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<http://strategicstudyindia.blogspot.in/2017/07/will-donald-trump-privatize-afghanistan.html>

## Will Donald Trump Privatize the Afghanistan War?

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Is the Trump administration going to hand over U.S. peacekeeping operations in Afghanistan to private mercenaries?

This is now the big question in national security policy circles. It follows last week's The New York Times report that Erik Prince, the founder of private security firm Blackwater, and Stephen Feinberg, the billionaire financier who owns defense contracting giant DynCorp International, have been lobbying the Pentagon to replace troops in Afghanistan with contractors.

Prince outlined his proposed solution in a recent The Wall Street Journal op-ed. A "MacArthur model," with an "American viceroy" leading a force of "private military units."

Feinberg's plan, according to the Times, calls for more collaboration with the Afghan government, but it would also use private fighters—possibly even DynCorp employees—and would put the CIA in command.

Both men pitched their ideas directly to Secretary of Defense James Mattis at the behest of Pres. Donald Trump's advisors Stephen Bannon and Jared Kushner.

The news is deeply troubling. There is an obvious conflict of interest in letting contractors devise a military strategy that relies entirely on contractors. In addition, the two pitchmen who stand to profit from it symbolize the worst aspects of outsourcing.

When Prince led Blackwater, the company earned international infamy with instances of excessive force and brutality in Iraq and Afghanistan, and a \$42-million fine for arms export violations.

Prince, who is Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos's brother and now runs another private security company, is reportedly under investigation for money laundering and sketchy business dealings with foreign governments. DynCorp continues to receive billions of dollars in federal business every year despite a long track record of questionable behavior, including instances of human trafficking and contract fraud.

It's also unclear how the Pentagon can square this strategy with a federal regulation that bars contractors from performing inherently governmental functions, or functions that directly impact the government's discretionary authority, decision-making responsibility or accountability.

Among the tasks considered off-limits to contractors are the command of military forces, the conduct of foreign relations, the determination of agency policy, and the direction and control of intelligence and counter-intelligence operations.

The strategy could also come with a price tag that antagonizes deficit hawks. The Project on Government Oversight's Bad Business report found that security services, performed both domestically and overseas, often cost the government more when performed by contractors. For example, we determined that Blackwater security guards in Iraq were between 11 and 78 percent more expensive than military guards.

So far, the ambitious proposals of Prince and Feinberg seem to be falling on deaf ears at the Pentagon, which is planning to send several thousand additional troops to a war that is about to enter its 17th year and has cost in the neighborhood of \$1 trillion.

POGO believes that contractors should continue to play a role in the pacification and redevelopment of Afghanistan, but not a leading role. This is especially true in combat, peacekeeping and intelligence operations, where a clear chain of command and a robust system of accountability are essential.

Taxpayers should not foot the bill for a private army that could ultimately undermine U.S. objectives and worsen the situation in Afghanistan