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[Erik Prince Blackwater & XE Tycoon, Contractor, Soldier, Spy](#)

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***Editor's Note:** Today Blackwater/Xe is almost a routine media name, a name that's detested and seen as the most inhuman organization that's around killing people for money. True, Blackwater is C.I.A. Operative that gets funds in billions from Fed Govt and C.I.A. This notorious outfit is busy operating in every theatre where American troops are fighting. Be it in Iraq, Afghanistan or Pakistan. This story has been put up for the benefit of the readers to get some insight into this mercenary organization of C.I.A. that was taken on board during Bush Administration; is still claimed to be operating through their instructions. In other words, it's a parallel C.I.A. Now its for the readers to read and form their own opinions.*

The author is considered by many to be Israel friendly.

By Adam Ciralsky

Erik Prince, recently outed as a participant in a C.I.A. assassination program, has gained notoriety as head of the military-contracting juggernaut Blackwater, a company dogged by a grand-jury investigation, bribery accusations, and the voluntary-manslaughter trial of five ex-employees, set for next month. Lashing back at his critics, the wealthy former navy seal takes the author inside his operation in the U.S. and Afghanistan, revealing the role he's been playing in America's war on terror.

"I put myself and my company at the C.I.A.'s disposal for some very risky missions," says Erik Prince as he surveys his heavily fortified, 7,000-acre compound in rural Moyock, North Carolina. "But when it became politically expedient to do so, someone threw me under the bus." Prince—the founder of Blackwater, the world's most notorious private military contractor—is royally steamed. He wants to vent. And he wants you to hear him vent.

Erik Prince has an image problem—the kind that's impervious to a Madison Avenue makeover. The 40-year-old heir to a Michigan auto-parts fortune, and a former navy seal, he has had the distinction



Erik Prince, founder of the Blackwater security firm (recently renamed Xe), at the

of being vilified recently both in life and in art. In **company's Virginia offices.***Photograph by* Washington, Prince has become a scapegoat for *Nigel Parry*. some of the Bush administration's misadventures in Iraq—though Blackwater's own deeds have also come in for withering criticism. Congressmen and lawyers, human-rights groups and pundits, have described Prince as a war profiteer, one who has assembled a rogue fighting force capable of toppling governments. His employees have been repeatedly accused of using excessive, even deadly force in Iraq; many Iraqis, in fact, have died during encounters with Blackwater. And in November, as a North Carolina grand jury was considering a raft of charges against the company, as a half-dozen civil suits were brewing in Virginia, and as five former Blackwater staffers were preparing for trial for their roles in the deaths of 17 Iraqis, The New York Times reported in a page-one story that Prince's firm, in the aftermath of the tragedy, had sought to bribe Iraqi officials for their compliance, charges which Prince calls "lies ... undocumented, unsubstantiated [and] anonymous." (So infamous is the Blackwater brand that even the Taliban have floated far-fetched conspiracy theories, accusing the company of engaging in suicide bombings in Pakistan.)

In Hollywood, meanwhile, a town that loves nothing so much as a good villain, Prince, with his blond crop and Daniel Craig mien, has become the screenwriters' darling. In the film *State of Play*, a Blackwater clone (PointCorp.) uses its network of mercenaries for illegal surveillance and murder. On the Fox series *24*, Jon Voight has played Jonas Hodges, a thinly veiled version of Prince, whose company (Starkwood) helps an African warlord procure nerve gas for use against U.S. targets.

But the truth about Prince may be orders of magnitude stranger than fiction. **For the past six years, he appears to have led an astonishing double life. Publicly, he has served as Blackwater's C.E.O. and chairman. Privately, and secretly, he has been doing the C.I.A.'s bidding, helping to craft, fund, and execute operations ranging from inserting personnel into "denied areas"—places U.S. intelligence has trouble penetrating—to assembling hit teams targeting al-Qaeda members and their allies.** Prince, according to sources with knowledge of his activities, has been working as a C.I.A. asset: in a word, as a spy. While his company was busy gleaning more than \$1.5 billion in government contracts between 2001 and 2009—by acting, among other things, as an overseas Praetorian guard for C.I.A. and State Department officials—Prince became a Mr. Fix-It in the war on terror. His access to paramilitary forces, weapons, and aircraft, and his indefatigable ambition—the very attributes that have galvanized his critics—also made him extremely valuable, some say, to U.S. intelligence. (Full disclosure: In the 1990s, before becoming a journalist for CBS and then NBC News, I was a C.I.A. attorney. My contract was not renewed, under contentious circumstances.)

