

## 5. *Unaccountable Supply Chain Security Contractors Undermine U.S. Counterinsurgency Strategy*

**Finding:** While outsourcing principal responsibility for the supply chain in Afghanistan to local truckers and unknown security commanders has allowed the Department of Defense to devote a greater percentage of its force structure to priority operations, these logistics arrangements have significant unintended consequences for the overall counterinsurgency strategy. By fueling unaccountable warlords and funding parallel power structures, the United States undercuts efforts to establish popular confidence in a credible and sustainable Afghan government.

*In both conventional and irregular war, the normal rule of law – and attendant mechanisms for oversight and punishment – has deteriorated. As a result, the use of deadly force must be entrusted only to those whose training, character and accountability are most worthy of the nation’s trust: the military. The military profession carefully cultivates an ethic of “selfless service,” and develops the virtues that can best withstand combat pressures and thus achieve the nation’s objectives in an honorable way. By contrast, most corporate ethical standards and available regulatory schemes are ill-suited for this environment. We therefore conclude that contractors should not be deployed as security guards, sentries, or even prison guards within combat areas. [Armed private security guards] should be restricted to appropriate support functions and those geographic areas where the rule of law prevails. In irregular warfare environments, where civilian cooperation is crucial, this restriction is both ethically and strategically necessary.*

– Letter from Vice Admiral Jeff Fowler, Superintendent, U.S. Naval Academy to General James T. Conway, Commandant of the Marine Corps summarizing the 2009 McCain Conference on Ethics & Military Leadership

During the Soviet Union’s ten-year war in Afghanistan, “[h]ardly a day would pass without a Mujahideen attack on enemy columns along the main highway connecting [Kandahar] with Ghazni.” Much of the combat for the entire conflict gravitated around control and protection of the thinly stretched Soviet supply chain. More than three-fourths of Soviet combat forces were regularly involved in convoy security missions, which prevented them from ever sustaining a larger occupation force and controlling key cities such as Kandahar.<sup>176</sup>

In Afghanistan, the U.S. Department of Defense has created a new model of supply chain that relies entirely on private local contractors to carry and defend the food, water, shelter, fuel, and arms that our troops need to perform their mission. The logistics benefits of such a supply chain model are clear – U.S. troops are not put directly in harms way for logistics missions and can instead focus on higher priority objectives – but the costs to overall U.S. counterinsurgency strategy have not been adequately analyzed or assessed. As one former senior Department of Defense official in Kabul put it: “[t]his is symptomatic of what we are doing [in Afghanistan]. Our heart is in the right place, but the business model is to outsource important services and not look at the collateral consequences.”<sup>177</sup>

### **“They Tend to Squeeze the Trigger First and Ask Questions Later”**

In August 2009, General Stanley McChrystal released his “Commander’s Initial Assessment” of NATO forces in Afghanistan where he declared that, “success demands a comprehensive counterinsurgency campaign” to gain “the support of the Afghan people.” The assessment then specifically outlined how unrestrained, arbitrary force negatively impacts counterinsurgency efforts. Civilian casualties and collateral damage resulting “from an over-reliance on firepower and force protection have severely damaged ISAF’s legitimacy in the eyes of the Afghan people.” The assessment concluded that the Afghans perceived that ISAF was “complicit” in “widespread corruption and abuse of power.”<sup>178</sup>



*Screenshot of Watan Risk Management guards engaged in a firefight off Highway 1*

While the Department of Defense may not know who operates and protects its supply chain, the Afghan people do. When a supply convoy of 300 trucks and 500 heavily armed guards rolls down Highway 1 engaging in firefights with competitors, criminals, and insurgents, the local population understands that it is an American convoy.<sup>179</sup> In other words, in the eyes of the Afghan population, the United States of America is responsible for the actions of Commander Ruhullah, Matiullah, Colonel Razziq, Koka, and others.

A recent article entitled, “Reckless Private Security Companies Anger Afghans,” painted a portrait of U.S. military operators’ frustration with the unaccountable private security companies protecting NATO supplies that travel through their battlespace:

Private Afghan security guards protecting NATO supply convoys in southern Kandahar province regularly fire wildly into villages they pass, hindering coalition efforts to build local support ahead of this summer’s planned offensive in the area, U.S. and Afghan officials say.

The guards shoot into villages to intimidate any potential militants, the officials say, but also cause the kind of civilian casualties that the top U.S. commander in Afghanistan has tried repeatedly to stop.

