this, the DEA was unable to perform a meaningful review and analysis of its operations in Afghanistan.

Jim: Christine, If I heard Michael correctly at the beginning of this podcast, he said the plane was purchased in 2008 and modifications to the aircraft were originally supposed to be completed by 2012. And here we are in March 2016, and the plane still hasn't been delivered? Is that right?

Christine: That's right.

Jim: Does the DEA have any idea when this plane is finally going to be ready to be pressed into service?

Christine: Well, our audit team was told that the earliest projected delivery date for an operable aircraft is now June 2016. However, even if they can meet that new target date, DEA and DOD officials estimate that the aircraft will not be completed with all previously agreed-upon modifications.

Jim: So if they are finally able to meet a due date, the plane would be delivered more than three years late, without all the originally agreed upon enhancements and it's not going to fly in Afghanistan?

Christine: That's right.

Jim: So what's going to happen to the plane?

Christine: The DEA told us they plan to use the aircraft for operations in the Caribbean, Central America, and South America. Of course, that was not the original purpose of the appropriated funding or the Global Discovery program.

Jim: Did your team make any other findings as to the root cause for the problems you identified in today's report?

Christine: Yes, we did. For example, we found that when the DEA was purchasing the Global Discovery aircraft, it did not identify its legitimate needs or properly evaluate trade-offs, in order to ensure that the aircraft met DEA's needs in the most cost-effective manner. As a result, the DEA did not fully comply with what's known as the Federal Acquisition Regulation, or so-called "FAR rules" for government purchases.

Jim: Thank you, Christine. Inspector General Horowitz, today's report makes 13 recommendations to the DEA. Let's talk about what we recommended and why.

Michael: The goal of our recommendations is to help the DEA make sure this situation does not repeat itself in the future by improving its management and oversight of its MOUs for Global Discovery, and for its aviation operations generally.

For instance, we recommended the DEA strengthen its internal controls to make sure it follows existing policies and procedures. And that it abides by federal acquisition rules when purchasing future aircraft. And we also recommended that major agreements involving the transfer, or modification, of high-dollar assets -- such as this aircraft -- should be sufficiently documented.

Jim: Thank you, Inspector General Horowitz. That wraps up things for today. For listeners who'd like more details, today's full report is now available on our website, at oig.justice.gov. Michael and Christine, thanks for taking the time to talk.

Michael: Thank you, Jim, and thank you to our listeners for joining us today.