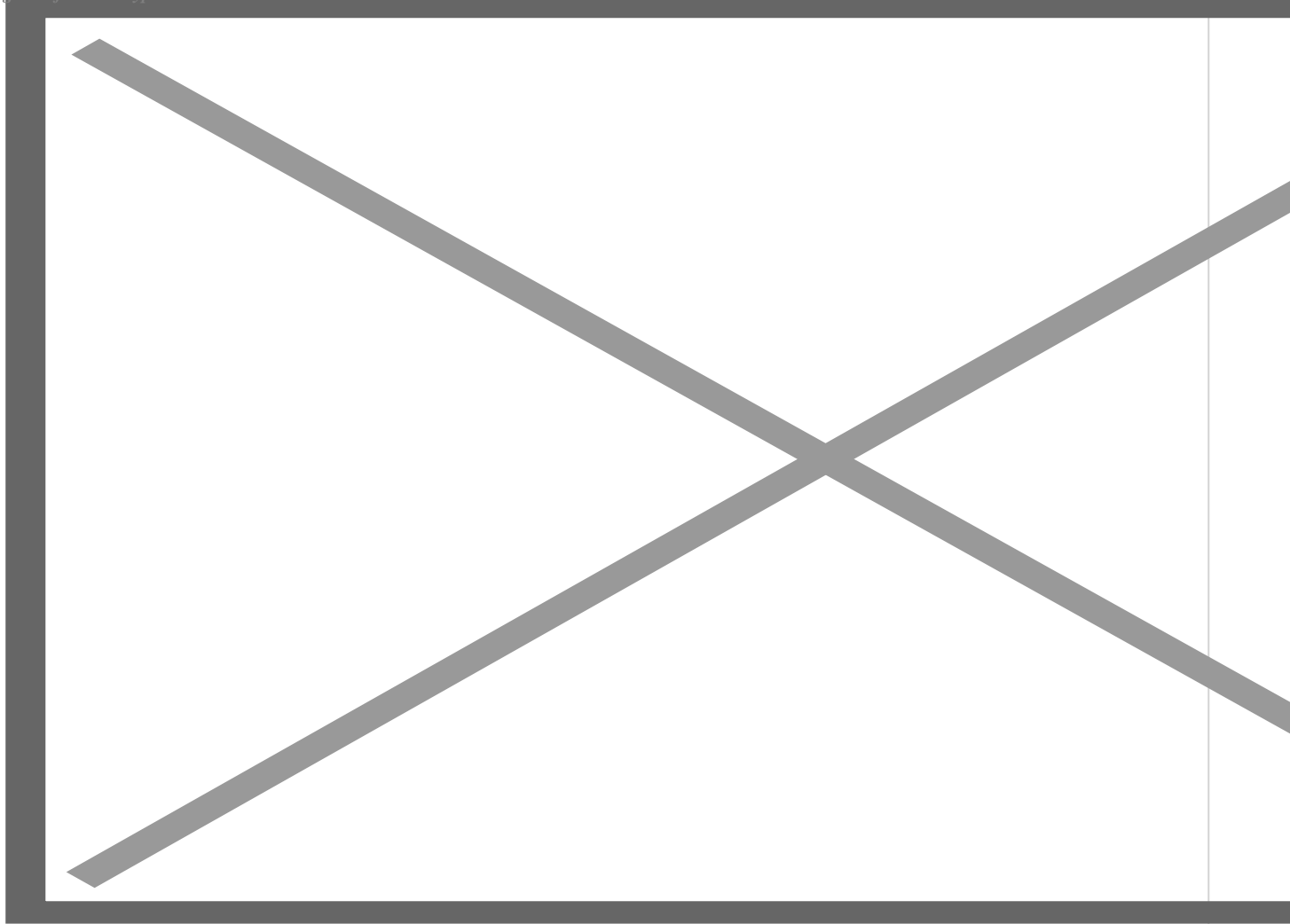


Trump pardons Blackwater mercenaries, corrupt lawmakers and murderers

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Trump pardons Blackwater mercenaries, corrupt lawmakers and murderers

Washington, December 23 (RHC)-- U.S. President Donald Trump has issued 15 pardons and five commutations, including pardons for four former Blackwater contractors involved in a massacre in Iraq,

three corrupt former Republican lawmakers, two people convicted in Robert Mueller's investigation into Russian interference in the 2016 election, and two Border Patrol agents convicted of shooting an undocumented immigrant.

The Blackwater guards included Nicholas Slatten, who was sentenced to life in prison after being convicted of first-degree murder for his role in the 2007 Nisoor Square massacre, when he and other Blackwater mercenaries opened fire with machine guns and grenades on a crowded public space in Baghdad, killing 17 unarmed civilians, including women and children. The youngest victim was a 9-year-old named Ali Kinani.

Blackwater was founded by Erik Prince, a close ally of Donald Trump. Prince's sister Betsy DeVos serves as education secretary in the Trump administration.

Donald Trump also pardoned Ignacio Ramos and José Compeán, two former Border Patrol agents who were convicted in 2006 of shooting an unarmed Mexican man and then covering it up. A pardon was also given to George Papadopoulos, a 2016 campaign foreign policy adviser who pleaded guilty to lying to the FBI during its Russia investigation.

The three former congressmen given pardons or commutations are all allies of Trump: Duncan Hunter, who had pleaded guilty to misusing campaign funds; Chris Collins, who pleaded guilty to insider trading; and Steve Stockman, who was convicted for stealing hundreds of thousands of dollars in charitable donations. Trump was pushed to commute Stockman's 10-year sentence by the conspiracy theorist lawyer Sidney Powell, who has been helping Trump try to overturn the November election. Trump also reduced the sentences of three women convicted of nonviolent drug crimes.

Meanwhile, Trump is reportedly considering granting legal immunity to Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, who is facing a federal lawsuit over a plot to assassinate a former top Saudi intelligence officer who now lives in Canada. Such a move may provide the legal basis to protect bin Salman over the killing of Jamal Khashoggi.

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