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Blackwater and the crimes of US imperialism

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This week's sentencing of four former Blackwater mercenaries to prison terms ranging from 30 years to life is an event that, by its entirely exceptional nature, underscores the effective immunity for US war criminals, in Iraq, Afghanistan and beyond.

Nicholas Slatten, Evan Liberty, Paul Slough and Devin Heard were convicted on multiple counts of first-degree murder or voluntary manslaughter, as well as the use of heavy weaponry in a crime, for their actions on September 16, 2007. The four were among a group of Blackwater guards who opened fire on Iraqi civilians in Nisour Square, Baghdad, killing 17 people and wounding another 20.

The names of the victims have hardly been reported in the American media, although they are listed in official documents. They include nine-year-old Ali Mohammed Hafeedh Abdul Razzaq; Ahmed Haithem Ahmed Al Rubia'y, 20, an aspiring medical student, and his mother, Dr. Mahassin Mohssen Kadhum Al-Khazali, 46, a dermatologist; Osama Fadhil Abbas, a 52-year-old car dealer; Mohamed Abbas Mahmoud, 47, a delivery truck driver, and his son Qasim, 12 years old; Sa'adi Ali Abbas Alkarkh, 52, a businessman; Ibrahim Abid Ayash, 77, a gardener, a passenger on a bus; and Ali Khalil Abdul Hussein, 54, a blacksmith commuting to work on his motorcycle.

Also killed were Mushtaq Karim Abd Al-Razzaq, 18, an Iraqi soldier standing at a military checkpoint; Ghaniyah Hassan Ali, 55, killed on a bus as she sheltered her daughter from the spray of bullets; Mahdi Sahib Nasir, 26, a taxi driver who was the sole support of seven other family members; Hamoud Sa'eed Abttan, 33, father of seven, in the square looking for work, along with his cousin, Uday Ismail Ibrahiem, 27, father of three.

These bare descriptions are important, because they suggest the wide range of victims of the US conquest and occupation of Iraq, which led to the deaths of an estimated one million people: young and old; men, women and children; laborers, students, professionals. As the *World Socialist Web Site* has repeatedly pointed out, what took place in Iraq from 2003 on was not merely imperialist aggression and mass slaughter, but the destruction of an entire society, one of the most advanced in the Middle East.

Meanwhile, as the *New York Times* reported Wednesday, mercenary outfits like Blackwater have prospered, reaping billions in profits, with their contractors frequently outnumbering actual uniformed personnel in US-dominated countries like Afghanistan. Security subcontractors for the military, the State Department, and giant US and multinational corporations do as much as \$100 billion worth of business, the newspaper said.

The Blackwater mercenaries were among the most flagrant killers in Iraq, but hardly unique. There are numerous reported incidents of mass murder conducted by US soldiers, special forces operatives and private contractors. Many more such incidents are unrecorded, because no victims survived. But some of these were among the hundreds of atrocities made public by Private Chelsea (Bradley) Manning, who released logs of military reports to WikiLeaks, some made public under the title "Collateral Murder."

The military justice system has condemned Private Manning to a 35-year prison term for exposing war crimes, but it has prosecuted only a handful of US soldiers for murdering, raping or maiming Iraqis, no matter how strong the evidence and how grisly the circumstances.

More importantly, the politicians and generals who organized and led the US war in Iraq have gotten off scot-free. Under the principles laid down by the Nuremberg Tribunal after World War II, the leaders of the US government during the Iraq War—George W. Bush, Richard Cheney, Donald Rumsfeld, Condoleezza Rice, Colin Powell, George Tenet, Paul Wolfowitz—and top military commanders from Tommy Franks to David Petraeus are guilty of the crime of planning and executing a war of aggression. They are collectively responsible for all the deaths that ensued as a result of their actions.

The list does not stop with the Bush-Cheney administration. President Barack Obama, Vice President Joseph Biden, and their top military-intelligence officials continued the US occupation for another three years, and have relaunched the war beginning in August 2014, using as a pretext the emergence of Islamic State in Iraq and Syria, a former Al Qaeda affiliate that was armed and financed as part of the US-backed war against the Assad regime in Syria.

Under Obama, the US war crimes against the Iraqi people have become war crimes against the entire population of the Middle East. Libya, Syria and now Yemen have been destroyed as functioning societies by US-backed civil wars, bombing and drone missile strikes.

The perpetrators of these horrific crimes have the blood of millions on their hands. But under the global capitalist system, this is regarded merely as the price of doing business, and extracting the oil wealth of the Persian Gulf and Central Asia. The war criminals of American imperialism—and their counterparts in the lesser imperialist powers—can only be brought to justice by an international movement of the working class against imperialist war and for socialist revolution.

As a critical step forward in this struggle, the International Committee of the Fourth International is holding an international online May Day rally on Sunday, May 3. We urge working people and young people throughout the world to attend this important event.