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## America's Brother Karzai Problem

By [Malou Innocent](#)

The war in Afghanistan has taken a turn for the worse. According to the *New York Times*, Ahmed Wali Karzai--brother of Afghanistan's incumbent president, and a notorious drug baron--is also a long-time employee of the Central Intelligence Agency.

President Karzai has long been considered a U.S. puppet. And now, with evidence that his brother has been on the CIA payroll for the past eight years (a claim conveniently disclosed ahead of the second-round presidential election), shows why Afghanistan's "democratic experiment" is largely a sham. But what's new? What does "justice" really mean when someone with friends in high places can get away with a \$4 billion drug trafficking racket; while poor local farmers have their opium crops eradicated and their drug processing facilities destroyed?

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According to *New York Times* reporters Dexter Filkins, Mark Mazzetti, and James Risen, brother Karzai helps the CIA by operating a paramilitary group; renting out housing to U.S. forces, and acting as a go-between for the Americans and the Taliban. This should come as no surprise. Even though free markets, democracy, and freedom are the principles that define the United States of America, these have not always been the principles that guided its foreign policy. From time to time, America's perceived national security interests have led it to cooperate with some of the world's most repressive regimes and unsavory political movements. U.S. policymakers often openly embrace authoritarian allies. But such prominent alliances are all too often coupled with America's simultaneous promotion of democracy, liberty and human rights. These mixed messages have severely compromised America's image and interests on more than one occasion.

Which brings us to Afghanistan. The U.S. has assisted and sponsored a corrupt, illegitimate and slightly

autocratic regime there while purporting to advance the values of freedom and democracy. The entire rationale for the presence of the U.S. and its allies in Afghanistan rests on democracy, stability and winning hearts and minds.

President Obama has just signed a \$680 billion defense appropriations bill with a provision giving commanders in Afghanistan the ability to pay Taliban members to switch sides. Sponsoring assets is not necessarily a bad thing. But the U.S. government works at cross purposes when it attempts to install a "legitimate" centralized government, wags a sanctimonious finger when elections are riddled with pervasive levels of fraud and vote-fixing, and then go behind the backs of millions of Afghans by having a close working relationship with the brother of the incumbent candidate.

Brother Karzai is one of the most powerful figures in the southern province of Kandahar; the heart of Taliban country. This ongoing relationship with the CIA is arguably critical in getting information on the whereabouts of insurgents, which is a U.S. interest. But it undermines America's stated policy of trying to transform what is a deeply divided, poverty stricken, tribal based society into a self sufficient, non-corrupt, stable electoral democracy, which is not a U.S. interest.

"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 quoted in the *NYT* piece. The U.S. Army and Marine Corps' Counterinsurgency Field Manual states that the legitimacy of the host nation's government is a critical component of combating an insurgency. We are sending our brave, disciplined and highly dedicated men and women in uniform to fight the Taliban; yet, as Spencer Ackerman at the *Washington Independent* noted, "CIA money funds a politically connected drug dealer. Opium funds the Taliban. We are in Afghanistan to fight the Taliban. How much CIA money has indirectly funded the Taliban?"

Certainly, America's national interests sometimes dictate cooperation with a foreign government or movement that does not share America's values. Some partnerships are unavoidable. Even so, Washington's goal should be to foster only as much cooperation as is necessary to protect and advance the vital interests of the American people. To what end are we needlessly compromising our values in Afghanistan? That is a question that should not be answered with more troops.

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