

Washington, D.C. - Today, the Government Accountability Office (GAO) released a final report on the Pentagon's use of security contractors in Iraq, finding major problems in the lack of data collection on contractors and inadequate communication between contractors and the military. US Rep. David Price (NC-04) requested the report more than a year ago.

"I am glad that the GAO has shed some light on the current problems with private military contracting in Iraq," said Price. "These findings, while not unexpected, are disturbing. This report underscores the need for legislation to clarify the contracting process, and I hope it will reinforce Congress's determination to address these issues."

Earlier this year, Price introduced legislation that would address the very problems highlighted by the GAO report. Price's TASC Act (Transparency and Accountability in Security Contracting) would set standards for contracting and require that the government collect basic information from its contractors, including the estimated cost of the job, the number of people employed by the contract, and the level of training required.

In the report released today, the GAO recommended, among other things, that federal agencies start collecting enough data to determine the cost of security contracting, which is still unknown.

GAO also faulted inadequate communication between the military and the private security contractors, which has led to confusing and dangerous interactions between the military and security contractors on the battlefield. In the first installments of the report released in April, the GAO found confusion dealing with the contracting process.

In addition, the report highlighted the lack of any standards for private military contractor personnel, such as training and experience requirements or weapons qualifications, which has led to the hiring of many unqualified security personnel.

"The contractors themselves have told us they want more clarity and better guidance as they carry out their dangerous work in Iraq and Afghanistan," continued Price. "From the tragic murder of Blackwater contractors in Fallujah to the national embarrassment of the Abu Ghraib scandal, it is clear that Congress needs to take action, both to protect our contractors and to

deal with the few who aren't doing their jobs properly."

Price incorporated parts of the TASC Act into the "Contractors on the Battlefield" section of the Defense Authorization Act for FY 2006 (HR 1815), which passed the House in May. These provisions would improve federal oversight and accountability for contractors working in war zones. The Senate has not yet completed consideration of its version of the Defense Authorization bill.

Those parts of Price's bill that were not included in HR 1815 would address the GAO's newest findings about the use of contractors, particularly the need to collect better data.

In May 2004, Price wrote a letter to GAO, signed by more than 100 Members of Congress, asking for an investigation into the use of civilian contractors in Iraq and elsewhere. GAO agreed to issue this report answering Price's questions, including whether contractors are carrying out security duties beyond the scope of their authority, and whether the federal government is providing contractors the information they need to do their jobs safely and effectively.

###