

CIA BAGS O' CASH TOTAL TENS OF MILLIONS OF DOLLARS, BUT OVER \$4.5 BILLION LEFT AFGHANISTAN IN 2011

Today's New York Times carries a frank exposure of blatant moves by the CIA to curry favor with Hamid Karzai and high ranking members of Afghanistan's government through direct cash payments brazenly dropped off at Karzai's office:

For more than a decade, wads of American dollars packed into suitcases, backpacks and, on occasion, plastic shopping bags have been dropped off every month or so at the offices of Afghanistan's president – courtesy of the Central Intelligence Agency.

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.

Perhaps the most disturbing aspect of these cash payments is that they seem to have been designed in large part to pay off Afghan warlords:

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.

And it's not just any warlords who are being funded by this cash. We learn in the article

that the current corruption pay for Rashid Dostum, who committed the largest single war crime in the Afghan war, is now \$80,000 per month.

And in the funding of warlords, keep in mind that they form the backbone of David Petraeus' Afghan ~~Death Squads~~ Local Police under the "direction" of US special operation forces and the CIA. After particularly egregious behavior by one of these groups earlier this year, Karzai first expelled US special forces from Maidan Wardak province and then eventually backed off somewhat on that move. Today's article suggests that Karzai is trying to play a major role in controlling these groups. Given the main topic of the article, we are left to presume that Karzai's control is through the allocation of these CIA funds:

Now, Mr. Karzai is seeking control over the Afghan militias raised by the C.I.A. to target operatives of Al Qaeda and insurgent commanders, potentially upending a critical part of the Obama administration's plans for fighting militants as conventional military forces pull back this year.

Although an off the books cash influence-buying program that has totaled tens of millions of dollars over the course of a decade sounds like a huge scandal, this is chump change compared to the real theft of US funds in Afghanistan. The Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction noted in the January, 2013 report (pdf) that huge sums of cash exit Afghanistan through the Kabul airport:

The U.S. government has long had serious concerns about the flow of cash out of the Kabul International Airport. According to the Congressional Research Service, some \$4.5 billion was taken out of Afghanistan in 2011.

Where does all this cash come from? The largest flow of money into Afghanistan of course comes from the US and the biggest program we fund there supports Afghan security forces:

The Congress created the Afghanistan Security Forces Fund (ASFF) to provide the ANSF with equipment, supplies, services, and training, as well as facility and infrastructure repair, renovation, and construction.

Here is a figure from the SIGAR report showing how lavishly the ASFF has been filled with US funds:

FIGURE 3.4

ASFF APPROPRIATED FUNDS BY FISCAL YEAR
(\$ BILLIONS)



Notes: Numbers have been rounded.

^a DoD reprogrammed \$1 billion of FY 2011 ASFF to the Defense Working Capital Fund.

Sources: DoD, response to SIGAR data call, 1/17/2013; OMB, response to SIGAR data call, 1/4/2013; P.L. 112-239, 1/3/2013; P.L. 112-74, 12/23/2011; P.L. 112-10, 4/15/2011.

The US has been providing over \$5 billion a year to fund Afghan security forces every year since 2009. Given that SIGAR has also shown that the Afghans are in charge of certifying to us the level at which their forces are staffed and that

the mythical 352,000 ANSF force size is not validated, I would think that ASFF funds may be a major (but undoubtedly not the only) source for the cash that is leaving the country. Because ASFF dollars seem so particularly ripe for corrupt officials to embezzle, I saw the NATO push to extend the number of years at which ANSF force size will be supported at the 352,000 level as a blatant move to wave an additional \$22 billion in US funds under the noses of these thieves.

Also note that DoD itself is at least \$7 billion over budget this year (mostly due to withdrawal costs), but our commander, General Dunford, professes ignorance of this minor detail of accounting, so there are huge sums of money being handled in Afghanistan with little to no real oversight.

One last caveat should be pointed out on the relatively small size of the CIA bags o' cash plan. As Barry Eisler would note, the CIA is notorious for admitting to problems first by broaching the subject through admitting a small transgression and then later admitting the full scale of the problem. The best example of that behavior was the disclosure in 2007 that the CIA had destroyed "two" videotapes of CIA torture sessions and then finally admitting in 2009 that the number of tapes destroyed was actually 92. We should not be surprised then, if the CIA bags o' cash program turns out to be hundreds of millions or even billions of dollars instead of the tens of millions currently admitted.