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edited by alexander cockburn and jeffrey st.clair

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September 10, 2008

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September 10, 2008

From Afghanistan to Africa

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[The Return of U. S. Death Squads](#)

The Return of U. S. Death Squads

By CONN HALLINAN

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September 9, 2008

United Nations officials charge that secret "international intelligence services" are conducting raids to kill Afghan civilians, then hiding the perpetrators behind an "impenetrable" wall of bureaucracy.

Michael Colby
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Philip Alston of the UN Human Rights Council said that "heavily armed internationals" leading local militias have killed scores of Afghan civilians. Coalition forces have killed more than 200 Afghan civilians since January.

Vijay Prashad
[Losing Game](#)

He called the raids, which operate independent of the US and NATO military commands, "unacceptable." Alston pointed to a specific incident last January in which two brothers were killed during a raid in the southern city of Kandahar, an area where the Taliban have a strong presence.

Jeffery R. Webber/
George Ciccariello-Maher

[Venezuela From Below](#)

"The [two] victims are widely acknowledged, even by well informed government officials, to have no connection to the Taliban, and the circumstance of their deaths is suspicious," he said.

David Michael Green
[Country Last](#)

Brian J. Foley
[The New Face of Republican Power](#)

When Alston tried to investigate the murders, however, he hit a stonewall. "Not only was I unable to get any international military commander to provide their version of what took place, but I was unable to get any military commander to even admit that their soldiers were involved," the UN official told the *Financial Times*.

John Ross
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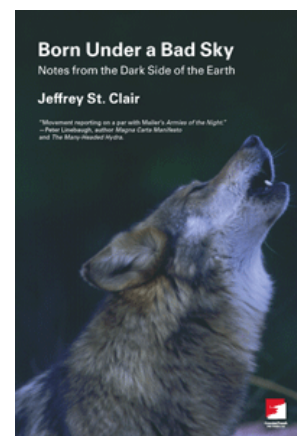
Suspicion has fallen on the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), which led such teams into Afghanistan during the 1990s in an attempt to capture or kill Osama bin Ladin, and again during the 2001 invasion.

Pierre M. Sprey /
Winslow T. Wheeler
[Joint Strike Fighter: Another Defense Acquisition Disaster](#)

According to Alston, the shadow units work out of two bases: U.S. Camp Ghecko near Kandahar, and a base in the province of Nangarhar. "It is absolutely unacceptable for heavily armed internationals, accompanied by heavily armed Afghan forces, to be wondering around conducting dangerous raids that too often result in killings without anyone taking responsibility for them," he wrote in a recent UN report.

Nicole Colson
[Sami Al-Arian's Long Road to Freedom](#)

Marc Gardner
[California's Anti-](#)



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of the Earth
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September 6 / 7, 2008

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Linn Washington, Jr.
[The GOP Excluded Black-Owned Businesses from Contracts at St. Paul Convention](#)

Patrick Cockburn
[Did Bush Spies Monitor](#)

Something very similar may be going on in Iraq. In his latest book, "[The War Within](#)," Bob Woodward writes that the U.S. military has a program to "locate, target and kill key individuals in extremist groups." Last month U.S. Special Forces killed the son and nephew of the governor of Salahuddin Province north of Baghdad. Unlike the shootings at roadblocks by U.S. troops, a common occurrence, Iraqi investigators say the two men were essentially executed.

A U.S. spokesman said the raid was conducted to capture a "suspected Al Qaeda in Iraq operative," and that the man was injured when he "charged" the American troops. The other "suspected terrorist" was wounded and arrested. "Both men were armed and presented hostile intent," the spokesman said.

But according to a spokesman for Governor Hamed al-Qaisi, U.S. troops broke into the house at 3 AM and shot the governor's 17-year old son to death while he slept. The nephew, hearing the commotion, tried to enter the room and was gunned down as well.

The killings are similar to one near Karbala in June, where a cousin of current Iraqi Prime Minister Nuri Kamal al-Maliki was killed. In both cases, Iraqi authorities were kept in the dark about the impending raids.

