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## UK's *Sunday Times*: Iran Using Needlessly Convolved Scheme to Fund Taliban

By Jason Ditz

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In [an article in today's Sunday Times](#), the Rupert Murdoch-owned paper cites a series of unnamed "Taliban sources" who told them that the Iranian government, by way of some Iranian companies involved in the reconstruction effort in Afghanistan are "funding the Taliban" and even "paying a bounty" for each American killed.

The allegation was quickly latched onto by a number of other media sources including Fox News and [MSNBC](#), who appear to have done no further research into the matter but simply reported it as something the paper discovered by way of its own sources.

Though the headline "Iran pays Taliban to kill Americans" plays well with the endless drumbeat of stories that Iran is just plain bad, the scheme is remarkable more for its almost absurd and surely needlessly convoluted nature.

According to the "sources," the Iranian companies, which aren't real but are just fronts for the Iranian government, win reconstruction contracts within Afghanistan and use that money, paid out by western nations to pay the relatively paltry bounties to a farmer who the Taliban taught to read last winter. The farmer, in turn, funds the entire operation but some of the money also gets put into Kabul Bank and funneled to Tehran, for some inexplicable reason.

Of course unsourced allegations cannot be conclusively disproven, but it does not require serious scrutiny to realize a few things about this claim, perhaps the most glaring being that the Iranian government, with an annual budget of \$368 billion, is inexplicably setting up shell companies to bid on contracts to collect puny sums of money that it can funnel to “some guy” who sticks them in sacks of flour. Putting aside Iran’s historical animosity to the Taliban it seems as though even if they were looking to “fund” them the porous border between Iran and Afghanistan would allow them to do so without setting up a number of artificial hoops which are seemingly only there to make the story sound good and scary.