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European Languages

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The New York Times

## Former spy with agenda operates a private CIA

By Mark Mazzetti

01/23/2011

Mark Mazzetti - Washington: Duane R Clarridge parted company with the Central Intelligence Agency more than two decades ago, but from poolside at his home near San Diego, he still runs a network of spies.

Over the past two years, he has fielded operatives in the mountains of Pakistan and the desert badlands of Afghanistan. Since the United States military cut off his funding in May, he has relied on like-minded private donors to pay his agents to continue gathering information about militant fighters, Taliban leaders and the secrets of Kabul's ruling class.

Hatching schemes that are something of a cross between a Graham Greene novel and Mad Magazine's "Spy vs. Spy," Mr Clarridge has sought to discredit Ahmed Wali Karzai, the Kandahar power broker who has long been on the CIA payroll, and planned to set spies on his half brother, the Afghan president, Hamid Karzai, in hopes of collecting beard trimmings or other DNA samples that might prove Mr. Clarridge's suspicions that the Afghan leader was a heroin addict, associates say.

Mr. Clarridge, 78, who was indicted on charges of lying to Congress in the Iran-contra scandal and later pardoned, is described by those who have worked with him as driven by the conviction that Washington is bloated with bureaucrats and lawyers who impede American troops in fighting adversaries and that leaders are overly reliant on mercurial allies.

His dispatches -- an amalgam of fact, rumor, analysis and uncorroborated reports -- have been sent to military officials who, until last spring at least, found some credible enough to be used in planning strikes against militants in Afghanistan. They are also fed to conservative commentators, including Oliver L. North, a compatriot from the Iran-contra days and now a Fox News analyst, and Brad Thor, an author of military thrillers and a frequent guest of Glenn Beck.

For all of the can-you-top-this qualities to Mr. Clarridge's operation, it is a startling demonstration of how private citizens can exploit the chaos of combat zones and rivalries inside the American government to carry out their own agenda.

It also shows how the outsourcing of military and intelligence operations has spawned legally murky clandestine operations that can be at cross-purposes with America's foreign policy goals. Despite Mr. Clarridge's keen interest in undermining Afghanistan's ruling family, President Obama's administration appears resigned to working with President Karzai and his half brother, who is widely suspected of having ties to drug traffickers.

Charles E. Allen, a former top intelligence official at the Department of Homeland Security who worked with Mr. Clarridge at the CIA, termed him an "extraordinary" case officer who had operated on "the edge of his skis" in missions abroad years ago.

But he warned against Mr. Clarridge's recent activities, saying that private spies operating in war zones "can get both nations in trouble and themselves in trouble." He added, "We don't need privateers."

The private spying operation, which The New York Times disclosed last year, was tapped by a military desperate for information about its enemies and frustrated with the quality of intelligence from the CIA, an agency that colleagues say Mr. Clarridge now views largely with contempt. The effort was among a number of secret activities undertaken by the American government in a shadow war around the globe to combat militants and root out terrorists.

The Pentagon official who arranged a contract for Mr. Clarridge in 2009 is under investigation for allegations of violating Defense Department rules in awarding that contract. Because of the continuing inquiry, most of the dozen current and former government officials, private contractors and associates of Mr. Clarridge who were interviewed for this article would speak only on the condition of anonymity.

Mr. Clarridge declined to be interviewed, but issued a statement that likened his operation, called the Eclipse Group, to the Office of Strategic Services, the CIA's World War II precursor. "OSS was a success of the past," he wrote. "Eclipse may possibly be an effective model for the future, providing information to officers and officials of the United States government who have the sole responsibility of acting on it or not."

A Pentagon spokesman, Col. David Lapan, declined to comment on Mr. Clarridge's network, but said the Defense Department "believes that reliance on unvetted and uncorroborated information from private sources may endanger the force and taint information collected during legitimate intelligence operations."

Whether military officials still listen to Mr. Clarridge or support his efforts to dig up dirt on the Karzai family is unclear. But it is evident that Mr. Clarridge -- bespectacled and doughy, with a shock of white hair -- is determined to remain a player.

On May 15, according to a classified Pentagon report on the private spying operation, he sent an encrypted e-mail to military officers in Kabul announcing that his network was being shut down because the Pentagon had just terminated his contract. He wrote that he had to "prepare approximately 200 local personnel to cease work."

In fact, he had no intention of closing his operation. The very next day, he set up a password-protected Web site, [afpakfp.com](http://afpakfp.com), that would allow officers to continue viewing his dispatches.

### A Staunch Interventionist

From his days running secret wars for the CIA in Central America to his consulting work in the 1990s on a plan to insert Special Operations troops in Iraq to oust Saddam Hussein, Mr. Clarridge has been an unflinching cheerleader for American intervention overseas.

