

Evidence that Afghan leaders are on CIA payroll

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A series of leaks to the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post* over the past week has revealed that members of the Afghan government headed by President Hamid Karzai are paid agents and informers of the CIA.

The revelations began on August 25 when senior *Times*' correspondents Dexter Filkins and Mark Mazzetti reported that a close aide of Karzai who is accused of corruption, Mohammed Zia Salehi, had been on the CIA payroll for "many years". The information was provided by anonymous sources "in Kabul and Washington," suggesting it came from high up within the US military or the Obama administration itself.

Two days later, the *Washington Post* cited other US sources alleging that the "CIA is making secret payments to multiple members of the Karzai administration". The *Post* stated: "The CIA has continued the payments despite concerns that that it is backing corrupt officials and undermining efforts to wean Afghans' dependence on secret sources of income and graft".

Mohammed Zia Salehi, who is the chief of administration of the Afghan National Security Council, is at the centre of a controversy between Washington and Karzai. In July, he was arrested by a US-created anti-corruption investigation unit. Wiretaps allegedly documented him requesting a \$US10,000 car for his son, as his price for stopping an investigation into a money transfer company, New Ansari.

President Karzai intervened, and within seven hours had the arrest overturned and Salehi released. Karzai has also blocked attempts to arrest senior executives of

New Ansari.

Any investigation of the company is clearly opposed by a significant section of the Afghan establishment linked to Karzai's administration. New Ansari is accused of transferring hundreds of millions of dollars in cash out of Afghanistan each year on behalf of warlords, government officials and drug traffickers. A United Arab Emirates custom official said \$1 billion in cash had arrived in that state last year alone.

The *Times* noted that "many Afghan officials maintain second homes" in Abu Dubai "and live in splendid wealth". Since 2001, the amount of money that has been plundered from the "international aid" sent to Afghanistan must run into the tens of billions. Large amounts also appear to have been simply handed over by the CIA in pay-offs and bribes.

On August 29, Karzai's office denounced the allegations that the CIA has much of his government on its payroll, as "groundless allegations" that could "negatively impact the alliance against terrorism" and which "cast [a] slur on the reputation of the Afghan responsible executives".

There are, however, no reasons to doubt that the claims are true. The CIA's operations in Afghanistan date back to the late 1970s and 1980s, when it financed and armed Islamist groups that were fighting the Soviet military occupation of the country. Several years before the events of 9/11, CIA agents were back in Afghanistan, bribing various warlords to support a US invasion.

In 2001, Mohammed Zia Salehi was a spokesman for

one of the most powerful and murderous of the anti-Taliban warlords, Abdul Rashid Dostum, who was openly taking money from the US government. CIA operatives worked with his militia during the invasion to crush Taliban forces in northern Afghanistan and took part in the cold-blooded murder of thousands of Taliban prisoners.

Karzai was selected as president on the basis of his decades-long ties with US intelligence agencies. The US official with whom Karzai maintains the closest relations is the current CIA station chief, known only as “Spider”. The pair has been working together since before the 2001 invasion. One obvious question is the role that the CIA and the many Afghans on its payroll played in the blatant rigging of the 2009 presidential election, which returned Karzai to power.

According to the *Wall Street Journal*, the CIA station chief’s prominence and close relations with Karzai provoked opposition from the US embassy and the State Department, but they were overruled earlier in the year by Obama.

A possible motive for the latest leaks is to prompt a refashioning of the Afghan government, perhaps involving some high-profile trials of corrupt officials. Popular hatred and contempt for Karzai’s administration is increasingly blamed by the White House and the US military for the growing support for the Taliban-led resistance movement and soaring US and NATO casualties. Seven more American troops were killed over the weekend, pushing the 2010 American death toll to 308, just nine less than all of 2009.

Indicating the concerns in US political and military circles, the Institute for the Study of War stated in a recent report on the situation in the major southern city of Kandahar “that the population views government institutions as predatory and illegitimate, representing the interests of key power-brokers rather than the populace”.

Kandahar is essentially ruled by Karzai’s half-brother, Ahmed Wali Karzai, who has been publicly accused of both presiding over a massive drug cartel

and being on the CIA payroll. Karzai’s older brother, Mahmoud, who holds American citizenship, has become one of the richest men in the country, with Toyota dealerships and government-allocated contracts in the cement industry.

Any changes in the personnel of the Afghan government on the grounds of combating corruption, however, will not alter the puppet character of the regime. The rampant payoffs, bribery and outright theft flow inexorably from a colonialist foreign occupation that is hated and opposed by the majority of the Afghan people.

The CIA revelations underscore the cynical nature of the American propaganda used to justify the war since 2001. Venal individuals who take payments from a foreign occupying power and plunder the country have been portrayed as the representatives of a democratic future for Afghanistan. The Afghans who have resisted the occupation and fought for the liberation of the country have been labelled terrorists, killed in their tens of thousands and hunted down by 150,000 foreign troops.



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