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Spy: Stolen U.S. dollars exit Afghan airport controlled by Karzai brother

By Jeff Stein

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Afghan intelligence service reports in the hands of NATO-led forces say that the major exit point for stolen American dollars is through the airport in Kandahar, controlled by President Hamid Karzai's brother.

According to a Washington Post [report](#) on Friday, U.S. and Afghan authorities, "alarmed by an exodus of money from Afghanistan ... are trying to constrict a flow of cash through the country's main airport," in Kabul. The airport, according to the report, is "believed to be a major conduit for drug proceeds and diverted foreign aid."

But a former CIA official who works with Afghanistan's spy service said the airport at Kandahar dwarfs Kabul as an exit point for millions of dollars in pilfered U.S. aid money and drug proceeds. The president's brother, Ahmed Wali Karzai, president of the provincial council in Kandahar, has been repeatedly accused of controlling the opium trade there.

"The direct [Ariana](#) flight from Kandahar to Dubai in its cargo hold carries many bales of U.S. dollars wrapped in burlap," said the former CIA official, who spoke on condition of anonymity so he could speak freely. "No hand carry. This is AWK's preferred route."

"On one day in July," he added, "one of our guys saw 13 bales of cash being unloaded in Dubai from this flight."

Karzai, sometimes called "the King of Kandahar," has denied his involvement in the drug trade, most recently in an [interview](#) Thursday with CBS News.

"No one came up with any proof that I'm involved in any illegal activities," he said. "When it comes to drug issues, it's not a legal issue. It is a political issue..."

Afghanistan's intelligence agency, [the National Directorate of Security](#), or NDS, keeps a close eye on meetings between Ahmed Wali Karzai and the CIA, the former CIA official said.

"The NDS has told us where they meet, when they meet, what his monthly salary is, how it is delivered and the names of the two CIA women who do the actual cash transfer," he said.

The former official, a CIA operations official during his almost four decades in the spy agency, gives the Afghan intelligence service high marks.

"I have read a lot of NDS material by now, and contrary to one's usual impression about Third-World intel services, they are good (if perhaps not too aware of human rights)."

"One of our non-US guys," the former official continued, "had a long friendly chat with the head of NDS, and the NDS head just lit into the stupidity and myopia of CIA. It made me cry."

The Washington Post, the New York Times and other news media [reported](#) last year that Karzai, who controls much in the bellwether province of Kandahar, is a U.S. intelligence asset.

Rep. Mike Rogers (R - Mich.), the ranking Republican on the House Intelligence Committee panel that oversees human intelligence issues, told SpyTalk last October that Karzai "cooperates" with U.S. intelligence but is not a controlled agent.

"There's a difference between being an intelligence asset and somebody who cooperates," said Rogers, a former FBI agent who has visited Afghanistan several times. "Asset is an overstatement," he continued. "[Ahmed Wali Karzai] is a public official who cooperates ... when he's talked to -- that's different than an asset."

Whatever the exact relationship Karzai has with drugs and the CIA, "several U.S. lawmakers, including Vice President Biden when he was chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, have urged the president to dismiss his brother from the council," The Post's Rajiv Chandrasekaran [reported](#) last September.

"But U.S. and Canadian diplomats have not pressed the matter, in part because Ahmed Wali Karzai has given valuable intelligence to the U.S. military, and he also routinely provides assistance to Canadian forces, according to several officials familiar with the issue."

The Post's Greg Miller and Johua Partlow [reported](#) Friday that U.S. and Afghan authorities were planning to install "U.S.-developed currency counters at the Kabul airport. The devices would be used to record serial numbers on bills to determine whether

money being carried out of the country has been siphoned from aid funds flowing in, U.S. and Afghan officials said.”

But greenbacks exiting Kandahar in burlap bales would require a different kind of screening, the former CIA official said.