[Summary published by CapitolReader.com on November 1, 2007]

**Blackwater:**
The Rise of the World’s Most Powerful Mercenary Army  
Author: Jeremy Scahill  
Publisher: Nation Books  
Date of Publication: February 2007  
ISBN: 9781560259794  
No. of Pages: 452  
**Buy This Book**

About The Author:  
Jeremy Scahill is a Polk Award-winning investigative journalist. He frequently writes for The Nation magazine and he is a correspondent for the national radio and television program Democracy Now. Scahill has reported from Iraq, the former Yugoslavia, and other hotspots.

General Overview:  
In Blackwater, Scahill takes an in-depth look at the powerful private army that operates in international war zones and on American soil. With its own military base, a fleet of 20 aircraft and 20,000 troops at the ready, Blackwater USA has become the elite Praetorian Guard for the “global war on terror.”

Scahill examines the epic rise of one of the most powerful and secretive forces to emerge from the U.S. military-industrial complex, hailed by the Bush administration as a revolution in military affairs, but considered by others as a dire threat to American democracy.

* Please Note: This CapitolReader.com summary does not offer judgment or opinion on the book’s content. The ideas, viewpoints and arguments are presented just as the book’s author has intended.

From the book Blackwater by Jeremy Scahill. Copyright © 2007. Reprinted by arrangement with Nation Books, a member of the Perseus Books Group (www.perseusbooks.com). All rights reserved.  
Published by CapitolReader.com. Copyright © 2007, Capitol Reader and Shamrock New Media, Inc. No part of this summary may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means without prior notice and consent from CapitolReader.com and Shamrock New Media, Inc. The respective copyrights of authors and publishers are acknowledged. "Political Book Summaries" is a registered trademark of Shamrock New Media, Inc. The material provided is for general informational purposes only.
Introduction
Blackwater USA is one of the fastest growing (and controversial) security firms in the world. The company, founded by a right-wing Christian and ex-Navy SEAL named Erik Prince, boasts 20,000 troops, a fleet of 20 aircraft, and its own military base. It is virtually a private army capable of overthrowing governments, responding to natural disasters, or mounting significant operations in the war on terror. In fact, Blackwater’s mercenaries have deployed in Iraq, Afghanistan, and even New Orleans in the wake of Hurricane Katrina.

Blackwater has close ties to the military-industrial complex, the Bush administration, and extremist Christian groups. Its fortunes have soared with the war on terror, the invasion of Iraq, and the Bush administration’s drive to privatize military functions. The company and its founder maintain an aura of secrecy, but it is believed that Blackwater has more than $500 million in government contracts, though this number does not include secret “black” budget operations for intelligence agencies, foreign governments, and corporate clients.

In 2004, four Blackwater employees were ambushed and murdered by a Sunni mob in Fallujah, Iraq. For many Americans, this was the first time they had heard of Blackwater. The incident helped cement support for Blackwater with Washington’s power brokers, but the U.S. military’s subsequent heavy-handed crackdown on the city of Fallujah was seen by many Iraqis as a form of collective punishment. Thus, the siege of Fallujah had the effect of throwing gasoline on the sparks of an incipient Sunni insurgency.

Blackwater raises profound questions regarding the implications that for-hire private militias have for democracy. Private security firms like Blackwater are playing a prominent role in the occupation of Iraq. In fact, there are more private contractors in Iraq than U.S. troops. Many of Blackwater’s elite mercenaries are making $600 or more a day providing security to America’s top diplomats, a remunerative rate that has raised deep resentment among U.S. grunts who are earning a fraction of that. Further, the private security personnel at Blackwater and other firms are often immune from prosecution in the countries where they work and they are not subject to the Uniform Code of Military Justice that governs U.S. troops.

Privatizing and outsourcing military functions was always a key priority for the Bush administration. As Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld took steps to shrink the size of the conventional military, firms like Blackwater have moved to fill the void. Privatizing military functions provided many benefits for the Bush administration, which seemed determined to wage a series of imperial wars to secure energy resources in the Middle East. For instance, the availability of private mercenary armies tends to mitigate democratic checks and balances that might impede the administration’s war-making ability. Also, private mercenaries don’t turn up in official casualty reports.
Blackwater has positioned itself as a one-stop shopping center for security needs. It trains police and SWAT teams at its state-of-the-art facility in North Carolina. It provides bodyguards for State Department officials in hot spots like Iraq. It has also branched out into the disaster relief industry. For example, many of the same Blackwater mercenaries that patrolled Iraq also patrolled the streets of New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina hit.

