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Erik Prince, the reclusive owner of the Blackwater empire, rarely gives public speeches and when he does he attempts to ban journalists from attending and forbids recording or videotaping of his remarks. On May 5, that is exactly what Prince is trying to do when he speaks at DeVos Fieldhouse as the keynote speaker for the "Tulip Time Festival" in his hometown of Holland, Michigan. He told the event's organizers no news reporting could be done on his speech and they consented to the ban. Journalists and media associations in Michigan are protesting this attempt to bar reporting on his remarks.

Despite Prince's attempts to shield his speeches from public scrutiny, *The Nation* magazine has obtained an audio recording of a recent, private speech delivered by Prince to a friendly audience. The speech, which Prince attempted to keep from public consumption, provides a stunning glimpse into his views and future plans and reveals details of previously undisclosed activities of Blackwater. The people of the United States have a right to media coverage of events featuring the owner of a company that generates 90% of its revenue from the United States government.

In the speech, Prince proposed that the US government deploy armed private contractors to fight "terrorists" in Nigeria, Yemen, Somalia and Saudi Arabia, specifically to target Iranian influence. He expressed disdain for the Geneva Convention and described Blackwater's secretive operations at four Forward Operating Bases he controls in Afghanistan. He called those fighting the US in Afghanistan, Iraq and Pakistan "barbarians" who "crawled out of the sewer." Prince also revealed details of a July 2009 operation he claims Blackwater forces coordinated in Afghanistan to take down a narcotrafficking facility, saying that Blackwater "call[ed] in multiple air strikes," blowing up the facility. Prince boasted that his forces had carried out the "largest hashish bust in counter-narcotics history." He characterized the work of some NATO countries' forces in Afghanistan as ineffectual, suggesting that some coalition nations "should just pack it in and go home." Prince spoke of Blackwater working in Pakistan, which appears to contradict the official, public Blackwater and US government line that Blackwater is not in Pakistan.

Prince also claimed that a Blackwater operative took down the Iraqi journalist who threw his shoes at President George W Bush in Baghdad and criticized the Secret Service for being "flat-footed." He bragged that Blackwater forces "beat the Louisiana National Guard to the scene" during Katrina and claimed that lawsuits, "tens of millions of dollars in lawyer bills" and political attacks prevented him from deploying a humanitarian ship that could have responded to the earthquake in Haiti or the tsunami that hit Indonesia.

Several times during the speech, Prince appeared to demean Afghans his company is training in Afghanistan, saying Blackwater had to teach them "Intro to Toilet Use" and to do jumping jacks. At the same time, he bragged that US generals told him the Afghans Blackwater trains "are the most effective fighting force in Afghanistan." Prince also revealed that he is writing a book, scheduled to be released this fall.

The speech was delivered January 14 at the University of Michigan in front of an audience of entrepreneurs, ROTC commanders and cadets, businesspeople and military veterans. The speech was titled "Overcoming Adversity: Leadership at the Tip of the Spear" and was sponsored by the Young Presidents' Association (YPO), a business networking association primarily made up of corporate executives. "Ripped from the headlines and described by Vanity Fair magazine, as a Tycoon, Contractor, Soldier and Spy, Erik Prince brings all that and more to our exclusive YPO speaking engagement," read the event's program, also obtained by *The Nation*.

It proclaimed that Prince's speech was an "amazing don't miss opportunity from a man who has 'been there and done that' with a group of Cadets and Midshipmen who are months away from serving on the 'tip of the spear.'" Here are some of the highlights from Erik Prince's speech:

### **Send the Mercs into Somalia, Yemen, Saudi Arabia and Nigeria**

Prince painted a global picture in which Iran is "at the absolute dead center... of badness." The Iranians, he said, "want that nuke so that it is again a Persian Gulf and they very much have an attitude of when Darius ran most of the Middle East back in 1000 BC. That's very much what the Iranians are after." [NOTE: Darius of Persia actually ruled from 522 BC-486 BC]. Iran, Prince charged, has a "master plan to stir up and organize a Shia revolt through the whole region." Prince proposed that armed private soldiers from companies like Blackwater be deployed in countries throughout the region to target Iranian influence, specifically in Yemen, Somalia and Saudi Arabia. "The Iranians have a very sinister hand in these places," Prince said. "You're not going to solve it by putting a lot of uniformed soldiers in all these countries. It's way too politically sensitive. The private sector can operate there with a very, very small, very light footprint." In addition to concerns of political expediency, Prince suggested that using private contractors to conduct such operations would be cost-effective. "The overall defense budget is going to have to be cut and they're going to look for ways, they're going to have to have ways to become more efficient," he said. "And there's a lot of ways that the private sector can operate with a much smaller, much lighter footprint."

