

THE CIA DOESN'T WANT YOU TO KNOW THAT ISI SUPPORTS TERROR, BUT DIA DOES

The National Security Archive just got a number of documents on the funding of the Haqqani network, showing it gets (or got) funding from Gulf donations, the Taliban in the tribal lands, and Pakistan's ISI. A particularly interesting DIA cable describes how a guy named Qabool Khan, on orders of the Haqqani, got a job – thanks to Hamid Karzai's brother Mahmoud's influence – running security for the US Salerno and Chapman bases. Along with intelligence about Americans on the base, of the \$800 he made for each guard at the base, Khan sent \$300 back to the Haqqanis.

This DIA cable, however, has generated more attention. It alleges that Pakistan's ISI gave the Haqqanis \$200,000 to carry out the attack on the Chapman base in Khost that killed seven CIA officers.

4. ~~(S//NF)~~ DURING DISCUSSIONS AT AN UNKNOWN DATE BETWEEN HAQQANI, SALAR, AND AN UNIDENTIFIED ISID OFFICER OR OFFICERS, HAQQANI AND SALAR WERE PROVIDED 200,000.00 USD TO ENABLE THE ATTACK ON CHAPMAN. HAQQANI PROVIDED THE MONEY TO SALAR WHO THEN COMMUNICATED THE PLANNING DETAILS TO MULLAWI ((SAKH)). SAKH THEN CONTACTED ((ARGHAWAN)), AFGHAN BORDER COMMANDER OF THE KHOWST PROVINCIAL FORCE. ARGHAWAN WAS PROMISED 100,000.00 USD BY SALAR FOR HIS ASSISTANCE TO ENABLE A SUICIDE MISSION BY AN UNNAMED JORDANIAN NATIONAL. FOLLOWING THE ATTACK, SALAR WAS BELIEVED TO HAVE KEPT THE 100,000.00 USD PROMISED TO ARGHAWAN BECAUSE ARGHAWAN DIED DURING THE SUICIDE ATTACK.

Reuters reported it here, saying this about the accuracy of the report.

A spokesman for Pakistan's embassy in Washington did not have any immediate comment.

Because the document is heavily censored, it is not clear whether it represents an intelligence agency consensus or fragmentary reporting. One line, which has been crossed out, says: "This is an information report, not finally evaluated intelligence."

More amusing is this piece from Joby Warrick who, after all, wrote an entire book about the attack filled with very detailed descriptions that could only have come from top CIA people. His anonymous source(s) – whose particular agency affiliation he does not identify, which clearly matters here – cast doubt on the report, and either they or Warrick himself questions the claim that Arghawan might be involved in the plot because he died.

But is the claim credible? The new version of events has prominent skeptics, starting with the U.S. intelligence community, which was both targeted by the attack and also spent many months piecing together the evidence on how and why it happened.

[snip]

One U.S. intelligence official who studied the newly released document described its contents on Thursday as an “unverified and uncorroborated report”– essentially raw intelligence of the kind that routinely lands on the desk of U.S. analysts and diplomats in overseas posts. The redacted report says nothing about the source of the information, including whether the person was regarded as reliable or how the allegations were eventually assessed.

“The document clearly states that it contains unevaluated information,” said the official, who insisted on anonymity because much of the investigation into the bombing remains classified.

“The Haqqanis are brutal terrorists who continue to target innocent people, including Americans,” the official said. “Nonetheless, the general consensus is that the 30 December attack was primarily an al-Qaeda plot and did not involve the Haqqani network.”

[snip]

Arghawan was in fact the man assigned by the CIA to pick up Balawi at the Pakistan border and drive him to Khost for the meeting. But his involvement in any plot would appear doubtful, as he was killed along with seven Americans when Balawi detonated his bomb.

Call me crazy, but I can imagine how an extra \$100,000 might motivate someone to kill an accomplice, even setting aside the possibility that those who plotted this attack would want as few live witnesses as possible. Note, too, that Bob Baer pointed to the use of a driver (that is, Arghawan) as a key failure of tradecraft.

An old operative I used to work with in Beirut said he would have picked up Balawi himself and debriefed him in his car, arguing that any agent worth his salt would never expose the identity of a valued asset to a foreigner like the Afghan driver. I pointed out that if he'd been there and done it that way, he'd probably be dead now. "It's better than what happened," he said.

But all the discussion about the credibility (or not) of this report doesn't consider something: that this just got released under FOIA! It is a cinch to withhold information, especially raw intelligence, under FOIA. Indeed, the paragraph, like the cable as a whole, is classified Secret/NoForn. But here, the State Department not only went to DIA to facilitate this release, but the censors made an affirmative decision this piece of data should not be withheld.

Whether or not its true (and I'd be surprised if DIA wanted inaccurate information implicating ISI released, unless they just wanted to burn this source), it is the case that DIA, possibly with the involvement of State, released information revealing that DIA obtained intelligence that those in charge of Chapman (that is, the CIA) were employing at least one

and probably two Haqqani agents. (Remember, too, that CIA reportedly got warning about this attack but still failed to prevent it.)

I'd also add that alleged ISI involvement in the attack would raise really interesting questions about whether ISI wanted the particular CIA attendees, including key Osama bin Laden targeter Jennifer Matthews, at the meeting killed, rather than just a strike at CIA drone targeters generally. Indeed, the possibility that ISI facilitated the attack, luring in the CIA with promises of the location of Ayman al-Zawahiri, particularly when we know that ISI wanted the Haqqanis protected, is particularly intriguing.

In any case, I'm sure the ISI is reading the reporting on this cable with some interest.