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## Western Mercenaries in Ukraine?

By Ulson Gunnar

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Recent rumors of notorious Blackwater US mercenaries operating inside of Ukraine invoked a plausible narrative so convincing even news outlets across the West began echoing it.

UK's Daily Mail article "Has Blackwater been deployed to Ukraine? Notorious U.S. mercenaries 'seen on the streets of flashpoint city' as Russia claims 300 hired guns have arrived in country" stated "a Russian diplomat in Kiev told the Interfax news agency on Wednesday that 300 employees of private security companies had arrived there."

The article continued by stating, "*These are soldiers of fortune proficient in combat operations. Most of them had operated under private contracts in Iraq, Afghanistan and other states,*" the source said. Interfax reported that the diplomat did not disclose the nationalities of the mercenaries but said, '*Most of them come from the United States*'."

An accompanying video showed unidentified armed men running through the streets of the eastern Ukrainian city of Donetsk, however it appeared unrelated to the claims made by the Russian diplomat.

## The Murky Tracks Left by US Mercenaries

The notoriety of US private contractor Blackwater, also known as Xe, and more recently Academi, has exposed the usually shadowy nature of modern mercenaries. Mercenaries have been used all throughout history, particularly by empires who lacked the manpower necessary within their own military ranks to carry out their adventures abroad, but had the cash to pay those who did.

More recently in Iraq, this was also the case, where the United States lacked the necessary manpower to provide security for the exceedingly large number of administrators they had deployed in the region. Primarily, Blackwater provided security for the US State Department and other officials building up the “new” Iraq as the US saw fit.

The scale on which Blackwater operated made it impossible to keep their role in the war hidden from the public. In September of 2007, Blackwater mercenaries opened fire killing 11 Iraqi civilians. Also during that year, a number of other incidents occurred also involving Blackwater. While the company became the scapegoat for Western contractors operating in Iraq, other news reports, such as the New York Times article “Use of Contractors Added to War’s Chaos in Iraq” and NBC’s “Contractors accused of firing on civilians, GIs” told a troubling tale in which massive numbers of hired mercenaries from many companies were working and killing inside of Iraq with little or no oversight, and zero accountability.

The NBC piece in particular states, *“there are now nearly as many private contractors in Iraq as there are U.S. soldiers — and a large percentage of them are private security guards equipped with automatic weapons, body armor, helicopters and bullet-proof trucks.”*

The article also reports, “they operate with little or no supervision, accountable only to the firms employing them. And as the country has plummeted toward anarchy and civil war, this private army has been accused of indiscriminately firing at American and Iraqi troops, and of shooting to death an unknown number of Iraqi citizens who got too close to their heavily armed convoys.”

NBC also adds, *“not one has faced charges or prosecution.”*

Tellingly, the report states, *“there is great confusion among legal experts and military officials about what laws — if any — apply to Americans in this force of at least 48,000.”*

What the US has created in Iraq is essentially a shadowy mercenary force, tens of thousands strong, that is heavily armed, well funded, has unlimited access and limitless impunity to carry out whatever its mission may require, and whatever else it may feel like doing along the way.

It is difficult to imagine something more disturbingly dangerous than such a force. Beyond Iraq, US military contractors have found themselves on the shores of Somalia. Blackwater founder Erik Prince, in an AP article titled, “Blackwater founder secretly backing Somali militia,” was said to be involved in “a multimillion-dollar program financed by several Arab countries, including the United Arab Emirates, to mobilize some 2,000 Somali recruits to fight pirates who are terrorizing the African coast.”

Beyond Iraq and Somalia, it was suggested that private mercenaries were also involved in the destabilization of Syria backing foreign militants who have been invading the country and waging war for now 3 years. CIA agents have been admittedly working along Syria's borders directing arms and other gear into the hands of these militants, as confirmed by the New York Times. And these weapons were being provided by the very same interests that had hired Prince to raise armies in Somalia. Would they also be interested in hiring Prince, or someone else like him, to raise armies to carry the arms they had so generously flooded Syrian territory with?

### **The Question of Western Mercenaries in Ukraine**

And if mercenaries are turning up across every battlefield the US demarcates around the world, why would Ukraine be any different? Already it is admitted that at least some of the leading factions of the Euromaidan protests were armed, thus driving out the government in Kiev. The West, including the United States has made it abundantly clear that they wholly back the new regime that has now taken over. Why wouldn't US mercenaries be in Ukraine arming, training, and enhancing the capabilities of armed militants they will need to continue their favored regime's consolidation of power?

It is a question that needs to be both asked, and carefully answered. For the Russians, it would be essential to find evidence of US mercenary activity inside of Ukraine, as well as the newly independent region of Crimea. Exposing such forces working along side the already increasingly unsavory elements leading the new regime in Kiev would attach to them the well-deserved taint US mercenaries have earned through their misdeeds in Iraq, Afghanistan, and beyond.

Experience garnered throughout the fighting in Syria can be utilized within Ukraine regarding how these foreign forces mesh with Ukrainian militants now being prepared for potential confrontations both within Crimea, and with Russia directly.

Finally, it should be remembered that within the US itself, politicians have called openly for both the sending of arms and "advisers" to aid the new Ukrainian regime, including US Senator John McCain (Republican-Arizona) who stated in frank terms, *"they only have a few thousand combat troops and would be overwhelmed by the Russians if it came to that. One of their urgent requests is to have us supply them with weapons."*

The supplying of the regime with weapons and advisers would be the job of the CIA and perhaps military contractors. They may be on their way to Ukraine, along with aid the Pentagon has already officially approved, or they may be sent eventually.

The specter of Western mercenaries hangs over Ukraine, threatening to sow the same sort of chaos, death, and injustice seen everywhere else they carry out their dark deeds. For Ukrainians on either side of the conflict, especially those supporting the current regime, they must ask themselves carefully exactly what it is they really want, and what price they are willing to pay to obtain it... with the burning carnage of Iraq, Syria, Afghanistan in clear hindsight.