

SCAHILL: PRINCE IS CONDUCTING GRAYMAIL

Jeremy Scahill expands the explanation he gave Rachel Maddow last night about what Erik Prince was doing with the Vanity Fair article admitting his role in the CIA (primarily) operations.

The in-depth *Vanity Fair* profile of the infamous owner of Blackwater, Erik Prince, is remarkable on many levels—not least among them that Prince appeared to give the story’s author, former CIA lawyer Adam Ciralsky, unprecedented access to information about sensitive, classified and lethal operations not only of Prince’s forces, but Prince himself. In the article, Prince is revealed not just as owner of a company that covertly provided contractors to the CIA for drone bombings and targeted assassinations, but as an actual CIA asset himself. While the story appears to be simply a profile of Prince, it might actually be the world’s most famous mercenary’s insurance policy against future criminal prosecution. The term of art for what Prince appears to be doing in the VF interview is graymail: a legal tactic that has been used for years by intelligence operatives or assets who are facing prosecution or fear they soon will be. In short, these operatives or assets threaten to reveal details of sensitive or classified operations in order to ward off indictments or criminal charges, based on the belief that the government would not want these details revealed.

I’m most interested, though, in what Scahill says about the JSOC side of this.

While much of the focus in the *Vanity Fair* story was on Prince's work with the CIA, the story also confirmed that Blackwater has an ongoing relationship with the US Special Forces, helping plan missions and providing air support. As *The Nation* reported, Blackwater has for years been working on a classified contract with the Joint Special Operations Command in a drone bombing campaign in Pakistan, as well as planning snatch-and-grab missions and targeted assassinations. **Part of what may be happening behind closed doors is that the CIA is, to an extent, cutting Blackwater and Prince off. But, as sources have told *The Nation*, the company remains a central player in US Special Forces operations in Pakistan and Afghanistan.**[my emphasis]

Those JSOC issues, of course, would be far more inflammatory than the stuff he already revealed about the CIA.

But what I'm most interested in is who the target of this threat is: yes, Blackwater's role is scandalous (and might make Leon Panetta regret revealing Blackwater to Congress). But there are a whole lot of people who are more worried about what Prince would have to say than Panetta.