Prince also proposed using private armed contractors in the oil-rich African nation of Nigeria. Prince said that guerilla groups in the country are dramatically slowing oil production and extraction and stealing oil. "There's more than a half million barrels a day stolen there, which is stolen and organized by very large criminal syndicates. There's even some evidence it's going to fund terrorist organizations," Prince alleged. "These guerilla groups attack the pipeline, attack the pump house to knock it offline, which makes the pressure of the pipeline go soft. they cut that pipeline and they weld in their own patch with their own valves and they back a barge up into it. Ten thousand barrels at a time, take that oil, drive that 10,000 barrels out to sea and at \$80 a barrel, that's \$800,000. That's not a bad take for organized crime." Prince made no

mention of the nonviolent indigenous opposition to oil extraction and pollution, nor did he mention the notorious human rights abuses connected to multinational oil corporations in Nigeria that have sparked much of the resistance.

### **Blackwater and the Geneva Convention**

Prince scornfully dismissed the debate on whether armed individuals working for Blackwater could be classified as "unlawful combatants" who are ineligible for protection under the Geneva Convention. "You know, people ask me that all the time, 'Aren't you concerned that you folks aren't covered under the Geneva Convention in [operating] in the likes of Iraq or Afghanistan or Pakistan? And I say, 'Absolutely not,' because these people, they crawled out of the sewer and they have a 1200 AD mentality. They're barbarians. They don't know where Geneva is, let alone that there was a convention there."

It is significant that Prince mentioned his company operating in Pakistan given that Blackwater, the US government and the Pakistan government have all denied Blackwater works in Pakistan.

### **Taking Down the Iraqi Shoe Thrower for the 'Flat-Footed' Secret Service**

Prince noted several high-profile attacks on world leaders in the past year, specifically a woman pushing the Pope at Christmas mass and the attack on Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi, saying there has been a pattern of "some pretty questionable security lately." He then proceeded to describe the feats of his Blackwater forces in protecting dignitaries and diplomats, claiming that one of his men took down the Iraqi journalist, Muntadhar al-Zaidi, who threw his shoes at President Bush in Baghdad in December 2008. Prince referred to al-Zaidi as the "shoe bomber:"

"A little known fact, you know when the shoe bomber in Iraq was throwing his shoes at President Bush, in December 08, we provided diplomatic security, but we had no responsibility for the president's security--that's always the Secret Service that does that. We happened to have a guy in the back of the room and he saw that first shoe go and he drew his weapon, got a sight picture, saw that it was only a shoe, he re-holstered, went forward and took that guy down while the Secret Service was still standing there flat-footed. I have a picture of that--I'm publishing a book, so watch for that later this fall--in which you'll see all the reporters looking, there's my guy taking the shoe thrower down. He didn't shoot him, he just tackled him, even though the guy was committing assault and battery on the president of the United States. I asked a friend of mine who used to run the Secret Service if they had a written report of that and he said the debrief was so bad they did not put it in writing."

While the Secret Service was widely criticized at the time for its apparent inaction during the incident, video of the event clearly showed another Iraqi journalist, not security guards, initially

pulling al-Zaidi to the floor. Almost instantly thereafter, al-Zaidi was swarmed by a gang of various, unidentified security agents.

### **Blackwater's Forward Operating Bases**

Prince went into detail about his company's operations in Afghanistan. Blackwater has been in the country since at least April 2002, when the company was hired by the CIA on a covert contract to provide the Agency with security. Since then, Blackwater has won hundreds of millions of dollars in security, counter-narcotics and training contracts for the State Department, Defense Department and the CIA. The company protects US Ambassador Karl Eikenberry and other senior US officials, guards CIA personnel and trains the Afghan border police. "We built four bases and we staffed them and we run them," Prince said, referring to them as Forward Operating Bases (FOBs). He described them as being in the north, south, east and west of Afghanistan. "Spin Boldak in the south, which is the major drug trans-shipment area, in the east at a place called FOB Lonestar, which is right at the foothills of Tora Bora mountain. In fact if you ski off Tora Bora mountain, you can ski down to our firebase," Prince said, adding that Blackwater also has a base near Herat and another location. FOB Lonestar is approximately 15 miles from the Pakistan border. "Who else has built a [Forward Operating Base] along the main infiltration route for the Taliban and the last known location for Osama bin Laden?" Prince said earlier this year.

