

SALT PIT VICTIM, GUL RAHMAN, ONCE RESCUED HAMID KARZAI

In a follow-up on its story on Gul Rahman's death in the Salt Pit in November 2002, AP reports that Rahman may have rescued Hamid Karzai from imprisonment by Afghan intelligence in 1994.

After Soviet forces withdrew in 1989, Afghanistan descended into civil war as the Islamic groups that ousted the Soviets fought each other for control of the capital, Kabul.

During fighting in 1994, Karzai, then deputy foreign minister, was arrested by Afghan intelligence, by some accounts because he was in contact with Hekmatyar and other militia leaders to end the conflict.

[snip]

According to Habib Rahman, his brother, Gul Rahman was sent to fetch Karzai by Hekmatyar, whose forces had long been suspected of firing the rockets at the building. Gul Rahman carried a letter for Karzai from Hekmatyar, saying he had been sent to rescue him at the request of Karzai's father, the brother said.

Habib Rahman said his brother took Karzai to a safe house in Kabul, then drove with him to the Pakistani city of Peshawar, where Karzai was hospitalized for two days.

Mind you, this story is based on what Gulbuddin Hekmatyar and Rahman's brother, Habib, say; Karzai has refused to comment on the story. Hekmatyar raised the incident last year to criticize Karzai. And Hekmatyar, who is back in negotiations with Karzai at the moment, may have

his own reasons to escalate this story.

Nevertheless, given the claims that DOJ avoided charging anyone in Rahman's death because it claimed the US did not control the Salt Pit when he died, the story adds an extra level of irony and legal intrigue.

The Salt Pit was the top-secret name for an abandoned brick factory, a warehouse just north of the Kabul business district that the CIA began using shortly after the United States invaded Afghanistan in October 2001. The 10-acre facility included a three-story building, eventually used by the U.S. military to train the Afghan counterterrorism force, and several smaller buildings, which were off-limits to all but the CIA and a handful of Afghan guards and cooks who ran the prison, said several current and former military and intelligence officers.

The CIA wanted the Salt Pit to be a "host-nation facility," an Afghan prison with Afghan guards. Its designation as an Afghan facility was intended to give U.S. personnel some insulation from actions taken by Afghan guards inside, a tactic used in secret CIA prisons in other countries, former and current CIA officials said.

The CIA, however, paid the entire cost of maintaining the facility, including the electricity, food and salaries for the guards, who were all vetted by agency personnel. The CIA also decided who would be kept inside, including some "high-value targets," senior al Qaeda leaders in transit to other, more secure secret CIA prisons.

"We financed it, but it was an Afghan deal," one U.S. intelligence officer said.

In spring 2004, when the CIA first

referred the Salt Pit case to the Justice Department for possible prosecution, the department cited the prison's status as a foreign facility, outside the jurisdiction of the U.S. government, as one reason for declining to prosecute, U.S. government officials aware of the decision said.

Karzai was Interim President when Rahman died. Either his Administration or the US was in charge of the prison. If the US was in charge, then Rahman's death can be prosecuted. If Karzai's Administration was in charge, then he bears legal responsibility for his rescuer's death.

And I would imagine Hekmatyar is well aware of this dynamic.