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The Nation

## Blackwater's Secret War in Pakistan

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At a covert forward operating base run by the US Joint Special Operations Command (JSOC) in the Pakistani port city of Karachi, members of an elite division of Blackwater are at the center of a secret program in which they plan targeted assassinations of suspected Taliban and Al Qaeda operatives, "snatch and grabs" of high-value targets and other sensitive action inside and outside Pakistan, an investigation by *The Nation* has found. The Blackwater operatives also assist in gathering intelligence and help direct a secret US military drone bombing campaign that runs parallel to the well-documented CIA predator strikes, according to a well-placed source within the US military intelligence apparatus.

The source, who has worked on covert US military programs for years, including in Afghanistan and Pakistan, has direct knowledge of Blackwater's involvement. He spoke to *The Nation* on condition of anonymity because the program is classified. The source said that the program is so "compartmentalized" that senior figures within the Obama administration and the US military chain of command may not be aware of its existence.

The White House did not return calls or email messages seeking comment for this story. Capt. John Kirby, the spokesperson for Adm. Michael Mullen, Chair of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, told *The Nation*, "We do not discuss current operations one way or the other, regardless of their nature." A defense official, on background, specifically denied that Blackwater performs work on drone strikes or intelligence for JSOC in Pakistan. "We don't have any contracts to do that work for us. We don't contract that kind of work out, period," the official

said. "There has not been, and is not now, contracts between JSOC and that organization for these types of services."

The previously unreported program, the military intelligence source said, is distinct from the CIA assassination program that the agency's director, Leon Panetta, announced he had canceled in June 2009. "This is a parallel operation to the CIA," said the source. "They are two separate beasts." The program puts Blackwater at the epicenter of a US military operation within the borders of a nation against which the United States has not declared war--knowledge that could further strain the already tense relations between the United States and Pakistan. In 2006, the United States and Pakistan struck a deal that authorized JSOC to enter Pakistan to hunt Osama bin Laden with the understanding that Pakistan would deny it had given permission. Officially, the United States is not supposed to have any active military operations in the country.

Blackwater, which recently changed its name to Xe Services and US Training Center, denies the company is operating in Pakistan. "Xe Services has only one employee in Pakistan performing construction oversight for the U.S. Government," Blackwater spokesperson Mark Corallo said in a statement to *The Nation*, adding that the company has "no other operations of any kind in Pakistan."

A former senior executive at Blackwater confirmed the military intelligence source's claim that the company is working in Pakistan for the CIA and JSOC, the premier counterterrorism and covert operations force within the military. He said that Blackwater is also working for the Pakistani government on a subcontract with an Islamabad-based security firm that puts US Blackwater operatives on the ground with Pakistani forces in counter-terrorism operations, including house raids and border interdictions, in the North-West Frontier Province and elsewhere in Pakistan. This arrangement, the former executive said, allows the Pakistani government to utilize former US Special Operations forces who now work for Blackwater while denying an official US military presence in the country. He also confirmed that Blackwater has a facility in Karachi and has personnel deployed elsewhere in Pakistan. The former executive spoke on condition of anonymity.

His account and that of the military intelligence source were borne out by a US military source who has knowledge of Special Forces actions in Pakistan and Afghanistan. When asked about Blackwater's covert work for JSOC in Pakistan, this source, who also asked for anonymity, told *The Nation*, "From my information that I have, that is absolutely correct," adding, "There's no question that's occurring."

"It wouldn't surprise me because we've outsourced nearly everything," said Col. Lawrence Wilkerson, who served as Secretary of State Colin Powell's chief of staff from 2002 to 2005, when told of Blackwater's role in Pakistan. Wilkerson said that during his time in the Bush administration, he saw the beginnings of Blackwater's involvement with the sensitive operations of the military and CIA. "Part of this, of course, is an attempt to get around the constraints the Congress has placed on DoD. If you don't have sufficient soldiers to do it, you hire civilians to do it. I mean, it's that simple. It would not surprise me."