But Prince, with a new administration in power, and foes closing in, is finally coming in from the cold. This past fall, though he infrequently grants interviews, he decided it was time to tell his side of the story—to respond to the array of accusations, to reveal exactly what he has been doing in the shadows of the U.S. government, and to present his rationale. He also hoped to convey why he's going to walk away from it all.

To that end, he invited *Vanity Fair* to his training camp in North Carolina, to his Virginia offices, and to his Afghan outposts. It seemed like a propitious time to tag along.

Split Personality

Erik Prince can be a difficult man to wrap your mind around—an amalgam of contradictory caricatures. He has been branded a "Christian supremacist" who sanctions the murder of Iraqi civilians, yet he has built mosques at his overseas bases and supports a Muslim orphanage in Afghanistan. He and his family have long backed conservative causes, funded right-wing political

candidates, and befriended evangelicals, but he calls himself a libertarian and is a practicing Roman Catholic. Sometimes considered arrogant and reclusive—Howard Hughes without the O.C.D.—he nonetheless enters competitions that combine mountain-biking, beach running, ocean kayaking, and rappelling.

The common denominator is a relentless intensity that seems to have no Off switch. Seated in the back of a Boeing 777 en route to Afghanistan, Prince leafs through Defense News while the film *Taken* beams from the in-flight entertainment system. In the movie, Liam Neeson plays a retired C.I.A. officer who mounts an aggressive rescue effort after his daughter is kidnapped in Paris. Neeson's character warns his daughter's captors:

If you are looking for ransom, I can tell you I don't have money. But what I do have are a very particular set of skills ... skills that make me a nightmare for people like you. If you [don't] let my daughter go now ... I will look for you, I will find you, and I will kill you.

Prince comments, "I used that movie as a teaching tool for my girls." (The father of seven, Prince remarried after his first wife died of cancer in 2003.) "I wanted them to understand the dangers out there. And I wanted them to know how I would respond."

You can't escape the impression that Prince sees himself as somehow destined, his mission anointed. It comes out even in the most personal of stories. During the flight, he tells of being in Kabul in September 2008 and receiving a two a.m. call from his wife, Joanna. Prince's son Charlie, one year old at the time, had fallen into the family swimming pool. Charlie's brother Christian, then 12, pulled him out of the water, purple and motionless, and successfully performed CPR. Christian and three siblings, it turns out, had recently received Red Cross certification at the Blackwater training camp.

But there are intimations of a higher power at work as the story continues. Desperate to get home, Prince scrapped one itinerary, which called for a stay-over at the Marriott in Islamabad, and found a direct flight. That night, at the time Prince would have been checking in, terrorists struck the hotel with a truck bomb, killing more than 50. Prince says simply, "Christian saved Charlie's life and Charlie saved mine." At times, his sense of his own place in history can border on the evangelical. When pressed about suggestions that he's a mercenary—a term he loathes—he rattles off the names of other freelance military figures, even citing Lafayette, the colonists' ally during the Revolutionary War.

Prince's default mode is one of readiness. He is clenched-jawed and tightly wound. He cannot stand down. Waiting in the security line at Dulles airport just hours before, Prince had delivered a little homily: "Every time an American goes through security, I want them to pause for a moment and think, What is my government doing to inconvenience the terrorists? Rendition teams, Predator drones, assassination squads. That's all part of it."

Such brazenness is not lost on a listener, nor is the fact that Prince himself is quite familiar with some of these tactics. In fact Prince, like other contractors, has drawn fire for running a company that some call a "body shop"—many of its staffers having departed military or intelligence posts to take similar jobs at much higher salaries, paid mainly by Uncle Sam. And to get those jobs done—protecting, defending, and killing, if required—Prince has had to employ the services of some decorated vets as well as some ruthless types, snipers and spies among them.

