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## The Real Butchers of Baghdad: G. W. Bush and His Corporate Mercenaries

By Cheryl Seal

05/06/04 -- The Bush administration is feigning shock and disgust over the revelations of systematic torture of Iraqi prisoners. But there is no doubt whatsoever in my mind that the White House was fully aware that such crimes were being committed and by whom. Not only that, they continually took steps to cover their own butts should the matter ever come up. I will make that case later. But first, let's take a look at the group that is, I am certain, perpetrating, or engineering the perpetration of, crimes against Iraqi civilians.

### Soldiers of Misfortune

Mercenaries, of course, have a history that extends back into the murkiest depths of human history. These are paid fighters - supreme opportunists - whose only allegiance is to themselves and, more loosely, to the guy who signs their checks. Patriotism, honor, and democracy don't enter into the deal. The primary focus of a mercenary is getting the job done, by any means, and collecting their pay off.

In every war in the past 50 years in which mercenaries were deployed, atrocities have been committed with an unflinching regularity. After South Africa's apartheid government fell, thousands of former soldiers and police were displaced - many of them brutal racists who had committed torture and other abuses under Apartheid. Hundreds of these people were hired to fight in various hotspots, from the Sudan and Zimbabwe to Kosovo. Not surprisingly, many have since been charged with atrocities committed while "fighting" in these places. In fact, the problem of criminal activity by South African mercenaries became such an embarrassment for the South African government that it passed a law in 1999 banning South African citizens from acting as mercenaries abroad. But most "soldiers of fortune" and the companies that recruit them consider themselves above any law and have simply gone underground, working out deals via the Internet and thumbing their noses at such laws.

Despite this dubious history, the use of mercenaries has become increasingly popular in recent decades as western corporations (often using the US military as their "point force") expand

their operations into resource-rich or strategically positioned nations that are unstable and/or uncooperative. Many outfits, including the UK's Sandline and Northridge Services Group or the USA's Blackwater Security Consulting, act more or less as mercenary "brokers," recruiting "manpower" from anywhere they can find it, including South Africa -despite the 1999 law. UK-recruited mercenaries have been accused of atrocities in Zimbabwe and the Ivory Coast, while Russian mercenaries stand accused of participating in ethnic cleansing in Kosovo.

While the Blair and Bush regimes try to play down the mercenary theme, calling such people "civilian contractors," the BBC reports that "one military source who wanted to remain anonymous [states that] mercenaries were still very active and could command \$10-20,000 a month for their services." In fact, a company called Erinys with offices in South Africa and the UK, which is operating illegally - not even bothering to register with the government - won a huge contract to protect the oil industry interests of western corporations in Iraq. Mercenaries contracted by US corporations like Halliburton are receiving a minimum of \$100,000 per year. In true corporate style, the accepted euphemism for mercenary brokers in the US is "risk management companies." Makes it sound almost like Morgan Stanley, eh?

The four "civilian contractors" ambushed and brutally murdered near Fallujah were in fact mercenaries recruited by a Blackwater Security Consulting. Blackwater operates a 2,400-square-acre training facility in Moyock North Carolina. Even if the four murdered men were not guilty of any crimes against Iraqis themselves, they most certainly may have been the victims of "guilt by association" with other mercenaries who had committed crimes such as torture. That some Blackwater recruits could be capable of committing such crimes is beyond doubt: many are veterans of some of the most repressive regimes of recent history. Among Blackwater's contribution to the Iraq war are at least 60 commandos who worked for Chilean dictator Augusto Pinochet and an untold number of former apartheid South African soldiers and police. At least 1,500 South African mercenaries are now in Iraq - a situation that clearly flaunts the 1999 law. Chile, alarmed by the situation, is now investigating the recruitment of mercenaries. Add to the quality of recruits the sheer numbers of mercenaries now in Iraq -an estimated 15,000-20,000- and you have a recipe for humanitarian disaster.

But mercenary recruiters have thrived with obscene vigor since Bush took office. Since 2001, Blackwater's profits have increased by 300%. Last October, Blackwater landed a \$35.7-million contract to train at least 10,000 sailors from Virginia, Texas, and California each year in the fine art of guerilla warfare (the Blackwater folks like to call this "force protection" training.).

There are already many reports that mercenaries in Iraq routinely act in violation of International and US military laws governing rules of engagement and conduct in a war and post-war occupation zone. For example, the "Army Times" reported that mercenaries were using armor-piercing, limited-penetration rounds manufactured by RBCD of San Antonio. These bullets were banned by the US military because of the horrific, unnecessary suffering and damage they inflict, such as shredding internal organs. "The bullet is so controversial that

if [the mercenary], a former SEAL, had been on active duty, he would have been court-martialed for using it," says the AT. "The ammunition is 'nonstandard' and hasn't passed the military's approval process.

