**Headline:** What Are Erik Prince’s Plans for the Second Trump Administration?

**Teaser:** New plans from Erik Prince, a persistent figure in America’s private military complex, signal a wider push to privatize government functions in Trump’s second term.

By John P. Ruehl

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**Source:** Independent Media Institute

**Credit Line:** *This article was produced by* [*Economy for All*](https://independentmediainstitute.org/economy-for-all/)*, a project of the Independent Media Institute.*

**Tags:** Politics, Central America/El Salvador, Trump, North America/United States of America, Economy, Europe/Russia, Middle East/Iraq, Middle East/United Arab Emirates, Asia/China, South America/Ecuador, South America/Colombia, North America/Haiti, South America/Venezuela, Europe/France, Europe/United Kingdom, Africa/Democratic Republic of the Congo, Africa/Rwanda, Africa/Libya, Middle East/Yemen, Middle East/Afghanistan, Middle East/Israel, Middle East/Palestine, News, Time-Sensitive, Opinion

**[Article Body:]**

The [deportation case](https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/immigration/judge-abrego-garcia-case-indicates-weighing-contempt-proceedings-trump-rcna201359) of Maryland resident and Salvadoran national Kilmar Abrego Garcia has drawn major attention to the practice of [sending migrants](https://www.cnn.com/2025/04/09/politics/deportees-el-salvador-prison-trump) to El Salvador for detention. One man looking to capitalize on this trend is Erik Prince, the former CEO of the private military company (PMC) Blackwater.

In a plan that has caught the interest of Salvadoran President Nayib Bukele and President Donald Trump, Prince [has proposed](https://www.politico.com/news/2025/04/11/military-contractors-prison-plan-detained-immigrants-erik-prince-00287208) deporting undocumented migrants through his new venture, 2USV, on a fleet of private aircraft. A “Treaty of Cession” would designate part of El Salvador’s Center for the Confinement of Terrorism (CECOT) prison as U.S. territory, and the transfer of “a prisoner to such a facility would not be an Extradition nor a Deportation,” according to a Politico article. The prison complex, which Prince previously [toured in August 2024](https://elsalvadorinenglish.com/2024/08/19/president-bukele-holds-meeting-with-founder-of-blackwater/), would then be leased back to El Salvador to run, and the U.S. prison standards would not apply to it, similar to Guantanamo Bay.

If the U.S. had a counterpart to [Yevgeny Prigozhin](https://www.newamerica.org/future-security/reports/decoding-wagner-group-analyzing-role-private-military-security-contractors-russian-proxy-warfare/tracing-wagners-roots/), the late architect of Russia’s modern PMC network, it is Erik Prince. Relentlessly entrepreneurial, Prince became a prominent player in Washington during the Bush and first Trump administrations, though he was mostly sidelined during the Obama and Biden years. He now returns to Washington’s inner circle seeking to increase his role again, having visited the White House [shortly after Trump’s inauguration](https://www.cnn.com/2025/03/13/politics/erik-prince-return-maneuvered-inside-trump-orbit/index.html) in January 2025 and serving [as a character witness](https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2025/mar/16/erik-prince-trump-immigration-enforcement) during the confirmation hearing for Director of National Intelligence Tulsi Gabbard.

As a hugely influential figure across the American PMC ecosystem, Prince’s Salvadoran pitch is one of many ambitious and controversial ventures he’s pursued. But his track record is uneven, with many proposals never materializing, and those that do often bring intense scrutiny.

**Prince and Previous Administrations**

Erik Prince first rose to prominence after founding the PMC Blackwater [in 1997](https://silentprofessionals.org/blackwater/), initially offering training services to police and military personnel. After 9/11, Blackwater [became a central player](https://americanreformer.org/2024/09/a-man-for-our-times/) in the war on terror, expanding into armed security, logistics, transportation, and working with [CIA assassination teams](https://www.thenation.com/article/archive/blackwaters-new-sugar-daddy-obama-administration/).

The company’s rise was accompanied by controversy. In [2006](https://www.newsweek.com/blackwater-soaked-103437), its contractors allegedly disarmed and held U.S. soldiers at gunpoint in Iraq. [A year later](https://www.nytimes.com/2014/10/23/us/blackwater-verdict.html), Blackwater guards killed 17 civilians in Baghdad’s Nisour Square, causing global outrage. Prince and his allies [argued the company](https://americanreformer.org/2024/09/a-man-for-our-times/) was scapegoated for a chaotic war effort, while [WikiLeaks files](https://www.ebsco.com/research-starters/military-history-and-science/wikileaks-iraq-war-documents) showed similar incidents with U.S. military members. Following these incidents involving the company, its reputation was severely damaged. Iraq revoked its license in 2007, and though the Obama administration briefly [continued working](https://www.thenation.com/article/archive/blackwaters-new-sugar-daddy-obama-administration/) with Prince, mounting scrutiny forced the [severing of ties](https://www.wsj.com/articles/blackwater8217s-founder-blames-us-for-its-troubles-1384781453).

