



SIGAR

Office of the Special Inspector General
for Afghanistan Reconstruction

John F. Sopko
Special Inspector General

November 22, 2013

The Hon. John Kerry, Secretary of State
The Hon. Chuck Hagel, Secretary of Defense
Dr. Rajiv Shah, Administrator, U.S. Agency for International Development

Dear Secretary Kerry, Secretary Hagel, and Administrator Shah:

I am writing to ask your organizations' help to improve the accuracy, timeliness, completeness, and usefulness of the data on Afghanistan reconstruction that my agency includes in its statutorily mandated Quarterly Report to Congress. That help would be in the form of making greater efforts to respond to data calls for our reports.

Frankly, we need better answers—a need that also involves a change in practice regarding our interest in reviewing classified information, as described later. I am addressing you in a single letter because this is a reporting concern that involves all of us, and because I want to be clear that no one organization is being singled out for attention.

As background, SIGAR's reporting responsibilities—and federal agencies' response and support obligations—are detailed in the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2008, Pub. L. 110-181, particularly in §§1229(a)(3), 1229(f)(1), 1229(h)(5), and 1229(i)(1), which covers SIGAR's requirement to file a very detailed Quarterly Report to Congress and to the Secretaries of State and Defense.

In preparing its congressionally mandated Quarterly Reports, SIGAR relies heavily upon agency responses to its data calls. SIGAR staff strive to maintain productive working relationships with your officials and staff, and we appreciate the efforts you make every quarter to collect, process, and forward data to us in time to meet our tight reporting deadlines. We also recognize that collecting information from Afghanistan—often information that relies on paper-based Afghan reports that cannot be independently verified—can present genuine difficulties, and that issues like personnel turnover and distractions like mandatory furlough days compound the challenges you face. We thank you for all your good-faith efforts and your hard work in such circumstances.

Nonetheless, there have been instances where incomplete or internally inconsistent responses and, occasionally, non-responses have engendered extra follow-up and clarification queries to your staff. Our efforts sometimes bear no fruit, obliging SIGAR to note that it is including incomplete or ambiguous data in its reports. Such instances diminish the usefulness of our

reports for members of Congress and the public, and could possibly be construed as violating the Inspector General Act of 1978 (Pub. L. 95-452).

A few recent examples involving data-call questions for the security, governance, and economics sections of our Quarterly Report may clarify our concern:

SECURITY

- In response to SIGAR's data call for July 2013, Combined Security Assistance Command-Afghanistan (CSTC-A), through CENTCOM, told us that the *cumulative* amount of U.S. funding provided to the Law and Order Trust Fund for Afghanistan (LOTFA) was \$1.01 billion to date. In response to the same question for October 2013, they told us the amount was \$285 million, with no explanation of the disparity. Cumulative totals may be unchanged in a particular reporting period, but they do not normally shrink as time passes.
- In response to SIGAR data call questions about the number of aircraft in the Afghan Air Force, CSTC-A, through CENTCOM, has repeatedly reported aircraft which we have confirmed, through direct observation and IG discussions with senior U.S. officials in Afghanistan, are no longer in service. Sixteen C-27A cargo aircraft are sitting unused in a weed-covered field in Kabul because they are reportedly unsuited to flying in higher-elevation areas of Afghanistan. (See attached photos.) An additional four aircraft purchased for use in Afghanistan are sitting in a similar abandoned state at the U.S. Air Force's Ramstein Air Base in Germany. Despite repeated emails to CSTC-A and admissions from CSTC-A action officers that those aircraft are no longer in service, CSTC-A continues to report those aircraft as part of Afghan Air Force inventory, with no explanation how abandoned aircraft ready to be scrapped can be so counted. SIGAR's October 2013 Quarterly Report also noted that DOD revised the number of Russian Mi-17 helicopters in Afghan service from 48 to 40 to reflect "a change in definition and [previous] double counting."

GOVERNANCE

- For the October 2013 Quarterly Report, SIGAR requested information on the Afghan civil-service "fill rate" (percent of authorized positions actually staffed) and civil servants' ability to access locations from which to perform their duties. This was to update October 2012 information showing vacancies 86% filled in the 14 most insecure Afghan provinces. We also asked how USAID determines the fill rate and access. USAID could not respond to the request even though the data requested relate to two indicators in USAID's *Post Performance Management Plan 2011-2015*.

ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

- In information supplied for the July 2013 Quarterly Report, USAID told SIGAR that 52,242 households directly benefitted from IDEA-NEW (an agricultural alternative-livelihood program). This last quarter, they reported over 1,000,000 households directly benefitted. When SIGAR asked for confirmation or clarification about the remarkable 19-fold reported surge in beneficiaries, there was no response.
- USAID reported for SIGAR's July 2013 Quarterly Report that Afghan agricultural exports totaled \$500,000. For the most recent quarter, the export number was \$5.2 million. Asked to confirm and clarify this large increase, USAID did not respond.

