



## **Afghanistan – Researched and compiled by the Refugee Documentation Centre of Ireland on 12 June 2012**

### **Information on the security situation for Afghans working with the American forces in Afghanistan. Information on Afghans receiving warning letters/night letters from the Taliban.**

A report published by the *Country of Origin Information Centre (Landinfo)* of Norway, in a section titled “General Considerations on the Character of the Conflict and the Attitude Towards Civilians of the Parties in the Conflict” (section 3), states:

“The Taliban also forbid any kind of collaboration with the government and particularly with the foreign troops, including of an economic nature. Since contracting for ISAF or for western aid agencies is one of the main sources of employment in Afghanistan, the ban has a major impact on the ability of household to earn a livelihood. Unsurprisingly, most Afghans ignore it, at their risk and peril. Executions of contractors do occur. Usually the Taliban follow a procedure, which includes warning the collaborationists that they are going to be punished if they persist.” (Country of Origin Information Centre (Landinfo) (9 September 2011) *Afghanistan: Human Rights and Security Situation*, p.7)

A *Danish Immigration Service* report fact-finding mission report, in a section titled “Association or employment with US military/ISAF” (section 2), states:

“Concerning the risk run by persons who are associated or employed with US military, an independent policy research organization in Kabul informed the delegation that these employees do not run a high risk if their workplace is in Kabul, but if one works in a military base outside Kabul, then there is a risk of being targeted regardless of one’s position and type of work. That includes contractors as well as service staff and drivers. As regards other people working for the US military, the independent policy research organization in Kabul stated that for instance interpreters are high targets. Another factor determining the level of risk in this connection is one’s place of living. Employees who live locally outside bases run a higher risk compared to those who are originating from another area than where the bases are located. The same source stated that many of those who work for the military keep their jobs a secret if they can.” (Danish Immigration Service (29 May 2012) *Afghanistan: Country of Origin Information for Use in the Asylum Determination Process (Report from Danish Immigration Service’s fact finding mission to Kabul, Afghanistan)*, p.17)

This report also refers to information provided by the UNHCR as follows:

“According to UNHCR, all persons who are seen to support NATO-soldiers and people working for NATO, as well as foreigners and people working for foreigners are at risk of being targeted by the Taliban. UNHCR commented that regarding staff employed by the US military or ISAF, there is a high possibility for every staff member being intimidated by the Taliban.

Interpreters as well as local drivers working for companies supporting the bases are at risk. UNHCR mentioned it as rule of thumb that all blue collar employees who are seen going in and out of military bases as well as PRT-camps on a regular basis, may be at risk of intimidation by the Taliban. As UNHCR expressed it: 'the more visible you are the higher the risk you run of being targeted'. In practice, however, it is difficult to distinguish between the various levels of employment according to UNHCR. In general, all Afghans who are associated with foreigners could be at risk in Kabul as well as in the country side. However, the risk is higher for people outside Kabul, according to UNHCR." (ibid, p.17)

Referring to information provided by the International Organization for Migration this report states:

"People working for US military or ISAF run a higher risk than other groups, according to IOM. Translators are more at risk than other employees such as cleaning staff, which IOM explained by the fact that translators are more in contact with the military staff. Family members of these employees would always be included in the threats, according to IOM. IOM further said that contractors working for the US military or American or British companies are also targeted, and contractors working for Indian companies are to some extent also targeted." (ibid, p.17)

This section of the report concludes by referring to information obtained from the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission, stating:

"According to AIHRC, people working with international forces are targeted by the Taliban. Translators working for U.S. military or ISAF forces were mentioned by AIHRC among the Taliban's targets. As regards family members of people working for the international forces, there are examples that the Taliban has intimidated their families and acquaintances, but the real risk is for the person working for the forces. An independent research institute in Kabul informed the delegation that especially interpreters employed by the international forces are at risk, but drivers and service staff could also be targeted. They can be kidnapped, blackmailed or killed because of this association. NATO convoy drivers are also often killed. AAWU stated that men who work within the security forces and interpreters working for the foreign forces are high targets." (ibid, pp.17-18)

The Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission is also referred to in a section of the report titled "Existence and consequences of receiving night letters" (section 4.3) which states:

"AIHRC informed the delegation that night letters are a well known tactic used by the Taliban to intimidate people. This tactic is not much used in Kabul, but in the countryside such as in Wardak and Ghazni provinces this phenomenon is widespread. When asked about assaults following a night letter, AIHRC stated that there are different levels of intimidation: while night letters in some cases may end up with killings, in other cases the assault is limited to beatings or nothing happens. When asked whether people would seek protection with the police in such cases, AIHRC stated that people would do so, but the protection provided by the police has not been effective until now. As an example, AIHRC mentioned that a week earlier one person was killed

after receiving a warning despite the fact that he went to the police and asked for protection.” (ibid, pp.30-31)

Information provided by the UNHCR is referred to in a section of this report which states:

“UNHCR informed the delegation that the Taliban, especially since 2009, has had the capacity to intimidate people by warning them: ‘we know who you are and where you work’. UNHCR explained that the use of night letters to intimidate people working for the Afghan government and Westerners is very widespread. In rural areas, the use of night letters is most widespread whereas the pattern of intimidation in Kabul is different and would most likely be in the form of phone calls rather than night letters. UNHCR stated that the intimidation by the Taliban will mostly be repeated until the victim is silenced by obeying orders. In cases of continued refusal to heed the warnings (for example continued collaboration with state authorities), intimidation can potentially lead to physical elimination. According to UNHCR, the intimidation will often also include the family members of the victim. According to an international organization, the use of night letters and threats by the Taliban is quite common, but this is not a phenomenon limited to the Taliban as use of threats in general are very common in Afghanistan. IPCB commented that night letters are a fairly well known occurrence. The message of these letters is often that the receiver should stop supporting the government.” (ibid, p.31)

This section also contains input from the Afghan-led research organisation Cooperation for Peace And Unity as follows:

“Concerning prevalence of night letters, CPAU confirmed that night letters are common. The messages contained in these letters could for instance be urging people to stop going to school or to work and leave their jobs. If the messages continue, they might have serious consequences such as physical elimination, abduction for ransom, physical beating and torture, etc. However, CPAU added that it is quite easy to fabricate a Taliban night letter and people sometimes even pretend to be the Taliban and threaten each other by night letters or SMS messages for different reasons. That is why when people receive a threatening message on their phone, they go to the mobile company to trace the number and identity of the person who has sent the message to find out whether the threat is real. CPAU pointed out that people usually do not go to the police, not even in Kabul, when they receive night letters or any other threatening message because the police would normally not take any action in these cases.” (ibid, p.31)

An article published by the *Omaha World Herald* states:

“Last year, 430 employees of U.S. companies were killed in Afghanistan, outpacing for the first time in the war's history the number of American active-duty troops killed, according to two government agencies and first reported by the New York Times. The toll of contractors killed and wounded — a number compiled by the U.S. Department of Labor — is likely artificially low, experts say, because the deaths of Afghan employees working for American companies often go unreported.” (Omaha World Herald (26 February 2012) *Afghan violence erodes security for workers*)

This article also states:

“The Center for Afghanistan Studies, run by nationally known Afghan expert Thomas Gouttierre, has long won government contracts to do teacher training and education projects in Afghanistan. Gouttierre runs a deliberately low-key operation in Kabul staffed almost exclusively by Afghans and overseen in part by Assistant Director Raheem Yaseer, an Afghan-American with a half-century of experience navigating the country's unique political and cultural landscape. The sign outside the center's Kabul headquarters remains purposely faded and hard to see, because a coat of new paint connotes money and power. The center's employees drive nondescript used cars, not the gleaming SUVs that Afghans equate with American contractors and that suicide bombers sometimes target. And you won't see guards with machine guns standing watch outside the center's headquarters, printing press or other projects throughout Afghanistan. Any security they have is well-hidden, Gouttierre says. None of that helped last spring when an Afghan employee of the center had to flee Afghanistan with her family after a series of 'night letters' warned she would be hurt or killed if she stayed. The woman is now safely outside Afghanistan, Gouttierre says, but the incident unsettled the center's staff.” (ibid)

