



Iran Sends Bagsful of Cash to Karzai

U.S. taxpayers, it seems, are not the only ones being taken for a ride by Afghan President Hamid Karzai. The *New York Times* reported on October 23 that Iranian taxpayers, too, are being forced to pony up millions of dollars for the Karzai regime, a story that was confirmed, at least in part, by Karzai himself two days later.



The thrust of the October 23 story, written by Dexter Filkins, is that Iran has been turning over bags of cash to Karzai's chief of staff, Umar Daudzai, as "part of a secret, steady stream of Iranian cash intended to buy the loyalty of Mr. Daudzai and promote Iran's interests in the presidential palace." Filkins writes that Afghan and Western officials, speaking on condition of anonymity, said that "the payments ... form an off-the-books fund that Mr. Daudzai and Mr. Karzai have used to pay Afghan lawmakers, tribal elders and even Taliban commanders to secure their loyalty."

A "senior NATO officer, speaking on condition of anonymity," told the *Times* that "the Iranian government was conducting an aggressive campaign inside Afghanistan to undermine the American and NATO mission and to gain influence in politics." He added that Iran's intelligence agencies were "providing financing, weapons and training to the Taliban" and "financed the campaigns of several Afghans who ran in last month's parliamentary election."

Meanwhile, said an Afghan official, Daudzai steers visitors to Karzai who will complain about the American occupation and civilian deaths. Of course, this might well be the case regardless of the Iranian influence: Daudzai, Filkins reports, "is part of a group of Afghans around Mr. Karzai whose members once belonged to Hezb-i-Islami, a hard-line Islamist group that fought the Soviet Union in the 1980s. The group, loosely allied with the Taliban, is still fighting NATO forces and the Afghan government." In other words, they are simply against any and all foreign occupation of their country. Daudzai, therefore, probably required very little encouragement from Tehran in order to become a thorn in Uncle Sam's side.

How much money has Iran been lavishing on the Karzai regime? Filkins could not get a firm accounting: "An Afghan political leader said he believed that Mr. Daudzai received between \$1 million and \$2 million every other month. A former diplomat who served in Afghanistan said sometimes single payments totaled as much as \$6 million."

Daudzai, Karzai, and Feda Hussein Maliki, the Iranian ambassador to Afghanistan, all declined to comment on Filkins' story. Nonetheless, an aide to Daudzai did take time to dismiss the allegations as



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“rubbish,” and Maliki’s spokesman called them “devilish gossip by the West and foreign media.”

Within 48 hours of the publishing of Filkins’ story, however, Karzai admitted that Afghanistan had indeed been receiving cash from Iran via Daudzai. Alissa J. Rubin, reporting for the *Times* on October 25, wrote that Karzai “said the Iranian money was used to pay expenses in his office and that he had instructed Mr. Daudzai to accept it.” Nor was Karzai apologetic about taking the cash, saying that “his government will continue to receive the payments, which amount to no more than \$1 million twice a year” — far less than any of Filkins’ sources had suggested, which means either (a) the sources or Karzai is lying or (b) Daudzai is pocketing most of the loot, which might explain why, according to Filkins’ sources, Daudzai “owns at least six homes in Dubai, in the United Arab Emirates, and in Vancouver, British Columbia, acquired during his time as Mr. Karzai’s top aide.”

Karzai denied that the payments were part of a nefarious Iranian plot, explaining that the cash transfers are “a relationship between neighbors,” with Iran asking “for good relations in return, and for lots of other things in return” and Afghanistan doing likewise. Rubin reports that Karzai also claimed that “the United States had long been well aware of the Iranian money” and that he had discussed it with President George W. Bush.

If the Bush and, presumably, Obama administrations have been aware of the Iranian cash transfers all along, why are the transfers only now coming to light? The Western and Afghan officials who spoke to Filkins claimed they were revealing the secret goings on out of concern for the U.S.-Afghanistan relationship. An equally (perhaps more) plausible explanation, though, is that the story was leaked to the *Times* as part of the propaganda issuing from Washington to drum up support for military action against Iran. By describing a shadowy financial relationship between Iran and Afghanistan and portraying it as an evil plan whereby Tehran could manipulate Kabul and stymie U.S. efforts to stabilize the country, American officials could then argue that Iran’s actions had made it a front in the War on Terror.

In fact, Bloomberg News reports that State Department spokesman Philip J. Crowley has already weighed in with confrontational language, saying in a statement that “Iran should not interfere with the internal affairs of the Afghan government.” Mr. Pot, meet Mr. Kettle. Which country invaded and has been interfering in the internal affairs of Afghanistan since 2001? Which one has shelled out far more than a few million dollars a year to Kabul in exchange for Karzai’s cooperation? According to Rubin, Karzai himself pointed out that the United States had also given his government “bags of money,” saying, “Yes, yes, they do. It’s all the same. So let’s not make this [the Iranian payments] an issue.” (Karzai’s acknowledgement of the Iranian money, somewhat diluting the value of the initial story, cannot have won him any friends in Washington, either. For a man who’s already skating on thin ice with the U.S. government, whose military is practically the only thing keeping Karzai in power, he’s taken some pretty big chances lately.)

Iran, in contrast to the United States, did not invade Afghanistan and install a new government. It is, quite naturally, playing the game of realpolitik in a neighboring country, trying to shape the outcome of events in its favor, much as the United States does in numerous countries throughout the world where our government distributes unconstitutional “foreign aid” to buy loyalty from foreign governments. Iran, at least, is attempting to influence a country with which it shares a lengthy border, not one removed from it by thousands and thousands of miles. Furthermore, with Iraq, Iran’s neighbor to the west, already under the sway of the United States, it is understandable that the Iranian government would not want the same situation to occur to its east.



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That Iran is gaining influence in both Iraq and Afghanistan only demonstrates the foolishness of the United States' invasions of both countries. Neither country was a friend of Iran prior to the American invasions. Iraq, having been transformed from a secular, Sunni-dominated state to an Islamic, Shiite-dominated one, is becoming much friendlier with its eastern, Shiite-run neighbor. Afghanistan, no longer ruled by the Taliban regime that was unable to obtain diplomatic recognition from the Iranian government, is now openly and unabashedly accepting cash and influence from Tehran.

U.S. involvement in Iraq and Afghanistan has been a disaster from day one, proving once again the Founding Fathers' wisdom in advising America to avoid foreign entanglements. Bringing the troops home now would almost certainly allow Iran much greater influence over both countries, but that is going to happen anyway sooner or later; the die was cast when Bush decided to make war on them. Better to get Americans back to their own country as soon as possible than to leave them as sitting ducks for political intrigues and resistance movements funded by Tehran. After that, bring all other troops home and eliminate all aid to, meddling in, and threats against foreign countries. Iran will undoubtedly gain a greater sphere of influence in Asia; but a United States that cultivates "peace, commerce, and honest friendship with all nations, entangling alliances with none," as Thomas Jefferson so memorably put it, will have little to fear from it.

Photo of Hamid Karzai: AP Images



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