## **The Counterterrorism Tag Team in Karachi**

The covert JSOC program with Blackwater in Pakistan dates back to at least 2007, according to the military intelligence source. The current head of JSOC is Vice Adm. William McRaven, who took over the post from Gen. Stanley McChrystal, who headed JSOC from 2003 to 2008 before being named the top US commander in Afghanistan. Blackwater's presence in Pakistan is "not really visible, and that's why nobody has cracked down on it," said the source. Blackwater's operations in Pakistan, he said, are not done through State Department contracts or publicly identified Defense contracts. "It's Blackwater via JSOC, and it's a classified no-bid [contract] approved on a rolling basis." The main JSOC/Blackwater facility in Karachi, according to the source, is nondescript: three trailers with various generators, satellite phones and computer systems are used as a makeshift operations center. "It's a very rudimentary operation," says the source. "I would compare it to [CIA] outposts in Kurdistan or any of the Special Forces outposts. It's very bare bones, and that's the point."

Blackwater's work for JSOC in Karachi is coordinated out of a Task Force based at Bagram Air Base in neighboring Afghanistan, according to the military intelligence source. While JSOC technically runs the operations in Karachi, he said, it is largely staffed by former US special operations soldiers working for a division of Blackwater, once known as Blackwater SELECT, and intelligence analysts working for a Blackwater affiliate, Total Intelligence Solutions (TIS), which is owned by Blackwater's founder, Erik Prince. The military source said that the name Blackwater SELECT may have been changed recently. Total Intelligence, which is run out of an office on the ninth floor of a building in the Ballston area of Arlington, Virginia, is staffed by former analysts and operatives from the CIA, DIA, FBI and other agencies. It is modeled after the CIA's counterterrorism center. In Karachi, TIS runs a "media-scouring/open-source network," according to the source. Until recently, Total Intelligence was run by two former top CIA officials, Cofer Black and Robert Richer, both of whom have left the company. In Pakistan, Blackwater is not using either its original name or its new moniker, Xe Services, according to the former Blackwater executive. "They are running most of their work through TIS because the other two [names] have such a stain on them," he said. Corallo, the Blackwater spokesperson, denied that TIS or any other division or affiliate of Blackwater has any personnel in Pakistan.

The US military intelligence source said that Blackwater's classified contracts keep getting renewed at the request of JSOC. Blackwater, he said, is already so deeply entrenched that it has become a staple of the US military operations in Pakistan. According to the former Blackwater executive, "The politics that go with the brand of BW is somewhat set aside because what you're doing is really one military guy to another." Blackwater's first known contract with the CIA for operations in Afghanistan was awarded in 2002 and was for work along the Afghanistan-Pakistan border.

One of the concerns raised by the military intelligence source is that some Blackwater personnel are being given rolling security clearances above their approved clearances. Using Alternative Compartmentalized Control Measures (ACCMs), he said, the Blackwater personnel are granted clearance to a Special Access Program, the bureaucratic term used to describe highly classified "black" operations. "With an ACCM, the security manager can

grant access to you to be exposed to and operate within compartmentalized programs far above 'secret'--even though you have no business doing so," said the source. It allows Blackwater personnel that "do not have the requisite security clearance or do not hold a security clearance whatsoever to participate in classified operations by virtue of trust," he added. "Think of it as an ultra-exclusive level above top secret. That's exactly what it is: a circle of love." Blackwater, therefore, has access to "all source" reports that are culled in part from JSOC units in the field. "That's how a lot of things over the years have been conducted with contractors," said the source. "We have contractors that regularly see things that top policy-makers don't unless they ask."

According to the source, Blackwater has effectively marketed itself as a company whose operatives have "conducted lethal direct action missions and now, for a price, you can have your own planning cell. JSOC just ate that up," he said, adding, "They have a sizable force in Pakistan--not for any nefarious purpose if you really want to look at it that way--but to support a legitimate contract that's classified for JSOC." Blackwater's Pakistan JSOC contracts are secret and are therefore shielded from public oversight, he said. The source is not sure when the arrangement with JSOC began, but he says that a spin-off of Blackwater SELECT "was issued a no-bid contract for support to shooters for a JSOC Task Force and they kept extending it." Some of the Blackwater personnel, he said, work undercover as aid workers. "Nobody even gives them a second thought."