The question is: are Special Forces in Iraq and CIA units in Afghanistan carrying out clandestine hits? In most places in the world, those groups are called "death squads."

* * *

Mercenaries are on a roll. Last month's *Associated Press* story that the infamous mercenary firm Blackwater Worldwide was getting out of the private army business was a mistake. A company spokesman said the reporter had misunderstood him. Indeed, as the Iraq war winds down, firms like Blackwater, Triple Canopy and DynCorp are finding new markets to exploit, many of them in Africa.

As conservative military analyst David Isenberg points out in his column, "Dogs of War," mercenaries are, in a sense, returning to their modern roots. "The progenitor for many of today's private security firms was the South-Africa-based Executive Outcomes, which fought in Angola and Sierra Leone," says Isenberg.

Executive Outcomes and the South African Army were routed by Angolan and Cuban troops during Angola's long and bloody civil war, a conflict that was fueled in large part by apartheid Pretoria and the US, along with help from Zaire and the People's Republic of China.

But the defeat was hardly a major setback for the mercenary industry. It's hard to keep jackals down.

Cold War conflicts created a growth market, and, coupled with the Reagan Administration's passion for privatization, mercenary organizations like the U.S. Military Professional Resources Inc. (MPRI) and DynCorp became players in Latin America and the Balkans conflict.

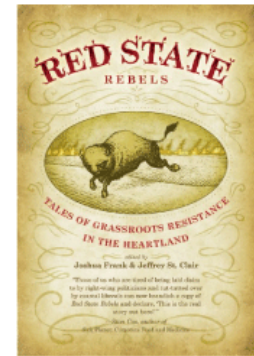
While Ronald Reagan's and George W. Bush's administrations generally get the credit for this privatization drive, as Tim Shorrock points out in his book, "Spies for Hire: The Secret World of Intelligence Outsourcing," it was Bill Clinton who really brought private enterprise into the business of gathering intelligence and fighting wars.

According to Shorrock, Clinton "picked up the cudgel where the conservative Reagan left off," and by the end of his last term, had cut 360,000 federal jobs, while spending on private contractors had jumped 44 percent over 1993.

The right-wing Heritage Foundation, a major force in the current Bush Administration, called Clinton's 1996 budget the "boldest privatization agenda put forth by any president to date."

One obvious advantage to hiring Blackwater, DynCorp, MPRI, and Triple Canopy was that it short circuits Congressional oversight, bypasses pesky obstacles like the Uniform Code of Military Justice, and hides the cost of the wars.

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Jeffrey St. Clair
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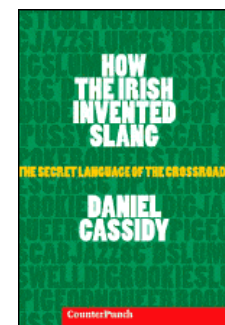
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Now the mercenaries are returning to their old haunts in Africa to train "peacekeepers." The problem is that today's "peacekeeper" may become tomorrow's thug. An examination of training programs by the U.S. Army's Strategic Studies Institute found that "Every armed group that plundered Liberia over the past 25 years had at its core" U.S. trained soldiers.

Addressing the current training of Liberian soldiers by DynCorp, the study warns there is a definite downside "to creating an armed elite." If the U.S. withdraws its training funds, "Liberia will be sitting on a time bomb; a well-trained and armed force of elite soldiers who are used to good pay and conditions of service, which may be impossible for the government of Liberia to sustain on its own."

MPRI is training militaries in Benin, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Mali, Malawi, Nigeria, Rwanda and Senegal. DynCorp is doing the same in Darfur and Somalia. While the cover story is fighting terrorism and ensuring stability, U.S. military intervention—direct and through mercenaries and its client state, Ethiopia—has thoroughly destabilized Somalia, creating a crisis that rivals Darfur.

While the malnutrition rate in Darfur is 13 percent, in some areas of Somalia it is 19 percent. The UN considers 15 percent to be the "emergency threshold."

"The situation in Somalia is the worst on the continent," says the UN's top official in Somalia, Ahmedou Ould-Abdallah.

