



# SPY vs SPY

The Trump administration is considering a set of proposals developed by **Blackwater** founder **Erik Prince** and a retired CIA officer — with assistance from **Oliver North**, a key figure in the Iran-Contra scandal — to provide CIA Director **Mike Pompeo** and the White House with a global, private spy network that would circumvent official U.S. intelligence agencies, according to several current and former U.S. intelligence officials and others familiar with the proposals. The sources say the plans have been pitched to the White House as a means of countering “**deep state**” enemies in the intelligence community seeking to undermine Donald Trump’s presidency.

The creation of such a program raises the possibility that the effort would be used to create an intelligence apparatus to justify the Trump administration’s political agenda.

“*Pompeo can’t trust the CIA bureaucracy, so we need to create this thing that reports just directly to him,*” said a former senior U.S. intelligence official with firsthand knowledge of the proposals, in describing White House discussions. “*It is a direct-action arm, totally off the books,*” this person said, meaning the intelligence collected would not be shared with the rest of the CIA or the larger intelligence community. “The whole point is this is supposed to report to the president and Pompeo directly.”

North, who appears frequently on Trump’s favorite TV network, Fox News, was enlisted to help sell the effort to the administration. He was the “*ideological leader*” brought in to lend credibility, said the former senior intelligence official.

Some of the individuals involved with the proposals secretly met with major Trump donors asking them to help finance operations before any official contracts were signed.

The proposals would utilize an army of spies with no official cover in several countries deemed “*denied areas*” for current American intelligence personnel, including North Korea and Iran. The White House has also considered creating a new global rendition unit meant to capture terrorist suspects around the world, as well as a propaganda campaign in the Middle East and Europe to combat Islamic extremism and Iran.

“*I can find no evidence that this ever came to the attention of anyone at the NSC or [White House] at all,*” wrote Michael N. Anton, a spokesperson for the National Security Council, in an email. “*The White House does not and would not support such a proposal.*” But a current U.S. intelligence official appeared to contradict that assertion, stating that the various proposals were first pitched at the White House before being delivered to the CIA. The Intercept reached out to several senior officials that sources said had been briefed on the plans by Prince, including Vice President Mike Pence. His spokesperson wrote there was “*no record of [Prince] ever having met with or briefed the VP.*” North did not respond to a request for comment.

According to two former senior intelligence officials, Pompeo has embraced the plan and lobbied the White House to approve the contract. Asked for comment, a CIA spokesperson said, “You have been provided wildly inaccurate

information by people peddling an agenda.”

At the heart of the scheme being considered by the White House are Blackwater founder Erik Prince and his longtime associate, CIA veteran John R. Maguire, who currently works for the intelligence contractor **Amyntor Group**. Maguire also served on Trump’s transition team. Amyntor’s role was first reported by BuzzFeed News.

Michael Barry, who was recently named NSC senior director for intelligence programs, worked closely with Prince on a CIA assassination program during the Bush administration.

Prince and Maguire deny they are working together. Those assertions, however, are challenged by current and former U.S. officials and Trump donors who say the two men were collaborating.

As with many arrangements in the world of CIA contracting and clandestine operations, details of who is in charge of various proposals are murky by design and change depending on which players are speaking. An Amyntor official said Prince was not “*formally linked to any contract proposal by Amyntor.*” In an email, Prince rejected the suggestion that he was involved with the proposals. When asked if he has knowledge of this project, Prince replied: “*I was/am not part of any of those alleged efforts.*”

The former senior intelligence official with direct knowledge of the efforts scoffed at Prince’s denials. “*Erik’s proposal had no company names on the slides,*” this person said, “*but there is no doubt that Prince and Maguire were working together.*”

Prince and Maguire have a long professional relationship. Maguire recently completed a stint as a consultant with Prince’s company, Frontier Services Group, a Hong Kong-based security and logistics company partially owned by the Chinese government. FSG has no known connections to the private spy plan.

Prince has strong ties to the Trump administration: His sister Betsy DeVos is secretary of education, he was a major donor to the Trump election campaign, and he advised the transition team on intelligence and defense appointments, as The Intercept has previously reported. Prince has also contributed to Pence’s campaigns.

