



## **Afghanistan war profiteering: 90% of US spending went to Military-Industrial Complex contractors**

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**Ben Norton:** Hey, everyone, this is Ben Norton, and I'm announcing that I have a new show at the independent streaming platform Rokfin, that is [rokfin.com](http://rokfin.com). It's called Propaganda Today, as you can see behind me. This show is going to focus on corporate media deceptions, lies in propaganda in the corporate media, and also stories that should be told, that are not being told in mainstream corporate media- ignored important issues. I'm going to be doing it every week over at [rokfin.com/benjaminorton](http://rokfin.com/benjaminorton), you can find my channel and I'm going to be doing streams at least once a week talking about a variety of different issues related to politics, the empire, propaganda and all of that good stuff. And of course, I'm still going to continue the work that I'm doing with Moderate Rebels, the show I have with Max Blumenthal, we're going to do that weekly as well and everything falls under the rubric of the umbrella of The Grayzone, right, of our independent investigative journalism. But Rokfin is a really cool new platform that doesn't censor and actually encourages independent alternative media. We've seen big tech corporations have become so censorious in just trying to destroy all independent media outlets and remove them from their algorithm whenever they challenge Western corporate media propaganda and really the US government's foreign policy interests. So Rokfin has been really supportive of independent media, so you can go check out my show over at [rokfin.com](http://rokfin.com). And what's cool about the Rokfin model is it's kind of like Netflix for independent media, there's- the idea is you pay ten dollars a month and you get access to everything that you have on the platform. So it's not just for my show. It's not like Patreon, where you can only listen to my show. They also have Jimmy Dore as a show, they also have Alex Rubinstein, a friend of ours, has a show, Richard Medhurst has a good show, and of course, my colleague Max Blumenthal has his own show, Foreign Agents. So definitely please check out my show to hear more about the deceptions and lies in the mainstream corporate media over at Propaganda Today at [rokfin.com/benjaminorton](http://rokfin.com/benjaminorton), thanks a lot.

**BN:** Hey, hello. So I'm going to start this stream right now talking about Afghanistan and

some of the lies we've seen in the mainstream corporate media, because, again, one of the ideas of this show is focusing on specifically a media criticism angle. And I'll have guests sometimes it's not going to just be me. And I'm going to start with an article that was published in the mainstream corporate media but it actually really shows a lot of the lies in mainstream corporate media about Afghanistan. If you've watched anything in the news in the past few weeks past week, really, you've seen people just lose their collective minds with the idea that the United States and Afghanistan spent trillions of dollars trying to supposedly defend freedom and democracy, which is hilarious because there's neither freedom nor democracy in the United States. How is it supposed to bring it to another country? And there's this idea that the US spent, there's numbers that vary, two trillion, 2.6 trillion dollars, the number is all over the place, and supposedly it got nothing for it in scare quotes. That's the narrative we keep hearing: It got nothing for it. Well, if that's not a surprise to you, that's a total lie, the idea that the US got nothing for it. And I'm going to point to an article that of all places was actually published in Foreign Policy, which is like the mouthpiece of Washington. It really is a propaganda outlet. But every once in a while they publish- there are these conflicts going on inside the elites in Washington, right, it's something like Afghanistan or these conflicts, and it exposes these internal contradictions and they admit some uncomfortable truths. And this article is ironically written by Christine Fair, who ironically was one of the leading cheerleaders for the drone program. And she's very much an elite at Georgetown University, which is like a hub for intelligence agencies. But there's a few uncomfortable truths in here that is not usually acknowledged in mainstream corporate media. So I'm going to go through some of this and talk about how important it is. This is not going to be acknowledged much elsewhere. It says the United States insisted on the country's security architecture, talking about Afghanistan, but has retrenched from its willingness to pay for it. Since 2014 Washington provided about 75 percent of the five billion to six billion dollars per year needed to fund the Afghan national security forces. Of course, we now know that these forces were just puppet forces. They really didn't put up a fight at all against the Taliban. And she talks about how in 2021, the US Congress appropriated only around three billion, the lowest amount since 2008. And they said after the so-called president, Ashraf Ghani and I'm going to talk about him, this guy, he fled with 170 million dollars that he just stole from the country and is now in the United Arab Emirates. So the so-called president, that was only a president on paper, let's talk about how hilarious that hypocrisy is. So we're talking about the numbers here. But a lot of these numbers, I think, are actually kind of misleading because as you can see, as of June 30th, the United States has spent 145 billion in funds for reconstruction and related activities since fiscal year 2002. But these are misleading numbers. These are the numbers you're going to see a lot in mainstream corporate media. But what I want to acknowledge, actually, is that the numbers actually are going back to the US economy. When we need to talk about this, look at this quote here. This quote is so important to understand what was going on in Afghanistan: Although these numbers are staggering, much of US investment did not stay in Afghanistan because of heavy reliance on a complex ecosystem of defense contractors, Washington banditry, and aid contractors between 80 and 90 percent of outlays, that's of the spending spent in Afghanistan, returned to the US

