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CIA paid Karzai office millions in ghost money: NYT

4/29/2013

In a costly influence-peddling attempt, the US Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) delivered tens of millions of dollars to the office of President Hamid Karzai over the past decade, an American newspaper reported on Monday.

“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,” the New York Times report said.

Off-the-books cash receipts from the CIA were acknowledged by sitting and former advisors to Karzai, whose ex-chief of staff Khalil Roman told the paper: “We called it ghost money...It came in secret and it left in secret.”

Meant to buy influence for the CIA, the payments instead fuelled corruption and gave warlords a boost, unnamed US officials were quoted as saying. As a result, the US drawdown strategy was weakened, the newspaper claimed.

With no immediate comments on the issue from CIA, the State Department or Karzai’s office, one US official remarked: “The biggest source of corruption in Afghanistan was the United States.”

Afghan officials said there was no evidence that Karzai personally received any of the money that was handled by the National Security Council. Much of the cash ended up in the hands of warlords and politicians, many with ties to the drug trade and the Taliban.

In Afghanistan, the report said, cash payments had been standard procedure for the CIA, which bought the services of numerous warlords, including senior officials and their relatives. “We paid them to overthrow the Taliban,” the American official said.