

SPY CONTRACTOR V. SPY CONTRACTOR

Mark Mazzetti has a follow-up story to his previous expose of a DOD-funded contractor network conducting spying in Pakistan. In an article providing many new details about complaints from CIA about the DOD contractor, he comes pretty close to admitting that this turf war focuses at least partly on whose contractors—rather than whose officers—are conducting the spying in Pakistan.

With the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, the expanded role of contractors on the battlefield – from interrogating prisoners to hunting terrorism suspects – has raised questions about whether the United States has outsourced some of its most secretive and important operations to a private army many fear is largely unaccountable. The C.I.A. has relied extensively on contractors in recent years to carry out missions in war zones.

The exposure of the spying network also reveals tensions between the Pentagon and the C.I.A., which itself is running a covert war across the border in Pakistan. In December, a cable from the C.I.A.'s station chief in Kabul, Afghanistan, to the Pentagon argued that the military's hiring of its own spies could have disastrous consequences, with various networks possibly colliding with one another.

As much as it appears that this story is a CIA attempt to make sure this DOD effort is not renewed when its contract expires this month, this is still fundamentally a story about contractor v. contractor, not spy v. spy.

That said, Mazzetti's story provides some interesting new details about those contractors.

I'm particularly interested in new details about the contractor International Media Ventures. As Mazzetti explains, one of the Generals present when DOD told CIA they'd be setting up this network has since moved onto IMV (here's the announcement).

In October of [2008, Michael] Furlong traveled to C.I.A. headquarters with top Pentagon officials, including Brig. Gen. Robert H. Holmes, then the deputy operations officer at United States Central Command. General Holmes has since retired and is now an executive at one of the subcontractors, International Media Ventures. The meeting at the C.I.A.'s counterterrorism center was set up to inform the spy agency about the military's plans to collect "atmospheric information" about Afghanistan and Pakistan, including information about the structure of militant networks in Pakistan's tribal areas.

Mazzetti explains that IMV has Czech ownership.

The web of private businesses working under the Lockheed contract include Strategic Influence Alternatives, American International Security Corporation and International Media Ventures, a communications company based in St. Petersburg, Fla., with Czech ownership.

And describes CIA concerns about a previous effort Furlong made to set up propaganda servers in Prague.

The memo also said that Mr. Furlong had a history of delving into outlandish intelligence schemes, including an episode in 2008, when American officials expelled him from Prague for trying to clandestinely set up computer servers for propaganda operations.

It's the last part—from the December cable sent by CIA's Kabul station chief—in which I'm particularly interested (though the story does not say this Prague effort was an IMV effort). The turf war against Furlong, at least (and potentially IMV), extends beyond the borderlands of Pakistan and into the online world. Particularly given the timing of this (that is, back in the Bush Administration), I find that turf war as potentially interesting as the Pakistan one.