Erik Prince flies coach internationally. It's not just economical ("Why should I pay for business? Fly coach, you arrive at the same time") but also less likely to draw undue attention. He considers himself a marked man. Prince describes the diplomats and dignitaries Blackwater protects as "Al

Jazeera-worthy,” meaning that, in his view, “bin Laden and his acolytes would love to kill them in a spectacular fashion and have it broadcast on televisions worldwide.”

Stepping off the plane at Kabul’s international airport, Prince is treated as if he, too, were Al Jazeera-worthy. He is immediately shuffled into a waiting car and driven 50 yards to a second vehicle, a beat-up minivan that is native to the core: animal pelts on the dashboard, prayer card dangling from the rearview mirror. Blackwater’s special-projects team is responsible for Prince’s security in-country, and except for their language its men appear indistinguishable from Afghans. They have full beards, headscarves, and traditional knee-length shirts over baggy trousers. They remove Prince’s sunglasses, fit him out with body armor, and have him change into Afghan garb. Prince is issued a homing beacon that will track his movements, and a cell phone with its speed dial programmed for Blackwater’s tactical-operations center.

Once in the van, Prince’s team gives him a security briefing. Using satellite photos of the area, they review the route to Blackwater’s compound and point out where weapons and ammunition are stored inside the vehicle. The men warn him that in the event that they are incapacitated or killed in an ambush Prince should assume control of the weapons and push the red button near the emergency brake, which will send out a silent alarm and call in reinforcements.



Black Hawks and Zeppelins Prince in the tactical-operations center at a company base in Kabul. *Photograph by Adam Ferguson.*

Blackwater’s origins were humble, bordering on the primordial. The company took form in the dismal peat bogs of Moyock, North Carolina—not exactly a hotbed of the defense-contracting world.

In 1995, Prince’s father, Edgar, died of a heart attack (the Evangelical James C. Dobson, founder of the socially conservative Focus on the Family, delivered the eulogy at the funeral). Edgar Prince left behind a vibrant auto-parts manufacturing business in Holland, Michigan, with 4,500 employees and a line of products ranging from a lighted sun visor to a programmable garage-door opener. At the time, 25-year-old Erik was serving as a navy seal (he saw service in Haiti, the Middle East, and Bosnia), and neither he nor his sisters were in a position to take over the business. They sold Prince Automotive for \$1.35 billion.

Erik Prince and some of his navy friends, it so happens, had been kicking around the idea of opening a full-service training compound to replace the usual patchwork of such facilities. In 1996, Prince took an honorable discharge and began buying up land in North Carolina. “The idea was not to be a defense contractor per se,” Prince says, touring the grounds of what looks and feels like a Disneyland for alpha males. “I just wanted a first-rate training facility for law enforcement, the military, and, in particular, the special-operations community.”

Business was slow. The navy seals came early—January 1998—but they didn’t come often, and by

the time the Blackwater Lodge and Training Center officially opened, that May, Prince's friends and advisers thought he was throwing good money after bad. "A lot of people said, 'This is a rich kid's hunting lodge,'" Prince explains. "They could not figure out what I was doing."

Today, the site is the flagship for a network of facilities that train some 30,000 attendees a year. Prince, who owns an unmanned, zeppelin-esque airship and spent \$45 million to build a fleet of customized, bomb-proof armored personnel carriers, often commutes to the lodge by air, piloting a Cessna Caravan from his home in Virginia. The training center has a private landing strip. Its hangars shelter a petting zoo of aircraft: Bell 412 helicopters (used to tail or shuttle diplomats in Iraq), Black Hawk helicopters (currently being modified to accommodate the security requests of a Gulf State client), a Dash 8 airplane (the type that ferries troops in Afghanistan). Amid the 52 firing ranges are virtual villages designed for addressing every conceivable real-world threat: small town squares, littered with blown-up cars, are situated near railway crossings and maritime mock-ups. At one junction, swat teams fire handguns, sniper rifles, and shotguns; at another, police officers tear around the world's longest tactical-driving track, dodging simulated roadside bombs.



Blackwater outpost near the Pakistan border, used for training Afghan police. Photograph by Adam Ferguson.

In keeping with the company's original name, the central complex, constructed of stone, glass, concrete, and logs, actually resembles a lodge, an REI store on steroids. Here and there are distinctive touches, such as door handles crafted from imitation gun barrels. Where other companies might have *Us Weekly* lying about the lobby, Blackwater has counterterrorism magazines with cover stories such as "How to Destroy Al Qaeda."

