

The Criminal CIA 'Biggest Source of Corruption in Afghanistan'

by Jon Queally via sal - CommonDreams *Monday, Apr 29 2013, 11:26am*

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Confirming what many policy experts have known for some time, a New York Times [headline](#) in Monday's print edition describes how the most corrupting influence within the Afghan government of Hamid Karzai is not innate cronyism or tribal favoritism, but rather the suitcases full of US cash delivered to the Presidential Palace over the last decade by the CIA.



Hamid Karzai

"The biggest source of corruption in Afghanistan was the United States," one unnamed US official told the Times' Matthew Rosenberg, who described "wads of American dollars packed into suitcases, backpacks and, on occasion, plastic shopping bags" being delivered to Karzai's door.

According to the reporting:

All told, tens of millions of dollars have flowed from the C.I.A. to the office of President Hamid Karzai, according to current and former advisers to the Afghan leader.

"We called it 'ghost money,' " said Khalil Roman, who served as Mr. Karzai's deputy chief of staff from 2002 until 2005. "It came in secret, and it left in secret."

The C.I.A., which declined to comment for this article, has long been known to support some relatives and close aides of Mr. Karzai. But the new accounts of off-the-books cash delivered directly to his office show payments on a vaster scale, and with a far greater impact on everyday governing.

Moreover, there is little evidence that the payments bought the influence the C.I.A. sought. Instead, some American officials said, the cash has fueled corruption and empowered warlords, undermining Washington's exit strategy from Afghanistan.

It has been a key talking point within mainstream discourse that the one of the "goals" of US policy has been to undo the "culture of corruption" that is described as somehow a natural phenomenon in Afghanistan. However, as many progressive analysts have noted throughout the years of the military occupation, US policy has been the single largest driving force of political corruption in the country.

As Robert Naiman, director of Just Foreign Policy, pointed out in 2009:

Is it just me, or is the pontification of Western leaders about corruption in Afghanistan growing rather tiresome?

There is something very Captain Renault about it. We're shocked, shocked that the Afghans have sullied our morally immaculate occupation of their country with their dirty corruption. How ungrateful can they be?

But perhaps we should consider the possibility that our occupation of the country is not so morally immaculate - indeed, that the most corrupt racket going in Afghanistan today is the American occupation.

And just this month, writing for TomDispatch.com, historian and author Dilip Hiro describes how cash infusions from the US went beyond what the CIA was delivering to Karzai, revealing that the culture of "cash assistance" was fueling an illegitimate economy as a war waged in the margins:

In its drive to win the hearts and minds of Afghan villagers, the Pentagon's policymakers also gave cash directly to U.S. officers to fund the building of wells, schools, and health clinics in areas where they were posted. The stress was on quick, visible results -- and they were indeed quick and visible: the funds generally ended up in the pockets of rural power brokers with little oversight and no accountability, particularly when the American officer involved usually left the area after a relatively brief tour of duty.

Later, the State Department's Agency for International Development (USAID) took over this role. As with the Pentagon, most of the money it distributed ended up in the pockets of those local power brokers. By some accounts, USAID lost up to 90 cents of each dollar spent on certain projects. According to a Congressional report published in June 2011, much of the \$19 billion in foreign aid that the U.S. pumped into Afghanistan after 2001 was probably destabilizing the country in the long term.

Staggering amounts of U.S. taxpayer dollars allocated to aid Afghanistan were spent so quickly and profligately that they circumvented any anti-corruption, transparency, or accountability controls and safeguards that existed on paper. However, those who amassed bagsful of dollars faced a problem. Afghanistan's underdeveloped \$12 billion economy -- a sum Washington spent in that country in a single month in 2011 -- did not offer many avenues for legitimate profitable investment. Therefore, most of this cash garnered on a colossal scale exited the country, large parts of it [ending up in banks](#) and real estate in the Gulf emirates, especially freewheeling Dubai.

Back to the Times reporting:

... much of the C.I.A.'s money goes to paying off warlords and politicians, many of whom have ties to the drug trade and, in some cases, the Taliban. The result, American and Afghan officials said, is that the agency has greased the wheels of the same [patronage networks](#) that American diplomats and law enforcement agents have struggled unsuccessfully to dismantle, leaving the government in the grips of what are basically organized crime syndicates.

The cash does not appear to be subject to the oversight and restrictions placed on official American aid to the country or even the C.I.A.'s formal assistance programs, like financing Afghan intelligence agencies. And while there is no evidence that Mr. Karzai has personally taken any of the money -- Afghan officials say the cash is handled by his National Security Council -- the payments do in some cases work directly at odds with the aims of other parts of the American government in Afghanistan.

As Hiro concludes in his piece, "In the next two years, as Washington draws down its forces in Afghanistan and the situation there disintegrates further, there will undoubtedly be more stories about "Afghan" corruption. Given that, it's well worth recalling the following facts: it was the U.S. that flooded the country with military and aid funds, while expediently skipping any process of oversight, and so turned Operation Enduring Freedom into Operation Enduring Corruption."

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