

U.S. Indirectly Paying Afghan Warlords as Part of Security Contract

By [Karen DeYoung](#)

Global Research, June 24, 2010

[Washington Post](#) 22 June 2010

Region: [Asia](#)

Theme: [US NATO War Agenda](#)

In-depth Report: [AFGHANISTAN](#)

The U.S. military is funding a massive protection racket in [Afghanistan](#), indirectly paying tens of millions of dollars to warlords, corrupt public officials and the Taliban to ensure safe passage of its supply convoys throughout the country, according to congressional investigators.

The security arrangements, part of a \$2.16 billion transport contract, violate laws on the use of private contractors, as well as [Defense Department](#) regulations, and “dramatically undermine” larger U.S. objectives of curtailing corruption and strengthening effective governance in Afghanistan, [a report released late Monday said](#).

The report describes a Defense Department that is well aware that some of the money paid to contractors winds up in the hands of warlords and insurgents. Military logisticians on the ground are focused on getting supplies where they are needed and have “virtually no understanding of how security is actually provided” for the local truck convoys that transport more than 70 percent of all goods and materials used by U.S. troops. Alarms raised by prime trucking contractors were met by the military “with indifference and inaction,” the report said.

“The findings of this report range from sobering to shocking,” [Rep. John Tierney](#) (D-Mass.) wrote in an introduction to the 79-page report, titled “Warlord, Inc., Extortion and Corruption Along the U.S. Supply Chain in Afghanistan.”

The report comes as the number of U.S. casualties is rising in the Afghan war, and public and congressional support is declining. The administration has been on the defensive in recent weeks, insisting that the slow progress of anti-Taliban offensives in Helmand province and the city of Kandahar does not mean that more time is needed to assess whether [President Obama](#)’s strategy is working.

“I think it’s much too early to draw a negative conclusion,” said a senior administration official, speaking on the condition of anonymity to discuss internal deliberations. “I think there’s more positive than negative. We’re heading toward a year-end assessment, which will be a big one for us.” The review was set when Obama announced in December that he would send an additional 30,000 troops to Afghanistan and begin to withdraw them in July 2011.

Tierney is chairman of the national security subcommittee of the House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform, whose majority staff spent six months preparing the report. A proponent of a smaller U.S. military footprint in Afghanistan and targeted attacks

on insurgents, Tierney said in an interview Monday that he hopes the report will help members of Congress “analyze whether they think this is the most effective way to go about dealing with terrorism. Or the most cost-effective way.”

The report’s conclusions will be introduced at a hearing Tuesday at which senior military and defense officials are scheduled to testify. The report says that all evidence and findings were made available to Republicans on the subcommittee. A spokesman for [Rep. Jeff Flake](#) (Ariz.), the ranking Republican, said the lawmaker will not comment until he has seen the entire report.

In testimony shortly after Obama’s strategy announcement, Secretary of State [Hillary Rodham Clinton](#) said that “much of the corruption” in Afghanistan has been fueled by billions of dollars’ worth of foreign money spent there, “and one of the major sources of funding for the Taliban is the protection money.”

Military officials said that they have begun several corruption investigations in Afghanistan and that a task force has been named, headed by Navy Rear Adm. Kathleen Dussault, director of logistics and supply operations for the chief of naval operations and former head of the Baghdad-based joint contracting command for [Iraq](#) and Afghanistan.

Rear Adm. Gregory J. Smith, communications chief for U.S. and NATO forces in Kabul, said that the entire Tierney report has not been examined but that Dussault will be “reviewing every aspect of our contracting process and recommending changes to avoid our contribution to what is arguably a major source of revenue that feeds the cycle of corruption.”

The U.S. military imports virtually everything it uses in Afghanistan — including food, water, fuel and ammunition — by road through [Pakistan](#) or Central Asia to distribution hubs at Bagram air base north of Kabul and a similar base outside Kandahar. From there, containers are loaded onto trucks provided by Afghan contractors under the \$2.16 billion Host Nation Trucking contract. Unlike in the Iraq war, the security and vast majority of the trucks are provided by Afghans, a difference that Army [Gen. Stanley A. McChrystal](#), the top U.S. and NATO commander in Afghanistan, has praised as promoting local entrepreneurship.

