

Blackwater founder Erik Prince pitches deployment of US mercenaries to South America

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11 August 2025

The recent visit to Ecuador and Peru by former US Navy SEAL and mercenary contractor Erik Prince is cause for alarm throughout the region.

The billionaire Prince is the founder of Blackwater, an infamous mercenary army with a bloody record of assassinations and human rights violations in Iraq, Afghanistan, Somalia, Haiti and other countries. His purpose in visiting Ecuador and Peru is to train the police and the military in combating the growing upsurge of the masses, as well as providing mercenary soldiers with a license to kill if the situation so requires.

Both countries' governments face the growth of extortionate mafias that control the streets of working-class districts in the cities and mining regions in the Andes. In Peru, it includes cities like Trujillo, El Callao, and Lima. Similarly, in Ecuador, drug trafficking gangs are prevalent in the port city of Guayaquil. These issues, however, have their source in rising social inequality, widespread poverty, and the marginalization of broad layers of workers and youth by the capitalist ruling elite.

It is against this backdrop that Prince, a longtime supporter of Washington's fascist President Trump, traveled to the region in July.

In Quito, President Daniel Noboa and Prince reached a "strategic agreement" to combat drug trafficking and illegal fishing. The establishment of a US military base in Ecuador is also under consideration.

Prince ostensibly visited Peru at the invitation of Hernando de Soto, a right-wing economist and former advisor to dictatorial regime of President Alberto Fujimori. Founder of the neo-liberal think tank Institute of Liberty and Democracy (ILD), which purports to fight regulation and to secure property rights for micro and medium size enterprises (MYPES), de Soto was among the first recipients of funding from the National Endowment for Democracy, which was set up under the Reagan administration to carry out overtly the kind of backing previously provided by the CIA

covertly.

Prince's presence in Peru was allegedly to intervene in the conflict involving informal mining based upon de Soto's agenda. This is a lie. His expertise is not in the regulation of mining activity, but in training police and army elements, as well as in deploying mercenaries, to conduct mass repression and assassinations. This real agenda is aimed not only at repressing the recent violence involving informal miners, like the 13 miners massacred recently in Pataz, a mining region in the northern Andes. Its purpose goes far beyond that.

Since early 2023, Peru has seen a rise in class struggle, driven by ever widening social inequality and rampant government corruption that leaves the bourgeoisie without democratic options to rule. Consequently, the government is increasingly relying on the police and military for control. Prince offers specialized training in tactics to meet this growing mass discontent with deadly force.

In late July, artisanal and informal miners blockaded the main highway that carries minerals from the mines in the southern Andean region. This action was just the beginning of their protest. Unions and working-class organizations have announced a national general strike that could significantly challenge the government.

El Comercio mentions Prince is the "the founder of the controversial Blackwater (now known as Academi), a company that at one time became the largest contractor of security personnel for the US State Department, securing contracts from 2001 to 2009. However, the company was sold in 2010 following a scandal that resulted in the deaths of 17 civilians in Baghdad."

Blackwater mercenaries escorting US diplomats passing by a public square in Baghdad launched an unprovoked attack using automatic weapons and grenades that left 17 dead, including a 9-year-old boy.

It took three years of continuous struggle by families of the victims for the courts to declare four mercenaries guilty.

Then, President Trump pardoned them in 2020.

Trump's pardon sparked a global debate over several issues: (1) the impunity of mercenaries in war zones; (2) the legal vacuum in which private military companies operate; and (3) objections from the United Nations, human rights organizations, and the Iraqi government which deemed the pardons an affront to justice and the rule of law.

But these complaints did not stop Blackwater, along with its successor companies, from receiving lucrative contracts worth billions of dollars from the US government and private entities between 2001 and 2020. Prince's operations have included the deployment of military contractors (mercenaries) not only in Iraq and Afghanistan, but also in the United Arab Emirates, Libya, Somalia, South Sudan, Congo (DRC) and Yemen.

In 2009, the WWS reported on Prince mercenaries' assassinations in Iraq and Afghanistan: "[Bush] hired Blackwater USA to carry out assassinations of alleged Al Qaeda operatives." Hiring Blackwater continued under the Obama administration.

The WWS wrote:

In spite of Blackwater's well-established record of indiscriminate killings of Iraqi civilians, the Obama administration has retained its services in Afghanistan, where a new report reveals that Blackwater has been contracted to work with the unmanned Predator drones that carry out assassinations and terrorize villages in eastern and southern Afghanistan and the border regions of Pakistan.

In the interview with *El Comercio*, Prince describes his experience in Haiti:

In the case of Haiti, the government has asked us to help them confront the gangs because they have a terrible problem: the gangs have taken over 90 percent of Port-au-Prince. This is how we work with and through the Haitian police, giving them the tools and capacity to combat gangs more effectively. In Haiti, they don't just kill police officers; they eat them. It has truly been a terrible situation, and little by little, we are turning it around.

Among Prince's mercenaries were 150 of Haitian origin who used explosive drones. The result was 300 dead and 400

wounded. All of Prince's operations have a common denominator: a lack of transparency, the excessive use of lethal weapons, and the violation of sovereignty.

Prince is a close political ally of Trump, who appointed the mercenary chief's sister as his secretary of education in his first administration. His attempt to drum up business for his mercenary forces in South America could well serve as the point of the spear for a broader US military intervention in the region, which Washington views as a strategic battleground in its drive toward war with China.

China is the biggest trading partner for South America and a major investor in Peruvian infrastructure and mining, with recent road blockades by miners directly conflicting with Chinese mining interests. Prince could thus attempt to profit from both sides of the geopolitical confrontation, while serving the interests of Peru's ruling capitalist oligarchy and foreign capital by unleashing violence against a restive working class.

Recently, *Infobae* published an article titled: "Africa: China is investing in its own private security companies to protect its interests in Africa". *Infobae* reports:

As a result of this phenomenon, hybrid companies have emerged, such as China Overseas Security Services, registered in the United Kingdom as a "Chinese-controlled company utilizing Western security experts," or Frontier Services Group, created by Erik Prince, a former US SEAL and founder of Blackwater. The latter is a subsidiary of the China International Trust Investment Corporation (CITIC), one of the largest conglomerates in the Asian giant.



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