Typical of his pugnacious style are his comments, provided in a 2008 interview for a documentary now on YouTube, defending many of the CIA's most notorious operations, including undermining the Chilean president Salvador Allende, before a coup ousted him 1973.

"Sometimes, unfortunately, things have to be changed in a rather ugly way," said Mr. Clarridge, his New England accent becoming more pronounced the angrier he became. "We'll intervene whenever we decide it's in our national security interests to intervene."

"Get used to it, world," he said. "We're not going to put up with nonsense."

He is also stirred by the belief that the CIA has failed to protect American troops in Afghanistan, and that the Obama administration has struck a Faustian bargain with President Karzai, according to four current and former associates. They say Mr. Clarridge thinks that the Afghan president will end up cutting deals with Pakistan or Iran and selling out the United States, making American troops the pawns in the Great Game of power politics in the region.

Mr. Clarridge -- known to virtually everyone by his childhood nickname, Dewey -- was born into a staunchly Republican family in New Hampshire, attended Brown University and joined the spy agency during its freewheeling early years. He eventually became head of the agency's Latin America division in 1981 and helped found the CIA's Counterterrorism Center five years later.

In postings in India, Turkey, Italy and elsewhere, Mr. Clarridge, using pseudonyms that included Dewey Marone and Dax Preston LeBaron, made a career of testing boundaries in the dark space of American foreign policy. In his 1997 memoir, he wrote about trying to engineer pro-American governments in Italy in the late 1970s (the former American ambassador to Rome, Richard N. Gardner, called him "shallow and devious"), and helping run the Reagan administration's covert wars against Marxist guerrillas in Central America during the 1980s.

He was indicted in 1991 on charges of lying to Congress about his role in the Iran-contra scandal; he had testified that he was unaware of arms shipments to Iran. But he was pardoned the next year by the first President George Bush.

Now, more than two decades after Mr. Clarridge was forced to resign from the intelligence agency, he tries to run his group of spies as a CIA in miniature. Working from his house in a San Diego suburb, he uses e-mail to stay in contact with his "agents" -- their code names include Willi and Waco -- in Afghanistan and Pakistan, writing up intelligence summaries based on their reports, according to associates.

Mr. Clarridge assembled a team of Westerners, Afghans and Pakistanis not long after a security consulting firm working for The Times subcontracted with him in December 2008 to assist in the release of a reporter, David Rohde, who had been kidnapped by the Taliban. Mr. Rohde escaped on his own seven months later, but Mr. Clarridge used his role in the episode to promote his group to military officials in Afghanistan.

In July 2009, according to the Pentagon report, he set out to prove his worth to the Pentagon by directing his team to gather information in Pakistan's tribal areas to help find a young American soldier who had been captured by Taliban militants. (The soldier, Pfc. Bowe R. Bergdahl, remains in Taliban hands.)

Four months later, the security firm that Mr. Clarridge was affiliated with, the American International Security Corporation, won a Pentagon contract ultimately worth about \$6 million. American officials said the contract was arranged by Michael D. Furlong, a senior Defense Department civilian with a military "information warfare" command in San Antonio.

To get around a Pentagon ban on hiring contractors as spies, the report said, Mr. Furlong's team simply rebranded their activities as "atmospheric information" rather than "intelligence."

Mr. Furlong, now the subject of a criminal investigation by the Pentagon's inspector general, was accused in the internal Pentagon report of carrying out "unauthorized" intelligence gathering, and misleading senior military officers about it. He has said that he became a scapegoat for top commanders in Afghanistan who had blessed his activities.

As for Mr. Clarridge, American law prohibits private citizens from actively undermining a foreign government, but prosecutions under the so-called Neutrality Act have historically been limited to people raising private armies against foreign powers. Legal experts said Mr. Clarridge's plans against the Afghan president fell in a gray area, but would probably not violate the law.

**Intelligence of Varying Quality** It is difficult to assess the merits of Mr. Clarridge's secret intelligence dispatches; a review of some of the documents by The Times shows that some appear to be based on rumors from talk at village bazaars or rehashes of press reports.

Others, though, contain specific details about militant plans to attack American troops, and about Taliban leadership meetings in Pakistan. Mr. Clarridge gave the military an in-depth report about

a militant group, the Haqqani Network, in August 2009, a document that officials said helped the military track Haqqani fighters. According to the Pentagon report, Mr. Clarridge told Marine commanders in Afghanistan in June 2010 that his group produced 500 intelligence dispatches before its contract was terminated.

When the military would not listen to him, Mr. Clarridge found other ways to peddle his information. For instance, his private spies in April and May were reporting that Mullah Muhammad Omar, the reclusive cleric who leads the Afghan Taliban, had been captured by Pakistani officials and placed under house arrest. Associates said Mr. Clarridge believed that Pakistan's spy service was playing a game: keeping Mullah Omar confined but continuing to support the Afghan Taliban.

