

We Need a Special Prosecutor for Blackwater and Other CIA “Contractors”

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Some parts of Blackwater’s clandestine work for the CIA have begun to leak out from behind the iron curtain of secrecy. The company’s role in the secret assassination program and its continued involvement in the CIA drone attacks that occur regularly in Afghanistan and Pakistan have become front page material in the *Washington Post* and *New York Times*. There is much more to this story than has been reported publicly and details will continue to emerge, particularly about Blackwater’s aviation division(s).

Now we [learn](#) (unsurprisingly) that Blackwater offered “foreign” operatives to work on the CIA assassination program. Blackwater told the CIA that it “could put people on the ground to provide the surveillance and support — all of the things you need to conduct an operation,” a former senior CIA official familiar with the secret program told *The Associated Press*. If that’s true, those foreign individuals would appear to have been privy to information that vice president Cheney and other US officials deemed not appropriate for Congressional ears, not to mention oversight.

In light of all of these developments, it is important to remember how Erik Prince essentially hired George W Bush’s top people from the CIA’s Directorate of Operations to create his own private CIA, Total Intelligence Solutions. He also offered Alvin “Buzzy” Krongard, the former number 3 man at the CIA, a paid position on Blackwater’s board. Buzzy was the guy who got Blackwater its first known CIA contract back in 2002 in Afghanistan. Buzzy is also the one whining about the CIA’s “morale” problem, in light of the recent scandals, in the *Washington Post*. “Morale at the agency is down to minus 50,” he [told](#) the paper.

When you hear reports that a “private” company was hired to do clandestine work, remember that this particular “private” company, Blackwater, is, in part, being run by Agency veterans, including several of the top people running the torture and assassination programs under Bush. At the end of the day, using Blackwater and/or other companies represents taking covert, lethal operations even further away from anything vaguely resembling oversight by the Congress. By using ex-Agency people instead of “current” Agency personnel, yet another barrier is thrown up and the case for “plausible deniability” becomes stronger. When you are dealing with a billionaire like Erik Prince who apparently viewed himself as a crusader tasked with eliminating muslims and Islam globally, as has been alleged by a former Blackwater official, it is not difficult to imagine how all of this could remain—at least in part—off the books. Would it be a great shock if we learn that Prince volunteered some of his men or his company’s time to lethal missions for the CIA free of charge? “I’m not a *financially driven* guy,” Prince told Congress in October 2007. Take that with a grain of salt, but it is probably not flat out false. He was a *believer* in the crusade.

That is why it is [essential](#) that Congress dig deep into all aspects of the CIA assassination program and Blackwater's total involvement. But it is important to remember that it is so much bigger than this one company and certainly bigger than one clandestine program.

Also, it is very important to remember this: Blackwater is hardly alone. *Salon's* Tim Shorrock obtained documents in 2007 from the office of the Directorate of National Intelligence (DNI) showing that Washington spends some \$42 billion annually on private intelligence contractors, up from \$17.5 billion in 2000. That means 70 percent of the US intelligence budget is going to private companies. "This is the magnet now. Everything is being attracted to these private companies in terms of individuals and expertise and functions that were normally done by the intelligence community," former CIA division chief and senior analyst Melvin Goodman told me a year ago. "My major concern is the lack of accountability, the lack of responsibility. The entire industry is essentially out of control. It's outrageous."

Attorney General Eric Holder should appoint a special prosecutor just to examine the role that Blackwater and other "private contractors" have played—from the jump—in the torture program, the extraordinary rendition program and the assassination program to name a few. And it should not be just about the operatives in the field. Who hired Erik Prince's men? Who authorized these contracts? Who "managed" their operations in the field? What exactly did they do? At Guantanamo, there were contractors involved with torture. Same at Abu Ghraib. Same at Bagram. This all needs to be dismantled and investigated.

Blackwater's Private Spies: A Bush-era CIA Who's Who

As for Blackwater's role, I [wrote](#) about Prince's private CIA last summer for *The Nation* in a piece called "[Blackwater's Private Spies](#)," but thought it would be relevant to repost some of what I laid out then because it is extremely relevant to what is happening right now. [One note: Robert Richer recently left Prince's employ...]. Excerpt:

Total Intelligence, which opened for business in February 2007, is a fusion of three entities bought up by Prince: the Terrorism Research Center, Technical Defense and The Black Group—Blackwater vice chair Cofer Black's consulting agency. The company's leadership reads like a Who's Who of the CIA's "war on terror" operations after 9/11. In addition to the twenty-eight-year CIA veteran Black, who is chair of Total Intelligence, the company's executives include CEO Robert Richer, the former associate deputy director of the agency's Directorate of Operations and the second-ranking official in charge of clandestine operations. From 1999 to 2004, Richer was head of the CIA's Near East and South Asia Division, where he ran clandestine operations throughout the Middle East and South Asia. As part of his duties, he was the CIA liaison with Jordan's King Abdullah, a key US ally and Blackwater client, and briefed George W. Bush on the burgeoning Iraqi resistance in its early stages.