The private military industry has been valued at more than $100 billion per year globally. The war on terror, the war in Iraq, and natural disasters like Katrina have been a boon for the mercenary industry. Blackwater and their ilk are marketing themselves as a free market service that will provide taxpayers with cost-savings and efficiencies. In reality, however, firms like Blackwater invariably receive lucrative no-bid contracts that rely heavily on cronynism and political connections. In short, mercenary armies like Blackwater have been able “to affix a permanent sieve to the most lucrative feeding trough in the world – the national budgets of the United States and its war-making allies.”

Blackwater is fast becoming one of the most powerful private armies in the world. Many of its top officials are religious and right-wing zealots that believe the United States is engaged in an epic battle against Muslim forces in defense of Christianity. Unfortunately, Blackwater’s ideal – an army of God-fearing patriot’s – reinforces the worst fear in the Islamic world, namely that the U.S has embarked on a neo-Crusader agenda under the guise of “liberating” Muslim countries.

The rise of a private army like Blackwater is the fulfillment of President Eisenhower’s ominous warning regarding the propensity for an unchecked military-industrial complex to create “misplaced power” that will have “grave implications” on our democracy. Blackwater, however, believes it represents the future of the military industry. Its troops are included in what the Pentagon is calling the “Total Force” – the number of private contractors and U.S. troops that make up the nation’s war-making capacity. This represents a momentous shift for the United States. Private mercenaries are now central to U.S. foreign policy and issues of war and peace.

The Birth of Blackwater
On September 10, 2001, Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld gave a speech on what he believed was the greatest adversary America faced: the Pentagon bureaucracy. One day later, of course, Rumsfeld was helping survivors out of the rubble when the Pentagon itself was hit by American Airlines Flight 77 as part of al-Qaeda’s attack on the United States. Donald Rumsfeld, however, came to his job determined to transform the military by overhauling the Department of Defense and instituting a new model based on the private sector.
Blackwater, the private security firm founded in 1997 by a former Navy SEAL, a right-wing Christian named Erik Prince, fit perfectly with the Bush administration’s agenda to privatize military functions. In roughly a decade, the company has risen out of the swamp in North Carolina (the company is named after the swamp waters that border its corporate headquarters) to become a virtual Praetorian Guard for the Bush administration and its global war on terror.

Presently, Blackwater employs more than 2,300 private soldiers in nine countries, it maintains a database of 21,000 Special Forces and law enforcement personnel it can call on, and it has a fleet of more than 20 aircraft. Its 7,000-acre state of the art training facility in North Carolina is the largest private military facility in the world.

The privatization of the military was kick-started by Dick Cheney when he was Defense Secretary during the first Bush administration. However, the fortunes of Blackwater accelerated with the 9/11 attacks. As one expert put it, “Osama bin Laden turned Blackwater into what it is today.” The invasion of Iraq in 2003, however, was an even greater boon to the company.

Blackwater landed security contracts with the CIA and the military as part of the campaign to oust the Taliban from Afghanistan. But the company’s biggest coup came when it was awarded the contract to provide private bodyguards to safeguard the Bush administration’s proconsul in Iraq, Ambassador Paul Bremer. Bremer was the most visible face of the American occupation, thus making him a top target of both al-Qaeda and Iraqi insurgents. Keeping such a high-profile target safe in one of the most hostile environments on the planet would greatly enhance Blackwater’s reputation.

**Fallujah**

On March 31st of 2004, four Blackwater employees were ambushed and brutally murdered by Sunni resistance fighters in the stronghold of Fallujah. “The killing of those Americans would alter the course of the war in Iraq, spark multiple U.S. sieges of Fallujah, and embolden the anti-occupation resistance movement.”

