



Written by [Thomas R. Eddlem](#) on August 20, 2009

CIA Hired Blackwater for Assassinations

The CIA outsourced its assassination program to controversial security company Blackwater Worldwide, according to the New York Times for August 20. The assassination program never got to the point of actually carrying out assassination missions, but the New York Times and other news sources reported that Blackwater had received a multimillion-dollar contract to draw up the program and provide training.

The *Washington Post* [reported](#) August 20 that “total spending was well under \$20 million over eight years,” citing anonymous CIA sources.



Congress was not informed of the program, but the issue of the CIA assassination program became highly politicized when Director of National Security Leon Panetta revealed the Bush-era program to Congress shortly after House Speaker Nancy Pelosi had accused the CIA of routinely withholding information from Congress in the wake of the [Bush “waterboarding” torture scandal](#).

Under the U.S. Constitution, the president is not allowed to create private assassination squads. This power is exclusively delegated to Congress under [Article I, Section 8 of the U.S. Constitution](#), which grants Congress the power to both “define and punish piracies and felonies” as well as to “grant letters of marque and reprisal”:

Congress shall have the power ... To define and punish piracies and felonies committed on the high seas, and offenses against the law of nations; To declare war, grant letters of marque and reprisal, and make rules concerning captures on land and water.

A letter of marque is a license for privateers to attack or kill persons who have wronged the United States in the judgment of Congress, while a letter of reprisal is a similar measure geared toward organizations or governments.

“It is unclear whether the C.I.A. had planned to use the contractors to actually capture or kill Qaeda operatives,” the *New York Times* [reported](#), “or just to help with training and surveillance in the program. American spy agencies have in recent years outsourced some highly controversial work, including the interrogation of prisoners.”

The *New York Times* has [noted](#) that Blackwater has had strong ties to the CIA in recent years, including:

- “In 2002, Blackwater won a classified contract to provide security for the C.I.A. station in Kabul, Afghanistan, and the company maintains other classified contracts with the C.I.A., current and former officials said.”
- “Blackwater has hired several former top C.I.A. officials, including Cofer Black, who ran the C.I.A. counterterrorism center immediately after the Sept. 11 attacks.”



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- “C.I.A. operatives also regularly use the company’s training complex in North Carolina.”

Most of Blackwater Worldwide’s contracts with the U.S. government were [“no bid” contracts](#), meaning no other companies were encouraged to compete for the government contracts, though the company and its founder have a checkered past.

The firm suffered such bad publicity after [massacres by its employees in Iraq](#) that the company [changed its name to Xe Services](#) in February of 2009. The *London Times* [reported](#) August 6 that former employees of Blackwater have accused the company founder of a variety of crimes in U.S. courts. “The accusations, including a claim that the company founder Erik Prince either murdered or had killed former employees co-operating with federal investigators, are contained in sworn affidavits lodged at a Virginia court on Monday night.”

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