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Monday, April 13, four Blackwater contract killers were sentenced to long prison terms for the 2007 massacre of 17 unarmed civilians in Nisour Square in Baghdad during the height of the Iraq war. (The mercenaries were only charged for 14 of the 17 murders.)

After years of investigations and hearings, they had finally been convicted late last year. One got life in prison for first-degree murder, three others got 30 years each for manslaughter.

This unprovoked massacre, the lies rolled out to attempt to cover it up, and the years it took to get any taste of justice for the Iraqi victims isn't some exceptional incident that "tarnished," as the *New York Times* put it, America's war effort. It provides a glimpse into, and speaks volumes about, what the U.S. brought—and is still bringing—to Iraq, and what imperialism brings all over the world.

September 16, 2007, Nisour Square, Baghdad, Iraq. The U.S. had invaded and occupied Iraq four years earlier, in a war based on the deliberate, conscious lie that Saddam Hussein's regime had links to Al Qaeda and possessed weapons of mass destruction. By 2007, an armed resistance to the U.S. occupation and installation of a new reactionary regime was raging, based largely in the now-dispossessed Sunni population. At that point, roughly half of the more than 300,000 personnel the U.S. imperialists were using to occupy Iraq and suppress the Iraqi people were private military contractors. Blackwater was one of those companies, run by a Christian fascist—Erik Prince.

That day a gang of Blackwater operatives had been called to respond to a reported incident across town. They drove furiously, but then they hit the traffic-crowded Nisour Square. According to journalist Jeremy Scahill, author of *Blackwater: The Rise of the World's Most Powerful Mercenary Army*, here's what

happened next:

What often would happen in Iraq is that mercenary contractors would start throwing frozen water bottles at cars, trying to force them off the street, and then eventually escalate up to shooting at vehicles. These guys basically tried to take over this traffic circle, the Blackwater guys, so that they could speed around and continue on to their destination. A small white car with a young Iraqi medical student and his mother didn't stop fast enough for the Blackwater convoy, and they decided to escalate it all the way up to assassinating those individuals. And I say "assassinating," because they shot to kill these people, and then they blew their car up. And then, that started this massive shooting spree that went on for—it was sustained for minutes. And at the end of it, 17 Iraqis were killed, including a nine-year-old boy named Ali Kinani, whose story we've told on the show before, and some 20 others were wounded in the attacks. And it was—you know, it became known as Baghdad's "Bloody Sunday." (*Democracy Now!*, October 23, 2014)

For years, Blackwater claimed that its forces had been fired upon and were simply defending themselves—a bald-faced lie—and the Bush regime had resisted any prosecution. And while in Iraq, both U.S. forces and private contractors were immune from any prosecution by Iraq's authorities. (The current proceedings are in U.S. courts—not Iraqi courts.)

These contractors were not "rogue" operatives; they are a key part of how the U.S. wages war—in Iraq, in Afghanistan, and globally. According to the *Christian Science Monitor*, "By 2008, the US Department of Defense employed 155,826 private contractors in Iraq—and 152,275 troops. This degree of privatization is unprecedented in modern warfare." (March 19, 2013)

And right now, while the U.S. currently has 9,800 troops in Afghanistan—it has 40,000 private contractors.

And U.S. regular forces were just as capable of committing heinous massacres as the contractors were, as one former contractor bitterly writes pointing to the 2005 massacre of 24 unarmed Iraqi civilians at Haditha in a "revenge killing spree" by the U.S. Marines. After the Marine Humvee was hit by an IED, "the squad immediately killed five people in the street. They then went house to house, and killed 19 more civilians, ranging in age from 3 to 76. Many were

shot multiple times at close range, some still in their pajamas. One was in a wheelchair.” One Marine ended up getting “a slap on the wrist,” and the Pentagon blamed “an unscrupulous enemy” for an operation gone bad. (“Reining in Soldiers of Fortune,” *New York Times*, April 17, 2015)

But these examples are just the tip of an iceberg of massive killings, dislocations, destruction, and torture. A new study by the German affiliate of the Nobel Prize-winning International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War (IPPNW) finds that a million Iraqis were killed as a result of the U.S. invasion and its aftermath—five percent of the entire population of Iraq. (The study finds that 220,000 have been killed in Afghanistan and 80,000 in Pakistan for a total of around 1.3 million killed by the U.S. “war on terror.” See “[Doctors group releases startling analysis of the death and destruction inflicted upon Iraq, Pakistan and Afghanistan from the ‘War on Terror’ in Body Count](#),” March 19, 2015.)

The conviction of the Blackwater murderers is not about the U.S. imperialists turning over a new leaf and repudiating mass violence. This has everything to do with the necessities now facing the U.S. rulers in Iraq—especially their need to send troops and mercenary contractors back into Iraq. (Prince blamed the prosecution of his operatives for the Nisour massacre and Blackwater's collapse on “shifting political tectonic plates.”) “There was a lack of confidence between the Iraqi people and the United States administration,” a spokesman for Iraq's vice president told the *New York Times*. “I think this verdict will help restore confidence.” (April 14, 2015) In short, to pave the way for more U.S.-sponsored atrocities in Iraq.