The city of Fallujah has a history of offering fierce resistance to foreign occupations. It has also suffered tremendously since the U.S. invasion in 2003. American officials have repeatedly sought to make an example of the rebellious city, but attempts to portray Fallujah as a hotbed of pro-Saddam resistance fighters and al-Qaeda type forces is only part of the story. The fact is that Fallujah was particularly devastated by errant allied bombs during the First Gulf War in 1991, and U.S. sanctions exacted a terrible toll as well.

In 2003, U.S. forces reportedly fired into a crowd to break up a demonstration, leading to a bloodbath. Further incidents followed and stories of U.S massacres began to spread across Iraq and the Arab world. As George Bush was on board the USS *Lincoln* declaring the end to all major combat operations before a “Mission Accomplished”
In 2004, Fallujah was reaching the boiling point. The four Blackwater personnel who were massacred were not engaged in an exotic mission (like working for the CIA or guarding a VIP). In fact, they were providing security for a catering convoy. Nevertheless, the men were highly trained ex-military and ex-Special Forces. In retrospect, however, it is clear that the four men embarked on their mission without the proper vehicles, firepower, and manpower.

Though the four men were literally transporting kitchen utensils when they were murdered, it is possible their killers believed they were CIA. It is also quite possible that the ambush was a setup (possibly a leak from the Iraqi police from within the Green Zone) as Islamic insurgents videotaped the entire ambush.

Outgunned and outmanned, the four contractors never had a chance driving through the hostile territory of Fallujah in lightly armored SUVs. Their bodies were dragged from their vehicles, set on fire, torn apart, and their remains were hung from a main bridge crossing the Euphrates.

The horrific images out of Fallujah that day were the first time most Americans had ever heard of Blackwater. Almost immediately, Blackwater was lionized in the halls of power in Washington. The Bush administration viewed the killings as a challenge to U.S. resolve. Marine commanders on the ground wanted to treat the matter as a law enforcement issue, but the White House wanted a crackdown to set an example.

President Bush knew an offensive would be bloody, but the attitude coming from the administration was characterized by one officer as, “Go in and clobber people.” But just as the Marines were preparing for a full assault on Fallujah, Blackwater personnel found themselves in the middle of an explosive situation in the Shiite holy city of Najaf.

Najaf

The incident in Fallujah had enhanced Blackwater’s reputation among Republican lawmakers, who already viewed the company as a “silent partner” in the war on terror. Less well known, however, is an incident in Najaf where four Blackwater mercenaries found themselves commanding active-duty U.S. troops in a fierce firefight involving a dozen Americans (as well as a handful of Salvadoran troops) fending off Iraqi demonstrators and more than 1,200 Mahdi troops loyal to the Shiite firebrand Muqtada al-Sadr.

There is no official military report on how the incident started, but video made during the four-hour battle showed that Blackwater’s private mercenaries were giving orders to active-duty U.S. personnel. The engagement also greatly complicated America’s occupation because many Iraqis interpreted the incident as another massacre by the U.S.
military. Of course, Blackwater and the Marines saw it differently. In their view, they had “fended off hordes of angry, armed militia members intent on killing them and overtaking a building they were tasked by their government with protecting.”

The incident in Najaf would help spark uprisings in eight cities by Sadr’s followers. It was becoming clear to many observers, such as the New York Times, that outsourcing core security functions to private mercenaries was a trend fraught with peril. In any event, the crackdowns in Fallujah and against Sadr’s forces would help fuel Sunni and Shiite resistance to the occupation.

The Bush administration, including Paul Bremer, believed that pacifying Fallujah and making an example of al-Sadr would put an end to organized resistance in Iraq. Instead, Washington’s disastrous policies would only fan the flames of violence, leading to the deaths of thousands of Iraqis and hundreds of U.S. troops. Nevertheless, the Bush administration’s miscalculations would greatly enhance Blackwater’s prospects.

The siege of Fallujah was a humanitarian nightmare that was interpreted in the Arab world as a form of collective punishment. While the U.S. press focused on the “urban warfare” angle, the Arab media “painted a vivid picture of the civilian devastation.” When U.S. officials realized they were losing the global propaganda war, they decided to go after the messenger. For example, the British Daily Mirror reported that “President Bush allegedly told Prime Minister Tony Blair of his desire to bomb Al Jazeera.” The Bush administration ordered Al Jazeera out of Fallujah and when the network refused, its correspondents believed it had become a target.

