

Washington, D.C. - This week Rep. David Price (D-NC) reported progress on two of his efforts to promote accountability for private contractors performing sensitive national security tasks for the government.

In response to his concerns, the House Intelligence Committee included in its Intelligence Authorization bill (H.R. 2082) new reporting and disclosure requirements for the Director of National Intelligence (DNI). Under the bill, the DNI will be required to report to Congress every year on the number of contractors working for the intelligence agencies, the full costs associated with those contracts, and the measures in place to hold contractors accountable for waste, fraud, abuse, or criminal violations.

During consideration of the Intelligence bill late last night, the House passed an amendment offered by Price that would require the DNI to conduct a comprehensive examination of the activities currently being performed by contractors, the minimum standards for hiring and training contractors, whether contractors save taxpayer money, and which intelligence activities, including sensitive tasks such as interrogation and electronic surveillance, are appropriate for contracting out to private entities.

Meanwhile, the House Armed Services Committee has approved its Defense Authorization Bill (H.R. 1585), which also includes provisions Price has advocated that will lead to greater accountability and transparency in the government's use of armed contractors in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Price worked with Armed Services Chairman Ike Skelton (D-MO) and others on provisions to facilitate identifying and reporting cases of abuse by rogue contractors, and to establish clear regulations, accountability mechanisms, and strong oversight for battlefield contracting. To date, contractors have been operating in a virtual legal vacuum. Despite many documented incidents of the alleged violent criminal misconduct by contractors, the Justice Department has filed charges in only one case of such abuse by a contractor in Iraq.

Price's provisions will require the State Department, the Defense Department and the US Agency for International Development (US AID) to create a mutual framework for managing contractors and will require them to establish regulations in a number of important areas that have been unregulated thus far. For the first time, these agencies will be required to:

-Maintain a comprehensive database of contractors working in Iraq and Afghanistan that will include the type of work, the cost, the number of personnel, the cost of security, the number of security personnel, and the overhead costs;

-Coordinate movements of contractors in the battle zone (so their operations are consistent with the military's mission and that their activities do not endanger US troops);

-Regulate the authority of contractor personnel to carry weapons, issue rules of engagement for security contractors, and establish minimum qualifications, including background checks for vetting armed security personnel;

-Collect and refer information relating to criminal misconduct to the appropriate authorities.

"This bill dramatically changes the rules of the game for battlefield contracting," Price said. "To this point, I think it's fair to say that there have been no rules in many cases, and that contractors haven't been made aware of the rules that exist. With this legislation, the executive branch will be required to set out a clear framework for battlefield contracting, and Congress will be granted access to the information we need to hold the government accountable for enforcing this framework in a fair and just way."

Price has been working for the last three years to clarify and enhance the rules governing the use of private contractors on the battlefield and within the intelligence agencies. He plans to continue pressing for further reforms to ensure that allegations of abuse by armed contractors are fully investigated and prosecuted by the Justice and Defense Departments.

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