The military intelligence source said that the Blackwater/JSOC Karachi operation is referred to as "Qatar cubed," in reference to the US forward operating base in Qatar that served as the hub for the planning and implementation of the US invasion of Iraq. "This is supposed to be the brave new world," he says. "This is the Jamestown of the new millennium and it's meant to be a lily pad. You can jump off to Uzbekistan, you can jump back over the border, you can jump sideways, you can jump northwest. It's strategically located so that they can get their people wherever they have to without having to wrangle with the military chain of command in Afghanistan, which is convoluted. They don't have to deal with that because they're operating under a classified mandate."

In addition to planning drone strikes and operations against suspected Al Qaeda and Taliban forces in Pakistan for both JSOC and the CIA, the Blackwater team in Karachi also helps plan missions for JSOC inside Uzbekistan against the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, according to the military intelligence source. Blackwater does not actually carry out the operations, he said, which are executed on the ground by JSOC forces. "That piqued my curiosity and really worries me because I don't know if you noticed but I was never told we are at war with Uzbekistan," he said. "So, did I miss something, did Rumsfeld come back into power?"

### **Pakistan's Military Contracting Maze**

Blackwater, according to the military intelligence source, is not doing the actual killing as part of its work in Pakistan. "The SELECT personnel are not going into places with private aircraft and going after targets," he said. "It's not like Blackwater SELECT people are running around assassinating people." Instead, US Special Forces teams carry out the plans developed in part by Blackwater. The military intelligence source drew a distinction between the

Blackwater operatives who work for the State Department, which he calls "Blackwater Vanilla," and the seasoned Special Forces veterans who work on the JSOC program. "Good or bad, there's a small number of people who know how to pull off an operation like that. That's probably a good thing," said the source. "It's the Blackwater SELECT people that have and continue to plan these types of operations because they're the only people that know how and they went where the money was. It's not trigger-happy fucks, like some of the PSD [Personal Security Detail] guys. These are not people that believe that Barack Obama is a socialist, these are not people that kill innocent civilians. They're very good at what they do."

The former Blackwater executive, when asked for confirmation that Blackwater forces were not actively killing people in Pakistan, said, "that's not entirely accurate." While he concurred with the military intelligence source's description of the JSOC and CIA programs, he pointed to another role Blackwater is allegedly playing in Pakistan, not for the US government but for Islamabad. According to the executive, Blackwater works on a subcontract for Kestral Logistics, a powerful Pakistani firm, which specializes in military logistical support, private security and intelligence consulting. It is staffed with former high-ranking Pakistani army and government officials. While Kestral's main offices are in Pakistan, it also has branches in several other countries.

A spokesperson for the US State Department's Directorate of Defense Trade Controls (DDTC), which is responsible for issuing licenses to US corporations to provide defense-related services to foreign governments or entities, would neither confirm nor deny for *The Nation* that Blackwater has a license to work in Pakistan or to work with Kestral. "We cannot help you," said department spokesperson David McKeeby after checking with the relevant DDTC officials. "You'll have to contact the companies directly." Blackwater's Corallo said the company has "no operations of any kind" in Pakistan other than the one employee working for the DoD. Kestral did not respond to inquiries from *The Nation*.

According to federal lobbying records, Kestral recently hired former Assistant Secretary of State for Western Hemisphere Affairs Roger Noriega, who served in that post from 2003 to 2005, to lobby the US government, including the State Department, USAID and Congress, on foreign affairs issues "regarding [Kestral's] capabilities to carry out activities of interest to the United States." Noriega was hired through his firm, Vision Americas, which he runs with Christina Rocca, a former CIA operations official who served as assistant secretary of state for South Asian affairs from 2001 to 2006 and was deeply involved in shaping US policy toward Pakistan. In October 2009, Kestral paid Vision Americas \$15,000 and paid a Vision Americas-affiliated firm, Firecreek Ltd., an equal amount to lobby on defense and foreign policy issues.

For years, Kestral has done a robust business in defense logistics with the Pakistani government and other nations, as well as top US defense companies. Blackwater owner Erik Prince is close with Kestral CEO Liaquat Ali Baig, according to the former Blackwater executive. "Ali and Erik have a pretty close relationship," he said. "They've met many times and struck a deal, and they [offer] mutual support for one another." Working with Kestral, he said, Blackwater has provided convoy security for Defense Department shipments destined for Afghanistan that would arrive in the port at Karachi. Blackwater, according to the former

executive, would guard the supplies as they were transported overland from Karachi to Peshawar and then west through the Torkham border crossing, the most important supply route for the US military in Afghanistan.