### **Blackwater's War on Drugs**

Prince described a Narcotics Interdiction Unit Blackwater started in Afghanistan five years ago that remains active. "It is about a 200 person strike force to go after the big narcotics traffickers, the big cache sites," Prince said. "That unit's had great success. They've taken more than \$3.5 billion worth of heroin out of circulation. We're not going after the farmers, but we're going after the traffickers." He described an operation in July 2009 where Blackwater forces actually called in NATO air strikes on a target during a mission:

"A year ago, July, they did the largest hashish bust in counter-narcotics history, down in the south-east. They went down, they hit five targets that our intel guys put together and they wound up with about 12,000 pounds of heroin. While they were down there, they said, 'You know, these other three sites look good, we should go check them out.' Sure enough they did and they found a cache--262,000 kilograms of hash, which equates to more than a billion dollars street value. And it was an industrialized hash operation, it was much of the hash crop in Helmand province. It was palletized, they'd dug ditches out in the desert, covered it with tarps and the bags of powder were big bags with a brand name on it for the hash brand, palletized, ready to go into containers down to Karachi [Pakistan] and then out to Europe or elsewhere in the world. That raid alone took about \$60 million out of the Taliban's coffers. So, those were good days. When the guys found it, they didn't have enough ammo, enough explosives, to blow it, they couldn't burn it all, so they had to call in multiple air strikes. Of course, you know, each of the NATO countries that came and did the air strikes took credit for finding and destroying the

cache."

### **December 30, 2009 CIA Bombing in Khost**

Prince also addressed the deadly suicide bombing on December 30 at the CIA station at Forward Operating Base Chapman in Khost, Afghanistan. Eight CIA personnel, including two Blackwater operatives, were killed in the bombing, which was carried out by a Jordanian double-agent. Prince was asked by an audience member about the "failure" to prevent that attack. The questioner did not mention that Blackwater was responsible for the security of the CIA officials that day, nor did Prince discuss Blackwater's role that day. Here is what Prince said:

"You know what? It is a tragedy that those guys were killed but if you put it in perspective, the CIA has lost extremely few people since 9/11. We've lost two or three in Afghanistan, before that two or three in Iraq and, I believe, one guy in Somalia--a landmine. So when you compare what Bill Donovan and the OSS did to the Germans and the Japanese, the Italians during World War II--and they lost hundreds and hundreds of people doing very difficult, very dangerous work--it is a tragedy when you lose people, but it is a cost of doing that work. It is essential, you've got to take risks. In that case, they had what appeared to be a very hot asset who had very relevant, very actionable intelligence and he turned out to be a bad guy... That's what the intelligence business is, you can't be assured success all the time. You've got to be willing to take risks. Those are calculated risks but sometimes it goes badly. I hope the Agency doesn't draw back and say, 'Oh, we have to retrench and not do that anymore,' all the rest. No. We need you to double down, go after them harder. That is a cost of doing business. They are there to kill us."

### **Prince to Some NATO Countries in Afghanistan: 'Go Home'**

Prince spoke disparagingly of some unnamed NATO countries with troops in Afghanistan, saying they do not have the will for the fight. "Some of them do and a lot of them don't," he said. "It is such a patchwork of different international commitments as to what some can do and what some can't. A lot of them should just pack it in and go home." Canada, however, received praise from Prince. "The Canadians have lost per capita more than America has in Afghanistan. They are fighting and they are doing it and so if you see a Canadian thank them for that. The politicians at home take heavies for doing that," Prince said. He did not mention the fact that his company was hired by the Canadian government to train its forces.

