

Box 2.1.1 The Public Cost of Private Security in Afghanistan

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“The Public Cost of Private Security in Afghanistan,” published by the Center on International Cooperation at New York University in September 2009, found that overdependence on private security providers (PSPs) by international military forces in Afghanistan—particularly overdependence on local militia groups—negatively affects stabilization efforts. The authors of the report argue that lack of effective oversight of the private security sector is detrimental to the stabilization of Afghanistan and to Afghan perceptions of the Afghan government and the international military and civilian community.

There are a range of PSPs currently operating in Afghanistan, including international and national private security companies, operating with or without the mandatory Afghan government licenses, as well as illegal militias or “armed support groups”—many of which are

controlled by Afghan elites and entrenched in criminal activities.

Although the use of PSPs in Afghanistan is not a new phenomenon, the private security industry has grown in response to widening insecurity and the related demand from the increased presence of international military forces. Following the deployment of US military forces, the US Department of Defense—the largest employer of private security in Afghanistan—reported a 19 percent increase in the number of private security contractors as of August 2009. There are also many cases where private security services are necessary, and blanket condemnation of the use of these services would be imprudent, but those employing PSPs must undertake due diligence to ensure professionalism.

Afghan government regulation has done little to militate against the power that Afghan elites have over security

services, particularly outside the capital, Kabul. The international community’s use of PSPs that serve the interests of Afghan elites has created parallel security structures that compete with state authority, undermining international efforts to strengthen Afghan governance institutions and public security forces, while at the same time increasing the costs of international reconstruction efforts.

The authors of the report conclude that the long-term goal of the international presence in Afghanistan to strengthen national security services cannot currently be achieved without PSPs. However, implementing better government regulation, monitoring, and enforcement on the part of both the consumers and the providers of private security will serve to enhance rather than diminish stabilization efforts.