According to the former executive, Blackwater operatives also integrate with Kestral's forces in sensitive counterterrorism operations in the North-West Frontier Province, where they work in conjunction with the Pakistani Interior Ministry's paramilitary force, known as the Frontier Corps (alternately referred to as "frontier scouts"). The Blackwater personnel are technically advisers, but the former executive said that the line often gets blurred in the field. Blackwater "is providing the actual guidance on how to do [counterterrorism operations] and Kestral's folks are carrying a lot of them out, but they're having the guidance and the overwatch from some BW guys that will actually go out with the teams when they're executing the job," he said. "You can see how that can lead to other things in the border areas." He said that when Blackwater personnel are out with the Pakistani teams, sometimes its men engage in operations against suspected terrorists. "You've got BW guys that are assisting... and they're all going to want to go on the jobs--so they're going to go with them," he said. "So, the things that you're seeing in the news about how this Pakistani military group came in and raided this house or did this or did that--in some of those cases, you're going to have Western folks that are right there at the house, if not in the house." Blackwater, he said, is paid by the Pakistani government through Kestral for consulting services. "That gives the Pakistani government the cover to say, 'Hey, no, we don't have any Westerners doing this. It's all local and our people are doing it.' But it gets them the expertise that Westerners provide for [counterterrorism]-related work."

The military intelligence source confirmed Blackwater works with the Frontier Corps, saying, "There's no real oversight. It's not really on people's radar screen."

In October, in response to Pakistani news reports that a Kestral warehouse in Islamabad was being used to store heavy weapons for Blackwater, the US Embassy in Pakistan released a statement denying the weapons were being used by "a private American security contractor." The statement said, "Kestral Logistics is a private logistics company that handles the importation of equipment and supplies provided by the United States to the Government of Pakistan. All of the equipment and supplies were imported at the request of the Government of Pakistan, which also certified the shipments."

### **Who is Behind the Drone Attacks?**

Since President Barack Obama was inaugurated, the United States has expanded drone bombing raids in Pakistan. Obama first ordered a drone strike against targets in North and South Waziristan on January 23, and the strikes have been conducted consistently ever since. The Obama administration has now surpassed the number of Bush-era strikes in Pakistan and has faced fierce criticism from Pakistan and some US lawmakers over civilian deaths. A drone attack in June killed as many as sixty people attending a Taliban funeral.

In August, the *New York Times* reported that Blackwater works for the CIA at "hidden bases in Pakistan and Afghanistan, where the company's contractors assemble and load Hellfire

missiles and 500-pound laser-guided bombs on remotely piloted Predator aircraft." In February, The *Times* of London obtained a satellite image of a secret CIA airbase in Shamsi, in Pakistan's southwestern province of Baluchistan, showing three drone aircraft. The *New York Times* also reported that the agency uses a secret base in Jalalabad, Afghanistan, to strike in Pakistan.

The military intelligence source says that the drone strike that reportedly killed Pakistani Taliban leader Baitullah Mehsud, his wife and his bodyguards in Waziristan in August was a CIA strike, but that many others attributed in media reports to the CIA are actually JSOC strikes. "Some of these strikes are attributed to OGA [Other Government Agency, intelligence parlance for the CIA], but in reality it's JSOC and their parallel program of UAVs [unmanned aerial vehicles] because they also have access to UAVs. So when you see some of these hits, especially the ones with high civilian casualties, those are almost always JSOC strikes." The Pentagon has stated bluntly, "There are no US military strike operations being conducted in Pakistan."

The military intelligence source also confirmed that Blackwater continues to work for the CIA on its drone bombing program in Pakistan, as previously reported in the *New York Times*, but added that Blackwater is working on JSOC's drone bombings as well. "It's Blackwater running the program for both CIA and JSOC," said the source. When civilians are killed, "people go, 'Oh, it's the CIA doing crazy shit again unchecked.' Well, at least 50 percent of the time, that's JSOC [hitting] somebody they've identified through HUMINT [human intelligence] or they've culled the intelligence themselves or it's been shared with them and they take that person out and that's how it works."

