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In a continuous flow of money, American tax dollars end up paying members of the Taliban and funding a volatile environment in Afghanistan. Private contractors pay insurgents with the hope of attaining the very safety they are contracted to provide. Concurrently, US soldiers pay at checkpoints run by suspected insurgents in order to get safe passage. In some cases, Afghan companies run by former Taliban members, like President Hamid Karzai's cousin, are protecting the passage of American soldiers. The funding of the insurgents, along with rumors of American helicopters ferrying Taliban members in Afghanistan, has led to widespread distrust of American forces. In the meantime, the US taxpayer's dollar continues to fund insurgents to protect American troops so they can fight insurgents.

Ahmad Rate Popal is a grand example of how those who controlled Afghanistan under Taliban rule are still controlling Afghanistan today and being paid by US tax dollars. Popal, who served as interpreter at one of the ruling Taliban's last press conferences, is greatly increasing his wealth through the US war in Afghanistan. In 1988, he was charged with conspiring to import heroin into the United States. He was released from prison in 1997. Popal's cousin is Afghanistan's President Karzai. Popal and his brother Rashid (who pleaded guilty in 1996 to a separate heroin charge) control the Watan Group in Afghanistan, which is a consortium engaged in many different fields of business. One of Watan's enterprises is to protect convoys of Afghan trucks heading from Kabul to Kandahar, carrying American supplies. Popal is one example of the virtual carnival of improbable characters and shady connections, with former CIA officials and ex-military officers in Afghanistan joining hands with former Taliban members and *mujahideen* to collect US government funds in the name of the war effort.

US security contractors as well as countless other private American corporations cannot provide the safety that they are paid to offer. So US military contractors in Afghanistan pay suspected insurgents to protect the US supply routes they were contracted to protect. A war-torn country such as Afghanistan has plenty of impoverished citizens, and, as a result, it is not hard for private contractors to find individuals willing to take money to protect supply routes.

Thus, an estimated 10 percent of the Pentagon's logistics contracts worth hundreds of millions of dollars are paid to insurgents as the US government funds the very forces American troops are fighting.

An example of these contracts are those granted to the NCL Holdings in Afghanistan run by Hamed Wardak, the young American son of Afghanistan's current defense minister, General Abdul Rahim Wardak. NCL is a small firm that was awarded a US military logistics contract worth hundreds of millions of dollars. Despite the fact that the firm only operates in Afghanistan, Wardak incorporated NCL in the United States early in 2007, due to his connections there.

On NCL's advisory board is Milton Bearden, a well-known former CIA officer who in 2009 was introduced by Senator John Kerry as "a legendary former CIA case officer and a clearheaded thinker and writer." Bearden is an incredible asset to a small defense contracting firm. Wardak was able to get a contract for Host Nation Trucking despite having no apparent trucking experience. The contract is aimed at handling the bulk of US trucking in Afghanistan, bringing supplies to bases and remote outposts throughout Afghanistan. At first the contract was small, but very quickly it expanded by 600 percent, making it a gargantuan contract worth \$360 million. NCL had struck pure contracting gold. These profits, which only go to a very select and well-connected portion of the Afghan people, build a large amount of distrust from Afghan citizens toward American troops and those connected to them.

It is persistently rumored in Afghanistan that US forces are using their helicopters to ferry Taliban fighters. The rumor is strongly denied by the military. However, the helicopter rumors heard in many areas are feeding mistrust of the forces that are supposed to be bringing order to the country. The international troops deny that they are supporting the insurgents. "This entire business with the helicopters is just a rumor," said Brigadier General Jüergen Setzer, recently appointed commander for the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in northern Afghanistan. "It has no basis in reality, according to our investigations." But the persistent rumors that foreign helicopters have been sighted assisting the Taliban in northern Afghanistan were given an unexpected boost in mid-October 2009 by President Karzai, who told the media that his administration was investigating similar reports that "unknown" helicopters were ferrying the insurgents from the Helmand province in the south to the Baghlan, Kunduz, and Samangan provinces in the north.

Update

On June 6, the *New York Times* reported that the House National Security Subcommittee, whose chair is John Tierney (D-MA), is holding hearings on this issue. In a March 2010

Washington Post

article, Congressman Tierney cited the article in the

Nation

as the reason he began the investigation.

Since our initial search of corporate media coverage on this issue in February 2010, finding zero coverage at that time, both the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post* have covered part of the story on their front pages. Both mentioned President Hamid Karzai's cousin, and both acknowledged that in all likelihood money is making its way to the Taliban. Neither paper mentioned the US connection, Milton Bearden. The

Washington Post

covered the story on March 29, 2010, and mentioned the

Nation

magazine article.

The

New York Times

story came out on June 6, 2010, acknowledging the corruption, but included the news that President Obama was addressing the issue with President Karzai. That the two stories came out two months apart, and that the US links are left out, led to the decision at Project Censored to keep this important story in the top censored stories list for the year.