


HOME PAGE TODAY'S PAPER VIDEO MOST POPULAR TIMES TOPICS


Get Home Delivery-Bay Area | Welcome, 75200 | Log Out | Help

**The New York Times** Search All NYTimes.com  Go 

**Asia Pacific**

WORLD U.S. N.Y. / REGION BUSINESS TECHNOLOGY SCIENCE HEALTH SPORTS OPINION ARTS STYLE TRAVEL JOBS REAL ESTATE

AFRICA AUSTRALASIA ASIA PACIFIC EUROPE MIDDLE EAST



## Contractors Tied to Effort to Track and Kill Militants



From Left: United States Air Force; Robert Young Pelton; Mike Wintroath/Associated Press; Adam Berry/Bloomberg News

From left: Michael D. Furlong, the official who was said to have hired private contractors to track militants in Afghanistan and Pakistan; Robert Young Pelton, a contractor; Duane Clarridge, a former C.I.A. official; and Eason Jordan, a former television news executive.

By DEXTER FILKINS and MARK MAZZETTI  
Published: March 14, 2010

KABUL, Afghanistan — Under the cover of a benign government information-gathering program, a Defense Department official set up a network of private contractors in [Afghanistan](#) and [Pakistan](#) to help track and kill suspected militants, according to military officials and businessmen in Afghanistan and the United States.

### At War

Notes from Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iraq and other areas of conflict in the post-9/11 era.

[Go to the Blog »](#)

[Enlarge This Image](#)



Alpax.com

The Afpax Web site, set up to report on news and intelligence from Afghanistan and Pakistan, similar to an operation already put into place in Iraq

The official, Michael D. Furlong, hired contractors from private security companies that employed former [C.I.A.](#) and Special Forces operatives. The contractors, in turn, gathered intelligence on the whereabouts of suspected militants and the location of insurgent camps, and the information was then sent to military units and intelligence officials for possible lethal action in Afghanistan and Pakistan, the officials said.

While it has been widely reported that the C.I.A. and the military are attacking operatives of [Al Qaeda](#) and others through unmanned, remote-controlled [drone](#) strikes, some American officials say they became troubled that Mr. Furlong seemed to be running an off-the-books spy operation. The officials say they are not sure who condoned and supervised his work.

COMMENTS

E-MAIL

PRINT

SINGLE PAGE

REPRINTS

SHARE



It is generally considered illegal for the military to hire contractors to act as covert spies. Officials said Mr. Furlong's secret network might have been improperly financed by diverting money from a program designed to merely gather information about the region.

Moreover, in Pakistan, where Qaeda and [Taliban](#) leaders are believed to be hiding, the secret use of private contractors may be seen as an attempt to get around the Pakistani government's prohibition of American military personnel's operating in the country.

Officials say Mr. Furlong's operation seems to have been shut down, and he is now is the subject of a criminal investigation by the Defense Department for a number of possible offenses, including contract fraud.

Even in a region of the world known for intrigue, Mr. Furlong's story stands out. At times, his operation featured a mysterious American company run by retired Special Operations officers and an iconic C.I.A. figure who had a role in some of the agency's most famous episodes, including the Iran-Contra affair.

The allegations that he ran this network come as the American intelligence community confronts other instances in which private contractors may have been improperly used on delicate and questionable operations, including secret raids in Iraq and an assassinations program that was halted before it got off the ground.

"While no legitimate intelligence operations got screwed up, it's generally a bad idea to have freelancers running around a war zone pretending to be James Bond," one American government official said. But it is still murky whether Mr. Furlong had approval from top commanders or whether he might have been running a rogue operation.

This account of his activities is based on interviews with American military and intelligence officials and businessmen in the region. They insisted on anonymity in discussing a delicate case that is under investigation.

Col. Kathleen Cook, a spokeswoman for United States Strategic Command, which oversees Mr. Furlong's work, declined to make him available for an interview. Military officials said Mr. Furlong, a retired [Air Force](#) officer, is now a senior civilian employee in the military, a full-time Defense Department employee based at Lackland Air Force Base in San Antonio.