It has, since the prison torture scandal broke, emerged that military contractors -i.e., mercenaries hired by the Pentagon- have been engaged in the torture/interrogation of prisoners, including those at Abu Ghraib prison. War crimes expert Gary Solis of Georgetown University says the only reason he can think of that US military would use mercenaries for such a "delicate operation" as prisoner interrogation is that there are too few real military people available. Solis says that so many critical positions have been eliminated from the military now that when they do need trained specialists, they simply don't exist. All that are available, says Solis, are "trigger pullers." Worse, the mercenaries hired by the US military are not only being paid up to three times more than honest US soldiers subject to military law, but are being paid by TAXPAYERS.

But while Solis thus suggests that the problem can be traced directly back to Bush's failure to plan for any contingency in Iraq except happy, warmly welcoming Iraqis, great weather, and no loss of basic services (despite the targeted bombing out of water treatment and power facilities) I say this is wishful thinking. Bush never planned to use a larger military force in Iraq. He was no doubt assured by Cheney, Rumsfeld, Kissinger, and other "advisors" that 15,000 or so brutal mercenaries roaming the countryside would be more than enough "muscle" to keep Iraqis in line. After all, that tactic had worked for Cheney in Burma, for Kissinger in Indonesia and Chile, and for Rummy in the Iran-Iraq conflict.

#### The Case for Bush's Premeditated Complicity in the Systematic Abuse of Iraqi Civilians

Since the scandal broke, observers have been calling for investigations, for war crimes charges, for court martials. What most, in their blissful ignorance don't know, is that Bush and Co. made sure well ahead of time that its operations in Afghanistan and Iraq would escape accountability. From the day Bush and his pals commandeered the White House and set their sights on Central Asian oil (simultaneous events), they have worked to maneuver into place all the corporate-style blocks to accountability available to them. First, to evade the Geneva Convention in Afghanistan, Bush never formally declared war. Instead, he claimed that the US bombing and invasion was part of the "war on terror" and that the war on terror did not constitute a "real war" under the Geneva Convention. This twisting of international law and morality outraged many international law experts and human rights advocates - an outcry kept conveniently out of nearly all the US media.

Kenneth Roth, Executive Director of Human Rights Watch said, "To say that the Geneva Conventions do not apply to a war on terrorism is particularly dangerous, as it is all too easy to imagine this 'exception' coming back to haunt U.S. forces in future conflicts." How right he was! Bush used this "interpretation": of what constitutes war to justify the indiscriminate round up of Muslims and their shipment to Guantanamo Bay's infamous Camp X-ray, where they have been held, protected by no laws, regulations or basic sense of moral "right" ever

since.

Next came Iraq. Has no one stopped to wonder, especially now with 20-20 hindsight, why, in July 2002, just as Bush was first publicly rattling his saber towards Iraq, that he also announced that he would not sign onto the International Criminal Court? This move was designed to place the US beyond prosecution by the international community for crimes just such as those committed in Abu Ghraib.

It is quite obvious Bush anticipated the need for this preventive measure. Even if he could dodge the Geneva Convention bullet, Bush knew that there are several internationally recognized laws that are supposed to be observed both during and after a war in an occupied country. "Article 7 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and which the United States ratified in 1992, provides that 'No one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.' Also in force at all times is the Convention against Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment and the UN Standard Minimum Rules on the Treatment of Prisoners to which the United States became a party in 1994."

In addition, Article 3 of the International Convention states that "A mercenary, as defined in article 1 of the present Convention, who participates directly in hostilities or in a concerted act of violence, as the case may be, commits an offence for the purposes of the Convention." Knowing that mercenaries were going to be on the scene, Bush knew he had to cover his ass. So what seemed like an inexplicable act of arrogance back in July 2002 (his failure to acknowledge the International Court) now clearly seems a simple cynical act of "preemptive self defense."

To attack Iraq so soon after Afghanistan, Bush had to trump up a sufficiently compelling pretext -thus he settled on WMDs. To rally the American public and "coalition forces" behind him, he also had to make it the war "official." However, he made sure that the war's "official" status lasted as short a time as possible. Thus, on May 2, 2003, before the heaviest fighting had even begun, we find our vulture-in-chief parading the decks of an aircraft carrier declaring an end to major conflict. As a result, everything that is going on in Iraq today is beyond the touch of the Geneva Convention. During an interview with NPR's Cheryl Conley on May 2, 2004, war crimes expert Gary Solis of Georgetown University stated that even the most horrific and systematic abuse of prisoners, even those committed at a military run facility like Abu Ghraib are not war crimes. Why? Because, says Solis, anyone captured after Bush declared an end of major conflicts would automatically lose their prisoner of war status under the Geneva Convention. They would instead be classed as "insurgents."

