

**THE BLOG**

Paging Tom Clancy

By Marty Kaplan

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Shirlington Limousine, the firm said by defense contractor Brent Wilkes, the confessed Duke Cunningham briber, to have shuttled hookers to congressional hospitality suites, won \$25 million in contracts from the Department of Homeland Security in 2004 and 2005. This is especially curious because, as TPMmuckracker and others have pointed out, Christopher D. Baker, the head of Shirlington Limo, has a record that could at best be called checkered. Here is a Washington Post account of how DHS, in this age of the long war, vets its contractors:

“[Homeland Security] Officials said Baker’s criminal record, which includes numerous misdemeanors and two felony convictions, would not have affected the company’s bid. When the agency contracts with a company, officials said, they do not check the criminal backgrounds of its executives — nor do they run their names against the government’s terrorist watch list. In Shirlington Limousine’s case, only the drivers’ backgrounds were checked.” (via Digby)

Just in case Tom Clancy is looking for a plot point for his next novel — a kidnapping, a dirty bomb, a decapitation of command and control — this is a juicy one. The agency in charge of protecting us against terrorists over here — while we’re fighting them over there so we don’t have to fight them over here — could care less if they outsource the agency mission to companies which could be run, for all the Department knows, by the mob, the Russian mafia, Colombian drug cartels or, yes, al Qaeda.

The administration howled about the press stories revealing warrantless wiretapping; Rummy & Cheney claimed that it gave the enemy our playbook. Yeah, as though until some reporters wrote about it, the terrorists were so stupid that they had no clue their communications might be the target of surveillance. Now I suppose BushCo is going to come down like a ton of bricks on Chuck Babcock and Jo Becker, the obviously unpatriotic authors of the Post piece about Shirlington Limo, for deviously coaxing nameless Homeland Security officials, who clearly hate America, into leaking the top secret that the agency doesn’t even perform the most rudimentary due diligence on its contractors.

The Republicans chose to fight the 2004 election on the ground of who will best protect us against terrorists. Now we know what that means. Watch lists? Not so good. Witch hunts? At your service.

UPDATE: Did I say Tom Clancy? Check this out at AMERICAllog, and this and this at Kos, and maybe you’ll think only Gore Vidal (*The Best Man*) could do justice to it.