economy. And then adding: Of the ten to 20 percent of contracts that remained in the country, the United States rarely cared about the efficacy of the initiative, talking about corruption and then talking about the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction SIGAR, which I'm going to talk about in a bit. In many cases, US firms even defrauded Afghans. So why am I reading this quote, this article, here? Because this is someone inside Washington. This is an elite in Washington complaining, admitting that 80 to 90 percent of that money spent did not actually go to help Afghans. That money went- where did it go- to benefit the Beltway bandits, as they're called? The people, the people running private, for profit companies, the defense contractors. It's so important to understand this because this is why, one of the main reasons these wars continued for so long, the war in Afghanistan, the idea that the US was so concerned about building democracy and all this stuff, obviously it's ridiculous because the government collapsed in literally days. But they were there for 20 years for a variety of reasons, which I'll talk about today, but also because so many people were making so much money, so many contractors, we're talking about literally trillions of dollars. And actually one of the greatest truth tellers of our time, one of the greatest journalists of our day, also had a great quote about this back in 2011. So here's a quote from Julian Assange back in 2011, WikiLeaks recently shared this. I'm going to play this.

**Julian Assange in Video:** Because the goal is not to completely subjugate Afghanistan, the goal is to use Afghanistan to wash money out of the tax bases of the United States, out of the tax bases of European countries through Afghanistan and back into the hands of the transnational security elite. So that is the goal. The goal is to have an endless war, not a successful war.

**Ben Norton:** I mean, talk about a truth teller. Not only was Assange a truth teller in the sense that his journalism has just exposed the crimes of the US around the world, in Afghanistan, in Iraq. But this is another example of truth telling. I mean, talk about prison, this is ten years ago. He's saying that that's why the war, the goal is an endless war, because they were making so much money. So that's why I'm beginning this stream talking today. I'm going to talk about the history of the CIA and the irony of the fact that the CIA actually helped create the Taliban in the first place and that history is so important to understand what we're living through now. But this truth teller, Assange, I mean, he hit the nail on the head. The goal was going to be- the goal of the war was endless because there were so many people making so much money, trillions of dollars. And when I say trillions of dollars, by the way, this isn't my opinion, this isn't just you know, all of the anti-war activists are exaggerating how much was spent, I want to point out something that, again, is not going to be emphasized in mainstream corporate media. So there's this group I mentioned called SIGAR, which is really the internal oversight watchdog, the oversight office for the US military, and this is specifically the Office for Afghanistan Reconstruction. That's what the A and the R and SIGAR means. And they just published this big report, which I'm going to look at in a second, and this report, it's over 100 pages and it's called What We Need to Learn Lessons from 20 Years of Afghanistan Reconstruction. This is the money quote here, and I went through it and I can talk about some

