

Transcript: “From the Inspectors General of the Justice and State Departments: A Special Joint Review of Post-Incident Responses by the Department of State and Drug Enforcement Administration to Three Deadly Force Incidents in Honduras” May 2017

Hello, I’m Michael Horowitz, Inspector General for the Department of Justice.

Today we released a joint report with the State Department Office of the Inspector General examining the responses of the Drug Enforcement Administration and the State Department to three deadly force incidents that occurred in Honduras in 2012. All three incidents took place in connection with a joint U.S.-Honduran counternarcotics operation known as Operation Anvil. We identified significant concerns with the actions of officials from both Departments before and after all three of these incidents.

Many of our findings concern an encounter on May 11, 2012, that took place on a river between a small canoe transporting two Honduran law enforcement officers and a DEA agent, and a larger boat carrying approximately 16 people. The Honduran officers and DEA agent were transporting a large amount of seized cocaine when the two boats made contact. Honduran officers in the canoe and on a nearby helicopter discharged their firearms, killing four passengers and injuring four others.

After reports surfaced that innocent civilians had been killed and injured, DEA officials asserted to Justice Department leadership, the U.S. Ambassador to Honduras, and Congress, that some of the people in the passenger boat were drug traffickers attempting to retrieve the seized cocaine, and that the people on the passenger boat had fired on the officers first. DEA officials continued to make these assertions for nearly two years, including in letters to Congress.

However, our review found no evidence to corroborate these assertions. We identified no evidence that anyone in the passenger boat fired first. In fact, we found that the evidence, which was available to the DEA at the time, raises serious questions about whether there was any gunfire from the passenger boat.

Moreover, we concluded that DEA inspectors did not meet their responsibility of ensuring a thorough, factual, and objective investigation of what was clearly a very sensitive shooting incident. We found that the DEA shooting reviews of the two subsequent deadly force incidents in Honduras, which took place in June and July 2012, were more thorough, although flaws remained.

We also found that both DEA and State Department officials failed to cooperate with various information requests and investigations concerning the three deadly force incidents. This included a lack of cooperation with investigations authorized by the U.S. Ambassador to Honduras, and also the provision of incomplete and inaccurate information to Congress, and to the public, regarding these incidents.

These are just a few of the findings in today’s report. To learn more, and to see our 8 recommendations, please visit our websites, oig.justice.gov and oig.state.gov.

Thank you for joining us.