Total Intelligence's chief operating officer is Enrique "Ric" Prado, a twenty-four-year CIA veteran and former senior executive officer in the Directorate of Operations. He spent more than a decade working in the CIA's Counterterrorist Center and ten years with the CIA's "paramilitary" Special Operations Group. Prado and Black worked closely at the CIA. Prado also served in Latin America with Jose Rodriguez, who gained infamy late last year after it was revealed that as director of the National Clandestine Service at the CIA he was allegedly responsible for destroying videotapes of interrogations of prisoners, during which "enhanced

interrogation techniques,” including waterboarding, were reportedly used. Richer told the *New York Times* he recalled many conversations with Rodriguez, about the tapes. “He would always say, ‘I’m not going to let my people get nailed for something they were ordered to do,’” Richer said of his former boss. Before the scandal, there were reports that Blackwater had been “aggressively recruiting” Rodriguez. He has since retired from the CIA.

The leadership of Total Intelligence also includes Craig Johnson, a twenty-seven-year CIA officer who specialized in Central and South America, and Caleb “Cal” Temple, who joined the company straight out of the Defense Intelligence Agency, where he served from 2004 to ‘06 as chief of the Office of Intelligence Operations in the Joint Intelligence Task Force—Combating Terrorism. According to his Total Intelligence bio, Temple directed the “DIA’s 24/7 analytic terrorism target development and other counterterrorism intelligence activities in support of military operations worldwide. He also oversaw 24/7 global counterterrorism indications and warning analysis for the U.S. Defense Department.” The company also boasts officials drawn from the Drug Enforcement Agency and the FBI.

Total Intelligence is run out of an office on the ninth floor of a building in the Ballston area of Arlington, Virginia. Its “Global Fusion Center,” complete with large-screen TVs broadcasting international news channels and computer stations staffed by analysts surfing the web, “operates around the clock every day of the year” and is modeled after the CIA’s counterterrorist center, once run by Black. The firm employs at least sixty-five full-time staff—some estimates say it’s closer to 100. “Total Intel brings the...skills traditionally honed by CIA operatives directly to the board room,” Black said when the company launched. “With a service like this, CEOs and their security personnel will be able to respond to threats quickly and confidently—whether it’s determining which city is safest to open a new plant in or working to keep employees out of harm’s way after a terrorist attack.”

Black insists, “This is a completely legal enterprise. We break no laws. We don’t go anywhere near breaking laws. We don’t have to.” But what services Total Intelligence is providing, and to whom, is shrouded in secrecy. It is clear, though, that the company is leveraging the reputations and inside connections of its executives. “Cofer can open doors,” Richer told the *Washington Post* in 2007. “I can open doors. We can generally get in to see who we need to see. We don’t help pay bribes. We do everything within the law, but we can deal with the right minister or person.” Black told the paper he and Richer spend a lot of their time traveling. “I am discreet in where I go and who I see. I spend most of my time dealing with senior people in governments, making connections.” But it is clear that the existing connections from the former spooks’ time at the agency have brought business to Total Intelligence.

Take the case of Jordan. For years, Richer worked closely with King Abdullah, as his CIA liaison. As journalist Ken Silverstein reported, “The CIA has lavishly subsidized Jordan’s intelligence service, and has sent millions of dollars in recent years for intelligence training. After Richer retired, sources say, he helped Blackwater land a lucrative deal with the Jordanian government to provide the same sort of training offered by the CIA. Millions of dollars that the CIA ‘invested’ in Jordan walked out the door with Richer—if this were a movie, it would be a cross between *Jerry Maguire* and *Syriana*. ‘People [at the agency] are pissed off,’ said one source. ‘Abdullah still speaks with Richer regularly, and he thinks that’s the same thing as talking to us. He thinks Richer is still the man.’ Except in this case it’s Richer, not his client, yelling ‘show me the money.’”

In a 2007 interview on the cable business network CNBC, Black was brought on as an

analyst to discuss “investing in Jordan.” At no point in the interview was Black identified as working for the Jordanian government. Total Intelligence was described as “a corporate consulting firm that includes investment strategy,” while “Ambassador Black” was introduced as “a twenty-eight-year veteran of the CIA,” the “top counterterror guy” and “a key planner for the breathtakingly rapid victory of American forces that toppled the Taliban in Afghanistan.” Black heaped lavish praise on Jordan and its monarchy. “You have leadership, King Abdullah, His Majesty King Abdullah, who is certainly kind towards investors, very protective,” Black said. “Jordan is, in our view, a very good investment. There are some exceptional values there.” He said Jordan is in a region where there are “numerous commodities that are being produced and doing well.”

With no hint of the brutality behind the exodus, Black argued that the flood of Iraqi refugees fleeing the violence of the US occupation was good for potential investors in Jordan. “We get something like 600, 700,000 Iraqis that have moved from Iraq into Jordan that require cement, furniture, housing and the like. So it is a—it is an island of growth and potential, certainly in that immediate area. So it looks good,” he said. “There are opportunities for investment. It is not all bad. Sometimes Americans need to watch a little less TV.... But there is—there is opportunity in everything. That’s why you need situation awareness, and that’s one of the things that our company does. It provides the kinds of intelligence and insight to provide situational awareness so you can make the best investments.”

Black and other Total Intelligence executives have turned their CIA careers, reputations, contacts and connections into business opportunities. What they once did for the US government, they now do for private interests. It is not difficult to imagine clients feeling as though they are essentially hiring the US government to serve their own interests. In 2007 Richer told the *Post* that now that he is in the private sector, foreign military officials and others are more willing to give him information than they were when he was with the CIA. Richer recalled a conversation with a foreign general during which he was surprised at the potentially “classified” information the general revealed. When Richer asked why the general was giving him the information, he said the general responded, “If I tell it to an embassy official I’ve created espionage. You’re a business partner.”

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