of the main points today, but this is what I wanted to focus on in this stream. They say here that, quote, All war related costs for US efforts in Afghanistan, Iraq and Pakistan over the last two decades are estimated to be 6.4 trillion dollars. Again, this is from the horse's mouth. This is from the US government's internal oversight office admitting 6.4 trillion dollars to the so-called war on terror. Now, we can say that this is all just US tax dollars, right? So basically, I mean, any of us who is a US citizen or even a resident, we're all paying, we're paying all this tax money and where does it go? It doesn't just go to war. It doesn't just go to so-called nation building. That's actually not what the US was doing. Again, 80 to 90 percent of the spending in Afghanistan went back to the US economy. So even with this idea, you'll hear some people, even people on the right, criticize and they'll say we shouldn't be nation building, the US was never nation building. The US never cared about democracy in Afghanistan. It's not about nation building. It was a racket. War is a racket, as Smedley Butler, the famous US general, said when he wrote his book. 80 to 90 percent of spending in Afghanistan went back to the Beltway bandits to the military industrial complex. And if you take the numbers of the US government's own internal office, SIGAR, 6.4 Trillion dollars of that, let's say it's 90 percent, so over five trillion dollars went into the pockets of the Beltway bandits. And as I point out, that in addition to being responsible for these millions of deaths, that is effectively one of the largest wealth transfers from the public sector into private pockets in human history. We're talking about six trillion dollars going from US tax dollars into the pockets of Raytheon and Bay System, VA systems and all of these Beltway bandit contractors. These are the people who have made trillions of dollars in the war in Afghanistan while hundreds of thousands of people have died. I mean, we can't overestimate that fact, that the idea that this war, you keep saying this in the mainstream media, it was- we were defeated and we spent trillions of dollars and got nothing for it. No, no, no, no, no. There are a lot of people who got extremely rich from the war. And yet the Afghan people, they didn't get anything from it. They got hundreds of thousands of deaths in the so-called war on terror. And, you know, they're never even acknowledged in mainstream corporate media. But that is a key point that you're never going to see acknowledged is, again, 80 to 90 percent of spending in Afghanistan went back to the US economy into the private sector, into the Beltway bandits, the military industrial complex. There's a really good comment here from Lazlo, I can't put the comments on the screen because they don't show up in streamyard, I'm going to try to figure that out in the future, but here in Rokfin Lazlo has a good comment. If US efforts totaled 6.4 Trillion, how many additional trillions from other NATO partners? I mean, we're talking about an insane amount of money. And again, war in the 21st century has been privatized. It's been privatized. And that's why so much of this money is going to these contractors. And, of course, there are people who would support modern monetary theory, who will be criticizing me and say that, well, not all those six trillion dollars are really kind of actual tax dollars, because the argument they make is that actually what the US government does is it just prints the money, which is true. I mean, the US, if it needs to wage war in Iraq and Afghanistan, as the neocons wanted, they didn't just say, where are we going to get the money, they just do it. They didn't sit around. You know, John Bolton wasn't like, where are we going to get the money to invade Iraq? No, they just did it. And then they print the money

and then they give it to all the contractors. That's true. So I get that critique of the modern monetary theory people. But at the same time, every time that happens, it leads to massive inflation. And as, if you've watched the streams that Max and I have done with Michael Hudson, one of the best journalists or sorry, one of the best economists in the world, Michael Hudson has done a lot of work on this, showing that he supports modern monetary theory, but he points out that there actually has been a lot of inflation and it's been inflation in the so-called fire sector, finance, insurance and real estate. Look at the massive real estate inflation we've seen over the past several decades during the so-called war on terror. So the US, yes, not all of this was technically tax dollars, although a lot of it was tax dollars, a lot of it was just printed money, but that does lead to inflation and it does lead to a lower standard of living for people in the United States. So it's not just about all of the deaths, but now I'm going to talk about something that, again, you're never going to see acknowledged in mainstream corporate media, and that is the deaths. So this is an article I actually wrote back at my blog in 2015. And this is a key report that is never acknowledged in mainstream corporate media. And to understand the horrible death toll in the war in Afghanistan, we have to talk about this. This was published by a Nobel Prize winning group called the International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War (IPPNW) and they found, again, this report was in 2015, so this is not considering the last six years with more civilian casualties. This report found, I'm going to read from the executive summary here: The purpose of this investigation is to provide as realistic an estimate as possible of the total body count in the three main war zones Iraq, Afghanistan and Pakistan during twelve years of the so-called war on terrorism. So, again, this is just twelve years. Again, the report is called Body Count: Casualty Figures after 10 Years of the "War on Terror". And this is a totally scientific report. And it came to the conclusion that the so-called war on terror directly or indirectly killed around one million people in Iraq, 220,000 people in Afghanistan and 80,000 people in Pakistan, i.e., a total of around 1.3 Million deaths. And that is, of course, not including other zones like Yemen, I would add Libya, I would add Syria, and I mean so many other deaths, Somalia. And this figure is ten times greater than that of what the so-called experts and decision makers are made aware of in the corporate media and from the major NGOs. And they point out, this is a conservative estimate, the total number of deaths in the three countries could be in the excess of two millions, whereas a figure below one million is extremely unlikely. They also quote this guy, Hans von Sponeck, who is extremely important in terms of the United Nations, especially for Iraq. He was the humanitarian coordinator for Iraq and also a former assistant secretary general of the UN. He wrote the introduction for this report. He was involved. This is a very legitimate mainstream report that should be acknowledged. And he said governments and civil society know now that in all counts, these assertions have proven to be preposterously false. He's talking about the previous death tolls. So that they add in the report: Unfortunately, these deaths have been effectively hidden from our collective consciousness and consciences by political leaders seeking to pursue military solutions to complex global issues with little, if any, accountability. So we're talking about just in those years, 16 years, 220,000 deaths in Afghanistan. Meanwhile, if you read most reporting right now of Afghanistan, they might say maybe tens of thousands of deaths in Afghanistan, but

