

Title: U.S. Military Secrets for Sale at Afghan Bazaar

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Author(s): Paul Watson

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U.S. Military Secrets for Sale at Afghan Bazaar

BAGRAM, Afghanistan — No more than 200 yards from the main gate of the sprawling U.S. base here, stolen computer drives containing classified military assessments of enemy targets, names of corrupt Afghan officials and descriptions of American defenses are on sale in the local bazaar.

Shop owners at the bazaar say Afghan cleaners, garbage collectors and other workers from the base arrive each day offering purloined goods, including knives, watches, refrigerators, packets of Viagra and flash memory drives taken from military laptops. The drives, smaller than a pack of chewing gum, are sold as used equipment.

The thefts of computer drives have the potential to expose military secrets as well as Social Security numbers and other identifying information of military personnel.

A reporter recently obtained several drives at the bazaar that contained documents marked “Secret.” The contents included documents that were potentially embarrassing to Pakistan, a U.S. ally, presentations that named suspected militants targeted for “kill or capture” and discussions of U.S. efforts to “remove” or “marginalize” Afghan government officials whom the military considered “problem makers.”

The drives also included deployment rosters and other documents that identified nearly 700 U.S. service members and their Social Security numbers, information that identity thieves could use to open credit card accounts in soldiers’ names.

After choosing the name of an army captain at random, a reporter using the Internet was able to obtain detailed information on the woman, including her home address in Maryland and the license plate numbers of her 2003 Jeep Liberty sport utility vehicle and 1998 Harley Davidson XL883 Hugger motorcycle.

Troops serving overseas would be particularly vulnerable to attempts at identity theft because keeping track of their bank and credit records is difficult, said Jay Foley, co-executive director of the Identity Theft Resource Center in San Diego.

¹ <https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-2006-apr-10-fg-disks10-story.html>



“It’s absolutely absurd that this is happening in any way, shape or form,” Foley said. “There’s absolutely no reason for anyone in the military to have that kind of information on a flash drive and then have it out of their possession.”

A flash drive also contained a classified briefing about the capabilities and limitations of a “man portable counter-mortar radar” used to find the source of guerrilla mortar rounds. A map pinpoints the U.S. camps and bases in Iraq where the sophisticated radar was deployed in March 2004.

Lt. Mike Cody, a spokesman for the U.S. forces here, declined to comment on the computer drives or their content.

“We do not discuss issues that involve or could affect operational security,” he said.

Workers are supposed to be frisked as they leave the base, but they have various ways of deceiving guards, such as hiding computer drives behind photo IDs that they wear in holders around their necks, shop owners said. Others claim that U.S. soldiers illegally sell military property and help move it off the base, saying they need the money to pay bills back home.

Bagram base, the U.S. military’s largest in Afghanistan and a hub for classified military activity, has suffered security lapses before, including an escape from a detention center where hundreds of Al Qaeda and Taliban suspects have been held and interrogated.

Last July, four Al Qaeda members, including the group’s commander in Southeast Asia, Omar Faruq, escaped from Bagram by picking the lock on their cell. They then walked off the base, ditched their prison uniforms and fled through a muddy vineyard.

The men later boasted of their escape on a video and have not been captured. The military said it had tightened security at Bagram after the breakout.

One of the computer drives stolen from Bagram contained a series of slides prepared for a January 2005 briefing of American military officials that identified several Afghan governors and police chiefs as “problem makers” involved in kidnappings, the opium trade and attacks on allied troops with improvised bombs.

The chart showed the U.S. military’s preferred methods of dealing with the men: “remove from office; if unable marginalize.”

A chart dated Jan. 2, 2005, listed five Afghans as “Tier One Warlords.” It identified Afghanistan’s former defense minister Mohammed Qassim Fahim, current military chief of staff Abdul Rashid Dostum and counter-narcotics chief Gen. Mohammed Daoud as being involved in the narcotics trade. All three have denied committing crimes.



