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Brother of Afghan Leader Said to Be Paid by C.I.A.

By DEXTER FILKINS, MARK MAZZETTI and JAMES RISEN
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KABUL, [Afghanistan](#) — [Ahmed Wali Karzai](#), the brother of the Afghan president and a suspected player in the country's booming illegal [opium](#) trade, gets regular payments from the [Central Intelligence Agency](#), and has for much of the past eight years, according to current and former American officials.

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Banaras Khani/Agence France-Presse — Getty Images

Ahmed Wali Karzai, right, the brother of President Hamid Karzai of Afghanistan, at a campaign event in Kandahar in August.

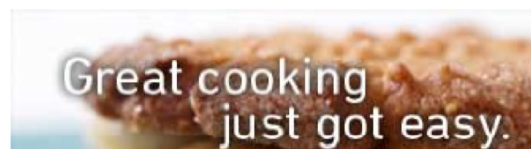
The agency pays Mr. Karzai for a variety of services, including helping to recruit an Afghan paramilitary force that operates at the C.I.A.'s direction in and around the southern city of Kandahar, Mr. Karzai's home.

The financial ties and close working relationship between the intelligence agency and Mr. Karzai raise significant questions about America's war strategy, which is [currently under review at the White House](#).

The ties to Mr. Karzai have created deep divisions within the Obama administration. The critics say the ties complicate America's increasingly tense relationship with President [Hamid Karzai](#), who has struggled to build sustained popularity among Afghans and has long been portrayed by the [Taliban](#) as an American puppet. The C.I.A.'s practices also suggest that the United States is not doing everything in its power to stamp out the lucrative Afghan drug trade, a major source of revenue for the Taliban.

More broadly, some American officials argue that the reliance on Ahmed Wali Karzai, the most powerful figure in a large area of southern Afghanistan where the Taliban insurgency is strongest, undermines the American push to develop an effective central

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Karzai's Brother

government that can maintain law and order and eventually allow the United States to withdraw.

“If we are going to conduct a population-centric strategy in Afghanistan, and we are perceived as backing thugs, then we are just undermining ourselves,” said Maj. Gen. Michael T. Flynn, the senior American military intelligence official in Afghanistan.

Ahmed Wali Karzai said in an interview that he cooperated with American

civilian and military officials, but did not engage in the drug trade and did not receive payments from the C.I.A.

The relationship between Mr. Karzai and the C.I.A. is wide ranging, several American officials said. He helps the C.I.A. operate a paramilitary group, the Kandahar Strike Force, that is used for raids against suspected insurgents and terrorists. On at least one occasion, the strike force has been accused of mounting an unauthorized operation against an official of the Afghan government, the officials said.

Mr. Karzai is also paid for allowing the C.I.A. and American Special Operations troops to rent a large compound outside the city — the former home of Mullah [Mohammed Omar](#), the Taliban’s founder. The same compound is also the base of the Kandahar Strike Force. “He’s our landlord,” a senior American official said, speaking on the condition of anonymity.

Mr. Karzai also helps the C.I.A. communicate with and sometimes meet with Afghans loyal to the Taliban. Mr. Karzai’s role as a go-between between the Americans and the Taliban is now regarded as valuable by those who support working with Mr. Karzai, as the Obama administration is placing a greater focus on encouraging Taliban leaders to change sides.

A C.I.A. spokesman declined to comment for this article.

“No intelligence organization worth the name would ever entertain these kind of allegations,” said Paul Gimigliano, the spokesman.

Some American officials said that the [allegations of Mr. Karzai’s role in the drug trade](#) were not conclusive.

“There’s no proof of Ahmed Wali Karzai’s involvement in [drug trafficking](#), certainly nothing that would stand up in court,” said one American official familiar with the intelligence. “And you can’t ignore what the Afghan government has done for American counterterrorism efforts.”

At the start of the Afghan war, just after the 9/11 terrorist attacks in the United States, American officials paid warlords with questionable backgrounds to help topple the Taliban and maintain order with relatively few American troops committed to fight in the country. But as the Taliban has become resurgent and the war has intensified, Americans have increasingly viewed a strong and credible central government as crucial to turning back the Taliban’s advances.



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Now, with more American lives on the line, the relationship with Mr. Karzai is setting off anger and frustration among American military officers and other officials in the Obama administration. They say that Mr. Karzai's suspected role in the drug trade, as well as what they describe as the mafialike way that he lords over southern Afghanistan, makes him a malevolent force.

These military and political officials say the evidence, though largely circumstantial, suggests strongly that Mr. Karzai has enriched himself by helping the illegal trade in poppy and opium to flourish. The assessment of these military and senior officials in the Obama administration dovetails with that of senior officials in the Bush administration.

"Hundreds of millions of dollars in drug money are flowing through the southern region, and nothing happens in southern Afghanistan without the regional leadership knowing about it," a senior American military officer in Kabul said. Like most of the officials in this article, he spoke on the condition of anonymity because of the secrecy of the information.

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Dexter Filkins reported from Kabul, and Mark Mazzetti and James Risen from Washington. Helene Cooper contributed reporting from Washington.

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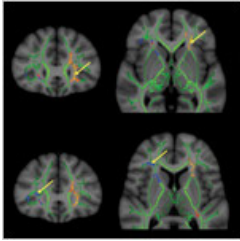
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