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European Languages

زبانهای اروپایی

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21.02.2025

Another Blackwater? Nearly 100 U.S. Mercenaries are in Gaza Right Now



Image by Charanjeet Dhiman.

Armed to the teeth with M4 rifles and Glock pistols and pockets stuffed with their \$10,000 advance plus some, 96 former U.S. special forces veterans are currently stationed in Gaza.

These mercenaries have been hired by UG Solutions, a North Carolina-based military contractor, to patrol the intersection that Israel used to separate the north from the south of Gaza. What the Occupation called the “Netzarim Corridor” split Gaza with a fortified wide road to re-supply weapons and tanks as well as providing a vantage point to launch attacks on both the north and the south. Named after the settler encampment in the same area from 1975-2005, the area was once again made into a violent and deadly zone. After the occupation forces withdrew from the intersection, the decomposing bodies and skeletal remains of Palestinian people were found.

In a recruiting email from UG Solutions, they describe the primary purpose of the soldiers as “internal vehicle checkpoint management and vehicle inspection.” They claim to be searching for weapons moving in Gaza, of course only on Palestinians, not their or their colleagues’ own American and Israeli guns, nor those of the Israeli occupation forces (IOF.) We know this means that these soldiers are doing the work of the occupation forces. Like the checkpoints that slice into the occupied West Bank and Jerusalem, these armed and oppressive checkpoints aim to terrorize Palestinians, securitize their land, and provide outposts for attacks. As the ceasefire unfolds in stages, all eyes should be on these checkpoints to ensure all soldiers are removed, American or Israeli.

The images of these mercenaries, being paid a minimum of \$1,100 a day, standing with their sunglasses and rifles next to Palestinians trying to travel in their own land is infuriating. But it’s also revealing. American boots have been on the ground in Gaza many times over the past 15 months of the accelerated genocide, and certainly before that. You might recall the since deleted photograph accidentally posted by the White House’s Instagram account that revealed the high-level U.S. Delta Squad were in Gaza, or when American forces assisted the occupation by committing a heinous massacre in Nuseirat refugee camp, killing at least 300 Palestinians and wounding 1,000 more. Not to mention the many, many Americans in the IOF – either settlers or enthusiastic killers travelling from the US – who have had their hand in committing genocide, perhaps recording a video celebrating themselves blowing up a mosque or parading in their victims’ undergarments, before returning to the United States – if not after taking a brief vacation to Dubai or Brazil first.

This is not the first time that U.S. private mercenaries have been hired to provide assistance to U.S. military invasions. Blackwater, a private mercenary company also headquartered in North Carolina, was hired to send U.S. mercenaries to both Afghanistan and Iraq shortly after the U.S. invasions. Between 2001 and 2007, Blackwater received \$1 billion in U.S. government contracts. On September 16 2007, Blackwater mercenaries massacred 17 Iraqi civilians, aged between 9 and 77, and wounded more than 30 people in Nisour Square, Baghdad. Four Blackwater mercenaries were convicted of their murders: Dustin Heard, Evan Liberty, Nicholas Slatten, and Paul Slough. Despite the global outrage, Blackwater CEO, Erik Prince, maintained that they acted “appropriately” and, in his first term, Trump pardoned all of the killers.

The Nisour Square massacre is but one example of the violence of Blackwater in Iraq. Between 2005 and 2007, U.S. mercenaries attacked Iraqi civilians at least 195 times. The actions of Blackrock employees revealed in the WikiLeaks’ War Logs uncover that these

were not only random acts of violence but how the private soldiers were acting in coordination with the U.S. military themselves. Blackwater is but one of the many companies like it exerted imperialist violence on behalf of the U.S. empire. The U.S. government turned to using privatized militaries to outsource accountability and actions, often opting for private contractors in the years after they officially withdrew from countries, or in places where they wanted a presence but fewer U.S. soldiers.

The presence of U.S. mercenaries in Gaza highlights a disturbing pattern of American involvement in the region's violence. In Gaza today, these mercenaries fulfill a role without scrutiny that neither the U.S. military nor Israeli occupation forces could with the same guns and boots but different logos. These soldiers, whether it's the IOF, Blackwater, U.S. military, or UG Solutions, only mean violence for the Palestinian people. The continuation of using private mercenaries reflects the unaccountability and disregard for Palestinian lives that characterizes U.S. foreign policy in the region, underscoring the need for global scrutiny and calls for justice, and the potential for escalated violence continues.

Nuvpreet Kalra is CODEPINK's Digital Content Producer. She completed a Bachelor's in Politics & Sociology at the University of Cambridge, and an MA in Internet Equalities at the University of the Arts London. As a student, she was part of movements to divest and decolonize, as well as anti-racist and anti-imperialist groups. Nuvpreet joined CODEPINK as an intern in 2023, and now produces digital and social media content. In England, she organizes with groups for Palestinian liberation, abolition and anti-imperialism.

FEBRUARY 20, 2025