

Washington, D.C. - House Armed Services Committee Chairman Ike Skelton (D-MO) and Congressman David Price (D-NC) yesterday called for an investigation of the government's use of private security contractors in Iraq.

In a letter to the Government Accountability Office (GAO), the investigative arm of Congress, the Congressmen noted that several government agencies employ private security contractors in Iraq for a wide range of functions, with limited oversight and within a murky legal environment.

"We have long been concerned about the use of private security contractors in Iraq and the lack of information regarding these contractors. Therefore, we are requesting that GAO undertake a review of the use of private security contractors in Iraq," the letter states.

The use of private security contractors has multiplied exponentially since the beginning of the Iraq War over four years ago, and the number of armed contractors operating in the battle zone is unprecedented in the history of U.S. military engagements.

"With this study, we hope to gain an accurate account of the role that contractors play in security operations in Iraq," Price said. "And given their sheer numbers on the ground, we hope to determine whether the current level of contracting is cost-effective, appropriate, and consistent with our national security objectives." Price has also introduced legislation, H.R. 369, which would enhance transparency, accountability, and battlefield coordination for private security contractors operating in a war zone.

The text of the letter follows.

April 26, 2007

Mr. David M. Walker

Comptroller General of the United States

441 G Street N.W.

Washington, DC 20548

Dear Mr. Walker,

As you know, the Department of Defense has contracted with several private security contractors to provide security for its employees as well as other U.S. Government civilian employees working in Iraq. In addition, the Department of Defense and other government departments and agencies have contracted with private security contractors to provide a variety of security services at installations in Iraq. Several government departments and agencies have also contracted for a diverse array of other services there.

We have long been concerned about the use of private security contractors in Iraq and the lack of information regarding these contractors. Therefore, we are requesting that GAO undertake a review of the use of private security contractors in Iraq. Specifically, we request that GAO examine (1) why private security contractors are being used in Iraq instead of military or U.S. Government civilian personnel; (2) the number of private security contractor employees working in Iraq for the U.S. Government and the total costs of employing those contractors; and (3) the process used to assure that the contractor employees are properly trained, qualified, and vetted. In addition, we would like GAO to review the process used by the contractors and the government to ensure accountability for vehicles and weapons acquired by contractors.

The GAO has already done tremendous work in raising concerns about the use, management, and oversight of security contractors in Iraq and elsewhere, and we are deeply grateful for this work. We believe the proposed study will allow you to continue this critical effort as questions about the U.S. Government's management of security contractors continue to arise. We are grateful for your assistance in this matter.

April 27, 2007

Sincerely,

IKE SKELTON

Chairman, House Committee on Armed Services

DAVID PRICE

Member of Congress

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