



Written by [Thomas R. Eddlem](#) on November 19, 2009

Anglo-American Strategy in Afghanistan: Pay off Insurgents with “Bags of Gold”

The London Times reported that official British documents have revealed that the new Anglo-American strategy in Afghanistan is to buy off insurgents with bribes of “bags of gold.”

British government Major-General Paul Newton told the London *Times* for November 16: “The best weapons to counter insurgents don’t shoot. In other words, use bags of gold in the short term to change the security dynamics. But you don’t just chuck gold at them, this has to be done wisely.”

The London *Times* story reminded its readers that it is widely known that the Taliban pays its fighters \$10 a day to attack the British-American forces that back up the Afghan government. The strategy is that allied forces would pick up the fighter’s salaries and get them to change sides.

The idea is controversial, because it involves paying the same people who are responsible for killing American and British soldiers in recent years. But it’s not a new idea. The [U.S. paid Iraqi insurgents during the “surge”](#) at the end of the second term of President George W. Bush. Under that program, some 70,000 Iraqis who had been shooting at and killing Americans soldiers were paid an average of \$10 a day not to kill Americans.

Not only is the idea of paying the killers of American soldiers not new, even the figure is not arbitrary. The London *Telegraph* [reported back in May 2008](#) that Iran had paid insurgents in Iraq the same amount to attack Americans: “Jaish al-Mahdi (JAM) — also known as the Mahdi Army — one of the most violent insurgent groups operating in Basra, used money from Iran to recruit and pay young unemployed men up to \$300 (£150) a month to carry out attacks against the British. The findings have been passed to the highest levels in the military.”

While the idea of buying off terrorists with bribes may be politically popular in Washington and London, largely because it temporarily results in lower casualty rates for soldiers, even military officials are wary of calling it a solution. “We need to understand that buying off your enemy is a good short-term solution to gain a respite from violence,” Gen. Barry McCaffrey [told National Public Radio](#) last year of the American Iraqi “surge” strategy, “but it’s not a long-term solution to creating a legitimate political order inside a country that, quite frankly, is recovering from the worst sort of civil war.”

McCaffrey’s words were prescient. The number of [deaths related to insurgents doubled last month](#) in Iraq, which reversed the trend downward in casualties begun by the 2007-08 surge.

In Afghanistan, there’s no guarantee that the United States will be able to pay everyone off with the \$10





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per day fee that worked at least temporarily in Iraq. Afghanistan is home to the multibillion-dollar opium industry, and most of the profits from that drug trade flow through the Taliban. The Taliban could simply raise the *ante*.

Moreover, bribing terrorists with U.S. taxpayer dollars may simply mean the United States will have to deal with a better-funded insurgency somewhere down the road.



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