

Drug mafia, CIA blamed for sacking of Afghan governor

KABUL: In a country flooded with narcotics traffickers and corrupt government officials, one of Afghanistan's few remaining 'clean' governors, Mohammed Daud, has been removed from his position, and many are blaming the drug mafia and the CIA for his abrupt dismissal.

Daud was appointed at the request of the British government in order to oversee Helmand province, the country's largest opium producing region.

The former governor of Helmand, Sher Muhammad Akhunzada, whom Daud replaced earlier this year, has been widely implicated in the drug trade.

Contrary to Akhunzada, "British officials regarded Mr Daud as the cleanest governor in Afghanistan and hoped that his extensive experience in development would help to win over Helmand's population," The Times reported.

Last month, however, the British government expressed frustration with the effort, pointing to the fact that Afghan President Hamid Karzai continued to meet with the former governor, Akhunzada. Adding further strain on the situation, Karzai appointed Akhunzada as a senator and made his brother, Amir Muhammad Akhundzada, Daud's deputy.

"The president is undermining his own governor," one British official told The Times. "It doesn't help what we're trying to do."

It would appear U.S. officials, particularly from the Central Intelligence Agency, were influencing Karzai's actions, undercutting the efforts of their British counterparts. Moreover, as The Independent reported, "British sources have blamed pressure from the CIA for President Hamid Karzai's decision to dismiss Mohammed Daud as governor".

"The Americans knew Daud was a main British ally," one official explained to The Independent, "yet they deliberately undermined him and told Karzai to sack him."

The U.S. apparently favors the brother of Daud's predecessor and purported drug lord, Akhunzada.

As The Times reports, "British officials fear that Mr Daud will be replaced by his deputy, Amir Muhammad Akhunzada, the brother of Sher Muhammad Akhunzada. He is thought to have links to the drug trade and has been banned from running in elections because he refuses to disband his personal militia."

"For the moment," as one official told The Times, "before a new governor is named, the governor of Helmand is a drug-dealing warlord who was banned from the elections by the UN for keeping a militia and his connection to narcotics, and with whom the British have said they cannot work. Nice."

Opium from Afghanistan provides more than 90 percent of the world's total supply, funding international drug syndicates with billions of dollars in profits every year.

According to a recent report issued by the United Nations and the World Bank, the U.S.-installed government has established a "complex pyramid of protection and patronage, effectively providing state protection to criminal trafficking activities."

"Around 25 to 30 key traffickers, the majority of them based in southern Afghanistan, control major transactions and transfers, working closely with sponsors in top government and political positions," the report states.


"This year's record harvest of 6,100 tons of opium will generate more than \$3 billion in illicit revenue -

equivalent to almost half of Afghanistan's GDP," writes Antonio Maria Costa, executive director of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. "Profits for drug traffickers downstream," he notes, "will be almost 20 times that amount."

According to Costa, "High-level collusion enables thousands of tons of chemical precursors, needed to produce heroin, to be trucked into the country. Armed convoys transport raw opium around the country unhindered. Sometimes even army and police vehicles are involved. Guns and bribes ensure that the trucks are waved through checkpoints. Opiates flow freely across borders into Iran, Pakistan, and other Central Asian countries."

"There are many cases where honest prosecutors or police chiefs try to do something about corruption, and they say they receive phone calls from very high officials in Kabul saying to leave the people alone," said Barnett Rubin, an expert on Afghanistan and director of studies and senior fellow at New York University's Center on International Cooperation.

As The Washington Post has plainly summarized, "corruption and alliances formed by Washington and the Afghan government with anti-Taliban tribal chieftains, some of whom are believed to be deeply involved in the trade, [have] undercut the [counter-narcotics] effort."

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