

US Officials: CIA Pays Afghan Government Officials

US Officials Say CIA Pays Multiple Members Of Afghan Government For Information

(AP) WASHINGTON (AP) - The CIA has multiple members of the Afghan government on its payroll in order to help it keep track of various factions within the Afghan government, according to former U.S. officials.

These individuals confirmed to The Associated Press reports that the agency has used payments to cultivate intelligence sources across the Afghan government, a practice that has raised concerns at a time when the U.S. is fighting corruption there.

The New York Times reported the agency is paying Mohammed Zia Salehi, the chief of administration for Afghanistan's National Security Council, for information. The Washington Post also had the report.

Salehi is accused of accepting a car in exchange for his help in exerting pressure on Afghan officials to ease off in another corruption case.

The U.S. has previously said it views Salehi's arrest as a test case of Karzai's willingness to reform his government. But the revelation that he has also received payments from the U.S. spy agency demonstrates the complex relationship Washington has developed with the Afghan government.

George Little, spokesman for the CIA, would neither confirm nor deny the report, saying that speculation about such matters was dangerous.

"This agency - acting in strict accord with American law - plays an essential role in promoting our nation's goals in Afghanistan, including security and stability," he said. "Speculation about who may help us achieve that is both dangerous and counterproductive."

The CIA has placed many Afghan officials on the payroll over the years, according to Ali A. Jalali, Afghan interior minister from 2003 to 2005 and now a professor in the Near East South Asia Center for Strategic Studies at National Defense University. He said that the U.S. intelligence agency has had deep involvement in Afghanistan for decades and that it would be natural for the CIA to have long-standing "relationships" with many Afghan leaders. "You have to put things into perspective," he said.

He said he doubted Karzai would be surprised if Salehi were on the CIA payroll, as alleged. "When Karzai was fighting against the Taliban, he was supported by the agency," too, he said.

Four former senior intelligence officials said it was common practice for the intelligence community to develop sources of information within fragile or hostile foreign governments. The former officials spoke anonymously because they are not authorized to talk about classified matters to the media.

One of the officials explained that from 2003 to 2004, the CIA had "a third of Iraq's original coalition government on the payroll." He added, "One of the first things we attempted to do when we went into Iraq is buy the loyalty of the former Ba'aathists, so they wouldn't fight us. You buy the leadership."

Another former official pointed out that the U.S. made regular payments to the leaders of the Sunni group "Sons of Iraq," made up of many former insurgents, in order to secure their cooperation and get them to stop attacking the Americans.

The official spoke on condition of anonymity to describe a classified intelligence practice.

The Sons of Iraq were part of the Iraqi "Awakening," movement, which was credited with turning around the insurgency in Iraq and bringing Sunni splinter groups into the Iraqi government.

The officials said this is the kind of results the CIA would be trying to produce in Afghanistan.

Associated Press writers Adam Goldman in Washington and Deb Riechmann in Kabul contributed to this report.

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