the reality is that we're talking about hundreds of thousands just in Afghanistan, not to mention over a million in Iraq. So it's so important to talk about these issues because the mainstream corporate media never will. And getting back to the chat here, I want to thank all of the tips from people, Greg Houseman, War is a Racket, I mean, people really should go back to the classic book, War is a Racket from Smedley Butler. I mean, this book is really so eye-opening in so many ways. And for people who don't know, Smedley Butler was one of the leading generals in the United States, one of the top ranking generals, when he wrote this. And this is a speech he delivered, War is a Racket, I believe, as something... The majority of people, he said, only a small inside group know what it is about. And he said, I believe in adequate defense at the coastline and nothing else. If a nation comes out here to fight, then we'll fight. The problem with America is that when the dollar only earns six percent over here, then it gets restless and goes overseas to get 100 percent. Then the flag follows the dollar and the soldiers follow. The soldiers follow the flag. Again, this guy was one of the top generals in the US military. And right here: There isn't a trick in the racketeering bag that the military gang is blind to. It has its "finger men" to point out its enemies, it's "muscle men" to destroy enemies, it's "brain man" to plan war preparations and a "Big Boss" Super-Nationalistic- Capitalism. I mean, dude, this is 1993, it sounds like, I mean, this could be any time in the past 100 years. And look at this. I helped make Mexico, especially Tampico, safe for American oil interests in 1914. I helped make Haiti and Cuba a decent place for the National City Bank boys to collect revenues in. I helped in raping a half a dozen Central American republics for the benefits of Wall Street. The record of racketeering is long. I helped purify Nicaragua for the International Banking House of Brown Brothers. I brought light to the Dominican Republic for American sugar interests in China. In China I helped to see to it that Standard Oil went it's way unmolested. And again, this is 1933. During those years I had, as the boys in the back room would say, a swell racket. Looking back on it, I feel that I could have given Al Capone a few hints. The best he could do was to operate his racket in three districts. I operated on three continents. A quote from 1933, Major General Smedley Butler, US Marine Corps. I mean, this history is never talked about and Afghanistan is exactly the same. War is a racket. People made so many billions of dollars, trillions of dollars in this war. So now I'm going to talk about some of the history of Afghanistan, right, because we can't understand what's going on today without understanding that history. For people who want to know about the pipelines and the CIA heroin ratline and opium and all of the other factors in Afghanistan check out the other stream we did with Pepe Escobar. That is also available here at my Rokfin, but of course, do that after this stream. In this part I'm going to talk about the history. Of course, we can't understand what's going on in Afghanistan without understanding this history, without understanding the role of the CIA and this classic book. Really, people need to check out this book by Alfred McCoy. It's called The Politics of Heroine: CIA Complicity in the Global Drug Trade. Alfred McCoy was a kind of mainstream journalist and he's now a historian at the Department of History at the University of Wisconsin, Madison. He's not like some fringe alternative media figure and he talks about the role of the CIA in the drug trade. And in the other stream, we talked about the role of the CIA and the heroin ratline in Afghanistan. 93 percent of the world's opium comes from

Afghanistan, and the CIA has used that to fund its operations. And, of course, we should keep in mind that that really blew back hard to the United States because it led to a massive opioid outbreak. It's not a coincidence that in the 1980s, as the famous journalist Gary Webb exposed and had his career destroyed, Gary Webb showed how the CIA used the cocaine trade to fund its operations in the terror war in Central America, to destroy the Nicaraguan Sandinistas, to destroy the FMLN, the revolutionaries in El Salvador, and in Guatemala, the revolutionaries as well. And then what? What happened? They had all this cocaine and they sent it to poor communities, largely black and brown communities in California and other parts of the United States, creating the crack cocaine epidemic in the United States. And similarly, the CIA had all of this opium and heroin, and it became part of the opioid crisis in the United States, leading to hundreds of thousands of deaths. So we're talking about at least 200,000 Afghan deaths. And that's a conservative estimate in just up into 2015, along with hundreds of thousands of Americans who, the thousands of American soldiers who died in this war for empire, this war to enrich military contractors. And then, of course, the hundreds of thousands of Americans who have died in one of the worst internal crises in American history, the opioid epidemic. So now I'm going to talk about the role of the CIA historically in Afghanistan.

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