

The Really Bad Dogs of War

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Focusing on Blackwater while neglecting MPRI is like investigating [Ivan Demjanjuk](#) for years on end, but allowing [Adolf Eichmann](#) to live peacefully in Buenos Aires.

Up to 17 Iraqis were killed on September 16 by mercenaries working for the security company [Blackwater USA](#), in what Iraqi and some U.S. officials say was [unprovoked murder](#). Earlier this week [two Armenian Christian women](#) were killed by [Unity Resources Group](#) hired guns. A devastating report by the House Oversight Committee accused Blackwater of acting like murderous cowboys, but the firm still operates with impunity—unaccountable under either U.S. or Iraqi law. Yet while exposing the misdeeds of “security contractors” is necessary and long overdue, it is curious that the media have neglected the work of a far more sinister mercenary outfit, one that has caused thousand-fold more death and suffering over the years.

Since time immemorial kings and governments have hired militarily skilled men and groups to do their fighting and provide security services. In the two decades since the Iran-Contra scandal, however, a few major “international security firms” and “private military contractors” have come into being to satisfy a particular requirement of the U.S. government: to provide military training, logistics, arms, equipment and advice to foreign clients whenever it is desirable for Washington to be able to plausibly deny direct American involvement. The most important among them has been [MPRI](#). The firm has claimed “more generals per square foot than in the Pentagon,” including Gen. Carl E. Vuono, the former Army chief of staff; Gen. Crosbie E. Saint, the former commander of the US Army in Europe; and Gen. Ron Griffith, the former Army vice chief of staff. There are also dozens of retired top-ranked generals and thousands of former military personnel, including elite special forces, on the firm’s books.

MPRI is to Blackwater what a general is to a sergeant. It is less interested in the heat of combat than—in its own words—in “training, equipping, force design and management, professional development, concepts and doctrine, organizational and operational requirements, simulation and wargaming operations, humanitarian assistance, quick reaction military contractual support, and democracy transition assistance programs.”

When the 1991 UN arms embargo prevented the Clinton Administration from helping Croats and Bosnian Muslims directly, MPRI was engaged to do all that the U.S. government preferred not to do openly. In 1994 it referred MPRI to Croatia’s visiting defense minister Gojko Susak, who duly contracted the company to train and equip its forces. According to *U.S. Army War College Quarterly*, [with the explicit consent of the U.S. State and Defense Departments](#) the firm undertook to modernize and retrain the Croatian army, including the general staff. In the summer of 1995, thanks to such assistance, the formerly inept Croatian

army mounted Operation Storm,

using typical American combined-arms tactics, including integrated air, artillery, and infantry movements, as well as maneuver warfare targeted against Serbian command, control, and communication systems. French and British officials accused MPRI of helping to plan the Croatian invasion, an allegation denied by the company. Correctly or not, MPRI received credit for a major success.

This “major success” was the bloodiest episode of ethnic cleansing in Europe since World War II. The operation drove a quarter-million Serb civilians from their homes, with MPRI-trained Croat soldiers summarily executing the stragglers and indiscriminately shelling refugees. All along, according to the former head of Croatian counterintelligence, Markica Redic, “the Pentagon had complete supervision during the Storm action.” Miro Tadjman, son of the late president and former head of Croatia’s foreign intelligence, says that during Operation Storm all Croatian electronic intelligence “went online in real time to the National Security Agency in Washington.” Several Croat officers—including MPRI graduates—have been brought to trial for war crimes since that time, but no MPRI employee has ever been charged.

“These new mercenaries work for the Defense and State Department and Congress looks the other way,” the late Colonel David Hackworth, a highly decorated Vietnam veteran, commented on MPRI’s role in the Balkan wars. “The American taxpayer is paying for our own mercenary army, which violates what our founding fathers said.”

MPRI was also granted a major contract to train and equip the Bosnian Muslim forces. It was financed by a number of Islamic countries. Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Brunei, the United Arab Emirates and Malaysia deposited money in the United States Treasury, which MPRI drew against. The Bosnian Muslims received over \$100 million in surplus military equipment from the US government “Equip and Train Program,” but MPRI contractors did everything else, from planning long-term strategy to conducting war games and training locals in the use of American weaponry. [According to Peter Singer](#) of the Brookings Institution, “It was a brilliant move in that the U.S. government got someone else to pay for what we wanted from a policy standpoint.”

The next MPRI assignment was to train and equip a shadowy guerrilla group accused by the State Department of being a terrorist organization. [The military men knew](#) that the Drug Enforcement Administration suspected the guerrillas of smuggling high-grade Afghan heroin into North America and Western Europe, and police agencies across Europe had been alerted to the links among the rebels and the various mafias:

Was this the setting for a Tom Clancy novel? Or was it a flashback to one of the numerous secret meetings attended by the likes of Richard Secord and Oliver North during the Iran-contra scandal of the 1980s? Actually, it was neither. It was a real life and present-day strategy session at MPRI (formerly known as Military Professional Resources, Inc.). Its client: the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA).

MPRI was subsequently caught off-guard when Bosnia’s Muslim army arranged for millions of dollars worth of arms to be secretly transferred from Bosnian caches to KLA guerrillas in

Kosovo and Serbian Muslims in the province of Sandzak. As a result of the arms transfers, the State Department temporarily suspended MPRI's "train and equip" program—but not for long: soon thereafter the KLA itself became itself a valued client. Col. Hackworth was the first prominent commentator to reveal that MPRI was using former U.S. military personnel to train KLA forces at secret bases inside Albania. Some of the military leadership of the KLA—including Kosovo's current "prime minister" Agim Ceku, a war criminal par excellence—included veterans of MPRI-planned Operations Storm.

The fruits of MPRI's work became apparent in the aftermath of NATO bombing. Just like in the Krajina, hundreds of thousands of Serbs were ethnically cleansed, thousands were murdered, their homes looted or burned, their cemeteries vandalized, their churches dynamited.

And finally, in 2001, MPRI enjoyed the rare feat of working for [both sides](#) both sides of a Balkan conflict. It was contracted by the government of Macedonia—as part of a U.S. military aid package—"to deter armed aggression and defend Macedonian territory." It was also helping the local KLA offshoot known as the NLA carry out armed aggression against Macedonian territory. In late June of that year, the Macedonian army undertook a major assault against KLA positions in the village of Aracinovo near Skopje. In a NATO sponsored operation—supposedly to help the Macedonian Army—U.S. troops were sent in to "evacuate" and "disarm" the terrorists. The soldiers "saved" 500 terrorists together with their weaponry, took them to another village, gave them their U.S.-made weapons back, and set them free. But sources in the U.S. Army in Kosovo revealed that the mysterious "evacuation" had the [real objective](#) of rescuing and concealing the identity of 17 Americans, MPRI instructors, who were among the withdrawing rebels.

Compared to MPRI, Blackwater are thuggish amateurs; but don't expect any House Oversight Committee reports or *New York Times* exposés.

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