

New York Times voices moral outrage over profiteering military contractors ... in Russia

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In an editorial published Monday, “The Spoils, and Profits, of Conflict,” the editors of the *New York Times* worked themselves into a moral lather over war profiteering by military contractors.

The subject is unquestionably one worth pursuing in a country that is engaged in at least seven different military conflicts, has troops stationed in nearly 150 countries and spends more on arms than the next nine largest military powers combined.

That these wars translate into massive profits for the arms industry and obscene fortunes for their stockholders, even as the American troops who do the killing and dying are drawn overwhelmingly from the working class and poor, is one of Washington’s dirty little secrets.

But the target of the *Times*’ umbrage is not the sprawling US military-industrial complex, but rather a little known Russian firm, Evro Polis, which, according to sources quoted by the newspaper, has made a deal with the Syrian government to provide private military contractors in return for Damascus guaranteeing it a share of the oil revenues from the areas that it retakes from the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS).

The newspaper describes the deal as “shadowy and secret” and reports that at the head of the company is a figure “close to President Vladimir Putin.” It goes on to provide what it presents as a shocking quote from an unnamed private security consultant that “War is business.”

The *Times*’ editors, seemingly conscious that they are treading on thin ice, acknowledge that “mercenaries have always been around” and even “played a major role with US forces in Afghanistan and Iraq.” It goes on to cite the infamous 2007 Nisour Square massacre in Baghdad, in which mercenary gunmen employed by the major US military contractor Blackwater gunned down

17 Iraqi civilians and wounded another 20.

Nonetheless, the newspaper insists, there is something uniquely nefarious about the deal between Evro Polis and the Syrian government, declaring that “turning the fight into a private scramble for profit is a dangerous and ignoble gambit.”

At this stage, after some 16 years of the US “war on terror,” the decimation of entire societies in the Middle East and the destruction of more than a million lives as a result of US acts of aggression, who does the *Times* editorial board think it is kidding?

Whatever the role of Evro Polis, its connection to the Russian government and the semi-criminal oligarchy that it represents, the fact of the matter is that it represents less than small potatoes in relation to the vast army of mercenary military contractors deployed by Washington, and the multi-billion-dollar corporations that profit from their exploits.

In Afghanistan today, there are nearly three military contractors for every US soldier deployed on the ground. In Iraq, contractors are 42 percent of the force fielded by the Pentagon.

As for “shadowy and secret” deals and close relations between military contractors and top government officials, this is hardly a Russian innovation. Has it escaped the memory of the *Times* editors that the largest military contractor in the Iraq war, scooping up seemingly unlimited billions of dollars worth of no-bid contracts, was Halliburton (now KBR), whose former CEO was none other than Vice President Dick Cheney?

This incestuous relationship underscoring the “war is business” model has been reprised under the current administration, with the elevation of the former ExxonMobil CEO Rex Tillerson to the post of secretary of state.

And while citing Blackwater (which has since chosen

the innocuous name Academi in an attempt to escape its legacy of blood and filth) as a fleeting historical reference, the *Times* doesn't bother recalling for its readers that the company's former CEO Erik Prince is the brother of current Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos, and that he serves as an unofficial adviser to Trump, while continuing to reap huge profits off of the "private security" racket.

As for the feigned outrage over anyone who would dare turn war into a "scramble for profit," the truth is that this is precisely what it has been since the advent of imperialism, and never more nakedly than in the past quarter century of uninterrupted US military interventions. As the *Times* foreign affairs commentator Thomas Friedman infamously commented—after first trying to sell the illegal invasion of Iraq as a legitimate response to non-existent "weapons of mass destruction" and a crusade for democracy and human rights in the Middle East—"I have no problem with a war for oil."

The feigned shock of *Times* editorial page editor James Bennet over Russian military contractors embracing the profit motive beggars belief. After all, didn't the newspaper support capitalist restoration and the dissolution of the Soviet Union? The editorial is merely one more piece of war propaganda on behalf of those sections of the military and intelligence apparatus and the ruling establishment as a whole that see Russia as the foremost obstacle to US imperialism's drive to assert global hegemony.

Bennet, the brother of right-wing Democratic Senator Michael Bennet of Colorado and son of Douglas Bennet, a former top State Department official who headed the Agency for International Development (AID), a frequent conduit for CIA operations, is closely attuned to these circles.

The problem for these factions for which the *Times* speaks is not that Russia is using mercenaries, but that its activities are cutting across crucial geo-strategic interests of American imperialism in Syria and the broader Middle East.

The newspaper's hypocritical and hollow attempts to generate outrage over a military contract that is dwarfed by any number of similar deals struck by US war firms is part of an attempt to shift the Trump administration toward a more aggressive policy toward Moscow and, more decisively, counter the immense popular hostility

in the US toward escalating a military confrontation with the world's second-largest nuclear power.



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