In fact, it was al-Qaeda that put Blackwater on the map. In the aftermath of the group's October 2000 bombing of the U.S.S. *Cole*, in Yemen, the navy turned to Prince, among others, for help in re-training its sailors to fend off attackers at close range. (To date, the company says, it has put some 125,000 navy personnel through its programs.) In addition to providing a cash infusion, the navy contract helped Blackwater build a database of retired military men—many of them special-forces veterans—who could be called upon to serve as instructors.

When al-Qaeda attacked the U.S. mainland on 9/11, Prince says, he was struck with the urge to either re-enlist or join the C.I.A. He says he actually applied. "I was rejected," he admits, grinning at the irony of courting the very agency that would later woo him. "They said I didn't have enough hard skills, enough time in the field." Undeterred, he decided to turn his Rolodex into a roll call for what would in essence become a private army.

After the terror attacks, Prince's company toiled, even reveled, in relative obscurity, taking on assignments in Afghanistan and, after the U.S. invasion, in Iraq. Then came March 31, 2004. That was the day insurgents ambushed four of its employees in the Iraqi town of Fallujah. The men were shot, their bodies set on fire by a mob. The charred, hacked-up remains of two of them were left hanging from a bridge over the Euphrates.

"It was absolutely gut-wrenching," Prince recalls. "I had been in the military, and no one under my command had ever died. At Blackwater, we had never even had a firearms training accident. Now all of a sudden four of my guys aren't just killed, but desecrated." Three months later an edict from coalition authorities in Baghdad declared private contractors immune from Iraqi law.

Subsequently, the contractors' families sued Blackwater, contending the company had failed to

protect their loved ones. Blackwater countersued the families for breaching contracts that forbid the men or their estates from filing such lawsuits; the company also claimed that, because it operates as an extension of the military, it cannot be held responsible for deaths in a war zone. (After five years, the case remains unresolved.) In 2007, a congressional investigation into the incident concluded that the employees had been sent into an insurgent stronghold “without sufficient preparation, resources, and support.” Blackwater called the report a “one-sided” version of a “tragic incident.”

After Fallujah, Blackwater became a household name. Its primary mission in Iraq had been to protect American dignitaries, and it did so, in part, by projecting an image of invincibility, sending heavily armed men in armored Suburbans racing through the streets of Baghdad with sirens blaring. The show of swagger and firepower, which alienated both the locals and the U.S. military, helped contribute to the allegations of excessive force. As the war dragged on, charges against the firm mounted. In one case, a contractor shot and killed an Iraqi father of six who was standing along the roadside in Hillah. (Prince later told Congress that the contractor was fired for trying to cover up the incident.) In another, a Blackwater firearms technician was accused of drinking too much at a party in the Green Zone and killing a bodyguard assigned to protect Iraq’s vice president. The technician was fired but not prosecuted and later settled a wrongful-death suit with the man’s family.

Those episodes, however, paled in comparison with the events of September 16, 2007, when a phalanx of Blackwater bodyguards emerged from their four-car convoy at a Baghdad intersection called Nisour Square and opened fire. When the smoke cleared, 17 Iraqi civilians lay dead. After 15 months of investigation, the Justice Department charged six with voluntary manslaughter and other offenses, insisting that the use of force was not only unjustified but unprovoked. One guard pleaded guilty and, in a trial set for February, is expected to testify against the others, all of whom maintain their innocence. The *New York Times* recently reported that in the wake of the shootings the company’s top executives authorized secret payments of about \$1 million to Iraqi higher-ups in order to buy their silence—a claim Prince dismisses as “false,” insisting “[there was] zero plan or discussion of bribing any officials.”

Nisour Square had disastrous repercussions for Blackwater. Its role in Iraq was curtailed, its revenue dropping 40 percent. Today, Prince claims, he is shelling out \$2 million a month in legal fees to cope with a spate of civil lawsuits as well as what he calls a “giant proctological exam” by nearly a dozen federal agencies. “We used to spend money on R&D to develop better capabilities to serve the U.S. government,” says Prince. “Now we pay lawyers.”