Prince also described how his private air force (which he recently sold) bailed out a US military unit in trouble in Afghanistan. According to Prince, the unit was fighting the Taliban and was running out of ammo and needed an emergency re-supply. "Because of, probably some procedure written by a lawyer back in Washington, the Air Force was not permitted to drop in an uncertified drop zone... even to the unit that was running out of ammo," Prince said. "So they called and asked if our guys would do it and, of course, they said, 'Yes.' And the cool part of the story is the Army guys put their DZ mark in the drop zone, a big orange panel, on the hood of their hummer and our guys put the first bundle on the hood of that hummer. We don't always get that close, but that time a little too close."

### **Blackwater: Teaching Afghans to Use Toilets**

Prince said his forces train 1300 Afghans every six weeks and described his pride in attending "graduations" of Blackwater-trained Afghans, saying that in six weeks they radically transform the trainees. "You take these officers, these Afghans and it's the first time in their life they've ever been part of something that's first class, that works. The instructors know what they're talking about, they're fed, the water works, there's ammunition for their guns. Everything works," Prince said. "The first few days of training, we have to do 'Intro to Toilet Use' because a lot of these guys have never even seen a flushed toilet before." Prince boasted: "We manage to take folks with a tribal mentality and, just like the Marine Corps does more effectively than anyone else, they take kids from disparate lifestyles across the United States and you throw them into Parris Island and you make them Marines. We try that same mentality there by pushing these guys very hard and, it's funny, I wish I had video to show you of the hilarious jumping jacks. If you take someone that's 25 years old and they've never done a jumping jack in their life--some of the convoluted motions they do it's comical. But the transformation from day one to the end of that program, they're very proud and they're very capable." Prince said that when he was in Afghanistan late last year, "I met with a bunch of generals and they said the Afghans that we train are the most effective fighting force in Afghanistan."

Prince also discussed the Afghan women he says work with Blackwater. "Some of the women we've had, it's amazing," Prince said. "They come in in the morning and they have the burqa on and they transition to their cammies (camouflage uniforms) and I think they enjoy the baton work," he said, adding, "They've been hand-cuffing a little too much on the men."

### **Hurricane Katrina and Humanitarian Mercenaries**

Erik Prince spoke at length about Blackwater's deployment in 2005 in New Orleans during Hurricane Katrina, bragging that his forces "rescued 128 people, sent thousands of meals in there and it worked." Prince boasted of his company's rapid response, saying, "We surged 145 guys in 36 hours from our facility five states away and we beat the Louisiana National Guard to the scene." What Prince failed to mention was that at the time of the disaster, at least 35% of the Louisiana National Guard was deployed in Iraq. One National Guard soldier in New Orleans at the time spoke to Reuters, saying, "They (the Bush administration) care more about Iraq and Afghanistan than here... We are doing the best we can with the resources we have, but almost all of our guys are in Iraq." Much of the National Guard's equipment was in Iraq at the time, including high water vehicles, Humvees, refuelers and generators.

Prince also said that he had a plan to create a massive humanitarian vessel that, with the generous support of major corporations, could have responded to natural disasters, such as earthquakes and tsunamis across the globe. "I thought, man, the military has perfected how to move men and equipment into combat, why can't we do that for the humanitarian side?" Prince said. The ship Prince wanted to use for these missions was an 800 foot container vessel capable of shipping "1700 containers, which would have lined up six and a half miles of humanitarian assistance with another 250 vehicles" onboard. "We could have gotten almost all those boxes donated. It would have been boxes that would have had generator sets from Caterpillar, grain from ADM [Archer Daniels Midland], anti-biotics from pharmaceutical companies, all the stuff you need to do massive humanitarian assistance," Prince said, adding that it "would have had turnkey fuel support, food, surgical, portable surgical hospitals, beds cots, blankets, all the above." Prince says he was going to do the work for free, "on spec," but "instead we got attacked politically and ended up paying tens of millions of dollars in lawyer bills the last few years. It's an unfortunate misuse of resources because a boat like that sure would have been handy for the Haitian people right now."

### **Outing Erik Prince**

Prince also addressed what he described as his outing as a CIA asset working on sensitive US government programs. He has previously blamed Congressional Democrats and the news media for naming him as working on the US assassination program. The US intelligence apparatus "depends heavily on Americans that are not employed by the government to facilitate greater success and access for the intelligence community," Prince said. "It's unprecedented to have people outed by name, especially ones that were running highly classified programs. And as much as the left got animated about Valerie Plame, outing people by name for other very very sensitive programs was unprecedented and definitely threw me under the bus."