

Coming to America: Mercenary Justice

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There is as yet no legal barrier to wholesale deployment of mercenary soldiers to U.S. cities. Such forces occupied New Orleans in 2005, two years before Blackwater troops massacred Iraqi civilians in Baghdad's Nisoor Square. Could Times Square be next?

The trial of four [Blackwater mercenaries](#) in the unprovoked massacre of Iraqi civilians in 2007 is probably not the biggest news item of the day for Iraqis, faced as they are with a national crisis of potentially apocalyptic dimensions. However, the events unfolding in a Washington DC federal court should be of critical interest to Americans, who will one day find themselves under the guns of mercenaries licensed to kill with impunity. In fact, it has already happened, in New Orleans, after Katrina.

Two years before the atrocity in Baghdad, Blackwater descended on New Orleans in force in the wake of the 2005 hurricane, setting up a downtown headquarters and deploying its troops in [full battle gear](#), armed just "as they would be in Iraq." Jeremy Scahill, reporting at the time for *The Nation* magazine, said Blackwater troops told him that in addition to having been authorized to use lethal force, they were also empowered to [arrest citizens](#). Many of them had flown in straight from Iraq to occupy a great Black American city.

At least five mercenary companies patrolled New Orleans under contract with Homeland Security, including an outfit of Israeli ex-special forces troops under a company named Instinctive Shooting International. Civil liberties activists warned at the time that placing an American city under mercenary occupation is illegal, but neither President Bush nor Barack Obama nor the Congress or the courts have clarified the question of mercenary deployment. Therefore, it is all but inevitable that legions of hired killers and "instinctive shooters" from around the world will again be sent to U.S. cities, with consequences that will rival the carnage at Nisoor Square, in Baghdad.

The Long Mercenary Legacy

Mercenaries have a long history in the United States. The granddaddy of them all, the [Pinkerton National Detective Agency](#), founded in 1850, specialized in both raw thuggery and advanced intelligence gathering techniques to make millions defending ruling class privileges and property. The Pinkertons broke scores of strikes and created the first national criminal data base. The State of Ohio outlawed the Pinkertons in 1890, fearing it had become a private army, or an independent militia. By that time, the Pinkerton's were a larger force than the standing army of the United States. In 1999, after almost a century and a half of service to the rich and powerful, the Pinkerton agency was sold to Securitas Security Services USA, which six years later took part in the [Katrina occupation](#).

However, we must be clear that the driving force behind the explosive growth of killer corporations is the U.S. military, which trains the assassins and sends them on missions of murder around the globe, and later hires them at fantastic salaries through mercenary corporations, which in turn become indispensable to the U.S. war machine. As long as the United States is allowed to act with imperial impunity on the world stage, its uniformed and civilian armed forces will recognize no laws, no limitations on their behavior. Private soldiers and mercenary corporations are only reflections of the government that gave them birth.

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