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Blackwater (Xe) Criticized for Iraq Bribes

Executives at the private North Carolina-based U.S. security firm Blackwater approved secret payments of about one million dollars to Iraqi officials to "silence their criticism" after its privately contracted guards killed 17 civilians in Baghdad in 2007, the New York Times reported on November 11.



The *Times* report cited interviews with four unnamed former Blackwater executives, who maintained that Gary Jackson, the company's president at the time, had approved the bribes.

A report in the British *Guardian* summarized the original incident:

In the shooting at Nisour Square in September 2007, 17 Iraqis were killed when guards protecting a convoy of US diplomats opened fire at a crowded crossing. The guards were accused of acting like trigger-happy cowboys, who shot with no fear of consequences. The killings shone a harsh light on the role of private contractors in war zones and hardened Iraqi sentiment against the company, which had already been criticized for its mistreatment of Iraqi civilians.

The *Guardian* reported that the Iraqi government suspended Blackwater's license after the incident and demanded that Blackwater personnel be expelled from the country within six months. The company afterwards rebranded itself as Xe Services LLC, in an attempt to distance itself from the 2007 incident.

The Iraqi government denied Xe an operating license in early 2009, and the State Department on March 31 awarded a contract reportedly worth nearly a billion dollars to Herndon, Virginia-based Triple Canopy to take over protection of U.S. government personnel in Iraq. The State Department also contracts out some security work to Falls Church, Virginia-based DynCorp. However, in September the State announced it had extended a contract with a Xe subsidiary to provide air support for protecting U.S. diplomats in Iraq. The *New York Times* reported in April that many of Triple Canopy's guards were likely to be former Blackwater employees.

A report in Iran-based *Press TV* cited Stacy DeLuke, a spokeswoman for Xe who dismissed the *Times* report as "baseless" and said the company would not comment about former employees. Another *Guardian* report noted that Cofer Black, a former top CIA and State Department official who was Blackwater's vice-chairman back in 2007, disputed the *Times*'s story, saying that he had met U.S. embassy officials to discuss the best course of action after the incident.

"Blackwater was directed to provide some financial compensation to relatives of those Iraqi victims which embassy officials described as called for by Iraqi custom," said Black. "During these meetings with embassy officials, Blackwater sought state department leadership in dispensing any such good faith compensation from Blackwater to the victims' relatives as Blackwater was subordinate to the state department as its security contractor. I never confronted [Blackwater's chairman and founder] Erik Prince or any other Blackwater official regarding any allegations of bribing Iraqi officials and was



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unaware of any plot or guidance for Blackwater to bribe Iraqi officials."

An article in the *New York Times* for October 1, 2007 headlined "Report Depicts Recklessness at Blackwater" quoted from a report compiled by the Democratic majority staff of the House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform that raised questions about the cost-effectiveness of using Blackwater forces instead of United States troops. Blackwater charges the government \$1,222 per day per guard, "equivalent to \$445,000 per year, or six times more than the cost of an equivalent U.S. soldier," the report said.

The congressional report, which the *Times* said was based on 437 internal Blackwater incident reports as well as internal State Department correspondence, said that Blackwater's use of force "is frequent and extensive, resulting in significant casualties and property damage." It noted that Blackwater's contract authorizes it to use lethal force only to prevent "imminent and grave danger" to themselves or the people they are paid to protect.

"In practice, however," the report said, "the vast majority of Blackwater weapons discharges are pre-emptive, with Blackwater forces firing first at a vehicle or suspicious individual prior to receiving any fire."

According to an article in [Wikipedia](#):

At least 90 percent of [Xe's] revenue comes from government contracts, of which two-thirds are no-bid contracts. Xe provided security services in Iraq to the United States federal government, particularly the Central Intelligence Agency, on a contractual basis...."

Cofer Black, the company's vice chairman from 2006 through 2008, was director of the CIA's Counterterrorist Center (CTC) at the time of the September 11 attacks in 2001.

Blackwater's close association with the CIA is not surprising, considering the history of the "neoconservative" political movement largely responsible for the invasion of Iraq.

One of the most vocal "hawks" advocating for the invasion was President George W. Bush's Vice President Dick Cheney, who is not only a textbook neocon, but also a member of the internationalist Council on Foreign Relations. In a speech given on May 21 at the neoconservative American Enterprise Institute in Washington, Cheney championed the role of the CIA, taking umbrage at those who compared the spy agency's "enhanced interrogation" techniques with those who abused prisoners at Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq: "It takes a deeply unfair cast of mind to equate the disgraces of Abu Ghraib with the lawful, skillful, and entirely honorable work of CIA personnel trained to deal with a few malevolent men."

It is hardly surprising to anyone who knows the history of neoconservatism that Cheney, speaking as a leading neocon before a group of other neocons, would defend the CIA so adamantly, because neoconservatism as a political movement was a stepchild of the CIA. The late Irving Kristol, the man who has been dubbed the "godfather of neoconservatism," co-founded the British-based *Encounter* magazine that had been funded by the CIA. Thomas W. Braden, who headed the CIA's IOD (International Organizations Division) operations between 1951 to 1954, admitted that the money for the magazine "came from CIA, and few outside the CIA knew about it."

Like many early neocons, Kristol was a Trotskyite, an adherent of the teachings of Leon Trotsky, a commissar under Vladimir Lenin, in his youth. Another early neocon, Willmoore Kendall, had also been a Trotskyite and had served in the OSS during World War II, staying on when the OSS became the CIA



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in 1947, and then became a Yale professor. This proved to be a common theme among the founders of neoconservatism: a Trotskyite philosophy; service with or connections to the OSS and the CIA; and, finally, a career in politically oriented journalism.

When Willmoore Kendall was a professor at Yale, he came to have great influence over one of his brightest students — William F. Buckley, Jr. Buckley would long be given undeserved recognition as a leader in the "conservative" movement, when it was, in fact, neoconservatism that Buckley so zealously advanced.

When Buckley sought to avoid military service after finishing Yale during the Korean War, Kendall sent him to James Burnham, another Trotskyite socialist who had also seen service with the OSS and then with the CIA. The plan was to have Buckley avoid serving in the military by having him serve in the CIA instead.

These two men, Kendall and Burnham, strongly influenced Buckley and were part of the initial team when their protégé launched *National Review* magazine in 1955. The early *National Review* team was loaded with Trotskyites and CIA veterans. So strong was the CIA presence at the neocon magazine that columnist Gary Wills, formerly a close friend of Buckley's, expressed publicly his strong suspicions that *National Review* had been a "CIA operation."

When our nation's neocon leadership took us down the path of yet another undeclared war in Iraq, incidents such as the September 2007 civilian killings in Baghdad should not have been unexpected. Blackwater (now Xe) was just the middleman hired by the State Department and the CIA to protect U.S. personnel against an unidentifiable enemy amidst next-to-impossible conditions.

Soldiering should be left to soldiers, who have accountability that private contractors do not, and wars should be declared by Congress, as the Constitution requires.

Photo of Blackwater founder Erik Prince: AP Images



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