
Blackwater Verdict Raises Questions About Private Armies in US Wars

23/10/2014



Wednesday's conviction by a U.S. Jury of four Blackwater security guards for killing Iraqi civilians in Baghdad in 2007, once again highlights the controversial use of fighting U.S. wars with private mercenaries.

The Nisour Square massacre perpetrated by Blackwater employees in 2007 resulted in the deaths of 17 people and injuries to 20 others on the streets of Baghdad.

Nicholas A. Slatten, a sniper who fired the first shots, was convicted of murder. The others — Dustin L. Heard, Evan S. Liberty and Paul A. Slough — were convicted of voluntary manslaughter and using a machine gun to carry out a violent crime. A fifth contractor, Jeremy Ridgeway, previously pleaded guilty to manslaughter and cooperated with prosecutors.

The massacre led to a world outcry against the killing of civilians by an agency hired by the U.S. State Department and led to Blackwater getting kicked out of Iraq.

It also came to symbolize the privatization of the war through the use of mercenary forces and the “outsourcing” of Defense Department responsibilities.

According to the New York Times, Blackwater employees were involved in “scores of shootings” in Iraq, and company founder, Erik Prince, “tapped retired Central Intelligence Agency officials for executive positions.”

It was the Nisour Square massacre, however that “helped cement Blackwater’s image as a

company that operated with impunity because of its lucrative contracts with the American government.”

Despite widespread international criticism of the use of the use of private security forces to fight U. S. wars, a recent opinion article in Business Insider bears the title: Erik Prince Is Right: Private Contractors Will Probably Join The Fight Against ISIS

The article quotes the Blackwater founder’s assessment that “for-hire ground troops are the missing element” in the new war against Islamic State force in Iraq and Syria.

Business Insider sees the involvement of the involvement of private contractors in the new war as inevitable, since they “provide a level of expertise, funding, capability, and willingness that other potential on-the-ground actors simply don't have. They can take risks that a foreign government cannot, while also serving as a cats' paw for US policy.”

“Maybe companies like Bancroft won't be sending combat forces of the type that Prince envisions,” says Business Insider, “but if history is any guide, they'll be involved in the fight in some form or another — assuming they aren't already.”
