

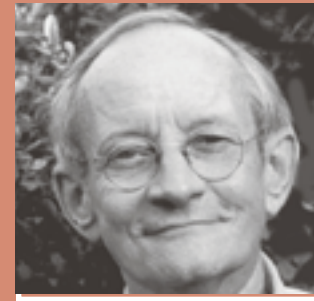
# CULTURE

April 6 — 12, 2007

music — 17



poetry — 17



calendar — 19



## Author tracks U.S. secret army

By Shay Totten  
*Vermont Guardian*

As journalist Jeremy Scahill watched the U.S. armed forces lay waste to the city of Fallujah in Iraq, he wondered to himself why such a strong response was prompted by the death of four mercenary soldiers.

"I watched the 37,000 air strikes on that city with utter horror," said Scahill. "How would the lives of four private soldiers be worth the death of an entire city and that's when I first heard of Blackwater, and then just months later I saw them openly operating on the streets of New Orleans."

Those were the two major incidents that made Scahill think to himself that the company deserved some scrutiny.

What he found was a private company with deep connections with the Christian Right, and with the Bush administration.

"It's a company that has made its fortunes on incredible suffering, war, misery, and violence," said Scahill.

The result is *Blackwater: The Rise of the World's Most Powerful Mercenary Army*, an expose of the company, its principals, and the work it has been called upon to do by various departments of the U.S. government, and what its plans are for the future.

Scahill will be in Burlington April 13 at the Unitarian Church as part of 35-city tour for the book. He will also take part in a limited seating discussion to benefit the Peace & Justice Center's Peace & Human Rights Project on April 14.

Key to Scahill's investigation is the growing role Blackwater, and other mercenary companies, are taking in the so-called "war on terror" and the Iraq War.

There are about 100,000 private contractors in Iraq, and almost half of them — 48,000 — are private mercenaries.

"We have tens of thousands in the country and in some sort of a combat or military capacity and this is a new development," said Scahill.

The concept of outsourcing aspects of the military to private companies began under Pres. George H. W. Bush in the early 1990s, and his defense secretary at the time — Dick Cheney.

"Dick Cheney commissioned a study from a division of Halliburton, ironically, and the study was aimed to do was to find every possible way to outsource the military bureaucracy," said Scahill.

After Bush lost to Bill Clinton, Cheney took a job with Halliburton only to return to the White House in 2000 and the current Bush administration began "the most radical privatization of our government. In fact, the day before 9/11 [Defense Secretary Donald] Rumsfeld declared war on the Pentagon bureaucracy ... and began to increase the use of private forces in special operations."

### The rise of Blackwater

A decade ago, Blackwater USA did not exist. They officially incorporated in 1996 and began building up its infrastructure in 1997 in Moyock, NC.

The company was founded by Erik Prince, a former Navy SEAL. He grew up in Michigan, and heir to the Prince Corporation, a maker of map lamps, consoles with ashtrays, cup and change holders, and a lighted car sun visor, as well as a programmable garage door opener.

"Its vision was to provide training services for federal and local training and they also had a vision to anticipate government outsourcing, and each year since then there has been an annual tragedy that has resulted in profits for Blackwater," Scahill said.

After the shooting at Columbine High School, Blackwater built a mock high school on its North Carolina property and began to train local, state, and federal law enforcement agents on how to deal with school violence.

In 2000, when the U.S.S. Cole was attacked in Yemen, Blackwater secured a \$35 million contract to train soldiers on how to defend against such an attack.

Then, came 9/11 and the Iraq War, which Scahill estimates kicked off a bonanza of \$750 million in contracts for private mercenary companies. Blackwater has received some of the most plum, and secretive, contracts including providing all security forces for diplomats traveling in Iraq, including members of Congress.

"Jeremy Scahill's exposé of the Blackwater mercenary firm forcefully demonstrates the grave dangers of outsourcing the government's monopoly on the use of force."  
—JOSEPH WILSON, former U.S. Ambassador to Iraq



# BLACKWATER

THE RISE OF THE  
WORLD'S MOST  
POWERFUL  
MERCENARY ARMY

JEREMY SCAHILL



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In addition, Blackwater was hired to provide the security force for Paul Bremer, who oversaw early reconstruction efforts in Iraq.

