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Kucinich: Afghanistan is ‘spy versus spy carnival of corruption’

By Muriel Kane

Thursday, August 26th, 2010

In the wake of new revelations by the *New York Times* of CIA support for a corrupt Afghan official, Rep. Dennis Kucinich (D-OH) accused the United States of turning Afghanistan into a "spy versus spy versus spy carnival of corruption."

"We are paying all sides to fight all sides and to betray all sides," Kucinich charged in a statement released on Wednesday. "This is further evidence that the United States must remove all its troops and assets out of Afghanistan."

"The tragedy is rapidly becoming a farce," he added. "They call it intelligence, but it is actually an innovative way to steal tens of billions of dollars from the U.S. taxpayers."

The *Times* story had reported that the chief of administration in Afghan President Hamid Karzai's national security council, who is currently "at the center of a politically sensitive corruption investigation," has apparently been on the CIA payroll for many years.

Mohammed Zia Salehi was arrested last month on charges of soliciting a bribe "in exchange for impeding an American-backed investigation into a company suspected of shipping billions of dollars out of the country for Afghan officials, drug smugglers and insurgents." He was released a few hours later after President Karzai personally intervened, and Karzai "has since threatened to limit the power of the anticorruption unit that carried out the arrest."

Reporters Dexter Filkins and Mark Mazzetti go on to suggest that the Salehi story "underscores deep contradictions at the heart of the Obama administration's policy in Afghanistan."

They write that some administration officials "view public corruption as the single greatest threat to the Afghan government and the American mission," while others describe the anti-corruption drive as "mission creep" and worry that "attacking corrupt officials who are crucial to the war effort could destabilize the Karzai government."

Marcy Wheeler of emptywheel's page at website firedoglake, however, **believes** the story has to be read in connection with two other stories by Filkins this week, both of which suggest infighting between the CIA and military special forces over which is pursuing the more effective strategy in Afghanistan.

"So after stories about who is doing more damage," Wheeler concludes, "special forces or credulous CIA, the debate shifts to whether it is more important to crack down on the corruption within Karzai's government -- even if it means cracking down on CIA's key assets -- or whether we have to deal with corruption because that's the way of the world."

"Boy," Wheeler concludes, "Dexter Filkins sure has had an interesting week cataloging the sniping within American strategy, huh? Mind you, I'm not complaining about Filkins' reporting (though his descriptions of anonymous sources doesn't seem to comply with the NYT's policy on identifying the motives for these anonymous leaks). ... But he does seem to be the focus of a lot of competing leaks of late."