

## Morale concern said protected Blackwater

by UPI

WASHINGTON -- Blackwater security guards' alleged falsehoods in a Baghdad shooting incident went unpunished because of morale, U.S. State Department records say.

Quoting newly released data, USA Today said the top security officer at the U.S. Embassy in Iraq refused to punish the guards for making false statements in a 2005 shooting because he did not want to lower the morale of those contracted to work security.

Federal investigators concluded that four guards were not justified in spraying an Iraqi's car with more than 70 bullets on Feb. 16, 2005, two years before a highly publicized incident in which Blackwater guards were accused of killing 17 Iraqis in Baghdad. The fate of the '05 driver was not known.

The 2005 shooting occurred when guards fired on a car they said refused an order to stop and fired on them. The investigators' final memo in June 2005 said several guards "failed to justify their actions" and "provided false statements."

When the investigators presented their findings to John Frese, the embassy's top security official, he said he would not punish anyone because "any disciplinary actions would be deemed as lowering the morale" of security guards contracted by the State Department, Special Agent Matthew McCormack wrote.

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