“Especially as they go through the populated areas, they tend to squeeze the trigger first and ask questions later,” said Capt. Matt Quiggle, a member of the U.S. Army’s 5<sup>th</sup> Stryker brigade tasked with patrolling Highway One, which connects Afghanistan’s major cities.

The troops say they have complained to senior coalition officials and have even detained some guards to lecture them about their conduct, but the problem has continued.

Many suspect there has been little response because the security companies are owned by or connected to some of the province’s most powerful figures ...

Public anger is directed at the Afghan government and coalition forces, making it more difficult for the U.S. and others to convince locals that they should look to them for protection rather than the Taliban, said Lt. Col. Dave Abrahams, deputy commander of a Stryker battalion that patrols the stretch of Highway One ...

“The irresponsible actions of these companies” are jeopardizing NATO’s attempts to gain the support of local villagers, Abrahams wrote in an e-mail to his superiors late last year.

“They are armed, wearing uniforms, escorting U.S. convoys, and indiscriminately shooting into villages,” said Abrahams, deputy commander of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, 1<sup>st</sup> Infantry Regiment, 5<sup>th</sup> Stryker Brigade, 2<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Division ...

Abrahams, the deputy battalion commander, tried to address the problem in November by stopping two convoys as they passed his base.

“We basically detained their entire security force, and I sat down to talk to their leaders to tell them not to shoot without reason and basically threatened” to take away their certification to work for NATO, said Abrahams. “But we haven’t been able to make good on it, which is part of our frustration.”

Many of the gunmen have little or no training and many are also high on either heroin or hashish, Afghan and U.S. officials said ...

Abrahams said he has tried to tell locals that he understands their plight, but he is consistently undermined by the wild shooting.

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***“Actions speak louder than words, and the locals see these drugged-out thugs with guns and trucks with ‘The United States’ painted on the side.”***

***– U.S. Lieutenant Colonel Dave Abrahams***

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The NATO commander of Regional Command-South, British Major General Nick Carter, agreed with the Highway 1 Stryker Battalion assessment, describing private security contractors as operating in a “culture of impunity.”<sup>181</sup>

### **Warlords Are a “Parallel Structure to the Government”**

*Units Employing [host nation] contractors and employees must watch for signs of exploitive or corrupt business practices that may alienate segments of the local populace and inadvertently undermine [counterinsurgency] objectives.*

– General David Petraeus and General James Amos,  
*Counterinsurgency*, Department of the Army (December 2006)

According to Qayum Karzai, President Karzai’s brother and an Afghan-American businessman, “the majority of money that should have gone to the Afghan people has gone to warlords and they are more powerful now than they have ever been.” In an interview with Subcommittee staff, Mr. Karzai lamented that warlords are “much more difficult to deal with now than they were nine years ago,” and described them as the “single element that has sidelined the population.” The population lost trust in “traditional Afghan political culture when warlords took over.” “[The Afghan people] saw the fight between warlords and Taliban, and they disliked both of them.”<sup>182</sup>

Qayum Karzai, Ahmed Wali Karzai, Rashid and Ahmed Rateb Popal, and Commander Ruhullah all agreed that, in a perfect world, the ANA and ANP should provide security along

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***– Qayum Karzai***

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the roads, but that such security would be a long time off. In the meantime, Watan Risk Management and Commander Ruhullah are engaged in active – and sometimes hostile – competition with the government. Commander Ruhullah described the Afghan government as “the enemy of convoy security.”<sup>183</sup>

In Uruzgan Province, for example, providing a variety of security services to the U.S. and NATO forces has significantly increased the power of Matiullah Khan vis-à-vis the official Afghan government structures there. According to the *New York Times*, “[m]any Afghans say the Americans and their NATO partners are making a grave mistake by tolerating or encouraging warlords like Mr. Matiullah. These Afghans fear the Americans will leave behind an Afghan government too weak to do its work, and strongmen without any popular support.”<sup>184</sup>

The Afghan government also seems to share concerns about the growing power of warlords at the expense of their own authority and legitimacy. The former Minister of the Interior, Hanif Atmar, stated, “[p]arallel structures of government create problems for the rule of law.” As one tribal elder in Uruzgan put it, “Matiullah is not part of the government, he is stronger than the government, and he can do anything he wants.”<sup>185</sup>

In short, while one of the primary U.S. strategic goals in Afghanistan is to bolster the Afghan central government, U.S. reliance on warlords for supply chain security has the effect of dramatically undermining that objective.