

Washington, D.C. - On Location with Other Members of Congress in Iraq

Related Documents: GAO Report on Contractors

Today, the House of Representatives passed the major elements of US Rep. David Price's TASC Act (Transparency and Accountability in Security Contracting), which would require that the government collect basic but critical information from its security contractors.

Price worked with members of the Armed Services Committee to incorporate the major provision of his legislation into the "Contractors on the Battlefield" section of the Defense Authorization Act for FY 2006 (HR 1815). These provisions would improve federal oversight and accountability for contractors working in war zones.

Like Price's TASC Act, HR 1815 would require security contractors to report on the number of personnel and their training. The bill would also establish protocols to improve communication between the military and these contractors.

The need for Price's legislation was underscored by a recently released Government Accountability Office (GAO) report, which found substantial confusion surrounding security contracts and how they fit into larger military operations. The report also determined that insufficient information exists to permit a substantive cost analysis to determine whether the use of security contractors is cost effective. GAO had agreed to issue a series of reports to answer several questions raised by Price, including whether contractors are carrying out security duties beyond the scope of their authority, and whether the federal government is providing contractors the direction they need to do their jobs safely and effectively.

Price is scheduled to make the following remarks related to the "Contractors on the Battlefield" section of the bill on the House floor today:

"Mr. Speaker, I rise today in support of the Defense Authorization Bill. I want to specifically

express my support for the "Contractors on the Battlefield" section of the bill, which takes a number of positive steps toward improving federal oversight of contractors providing security services in war zones.

"Several major incidents last year brought to light the problems and dangers inherent in the federal government's use of security contractors, including the Abu Ghraib scandal and the brutal murder of four Blackwater contractors in Fallujah.

"A year ago, more than 100 members of Congress joined me in writing to the GAO to request an investigation into the use of security contractors in combat zones. Last month, GAO confirmed many of our fears, releasing a report that found substantial confusion surrounding these contracts and how they fit into larger military operations.

"I have been working with Congressmen Spratt, Waxman, Cramer, and Snyder -- and with the various security contractor groups -- to develop legislation that would address these problems and help rationalize the security contracting system.

"Last month, we introduced a bill based on those efforts, the Transparency and Accountability in Security Contracting Act, and we have been working with the Armed Services Committee to incorporate the major elements of our bill into the Defense Reauthorization legislation we are considering today. I am grateful for the support that Representatives Hunter and Skelton have provided in addressing these issues.

"There were some items of our bill that I would have preferred be included in the measure now before us, but I understand there are some jurisdictional issues that would have complicated that. Nevertheless, the provisions that are part of the Defense Authorization bill are a solid first step, and I am pleased with this bipartisan accomplishment.

"To date, federal government has had no precise estimate of the number of armed contractors working in Iraq and, as a result, the Defense Department has had no systematic way to communicate with them, putting both contractors and troops at risk.

"The Defense Authorization bill would address that problem by requiring DoD contractors to provide information on their personnel who carry weapons, including the exact location where they are working. They would also be required to certify that those personnel have received the necessary training to do their jobs safely and effectively.

"The bill also would require combat commanders to establish protocols to improve communication between military personnel and contractor personnel. And it would require the Pentagon to establish guidelines for contractors as to the type of weapons they may use and the amount of training required to use them.

"These provisions would help keep our troops and contractors safe, and they should improve the effectiveness of contractors in Iraq and other areas of conflict. And after two years of being in the dark, this bill would also provide us with the information we need to provide appropriate oversight of contractors in war zones. I urge my colleagues to support this bill."

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