Does he ever. In North Carolina, a federal grand jury is investigating various allegations, including the illegal transport of assault weapons and silencers to Iraq, hidden in dog-food sacks. (Blackwater denied this, but confirmed hiding weapons on pallets of dog food to protect against theft by “corrupt foreign customs agents.”) In Virginia, two ex-employees have filed affidavits claiming that Prince and Blackwater may have murdered or ordered the murder of people suspected of cooperating with U.S. authorities investigating the company—charges which Blackwater has characterized as “scandalous and baseless.” One of the men also asserted in filings that company employees ran a sex and wife-swapping ring, allegations which Blackwater has called “anonymous, unsubstantiated and offensive.”

Meanwhile, last February, Prince mounted an expensive rebranding campaign. Following the infamous ValuJet crash, in 1996, ValuJet disappeared into AirTran, after a merger, and moved on to a happy new life. Prince, likewise, decided to retire the Blackwater name and replace it with the name Xe, short for Xenon—an inert, non-combustible gas that, in keeping with his political leanings, sits on the far right of the periodic table. Still, Prince and other top company officials

continued to use the name Blackwater among themselves. And as events would soon prove, the company's reputation would remain as combustible as ever.

Spies and Whispers

Prince at a Kandahar airfield. *Photograph Adam Ferguson.*



Last June, C.I.A. director Leon Panetta met in a closed session with the House and Senate intelligence committees to brief them on a covert-action program, which the agency had long concealed from Congress. Panetta explained that he had learned of the existence of the operation only the day before and had promptly shut it down. The reason, C.I.A. spokesman Paul Gimigliano now explains: “It hadn’t taken any terrorists off the street.” During the meeting, according to two attendees, Panetta named both Erik Prince and Blackwater as key participants in the program. (When asked to verify this account, Gimigliano notes that “Director Panetta treats as confidential discussions with Congress that take place behind closed doors.”) Soon thereafter, Prince says, he began fielding inquisitive calls from people he characterizes as far outside the circle of trust.

It took three weeks for details, however sketchy, to surface. In July, *The Wall Street Journal* described the program as “an attempt to carry out a 2001 presidential authorization to capture or kill al Qaeda operatives.” The agency reportedly planned to accomplish this task by dispatching small hit teams overseas. Lawmakers, who couldn’t exactly quibble with the mission’s objective, were in high dudgeon over having been kept in the dark. (Former C.I.A. officials reportedly saw the matter differently, characterizing the program as “more aspirational than operational” and implying that it had never progressed far enough to justify briefing the Hill.)

On August 20, the gloves came off. The *New York Times* published a story headlined *cia sought blackwater’s help to kill jihadists*. The *Washington Post* concurred: *cia hired firm for assassin program*. Prince confesses to feeling betrayed. “I don’t understand how a program this sensitive leaks,” he says. “And to ‘out’ me on top of it?” The next day, the *Times* went further, revealing Blackwater’s role in the use of aerial drones to kill al-Qaeda and Taliban leaders: “At hidden bases in Pakistan and Afghanistan ... the company’s contractors assemble and load Hellfire missiles and 500-pound laser-guided bombs on remotely piloted Predator aircraft, work previously performed by employees of the Central Intelligence Agency.”

Erik Prince, almost overnight, had undergone a second rebranding of sorts, this one not of his own making. The war profiteer had become a merchant of death, with a license to kill on the ground and in the air. “I’m an easy target,” he says. “I’m from a Republican family and I own this company outright. Our competitors have nameless, faceless management teams.”

Prince blames Democrats in Congress for the leaks and maintains that there is a double standard at play. “The left complained about how [C.I.A. operative] Valerie Plame’s identity was compromised for political reasons. A special prosecutor [was even] appointed. Well, what happened to me was worse. People acting for political reasons disclosed not only the existence of a very sensitive program but my name along with it.” As in the Plame case, though, the leaks prompted C.I.A. attorneys to send a referral to the Justice Department, requesting that a criminal investigation be undertaken to identify those responsible for providing highly classified information to the media.

By focusing so intently on Blackwater, Congress and the press overlooked the elephant in the room. Prince wasn’t merely a contractor; he was, insiders say, a full-blown asset. Three sources with direct knowledge of the relationship say that the C.I.A.’s National Resources Division recruited Prince in 2004 to join a secret network of American citizens with special skills or unusual access to targets of interest. As assets go, Prince would have been quite a catch. He had more cash, transport, matériel, and personnel at his disposal than almost anyone Langley would have run in its 62-year history.