I do not cite these examples to be querulous, but to point out the need for all of us to be more diligent in providing accurate and vetted data to Congress and the public. For our part, I have advised staff at SIGAR that we will take additional steps in reviewing data-call drafts to ensure that we are asking pertinent and reasonable questions in a clear and manageable way. For your part, I respectfully request that you consider whether additional steps are required to ensure that each of your organization's data responses are on point, accurate, and clearly expressed.

Further, it seems clear that the drawdown will require changes in the reporting process as Afghans assume a larger role for reporting their progress. It is therefore increasingly important that the information we, Congress, and the American people receive through your data responses be as accurate and responsive as possible to ensure that the U.S. investment in Afghan reconstruction is protected during this period of transition and transformation. In instances where information is better collected and tracked through a multilateral or Coalition organization, such as ISAF or NTM-A, I request that the senior American official or officer assigned to that organization be instructed to provide SIGAR with the information it requires to meet its statutory obligations.

Change from previous practice: Please note that SIGAR's data call for the January 2014 Quarterly Report to Congress includes questions that may require reference to classified material. In the past, we have submitted only unclassified data to Congress, so have not sought it from your agencies, and have accepted your staffs' explanations that responding to particular questions would entail using classified information.

Going forward, however, if we judge that full and useful discussion of issues requires or would materially benefit from citing classified information, we intend to prepare a *classified annex* to the Quarterly Report for separate, restricted submission to Congress, as per Pub. L. 110-181, §1229(i)(4). We therefore ask that your data responders be prepared to supply *both* classified and unclassified information as appropriate in their data-call responses. All SIGAR

staff who prepare our reports have security clearances. If your staffs will indicate whether classified data will be part of your response, we will arrange for its proper transmission and secure handling.

Thank you for your support and for your consideration.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'JF Sopko', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

John F. Sopko
Special Inspector General
for Afghanistan Reconstruction

Enclosure: photos of unused C-27A aircraft.

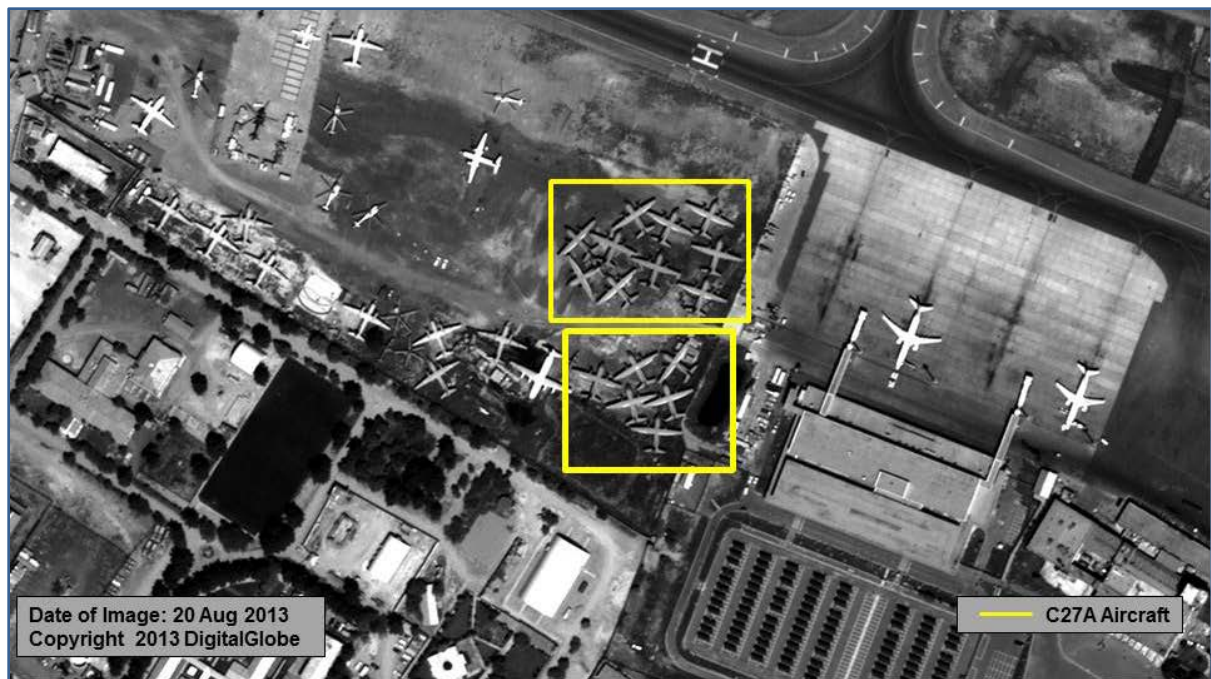


Figure 1: Aerial view of 16 C-27A cargo planes, purchased for Afghan military use, but now sitting idle in Kabul because they are unsuited for flight at higher elevations in Afghanistan.



Figure 2: The Special Inspector General and SIGAR staff discussing the status of the Kabul C-27s with members of the U.S. military during a recent inspection trip.