

US military created private spy and murder squad in Afghanistan

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16 March 2010

A long-time US military official used Pentagon funding to establish a private intelligence and assassination network in Afghanistan and Pakistan, according to a report Monday in the *New York Times*. The network was shut down after the CIA station chief in Kabul objected to a competing military-backed intelligence operation, the newspaper said.

The article identified the official as Michael D. Furlong, a 25-year veteran of the Air Force who is now a senior Pentagon civilian employee, working at the US Strategic Command at Lackland Air Force Base in San Antonio, Texas. He reportedly diverted money from a \$22 million contract to gather cultural and political information about Afghanistan and funneled it to at least two private firms which employed former intelligence and military Special Operations personnel.

The *Times* report, written by Dexter Filkins and Mark Mazzetti, has the character of a controlled release of information for the purpose of containing the damage to US covert operations in the Afghanistan-Pakistan theater. It is not only the US military and intelligence agencies that are being protected, but the *Times* itself. According to the article, the newspaper hired two of the covert operatives who had worked for Furlong in its efforts to release *Times* reporter David Rohde, who was captured by the Taliban in December 2008 and escaped seven months later.

Despite its prominent placement and sensational language, very few actual facts are presented in the *Times* account, and the article begs the obvious question: Did the private, off-the-books operation funded and directed by Furlong contain an operational component? In other words, did Furlong contract for the creation of a private American death squad?

The Obama administration refused any substantive comment on the *Times* report. Pentagon spokesman Bryan

Whitman told the media Monday, "The story makes some serious allegations and raises numerous unanswered questions that warrant further review by the department," but he declined to answer any questions. The Pentagon has refused to make Furlong available to the press.

Whatever the motivations of those who acted as sources for the *Times* article, including top executives of the *Times* itself, Monday's report puts the spotlight on the murky netherworld of US covert operations in Afghanistan, Pakistan and Iraq, where official military and intelligence personnel rub shoulders with contractors and sub-contractors, as well as journalists and researchers who are little more than disguised intelligence operatives.

For example, two of the contractors hired by Furlong as part of the public effort to gather cultural information about Afghanistan were Robert Pelton Young, an author, and Eason Jordan, a former top news executive at CNN. Jordan was forced to resign his post in February 2005, after 25 years with the network, after he made comments at a conference in Switzerland to the effect that US military personnel were deliberately targeting foreign reporters in Iraq, where journalists have been killed in record numbers.

Despite the apparent bad blood between the former CNN executive and the military brass, he became a Pentagon contractor, setting up web sites to collect cultural and political information for the training of military personnel, first in Iraq and then in Afghanistan. Young and Jordan apparently became discontented with Furlong because he failed to pay them on time, and, along with the CIA, helped expose the fact that Furlong was diverting money to the secret intelligence-gathering operation.

The *Times* account notably leaves out the most important facts about the Furlong affair: the names of those on whom his network spied and who were subsequently targeted for assassination, either by the CIA,

the military, or private mercenaries working as subcontractors.

Two companies named as recipients of funds via Furlong are International Media Ventures, which is described as “a private ‘strategic communication’ firm run by several former Special Operations officers,” and American International Security Corporation, “a Boston-based company run by Mike Taylor, a former Green Beret.”

The *Times* reports that Taylor said in a phone interview that “at one point he had employed Duane Clarridge, known as Dewey, a former top CIA official who has been linked to a generation of CIA adventures, including the Iran-Contra scandal.”

The article then reveals that the *Times* itself hired Taylor and Clarridge in the effort to locate and rescue David Rohde—a fact which confirms the connection of the former Iran-Contra figure to ongoing US covert operations, 25 years later.

The *Times* account indicates that Taylor proposed an armed assault on a Taliban compound where he believed Rohde was being held, clearly suggesting that American International Security Corporation had paramilitary operatives at its disposal, the same type of personnel who would be deployed in an assassination.

The echoes of the 1980s Iran-Contra affair are significant. A Reagan White House official, Lt. Col. Oliver North of the National Security Council, established an off-the-books covert operation to aid the Contra terrorists at war with the Sandinista-led government of Nicaragua, in defiance of a congressional ban on military aid to the Contras.

North used funds obtained through another illegal covert operation—the secret sale of US weapons to Iran, during the Iran-Iraq war—to finance the arms shipments to the Contras.

As the Workers League, forerunner of the Socialist Equality Party, warned at the time, the Iran-Contra affair was not merely a scandal, but laid bare the existence of a secret government in the United States that threatened the democratic rights of the American people:

“The contra aid network gives a glimpse of the real face of American imperialism which should dispel any illusions that democracy is a permanent feature of American life. ... Twelve years after the Watergate affair and the subsequent revelations in Senate hearings of the CIA’s counterrevolutionary operations, assassination plots and state terror, there has emerged a far more massive and dangerous development of an extra-

constitutional apparatus of terror and repression.” (Statement of the Central Committee of the Workers League, “Labor Must Act on Iran-Contra Crisis,” December 23, 1986).

This threat to democratic rights has grown enormously since then, and especially in the period after the 9/11 terrorist attacks—themselves of murky origin and with unexplained connections to the US intelligence apparatus. Today, the US government is running a multitude of death squad operations in Afghanistan and Pakistan, targeting those resisting the US occupation of Afghanistan and anyone else alleged to have links to “terrorism.”

One significant fact referred to by the *Times* is that the operations directed by Furlong “seemed to accelerate in the summer of 2009,” the period when Gen. Stanley McChrystal arrived to take command of US and NATO military operations in Afghanistan. McChrystal was previously the head of all US military Special Operations, and ran the assassination squads in Iraq which played an enormous role in the so-called “surge” of 2007-2008, when hundreds of Iraqi nationalists and militants opposed to the US occupation were hunted down by US Special Forces and murdered.

The *Times* report provides a reminder of the scale of such operations, and of their completely uncontrolled, illegal and unaccountable character. There is no reason to believe that the scope of such activities is limited to the mountains of the Hindu Kush.

The top Obama administration intelligence official, retired Admiral Dennis Blair, the director of national intelligence, has declared that the US government has the right to assassinate American citizens who are determined by the executive branch to represent a threat to national security—that is, the right of summary execution, without benefit of trial, due process or any constitutional protection.



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