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Blackwater mercenary Nicholas Slatten sentenced to life in prison for initiating 2007 Nisour Square Massacre

Eight months after being convicted of **first-degree murder** by a jury, Nicholas M. Slatten, 35, United States Army-trained Scout Sniper and Blackwater mercenary, was sentenced to life in prison Wednesday by federal judge Royce Lamberth. This is the second time Slatten has been sentenced to life in prison; a previous April 13, 2015 sentencing was tossed out by a three-judge panel of the US Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit on August 4, 2017.

The Nisour Square Massacre, in which Blackwater mercenaries fired hundreds of rounds in a crowded Baghdad traffic square, killing fourteen Iraqis, including ten women and two children, and injuring seventeen others took place on September 16, 2007 during the height of the illegal US occupation of Iraq. Blackwater, a private contracting firm that has since been rebranded to Academi had been operating in Iraq for several years racking up multiple accusations of abuse and murder prior to the massacre.

Slatten, who deployed twice previously to Iraq for the US military before joining Blackwater, touched off the one-sided firefight when he shot his sniper rifle through the windshield of a white Kia, murdering 19-year-old Ahmed Haithem Ahmed Al Rubia'y who was driving his mother to a doctor's appointment.

Once Slatten fired his rifle, several other Blackwater guards joined in and the heavily armed private convoy, equipped with grenade launchers, automatic rifles and machine

guns fired upon defenseless unarmed civilians trapped in their cars in the deadlocked square.

While Slatten and other Blackwater guards have asserted throughout their trials and sentencing hearings that they believed they were fired upon first and that they were responding to the “perceived threat” presented by a car, no evidence or eyewitness testimony has corroborated their story.

Multiple investigations conducted jointly by the Iraqi and US governments and the Federal Bureau of Investigation concluded that no Iraqi civilians were found to have fired upon the Blackwater convoy prior to or during the massacre, nor were any improvised explosive devices ever recovered, including in the vehicle Ahmed and his mother were driving in.

In court documents prosecutors presented throughout the multiple trials and retrials of Slatten, and fellow Blackwater guards who participated in the slaughter, Paul Slough, Dustin Heard and Evan Liberty, the mercenaries demonstrated a pattern of wanton violence and disregard for Iraqi lives.

One document that prosecutors presented stated that Slatten would routinely pontificate on his desire, “to kill as many Iraqis as he could as payback for 9/11 and he repeatedly boasted about the number of Iraqis he had shot.”

That Slatten would blame Iraq for the 9/11 attacks is not a mistake; these lies, like all that undergird US imperialism, were propagated by the ruling class.

An investigation first conducted by the House of Representatives in 2004 and again in the Senate in 2006 found the Bush administration, starting with President George W. Bush and including officials Colin Powell, Condeleezza Rice, Donald Rumsfeld and Dick Cheney made “237 misleading statements about the threat posed by Iraq” including in speeches, press interviews, written briefings and in congressional testimonies. Of these 237 “misleading statements,” at least 61 “misrepresented Iraq’s ties to al-Qaeda.”

In two separate 2007 incidents, court documents state that Liberty, who like Slough and Heard is awaiting a retrial, fired his automatic weapon indiscriminately while driving near the Amanat City Hall in Baghdad. The second time he did this was just one week prior to the tragic events at Nisour. These documents, which have not been refuted, also state that Slough, Heard and Slatten would regularly hurl frozen water bottles and fruit at Iraqi civilians while on patrol, “for sport,” breaking car windows and harassing the subjugated population.

These documents and testimony from eyewitnesses corroborate a report the House commissioned shortly following the massacre that Blackwater guards routinely engaged in deadly violence against the Iraqi population. An investigation launched by the House Oversight and Government Reform Committee released a report on October 2, 2007 concluded that Blackwater guards used deadly force in Iraq on a “weekly basis” causing “significant casualties and property damage.”

Despite overwhelming evidence and multiple convictions, Slatten was unrepentant during his sentencing hearing this week. Speaking before the judge, Slatten asserted his innocence and decried the “unjust prosecution” he had received at the hands of the court. Slatten’s father, Darrell also promised to “fight until hell freezes over to correct this travesty of justice.”

The fact is Slatten has been given exceptional protection from justice. The US government first intervened on Slatten and the fellow Blackwater guards’ behalf to protect them from prosecution in Iraq, passing the Military Extraterritorial Jurisdiction Act on October 4, 2007, ensuring that US mercenaries, no matter where they were operating and what crimes they committed would be prosecuted, leniently, in US courts.

While Judge Lamberth sided with the jury in imposing the mandatory life sentence, stating that, “the jury got this exactly right,” and that “this was murder,” Lamberth also sympathized with the convicted murderer. During his sentencing, Slatten brought up the fact that the prosecution had offered him a deal that only included pleading guilty to manslaughter charges with the possibility of “5-10 year” sentence. Lamberth agreed that manslaughter might have been a more appropriate charge, but that Slatten had decided to gamble by going to trial on the murder charges and he, “got what he gambled for.”

For now, Slatten remains behind bars, as do Slough, Liberty and Heard, whose sentencing hearings are scheduled for September 5. However, the possibility remains of a Presidential pardon. It was reported in **May that President Donald Trump** had “made expedited requests” for pardon papers for several soldiers, including Slatten, accused of heinous war crimes.

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