The military intelligence source says that the CIA operations are subject to Congressional oversight, unlike the parallel JSOC bombings. "Targeted killings are not the most popular thing in town right now and the CIA knows that," he says. "Contractors and especially JSOC personnel working under a classified mandate are not [overseen by Congress], so they just don't care. If there's one person they're going after and there's thirty-four people in the building, thirty-five people are going to die. That's the mentality." He added, "They're not accountable to anybody and they know that. It's an open secret, but what are you going to do, shut down JSOC?"

In addition to working on covert action planning and drone strikes, Blackwater SELECT also provides private guards to perform the sensitive task of security for secret US drone bases, JSOC camps and Defense Intelligence Agency camps inside Pakistan, according to the military intelligence source.

Mosharraf Zaidi, a well-known Pakistani journalist who has served as a consultant for the UN and European Union in Pakistan and Afghanistan, says that the Blackwater/JSOC program raises serious questions about the norms of international relations. "The immediate question is, How do you define the active pursuit of military objectives in a country with which not only have you not declared war but that is supposedly a front-line non-NATO ally in the US struggle to contain extremist violence coming out of Afghanistan and the border regions of Afghanistan and Pakistan?" asks Zaidi, who is currently a columnist for *The News*, the

biggest English-language daily in Pakistan. "Let's forget Blackwater for a second. What this is confirming is that there are US military operations in Pakistan that aren't about logistics or getting food to Bagram; that are actually about the exercise of physical violence, physical force inside of Pakistani territory."

### **JSOC: Rumsfeld and Cheney's Extra Special Force**

Colonel Wilkerson said that he is concerned that with General McChrystal's elevation as the military commander of the Afghan war--which is increasingly seeping into Pakistan--there is a concomitant rise in JSOC's power and influence within the military structure. "I don't see how you can escape that; it's just a matter of the way the authority flows and the power flows, and it's inevitable, I think," Wilkerson told *The Nation*. He added, "I'm alarmed when I see execute orders and combat orders that go out saying that the supporting force is Central Command and the supported force is Special Operations Command," under which JSOC operates. "That's backward. But that's essentially what we have today."

From 2003 to 2008 McChrystal headed JSOC, which is headquartered at Pope Air Force Base and Fort Bragg in North Carolina, where Blackwater's 7,000-acre operating base is also situated. JSOC controls the Army's Delta Force, the Navy's SEAL Team 6, as well as the Army's 75th Ranger Regiment and 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment, and the Air Force's 24th Special Tactics Squadron. JSOC performs strike operations, reconnaissance in denied areas and special intelligence missions. Blackwater, which was founded by former Navy SEALs, employs scores of veteran Special Forces operators--which several former military officials pointed to as the basis for Blackwater's alleged contracts with JSOC.

Since 9/11, many top-level Special Forces veterans have taken up employment with private firms, where they can make more money doing the highly specialized work they did in uniform. "The Blackwater individuals have the experience. A lot of these individuals are retired military, and they've been around twenty to thirty years and have experience that the younger Green Beret guys don't," said retired Army Lieut. Col. Jeffrey Addicott, a well-connected military lawyer who served as senior legal counsel for US Army Special Forces. "They're known entities. Everybody knows who they are, what their capabilities are, and they've got the experience. They're very valuable."

"They make much more money being the smarts of these operations, planning hits in various countries and basing it off their experience in Chechnya, Bosnia, Somalia, Ethiopia," said the military intelligence source. "They were there for all of these things, they know what the hell they're talking about. And JSOC has unfortunately lost the institutional capability to plan within, so they hire back people that used to work for them and had already planned and executed these [types of] operations. They hired back people that jumped over to Blackwater SELECT and then pay them exorbitant amounts of money to plan future operations. It's a ridiculous revolving door."

