

Mercenaries in Iraq Outnumber the Military

by Janet Jagan

The American occupation of Iraq continues to expose a host of wrong-doings that keep worsening as time goes by. The latest blatant acts which further lower the status of US and allied forces in Iraq and the position of President and Commander-in Chief George Bush include (1) the continued charges of torture of prisoners held by the USA, (2) the way the trials are proceeding of US servicemen involved in the killings of Iraqi men, women and children and (3) the exposure of the presence of tens of thousands of US mercenaries, assisting in the protection of officials and others in Iraq.

The latter includes some 180,000 men working for contractors in Iraq. According to the British newspaper The Guardian, they are "operatives" working for secret mercenary

firms based in the USA. The particular firm that has come under public attention in

investigators states that the shootings were unprovoked. Just this week two Iraqi

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recent weeks is known as Blackwater USA, security contractors. Altogether these mercenaries outnumber the military forces which are said to be 160,000 official troops. The mercenaries are fully armed and ready to kill. In fact, the Blackwater group of mercenaries came into public attention because they are charged with killing 17 Iraqi citizens. A report by Iraqi

women were shot dead by another mercenary firm.

Right now there is a Congressional hearing into the Blackwater firm. It is estimated that Blackwater's contracts for diplomatic security since 2004 amount to some \$750 million (US).

Iraqi officials are objecting not only to the presence of Blackwater and other mercenaries operating in their country but also to

the fact that these contractors cannot be prosecuted in Iraqi courts due to immunity by imposed conditions that Americans cannot be charged or prosecuted in Iraqi courts. The USA has imposed this condition on many countries, Guyana included!

The Iraqi government revoked licences for security contractors after the killing of the 17 Iraqis. It is not clear at this stage if the US will allow the Iraqi government to fulfill its decision, as Blackwater continues to work in Iraq.

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The number of civilians killed in Iraq since the US invasion is still unknown, but



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is estimated to be in the tens of thousands. Some 4 million Iraqis have migrated to Jordan and Syria because of fear and half of these live in tent camps in Iraq, far from the killing fields. Latest reports say that there are now no places for Iraqi refugees to go. The country is in ruins and living conditions are far worse than before the invasion.

While President Bush attempts to deny that his government has condoned torture, the facts keep emerging that methods

condemned by the Geneva Convention and all humanitarian bodies have, in fact taken place. The rendition of prisoners of the US to countries which practice torture is a well known fact and admitted by the European Union, whose airports were misused by the US to send prisoners to these countries. And the US continues to hold prisoners at Guantanamo Bay in Cuba without trial, without legal representation and outside the norms established by the Geneva Convention in protection of prisoners.

The great pity is that the present government of the USA continues in its warlike stance, still having to fight insurgencies in Iraq and Afghanistan while threatening other nations in the Middle East with its Big Stick policy.

The brighter side is that expectations of a Republican Party defeat in Presidential elections next year seem to be inevitable.