

Private Army Seeking Political Advice in D.C.

□ By Jonathan E. Kaplan - The Hill

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Blackwater USA, a private security company contracted by the Coalitional Provisional Authority (CPA) to protect its personnel in Iraq, has tapped the Alexander Strategy Group to help shape the company's response after four employees were murdered by a mob in Fallujah last month.

Blackwater encountered more problems when eight of its contractors, along with U.S. Marines and Salvadoran troops, fought hundreds of Iraqi insurgents in Najaf.

Unable to communicate with U.S. military forces, the Blackwater officials sent in their own helicopters, which CPA Chief Administrator Paul Bremer uses for transport, to resupply ammunition and rescue a wounded Marine.

Sen. Rick Santorum (R-Pa.), chairman of the Senate GOP Conference, arranged a meeting with Blackwater executives and three key Senate Republicans - Appropriations Committee Chairman Ted Stevens (Alaska), Armed Services Committee Chairman John Warner (Va.) and George Allen (Va.) - to discuss problems facing Blackwater.

Besieged by hundreds of calls from the media following the March 31 lynching, the Moyock, N.C.-based firm turned to Paul Behrends, who joined Alexander Strategy in February. Behrends, a U.S. Marine Corps Reserve lieutenant colonel, is friends with Erik Prince, one of Blackwater's founders and a former Navy SEAL.

"They did not go out looking for the publicity and did not ask for everything that happened to them," Chris Bertelli, a spokesman for Alexander Strategy, said. "We want to do everything we can to educate [the media and Congress] about what Blackwater does."

Behrends sat in on the 45-minute meeting between the senators and Blackwater.

The role of private security firms in Iraq is raising politically charged questions about the rules under which they can engage the enemy.

Thirteen Democratic senators have asked Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld to establish rules of engagement for private security contractors and to provide an "accurate tally of the number of privately armed . personnel in Iraq."

In a March 31 letter, they wrote: "It would be a dangerous precedent if the United States allowed the presence of private armies operating outside the control of governmental authority and beholden only to those who pay them."

Rep. Jan Schakowsky (D-Ill.) recently told *The New York Times* that she opposes "the use of military contractors who are not subject to the same kind of scrutiny and accountability as U.S. soldiers. When things go wrong for these contractors, they and their families have been shamefully forgotten by their American employers."

After the task of crisis management subsides, Bertelli said, his company would help Blackwater provide input into proposed regulations circulating in the Pentagon that would establish rules of engagement for private security contractors.

With at least 15,000 private contractors in Iraq, some lawmakers are increasingly concerned about using private security for military personnel. But a House Armed Services Committee spokeswoman said the committee had no plans to hold hearings.

Outsourcing activities in war zones started in the early 1990s when then-Secretary of Defense Dick Cheney approved a \$3.9 million contract to explore outsourcing logistical activities.

Peter Singer, an expert on private security forces at the Brookings Institution, said many tough questions remain unanswered. "What should and should not be outsourced? How can we do it in a way that guards our interests and saves money?" he said.

Blackwater, which has a \$21 million contract to protect Bremer and other CPA personnel, is not the only security firm in Iraq to use lobbyists.

CPA contracted Global Risk International, a British firm, to protect convoys carrying the new Iraqi currency. Global Risk hired Fijian soldiers, who are well regarded in military circles for performing peacekeeping missions in East Timor and Lebanon, to provide the muscle. Olive Security, a British firm, protects employees of General Electric in Iraq.

In Sulaymaniyah in northern Iraq early this year, an American special forces soldier, a Canadian former special forces operative employed by Global Risk, and a Fijian soldier invited two reporters from The Hill to drink beer. The Canadian soldier said the convoys were fired on an average of once per week. He praised the Fijians' restraint in using military force, except when attacked.

MPRI, Armor Holdings Inc., Science Applications International Corp., and Dyncorp provide military training and security, and pay top dollar for lobbyists.