



## ***New Report Sheds Light on Exploitation of Immigrant Contractors in Afghanistan***

**August 23, 2017 -- PROVIDENCE, R.I.** [Brown University] – On Monday, President Trump’s speech on the war in Afghanistan seemed to reveal a U.S. military strategy that will continue to look like more of the same. Even with an increase in military personnel, the U.S. can expect to see a continued reliance on the tens of thousands of security contractors who many war analysts now call America’s invisible soldiers or army. A report released this week by the [Costs of War Project](#) at Brown University’s [Watson Institute for International and Public Affairs](#) describes, in detail, the exploitation of immigrant contractors working for the U.S. in the war zones of Afghanistan and Iraq, highlighting abysmal labor conditions and other human rights violations.

“In discussions about continuing the fight in Afghanistan into its 17th year,” Catherine Lutz, co-director of the project said, “the American public and our elected officials should know that among the things being sacrificed are the basic human rights of thousands of workers hired by U.S. military contractors.”

Known in military and diplomatic circles as “Third Country Nationals” or “TCNs,” these workers provide a range of services, from private security to delivering supplies to working on American bases as cooks, cleaners and construction workers, often times for as little as a few hundred dollars a month. In these cases, working in war zones is not the free choice it might at first appear.

In order to secure much-needed work opportunities, low-income people from countries like Nepal pay high fees to brokers, often ending up deeply in debt. Once they arrive in the war zone, they work in far more dangerous situations and earn far less pay than originally promised, but debt and visa problems prevent them from leaving. Without worker protections or in-country support from their own governments, these laborers are extremely vulnerable. The report highlights the stories of several Nepali laborers, one of whom was falsely imprisoned in Afghanistan for years.

[Noah Coburn](#), the report’s author and a professor at Bennington College, writes, “In order to better protect these workers and understand the true impact of America’s wars on a broader set of global citizens, a crucial first step is gathering data and promoting transparency.”

According to Coburn, secrecy and murky accounting practices on the part of both the U.S. government and private security companies make it difficult to know how many of these laborers there are in the war zones, or how many have been wounded or killed in the fighting. Though there are no official counts, Coburn estimates that in 2010-2011, for instance, there were around 15,000 people in Afghanistan from Nepal alone -- suggesting that there are, at minimum, tens of thousands of these migrant laborers from third party countries in the war zones. Furthermore, “in the course of my research,” Coburn writes, “I found dozens of [cases of these] contractors who had been injured or killed in everything from roadside bombs to rocket attacks.” Since Coburn interviewed just 250 former contractors, who told him about their own or others’

injuries or deaths, this anecdotal evidence suggests that injuries and deaths among this population are all too common.

This report points to widespread human rights abuses of which most Americans are unaware, and which continue to be invisible under the Trump administration's new plan.

**To view the full report, click [here](#).**

*The [Costs of War](#) Project, housed at Brown University's Watson Institute for International and Public Affairs, documents the hidden or unacknowledged costs of the post-9/11 wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, and related violence elsewhere in the "war on terror." The project has issued, among other reports, the most comprehensive recent estimates of the human toll and US budgetary costs of these wars.*

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