Erik Prince nonetheless remained active abroad. After selling Blackwater in 2010, he moved to Abu Dhabi, where he helped create a presidential guard for the United Arab Emirates’ (UAE) royal family. Though [later marginalized](https://theintercept.com/2019/05/03/erik-prince-trump-uae-project-veritas/) amid media concerns and questions over funds, Prince remained an influential adviser in expanding the UAE’s PMC operations in [Yemen](https://greydynamics.com/fortune-favors-the-desert-sons-uae-mercenaries-in-yemen-and-libya/), [Somalia](https://www.dailysabah.com/op-ed/2018/04/19/uae-committed-an-act-of-piracy-in-somalia), and [Libya](https://apnews.com/general-news-00616a9a949726d8ed593f9a07dc53a3).

[In 2014](https://www.gsb.stanford.edu/faculty-research/case-studies/frontier-services-group-building-pan-african-logistics-provider), Prince also launched the Hong Kong-based Frontier Services Group (FSG), evolving from a Bermuda-registered shell. The company [focused on](https://warontherocks.com/2023/12/chinese-private-security-companies-neither-blackwater-nor-the-wagner-group/) logistics and security support for Chinese firms involved in projects across Africa under China’s Belt and Road Initiative.

He emerged from the American political wilderness in [2015](https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2025/mar/16/erik-prince-trump-immigration-enforcement) as a vocal supporter and donor to Trump’s election campaign. His sister, Betsy DeVos, was later appointed secretary of education. [In 2017](https://www.fastcompany.com/90233994/how-a-secret-seychelles-meeting-signaled-the-uae-pull-in-trump-d-c), Prince reportedly participated in a secretive meeting in the Seychelles to set up a backchannel between U.S. and Russian officials. He continued pitching unconventional proposals throughout Trump’s term, with Trump [pardoning four Blackwater contractors](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/dec/23/trump-pardons-blackwater-contractors-jailed-for-massacre-of-iraq-civilians) convicted in the 2007 massacre in 2020. The incoming Biden administration subsequently [distanced itself](https://nypost.com/2021/08/26/erik-prince-hits-back-at-biden-says-blackwater-contractors-rescued-him/) from Prince and his network.

**Latin America**

Now, with a more assertive Trump administration back in office, Erik Prince is aligning new business proposals with U.S. policy goals and those of receptive foreign leaders. In March 2025, he traveled to Ecuador and [announced plans](https://www.seafoodsource.com/news/supply-trade/ecuador-announces-partnership-with-notorious-us-defense-contractor-erik-prince) to combat organized crime and illegal fishing in coordination with President Daniel Noboa, who was reelected in April, [showing openness](https://www.cnn.com/2025/04/15/world/video/daniel-noboa-ecuador-president-us-military-digvid) of the country to amend its constitution and permit the deployment of U.S. troops to fight criminal groups.

Prince’s approach taps into a [consistent Washington view](https://www.dhs.gov/archive/news/2019/10/17/trump-administration-announces-resumption-foreign-aid-central-american-countries?utm_source=chatgpt.com) that stabilizing Latin America will reduce migration pressure on the U.S. border. Trump appears open to this, but the legacy of American intervention in the region from the Monroe Doctrine onward has [often created more instability](https://irregularwarfarecenter.org/publications/perspectives/american-irregular-warfare-in-latin-america/) than it resolved. Whether private contractors can deliver real stability or simply serve short-term strategic aims remains unclear.

Trump and Prince also see PMCs as useful tools in destabilizing governments deemed hostile to U.S. interests. [In 2019](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/4/30/blackwater-founders-plan-for-mercenaries-in-venezuela-report), Prince pitched a plan to overthrow Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro using mercenaries. The following year, [Operation Gideon](https://www.venezuelablog.org/demystifying-failed-silvercorp-operation/)—a failed coup attempt partly involving Florida-based PMC Silvercorp USA—led to the capture of several former U.S. servicemen by Venezuelan forces, though most fighters were Latin American, reflecting common American PMC sourcing practices.

Though the operation failed, another PMC-based operation proved more consequential soon after. [In 2021](https://theintercept.com/2021/07/26/colombian-mercenaries-haiti-jovenel-moise-assassination/), mostly Colombian mercenaries [hired](https://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-57762246) by the Florida-based company CTU were implicated in the assassination of Haitian President Jovenel Moïse in the capital Port-au-Prince. The operation required minimal military resources but had a major political fallout, triggering a power vacuum and rising gang violence.

Prince [was not tied to Operation Gideon](https://www.vice.com/en/article/we-just-really-want-them-back-families-of-americans-captured-in-failed-venezuela-coup-say-they-were-duped/) or the 2021 Haiti operation, but in 2024, following Venezuela’s disputed July election, Prince [began supporting](https://www.france24.com/en/live-news/20240924-blackwater-founder-probed-by-venezuela-over-anti-maduro-campaign) a new opposition movement called Ya Casi Venezuela. While its goals remain opaque, Prince’s involvement suggests plans are once again underway in Caracas.

