In Spies for Hire, investigative reporter Tim Shorrock lifts the veil off a major story the government doesn't want us to know about -- the massive outsourcing of top secret intelligence activities to private-sector contractors. Running spy networks overseas. Tracking down terrorists in the Middle East. Interrogating enemy prisoners. Analyzing data from spy satellites and intercepted phone calls. All of these are vital intelligence tasks that traditionally have been performed by government officials accountable to Congress and the American people. But that is no longer the case. Starting during the Clinton administration, when intelligence budgets were cut drastically and privatization of government services became national policy, and expanding dramatically in the wake of 9/11, when the CIA and other agencies were frantically looking to hire analysts and linguists, the Intelligence Community has been relying more and more on corporations to perform sensitive tasks heretofore considered to be exclusively the work of federal employees. This outsourcing of intelligence activities is now a $50 billion-a-year business that consumes up to 70 percent of the U.S. intelligence budget. And its a business that the government has tried hard to keep under wraps. Drawing on interviews with key players in the Intelligence-Industrial Complex, contractors annual reports and public filings with the government, and on-the-spot reporting from intelligence industry conferences and investor briefings, Spies for Hire provides the first behind-the-scenes look at this new way of spying. Shorrock shows how corporations such as Booz Allen Hamilton, Lockheed Martin, SAIC, CACI International, and IBM have become full partners with the CIA, the National Security Agency, and the Pentagon in their most sensitive foreign and domestic operations. He explores how this partnership has led to wasteful spending and threatens to erode the privacy protections and congressional oversight so important to American democracy. Shorrock exposes the kinds of spy work the private sector is doing, such as interrogating prisoners in Iraq, managing covert operations,
and collaborating with the National Security Agency to eavesdrop on Americans overseas phone calls and e-mails. And he casts light on a shadow Intelligence Community made up of former top intelligence officials who are now employed by companies that do this spy work, such as former CIA directors George Tenet and James Woolsey. Shorrock also traces the rise of Michael McConnell from his days as head of the NSA to being a top executive at Booz Allen Hamilton to returning to government as the nations chief spymaster. From CIA covert actions to NSA eavesdropping, from Abu Ghraib to Guantánamo, from the Pentagons techno-driven war in Iraq to the coming global battles over information dominance and control of cyberspace, contractors are doing it all. Spies for Hire goes behind todays headlines to highlight how private corporations are aiding the growth of a new and frightening national surveillance state.

My Personal Review:
This book appears to be a compilation of articles that together reveal the excessive use of private contractors by the major agencies of the U.S. Intelligence Community (IC). According to its author, the IC public officials in many cases have abdicated their duties to the public in favor of private contractors whose loyalties are divided between the public good and corporate profits. In any type of expose it has to be asked how accurate are the charges and is the author really providing the whole story? Well the answer in this case is yes and no.

The close relationship between the mega U.S. intelligence agencies (CIA, DIA, NGA, NRO, and NSA) and private contractors is indisputable. What this book tries to do, but fails, is show this relationship is also corrupt and dangerous to national security. He does provide many examples of intelligence agency employees moving to the private sector and lavish use of contractors on key intelligence agency projects. Yet he clearly has not spent much time considering the real problems affecting contractor-intelligence client relations.

First there are really three types of contractors currently serving the IC. The first are that body of contractors who provide consulting, advisory, and training services. The second are those contractors that provide technical support services such as development of information systems, IT infrastructure construction or enhancement, and other services that the clients lack the in-house expertise to perform. Finally there are the contractors who supply staffing for the core functions of collection and analysis, because their clients dont have the in-house personnel to fill all of the billets that they are authorized.

This latter use of contractors for core mission assignments is the most often criticized by folks within and out of the IC. But as with all things there are two views of this. For example, John Brennan President of The Analysis Corporation (former CIA officer, mentioned in this book) is in point of fact an honest and patriotic IC contractor who strongly supports the use of contractors to fill core positions. Of course that is his business, but he
appears sincere in this belief. (This reviewer had a polite dust-up with Brennan on this issue and ended up agreeing to disagree).

In the end, the use of any type of contractor by the IC is a neutral phenomenon. Contrary to the contentions in this book, contractors while wishing to make a profit also generally want what is best for their clients. Their clients really want to meet their mission requirements and look to contractors to help them accomplish this. The problem with the concept of out-sourcing lays with the execution not the concept itself. Far too often it turns out that the clients are not competent to draw up the technical requirements or do not understand the goals they are articulating. And too often contractors will take the money without pushing back and telling their requirements are worthless (politely of course) or sit down with the client to clarify goals and purposes.

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