### Network of Informants

Mr. Furlong has extensive experience in "psychological operations" — the military term for the use of information in warfare — and he plied his trade in a number of places, including Iraq and the Balkans. It is unclear exactly when Mr. Furlong's operations began. But officials said they seemed to accelerate in the summer of 2009, and by the time they ended, he and his colleagues had established a network of informants in Afghanistan and Pakistan whose job it was to help locate people believed to be insurgents.

Government officials said they believed that Mr. Furlong might have channeled money away from a program intended to provide American commanders with information about Afghanistan's social and tribal landscape, and toward secret efforts to hunt militants on both sides of the country's porous border with Pakistan.

Some officials said it was unclear whether these operations actually resulted in the deaths of militants, though others involved in the operation said that they did.

Military officials said that Mr. Furlong would often boast about his network of informants in Afghanistan and Pakistan to senior military officers, and in one instance said a group of suspected militants carrying rockets by mule over the border had been singled out and killed as a result of his efforts.

In addition, at least one government contractor who worked with Mr. Furlong in

Bringing a taste of New York to Johannesburg  
The renter roadblock

**nytimes.com**

REAL ESTATE

ADVERTISEMENTS



RELATED ADS

[What are Related Ads?](#)

- » [Inflation Calculation](#)
- » [Central Banks Inflation](#)
- » [Rampant Inflation](#)
- » [Inflation Rate](#)
- » [Inflation Investing](#)

Afghanistan last year maintains that he saw evidence that the information was used for attacking militants.

1 | 2 | 3 | [NEXT PAGE >](#)

*Dexter Filkins reported from Kabul, and Mark Mazzetti from Washington.*

A version of this article appeared in print on March 15, 2010, on page A1 of the New York edition.

[COMMENTS](#)

[E-MAIL](#)

[PRINT](#)

[SINGLE PAGE](#)

[REPRINTS](#)



**The Times & the Bay Area - now at 50% off when you subscribe for the convenience of home delivery.**

Ads by Google

[what's this?](#)

**Online Executive MBA**

Earn an Executive MBA Online at the Rochester Institute of Technology.  
[EmbaOnline.RIT.Edu](#)

**Theraflu® WarmingRelief™**

Get Powerful Cold Symptom Relief In A Soothing Warming Syrup.  
[www.TheraFlu.com](#)

**NEU Online MBA Program**

Earn an MBA Online at Northeastern University. No GMAT, Free Brochure.  
[OnlineMBA.NEU.Edu](#)

**Past Coverage**

- [NATO Contractor Is Sentenced to Death in Afghanistan \(January 28, 2010\)](#)
- [Two Former Blackwater Guards Are Charged With Murder in an Afghan Shooting \(January 8, 2010\)](#)
- [Blackwater Guards Tied To Secret Raids by C.I.A. \(December 11, 2009\)](#)
- [2 Say They Reported Abuses at Embassy \(September 11, 2009\)](#)

**Related Searches**

- [Afghanistan War \(2001- \)](#) [Get E-Mail Alerts](#)
- [Private Military Contractors](#) [Get E-Mail Alerts](#)
- [Defense Department](#) [Get E-Mail Alerts](#)
- [Espionage](#) [Get E-Mail Alerts](#)

**INSIDE NYTIMES.COM**



**BOOKS >**



[Take This Job and Write It](#)

**OPINION >**



[Op-Ed: To Stop Crime, Share Your Genes](#)

**WEEK IN REVIEW >**



[Tea-ing Up the Constitution](#)

**TECHNOLOGY >**



[Telling Friends Where You Are \(or Not\)](#)

**OPINION >**

**Op-Ed: It's My Party, and You Have to Answer**

A writer mourns the lost courtesy of responding to invitations.

**MUSIC >**



[Metal Variety: Death, Doom, Black and Cars](#)