The trucks distribute the material to more than 200 U.S. military outposts across Afghanistan, most of them in the southern and eastern parts of the country where roads are largely controlled by warlords and insurgent groups.

The report found no direct evidence of payoffs to the Taliban, but one trucking program manager estimated that \$1.6 million to \$2 million per week goes to the insurgents.

Most of the eight companies approved for the contract are Afghan-owned, but they serve largely as brokers for subcontractors that provide the trucks and security for the convoys, which often contain hundreds of vehicles. According to the congressional report, the U.S. officers charged with supervising the deliveries never travel off bases to determine how the system works or to ensure that U.S. laws and regulations are followed.

The report describes a system in which subcontractors — most of them well-known warlords who maintain their own militias — charge \$1,500 to \$15,000 per truck to supply guards and help secure safe passage through territory they control. The most powerful of them, known as Commander Ruhullah, controls passage along Highway One, the principal route between

Kabul and Kandahar, under the auspices of Watan Risk Management, a company owned by two of Afghan President Hamid Karzai's cousins.

Overall management of who wins the security subcontracts, it said, is often controlled by local political powerbrokers such as Karzai's half brother, Ahmed Wali Karzai, head of the Kandahar provincial council.

Relatively unknown before U.S. forces arrived in Afghanistan in fall 2001, Ruhullah is "prototypical of a new class of warlord in Afghanistan," the report said. Unlike more traditional warlords, he has no political aspirations or tribal standing but "commands a small army of over 600 guards."

The "single largest security provider for the U.S. supply chain in Afghanistan," Ruhullah "readily admits to bribing governors, police chiefs and army generals," the report said. In a meeting with congressional investigators in Dubai, he complained about "the high cost of ammunition in Afghanistan — he says he spends \$1.5 million per month on rounds for an arsenal that includes AK-47s, heavy machine guns and RPGs," or rocket-propelled grenades. It added: "Villagers along the road refer to him as 'the Butcher.' "

Despite his "critical role," the report said, "nobody from the Department of Defense or the U.S. intelligence community has ever met with him," other than special operations forces who have twice arrested and released him, and he "is largely a mystery to both the U.S. government and the contractors that employ his services."

Defense regulations and laws promulgated following difficulties with private security contractors in Iraq limit the weaponry that contractors can use and require detailed incident reports every time shots are fired. But such reports are rarely, if ever, filed, investigators said.

Another trucking contractor described a "symbiotic" relationship between security providers such as Ruhullah and the Taliban, whose fighters operate in the same space, and said that the Taliban is paid not to cause trouble for the convoys. "Many firefights are really negotiations over the fee," the report said.

Among its recommendations, the report calls on the military to establish "a direct line of authority and accountability over the private security companies that guard the supply chain" and to provide "the personnel and resources required to manage and oversee its trucking and security contracts in Afghanistan."

The original source of this article is [Washington Post](#)
Copyright © [Karen DeYoung](#), [Washington Post](#), 2010

[Comment on Global Research Articles on our Facebook page](#)

[Become a Member of Global Research](#)

Articles by: [Karen DeYoung](#)

Disclaimer: The contents of this article are of sole responsibility of the author(s). The Centre for Research on Globalization will not be responsible for any inaccurate or incorrect statement in this article. The Centre of Research on Globalization grants permission to cross-post Global Research articles on community internet sites as long the source and copyright are acknowledged together with a hyperlink to the original Global Research article. For publication of Global Research articles in print or other forms including commercial internet sites, contact: publications@globalresearch.ca

www.globalresearch.ca contains copyrighted material the use of which has not always been specifically authorized by the copyright owner. We are making such material available to our readers under the provisions of "fair use" in an effort to advance a better understanding of political, economic and social issues. The material on this site is distributed without profit to those who have expressed a prior interest in receiving it for research and educational purposes. If you wish to use copyrighted material for purposes other than "fair use" you must request permission from the copyright owner.

For media inquiries: publications@globalresearch.ca