

# *U.S. mercenary firm Blackwater training Daesh terrorists in Iraq*

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Beirut, May 7 (RHC)-- The notorious U.S. mercenary firm Blackwater has returned to Iraq, a Lebanese newspaper says, with the private company currently training defeated Daesh terrorists at a base near Baghdad. The Arabic-language newspaper al-Akhbar reported that Blackwater and other security firms have been allowed to operate in Iraq since early 2018 under intense U.S. pressure. The daily cited sources close to the chargé d'affaires of the U.S. mission in Iraq, Joey Hood, as saying that Blackwater had transferred U.S. military equipment from Jordan to Western Anbar Province.

According to the sources, the private company is currently training Daesh terrorists at the Ein al-Assad base which President Donald Trump visited in December. Al-Akhbar quoted field sources as saying that trucks carrying Daesh militants were transferred from the town of Baqouz, the last piece of land which the terror group held in Syria's eastern Province of Dayr al-Zawr.

Blackwater was expelled from Iraq in 2007 after its mercenaries killed 14 civilians in Baghdad's Nisour Square in a massacre that marked the peak of its violations against Iraqis during the U.S. invasion of the country.

Al-Akhbar cited a document from February 2018 obtained by BuzzFeed News that confirms its report. The document shows that Frontier Logistics Consultancy DMCC, a UAE-based subsidiary of a Hong Kong-listed security and logistics company established by Erik Prince -- the founder of Blackwater -- is operating in southern Iraq.

According to the daily, Blackwater which has changed its name to escape its bad reputation is seeking to operate in Syria, referring to Prince's remarks earlier this year when he welcomed Trump's Syria pullout

decision and stressed that American troops in the Arab country could be replaced with mercenaries.

Last week, the Syrian army and Iraqi Popular Mobilization Units (PMU), known as Hashd al-Sha'abi, carried out a coordinated operation with the aim of clearing the Iraq-Syria border area of remaining Daesh terrorists.

The operation came after Iraq and Syria agreed to reopen the al-Qaim border crossing. Both countries originally recaptured the al-Bukamal and al-Qaim border region from Daesh in November 2017 but continued terrorist presence had prevented a reopening of the crossing.

Syria and Iraq have both pledged to step up future security presence on the border in a bid to secure the strategic crossing. Iraq has planned to install thermal surveillance cameras and use aircraft to further reinforce security in the region.

The measures come as Iraq, Syria and Iran have sought to step up economic ties by developing a transnational railway line, along with a road route, linking the three countries. The U.S., however, has been engaged in a military campaign seeking to counter the emerging regional alliance.

Daesh terrorists have also commonly used U.S. presence in the region as a cover to attack Syrian and allied forces. Speculations have been made about Washington's direct or indirect support for the terrorist group in the past years.

Numerous accounts have emerged alleging airlifts, weapon airdrops and aerial support for the group, especially as its strength gradually diminished in the region. Several reports have suggested that the U.S. military has been allowing members of Daesh and their weapons into Afghanistan following the terror group's recent defeats in Syria and Iraq.

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