The C.I.A. won’t comment further on such assertions, but Prince himself is slightly more forthcoming. “I was looking at creating a small, focused capability,” he says, “just like Donovan did years ago”—the reference being to William “Wild Bill” Donovan, who, in World War II, served as the head of the Office of Strategic Services, the precursor of the modern C.I.A. (Prince’s youngest son, Charles Donovan—the one who fell into the pool—is named after Wild Bill.) Two sources familiar with the arrangement say that Prince’s handlers obtained provisional operational approval from senior management to recruit Prince and later generated a “201 file,” which would have put him on the agency’s books as a vetted asset. It’s not at all clear who was running whom, since Prince says that, unlike many other assets, he did much of his work on spec, claiming to have used personal funds to road-test the viability of certain operations. “I grew up around the auto industry,” Prince explains. “Customers would say to my dad, ‘We have this need.’ He would then use his own money to create prototypes to fulfill those needs. He took the ‘If you build it, they will come’ approach.”

According to two sources familiar with his work, Prince was developing unconventional means of penetrating “hard target” countries—where the C.I.A. has great difficulty working either because there are no stations from which to operate or because local intelligence services have the wherewithal to frustrate the agency’s designs. “I made no money whatsoever off this work,” Prince contends. He is unwilling to specify the exact nature of his forays. “I’m painted as this war profiteer by Congress. Meanwhile I’m paying for all sorts of intelligence activities to support American national security, out of my own pocket.” (His pocket is deep: according to *The Wall Street Journal*, Blackwater had revenues of more than \$600 million in 2008.)

Clutch Cargo

The Afghan countryside, from a speeding perch at 200 knots, whizzes by in a khaki haze. The terrain is rendered all the more nondescript by the fact that Erik Prince is riding less than 200 feet above it. The back of the airplane, a small, Spanish-built eads casa C-212, is open, revealing Prince in silhouette against a blue sky. Wearing Oakleys, tactical pants, and a white polo shirt, he looks strikingly boyish.

As the crew chief initiates a countdown sequence, Prince adjusts his harness and moves into position. When the “go” order comes, a young G.I. beside him cuts a tether, and Prince pushes a pallet out the tail chute. Black parachutes deploy and the aircraft lunges forward

from the sudden weight differential. The cargo—provisions and munitions—drops inside the perimeter of a forward operating base (fob) belonging to an elite Special Forces squad.

Five days a week, Blackwater's aviation arm—with its unabashedly 60s-spook name, Presidential Airways—flies low-altitude sorties to some of the most remote outposts in Afghanistan. Since 2006, Prince's company has been conscripted to offer this “turnkey” service for U.S. troops, flying thousands of delivery runs. Blackwater also provides security for U.S. ambassador Karl Eikenberry and his staff, and trains narcotics and Afghan special police units.



Blackwater aircraft en route to drop supplies to U.S. Special Forces in Afghanistan in September. Photograph by Adam Ferguson.

Once back on terra firma, Prince, a BlackBerry on one hip and a 9-mm. on the other, does a sweep around one of Blackwater's bases in northeast Afghanistan, pointing out buildings recently hit by mortar fire. As a drone circles overhead, its camera presumably trained on the surroundings, Prince climbs a guard tower and peers down at a spot where two of his contractors were nearly killed last July by an improvised explosive device. “Not counting civilian checkpoints,” he says, “this is the closest base to the [Pakistani] border.” His voice takes on a melodramatic solemnity. “Who else has built a fob along the main infiltration route for the Taliban and the last known location for Osama bin Laden?” It doesn't quite have the ring of Lawrence of Arabia's “To Aqaba!,” but you get the picture.

Going “Low-Pro”

Blackwater has been in Afghanistan since 2002. At the time, the C.I.A.'s executive director, A. B. “Buzzy” Krongard, responding to his operatives' complaints of being “worried sick about the Afghans' coming over the fence or opening the doors,” enlisted the company to offer protection for the agency's Kabul station. Going “low-pro,” or low-profile, paid off: not a single C.I.A. employee, according to sources close to the company, died in Afghanistan while under Blackwater's protection. (Talk about a tight-knit bunch. Krongard would later serve as an unpaid adviser to Blackwater's board, until 2007. And his brother Howard “Cookie” Krongard—the State Department's inspector general—had to recuse himself from Blackwater-related oversight matters after his brother's involvement with the company surfaced. Buzzy, in response, stepped down.)