Another slide presentation identified 12 governors, police chiefs and lower-ranking officials that the U.S. military wanted removed from office. The men were involved in activities including drug trafficking, recruiting of Taliban fighters and active support for Taliban commanders, according to the presentation, which also named the military's preferred replacements.

The briefing said that efforts against Afghan officials were coordinated with U.S. special operations teams and must be approved by top commanders as well as military lawyers who apply unspecified criteria set by Defense Secretary Donald H. Rumsfeld.

The military also weighs any ties that any official has to President Hamid Karzai and members of his Cabinet or warlords, as well as the risk of destabilization when deciding which officials should be removed, the presentation said.

One of the men on the military's removal list, Sher Mohammed Akhundzada, was replaced in December as governor of Helmand province in southern Afghanistan. After removing him from the governor's office, Karzai appointed Akhundzada to Afghanistan's Senate. The U.S. military believed the governor, who was caught with almost 20,000 pounds of opium in his office last summer, to be a heroin trafficker.

The provincial police chief in Helmand, Abdul Rahman Jan, whom U.S. forces suspect of providing security for narcotics shipments, kept his job.

Though U.S. officials continue to praise Pakistan as a loyal ally in the war on terrorism, several documents on the flash drives show the military has struggled to break militant command and supply lines traced to Pakistan. Some of the documents also accused Pakistan's security forces of helping militants launch cross-border attacks on U.S. and allied forces.

Militant attacks on U.S. and allied forces have escalated sharply over the last half year, and once-rare suicide bombings are now frequent, especially in southern Afghan provinces close to infiltration routes from Pakistan.

A document dated Oct. 11, 2004, said at least two of the Taliban's top five leaders were believed to be in Pakistan. That country's government and military repeatedly have denied that leaders of militants fighting U.S.-led forces in Afghanistan operate from bases in Pakistan.

The Taliban leaders in Pakistan were identified as Mullah Akhtar Osmani, described as a "major Taliban facilitator for southern Afghanistan" and a "rear commander from Quetta" in southwest Pakistan, and Mullah Obaidullah, said to be "responsible for planning operations in Kandahar."

At the time, fugitive Taliban leader Mullah Mohammed Omar, his second-in-command Mullah Berader, and three other top Taliban commanders were all suspected of being in southern or central Afghanistan, according to the military briefing.

Another document said the Taliban and an allied militant group were working with Arab Al Qaeda members in Pakistan to plan and launch attacks in Afghanistan. A map presented at a “targeting meeting” for U.S. military commanders here on Jan. 27, 2005, identified the Pakistani cities of Peshawar and Quetta as planning and staging areas for terrorists heading to Afghanistan.

One of the terrorism groups is identified by the single name “Zawahiri,” apparently a reference to Ayman Zawahiri, Osama bin Laden’s deputy and chief strategist in Al Qaeda. The document said his attacks had been launched from a region south of Miram Shah, administrative capital of Pakistan’s unruly North Waziristan tribal region.

In January, a CIA missile strike targeted Zawahiri in a village more than 100 miles to the northeast, but he was not among the 18 killed, who included women and children.

Other documents on the computer drives listed senior Taliban commanders and “facilitators” living in Pakistan. The Pakistani government strenuously denies allegations by the Afghan government that it is harboring Taliban and other guerrilla fighters.

An August 2004 computer slide presentation marked “Secret” outlined “obstacles to success” along the border and accused Pakistan of making “false and inaccurate reports of border incidents.” It also complained of political and military inertia in Pakistan.

Half a year later, other documents indicated that little progress had been made. A classified document from early 2005 listing “Target Objectives” said U.S. forces must “interdict the supply of IEDs (improvised explosive devices) from Pakistan” and “interdict infiltration routes from Pakistan.”

A special operations task force map highlighting militants’ infiltration routes from Pakistan in early 2005 included this comment from a U.S. military commander: “Pakistani border forces [should] cease assisting cross border insurgent activities.”

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