

## Upgraded Sikorsky Sea Kings on new mission

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The first of two old Sikorsky S-61 Sea Kings have been cleared for diplomatic duty in Afghanistan.

The U.S. State Department on Wednesday accepted modernized S-61TM helicopters that will eventually be used at the [U.S. Embassy](#) in Afghanistan as part of a larger contract.

Sikorsky Aircraft's aftermarket division, [Sikorsky Aerospace Services](#), is partnering with Pennsylvania-based Carson Helicopters to upgrade the Sea Kings with new blades and other systems as part of a five-year contract for up to 110 aircraft. The S-61s will be used to transport passengers and cargo for the State Department.

"The U.S. State Department's acceptance of these first two modernized S-61 aircraft marks a major milestone in the launch of the S-61TTM modernization program. The S-61T helicopter will meet the needs of customers worldwide, and we are excited about how much interest this aircraft has generated," said [David Adler](#), President of Sikorsky Aerospace Services. "As the State Department pursues worldwide aviation missions, we remain fully committed to supporting their helicopter requirements."

Adam Feld, aerospace defense retrofit modernization analyst for Newtown-based Forecast International, said it's difficult to say how much the contract is worth, "since they have such a large option, but only a commitment for four. The cost per unit will go lower if they order a lot."

Feld said based on a similar Navy upgrade, it works out to about \$3.5 million per helicopter for the blade and avionics upgrades.

"I would be surprised if they get 110 for this," Feld said. But he said the aircraft seems to be fulfilling a need to move personnel and cargo, especially in an area like Afghanistan, which doesn't have very good infrastructure.

The Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs' [Office of Aviation](#) is handling some of this contract. But due to security concerns, did not disclose the exact nature of the mission of these aircraft.

But the bureau did provide information on its fleet of aircraft, which is extensive. The IN/A operated a combined fleet of more than 240 aircraft. The aviation group provides resources to

"eradicate and interdict illicit drugs, strengthen law enforcement and support counter terrorism," it said on its website. It also provides evacuation and support and security for embassies.

It operates helicopters in Afghanistan, Bolivia, Colombia, Guatemala, Iraq, Mexico, Pakistan and Peru.

Richard Aboulafia, vice president of analysis with Virginia-based [Teal Group](#), called the deal "Good use of old helicopters."

The [U.S. Navy](#) retired their 61s a long time ago, he said.

He said the 61s are much more reliable than the Russian helicopters State was using over there.

For Sikorsky, this is the kind of contract helicopter makers love.

"I expect it's got a pretty healthy aftermarket," Aboulafia said. "The older they get the more maintenance they need."