While JSOC has long played a central role in US counterterrorism and covert operations, military and civilian officials who worked at the Defense and State Departments during the Bush administration described in interviews with *The Nation* an extremely cozy relationship



that developed between the executive branch (primarily through Vice President Dick Cheney and Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld) and JSOC. During the Bush era, Special Forces turned into a virtual stand-alone operation that acted outside the military chain of command and in direct coordination with the White House. Throughout the Bush years, it was largely General McChrystal who ran JSOC. "What I was seeing was the development of what I would later see in Iraq and Afghanistan, where Special Operations forces would operate in both theaters without the conventional commander even knowing what they were doing," said Colonel Wilkerson. "That's dangerous, that's very dangerous. You have all kinds of mess when you don't tell the theater commander what you're doing."

Wilkerson said that almost immediately after assuming his role at the State Department under Colin Powell, he saw JSOC being politicized and developing a close relationship with the executive branch. He saw this begin, he said, after his first Delta Force briefing at Fort Bragg. "I think Cheney and Rumsfeld went directly into JSOC. I think they went into JSOC at times, perhaps most frequently, without the SOCOM [Special Operations] commander at the time even knowing it. The receptivity in JSOC was quite good," says Wilkerson. "I think Cheney was actually giving McChrystal instructions, and McChrystal was asking him for instructions." He said the relationship between JSOC and Cheney and Rumsfeld "built up initially because Rumsfeld didn't get the responsiveness. He didn't get the can-do kind of attitude out of the SOCOM commander, and so as Rumsfeld was wont to do, he cut him out and went straight to the horse's mouth. At that point you had JSOC operating as an extension of the [administration] doing things the executive branch--read: Cheney and Rumsfeld--wanted it to do. This would be more or less *carte blanche*. You need to do it, do it. It was very alarming for me as a conventional soldier."

Wilkerson said the JSOC teams caused diplomatic problems for the United States across the globe. "When these teams started hitting capital cities and other places all around the world, [Rumsfeld] didn't tell the State Department either. The only way we found out about it is our ambassadors started to call us and say, 'Who the hell are these six-foot-four white males with eighteen-inch biceps walking around our capital cities?' So we discovered this, we discovered one in South America, for example, because he actually murdered a taxi driver, and we had to get him out of there real quick. We rendered him--we rendered him home."

As part of their strategy, Rumsfeld and Cheney also created the Strategic Support Branch (SSB), which pulled intelligence resources from the Defense Intelligence Agency and the CIA for use in sensitive JSOC operations. The SSB was created using "reprogrammed" funds "without explicit congressional authority or appropriation," according to the *Washington Post*. The SSB operated outside the military chain of command and circumvented the CIA's authority on clandestine operations. Rumsfeld created it as part of his war to end "near total dependence on CIA." Under US law, the Defense Department is required to report all deployment orders to Congress. But guidelines issued in January 2005 by former Under Secretary of Defense for Intelligence Stephen Cambone stated that Special Operations forces may "conduct clandestine HUMINT operations...before publication" of a deployment order. This effectively gave Rumsfeld unilateral control over clandestine operations.

The military intelligence source said that when Rumsfeld was defense secretary, JSOC was deployed to commit some of the "darkest acts" in part to keep them concealed from Congress. "Everything can be justified as a military operation versus a clandestine intelligence performed by the CIA, which has to be informed to Congress," said the source. "They were aware of that and they knew that, and they would exploit it at every turn and they took full advantage of it. They knew they could act extra-legally and nothing would happen because A, it was sanctioned by DoD at the highest levels, and B, who was going to stop them? They were preparing the battlefield, which was on all of the PowerPoints: 'Preparing the Battlefield.'"

The significance of the flexibility of JSOC's operations inside Pakistan versus the CIA's is best summed up by Senator Dianne Feinstein, chair of the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence. "Every single intelligence operation and covert action must be briefed to the Congress," she said. "If they are not, that is a violation of the law."

### **Blackwater: Company Non Grata in Pakistan**

For months, the Pakistani media has been flooded with stories about Blackwater's alleged growing presence in the country. For the most part, these stories have been ignored by the US press and denounced as lies or propaganda by US officials in Pakistan. But the reality is that, although many of the stories appear to be wildly exaggerated, Pakistanis have good reason to be concerned about Blackwater's operations in their country. It is no secret in Washington or Islamabad that Blackwater has been a central part of the wars in Afghanistan and Pakistan and that the company has been involved--almost from the beginning of the "war on terror"--with clandestine US operations. Indeed, Blackwater is accepting applications for contractors fluent in Urdu and Punjabi. The US Ambassador to Pakistan, Anne Patterson, has denied Blackwater's presence in the country, stating bluntly in September, "Blackwater is not operating in Pakistan." In her trip to Pakistan in October, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton dodged questions from the Pakistani press about Blackwater's rumored Pakistani operations. Pakistan's interior minister, Rehman Malik, said on November 21 he will resign if Blackwater is found operating anywhere in Pakistan.

