

BLACKWATER GUARDS GIVEN IMMUNITY FROM PROSECUTION

I pointed out the other day that several of the Blackwater guards involved in the September 16 shooting have left Iraq. Now bmaz points to this AP story revealing that all the guards have been given immunity from prosecution.

The State Department promised Blackwater USA bodyguards immunity from prosecution in its investigation of last month's deadly shooting of 17 Iraqi civilians, The Associated Press has learned.

[snip]

Three senior law enforcement officials said all the Blackwater bodyguards involved _ both in the vehicle convoy and in at least two helicopters above _ were given the legal protections as investigators from the Bureau of Diplomatic Security sought to find out what happened. The bureau is an arm of the State Department.

[snip]

An initial incident report by U.S. Central Command, which oversees military operations in Iraq, also indicated "no enemy activity involved" in the Sept. 16 incident. The report says Blackwater guards were traveling against the flow of traffic through a traffic circle when they "engaged five civilian vehicles with small arms fire" at a distance of 50 meters.

The FBI took over the case early this month, officials said, after prosecutors in the Justice Department's criminal division realized it could not bring charges against Blackwater guards based

on their statements to the Diplomatic Security investigators.

And here's today's candidate for credulous reporting award:

Garrity protections generally are given to police or other public law enforcement officers, and were extended to the Blackwater guards because they were working on behalf of the U.S. government, one official said. Experts said it's rare for them to be given to all or even most witnesses _ particularly before a suspect is identified.

[snip]

It's not clear why the Diplomatic Security investigators agreed to give immunity to the bodyguards, or who authorized doing so.

Gosh, I couldn't imagine why the State Department would immediately immunize all the guards in this investigation, can you?

Anyway don't you think that's something Condi should have told Waxman's committee the other day ... that these guys had already been given immunity from prosecution and that, therefore, the FBI investigation is likely to end up—like all other investigations of Blackwater—holding no one responsible?