There is no doubt at all that Bush knew that the Pentagon and US corporations in Iraq were planning to use mercenaries extensively. Not only that but, Bush and Co. knew what sort of means these mercenaries would use to "quell resistance" and welcomed it. An extensive report of abuses at the Abu Ghraib prison was sent to the Pentagon in January. Yet Myers claims he never saw it, nor did Bush or Rumsfeld. But again, this is merely a slippery

corporate ploy to elude accountability. Not seeing the report and not being aware of its contents are two different things. I am sure that it was prearranged by team Bush that any reports like that were NOT to be acknowledged or passed on beyond a certain point in the chain of command. Just as certain pieces of information on terrorist activity before 9/11 were not passed on beyond a certain "checkpoint". This way Bush, Cheney and the Bush cabinet could later honestly claim the never saw them. That they knew the contents, however, seems quite certain.

Need more evidence? Just days before the abuse of Iraqi civilians became public knowledge, Bush nominated John Negroponte to be the ambassador to Iraq. Negroponte, as Bush was quite well aware, was widely believed to have OK-ed and then systematically covered up, the systematic torture and murder of prisoners in Honduras. (see links to the Baltimore Sun investigative report below). What better man to have on the job in Iraq if you are running a banana republic-style operation? With all of the gifted seasoned diplomats around to choose from, Bush chose a known accomplice to torture and murder.

The techniques being used on the Iraqi prisoners are disturbingly similar to those used by the CIA in Central America -including Honduras under Negroponte's watch. A CIA training manual declassified under the Freedom of Information Act in 1997 details torture methods used against "insurgents" in Central America in the 1980s. "Human Resource Exploitation Training Manual -- 1983" and a CIA Vietnam-era training manual called "KUBARK Counterintelligence Interrogation -- July 1963," both taught the same method of torture being used in Iraq by the US right now: stripping suspects naked and keeping them blindfolded. Dark, windowless interrogation rooms with no toilet. The 1983 manual advises an interrogator to "manipulate the subject's environment, to create unpleasant or intolerable situations. The manual suggests that prisoners be deprived of food and sleep, and made to maintain rigid positions, that they be threatened with rape or death and that their families be threatened. In its 1995 investigative report on Negroponte in Honduras, the "Baltimore Sun" reported that "Ines Consuelo Murillo was tortured by a secret Honduran military intelligence unit called Battalion 316. Her captors tied the 24-year-old woman's hands and feet, hung her naked from the ceiling and beat her with their fists. They fondled her. They nearly drowned her. They clipped wires to her breasts and sent electricity surging through her body." Sounds sickening familiar now, doesn't it? (see bibliography below).

Last but not least, evidence that Bush knew and promoted heavy-handed tactics in Iraq can be found with just one glance at the people with whom he has surrounded himself. Richard Cheney, Donald Rumsfeld, Richard Myers, Condolezza Rice, Paul Wolfowitz - all served in the US government at the height of the power of some of the most repressive US-backed regime, including Pinochet and Saddam. In fact, many of the same crimes being committed in Iraq were committed by Halliburton mercenaries in Burma while Cheney was CEO. The Institute for Public Accuracy reports, "Cheney's Halliburton also profited enormously from projects around the world that have been widely condemned for horrendous human rights abuses and massive environmental destruction. The numerous examples include doing business with the notorious Yadana pipeline project in Burma --an environmentally damaging

project on behalf of which, according to a U.S. federal court, egregious human rights abuses were committed, including murder, torture, rape, forced labor and forced relocation.

"In short, the evidence that Bush knew about and condoned, if not promoted outright, abuses of Iraqi civilians is screaming at the American public...which has, alas, so far chosen to turn a deaf ear. Torture, Rape and Murder by Halliburton Mercenaries in Burma while Cheney was CEO

[http://www.accuracy.org/press\\_releases/PR071602.htm](http://www.accuracy.org/press_releases/PR071602.htm)

Background Paper on Geneva Conventions and Persons Held by U.S. Forces

<http://www.hrw.org/backgrounders/usa/pow-bck.htm>

Declassified Paper proves torture was taught by CIA

<http://users.westnet.gr/~cgian/ciatortu.htm>

US Officials Misstate Geneva Convention Requirements

<http://hrw.org/press/2002/01/us012802.htm>

International Law, Article 7.

<http://www.hrw.org/backgrounders/usa/pow-bck.htm>

Mercenaries in Africa's conflicts

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/africa/3501632.stm>

Russian Mercenaries Accused of Kosovo Atrocities <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/europe/375754.stm>

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<http://www.workingforchange.com/article.cfm?itemid=16701>

One-Shot Killer <http://www.armytimes.com/story.php?f=1-292925-2426405.php>

Laws of War and War Crimes <http://www.npr.org/rundowns/rundown.php?prgDate=02-May-2004&prgId=2>

A Survivor of Honduras CIA torture under Negroponte's Watch tells her tale  
<http://www.baltimoresun.com/news/local/bal-negroponte3a,0,3966794.story>

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<http://www.baltimoresun.com/news/local/bal-negroponte5.story>

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