U.N. officials demanded bribes to deliver U.S. assistance to Afghanistan, says inspector general

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<https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2025/aug/13/un-officials-demanded-bribes-deliver-us-assistance-afghanistan/>

Corrupt [U.N.](https://www.washingtontimes.com/topics/united-nations/) officials in [Afghanistan](https://www.washingtontimes.com/topics/afghanistan/) have stolen U.S. assistance by demanding bribes to allow the aid money to flow, an American inspector general charged Wednesday.

The Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction said senior [U.N.](https://www.washingtontimes.com/topics/united-nations/) officials ‘personally profit’ from the influx of assistance flowing into the troubled nation by taking advantage of a persistent pay-to-play culture.

Ten people, including a current [U.N.](https://www.washingtontimes.com/topics/united-nations/) official and a former official, confirmed the bribes.

The [U.N.](https://www.washingtontimes.com/topics/united-nations/) officials connect those with the money to the organizations that deliver the services. It’s those nongovernmental organizations that pay the bribes to win the contracts.

Several people reported that the [U.N.](https://www.washingtontimes.com/topics/united-nations/) officials were collaborating with the [Taliban](https://www.washingtontimes.com/topics/taliban/), the fundamentalist sect that took control of the Afghan government in 2021. That includes payments and, in some cases, demands that [Taliban](https://www.washingtontimes.com/topics/taliban/) officials or their relatives be added as shareholders or board members of the nongovernmental organizations.

One outcome is that aid goes most heavily to areas favored by the [Taliban](https://www.washingtontimes.com/topics/taliban/) rather than ‘the neediest.’

‘Interviewees told SIGAR that [UN](https://www.washingtontimes.com/topics/united-nations/) officials demand bribes from companies and NGOs seeking contracts from their agencies. They said that these are calculated as a percentage of the contract at stake, with estimates varying between 5 and 50 percent,’ the inspector general said in a report.

One former Afghan government official said the bigger the contract, the more senior the [U.N.](https://www.washingtontimes.com/topics/united-nations/) official who needs to be bribed.

One director of a nongovernmental organization said 70% of [U.N.](https://www.washingtontimes.com/topics/united-nations/) contracts in [Afghanistan](https://www.washingtontimes.com/topics/afghanistan/) required payments. The World Food Program, a major [U.N.](https://www.washingtontimes.com/topics/united-nations/) player, accounted for ‘most’ of the allegations, but the inspector general said it also collected reports about eight other [U.N.](https://www.washingtontimes.com/topics/united-nations/) divisions.

Those findings were part of a broader report looking at how the [Taliban](https://www.washingtontimes.com/topics/taliban/) have managed to funnel American money intended to help the country’s downtrodden residents into their own projects.

The [U.N.](https://www.washingtontimes.com/topics/united-nations/) mission in [Afghanistan](https://www.washingtontimes.com/topics/afghanistan/) acknowledged the report’s findings, saying they highlight ‘the extremely complex operating environment’ in that country.

The mission said it’s adopted ‘robust safeguards’ to try to make things work. That includes halting assistance programs when necessary, and insisting on new conditions to be met before the aid starts again.

‘We take extremely seriously any allegations of malpractice and corruption, either by [United Nations](https://www.washingtontimes.com/topics/united-nations/) officials or implementing partners, and ensure these are promptly investigated. We encourage anyone in possession of any evidence of aid diversion, misuse, misconduct, fraud and abuse to immediately report such information through the established, formal and confidential reporting channels so that these can be investigated,’ the mission said.

The inspector general said [U.N.](https://www.washingtontimes.com/topics/united-nations/) corruption was one of several hurdles for the U.S. as it tried to deliver assistance to [Afghanistan](https://www.washingtontimes.com/topics/afghanistan/) after the [Taliban](https://www.washingtontimes.com/topics/taliban/) takeover.

President Trump suspended most foreign assistance, including to [Afghanistan](https://www.washingtontimes.com/topics/afghanistan/), but the audit said it offered lessons if the U.S. wants to restart the money.

Acting Inspector General Gene Aloise said the lessons apply to aid to other places with hostile governments, such as the Gaza Strip, Sudan and Houthi-controlled areas of Yemen.

Investigators found several troubling factors in [Afghanistan](https://www.washingtontimes.com/topics/afghanistan/), including the [Taliban](https://www.washingtontimes.com/topics/taliban/) diverting U.S. money intended for the needy to go to their own aims.

The money is sometimes siphoned to the [Taliban’s](https://www.washingtontimes.com/topics/taliban/) preferred groups, and other times it involves direct extortion.

The inspector general said a ‘culture of denial within the international aid community’ enables the [Taliban](https://www.washingtontimes.com/topics/taliban/) to get away with it.

Though U.S. assistance to [Afghanistan](https://www.washingtontimes.com/topics/afghanistan/) fell substantially below what it was during the 20-year war-and-rebuilding effort, the U.S. remained the largest supporter even after the [Taliban](https://www.washingtontimes.com/topics/taliban/) took over.

The allegations track somewhat similar [U.N.](https://www.washingtontimes.com/topics/united-nations/) behavior in Iraq, where The Guardian reported that U.N. Development Program staff took kickbacks in its Funding Facility for Stabilization program. The U.S. was the largest donor to the stabilization fund at the time.

In [Afghanistan](https://www.washingtontimes.com/topics/afghanistan/), the inspector general said the [United Nations](https://www.washingtontimes.com/topics/united-nations/) and some nongovernmental organizations with which the U.S. does business paid [Taliban](https://www.washingtontimes.com/topics/taliban/) operatives to provide security for their offices and to act as armed escorts as their vehicles roamed the country.

The inspector general said security payments are a ‘controversial’ idea, pointing to a situation in Sudan where [U.N.](https://www.washingtontimes.com/topics/united-nations/) payments helped build a resistance movement that ended up supporting coups and attacks on the government.

‘The [U.N.](https://www.washingtontimes.com/topics/united-nations/) now needs to be protected from the very group they used to pay to protect them,’ the inspector general said.

Mr. Aloise said one of the whistleblowers who spoke to investigators, an employee of a nongovernmental organization, was killed for exposing how the [Taliban](https://www.washingtontimes.com/topics/taliban/) diverted food aid to their training camps.

The report said every nongovernmental organization that receives money takes a cut for its operations, which makes it imperative that the U.S. try to eliminate as many pass-throughs as possible when sending assistance.

Deputy Assistant Secretary of State Mary Bischoping, in an official response to the audit, said the department didn’t agree with all the allegations and findings in the report but worried that the [Taliban](https://www.washingtontimes.com/topics/taliban/) were benefiting from U.S. aid.

That, she said, has been stopped by Mr. Trump’s orders.

‘The department is committed to ensuring every dollar spent on U.S. foreign assistance makes America safer, stronger or more prosperous,’ she said.

Rep. Gregory Meeks of New York, the top Democrat on the House Foreign Affairs Committee, said Mr. Trump’s moves over the past months may have made it easier to misdirect U.S. foreign assistance.

‘I welcome oversight that strengthens U.S. programs, but the Trump administration’s reckless dismantling of USAID gutted safeguards to keep U.S. aid out of [Taliban](https://www.washingtontimes.com/topics/taliban/) hands,’ he said.