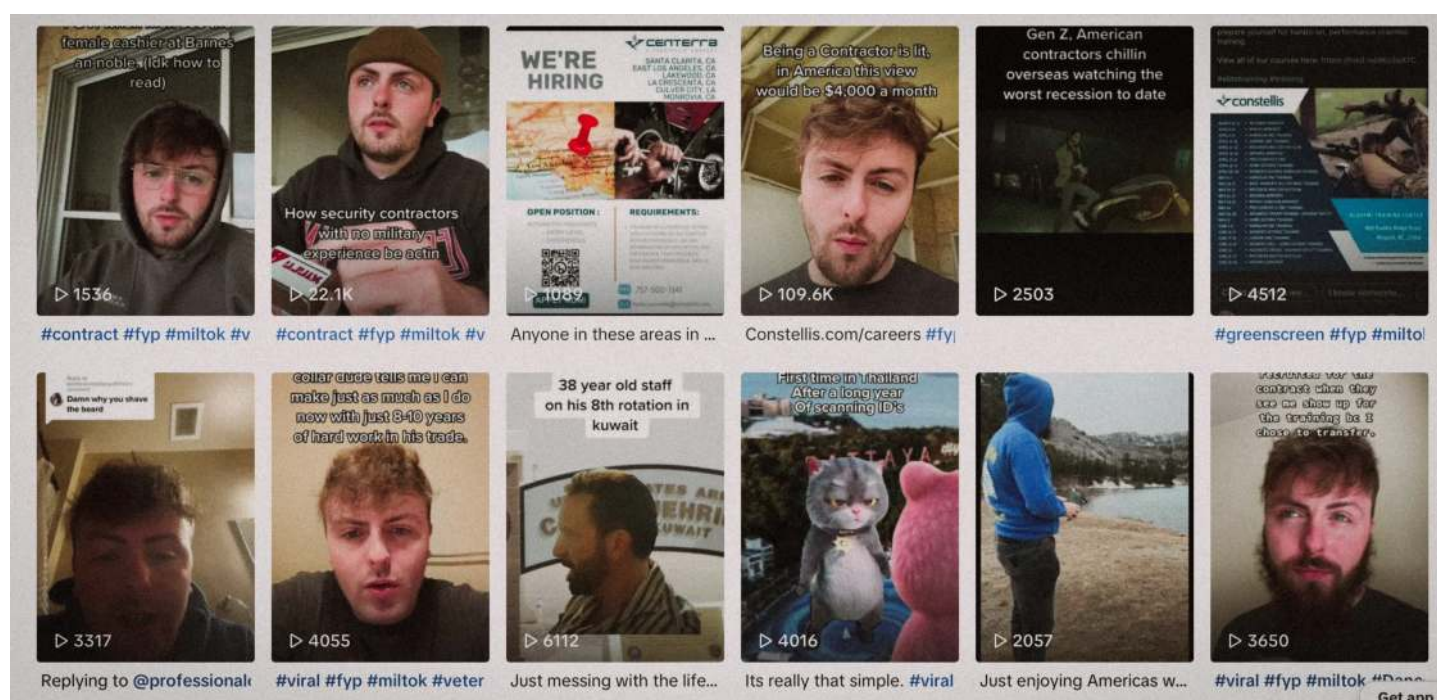


TIKTOK INFLUENCER RECRUITING FOR SECRET U.S. BASES IN ISRAEL

“Being a contractor is lit.”

Ken Klippenstein

December 11 2023, 6:00 a.m.



A screenshot of uploaded posts from Thomas Latham's TikTok account. Photo: The Intercept

TWENTY-SIX-YEAR-OLD U.S. ARMY infantry veteran Thomas Latham is one of countless young people on TikTok, but he's used it for a different purpose than most: recruiting veterans to staff secret U.S. military bases in Israel.

“Being a contractor is lit, in America this view would be \$4,000 a month,” says the superimposed text on a TikTok [post](#) by Latham. His

phone camera pans across the view from a high-rise in the Israeli town of Beersheba. In 2017, the Israeli military [celebrated](#) the construction of a U.S. military base in the town – a presence the Pentagon [tried](#) to downplay.

