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Inspector general resigning under fire

By [E-mail and share](#)
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WASHINGTON (AP) - The State Department's embattled inspector general, accused of impeding a Justice Department investigation of Blackwater Worldwide, announced his resignation Friday, saying a poisonous political atmosphere in Washington deters people from careers in public service.

Howard Krongard told President Bush in a letter that he would quit effective Jan. 15. He released a brief public statement that said recent congressional testimony and correspondence gives ample documentation of the reasons for his departure. He listed, in Washington-style bullet points, the dates of his previous statements dealing with conflict-of-interest and other allegations.

"I have nothing further to say at this time," he wrote.

Krongard has said he never stood in the way of the Blackwater probe, and he and his lawyer have said he did not know his brother was a Blackwater adviser. A letter from his lawyer, who has called the situation "he-said, he-said," is one of the documents Krongard lists in his statement.

In his letter to Bush, a frustrated Krongard pointed to what he called structural problems with the way the State Department inspector job is set up.

"Of even greater concern to me is the grave threat to public service posed by the current rancor and distrust" in Washington, Krongard said.

He singled out the political parties, feuding branches of government, the media and interest groups.

"We thank him for his service," said State Department spokesman Gonzalo Gallegos.

Blackwater Worldwide - a private contractor that protects U.S. diplomats in Iraq - is alleged to have smuggled weapons into the country. In November, Krongard was forced to recuse himself from any inquiries into Blackwater after it was disclosed that his brother had joined the company's advisory board.

In addition to recusing himself from matters related to Blackwater, Krongard also said last month he was no longer involved in corruption investigations related to the flawed construction of the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad, a \$600 million project that is beset by logistical delays and security concerns.

Howard Krongard's brother, Alvin, quit as an adviser to Blackwater two days after his relationship with the security contractor was sharply criticized by the House Oversight and Government Reform Committee.



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Blackwater is a major State Department contractor and the subject of ongoing federal investigations. One of those is examining whether Blackwater guards violated use-of-force rules during a Sept. 16 shooting in Baghdad that left 17 Iraqis dead.

Howard Krongard, who took over as the State watchdog in 2005 after a career in business, was unpopular with underlings who said he was abrasive and failed to understand the duties of the office. Numerous investigators quit or requested transfers during his tenure.

Krongard's colorful and troubled professional and family relationships were aired during a dramatic hearing last month before a House oversight panel. Howard Krongard first insisted under oath that his brother has no such affiliation with Blackwater, then called his brother during a break and discovered it was true. He returned to the hearing room and announced he had been wrong.

"Although his tenure has been defined by a myriad of poor decisions, Inspector General Howard Krongard is finally demonstrating sound judgment through his decision to step down," said Rep. Elijah Cummings, D-Md., who raised the issue of Krongard's brother during the hearing.

House Oversight and Government Reform Chairman Rep. Henry Waxman, D-Calif., said the resignation "removes an enormous distraction from the inspector general's office and will allow the office to focus on its important oversight responsibilities."

Krongard maintained he never interfered with any investigations, and he blamed allegations that he did on a dysfunctional office that he was attempting to transform.

He said he has no political ties and has never communicated with anyone in the White House since he took the job nearly two-and-a-half years ago.

Erik Prince, Blackwater's top executive, said last month that the conflict-of-interest questions prompted Alvin Krongard to submit his resignation.

"I have reluctantly accepted it," Prince said in a statement.

Alvin Krongard never received any payment for his work on Blackwater's advisory board, which met only once, Prince said.

Prince said there are no allegations of impropriety against Alvin Krongard for his membership on Blackwater's board, a group recently created to help the North Carolina-based security company plan future business activities.

"I'm not my brother's keeper," Howard Krongard said when pressed to explain how he could have been unaware of the connection.

On the Net

State Department biography of Howard J. Krongard:
<http://oig.state.gov/about/c12822.htm>

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