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## Profiting from America's Longest War: Trump Seeks to Exploit Mineral Wealth of Afghanistan

By Ben Dangel  
October 16, 2017



October 7th marked sixteen years since the start of the US War in Afghanistan – America’s longest war. In an effort to justify the continued and expanded presence of US troops in the country, President Trump is seeking a plan to have US companies extract minerals from resource-rich Afghanistan.

Afghanistan’s deposits of iron, copper, zinc, gold, silver, lithium and other rare-earth metals are estimated to be worth roughly \$1 trillion, a price tag which has intrigued the business mogul-turned-President Trump.

Afghan President Ashraf Ghani brought up the matter in one of his first conversations with Trump, suggesting it would be a great opportunity for US businesses.

“We are sitting on enormous wealth,” Ghani reportedly told Trump during a meeting in Riyadh in May. “Why aren’t the American companies in this instead of China?”

President Trump embraced the idea, convening meetings with senior aides and top mining and security executives to discuss profiting from Afghanistan’s mineral riches.

In July, he met with Michael Silver of American Elements, a company focused on using rare-earth minerals in high-tech devices. Stephen A. Fienberg, the owner of the military contracting firm DynCorp International, is also advising Trump on the issue. DynCorp, a controversial human rights violator, could provide security for the mines in Taliban-controlled regions.

Erik D. Prince, the founder of the notorious private security firm Blackwater International, has also been involved in discussions with Trump about Afghanistan.

Prince, in an op-ed for the Wall Street Journal last May, argued for a complete privatization of the war in the country, calling for one sole “viceroy” to conduct all US efforts, and an “East Indian Company approach” involving “private military units” and “a nimbler special-ops and contracted force.”

Meanwhile, Trump’s discussions with Afghan President Ghani continue. The two met in New York on September 22 and discussed, according to a White House press release, “how American companies can help quickly develop Afghanistan’s rich rare earth mineral resources.”

“They agreed that such initiatives would help American companies develop materials critical to national security while growing Afghanistan’s economy and creating new jobs in both countries,” the press release continued, “therefore defraying some of the costs of United States assistance as Afghans become more self-reliant.”

While the heads of the state discuss profiting from the mining sector, the US war in Afghanistan is escalating.

Since the US started the war in Afghanistan in 2001, Washington has spent an estimated \$714 billion in war and reconstruction efforts there, according to the most recent report from the

Pentagon's Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction. This means the war in Afghanistan costs the US roughly \$3.9 billion per month.

Eleven thousand troops are currently stationed in Afghanistan, according to the Pentagon. In August, Trump ordered an additional deployment of four thousand troops. At this point, Republican Senator Bob Corker, the chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, expects US troops to remain in Afghanistan for another decade or beyond.

And the bombs keep falling. Last month, airstrikes conducted by the US-led coalition in Afghanistan reached a seven-year high. In the first nine months of this year, the US dropped 2,353 bombs on Afghanistan – a dramatic increase from the 236 total airstrikes in 2015. In April, the US dropped an eleven-ton bomb, the largest non-nuclear bomb ever used by the US, in a bombing of ISIS militants in eastern Afghanistan.

Civilian casualties have increased with the escalated violence. From January 1 to September 30 of this year, the UN reported 2,640 deaths and 5,379 injuries among civilians.

US and Afghan airstrikes in 2017 have contributed to a 43% rise in civilian casualties from the air, according to the UN.

Civilian casualties among children and women have seen a rise from the previous year. The UN reports that two thirds of the casualties were due to bombings and attacks from the Taliban and other anti-government forces, such as ISIS. In addition, bombs left in empty homes and across the countryside have resulted in 1,483 injuries and many amputations.

“Afghan civilians are caught between corrupt, U.S.-backed warlords in government, U.S. troops on the ground and airstrikes from above, Taliban forces, and now an emerging Islamic State presence,” Sonali Kolhatkar, co-author of the book *Bleeding Afghanistan* and co-director of the Afghan Women's Mission, recently wrote. “The war has hardly improved their lives and will likely mean many more years of violence.”

Meanwhile, the mineral wealth of Afghanistan has the attention of President Trump, who is looking for a reason to continue America's longest war.

“Trump wants to be repaid,” a source close to the White House explained. “He's trying to see where the business deal is.”