As the agency's confidence in Blackwater grew, so did the company's responsibilities, expanding from static protection to mobile security—shadowing agency personnel, ever wary of suicide bombers, ambushes, and roadside devices, as they moved about the country. By 2005, Blackwater, accustomed to guarding C.I.A. personnel, was starting to look a little bit like the C.I.A. itself. Enrique “Ric” Prado joined Blackwater after serving as chief of operations for the agency's Counterterrorism Center (CTC). A short time later, Prado's boss, J. Cofer Black, the head of the CTC, moved over to Blackwater, too. He was followed, in turn, by *his* superior, Rob Richer, second-in-command of the C.I.A.'s clandestine service. Of the three, Cofer Black had the outsize reputation. As Bob Woodward recounted in his book *Bush at War*, on September 13, 2001, Black had promised President Bush that when the C.I.A. was through with al-Qaeda “they will have flies walking across their eyeballs.” According to Woodward, “Black became known in Bush's inner circle as the ‘flies-on-the-eyeballs guy.’” Richer and Black soon helped start a new company, Total Intelligence Solutions (which collects data to help businesses assess risks overseas), but in 2008 both men left Blackwater, as did company president Gary Jackson this year.

Off and on, Black and Richer's onetime partner Ric Prado, first with the C.I.A., then as a

Blackwater employee, worked quietly with Prince as his vice president of “special programs” to provide the agency with what every intelligence service wants: plausible deniability. Shortly after 9/11, President Bush had issued a “lethal finding,” giving the C.I.A. the go-ahead to kill or capture al-Qaeda members. (Under an executive order issued by President Gerald Ford, it had been illegal since 1976 for U.S. intelligence operatives to conduct assassinations.) As a seasoned case officer, Prado helped implement the order by putting together a small team of “blue-badgers,” as government agents are known. Their job was threefold: find, fix, and finish. Find the designated target, fix the person’s routine, and, if necessary, finish him off. When the time came to train the hit squad, the agency, insiders say, turned to Prince. Wary of attracting undue attention, the team practiced not at the company’s North Carolina compound but at Prince’s own domain, an hour outside Washington, D.C. The property looks like an outpost of the landed gentry, with pastures and horses, but also features less traditional accents, such as an indoor firing range. Once again, Prince has Wild Bill on his mind, observing that “the O.S.S. trained during World War II on a country estate.”



Prince in his Virginia office. His company took in more than \$1 billion from government contracts during the George W. Bush era. *Photograph by Nigel Parry.*

Among the team’s targets, according to a source familiar with the program, was Mamoun Darkazanli, an al-Qaeda financier living in Hamburg who had been on the agency’s radar for years because of his ties to three of the 9/11 hijackers and to operatives convicted of the 1998 bombings of U.S. Embassies in East Africa. The C.I.A. team supposedly went in “dark,” meaning they did not notify their own station—much less the German government—of their presence; they then followed Darkazanli for weeks and worked through the logistics of how and where they would take him down. Another target, the source says, was A. Q. Khan, the rogue Pakistani scientist who shared nuclear know-how with Iran, Libya, and North Korea. The C.I.A. team supposedly tracked him in Dubai. In both cases, the source insists, the authorities in Washington chose not to pull the trigger. Khan’s inclusion on the target list, however, would suggest that the assassination effort was broader than has previously been acknowledged. (Says agency spokesman Gimigliano, “[The] C.I.A. hasn’t discussed—despite some mischaracterizations that have appeared in the public domain—the substance of this effort or earlier ones.”)

The source familiar with the Darkazanli and Khan missions bristles at public comments that current and former C.I.A. officials have made: “They say the program didn’t move forward because [they] didn’t have the right skill set or because of inadequate cover. That’s untrue. [The operation continued] for a very long time in some places without ever being discovered. This program died because of a lack of political will.”