The video is one among many on Latham's feed, where he frequently extols life as a military contractor. Latham regularly posts job opportunities to help veterans trying to find work after the military, he said in an interview with The Intercept. At first, the TikTok posts came as part of his work as a recruiter for the private security contractor Triple Canopy. Since leaving Triple Canopy, he's recruited for other firms too, but sometimes he just posts.

Thanks to the job listings and other commentary, Latham's TikTok account provides a rare glimpse into the secretive world of national security contracting.

"I think what makes it work so well is it's an industry clouded in mystery," Latham told The Intercept. "People like me because I don't gatekeep information."

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Amid all the self-serving talk in the military contracting world about service and honor, Latham's honesty stands out, especially when it comes to companies' real motive: their bottom line. "Private defense companies after seeing another conflict on European soil," says the text on one [TikTok](#), as a camera zooms in on a tuxedo-clad man opening his arms and grinning.

"Private contracting, regardless in which realm – you need conflict you need things to guard. You need things to protect," Latham said. "Without anything going on, contracts are not going to pay as much."

For critics of U.S. defense spending, however, the contracts speak to a bloated military budget that outsources its own security, creating a windfall for private security firms to do what used to be a government job.

“It really speaks to our priorities that the Pentagon has divested from essential functions like base security,” said Julia Gledhill, an analyst at the Project on Government Oversight’s Center for Defense Information, who noted that defense priorities seemed to be tailored to contractors.

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Latham worked as a recruiter for Triple Canopy until March, before taking up a recruiting contract for a smaller firm, which he declined to identify. (Though Latham still posts contracting opportunities, he said he now works for the U.S. Forest Service.)

Many job listings of the sort posted by Latham require government security clearances, meaning that potential candidates will frequently be military veterans or those who have already worked in the private security world. Both communities, and the significant overlap between them, can be insular and are known for informal sharing networks.

“As mysterious as the defense industry is, I managed to open a gate for Triple Canopy,” Latham wrote in a LinkedIn [post](#), “to a direct market of qualified individuals.”



A TikTok Thomas Latham posted from Beersheba, Israel on March 14, 2023. Photo: The Intercept

Younger Recruits

With companies needing to reach a younger candidate pool for contracting gigs, Latham is at the vanguard of recruiting. He is using

TikTok, the China-based social media giant that allows for sharing short, often informally made video clips, as a new vein for tapping into the networks of qualified potential applicants. TikTok is especially popular among young users who, like Latham, peruse and post on the platform to engage with everything from entertainment to news.

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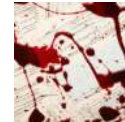
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William Hartung, an expert on defense contracting with the Quincy Institute, said companies like Triple Canopy may be taking the novel approach to expand their reach among candidates. He said, “It may be as simple as seeking platforms where they are more likely to reach

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After leaving the army in 2021, Latham was approached by Triple Canopy about a job in Kuwait. He was so excited, he took to TikTok to post a 15-second video letting people know how much they could make working there. The post quickly went viral. Triple Canopy took note – and offered him the recruiter job. (Constellis, which owns Triple Canopy, did not respond to multiple requests for comment.)



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“The reason why I got into this was to help veterans land jobs in a field that they’re already familiar with,” Latham said. “I understand how it is to be a veteran, how hard it is to find a job in a bunch of different industries you never really fit in.”

The golden age of private security contracting, Latham said, was during the Iraq War. In the era following the September 11 attacks, the Bush administration sought to privatize its global war effort, handing companies contracts for everything from logistics to providing security. In the first 10 years of the Iraq War, the U.S. spent nearly \$140 billion on contracts with businesses, private security contractors among them.

The most notorious of the private security firms was Blackwater, which massacred 17 Iraqi civilians in a single notorious incident and kicked off a national discussion about contractor accountability – and a lengthy legal fight.

In one TikTok post referencing the Iraq era, Latham makes light of a 2014 merger between Triple Canopy and Academi, Blackwater’s successor. A TikTok user asked Latham in a comment, “Isn’t Academi formerly known as Blackwater?” Latham refers to the firm in a response as “a company that shall not be named.” He cracks, “I’m unsure; I’ve never heard of that company before and neither have you.”

