

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-3313

July 12, 2017

Dr. Heather Wilson
Secretary of the Air Force
1670 Air Force Pentagon
Washington, DC 20310

Madam Secretary:

Thank you for what you do in the service of our country.

Two former majors in the 6th Special Operations Squadron recently relayed to us a troubling story regarding contracting practices at 645th Aeronautical Systems group, known as Big Safari, that we believe may be an indication of a serious, systemic problem at the unit.

Given that our own investigations have managed to reveal significant revolving door activity between Big Safari and L-3 Communications, we believe that the chain of events below may be the result of improper influence being exerted on the contracting process.

We view the recent, unprecedented Air Force decision (executed by Big Safari) to allow L-3 Communications to choose its own aircraft for the COMPASS CALL replacement as very much in keeping with the events relayed to us by the 6th SOS majors. The Kenya foreign military sale, implicating the same companies, aircraft, and contracting unit in the narrative below is a continuation of this problem.

We believe that their account credible, specific, and detailed. We are happy to make these individuals available to speak to you and your team directly should you desire. Our national defense, the fight against Islamic terrorism, our foreign policy, and taxpayer dollars have been affected by these issues, and will continue to be affected. It is our hope that you will act expeditiously to address the issues presented by the majors' account, and to address the issues raised surrounding the Kenya sale in light of this account:

On or about July of 2013, the 6th SOS majors were deployed to Yemen to assist with the ongoing United States mission to bolster that country's foreign internal defense. The 6th SOS is one of a very small number of units in the Services with expertise in providing aviation capabilities to foreign militaries. The two majors were at the time and remain longtime experts in executing this relatively unique mission aspect.

The Senior Defense Official and Defense Attaché to the Republic of Yemen at the time approached them regarding the possible addition of precision strike capability to the

Yemeni Air Force. It was believed by the country team at the time that such an addition presented the possibility of substantially improving the strategic picture for U.S. interests in the region, “a game-changer,” in the words of one of the majors. They received approval to explore putting together what was then called a 1206 case—in essence, using U.S. funds to purchase and supply foreign militaries with equipment in order to bolster the global effort against Islamic terrorism.

The 6th SOS majors explored a number of options for providing this capability to the Yemenis, among them refurbishing the aging Yemeni F-5 fleet, deploying the Super Tacano, the Beechcraft AT-6, or arming Cessna transport aircraft. None of these solutions met the cost profile, ease of deployment, or capability desired by the 6th SOS. After continued due diligence, the majors discovered that the UAE had about two dozen IOMAX Border Patrol Aircraft in service in their air force. They reviewed the capabilities of these aircraft, and found that they were not only approximately one-third the price of other potential solutions, but that they were also more capable in some aspects, and crucially, easier to maintain than other options. This was no small consideration given the limited maintenance capabilities of the Yemeni Air Force.

The opportunity to leverage cultural and regional affinities was also significant. UAE is a regional partner, an Islamic country, and counts Arabic as its native language. Since the purpose of the 1206 program and other foreign military sales efforts is to minimize U.S. involvement, this regional boost is a major element. Their evaluations of the IOMAX Archangel led the 6th SOS majors to perform a site visit to the IOMAX facility in Mooresville, North Carolina.

In the assessment of the majors, the training facility, production facility, and overall comprehensiveness of the IOMAX program there, given the company’s 3-years’ experience with training individuals from Islamic countries was excellent. Arabic translators were in place already, as well as access to the appropriate religious services.

At this point, the decision was made by both men to put together a 1206 case requesting 4 IOMAX block I archangels for use in the Yemeni Foreign Internal Defense mission. In the fall of 2013 both men presented their case to senior defense officials, including the DASD-SOLIC and the ASD-SOLIC, where it received an exceptionally positive reception. In the one major’s own words, “The [ASD-SOLIC] had never seen a 1206 case that was as comprehensive and cost effective” as the one presented by the two majors. The outcome of these meetings was that the majors were instructed to implement the 1206 case calling for the purchase of 4 IOMAX Block I Archangels.

Until the acquisition phase, according the majors, the case had been a textbook example of the intent of the 1206 program. Then, acquisition of the aircraft was assigned to Big Safari. Over the course of four months in late 2013/early 2014, the Big Safari contracting official assigned to the case systematically steered the contract to L-3.

For instance, 6th SOS majors were asked for by the contracting official for the specifications for the aircraft to be acquired. They provided these specifications. The

specifications included the ability to load a certain weight of weapons on each wing, a known capability of the IOMAX aircraft. The Big Safari acquisition official weakened this requirement after communication with L-3. Otherwise, L-3's aircraft, then in the design phase, would not have been able to be considered because of their aircraft's fundamental limitations.

Once he had changed the requirements to allow L-3 to be considered, the contracting official then zeroed in on Federal Aviation Administration Certification as the most important element of fulfilling the contract. Per the majors, without going into detail on the technical aspects of this assertion, it's important to note that the IOMAX aircraft at this time had advantages in cost, track record, and capability. Perhaps most importantly in the majors' view it had been successfully designed, produced, and deployed over four years in combat, where the L-3 aircraft was at that point a hypothetical. For the contracting official to zero in on the single element where the yet-to-be-produced L-3 airframe had a debatable advantage, ignoring all other factors, struck the majors as deeply concerning.


By early 2014, the contract had been awarded without competition to L-3, for a price of \$15 million above IOMAX's quote. The planes were delivered months late, and were so poorly manufactured that the 6th SOS majors rejected the aircraft.


According to the majors, the contracting official responsible for this chain of events later transitioned to the private sector. His new occupation was as the head of the L-3 program to which he had steered the Yemen 1206 case contract.

The Air Force's Justification and Approval document for the contract states, "a blown deadline in this case would have "an unacceptable operational impact on USCENTCOM's CT [United States Central Command's counterterrorism] efforts in Yemen, and our warfighter's [sic] lives will be put in danger."

This series of events is deeply troubling to us. We hope that, in light of these events, you and your department will cooperate fully with attempts by the Congress to gain insight into what occurred with regard to Yemen and the ongoing Kenya Foreign Military Sale as well as issues with the defense acquisition system more generally. The picture painted by the former 6th Special Operations Squadron majors suggests something is seriously wrong with the way Big Safari does business.

Sincerely,


Ted Budd
Member of Congress


Walter B. Jones
Member of Congress

CC: Secretary James Mattis, Vice Admiral Joseph Rixey