

# IF BLACKWATER COULDN'T KEEP BENAZIR BHUTTO SAFE, WHY IS STATE STILL CONTRACTING WITH THEM?

When Erik Prince testified before the Oversight Committee on October 2, 2007, he boasted that no one under Blackwater's protection had ever been seriously hurt or killed.

No individual protected by Blackwater has ever been killed or seriously injured. There is no better evidence of the skill and dedication of these men.

At precisely the same time as Prince was making that boast, Blackwater was negotiating a protection deal that would not end so successfully.

*The Nation* has previously reported on Blackwater's work for the CIA and JSOC in Pakistan. New documents reveal a history of activity relating to Pakistan by Blackwater. Former Pakistani Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto worked with the company when she returned to Pakistan to campaign for the 2008 elections, according to the documents. In October 2007, when media reports emerged that Bhutto had hired "American security," senior Blackwater official Robert Richer wrote to company executives, "We need to watch this carefully from a number of angles. If our name surfaces, the Pakistani press reaction will be very important. How that plays through the Muslim world will also need tracking." Richer wrote that "we should be prepared to [sic] a communique from an affiliate

of Al-Qaida if our name surfaces (BW). That will impact the security profile." Clearly a word is missing in the e-mail or there is a typo that leaves unclear what Richer meant when he mentioned the Al Qaeda communiqué. Bhutto was assassinated two months later. Blackwater officials subsequently scheduled a meeting with her family representatives in Washington, in January 2008.

This detail—though not surprising—raises more questions than offer answers. Like what the hell word is that is missing before “communique”? Was Blackwater proposing to mitigate the PR problem of public association with Bhutto just as scrutiny over the Nissour Square massacre was most intense by inventing a fake communique, of some sort, from al Qaeda? (Elsewhere in Scahill’s piece, he describes a training course Blackwater offered on al Qaeda tactics, including propaganda. So presumably, they considered themselves experts in creating fake al Qaeda propaganda.

And if Blackwater had a previously unrevealed failure—a really costly, spectacular one—then why is State Department still contracting with them for such protective services? Not least given that Blackwater would presumably be protecting people in Afghanistan against some of the same creeps who presumably bested Blackwater when they assassinated Bhutto?

Moreover, given that the State Department gave Blackwater follow-on contracts after Blackwater failed to keep Bhutto safe, then have they at least done a real assessment of what went wrong? Last we heard from Blackwater publicly, they had a purportedly perfect record. But they don’t. And no one told us that. If we’re going to give another \$120,000,000 to Blackwater, have we at least studied, first, what went wrong with Blackwater’s notable failure with Bhutto?