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Blackwater USA Takes Congressional Hot-Seat as Landmark Hearing Probes Mercenary Firm's Role in Iraq

by Democracy Now (reposted)
Thursday Feb 8th, 2007 9:52 AM

The private security company Blackwater admitted on Tuesday for the first time that one of its employees shot and killed an Iraqi guard inside the Green Zone in December. The disclosure came during a landmark hearing on the role of private contractors in Iraq. Among those to testify was Katy Helvenston. Her son Scott was one of the four Blackwater employees killed in Fallujah in 2004. Katy Helvenston joins us to talk about why she wants Blackwater held accountable for her son's death. We're also joined by Jeremy Scahill, author of the forthcoming book "Blackwater: The Rise of the World's Most Powerful Mercenary Army."

The private security company Blackwater admitted on Tuesday for the first time that one of its employees shot and killed an Iraqi guard inside the Green Zone in December. Blackwater removed its worker from Iraq on the next day before criminal charges could be filed. The case raises new questions about whether contractors can be held legally accountable for misconduct. Congressman Dennis Kucinich questioned Blackwater's general counsel Andrew Howell during a Congressional hearing on the role of private contractors in Iraq.

* Rep. Dennis Kucinich, questioning Blackwater general counsel Andrew Howell.

Critics of Blackwater have complained that its employees are not accountable under Iraqi or U.S. law. Wednesday's hearing on private contractors began with testimony from the relatives of the four Blackwater contractors who were brutally murdered in Fallujah in March 2004. After being shot, the men's bodies were dragged through the streets and mutilated. Two of the corpses were strung from a bridge. The families of the four men are now suing Blackwater alleging the men were sent into Fallujah unprepared.

A day before the men died, a co-worker wrote an email to company officials urging them to send new equipment to Iraq. The content of the email was released yesterday. It read in part: "I need new vehicles... I need Ammo... I need Glocks and M4s... all the client body armor you got... guys are in the field with borrowed stuff and in harms way." Henry Waxman, the chair of the House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform questioned Blackwater's general counsel about the email.

* Rep. Henry Waxman, questioning Blackwater general counsel Andrew Howell.

Wednesday's hearing began with testimony from Katy Helvenston. Her son, Scott Helvenston, was one of the four Blackwater employees killed in Fallujah. Katy joins us now from Washington D.C. -- and with us here in our fire house studio is Jeremy Scahill -- He is a Puffin Foundation Writing Fellow at The Nation Institute and the author of the forthcoming book, "Blackwater: The Rise of the World's Most Powerful Mercenary Army."

* Katy Helvenston. Mother of Scott Helvenston, who was killed in Fallujah on March 31st 2004.

* Jeremy Scahill. Puffin Foundation Writing Fellow at The Nation Institute and the author of the forthcoming book, "Blackwater: The Rise of the World's Most Powerful Mercenary Army."

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