

Report of Illegal \$80 Million Arms Transfer by Erik Prince to Libyan Warlord Raises Question of Who's Backing Former Blackwater CEO

Prince has "been linked to the Trump administration, the Emirati leadership, and the Russians," noted one expert.

By [Brett Wilkins](#)

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Erik Prince, the founder and former CEO of the mercenary firm Blackwater and a close ally of former President Donald Trump, sent weapons to a Libyan warlord in violation of a United Nations arms embargo, according to a confidential U.N. document [reported](#) Friday by the New York Times.

The U.N. report, which investigators sent to the Security Council on Thursday, reportedly details how Prince sent foreign mercenaries armed with attack aircraft, gunboats, and cyberwarfare capabilities to support renegade military commander Khalifa Haftar during a major 2019 battle in eastern Libya.

According to the U.N. report, the mercenary operation cost \$80 million and included a plan to form a hit squad to locate and assassinate commanders opposed to Haftar.

Haftar, a one-time [CIA asset](#) considered Libya's most powerful warlord, has fought to overthrow the North African nation's internationally recognized government during the country's second civil war since the overthrow of longtime dictator Muammar Gaddafi in the 2011 Arab Spring revolts. Haftar has enjoyed various degrees of support from [Egypt](#), the [United Arab Emirates](#), and [Russia](#). British, French, U.S., and UAE warplanes have also [assisted](#) his forces.

Erik Prince, the former head of Blackwater, brother of Betsy DeVos and prominent supporter of Donald Trump, violated a UN arms embargo on Libya by sending weapons to a militia commander who was attempting to overthrow the internationally backed government. <https://t.co/uYY1ly4Nkf>

— Citizens for Ethics (@CREWcrew) [February 19, 2021](#)

In 2019, Trump reportedly [granted permission](#) for Haftar—who stands accused of [ordering](#)

his troops to commit war crimes—to launch an air campaign against the U.N.-backed Government of National Accord, attacks which [killed](#) hundreds of civilians in the Libyan capital of Tripoli.

The U.N. report raises questions about whether Trump was complicit in Prince's violation of the international arms embargo against Haftar's forces.

Anas el-Gomati, director of Libyan think tank Sadeq Institute, [told](#) *Al Jazeera* that using mercenaries allows leaders to “outright refuse that you have any knowledge of what's going on.”

“To what degree did Trump help facilitate this war alongside Erik Prince?” asked el-Gomati, who also wondered whether “Erik Prince was coordinating with Russian Wagner Group mercenaries in Libya, and has helped them establish a foothold in the way he helped the United Arab Emirates establish a foothold in Libya.”

Another unanswered question is who funded Prince's \$80 million operation. Wolfram Lacher, a Libya expert at the German Institute for International and Security Affairs, told the *Times* that Prince has “been linked to the Trump administration, the Emirati leadership, and the Russians.”

“For me, the question is who is tacitly backing him?” asked Lacher.

BREAKING: A UN report says Betsy DeVos' brother Erik Prince violated an int'l arms embargo on Libya by deploying a force of mercenaries to help a militia leader try to overthrow the gov't, according to reporting by [@nytimes](#). Here's what else you need to know about the Trump ally pic.twitter.com/VTxqYVTsPN

— NowThis (@nowthisnews) [February 19, 2021](#)

Prince, a former U.S. Navy SEAL, founded Blackwater—now called Academi after being sold twice—in 1997. He rose to prominence during the George W. Bush administration and the so-called War on Terror, in which the U.S. relied heavily upon private contractors. On September 16, 2007, Blackwater guards [massacred](#) 17 men, women, and children in Nisour Square in Baghdad, Iraq.

Last December, Trump [pardoned](#) four of the Nisour Square killers, who had been sentenced to 12 years to life in prison for crimes including first-degree murder.

Trump and Prince have long enjoyed warm relations. Prince was a major Trump donor whose sister, Betsy DeVos, was confirmed as secretary of education in 2017.

This isn't the first time Prince has been accused of breaking domestic and international laws against weapons transfers. In 2012 his anti-piracy security force in Somalia was [accused](#) by the U.N. of “the most brazen violation of the arms embargo by a private security company.” Prince was also [reportedly](#) the target of an FBI investigation last year for weaponizing crop dusters.

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Featured image: Erik Prince is the brother of former Education Secretary Betsy DeVos and founder of the mercenary firm Blackwater. (Photo: The Oxford Union/REX Shutterstock)

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