

Blackwater still works for U.S. in Iraq

by UPI

WASHINGTON -- The U.S. State Department signed a contract with security firm Blackwater despite the Iraqi government saying it didn't want the company there, records show.

The State Department said \$22.2 million deal signed with Blackwater, since renamed Xe, in February was a contract modification concerning aviation work, The Washington Times first reported. The contract expires in September, months after its contract for work in Baghdad expires.

One observer said the deal raises questions about why the United States would want to pay a contractor for work in Iraq if the government won't approve its operating license.

"Why would you continue to use Blackwater when the Iraqi government has banned the highly controversial company and there are other choices?" asked Melanie Sloan, executive director of the nonpartisan Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington.

The private security firm has been heavily criticized, particularly for a 2007 incident that left 14 Iraqi civilians dead and six former guards facing manslaughter charges.

Xe spokeswoman Anne Tyrell declined to comment to the Times on the company's work in Iraq or the contract modification. She said the company was aware that the State Department indicated it didn't plan to

renew its contracts in Iraq but that Xe officials hadn't received specific information about leaving the country.

The Iraqi Embassy in Washington didn't comment on the contract, the Times said.

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