

On February 7, 2007, the Committee on Oversight and Government Reform held [a hearing to initiate an investigation into the performance and accountability of private military contractors in Iraq](#). The hearing included the examination of one prominent case study: a pivotal event of the Iraq War in which four Blackwater USA security contractors were ambushed and killed in Fallujah on March 31, 2004, while escorting a convoy.

At the hearing, Blackwater's General Counsel testified that the company acted responsibly in preparing for and executing the Fallujah mission. He asserted that the vehicles involved had an "appropriate" amount of protection and that the level of staffing was "the norm" given "the threat as it was known on the ground in Iraq."

Eyewitness accounts and investigative reports conflict with Blackwater's assertion that they sent the team out with sufficient preparation and equipment.

Since the hearing, the Committee has investigated what actually happened in Fallujah on March 31, 2004, and whether Blackwater approached its security duties responsibly. As part of this investigation, the Committee staff has reviewed documents based on the accounts of eighteen individuals with knowledge of the incident, including Blackwater's Baghdad operations manager and project director, seven other Blackwater personnel who were based in Iraq or Kuwait, the three truck drivers escorted in the Blackwater convoy through Fallujah, and three personnel from a different government contractor who spoke to the Blackwater team the night before and morning of its ambush, as well as employees of another private security contractor and Blackwater's contract partner. The Committee has also obtained, and the staff reviewed, unclassified investigative reports generated by the counterintelligence unit of the Coalition Provisional Authority — the U.S. entity that was governing Iraq at the time of the incident — and the Naval Criminal Investigative Service.

These eyewitness accounts and investigative reports conflict with Blackwater's assertion that they sent the team out with sufficient preparation and equipment. They portray a company that ignored multiple warnings about the dangers of traveling through Fallujah, cut essential personnel from the mission, and failed to supply its team with armored vehicles, machine guns, sufficient threat intelligence, or even maps of the area. Blackwater's own employees described its conduct as "flat out a sloppy | operation" and a "ship about to sink." Another Blackwater employee stated: "Why were they sent into the hottest zone in Iraq in unarmored, underpowered vehicles to protect a truck? They had no way to protect their flanks because they only had four guys." Even the internal review conducted by Blackwater at the direction of Erik Prince, the owner of Blackwater, found that the team ambushed in Fallujah "[h]ad no time to perform proper mission planning" and "[w]as without proper maps of the city."

The details of the events leading to the incident are disturbing, revealing an unprepared and disorderly organization operating in a hostile environment. Mistake apparently compounded mistake. According to the documents provided to the Committee:

- **At the time of the Fallujah incident, Blackwater was taking over operations from a British security company, Control Risks Group.** The project manager for the British company states that Blackwater “did not use the opportunity to learn from the experience gained by CRG on this operation, † leading to inadequate preparation for taking on this task.” The company’s incident report states that Blackwater was informed that Control Risks Group twice rejected the mission because of unacceptable security risks, reporting: “Blackwater were informed that we had turned this task down and the reasons why were given.”

- **Prior to the Blackwater team’s departure, two of the six members of the team were cut from the mission, depriving both security vehicles of a rear gunner.** These personnel were removed from the mission to perform administrative duties at the Blackwater operations center.

- **Blackwater had a contract dispute with a Kuwaiti company, Regency Hotel & Hospitality, over the acquisition of armored vehicles for the Blackwater team.** Blackwater officials instructed its employees to “string these guys along and run this † thing into the ground” because “if we stalled long enough they (Regency) would have no choice but to buy us armored cars, or they would default on the contract,” in which case the contractor who hired Regency “might go directly to Blackwater for security.” According to a Blackwater employee, Blackwater’s contract “paid for armor vehicles,” but “management in North Carolina made the decision to go with soft skin due to the cost.”

- **One day before the Fallujah attack, Blackwater’s operations manager in Baghdad sent an urgent e-mail to Blackwater headquarters in North Carolina with the subject line “Ground Truth.”** The e-mail stated: “I need new vehicles. I need new COMs, I need ammo, I need Glockes and M4s. † I’ve requested hard cars from the beginning. † Ground truth is appalling.”

- **Because they were without maps and the mission had not been sufficiently planned, the Blackwater personnel arrived at the wrong military base the day before the attack, where they were forced to spend the night.** A witness at the military base assessed that “the mission that they were on was hurriedly put together and that they were not prepared.”

Blackwater’s recalcitrance in responding to the Committee’s inquiry has also raised issues. The company consistently delayed and erected impediments to the Committee’s investigation, using tactics such as erroneously claiming that documents relating to the Fallujah incident were classified, seeking to have the Defense Department retroactively classify previously unclassified

documents, and asserting questionable legal privileges.

Documents and Links

- [Report: Private Military Contractors in Iraq - An Examination of Blackwater's Actions in Fallujah](#)
- [February 7, 2007 Hearing Examining Reliance on Private Military Contractors](#)