When Prado left the C.I.A., in 2004, he effectively took the program with him, after a short hiatus. By that point, according to sources familiar with the plan, Prince was already an agency asset, and the pair had begun working to privatize matters by changing the team’s composition from blue-

badgers to a combination of “green-badgers” (C.I.A. contractors) and third-country nationals (unaware of the C.I.A. connection). Blackwater officials insist that company resources and manpower were never directly utilized—these were supposedly off-the-books initiatives done on Prince’s own dime, for which he was later reimbursed—and that despite their close ties to the C.I.A. neither Cofer Black nor Rob Richer took part. As Prince puts it, “We were building a unilateral, unattributable capability. If it went bad, we weren’t expecting the chief of station, the ambassador, or anyone to bail us out.” He insists that, had the team deployed, the agency would have had full operational control. Instead, due to what he calls “institutional osteoporosis,” the second iteration of the assassination program lost steam.

Sometime after 2006, the C.I.A. would take another shot at the program, according to an insider who was familiar with the plan. “Everyone found some reason not to participate,” says the insider. “There was a sick-out. People would say to management, ‘I have a family, I have other obligations.’ This is the fucking C.I.A. They were supposed to lead the charge after al-Qaeda and they couldn’t find the people to do it.” Others with knowledge of the program are far more charitable and question why any right-thinking officer would sign up for an assassination program at a time when their colleagues—who had thought they had legal cover to engage in another sensitive effort, the “enhanced interrogations” program at secret C.I.A. sites in foreign countries—were finding themselves in legal limbo.

America and Erik Prince, it seems, have been slow to extract themselves from the assassination business. Beyond the killer drones flown with Blackwater’s help along the Afghanistan-Pakistan border (President Obama has reportedly authorized more than three dozen such hits), Prince claims he and a team of foreign nationals helped find and fix a target in October 2008, then left the finishing to others. “In Syria,” he says, “we did the signals intelligence to geo-locate the bad guys in a very denied area.” Subsequently, a U.S. Special Forces team launched a helicopter-borne assault to hunt down al-Qaeda middleman Abu Ghadiyah. Ghadiyah, whose real name is Badran Turki Hishan Al-Mazidih, was said to have been killed along with six others—though doubts have emerged about whether Ghadiyah was even there that day, as detailed in a recent *Vanity Fair* [Web story](#) by Reese Ehrlich and Peter Coyote.

And up until two months ago—when Prince says the Obama administration pulled the plug—he was still deeply engaged in the dark arts. According to insiders, he was running intelligence-gathering operations from a secret location in the United States, remotely coordinating the movements of spies working undercover in one of the so-called Axis of Evil countries. Their mission: non-disclosable.

Exit Strategy

Flying out of Kabul, Prince does a slow burn, returning to the topic of how exposed he has felt since press accounts revealed his role in the assassination program. The firestorm that began in August has continued to smolder and may indeed have his handlers wondering whether Prince himself is more of a liability than an asset. He says he can’t understand why they would shut down certain high-risk, high-payoff collection efforts against some of America’s most implacable enemies for fear that his involvement could, given the political climate, result in their compromise.

He is incredulous that U.S. officials seem willing, in effect, to cut off their nose to spite their face. “I’ve been overtly and covertly serving America since I started in the armed services,” Prince observes. After 12 years building the company, he says he intends to turn it over to its employees and a board, and exit defense contracting altogether. An internal power struggle is said to be under way among those seeking to define the direction and underlying mission of a post-Prince Blackwater.

He insists, simply, “I’m through.”

In the past, Prince has entertained the idea of building a pre-positioning ship—complete with security personnel, doctors, helicopters, medicine, food, and fuel—and stationing it off the coast of Africa to provide “relief with teeth” to the continent’s trouble spots or to curb piracy off Somalia. At one point, he considered creating a rapidly deployable brigade that could be farmed out, for a fee, to a foreign government.

For the time being, however, Prince contends that his plans are far more modest. “I’m going to teach high school,” he says, straight-faced. “History and economics. I may even coach wrestling. Hey, Indiana Jones taught school, too.”

Courtesy: [In God’s Name](#)

Rating: 10.0/10 (3 votes cast)



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Mehdi

24. Oct, 2010

Good money for murder – but come the Day of Judgement he will be of the losers. No doubt he will receive his book in his left hand, along with the rulers of most nations esp the so called Muslim nations.

Time is moving at a pace never experienced before and before you know it you’ll be in front of your Lord for the final judgement.

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