

Beat: News

Fraud by Afghan contractors may have killed U.S. soldiers, report finds

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USPA News - At least two Afghan contractors failed to install hundreds of devices which are designed to prevent improvised explosive devices (IEDs) from being placed under roadways, possibly resulting in the deaths of U.S. soldiers, according to a U.S. report released on Tuesday. Since 2009, the U.S. Defense Department (DoD) has awarded contracts worth approximately \$32 millions for the construction and installation of so-called culvert denial systems.

Such devices aim to block unauthorized access to culverts and prevent insurgents from placing IEDs in them. But at least two Afghan contractors, with a total contract amount of nearly \$1 million, are believed to have committed fraud by billing the U.S. government for the installation of 250 culvert denial systems that were either never installed or incorrectly installed, said Alex Bronstein-Moffly, a spokesman for the U.S. Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR). "To date, SIGAR's investigations led to an Afghan contractor and sub-contractor being arrested and charged with fraud and negligent homicide," Bronstein-Moffly said. "SIGAR's ongoing investigation is looking into whether this apparent failure to perform may have been a factor in the death or injury of several U.S. soldiers." The spokesman declined to say how many U.S. soldiers may have been killed as a result of the fraud or whether the failure may have also resulted in the deaths of other coalition service members as well as Afghan civilians and Afghan security forces. "As this is an ongoing investigation we cannot comment any further," he said. Special Inspector General John Sopko described the contractors' failures as horrific and unacceptable. "This case shows so clearly that fraud can kill in Afghanistan. We will find out if contracting officers did not do their job and if that proves to be true and Americans have died, we will hold those individuals accountable," he said. The number of coalition troops being killed in Afghanistan has declined in recent years. A total of 402 ISAF troops were killed in Afghanistan in 2012, down from 566 fatalities in 2011 and 711 in 2010. A majority of the fallen troops were American and were killed in the country's south, which is plagued by IED attacks on troops and civilians. There are currently more than 100,000 foreign troops in Afghanistan, including some 68,000 U.S. troops and 9,000 British soldiers. Approximately 3,800 British soldiers are expected to withdraw from Afghanistan by the end of 2013, with all foreign combat troops due to leave by the end of 2014. Last month, Afghan President Hamid Karzai announced the fifth and final phase of security transition in which coalition forces hand over control of the remaining 95 districts - including Taliban stronghold areas in the south and east - to Afghan security forces. ISAF will still be responsible for military air support as well as support in combat operations until the end of 2014.

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Editorial program service of General News Agency:

UPA United Press Agency LTD

483 Green Lanes

UK, London N13NV 4BS

contact (at) unitedpressagency.com

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