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## Blackwater: The Rise of the World's Most Powerful Mercenary Army

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effective tactics, techniques, and procedures against the mujahideen. Russia's trial-and-error efforts there could prove important to Western audiences. A good book on this subject is therefore something very much to be desired.

Unfortunately, Yossef Bodansky's *Chechen Jihad* is not that book. The author is a prolific writer on terrorism in general and its radical Islamic variant in particular, but his viewpoint lacks perspective and subtlety. Bodansky's treatment of the Chechen conflict follows his usual pattern of offering a detailed, chronological narrative, veering into a "you are there" account, devoid of any real analysis. Moreover, the author boasts of many unnamed sources in Moscow's security and intelligence agencies that have given him the "real" story to which others are not privy. The reader is bluntly told that all is to be taken on faith, with no endnotes, as is customary in Bodansky's writings, so as to protect his sources. It is, therefore, impossible to determine where the author gets his material or what its validity may be. In this connection, Bodansky's silence on many controversies relating to Russian intelligence in its struggle with the mujahideen is both revealing and troubling.

In spite of all this, however, a close examination by anyone well versed in the subject will reveal that most of Bodansky's information is in fact gleaned not from clandestine meetings in dark alleys but from (translated) press accounts (it appears that Bodansky knows none of the relevant languages). In other words, the author is relying on practices associated with sensationalist journalism, not serious analysis, much less scholarship.

*Chechen Jihad* is best left on the shelf; it

has nothing of substance to offer serious students of al-Qa'ida and terrorism.

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Scahill, Jeremy. *Blackwater: The Rise of the World's Most Powerful Mercenary Army*. New York: Nation Books, 2007. 480pp. \$26.95

Jeremy Scahill, an investigative journalist for *The Nation*, takes on Blackwater and the privatization of war and security with a vengeance. His fervor and intensity, no doubt prized characteristics in the world of investigative journalism, are on display here in spades. Scahill deconstructs the legal, political, and moral issues that are interwoven with the use of private security contractors like Blackwater Lodge & Training Center, Inc., in admirable fashion, pointing out the substantial and vexing issues that are presented by corporations engaging in activities formerly and traditionally reserved for the armed forces of nation-states. Regrettably, however, his passion generates stray voltage as his manuscript degenerates into an attack on the Bush administration's Iraq war policy, and further regresses into an assault on the Bush administration generally, political conservatism, and the Christian right. By the final pages, Scahill's vitriol discredits him and takes the wind out of the sails of any reasonable argument he otherwise presents regarding the dangers posed by Blackwater and its sister companies. This is too bad, because the author's meticulous research and willingness to take on an administration patsy are commendable and necessary.

A cursory review of Scahill's online postings, blogs, and congressional testimony reveals a clear and evident bias. But hardly any reasonable military professional would argue that the actions of companies like Blackwater have not harmed the coalition forces' counterinsurgency effort in Iraq. Downstream and third-order effects of these sometimes reckless and frequently arrogant mercenaries are not part of the calculation—they get paid for keeping the principal alive and unharmed. On the other hand, Scahill's rejection of private security companies as a *concept* leaves little room for the possibility that companies like Blackwater could be useful in the national security apparatus if future administrations and Congress could muster the political will to control them under an effective and feasible system of accountability. Moreover, while there is plenty to condemn about Blackwater's legacy, tactics, and management, that is only half of Scahill's story. That Blackwater founder Erik Prince is a deeply and evidently religious conservative is *prima facie* evidence, according to Scahill, that he and his business is or should be thoroughly discredited.

Finally, Scahill laments that Blackwater has been able to recruit seasoned intelligence and operational professionals, such as Cofer Black, without acknowledging that it is a common practice for corporations to recruit talent from the government, and vice versa. He paints Black, in particular, as a sellout, when Black's hiring by Blackwater only follows the typical pattern of Washington professionals across many vocations. Faulting his decision to move to the private sector is shallow and naive.

The bottom line on *Blackwater* is that it is worth reading. The book is a useful

medium to take stock of the myriad issues that confront policy makers on this controversial subject. Yet Scahill's antipathy toward all things Bush, Republican, and the Christian right ultimately takes over. Coupled with untidy organization and the author's tendency to repeat himself, this renders his work less constructive and credible than it otherwise might have been.

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Slim, Hugo. *Killing Civilians: Method, Madness, and Morality in War*. New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 2008. 300pp. \$29.95

Hugo Slim has written a remarkable and disturbing book that everyone concerned with the safety of "civilians" should read—and then join the public debate about protecting them. Slim states that while the word "civilian" has long been an ambiguous concept, it is one we must do more to support because it is grounded in basic Western values. He encourages wide public discussion about defending and expanding the civilian concept in an age of terrorism, failing states, and ethnic strife. He has fulfilled this purpose admirably, with a deep and wide breadth of scholarship that should spark serious debate at all levels.

This book is remarkable because the author, who has worked in humanitarian assistance for more than twenty years, tells of the horrendous evil that men do with a dispassionate tone that allows both the deadly logic of civilian killing and its terrible results to seep into the reader's mind. It is disturbing. This