

Federal Eye

U.S. taxpayers paid \$486 million for Afghan air fleet. DOD sold it for scrap.



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By **Josh Hicks** October 10 at 6:50 AM

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The Defense Department destroyed nearly half a billion dollars worth of defective Italian aircraft that U.S. taxpayers bought for Afghanistan and then sold the scrap for \$32,000, according to an agency watchdog.

[Inspector General John Sopko](#), who oversees U.S. reconstruction efforts in Afghanistan, asked Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel and U.S. Air Force Secretary Deborah James this month to cooperate with his review of the purchases.

In a [letter last week to James](#), Sopko expressed concern that defense officials “may not have considered other possible alternatives in order to salvage taxpayer dollars.”

U.S. taxpayers purchased 20 of these military transport planes for the Afghan Air Force but later scrapped them. (Photo by Special Inspector

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Sopko asked the Air Force to turn over contracting documents and records related to the decision-making process, and to explain what actions the department has taken to hold the aircraft manufacturer accountable.

The Defense Department spent \$486 million to buy the fleet of 20 Italian-made G222 military transport planes for the Afghan Air Force, but the agency terminated the program in 2013 because of problems with performance, maintenance and spare parts that kept the aircraft grounded.

The agency sold 16 of the planes as scrap for six cents per pound, recovering a tiny fraction of the price it paid for the them. Four of the aircraft remain intact at Ramstein Air Force Base in Germany.

Maj. Brad Avots, a Pentagon spokesman, said the Defense Department destroyed the G222s to “minimize impact on drawdown of U.S. forces in Afghanistan.” He added that the agency strives to ensure responsible stewardship of taxpayers’ dollars.

Sopko said in [a letter to Hagel last week](#) that his office expected to examine the aircraft on-site as part of its review. He asked the secretary to provide “sufficient advance notice of any change in the status of the four remaining G222s.”

Avots said the Defense Department will consider Sopko’s request while deciding what to do next with the

remaining aircraft.

“We value the oversight provided by inspectors general and audit agencies, and incorporate their findings and recommendations into subsequent efforts,” Avots said.

“Working in a wartime environment such as Afghanistan brings with it many challenges, and we continually seek to improve our processes.”

Josh Hicks covers the federal government and anchors the Federal Eye blog. He reported for newspapers in the Detroit and Seattle suburbs before joining the Post as a contributor to Glenn Kessler’s Fact Checker blog in 2011.
