



The US defence department is scrambling to dispose of what threatens to be a highly embarrassing expose by the former intelligence officer of secret operations in Afghanistan and Pakistan, and of how the US military top brass missed the opportunity to win the war against the Taliban.

The department of defence is in talks with St Martin's Press to purchase the entire first print run on the grounds of national security. The publisher is content to sell the books but the two sides are in a grinding dispute over what should appear in a censored version and when it should be released.

Now St Martin's Press says it will put the partly redacted manuscript on sale next week whether or not the defence department likes it – and there doesn't appear much the authorities can do.

The army had cleared the book by Lieutenant Colonel Shaffer, about "black ops" in the Afghan war when he was based at Bagram in 2003, for publication after relatively minor changes. But when the intelligence services and defence department officials saw it they were alarmed.

They said it contained highly classified material including the names of American intelligence agents and accounts of clandestine operations, and demanded the book be withdrawn on the grounds it "could reasonably be expected to cause serious damage to national security".

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