The Great Game
Blackwater may have made the headlines in Iraq, but it was also working quietly behind the scenes in the oil-rich Caspian Sea region, providing security and training on behalf of regimes favored by the Bush administration. Foreign policy experts described the Bush administration’s overtures in the region, which included planned oil pipelines and the construction of a U.S. military base near the Iranian border, as part of the “Great Game” to dominate the world’s petrol reserves.

As a private firm, Blackwater was an ideal candidate to lead a “backdoor” U.S. military deployment. Blackwater could operate with a lower profile than U.S troops, but they would protect the West’s oil interests in the region while “possibly laying the groundwork for an important forward operating base for an attack against Iran”

A Blackwater contract to train Azerbaijan’s security forces was almost certainly part of the Bush administration’s agenda in the region. Azerbaijan, though strategically vital to the Bush administration’s aims in the region, was a country with a dismal human rights record. Opponents of the authoritarian regime were routinely tortured and subject to arbitrary arrest and detention. The fact that Blackwater was contracted to bolster
Azerbaijan’s security forces makes it clear that Blackwater employees are more than just mercenaries; they are also strategic partners with the U.S. military industrial complex.

**Death Squads**

Blackwater has scoured the globe to find highly trained military personnel to fill its ranks. For instance, it has enlisted soldiers of fortune from military and paramilitary organizations that fought on behalf of right-wing causes and regimes in El Salvador, Chile, Colombia, and South Africa. Blackwater’s top American soldiers can typically rake in $600 a day, but mercenaries lured from the third world receive a fraction of the high sums they are promised.

Having third-world mercenaries policing Iraq is troubling in itself, but Paul Bremer signed an order the day before he scurried out of Iraq essentially giving Blackwater’s employees legal immunity within Iraq.

Blackwater’s forces are not subject to the U.S. military’s Uniform Code of Military Justice, thus raising the issue of who exactly these private forces are accountable to, if anyone. In 2006, for instance, a drunken Blackwater employee allegedly shot and killed an Iraqi security guard only to be whisked out of the country before the matter could be investigated.

Relatives of the four Blackwater employees killed in Fallujah have filed a civil case alleging that the company skimmed on contractually obligated security procedures in order to save money. The case raises thorny legal issues involving the role of for-profit forces operating in U.S. war zones. Not surprisingly, the suit has sent shockwaves through the corporate community that has reaped enormous profits in Iraq. “This is a precedent-setting case,” said one attorney. And “just like tobacco litigation or gun litigation, once they lose that first case, they’d be fearful there would be other lawsuits to follow.”

**Conclusion**

In early 2006, Blackwater and other major mercenary firms received a huge boost when the Pentagon officially recognized private contractors as part of the U.S. military’s “Total Force.” This was a watershed moment for Blackwater and other private armies in so far as “hiring mercenaries was no longer an option; it was U.S. policy.” This kind of integration and legitimacy was crucial to sustaining Blackwater’s rising fortunes.

For Blackwater’s executives, the trends toward privatizing war and the use of mercenaries are welcome indeed. The privatization bandwagon has also been led by right-wing think tanks, such as the American Enterprise Institute (AEI). At an AEI-sponsored conference, “Contractors on the Battlefield: A Briefing on the Future of the Defense Industry,” Blackwater’s vice-chairman, Cofer Black, spoke about the state of planetary disorder and how the mercenary trade could help provide stability. Black invoked the Knights of the Round Table, insisting that Blackwater was not a fly-by-night
operation, or merely interested in the bottom line. “Morals and ethics and integrity,” Black argued, were essential in his trade.

There is little doubt that Blackwater’s executives fancy themselves as part of a “just mercenary tradition.” Monetary gain is a major factor, of course, in attracting recruits, but so is patriotism and even religious zeal. A number of the company’s “top officials are extreme religious zealots, some of whom appear to believe they are engaged in an epic battle for the defense of Christendom.”

Blackwater, in sum, embodies a private army of God-fearing patriots committed to U.S. hegemony. Ironically, this is just what many Muslims fear; a Neo-Crusader army bent on destroying Islam under the guise of “liberating” the Middle East. But Blackwater also embodies the worst fears of President Eisenhower, who warned against the “grave implications” of a military-industrial complex where profit-motive and war-making become entangled.