

Blackwater employees convicted, company thrives

BY NICOLE ZELNIKER
SENIOR WRITER

Fourteen dead. Seventeen to 20 wounded. Five on trial. On Sept. 16, 2007, contractors for the private company Blackwater opened fire in Nisour Iraq, killing both civilians and U.S.-Iraq relations.

"My teammate's been firing wildly, and I don't want these kids to get shot," said turret gunner Matthew Murphy in an interview with The New York Times. "(It was) the most horrible, botched thing I've ever seen in my life."

Just this year, the five men who took more than a dozen lives stood trial.

According to Murphy's testimony, the contractors began shooting even though there was no threat and were no armed gunmen. They simply opened fire.

"Blackwater was contracted through the U.S. government, which meant that they were being held accountable to the U.S. government as employees," said sophomore and Civil Air Patrol member Ivie Norris.

Because Blackwater is a private company, they are not subject to the same scrutiny that the U.S. military is.

"They got a bunch of contracts in Iraq for protection, and they were completely outside accountability," said Assistant Professor of Political Science Robert Duncan. "They were able to do whatever they wanted."

As they were contracted by the government, the government often ignored suspicious activity.

"The government would turn a blind eye to some of the things that they were doing," said Corporal Paulo Hernandez in an email interview with The Guilfordian. "This would only later lead to the slaughter of women and children."

Blackwater contractors had been abusing Iraqi

citizens for years.

"We see the security firms ... doing whatever they want in the streets," said Baghdad resident Halim Mashkour in an interview with AP Television News. "They beat citizens and scorn them. If such a thing happened in America or Britain, would the American president or American citizens accept it?"

Since the massacre, Blackwater has been sold, the name changed to Academi and founder Erik Prince has been steering clear of his former company.

"When people say Blackwater, they know," said Chair and Visiting Assistant Professor of Peace & Conflict Studies Jeremy Rinker. "(Prince) knew he had a public relations nightmare."

Just this year, four of the five Blackwater contractors were

convicted: Nicholas Slatten, Paul Slough, Evan Liberty and Dustin Heard.

"It was all buried," said Duncan. "The Bush administration didn't want it to come out."

Though the verdict is certainly something to celebrate, it is also seven years after the fact.

"It may be seven years too late, (but) we finally did something," said Rinker.

Though Academi is supposedly inactive, there are other private contracting companies that continue to brutalize civilians like AirScan, DynCorp and Jorge Scientific Corporation.

"There is a revolving door between the military contractors and the Pentagon to the point where the contractors are actually doing the planning for the military's future," said Christian Stalberg of Blackwater Watch.

For Erik Prince, these events were an opportunity to develop not only a Blackwater video game but create a new private contracting group called Frontier Services Group.

"If the administration cannot rally the political nerve or funding to send adequate active duty ground forces to answer the call, let the private sector finish the job," said Prince in an interview with The Intercept.

Iraq continues to question the U.S. years after the shooting.

"We were there to help, free them from dictatorship that had been established and further a democracy," said Hernandez. "After the shooting, it broke the trust that the American government had built."

Ultimately, Academi continues to thrive, claiming "best in class instructors" and "unparalleled facilities" on their website.

"Their allegiance is not to the taxpayer or Uncle Sam but to the corporations and their bottom line, and that really stinks," said Duncan.



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Article Preview

US and other countries unite to respond to ISIS

BY AMOL GARG
STAFF WRITER

"If the Islamic State (is) to be characterized, it would be as a revolutionary (or radical) insurgent actor," said Yale Professor of Political Science & Director, Program on Order, Conflict and Violence Stathis N. Kalyvas in an article for the Washington Post. "These groups project a goal of radical political and social change; they are composed of a highly motivated core, recruit using ideological messages and tend to invest heavily in the indoctrination of their followers."

The Islamic State of Iraq and Syria, or Islamic state of Iraq and the Levant, is an extremist group that can be traced back to al-Qaeda. Consisting of more than 30,000 Sunni jihadist fighters, this extremist group has gained wide recognition for its brutal treatment of prisoners and success in plaguing and conquering Iraq.

"ISIL is a terrorist organization, pure and simple," said President Barack Obama in a public statement. "ISIL poses a threat to the people

of Iraq and Syria and the broader Middle East — including American citizens, personnel and facilities. If left unchecked, these terrorists could pose a growing threat beyond that region, including to the United States."

In an attempt to limit the progress of ISIS, the United States has conducted more than 150 airstrikes in Iraq while actively working to recruit nations to join the fight against the terrorist group.

Currently more than 40 nations have agreed to partake in a joint response to end ISIS's reign of terror. The involvement ranges from training rebels in Saudi Arabia to fight ISIS to providing military offensive and strategic forces to Iraq from Australia.

"We have to confront the menace (ISIS), in a calm, deliberate way — but with an iron determination," said British Prime Minister David Cameron in an address to the nation. "We cannot ignore this threat to our security and that of our allies."

Yet ISIS remains undefeated. So the question now is this: where does ISIS manage to gain all its support and finance?

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