

CIA'S BLACKWATER CIRCULAR FIRING SQUAD

While we wait for Jeremy Scahill's piece on this today (which will surely tell a more complete story than the NYT and WaPo's spook reporters did), I want to follow up on the two posts I did yesterday, obviously based on leaks and counter-leaks, to sort out what we know of the plans to use Blackwater as the US assassination squad. There are two parts to the story: first, that CIA invented an assassination program shortly after 9/11. And then, that CIA gave a contract to Blackwater for the program in 2004. Here are the dates we know of.

2001: Presidential finding allowing assassinations of al Qaeda, assassination squads set up

2002: CIA sets up contract for Blackwater to "provide security" for CIA's Afghan station

2002: Dick Cheney tells CIA not to brief Congress on assassination plans

2002: Cofer Black ousted from CTC

2004: CIA terminates program, then gives contract to Blackwater to do assassination squads

September, 2004: Buzzy Krongard resigns as CIA's Executive Director (replaced by Dusty Foggo)

February 2005: Cofer Black becomes Vice Chairman of Blackwater

Fall 2007: Krongard joins Blackwater advisory board

September 2007: Nisour Square massacre

June 23, 2009: Panetta learns of active assassination squad program, cancels it

June 24, 2009: Panetta briefs Congress

Now, a couple of points about this. The stories coming out today want to focus on 2004, when Blackwater supposedly got the contract to do this. If so, then what did Cheney order CIA not to tell Congress about in 2002? It may be that they're using the term "contract" loosely to hide an earlier arrangement, given that they admit to NYT there was never really a contract.

Officials said the C.I.A. did not have a formal contract with Blackwater for this program but instead had individual agreements with top company officials, including the founder, Erik D. Prince, a politically connected former member of the Navy Seals and the heir to a family fortune.

I guess if you're doing all this without contracts, it makes it a lot easier for it to take four months before the Director of the CIA learns about it. But isn't that one of the nightmares we've all been waiting for, as we outsource our intelligence? That the privatized spooks will take over and continue programs without telling the political appointees? Hell, that the privatized spooks will continue to work for the last guy who was President and not the current one?

I'm also curious whether this program just moved around, rather than ever really going away. As WaPo notes, the whole time CIA was playing around with this, Special Forces were doing the same thing.

The CIA – and Blackwater – were not the only agents that sought to covertly kill key members of al-Qaeda using small, highly trained teams. A similar effort, officials say, was undertaken by U.S. Special Forces.

And in fact, we know Cheney was using these

Special Forces assassination teams in DOD because—he claimed—he wouldn't have to brief Congress on them, because they weren't an intelligence operation.

Mostly though, with Cheney or someone who sounds a whole lot like him or Addington bitching at Panetta in the DailyBeast propaganda piece...

As one very former, very senior Bush administration official said to me in annoyance, "You know what? Let's videotape them all. And when some important covert action gets torpedoed by the those guys on the intelligence committees and then we get hit again, let's put those tapes up on YouTube for everyone to see who disarmed us. See what they think. It cuts both ways."

I wonder whether they didn't attack Panetta so aggressively because this is still going on in some pocket of the government.