A *Washington Post* article on the activities of the translation services provider Mission Essential Personnel states:

“Salaries can range from as low as \$900 a month for an Afghan to \$200,000 or more a year for an American working at forward operating positions. It is a dangerous business, and even more so for Afghans, who become special targets for the Taliban. MEP in September said that over the years 73 of its employees had been killed, with 312 injured and 10 missing.” (Washington Post (23 February 2012) *Profiting in Afghanistan*)

A statement originally published on the pro-Taliban *Voice of Jihad* website claims:

“Haji Ahmadollah, a former candidate for the provincial council of the province and a contractor working for the American forces, has been killed in a mine explosion in Tarin Kot city, the centre of Urozgan Province. According to a report, the incident happened as the said person fell victim to the landmine explosion on a road as he was leaving his home at around 0800 [local time] this morning. The report says the contractor and his driver were killed instantly in the heavy explosion and two of his sons were wounded.” (Voice of Jihad (13 February 2012) *Taliban claim killing contractor working for US forces in Afghan south*)

See also *Voice of Jihad* statement which claims:

“According to the latest report, Ma'alem Raz Mohammad, a well-known contractor who was working as a contractor for constructing the buildings of the invading forces' bases in the Zerkoh area of Shindand District, was killed in an armed attack by the mojahedin in the district's market in Herat Province, in the west of the country, a short while ago. The report adds the incident took place at 1830 [local time] today when the above-mentioned contractor, who was standing in front of a shop, came under the mojahedin's armed attack. The attacking mojahedin, on a motorcycle, left the area safely after the

attack.” (Voice of Jihad (5 April 2012) *Taliban claim killing contractor working for US forces in Afghan west*)

An article published on the independent journalism website *The Public Record* quotes a US army colonel as saying:

"Recently, I got a cellphone call from a Talib who had captured a friend of mine. While I could hear, he began to beat him, telling me I'd better quit working for the Americans. I could hear my friend crying out in pain. [The Talib] said the next time they would kidnap my sons and do the same to them. Because of the direct threats, I've had to take my children out of school just to keep them safe." (The Public Record (21 February 2012) *Military Officer Exposes Afghanistan "Success" As A Lie*)

A *Deutsche Welle* article, in a paragraph headed "Civil conflict", states:

"The biggest worry is the possibility of a breakdown in security that could lead to both an increase in terrorist activity and a civil conflict between the Taliban and their opponents. The safety of Afghan civilians in a post-America landscape is also of concern. Hundreds, like my driver, have been working for the Americans as interpreters and in other low-ranking jobs crucial to the Western operation here. They are worried not just about decreases in salary and changes in lifestyle, but about post-withdrawal retaliation from an opposition whose antagonism toward the US grows steadily with every military misstep." (Deutsche Welle (17 April 2012) *Afghan attacks raise specter of Taliban terror*)

This article also states:

"Earning wages far higher than most of their fellow Afghans, those who work for the US Embassy, NATO and other organizations have become accustomed to a certain lifestyle which, for most, is unlikely to be replicated. Most houses in Kabul are already guarded by heavy metal gates, barbed wire and, for the wealthier, guards with rifles. Foreign compounds are marked by blast-proof walls." (ibid)

An *Agence France Presse* report on interpreters working for the US army states:

"They feel lucky to be alive after countless risky missions with US troops, but Afghan interpreters are sure of their fate if they stay put after American forces leave in 2014. 'The Taliban will kill me and my family. I can't stay in Afghanistan,' 30-year-old Mohammad Yousaf told AFP. Yousaf is one of thousands of young Afghan men who learned English from watching American movies and now act as vital intermediaries between international troops and locals in the decade-long war. They work as interpreters, or 'terps' as they are known to foreign troops, in the hope of securing an American visa after at least one year of service. But they fear that when US and combat troops from other NATO allies withdraw in 2014, they will be targeted by the Taliban." (Agence France Presse (1 October 2011) *Afghan interpreters race for US visas as exit looms*)

This response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Research and Information Unit within time

constraints. This response is not and does not purport to be conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim to refugee status or asylum. Please read in full all documents referred to.

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