

Washington, D.C. - Congressman David Price (D-NC) delivered remarks before the House of Representatives today in support of accountability for private security contractors in the war zone.

The House is expected to vote tomorrow on his bill, [H.R. 2740](#) , which would ensure that all contractors working for the United States in the war zone are accountable to U.S. criminal law. The following are his remarks, as prepared.

Mr. Speaker, as the sponsor of this legislation, I rise to speak in favor of what is a long overdue solution to a problem with serious implications for our military and our national security.

Put simply, this legislation ensures that the U.S. government has the legal authority to prosecute crimes committed by U.S. contractor personnel working in war zones.

First let me thank Chairman Conyers and Chairman Scott for their leadership in bringing this legislation to the floor. And there are many other members on both sides of the aisle who have worked on this issue, including the gentleman from Connecticut, Mr. Shays, who held an excellent series of hearings on the issue last year, and Mr. Waxman, who has focused his committee on the issue this year.

My bill would do two simple things: it would expand the Military Extraterritorial Jurisdiction Act – MEJA – to cover all contractors operating in war zones, and it would beef up the Department of Justice's enforcement of MEJA.

The word "accountability" is used a lot in debates in this chamber. Let me tell you what "accountability" means in this context.

- It means that we will have the tools at our disposal to ensure that the criminal behavior of the men and women working in our name and on our dime does not, in any way, damage our goals and objectives.

- It means making sure that rogue actors – the bad apples in the bunch – are not able to act in ways that endanger our troops or our mission without fear of prosecution.
- Our military is the best fighting force in the world today, in large part because it is structured in a way that demands accountability, discipline, and unity of action. Military commanders will universally tell you that accountability is critical to success, because lapses in discipline or judgment can lead to defeat on the battlefield or can undermine popular support for the mission.
- The military goes to great lengths to ensure accountability. There is a clear chain of command, extensive training on legal and illegal actions in war, and – perhaps most importantly – clear consequences for violations. During the war in Iraq alone, there have been over 60 courts martial and hundreds of non-judicial punishments of military personnel under the Uniform Code of Military Justice.

And there is good reason for this accountability. If a military service member unlawfully kills an innocent civilian, steals property, or defiles a cultural icon, it contributes to popular outrage against American forces, making the military's mission more difficult and undermining our national security. It could motivate insurgents, and provide fodder for terrorist organizations. What's more, if we cannot ensure the rule of law for our own personnel, how can we credibly ask other nations – like Iraq – to uphold the rule of law when their own citizens commit crimes?

Unlike the military, there is no clear chain of command for contractors, little in the way of standards for training and vetting personnel, and no legal accountability for misconduct.

And as the recent shooting incident involving Blackwater USA employees demonstrated, contractors can clearly act in ways that have the same serious implications for our national security. If we do not hold contract personnel accountable for misconduct, as we do for our military, we are not only failing to uphold moral responsibilities, we are endangering the men and women of our Armed Forces. And we are undermining our nation's credibility as a country that upholds the rule of law.

It may be hard for some of us to believe that this gaping hole in the law exists. In fact, certain

contractors – those working under the Department of Defense – are already covered by MEJA. But others – including those working under the Department of State or USAID, a category that includes most armed security contractors – are not now covered under this law.

The law is not the only problem – we have also seen a serious deficiency in enforcement. Even though MEJA already covers DoD contractors, I am not aware of a single case of violent contractor misconduct that has been prosecuted in court. I have been told that MEJA has been applied in only one case in Iraq or Afghanistan: a Defense contractor convicted of child pornography.

There is nearly universal support for accountability for contractors, and there is broad support for the approach taken by this bill - including leading human rights organizations like Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, and Human Rights First, and from contractor associations, including the International Peace Operations Association.

My bill will improve the law, and it will improve enforcement. It will give our country the ability to hold contractors accountable, which will enhance our national security and the safety of our troops. And it will ensure that our country remains a model of law and integrity to the rest of the world.

I urge my colleagues to support this legislation.

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