Blackwater is not the only private mercenary company at work in Iraq, nor is it the largest in the world, said Scahill.

“They are not the largest or the most profitable, but they have the closest proximity to the Bush administration and are key in the operations that are part of the war on terror,” said Scahill.

### Shining a light

Scahill hopes his book opens the eyes of the public, the media, and Congress about the lack of oversight and accountability many of these multi-million dollar contracts include. He also worries that it sets a standard that allows any U.S. president the ability to fund and execute a war with private soldiers, rather than public soldiers.

“The most important thing to take away from this system is that Pres. George H. W. Bush when he invaded Iraq in the 1990s built a coalition of nations to participate with the United States,” said Scahill. “This president failed to build a coalition of the willing, and has replaced it with a coalition of the

billing, and private mercenary armies have taken the place of nation states.”

And, many of the men who joining Blackwater ranks are soldiers whose own governments opposed the invasion of Iraq, or governments who have since pulled their troops out of the country. They have also taken on soldiers from countries with poor human rights records, or who use military forces to suppress popular uprisings.

In at least one instance, Scahill was able to show that Blackwater forces actually commanded active-duty military.

Scahill believes Pres. Bush could rely more heavily on private soldiers, rather than U.S. military, if Congress begins to restrict use of money for the war. Current legislation would not preclude, Scahill argues, from Bush fulfilling his “surge” or troop strength beyond any timetable set by Democratic-backed legislation with private soldiers.

And, Scahill adds, the Bush administration has gained from the use of private armies. To date, 780 mercenary soldiers have been killed and 7,600 wounded — figures that are not included in the number of soldiers killed in Iraq that the public hears.



“If this model is allowed to proceed, and you have half of the occupation force operating under no real oversight and with no effective laws, and we allow presidents to wage wars with a shadow army, then we’re at a real crisis for democracy and world stability,” Scahill adds.

And, with National Guard troop strength stretched thin, Blackwater is now stepping in domestically in hopes of providing domestic disaster response. They are also opening up a new operation at a former military facility in Illinois, and are hoping to build a third facility in California.

And, they are lobbying to use its surveillance blimps to monitor the U.S./Mexico border and to train border patrol agents.

“This president failed to build a coalition of the willing, and has replaced it with a coalition of the billing.”

— Jeremy Scahill

### Concerns in Congress

Rep. Peter Welch, D-VT, who is going to be traveling to Iraq and Afghanistan later this month, is concerned about the growing use of private contractors, and was not impressed with the Blackwater officials who testified before the House Government Oversight and Reform Committee, of which he is a member.

“First of all, the private contract issue is a huge taxpayer rip-off; they are getting paid hundreds of thousand of dollars per employee doing the same work our men and women in the military are getting pennies and dimes for,” said Welch.

Welch said a key concern is how the families of killed Blackwater employees are treated. Many have not been given full information about the deaths of their loved ones, as they would if the person had served in the U.S. military.

“It’s the perfect storm of abuse,

really,” said Welch. “In some cases, you have no-bid or rip-off terms in the contract, and then you have no accountability, and you’re outsourcing sacrifice,” said Welch.

Welch said he, too, is concerned that Bush may try to use more private mercenaries if Congress puts limits on U.S. troop levels, but he’s confident that the Democratic-led Congress will pay more attention to this issue than the previous Congress.

For more information about the free April 13 event, call 863-2345.

For more information about the limited seating discussion with Jeremy Scahill — *Beyond Blackwater: Journalism, Justice, and Peace* — from 9-11 a.m. on April 14 at the Peace & Justice Center in Burlington, call 863-2345 ext. 3. Tickets are \$15-\$20 and benefit the Peace & Justice Center’s Peace and Human Rights Project. Space is limited.

### Featured Non-Profit

**Darfur**

**How to help stop the Genocide:**

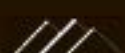
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