

The VILLAGER

Last year I began pushing for a congressional investigation into allegations of corruption and mismanagement at a U.S. sponsored Afghan National Army hospital, known as the Dawood National Military Hospital, in Kabul.

I did this after a story broke in the Wall Street Journal about senior Afghan medical personnel selling U.S. military medical aid on the black market. Afghan soldiers and police were dying at the U.S.-sponsored Dawood Hospital from untreated wounds and malnutrition because their families couldn't come up with the necessary bribes to pay the hospital staff in order for them to get the care that they needed.

The investigation culminated in two hearings, on July 28 and Sept. 12 by a subcommittee of the Oversight and Government Reform Committee chaired by Congressman Jason Chaffetz of Utah. More information can be found by going to <http://oversight.house.gov>.

The conclusion anyone listening to the testimony can easily reach is that the Afghan Surgeon General, Gen. Ahmed Zia Yaftali, was complicit in the corruption and that U.S. Army Lt. Gen. William Caldwell not only delayed an investigation to shield the administration from any political embarrassment prior to the 2010 midterm elections, but also purposely limited the scope of the investigation when it did occur in order to shift the focus away from the obvious issue of corruption.

It is unfortunate that, despite the Chairman's recommendations, the Department of Defense has refused to fully investigate the conduct of General Caldwell and the Afghan government has also refused to prosecute General Yaftali. Unfortunately, I believe that the behavior of Gen. Caldwell in Afghanistan – either a lack of leadership or a willingness to look the other way while Afghan officials are free to steal from the American taxpayers with impunity – is not uncommon. The Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction found significant problems in Afghanistan with “fraud with construction and maintenance contracts, procurement, public corruption and bribery, and theft of property and services.”

Last week, I was in Afghanistan and I visited the hospital. The visit reminded me of what it was

like for me when I was in the military and had to stand inspections. Medical personnel stood at attention in clean uniforms eager to tell me what their job descriptions were and to show me what equipment they had and they even took me to patients who were being respectfully and professionally cared for. However, it is impossible for me to know the real story about current conditions at the facility since the hospital staff has put on such performances before and then reverted back to their corrupt practices as soon as the oversight pressure on them was lifted. The corruption at the Dawood National Military Hospital is not isolated but representative of a much larger problem of corruption.

I left Afghanistan confirming my belief that the greatest threat to the future of the country is not the Taliban but the pervasive corruption that permeates every level of Afghan governance along with the lack of leadership by the United States in confronting it.

In the hearing on July 24, one of the officers who first reported the abuses at the hospital and was rebuffed by Gen. Caldwell, commented that in the Afghan culture when you are haggling over the price at a bazaar the seller will only take you seriously when he knows you are prepared to walk away. We must set firm benchmarks in place for combating corruption and if they fail to reach them we must be prepared to stop funding the Afghan government and walk away.

By: Rep. Mike Coffman

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