

[By Shay Totten, Seven Days](#)

US Rep. Peter Welch is urging the chairman of the House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform to investigate whether Blackwater Worldwide — now known as Xe Services — bribed Iraqi officials following a September 2007 shooting incident.

According to a New York Times story, Blackwater executives authorized \$1 million in bribes to Iraqi Interior Ministry officials in order to silence criticism of the 2007 incident, during which 17 Iraqi civilians were killed.

Independent journalist Jeremy Scahill, who wrote the book — literally — on Blackwater's rise to power as a U.S. military contractor, has additional details about the 2007 incident in a recent Nation article. If the bribery allegations are true, Scahill notes, Blackwater (Xe) could also be charged with impeding a federal investigation. After the shooting, FBI agents flew to Iraq to investigate.

"Blackwater has earned a reputation as a reckless and dangerous organization. Early reports indicate that Blackwater may have violated the Foreign Corrupt Practices Act and potentially interfered with a grand jury inquiry by issuing these bribes," wrote Welch. "The United States government simply cannot turn a blind eye to such actions."

Welch, who serves on the House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform is currently in Pakistan where he is taking part in a delegation organized by the panel's Subcommittee on National Security and Foreign Affairs.

Welch said the committee should hold its own investigation to determine what, if any, laws were broken to ensure that Blackwater is held accountable. Despite Welch's past efforts to shine light on Blackwater's dealing with the government, and an urging by some in Congress to have Pres. Barack Obama defund Blackwater entirely, the company still has billions of dollars in lucrative contracts to provide security protection for high-ranking officials, as well as other services.

In 2007, Welch authored two bills — both of which were passed by Congress and signed into law — aimed at bringing more accountability to the use of private military contractors.

One bill closed the multi-billion dollar overseas contractor fraud loophole, while the second required that companies conducting over 80 percent of their business with the federal government disclose compensation packages for their most highly-paid officers.

Below is the text of Welch's letter calling for a new probe of Blackwater:

November 11, 2009

Dear Chairman Towns,

I write in response to the very troubling news that Blackwater Worldwide — now called Xe Services — has been accused of bribing Iraqi officials in order to silence outcry about the September 2007 killing of 17 Iraqi civilians.

Blackwater has earned a reputation as a reckless and dangerous organization. Early reports indicate that Blackwater may have violated the Foreign Corrupt Practices Act and potentially interfered with a grand jury inquiry by issuing these bribes. The United States government simply cannot turn a blind eye to such actions.

Blackwater's practices have been the subject of an Oversight and Government Reform Committee investigation before. I strongly urge you to begin a new investigation to determine exactly what happened and whether any laws were broken. Blackwater officials must be held accountable for their actions.

Sincerely,

Peter F. Welch