



Written by [Jack Kenny](#) on June 11, 2010

## Is U.S. Funding Both Sides in Afghan War?

Is the United States indirectly funding the Taliban insurgents who are killing our troops in Afghanistan? The New York Times reported an ongoing investigation into whether private security companies hired to protect Western forces in Afghanistan are paying bribes to the Taliban to permit safe passage of military convoys and even to stage attacks on rival companies.



Congressman Dennis Kucinich (D-Ohio), a long-time opponent of the war, seized on the report and promised to use it as ammunition in the debate over further funding for what is now officially the longest war in U.S. history.

"In the coming weeks, Congress is expected to be asked to give another \$33 billion for war efforts," Kucinich said in an e-mail to the website, Raw Story. "I will be bringing this report to the personal attention of individual Members of Congress prior to the vote on any additional war funding." Continued U.S. military presence in Afghanistan is "detrimental to our security," said Kucinich, who has twice run for President as an antiwar candidate. "The American people are paying to prop up a corrupt government that may be using our money to pay private companies to drum up business by paying the insurgents to attack our troops," he said.

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The investigation was prompted by growing suspicions that some of the security firms are paying the Taliban for not attacking convoys transporting supplies to U.S. and NATO forces along highways where ambushes are common occurrences. Some of the firms are even suspected of paying the Taliban to mount attacks on competing companies.

"We're funding both sides," a NATO official told the *Times* on the condition of anonymity.

Suspicions grew, the *Times* reported, after two of the largest companies, Watan Risk Management and Compass Security, were banned from escorting NATO convoys between Kabul and Kandahar, following violent confrontations with Afghan civilians. On the day the ban took effect, a NATO caravan was attacked and an Afghan driver and a soldier were killed. Two weeks later, more than 1,000 trucks were stalled on the highway, unable to advance. The Afghan government then gave Watan and Compass permission to resume escort services.

Mohammed Halim Fedai, the Governor of Wardak Province, said Watan Risk Management has come under attack far less frequently than other security companies. "Maybe they are just stronger, so the Taliban are afraid of them," he said. But another Afghan official, speaking on condition of anonymity, suggested another possibility. "Watan's people may have staged the attack themselves," he said.

Private security firms operating in the country have often been criticized for attacks on civilians, with some companies reportedly attacking entire villages along routes where convoys have come under fire.



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There are 52 security companies with 24,000 registered gunmen registered with the Afghan government, the *Times* reported, but many more are unregistered. The thousands of security personnel, many of them untrained in rules of engagement, pose a problem for the civilian population, said Hanif Atmar, the Afghan Interior Minister, who recently resigned under pressure from President Hamid Karzai. "The Afghan people are not ready to accept the private companies' providing public security," Atmar told the *Times*.

Under a \$2.2 billion Host Nation Trucking contract, American officials hire trucking companies to transport food and supplies to U.S. and NATO bases and the truckers hire the various security firms. The firms, in turn, often engage subcontractors, creating a maze of contract and security arrangements that makes it difficult to track the relationships of the various firms and the recipients of the money. The companies typically charge \$800 to \$2,500 per truck to escort a convoy over a long distance. Since the convoys often contain hundreds of trucks, the business can be quite lucrative, albeit dangerous. Many of the same security companies also have contracts to guard U.S. military bases. The business is so good that members of the Afghan government have set up their own security companies.

Some of the security companies are owned by relatives of President Karzai and other senior officials. Popal, the president of Watan Risk Management, is a cousin of Karzai and the President's brother is believed to be the company's largest shareholder. Whether influential political figures are involved in schemes to pay off or otherwise conspire with the Taliban remains a matter of suspicion and concern to American and allied forces in Afghanistan.

"People think the insurgency and the government are separate, and that is just not always the case," another NATO official in Kabul told the *Times*. "What we are finding is that they are often bound up together."



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