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Corporate Accountability International

# The Blackwater backwater

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**Blackwater Worldwide is a for-profit corporation of trained soldiers and 'security professionals.' Some find it more instructive to label them mercenaries or hired guns. Regardless, U.S. taxpayers have already contributed more than \$1 billion to Blackwater's corporate coffers to carry out operations in Iraq and Afghanistan. But despite the taxpayer expenditure, Blackwater is largely unaccountable to the public for their actions.**

On September 16, 2007, Blackwater employees in Baghdad shot and killed 17 Iraqi civilians, at least 14 of whom were killed "without cause" according to the Federal Bureau of Investigation.[1]

Blackwater is also being sued by Iraqi families under the Alien Claims Tort Act for the incident.[2]

According to The Nation, "...many legal experts, including in the Justice Department, acknowledge that there may be no current U.S. law that could be used to prosecute security contractors for crimes committed in Iraq, such as the killing of seventeen Iraqi civilians last September in [Baghdad]..."[3]

Between 2005 and September 2007, Blackwater security staff were involved in 195 shooting incidents; in more than 80% of those cases, Blackwater personnel fired first. 25 members of staff have been fired for violations of Blackwater's drug and alcohol policy and 28 more for weapons-related incidents.[4]

### **Silencing the critics**

On March 31, 2004, four Blackwater employees were killed in Fallujah, and their bodies were hung on a bridge - an event that was covered by media worldwide.[5]

Blackwater refused to share with the families the circumstances of their deaths, telling the families they'd need to sue to find out. The families did, but that hasn't yet resulted in the truth being revealed. Ultimately, Blackwater has gone so far as to countersue a whole set of families to the tune of \$10 million[6] because they demanded to learn the circumstances surrounding their sons' grisly, widely-publicized deaths.[7]

According to advocates for the families, "Blackwater is attempting to cover up its incompetence, its cutting of corners in favor of higher profits, and is over billing to the government. Due to lack of accountability and oversight, Blackwater's private army has been able to obtain huge profits from the government, utilizing contacts established through [the CEO's] relationships with high-ranking government officials."[8]

### **A prince and a president**

Blackwater founder Erik Prince comes from a wealthy, politically-connected family. The Prince family was a major funder of the Republicans during the 1990s, and Prince himself has contributed generously to our current president and his allies. Since 1989 Prince has donated over \$151,250 to Republicans. Prince's sister, Elizabeth, was the head of the Michigan Republican Party until early 2005, the former finance chairwoman for the National Republican Senatorial Committee (NRSC), and married Dick DeVos, the son of billionaire Amway co-founder, Richard DeVos. Amway has donated roughly \$7.5 million to Republican candidates since 1990.[9]

### **Corporate snapshot**

Blackwater USA, later to become Blackwater Worldwide, was founded in 1996 by ex-Navy Seal Erik Prince as a private, military training facility in North Carolina.[10] According to one expert, Blackwater's executives were, "all

former Navy SEALs or other Elite Special Forces people who envisioned it as a project that would take advantage of the anticipated government outsourcing of military operations.[11]

Blackwater's parent company is the Prince Group.[12]

Blackwater trains more than 40,000 people every year, has 20,000 soldiers for hire on call, the world's largest private military base, and controls a fleet of twenty aircraft.[13]

Blackwater aims to hire the best soldiers that money can buy, from anywhere in the world. Its employees even include former Chilean commandos trained under the murderous dictator Augusto Pinochet.[14]

Blackwater consists of seven divisions, and two affiliated companies.[15] Overall, the company has government contracts account for at least 90 percent of its revenue.[16] Two-thirds of these are no-bid contracts.[17]

The U.S. State Department has roughly 1,450 diplomatic security agents worldwide who are actual government employees, and thirty-six in Iraq. Blackwater has nearly 1,000 operatives in Iraq alone.[18]

Other countries, including Japan[19] and Azerbaijan,[20] have hired Blackwater to train elite military personnel for secret missions and to guard high-security weapons facilities.

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