According to Eric Laroche, the head of the UN's humanitarian services in Somalia, conditions were much better under the Islamic Courts Union that the U.S.-sponsored invasion overthrew. "It was much more peaceful and much easier for us to work. The Islamists didn't cause us any problems," he said.

In spite of Blackwater's reputation as trigger-happy cowboys who gunned down 17 unarmed Iraqi civilians last year, the company may soon see action in the Sudan. Actress and Darfur activist Mia Farrow recently met with the corporation's owner, Erik Prince, to discuss using the company in a military role in the western Sudan.

According to a 2007 study by the industrial College of the Armed Forces, "Africa may do for the [mercenary] industry in the next 20 years what Iraq has done in the past four years, provide a significant growth engine."

Behind that growth, says Nicole Lee of TransAfrica, "is nothing short of a sovereignty and resource grab." The National Energy Policy Development Group estimates that by 2015, a quarter of U.S. oil imports will come from Africa. Most of these will come from the Gulf of Guinea and the western regions of North Africa, but Sudan has the second largest reserves on the continent.

The U.S. has established a military command for the region—Africom—but no nation has agreed to host it yet. While suspicions about U.S. goals in Africa run high, those doubts apparently don't extend to U.S.-based mercenary organizations. While countries are holding Africom at arm's length, those same countries are embracing Blackwater, DynCorp, Triple Canopy, and MPRI.

Mercenaries are not just an American phenomena. Israel has begun privatizing its security checkpoints using the Israeli mercenary company Modiin Ezrahi. According to a spokesman for the Ministry of Defense, "By the end of the year all the people [guards] at the checkpoints will be civilians."

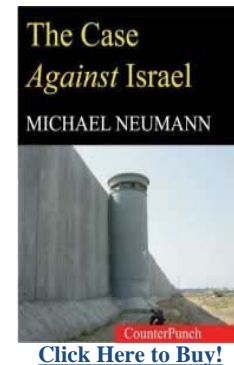
Israel claims it is replacing the army with mercenaries because it wants to demilitarize the checkpoints, but peace activists say that argument is nonsense. Hanna Barag of the human rights organization Machsom Watch says the civilian security guards are "Rambos" who behave no differently than Israeli soldiers.

The UN reports an increase in "significant difficulties" since the mercenaries took over.

Daniel Levy, a former advisor to current Israeli Defense Minister Ehud Barak, says the real reason is that it walls off the Israeli population from the burdens of trying to control 2.5 million Palestinians. "It separates [the occupation] from Israeli society," he told the *Financial Times*, "these guys [mercenaries] don't go home

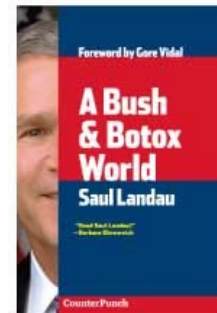
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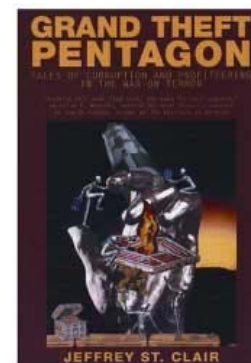
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and tell their mothers what they are doing.”

In the end, the bottom line is the bottom line. Private contractors in Iraq—190,000 strong—will cost U.S. taxpayers an estimated \$100 billion by the end of 2008.

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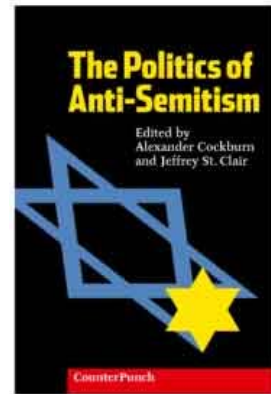
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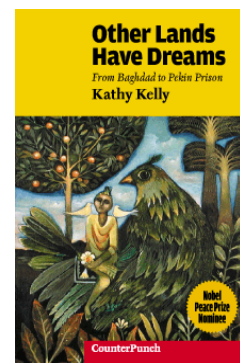
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