Maguire spent more than two decades as a paramilitary officer in the CIA, including tours in Central America working with the Contras. He has extensive experience in the Middle East, where he helped plan the 2003 invasion of Iraq.

Maguire and Prince met together in September with a senior CIA official at a Virginia restaurant to discuss privatizing the war in Afghanistan.

Prince told a top fundraiser that Maguire was working on part of his Afghanistan plan, characterizing it as the first part of a multi-pronged program. The fundraiser added that Prince never directly asked him for money. But sources close to the project say Maguire did seek private funding for Amyntor’s efforts until a CIA contract materialized. “*They’ve been going around asking for a bridge loan to float their operations until the CIA says yes,*” said a person who has been briefed on the fundraising efforts.

Beginning last spring and into the summer, Maguire and a group of Amyntor representatives began asking Trump donors to support their intelligence efforts in Afghanistan, the initial piece of what they hoped would be a broader program. Some Trump fundraisers were asked to provide introductions to companies and wealthy clients who would then hire Amyntor for economic intelligence contracts. Maguire explained that some of the profit from those business deals would fund their foreign intelligence collection. Others were asked to give money outright.

“*[Maguire] said there were people inside the CIA who joined in the previous eight years [under Obama] and inside the government, and they were failing to give the president the intelligence he needed,*” said a person who was pitched by Maguire and other Amyntor personnel. To support his claim, Maguire told at least two people that National Security Adviser H.R. McMaster, in coordination with a top official at the National Security Agency, authorized surveillance of Steven Bannon and Trump family members, including Donald Trump Jr. and Eric Trump. Adding to these unsubstantiated claims, Maguire told the potential donors he also had evidence McMaster used a burner phone to send information gathered through the surveillance to a facility in Cyprus owned by George Soros.



Amyntor employees took potential donors to a suite in the Trump Hotel in Washington, which they claimed was set up to conduct “secure communications.” Some White House staff and Trump campaign supporters came to refer to the suite as “the tinfoil room,” according to one person who visited the suite. This account was confirmed by another source to whom the room was described. “John [Maguire] was certain that the deep state was going to kick the president out of office within a year,” said a person who discussed it with Maguire. “These guys said they were protecting the president.”

Maguire and others at Amyntor have boasted that they have already sent intelligence reports to Pompeo.

Prince, Maguire, and North have long shared a common frustration over the failure of the U.S. government to bring two suspects from a high-profile terrorist event in the 1980s to justice. Last summer, Maguire discussed rendering the suspects with White House officials after learning the men had been located in the Middle East. Despite having no U.S. government approval, associates of Maguire began working on a snatch operation earlier this year, according to a former senior U.S. intelligence official and a former Prince colleague.

Maguire, concerned that the FBI would not take action, made an offer to senior White House officials. The message, according to a person with direct knowledge of the rendition plan, was: “We’re going to go get these guys and bring them to the U.S. Who should we hand them over to?”

The rendition plan was meant to be a demonstration that Maguire and his associates had an active intelligence network and the capability to grab suspects around the world. Prince maintains he has nothing to do with that plan. But according to a source with extensive knowledge of Prince’s networks, Prince was working in parallel to assemble a team to help apprehend the men.

According to two people who have worked extensively with Prince in recent years, Prince has been contacting former Blackwater personnel who worked on a post-9/11 era CIA assassination program targeting Al Qaeda operatives. That program, which the Bush White House prohibited the CIA from disclosing to congressional intelligence committees, was revealed to Congress in 2009 by then-CIA Director Leon Panetta. The CIA says the program did not result in any assassinations.

Among the capabilities Prince offers is a network of deniable assets — spies, fixers, foreign intelligence agents — spread across the globe that could be used by the White House. “You pick any country in the world Erik’s been in, and it’s there,” said a longtime Prince associate. “They’re a network of very dark individuals.” The associate, who has worked extensively with Prince, then began rattling off places where the private spies and paramilitaries already operate — Saudi Arabia, Israel, the United Arab Emirates, Egypt, “all across North Africa.”

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