

Reports That Pentagon Funding of Taliban is “Unintentional” Are Wrong

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In the wake of the [report from a congressional subcommittee](#) which confirms that massive amounts of Pentagon money (perhaps equaling or exceeding the Taliban’s opium profits) finance the Taliban insurgency through a “protection racket” for truck convoys, media reports have been careful to hedge descriptions of the funding as “unintentional.” This [CBS news report](#) mirrors [the AP write-up](#), which states:

Criminal investigators are examining allegations that Afghan security firms have been extorting as much as \$4 million a week from contractors paid with U.S. tax dollars and then funneling the spoils to warlords and the Taliban. If the allegations are true, the U.S. would be unintentionally financing the enemy and undermining international efforts to stabilize the country.

I hate to be the bearer of bad news, but this is simply not correct. The truth is much worse.

The report is “Warlord Inc,” [summary here](#).

Although it may be understandable if the Pentagon insists on the use of this word “unintentional,” which lessens the impact, especially among military families, of finding out that many of the weapons and explosives used against their loved ones were paid for by funds from the U.S. Treasury, the Pentagon has known for years that this has been going on. It may be “reluctantly,” but it is not “unintentionally.” Unintentional implies a lack of deliberation and knowledge of consequences. The Tierney subcommittee report at many points includes statements such as:

“When HNT contractors self-reported to the military that they were being extorted by warlords for protection payments for safe passage and that these payments were “funding the insurgency,” they were largely met with indifference and inaction.”

And [Hillary Clinton herself](#) said in Nov. 2009 in Congressional testimony:

“You offload a ship in Karachi and by the time whatever it is – you know, muffins for our soldiers’ breakfasts or anti-IED equipment – gets to where we’re headed, it goes through a lot of hands. And one of the major sources of funding for the Taliban is the protection money.”

How can something be unintentional if knowledge of the practice goes all the way up the

chain of command even to the Secretary of State herself, seven months ago?

The generals and Gates know about it and knew about it and continue to know about it, and it is still happening to this minute, because there is absolutely no other way to move the amount of military supplies required to re-supply the network of 200 American bases. The further bad news is that no amount of “criminal investigation” can fix this. An American officer in the Tierney report says:

“the heart of the matter is that insurgents are getting paid for safe passage because there are few other ways to bring goods to the combat outposts and forward operating bases where soldiers need them. By definition, many outposts are situated in hostile terrain, in the southern parts of Afghanistan. The [Afghan security companies run by warlords] don’t really protect convoys of American military goods here, because they simply can’t; they need the Taliban’s cooperation.”

Figures from the report place the amount going to insurgents from the protection racket at between \$100 million to \$400 million last year. The amount the Taliban is estimated to take in from the opium business is about \$300 million per year.

The Pentagon and the PTB have excellent reason to downplay the conclusions of the report. This is war, and everyone understands that f-ed up shit happens accidentally, like friendly fire, all the time. That is one matter. But this is not an accident, and as reluctantly as contracting officers who continue to release the funds might participate, there is full knowledge of the consequences. Were an understanding that this is not an accident to sink in, really sink in, among the general public, next week’s vote in the Senate on continuing war funds might become a bit more difficult. “Unintentional” is something which simply cannot be claimed.

The following is a statement being circulated among peace activists for transmission to the Senate and the U.S. Congress. If you are in agreement, please sign it and fax or forward it to both your senators via the contacts you have developed, or if nothing else, their [online email form](#) (faxes are better.)

The following is a statement from opponents of the war in Afghanistan on the report recently issued by the U.S. House of Representatives Subcommittee on National Security and Foreign Affairs, the Honorable John Tierney, Chairman:

It is unconscionable that U.S. taxpayer dollars, in very significant sums rivaling the Taliban’s estimated take from the opium business, should be ending up as “protection money” which in turn finances the Afghan insurgency. This is appalling to U.S. taxpayers and the Afghans who suffer from continued war, and to military families whose loved ones serve. The Pentagon is funding both sides of the war.

Further, it is an outrage that the U.S. Congress is, and has been, completely aware of this practice. Any claims to lack knowledge of the practice are erased by the work of one of Congress’s own subcommittees. The only remedy possible following this news is the suspension of funding for continued military operations, now under consideration in Congress, except in preparation for orderly withdrawal. We also support very specific forms of civilian assistance which empowers the Afghan people, not national elites or U.S. corporations.

This report is the stunning final proof that the war in Afghanistan is inherently flawed and unwinnable, when the price of continuing the charade is U.S. taxpayer dollars being handed over to insurgents who then use the money to buy weapons and explosives, and to pay fighters to attack U.S. troops.

There is no longer any plausible reason to continue war funding for anything but preparation for withdrawal, keeping U.S. troops confined to forward operating bases until such time. There is not, and never has been a military solution to Afghanistan.

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