

VIDEO: Murder, Inc?

Blackwater accused of murder in 'crusade to eliminate Muslims'

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OLBERMANN: The slaughter of civilians for sport, weapons smuggling, destruction of evidence, wholesale corruption and finally murder. In our third story on the COUNTDOWN, a full-fledged criminal enterprise executed by the military contractors known formally as Blackwater, according to the sworn testimony of two of its employees. "The Nation's" Jeremy Scahill, who broke the story, joins us in a moment.

The details come straight from two sworn affidavits filed late last night by persons whose identities have been sealed to protect their identity, men who have previously cooperated with federal prosecutors in the criminal inquiry into Blackwater. From John Doe number two, a former member of Blackwater's management team, quoting the affidavit, "it appears that Mr. Erik Prince, Blackwater's founder, and his employees murdered or had murdered one or more persons who had provided information or were planning on providing information to the federal authorities about the ongoing criminal conduct. On several occasions after my departure from Mr. Prince's employ, Mr. Prince's management has personally threatened me with death and violence."

John Doe number two also stating that Mr. Prince, pictured here, smuggled unlawful weapons into Iraq, including sawed-off, semi-automatic machine guns with silencers and illegal hand grenades. The affidavit also says that Prince, quote, "views himself as a Christian crusader eliminating Muslims and the Islamic faith from the globe. To that end, Mr. Prince intentionally deployed to Iraq certain men who shared his vision of Christian supremacy. Many of these men used call signs based on the Knights of the Templar, the warriors who fought the crusades. Mr. Prince operated his companies in a manner that encouraged and rewarded the destruction of Iraqi life. Going to Iraq to shoot and kill Iraqis was viewed as a sport or game."

Striking similar allegations made in the affidavit of John Doe number one, a former U.S. marine who worked for Blackwater in Iraq. He alleges that incidences of unjustified deadly force were initially videotaped and watched in a session called a Hot Wash. Blackwater, now known as XE Services, spelled XE, maintains that Mr. Prince and the company are innocent of any wrongdoing and performed their duties on behalf of their employer, the State

Department.

Joining me now, as promised, the contributor to "The Nation Magazine" and author of "Blackwater, the Rise of the World's Most Powerful Mercenary Army," Jeremy Scahill. Good to see you. Thanks for coming in.

JEREMY SCAHILL, "THE NATION": Thanks for having me back, Keith.

OLBERMANN: As horrific as all this sounds, it's just part of what you described in the piece today. Flesh it out for us.

SCAHILL: Obviously to hear the term murder and Blackwater in the same sentence is no great surprise, particularly to people who have been following the history of this company. It's been at the center of some of the worst violence of in Iraq, killing civilians repeatedly. Five of its men are going to be tried on manslaughter charges for the Nisr (ph) Square Massacre in Baghdad in September '07. Another one pled guilty.

The Congress is investigating. The IRS is investigating. This is a scandal-plagued company.

What is explosive about what's happened here-and you just went through some of the most explosive of these details-is that you have two former Blackwater officials. I have learned from sources that's John Doe number two was actually in Blackwater management and was privy to some of the inner workings of the company.

Erik Prince, the owner of Blackwater, remains the sole owner of the company, no matter that he stepped down as CEO and founder of the company. He micro-manages every aspect of Blackwater's operations and that's been well known.

On the Christian supremacist angle, let's remember that Erik Prince viewed Blackwater as a neo-crusader force and has from the beginning. This is a guy who comes from the powerhouse of the radical religious right. His father was a major bank roller and gave the seed money to Gary Bauer to start the Family Research Council, James Dobson, Focus on the Family.

And then we have his force employed in Iraq as part of a war against a Muslim nation that George Bush characterized as a crusade. What we have here, Keith, is a confirmation from insiders at Blackwater that, in fact, Erik Prince did have a neo-crusader agenda, and, most explosively, may have murdered or facilitated the murder of individuals who were intending to or did cooperate in the federal government's criminal investigation of Blackwater.

This is deadly serious.

OLBERMANN: To the murder in a second. But you mentioned something in here that strikes an obvious question. How could the Bush administration's State Department have missed this crusader element here, or was that what they were looking for?

SCAHILL: Missed it? I think it was considered a plus in the Bush White House. Remember, Keith, what we had here was the Bush administration essentially create a force that acted as an armed wing of the administration, not subject to the military command, not subject to the Uniformed Code of Military Justice, that reported directly to George Bush's secretary of state and then to the president.

These were his men, his private force in Baghdad. And the allegations that they were running around shooting Iraqis as part of a war to eliminate Islam globally, as is actually what one of these individuals said, is extremely disturbing to anyone who believes in any semblance of Constitution, law or human rights.

OLBERMANN: Some specifics, to what you know about them. This is a strong term murder in court documents. This is under oath. This is not somebody throwing something up against a wall to see if it will stick. Are we talking about something related to the 2007 Baghdad Massacre or something here?

SCAHILL: It's unclear but I will tell you what I do know about this, Keith. The fact of the matter is that these individuals, in these sworn depositions, provided those depositions to lawyers, Susan Burke and the Center for Constitution Rights, that are suing Blackwater on behalf of Iraqis killed by Blackwater operatives in Iraq. They are suing them in civil litigation.

What we do know is that these same individuals say that they gave this identical information to the federal government, one of them in Grand Jury testimony, as part of the on-going criminal investigation. When I called the Justice Department and asked specifically, are you investigating Erik Prince on allegations that he was involved with murder, the Justice Department interestingly said that they would not confirm or deny any action that they may or may not be taking against uncharged individuals.

Erik Prince, according to the lawyers suing Blackwater, could be eligible for murder charges in both Virginia and the state of North Carolina under this existing law. That's the argument they're making in their motion that was filed late last night in the Eastern District of Virginia.

OLBERMANN: Jeremy Scahill, who has been the watchdog on Blackwater, now Xe, of "The Nation," who brought this story to everyone's attention today. Great thanks for doing so and great thanks for coming in.

SCAHILL: Thank you, Keith.

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