

Aussie spies may have paid people smugglers

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- THE DAILY TELEGRAPH
- JUNE 15, 2015 12:00AM



Foreign Minister Julie Bishop denied last week that the payment had been made.

AUSTRALIAN spies may have been involved in paying people smugglers to turn their boats around as part of a classified operation to disrupt their movements, a senior intelligence source revealed.

Labor is demanding the government confirm or deny reports that Australian navy officials recently paid people-smugglers to return a boat to Indonesia.

However, a senior intelligence source has told The Daily Telegraph that Australia's foreign intelligence service ASIS had been engaged in covert

disruption and intelligence operations which may have involved such payments.

“So we should certainly be hearing from the Prime Minister as soon as possible: What actually happened?”

“Put it this way, the navy doesn’t have authorisation to do such things nor do they sail around with safes full of US dollars in them,” the source said.

“But for obvious and good reasons, we don’t talk about operations of that agency.”

The opposition has demanded answers from the government over reports that a boat crew had been paid \$30,000 to turn around. They were arrested by the Indonesian navy and are now believed to be facing prosecution for people-smuggling offences.

The Indonesian government is also demanding an explanation.



Tony Abbott hinted at spy involvement.

But Prime Minister Tony Abbott has refused to confirm or deny the reports, sticking to a longstanding practice of not commenting on operational matters.

Senior government sources conceded it had been politically unhelpful that immigration minister Peter Dutton and foreign affairs minister Julie Bishop had last week both answered "no" when asked if the payment had occurred.

Opposition immigration spokesman Richard Marles yesterday said Australians had the right to know whether the reports were accurate.

"One of the real problems ... is that all of this is happening under a shroud of secrecy," Mr Marles said.

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LEFTIES WON'T SHOW BOAT PEOPLE ANY COMPASSION

"It's not really for any national security reason. It's effectively a media strategy and it denies the Australian people the ability to apply scrutiny to a matter which is very much in the public interest.

"So we should certainly be hearing from the Prime Minister as soon as possible: What actually happened?"

Mr Abbott last Friday hinted at the possible involvement of national security agencies, rather than the navy or Immigration and Border Protection. ASIS operations are classified.

"There are all sorts of things that our security agencies do ... that they need to do to protect our country and many of those things just should never be discussed in public," he said.

"Operational matters when it comes to national security are never discussed in public and that's the way it should be and what I am charged with is the protection of our country and I am pleased to say that, when it comes to border protection, this government, unlike its predecessor, has a really outstanding record."