

Report Says U.S. Spent \$43 Million on Gas Station in Afghanistan



Washington, November 3 (RHC)-- The U.S. Defense Department spent \$43 million of American taxpayers' money to build a gas station in Afghanistan that should have cost roughly \$500,000, according to a new government watchdog report.

One of the most "troubling" issues is how the Pentagon was unable or unwilling to explain why the "ill-conceived" project was so expensive, the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR) said in a report issued Monday.

"Even considering security costs associated with construction and operation in Afghanistan, this level of expenditure appears gratuitous and extreme," said John Sopko, the director of SIGAR.

"It's an outrageous waste of money that raises suspicions that there is something more there than just stupidity," Sopko said. "There may be fraud. There may be corruption. But I cannot currently find out more about this because of the lack of cooperation."

The mission involved building and operating Afghanistan's first compressed natural gas filling station in the northern city of Sheberghan that was funded by the Task Force for Business and Stability Operations, a division of the U.S. Department of Defense established to "stabilize" the Afghan economy.

"I'm suspicious when I see something that cost 140 times more than it did and I find people trying to withhold or not cooperate with me," Sopko said. "It raises my suspicions."

He called the cost "sheer stupidity" and "indicative of a real serious mismanagement," but said perhaps the "more serious" issue was how the U.S. military had failed to offer documentation or records on the project.

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