

THE CONTRACTORS CAUSING CHAOS BUT NOT OUT AND OUT CORRUPTION

I'm beginning to agree with Rayne's comment of the other day that the only explanation for the length of the WaPo series on contractors is to please the Pulitzer committee. The other most (perhaps more) likely explanation for the style of the piece is that editors have tried so hard not to piss off the security establishment—and to stop short of voicing the conclusions that Dana Priest and William Arkin's work support—that they've turned Priest and Arkin's work into a bunch of disembodied fluff.

Take a look at the logic of this passage—which points out the drawbacks of using contractors—to see what I mean:

Since 9/11, contractors have made extraordinary contributions – and extraordinary blunders – that have changed history and clouded the public's view of the distinction between the actions of officers sworn on behalf of the United States and corporate employees with little more than a security badge and a gun.

Contractor misdeeds in Iraq and Afghanistan have hurt U.S. credibility in those countries as well as in the Middle East. Abuse of prisoners at Abu Ghraib, some of it done by contractors, helped ignite a call for vengeance against the United States that continues today. Security guards working for Blackwater added fuel to the five-year violent chaos in Iraq and became the symbol of an America run amok.

Contractors in war zones, especially those who can fire weapons, blur "the

line between the legitimate and illegitimate use of force, which is just what our enemies want," Allison Stanger, a professor of international politics and economics at Middlebury College and the author of "One Nation Under Contract," told the independent Commission on Wartime Contracting at a hearing in June.

Misconduct happens, too. A defense contractor formerly called MZM paid bribes for CIA contracts, sending Randy "Duke" Cunningham, who was a California congressman on the intelligence committee, to prison. Guards employed in Afghanistan by ArmorGroup North America, a private security company, were caught on camera in a lewd-partying scandal.

It starts with a classic "on the one side, on the other" piece of cowpie: a sentence that even linguistically refuses to take sides. Contractors, you see, are extraordinary in all ways!!!

Then watch the shift into an almost agent-less soft-pedaling of the problems contractors have caused. Abuse of prisoners happened. But apparently, only at Abu Ghraib, not at Bagram, not at Gitmo, not at firebases where detainees died. And the names of those contractors? Their role in the abuse? The WaPo stops short of telling you, for example, that a CACI interrogator was the one instructing the grunts at Abu Ghraib to abuse detainees. The WaPo also doesn't tell you the CACI contractors never paid any price for doing so. The WaPo doesn't mention that DOD believed they had no way of holding contractors accountable for such things (though the case of David Passaro, in which a detainee died, of course proved that contractors could be prosecuted).

Then there's Blackwater. What'd they do? Why they, "added fuel to the five-year violent chaos in Iraq and became the symbol of an America run

amok." No mention of Nisour Square. No mention of the Iraqi Vice President's murdered security guard. No mention of the contractors killed in Fallujah—who were left exposed by Blackwater. No mention of the illegal gun smuggling. And definitely no mention of the most recent allegations that Blackwater has been involved with assassination squads. Instead, we get Allison Stanger's quote—alluding to contractors doing the actual killing, but never actually spelling that out for those who don't read Jeremy Scahill (or, frankly, Erik Prince).

And then, after alluding to the CACI interrogators who avoided the legal consequences the Abu Ghraib guards paid, after alluding to Blackwater's fueling of chaos but not mentioning its many legal problems, only then does this story say,

■ Misconduct happens, too.

Which, grammatically and logically, suggests the CACI and Blackwater crimes were not actually misconduct.

And even here there's some real fudging. According to the WaPo, there was only one contractor involved in the Duke Cunningham story: MZM. (And even there, WaPo makes no mention of MZM's involvement in CIFA's spying on American citizens.) No mention of the other contracting scandal exposed in the Duke Cunningham case, wherein the third most senior guy at CIA, Dusty Foggo, went to jail for sending contracts to his childhood buddy Brent Wilkes in exchange for prostitutes and—possibly—a plush job after he left the CIA. That kind of revolving door corruption is one of the real and repeated problems with reliance on contractors. The such a senior person at CIA sold out security for an expensive whore ought to serve as a cornerstone for this morality tale. But according to the WaPo, it didn't happen.

And that's how the miracle of modern MSM editing

presents the downsides of contractors as largely disembodied chaos rather than security contracts getting doled out for reasons that have nothing to do with security, rather than contractors abusing their quasi-immune status to engage in really counterproductive crimes.