

US military's private spy and murder ring continues to operate in Afghanistan, Pakistan

David Walsh
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The *New York Times* reported May 15 that the US military was continuing “to rely on a secret network” of spies and paramilitary assassins in Afghanistan and Pakistan, two months after the newspaper first brought the unit to public attention.

At the time, in March 2010, the network, under the supervision of Michael Furlong, a longtime Pentagon dirty tricks operator, was routinely described by the media and military US officials as “off-the-books” or “unauthorized.” Much ado was made about a Defense Department criminal investigation into Furlong’s activities and the millions of dollars spent on the program he allegedly directed.

The *Washington Post* asserted March 19 that the operation was shut down “late last year” and an investigation begun, and cited the comments of a US military official who primly claimed that Furlong “had stepped outside the boundaries of his contract and ‘didn’t want to operate within the constraints of how we do business.’”

This was simply so much dust thrown in the public’s eyes. In the first place, every indication suggests that Furlong’s intelligence and murder outfit was authorized at the highest levels of the Defense Department.

It certainly corresponds to the escalation of US military operations, both in Afghanistan itself, with mass arrests, torture and Special Operations death squads, and in Pakistan, where US Predator drones are striking targets at triple the rate of last year. As the *Times* now reveals, the program continues, and it includes information used directly for the purposes of targeting US air and missile strikes.

Furlong was based at Lackland Air Force Base outside San Antonio, Texas. In the only interview gave before he went silent or was silenced, the psychological operations (“psy-ops”) veteran told the *San Antonio Express-News* March 18 that “his military superiors approved the

program, which at one point was supervised by US commanders and a separate NATO command.” He described himself as a “fall guy.” There is no reason to doubt him.

The *Times*’ Mark Mazzetti reported Saturday that despite previous claims as to the program’s “rogue” character, “Not only are the networks still operating, their detailed reports on subjects like the workings of the Taliban leadership in Pakistan and the movements of enemy fighters in southern Afghanistan are also submitted almost daily to top commanders and have become an important source of intelligence.” The US military is officially banned from operating in Pakistan and a Reagan-era executive order prohibits the military from contracting with private spies.

There is inevitably a great deal of murkiness, which includes no doubt various attempts to throw off investigators, surrounding Furlong’s operations. It seems the illegal program has only been exposed as the result of a turf war between the CIA and sections of the military over who has the right to carry out such activities. The CIA’s station chief in Kabul wrote a memorandum to the Defense Department outlining Furlong’s “serious offenses,” according to the *Times*, leading ultimately to their revelation in the US media.

As the WSWS noted in March, the newspaper’s report had “the character of a controlled release of information for the purpose of containing the damage to US covert operations in the Afghanistan-Pakistan theater.” (See “US military created private spy and murder squad in Afghanistan”)

To what extent the *Times* itself knows more, or is more deeply implicated, than it cares to reveal is a legitimate question. In 2008-2009 the newspaper hired two of Furlong’s operatives, former Green Beret Mike Taylor, who runs a company called American International Security Corporation (AISC), and Duane “Dewey”

Clarridge, a former top CIA official involved in the Iran-Contra scandal of the 1970s, to organize the rescue of its reporter David Rohde, then held by Afghan insurgents. Rohde eventually escaped, apparently by his own efforts, but Taylor and Clarridge were reportedly planning an armed assault, indicating they had access to paramilitary elements, which the *Times* must have known.

Moreover, in his most recent article, Mazzetti writes, “The *Times* is withholding some information about the contractor network, including some of the names of agents working in Afghanistan and Pakistan.” In other words, the newspaper is directly complicit in the US military’s war effort, which has already led to the deaths of thousands of Afghan civilians.

Furlong has a lengthy history in military-intelligence circles. According to his official biography, Furlong served in the military for 25 years, holding assignments “with the Joint Staff, Army Staff, U.S. Special Operations Command and U.S. European Command. Mr. Furlong was also a defense contractor for eight years. He was the project manager for the establishment of three U.S. government-funded independent [sic] television and radio networks on the ground in Bosnia, Kosovo and Iraq.”

His psy-ops career apparently began during the American intervention in the Balkans, when he was appointed commander of the Joint Psychological Operations Task Force in Bosnia and helped set up the broadcasting networks in the former Yugoslavia. After he left the military, he was associated with various firms in the surveillance and spying business. In Iraq, as an employee of one of these companies, he assisted in the establishment of the Iraqi Media Network, a propaganda effort funded by the US authorities, which ran the Al Iraqiya radio and television network. Furlong was also involved in the effort to plant pro-American stories and editorials in the Iraqi media.

In 2005, according to Pratap Chatterjee at ZCommunications, Furlong “returned to work with the Pentagon but as a senior civilian official [he currently has a civilian rank equivalent to that of a one-star general]—deputy director for the Pentagon’s Joint Psychological Operations Support Element (JPSE) out of the US Special Operations Command in Florida.”

In 2008, according to various media accounts, Furlong was put in charge of a program under which he hired civilians, writes Chatterjee, “mostly former CIA and Special Forces operatives, to gather intelligence on the whereabouts of ‘suspected militants and the location of insurgent camps.’ The information was then transmitted

to high-ranking Pentagon and CIA officials for ‘possible lethal action in Afghanistan and Pakistan.’” Furlong reportedly boasted about the deaths of opponents of the US occupation that resulted from his efforts.

The illegal operation was funded under a program tasked to reduce the threat from roadside bombs. With the nearly \$25 million, Furlong hired the services of numerous firms engaged in spying and mercenary work, including Taylor’s AISC. Clarridge, a prominent CIA official indicted for his part in the Iran-Contra scandal (and pardoned by President George H. W. Bush in 1992), also worked for AISC.

This has some significance, because Clarridge apparently has a long and close relationship with Defense Secretary Robert Gates, who has waxed indignant about the possible activities of Furlong’s outfit. As Chatterjee notes, “Despite the fact that Furlong is now being portrayed as a rogue operator, running an illegal spying operation unknown to his superiors at the Pentagon, he has a long history of working at the highest levels of the military and creating propaganda networks for the Pentagon.” His network in Afghanistan and Pakistan was clearly run with the fullest knowledge of these “highest levels.”

As the *Times* most recent report indicates, the public noises notwithstanding, the Pentagon has gone on using Furlong’s group to the present moment. Even as Pentagon press secretary Geoff Morrell was assuring the *Times* that “we are committed to determining if any laws were broken or policies violated,” the newspaper pointed out that “Mr. Furlong remains at his job, working as a senior civilian Air Force official.... While the Pentagon declined to discuss the program, it appears that commanders in the field are in no rush to shut it down because some of the information has been highly valuable, particularly in protecting troops against enemy attacks.”

This is of a piece with the brutal, lawless character of American imperialism’s aims and actions in the region.



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