**Further Abroad**

Prince is also looking further abroad, building on years of groundwork. [In 2023](https://inkstickmedia.com/an-american-mercenary-resurfaces-in-the-democratic-republic-of-the-congo/), he reportedly sought to deploy 2,500 Latin American personnel to the northern Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) to halt rebel advances and protect mining areas, part of a UAE-DRC deal flagged in a UN report on sanctions violations.

[In 2025](https://www.theafricareport.com/381915/erik-prince-returns-to-the-drc-amid-us-mineral-security-push/), he struck a deal with the DRC government for “tightening tax collection and cracking down on cross-border smuggling—particularly in the copper and cobalt-rich south,” according to an April article in the African Report. These actions will help secure and regulate the region’s mineral sector and align with U.S. efforts to counter Chinese influence in the global minerals race—a far cry from Prince’s past dealings with Chinese entities in Africa. The situation remains volatile, with Russian PMCs [long embedded in the DRC](https://www.globalsourcepartners.com/posts/russian-mercenaries-in-the-congo/teaser) and Romanian mercenaries [recently caught in the fighting](https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c9d591ldq46o).

PMCs have [accrued significant power](https://braveneweurope.com/john-p-ruehl-private-military-companies-continue-to-expand-in-africa) in Africa in recent years, with Russian mercenaries helping push the French military out of the Sahel in [2022-2023](https://www.politico.eu/article/france-africa-russia-emmanuel-macron-vladimir-putin-mali-central-african-republic-burkina-faso/). With Trump back in office, Prince is positioning his approach as a quieter alternative to hard power, with the DRC as a possible testing ground. His move coincides with the [Trump administration’s efforts](https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/us-pushing-congo-rwanda-peace-accord-accompanied-by-bilateral-minerals-deals-2025-05-01/) to broker peace between the DRC and Rwanda to stabilize the region for mineral extraction.

Prince has also floated a proposal [to take on Houthi rebels](https://www.cnn.com/2025/03/13/politics/erik-prince-return-maneuvered-inside-trump-orbit/index.html) in Yemen, currently targeted by British, American, and Israeli strikes. He has also been involved in Israel since shortly after the October 7, 2023, attacks. One shelved proposal called for [flooding Hamas tunnels](https://en.globes.co.il/en/article-blackwater-founder-us-military-aid-to-israel-must-end-1001499354) in Gaza. While never executed, the initiative has inspired proposals in Gaza from other entities, including the February 2025 announcement that U.S. PMC UG Solutions and another firm [will manage the strip’s Netzarim Corridor](https://popularresistance.org/erik-prince-smells-blood-in-gaza-and-hes-ready-to-cash-in/), [“](https://popularresistance.org/erik-prince-smells-blood-in-gaza-and-hes-ready-to-cash-in/)a checkpoint separating northern and southern Gaza,” according to Popular Resistance.org.

Other plans of his have also failed to advance. Trump’s first administration rejected Prince’s plans to [replace U.S. forces](https://www.forbes.com/sites/markcancian/2018/08/22/hes-despised-hes-reviled-but-erik-prince-has-a-point-about-afghanistan/) in Afghanistan with contractors and [arm Libyan General Khalifa Haftar](https://theintercept.com/2021/02/26/erik-prince-jordan-libya-weapons-opus/) as a counter to Russia, which would also help regulate migration to Europe. The latter plan later [triggered an FBI investigation](https://regtechtimes.com/erik-prince-under-fbi-investigation-allegations/) under Biden, and future proposals may be similarly rejected by Trump.

Yet Prince also has domestic ambitions. During Trump’s first term, he [partnered with Project Veritas](https://www.democracynow.org/2019/5/6/the_complete_mercenary_matthew_cole_on), an organization known for using undercover tactics and hidden cameras to target media and left-wing institutions. Prince [provided espionage training](https://nymag.com/intelligencer/article/project-veritas-james-okeefe-ashley-biden-diary.html) and allowed the group to [use his Wyoming ranch](https://www.nytimes.com/2022/02/08/us/politics/erik-prince-spy-operation-trump-democrats.html), an operation that could easily be revived or imitated.

The deportation plan tied to El Salvador’s CECOT prison, mentioned earlier, also has domestic implications. Prince’s company, 2USV, [tied it to a $25 billion business plan](https://www.politico.com/news/2025/04/11/military-contractors-prison-plan-detained-immigrants-erik-prince-00287208) to deploy private agents to arrest and remove 12 million undocumented migrants from the U.S. While not publicly endorsed by the White House, the plan closely mirrors Trump’s stated priorities and could divert public attention away from ICE’s efforts.

Regardless of what is adopted by the White House, the momentum behind PMCs, private intelligence networks, and related actors shows no signs of slowing. Prince’s array of plans reflects his willingness to test the boundaries of what these companies can do at home and abroad. Their ambiguous legal status makes them ideal for politically sensitive missions where plausible deniability is important.

Once peripheral, these private entities are now increasingly relevant to regime change, mineral security, and border enforcement. Prince, perhaps more than anyone, is leading the charge, though his reputation may bring more attention to his activities than either he or his clients want.