

ABC RETURNS THE BLACKWATER FOCUS TO PAKISTAN

ABC has now caught up to Jeremy Scahill. In this Blackwater installment, they describe sketchy details of two Blackwater operations in Afghanistan/Pakistan, one in 2003, and one in 2006.

CIA officials acknowledge that two private contractors were killed in Afghanistan in 2003 when they and other members of a CIA paramilitary team were in a firefight with Taliban fighters on a remote road.

In another case, in 2006, 12 Blackwater “tactical action operatives” were recruited for a secret raid into Pakistan by the U.S. military’s Joint Special Operations Command, according to a military intelligence planner. The target of the planned raid, code-named Vibrant Fury, was a suspected al Qaeda training camp, according to the planner, who said he did not know the outcome of the mission.

It’s not clear whether this on the record discussion of planning for an op in 2003 is the same one named above, in which two contractors (presumably BW) were killed. But note the explanation: a desire to avoid oversight.

A U.S. Army officer who ran human intelligence collections activities in Afghanistan in 2003, Tony Shaffer, says he never worked directly with Blackwater personnel but frequently encountered them in secret operations run by the military and the CIA.

“I actually met with the CIA and Blackwater operatives who were working

together, totally hand in glove, to conduct operational planning and support of their objectives, which are paramilitary operations along the border,” said Shaffer, then a Major but now a Lieutenant Colonel who teaches at the Center for Advanced Defense Studies.

“The idea was to bring to bear additional resources for specific special operations missions,” he said. “The purpose for that, in my judgment, may have been to avoid some level of oversight.”

In 2006, the purpose of using BW was to provide forces that were otherwise unavailable because they were occupied in Iraq.

In the case of Operation Vibrant Fury, military personnel say the decision to request Blackwater personnel came after a request for military “tier one” operatives was denied.

A spokesperson for Blackwater said the company was unaware of any operation with the code name Vibrant Fury.

The mission was to raid, destroy and kill al Qaeda members at a camp in Pakistan where guards for Osama bin Laden and Ayman al Zawahiri were believed to be training, according to the military planner.

A second person briefed on the operation confirmed Blackwater agreed to provide operatives for the military special forces.

The commanders of the elite special forces, then called Task Force 373, decided to solicit help from Blackwater, said the planner, after military superiors said the men could not be spared from Iraq.

The request to Blackwater was met on

Oct. 31, 2006, according to the planner.

I'll come back to some of the details. But for the moment, consider how the history of Bush letting Osama bin Laden go at Tora Bora played into this. Both ops were attempts to chase al Qaeda into Pakistan. One of those was an attempt to get OBL's guards.

Wouldn't it all have been better if we had dedicated the resources in 2001?