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Afghan rebels backers blame CIA official for restricting covert aid

By Bill Gertz
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Representatives of three Afghan resistance support groups yesterday called for the ouster of Deputy CIA Director John McMahon who, they charged, has impeded the covert aid program to Afghan guerrilla fighters.

"We need to start hitting this administration where it hurts, by naming names and helping to create a justifiable outrage among the American people that there is a genocide going on [in Afghanistan]," said Neal Blair, president of the conservative lobbying group Free the Eagle.

The remarks were made at a downtown press conference, where Mr. Blair said U.S. aid was not reaching Afghan freedom fighters and he was not satisfied with the response from many government agencies.

The group's 265,000 members are pressing the CIA's inspector general to investigate "the botched operations under McMahon's supervision," he said.

"We've undertaken the effort to have our members write directly to Donald Regan, White House chief of staff, urging him to call John McMahon to account for his performance, Mr. Blair said.

"And unless or until McMahon is able to do so, we are urging his immediate dismissal from his position at the CIA," he said.

A CIA spokesman called the allegations against Mr. McMahon "asinine" but would not comment further.

Nabi Salehi, a college professor who represents one of the Afghan mujahideen guerrilla groups, said "time is running out" for Afghan fighters opposing Soviet forces in Afghanistan.

Since the Soviet invasion in December 1979, more than 1 million Afghans have died in the fighting, he said.

"The war in Afghanistan is no longer a battle of one armed force against another," Mr. Salehi said. "It

is the systematic technological destruction of an entire population by the army of a superpower."

He called on the United States to provide advanced anti-aircraft missiles and ammunition.

Congressional sources said yesterday Mr. McMahon has opposed supplying the Afghan guerrillas with the advanced weapons needed

to knock down Soviet helicopter gunships. He fears the U.S. weapons would fall into Soviet hands and that the Soviets would then develop countermeasures against the arms, the sources said.

Andrew L. Eiva, a former U.S. special forces soldier and director of a group called the Federation of American Afghan Action, said Mr. McMahon was singled out for doing the most "in blocking effective aide to the Afghans and misleading Congress about it."

He provided reporters with a financial analysis of CIA covert arms deliveries to Afghan guerrillas, which shows that last year less than one-third of \$122 million in weapons appropriated by Congress had reached the Afghan resistance. The loss was attributed to "skimming" by Pakistani-based Afghan rebels.

The conclusion reached by the three groups resulted from an investigation that included information supplied by Congress and the rebel forces.

Mr. Eiva also distributed a "report card" grading CIA Afghan operations that he said were limited by an effort to provide only the Afghan guerrillas with "enough to survive," but not enough to win any major battles.

Mr. Eiva estimates that since 1981 the Reagan administration has appropriated a total of \$342 million in covert assistance to Afghanistan. But since the aid was covert, U.S. officials insisted on supplying outdated and militarily ineffective weapons that could not be traced to U.S. sources.

He called for ending covert assistance and providing more modern weapons, particularly advanced shoulder-held Stinger and Redeye surface-to-air missiles.

Mr. McMahon served as "point man" for CIA efforts to curb legislation that would facilitate the flow of advance weapons and briefed at least three members of Congress in an effort defend the CIA's efforts in Afghanistan, Mr. Eiva said.

Indiana Republican Representative Dan Burton, a supporter of congressional aid to the Afghan guerrillas, said in an interview that he has pressured the CIA to "get through to those mujahideen people everything that Congress sent."

"People are dying over there," Mr. Burton said. "They are fighting for freedom and, by gosh, we as a Congress have made a commitment to help them, and we ought to do it."