Both military and intelligence officials said the information could not be corroborated, but Mr. Clarridge used back channels to pass it on to senior Obama administration officials, including Dennis C. Blair, then the director of national intelligence.

And associates said that Mr. Clarridge, determined to make the information public, arranged for it to get to Mr. Thor, a square-jawed writer of thrillers, a blogger and a regular guest on Mr. Beck's program on Fox News.

Most of Mr. Thor's books are yarns about the heroic exploits of Special Operations troops. In interviews, he said he was once embedded with a "black special ops team" and helped expose "a Taliban pornography/murder ring."

On May 10, biggovernment.com -- a Web site run by the conservative commentator Andrew Breitbart -- published an "exclusive" by Mr. Thor, who declined to comment for this article.

"Through key intelligence sources in Afghanistan and Pakistan," Mr. Thor wrote, "I have just learned that reclusive Taliban leader and top Osama bin Laden ally, Mullah Omar, has been taken into custody."

Just last week, he blogged about another report -- unconfirmed by American officials -- from Mr. Clarridge's group: that Mullah Omar had suffered a heart attack and was rushed to a hospital by Pakistan's spy agency, the Directorate for Inter-Services Intelligence.

"America is being played," he wrote.

#### Taking on Afghan Leaders

Mr. Clarridge and his spy network also took sides in an internecine government battle over Ahmed Wali Karzai, head of the Khandahar Provincial Council.

For years, the American military has believed that public anger over government-linked corruption has helped swell the Taliban's ranks, and that Ahmed Wali Karzai plays a central role in that corruption. He has repeatedly denied any links to the Afghan drug trafficking.

According to three American military officials, in April 2009 Gen. David D. McKiernan, then the top American commander in Afghanistan, told subordinates that he wanted them to gather any evidence that might tie the president's half brother to the drug trade. "He put the word out that he wanted to 'burn' Ahmed Wali Karzai," said one of the military officials.

In early 2010, after General McKiernan left Afghanistan and Mr. Clarridge was under contract to the military, the former spy helped produce a dossier for commanders detailing allegations about Mr. Karzai's drug connections, land grabs and even murders in southern Afghanistan. The document, provided to The Times, speculates that Mr. Karzai's ties to the CIA -- which has paid him an undetermined amount of money since 2001 -- may be the reason the agency "is the only member of the country team in Kabul not to advocate taking a more active stance against AWK."

Ultimately, though, the military could not amass enough hard proof to convince other American officials of Mr. Karzai's supposed crimes, and backed off efforts to remove him from power.

Mr. Clarridge would soon set his sights higher: on President Hamid Karzai himself. Over the summer, after the Pentagon canceled his contract, Mr. Clarridge decided that the United States needed leverage over the Afghan president. So the former spy, running his network with money from unidentified donors, came up with an outlandish scheme that seems to come straight from the CIA's past playbook of covert operations.

There have long been rumors that Hamid Karzai uses drugs, in part because of his often erratic behavior, but the accusation was aired publicly last year by Peter W. Galbraith, a former United Nations representative in Afghanistan. American officials have said publicly that there is no evidence to support the allegation of drug use.

Mr. Clarridge pushed a plan to prove that the president was a heroin addict, and then confront him with the evidence to ensure that he became a more pliable ally. Mr. Clarridge proposed various ideas, according to several associates, from using his team to track couriers between the presidential palace in Kabul and Ahmed Wali Karzai's home in Kandahar, to even finding a way to collect Hamid Karzai's beard clippings and run DNA tests. He eventually dropped his ideas when the Obama administration signaled it was committed to bolstering the Karzai government.

Still, associates said, Mr. Clarridge maneuvered against the Karzais last summer by helping promote videos, available on YouTube, purporting to represent the "Voice of Afghan Youth." The slick videos disparage the president as the "king of Kabul" who regularly takes money from the Iranians, and Ahmed Wali Karzai as the "prince of Kandahar" who "takes the monthly gold from the American intelligence boss" and makes the Americans "his puppet."

The videos received almost no attention when they were posted on the Internet, but were featured in July on the Fox News Web site in a column by Mr. North, who declined to comment for this article. Writing that he had "stumbled" on the videos on the Internet, he called them a "treasure trove."

Mr. Clarridge, his associates say, continues to dream up other operations against the Afghan president and his inner circle. When he was an official spy, Mr. Clarridge recalled in his memoir,

he bristled at the CIA's bureaucracy for thwarting his plans to do maximum harm to America's enemies. "It's not like I'm running my own private CIA," he wrote, "and can do what I want."