Whatever the companies’ names, the post-September 11 wars were a windfall for the industry – and for the cohort of veterans and other security personnel who found new, if sometimes dangerous, employment. At the height of the security contractor boom, Marine veterans could make as much as \$200,000 a year.

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“I’ve met people that were veterans. They were like, ‘Yo, dude, I have no money, I have nothing.’ Now

were like, ‘Yo, dude, I have no money, I have nothing.’ Now they’re making money that they would never even imagine.”

they’re making money that they would never even imagine,” Latham said. “You kind of feel good after being a part of that.”

Hartung said the jobs offer veterans opportunities to make an income that might not otherwise be available

to them. “Many veterans struggle to find adequately paying jobs when they leave the service, especially those with families to support,” he said. “Working as a private security contractor can be relatively well paying, and it uses skills that ex-military personnel learned during their time of service.”

As the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan wound down, fewer employment opportunities became available, though Latham said newer conflicts might change that. In January, he posted a listing on TikTok for a Triple Canopy gig in Germany, where the Pentagon’s European Command runs much of its effort to support Ukraine’s defense against the Russian invasion.

When you thought you
were done with
international contracts,
Yet the offer though



A screenshot of a TikTok Thomas Latham posted on July 13, 2023. Photo: The Intercept

**“A Lot More in Play With
Particularly Israel”**

“Ever since Hamas invaded Israel,” Latham [said](#) in a TikTok two days after the attack, “there’s been chatter about if we’re gonna get out there and expand within Israel.” The chatter, he explained, was coming from “a lot of my buddies in the private sector.” In the TikTok, Latham superimposes himself in front of a screengrab of a contract listing for a security detail in Jerusalem. The job listing doesn’t disclose who the work is for, and Latham, using his expertise, sorts through some possibilities.

He says in passing that “there are contracts that have dropped” to support U.S. Special Operations Forces, the military’s secretive elite units, which the Pentagon has [acknowledged](#) are operating in Israel.

Latham concludes that the job listing is likely for a position with SOC, a Virginia-based security firm, to work for WPS – or World Protective Service, which does security for the U.S. State Department around the globe. After naming a few of the listing’s requirements, he said, “So it just makes sense that it’s a WPS contract and it’s SOC’s WPS contract – if I was a betting man.”

The video is typical, with Latham explaining to both potential security recruits and laypeople about how the contracting jobs work, but also delving into the geopolitics that drive the industry. The short video about the Israel posting offers Latham’s explanation why assignments are

“There’s a lot more in play with particularly Israel that not a lot of people know about. We have military bases there.”

cropping up there in the aftermath of the Hamas attack: because U.S. installations there were “taken completely off guard by all this.”

“There’s a lot more in play with particularly Israel that not a lot of people know about,” Latham says. “We have military bases there,

multiple military bases there.”

Latham is referring to the web of bases the U.S. quietly maintains in Israel. In August, the Pentagon awarded a \$38.5 million contract to build facilities for housing troops at a secret base in Israel, The Intercept [recently reported](#).

Other bases include weapons stockpiles the U.S. military has maintained in the country since the 1980s, originally intended for use by the U.S. in the event of a regional war but which Israel has increasingly drawn on for its own purposes over the years. (President Joe Biden recently asked Congress to remove nearly all restrictions on Israel’s ability to access the stockpiles, as [The Intercept reported last month](#).)



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Last year, the U.S. Army awarded Triple Canopy a \$21 million contract for armed security guards at an undisclosed and not previously reported communications site in Israel, according to [procurement records](#). The work requires a secret-level security clearance.

Latham’s TikTok account, with some 17,000 followers, appears to drive significant numbers of people to private security job opportunities. Data Latham [posted](#) on engagement with links on his social media postings show over 1,000 people clicking through to each one of three security job postings in Israel, Kuwait, and Germany – the countries he has [said](#) he recruits for.

The conflict between compensation and undesirable locations is a recurring theme in Latham’s posts.

“When you thought you were done with international contracts, yet the offer though,” another [TikTok](#) is captioned.

“6 figures take home is cool and all, but what’s the living conditions lol?” a user replies. “A tent for 175k? Nah.”

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