

Corporate Mercenaries in Occupied Iraq

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Prostitution may indeed be the world's oldest profession mercenary soldiering is probably a close second place. Like so many other late-contemporary capitalist service commercial enterprises, soldiering-for-hire has undergone particularly ugly mutations in the last fifteen years as the bosses and clients have become more internationalized and more committed to the successful business strategy of plausible deniability. The latest globalized incarnation of the mercenary trade is the burgeoning \$100 billion-per-year corporate military service industry.

To date, there are about two dozen firms providing US military occupation authorities in Iraq with more than 20,000 heavily-armed cowboys in black T-shirts, flak jackets and ludicrously expensive designer wrap-around sunglasses at the total cost of \$18.4 billion. More money is expected to be spent on privatized troops as the security situation worsens and the skittish partners in the Coalition of the Wilting withdraw from Iraq. Seven-day military-security contracts in Sunni Triangle cities can pay \$1,000 a day, but the going rate for outsourced thuggery varies widely according to the nature of the assignment and to current market conditions.

There's no telling how much is being paid to the paramilitary interrogation specialists hired from the Titan Corporation and CACI International who supervise the leering GIs that systematically dehumanize, sexually abuse, torture, and murder naked Iraqi prisoners in foul hellholes like the US military prison at Abu Graib.

In their promotional material, the top mercenary corporations brag that they "scour the ends of the earth to find professionals" like gung-ho ex-SAS British commandos from Northern Ireland and search-and-destroy soldiers from the Pinochet-era police state in Chile.

One British-owned company, Erinys, specializes in supplying the military-industrial complex in Occupied Iraq with former members of some of South Africa's more infamous apartheid death squads; among those Erinys employees killed in Iraq during the first two weeks of April were two paramilitary war criminals sought by South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission and a veteran counter-insurgency operative of Rhodesia's white supremacist police force with a record of assassination, terrorism, and torture against dozens of people and their families in Zimbabwe, Botswana, and Zambia. Erinys also supplies the Kurdish hired guns protecting the oilfields for the Western transnational petroleum conglomerates and the carpetbaggers from Bechtel and Halliburton KBR.

According to the official spokesman for the business syndicate representing the corporate mercenaries (called the International Peace Operations Association, incredibly enough), business is booming. Blackwater USA, a privatized army-for-hire specializing in Big Business and Department of Defense contract work whose four employees were famously killed and mutilated in Fallujah on March 31, just opened two new offices, one in Kuwait City and the other in Baghdad.

(The name "Blackwater" is a good one for war-commodity branding—it is derived from the term used by Navy SEALs to describe their stealthy, night-time water-entry commando assaults, like the one that Democratic Party Senator Bob Kerrey went on in 1969 when he single-handedly cut the throats of at least twenty women, children, and old men in a small hamlet in the southern Mekong Delta.)

There's something about the Occupation's use of contract killers to enforce their rule in Iraq that is at least as repugnant as their foes' use of wicked religious fanatics to resist it.

Perhaps most nauseating has been the cynical political decision by the US Executive Branch's Ministry of Truth to crank up the cognitive dissonance and call these corporate mercenaries "civilian military contractors," as if they were carpenters, plumbers, electricians, or some similar wage-slave construction worker "contracted" to do infrastructural repairs and reconstruction.

Or maybe it is just the unabashed coupling (or, as some overpaid marketing executive would jargonize, "synergy") of capitalism, militarism, and imperialism that makes the corporate mercenary operations in Iraq so vile.

US and British reliance on hired goons from private military contractors like Erinys, Blackwater, and CACI are not stop-gap measures meant to compensate for temporary personnel crises in the imperialists' business plans. Rather, they are an integral part of a deliberate restructuring of the political economy of the military-industrial complex where the high profit-margin of whiz-bang war technology eclipses the human (and political) costs of conventional flesh-and-blood cannon fodder.

As Secretary of War, full-time weapons industry lobbyist Donald Rumsfeld wants to "transform" US military forces to the immense benefit of his chums at Lockheed Martin, Raytheon, Boeing, Northrop Grumman, and General Dynamics, and the use of armed mercenaries for security, logistics operations, and combat missions has always been an integral part of that. (More than 90% of CACI's business comes from the Pentagon; Deputy Undersecretary of State Richard Armitage was director of CACI before going to Washington DC in 2001).

The current US regime's sick fixation on amok capitalism infecting every aspect of daily life has spawned the absolute worst in dishonest corporate capitalism. Within the globalized corporate state, Adam Smith's invisible hand rabbit-punches us more vigorously every day, so it should surprise no one that the atrocities of war previously the jealously protected privilege of the State's monopoly on violence—are now outsourced to a growing number of malevolent low-bid contractors.



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