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The Nation

## Blackwater and the Khost Bombing: Is the CIA Deceiving Congress?

By Jeremy Scahill

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A leading member of the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence has told The Nation that she will launch an investigation into why two Blackwater contractors were among the dead in the December 30 suicide bombing at the CIA station at Forward Operating Base Chapman in Khost, Afghanistan. "The Intelligence Committees and the public were led to believe that the CIA was phasing out its contracts with Blackwater and now we find out that there is this ongoing presence," said Illinois Democrat Jan Schakowsky, chair of the Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations, in an interview. "Is the CIA once again deceiving us about the relationship with Blackwater?"

In December, the CIA announced that the agency had canceled its contract with Blackwater to work on the agency's drone bombing campaign in Afghanistan and Pakistan and said Director Leon Panetta ordered a review of all existing CIA contracts with Blackwater. "At this time, Blackwater is not involved in any CIA operations other than in a security or support role," CIA spokesman George Little said December 11.

But Schakowsky said the fact that two Blackwater personnel were in such close proximity to the December 30 suicide bomber--an alleged double agent, who was reportedly meeting with CIA agents including the agency's second-ranking officer in Afghanistan when he blew himself up--shows how "deeply enmeshed" Blackwater remains in sensitive CIA operations, including those CIA officials claim it no longer participates in, such as intelligence gathering and briefings with valuable agency assets. The two Blackwater men were reportedly in the room for the expected briefing by the double agent, Humam Khalil Muhammed Abu Mulal al-Balawi, who claimed to have recently met with Al Qaeda leader Ayman al Zawahiri.

"It's just astonishing that given the track record of Blackwater, which is a repeat offender endangering our mission repeatedly, endangering the lives of our military and costing the lives of innocent civilians, that there would be any relationship," Schakowsky said. "That we would continue to contract with them or any of Blackwater's subsidiaries is completely unacceptable."

Under the Obama administration, Blackwater continues to work for the Department of Defense, the State Department and, as evidenced by the December 30 bombing, the CIA in Afghanistan. The company even maintains its own forward operating bases in Afghanistan, including one along the Afghanistan-Pakistan border. "This is the closest base to the [Pakistani] border," Blackwater's owner Erik Prince recently bragged to Vanity Fair. "Who else has built a fob along the main infiltration route for the Taliban and the last known location for Osama bin Laden?"

Blackwater has been working for the CIA since at least April 2002. Prince recently claimed he was personally a CIA asset, conducting clandestine black operations around the globe. In June, Leon Panetta reportedly told Congress he had canceled the CIA assassination program involving Blackwater.

While the CIA said in December that Blackwater only continues its security and support role for the CIA, NBC News reported that the Blackwater men were not doing security at the time of the blast. The two Blackwater operatives killed in the bombing have been identified as Jeremy Wise, a 35-year old ex-Navy SEAL, and 46-year-old Dane Clark Paresi.