The *Christian Science Monitor* recently reported that Blackwater "provides security for a US-backed aid project" in Peshawar, suggesting the company may be based out of the Pearl Continental, a luxury hotel the United States reportedly is considering purchasing to use as a consulate in the city. "We have no contracts in Pakistan," Blackwater spokesperson Stacey DeLuke said recently. "We've been blamed for all that has gone wrong in Peshawar, none of which is true, since we have absolutely no presence there."

Reports of Blackwater's alleged presence in Karachi and elsewhere in the country have been floating around the Pakistani press for months. Hamid Mir, a prominent Pakistani journalist who rose to fame after his 1997 interview with Osama bin Laden, claimed in a recent interview that Blackwater is in Karachi. "The US [intelligence] agencies think that a number of Al-Qaeda and Taliban leaders are hiding in Karachi and Peshawar," he said. "That is why [Blackwater] agents are operating in these two cities." Ambassador Patterson has said that the claims of Mir and other Pakistani journalists are "wildly incorrect," saying they had

compromised the security of US personnel in Pakistan. On November 20 the *Washington Times*, citing three current and former US intelligence officials, reported that Mullah Mohammed Omar, the leader of the Afghan Taliban, has "found refuge from potential U.S. attacks" in Karachi "with the assistance of Pakistan's intelligence service."

In September, the Pakistani press covered a report on Blackwater allegedly submitted by Pakistan's intelligence agencies to the federal interior ministry. In the report, the intelligence agencies reportedly allege that Blackwater was provided houses by a federal minister who is also helping them clear shipments of weapons and vehicles through Karachi's Port Qasim on the coast of the Arabian Sea. The military intelligence source did not confirm this but did say, "The port jives because they have a lot of [former] SEALs and they would revert to what they know: the ocean, instead of flying stuff in."

*The Nation* cannot independently confirm these allegations and has not seen the Pakistani intelligence report. But according to Pakistani press coverage, the intelligence report also said Blackwater has acquired "bungalows" in the Defense Housing Authority in the city. According to the DHA website, it is a large residential estate originally established "for the welfare of the serving and retired officers of the Armed Forces of Pakistan." Its motto is: "Home for Defenders." The report alleges Blackwater is receiving help from local government officials in Karachi and is using vehicles with license plates traditionally assigned to members of the national and provincial assemblies, meaning local law enforcement will not stop them.

The use of private companies like Blackwater for sensitive operations such as drone strikes or other covert work undoubtedly comes with the benefit of plausible deniability that places an additional barrier in an already deeply flawed system of accountability. When things go wrong, it's the contractors' fault, not the government's. But the widespread use of contractors also raises serious legal questions, particularly when they are a part of lethal, covert actions. "We are using contractors for things that in the past might have been considered to be a violation of the Geneva Convention," said Lt. Col. Addicott, who now runs the Center for Terrorism Law at St. Mary's University School of Law in San Antonio, Texas. "In my opinion, we have pressed the envelope to the breaking limit, and it's almost a fiction that these guys are not in offensive military operations." Addicott added, "If we were subjected to the International Criminal Court, some of these guys could easily be picked up, charged with war crimes and put on trial. That's one of the reasons we're not members of the International Criminal Court."

If there is one quality that has defined Blackwater over the past decade, it is the ability to survive against the odds while simultaneously reinventing and rebranding itself. That is most evident in Afghanistan, where the company continues to work for the US military, the CIA and the State Department despite intense criticism and almost weekly scandals. Blackwater's alleged Pakistan operations, said the military intelligence source, are indicative of its new frontier. "Having learned its lessons after the private security contracting fiasco in Iraq, Blackwater has shifted its operational focus to two venues: protecting things that are in danger and anticipating other places we're going to go as a nation that are dangerous," he said. "It's as simple as that."

