

MAY 7, 2004

**SCHAKOWSKY: BUSH ADMINISTRATION MISSTATEMENT OF THE DAY -
PRIVATE MILITARY
CONTRACTORS IN IRAQ**

WASHINGTON, D.C. - U.S. Representative Jan Schakowsky (D-IL) issued "The Bush Administration Misstatement of the Day" on private military contractors operating in Iraq.

The *New York Times* reported today that many private military contractors hired by the United States military to conduct *"tactical, operational and strategic interrogations"* in Iraq *"are now carrying out highly sensitive duties"* without the proper background checks or security clearance.

As a matter of fact, J. P. London, chief executive of CACI Inc., a firm with a contract at Abu Ghraib prison where Iraqi detainees were abused by U.S. soldiers and contractors, told the *New York Times*, *"we are not in the background investigation business."*

The newspaper added: *"Two contract workers have been implicated in the Abu Ghraib prison abuses, and investigators found that one of them, a translator working with interrogators who were trying to obtain sensitive information from Iraqi prisoners, had no security clearance at all."*

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However, according to the article:□

.in Congressional testimony last fall, Charles Abell, principal deputy undersecretary of defense for personnel, said he believed that the companies. "run a background check and then, of course, the military does a more detailed check." But Mr. Abell added: "In our rush to meet the requirements, the mere numerical requirements, I think folks were brought in based on those initial checks, and the more detailed checks followed as time permitted." Mr. Abell declined a request for an interview this week, and military spokesmen said they could not produce records of contractors' security clearances on Thursday.

May 7, 2004

Contractors in Sensitive Roles, Unchecked

By JOEL BRINKLEY and JAMES GLANZ - New York Times

WASHINGTON - The military's reliance on civilians to serve as interrogators and translators in Iraq is now so great that many people are being sent abroad without complete background investigations or full qualifications for the positions, government officials and industry experts say.

Once on the job, several experts said, many of the contractors are barely supervised. Two contract workers have been implicated in the Abu Ghraib prison abuses, and investigators found that one of them, a translator working with interrogators who were trying to obtain sensitive information from Iraqi prisoners, had no security clearance at all.

The revelations at Abu Ghraib have also led to the disclosure that private contractors are now carrying out highly sensitive duties that until very recently were the province of government agencies only.

Although senior Pentagon officials have long called for privatizing much of the military's work, current and former officials say the new reliance on contractors for intelligence and interrogation work resulted from the unexpected demands of the war in Iraq and had not been long planned.

Kevin Hendzel, an officer with the American Translators' Association, which represents translators nationwide, said the government's need for Arabic translators "is so great that demand has completely outstripped supply, draining the pipeline," so that now "people with no real qualifications are being hired."

After a translators' association convention in December, he added, the government quickly hired more than 2,000 people.

Ralph Williams, spokesman for the Titan Corporation, which supplies translators in Iraq, was unapologetic about hiring bilingual people with unlikely professional backgrounds, like taxi drivers, for positions in Iraq and elsewhere.

"Just because he is a taxi driver does not mean he is not fluent in Arabic and English," Mr. Williams said. One Titan translator, a former taxi driver working at the detention center at Guantánamo Bay, Cuba, was arrested on charges of espionage last year. John Israel, the translator with no security clearance implicated in the prison abuse case, worked for a Titan subcontractor, the company said.

Mr. Hendzel said he worried that "if you just hire someone off the street, you have a security risk and maybe even a loyalty question."

Every company official interviewed said he did not consider it his company's responsibility to research the backgrounds of the people it hires for government contracts.

"No, we are not in the background investigation business," J. P. London, chief executive of CACI Inc., said in an interview Thursday. A CACI employee, Steven Stefanowitz, was implicated in the abuse case.

Ralph Williams, spokesman for Titan, said, "It's up to the government to execute" background checks.

But in Congressional testimony last fall, Charles Abell, principal deputy undersecretary of defense for personnel, said he believed that the companies, including Titan, "run a

background check and then, of course, the military does a more detailed check." But Mr. Abell added: "In our rush to meet the requirements, the mere numerical requirements, I think folks were brought in based on those initial checks, and the more detailed checks followed as time permitted."

Mr. Abell declined a request for an interview this week, and military spokesmen said they could not produce records of contractors' security clearances on Thursday.

Maj. Gen. Robert A. Harding, retired, who served in senior military intelligence positions until three years ago and now runs a company that supplies intelligence analysts and interrogators to the military in Iraq said the government's appetite is now so great that almost any qualified person can get a job. "It doesn't surprise me that a lot of people are going in with only interim checks for secret" clearances, he said.

Thomas E. White, who was secretary of the Army until April 2003 and a leading advocate of privatization in the military said in an interview Thursday that he was surprised when he learned this week that employees of private companies were now involved in intelligence work, which suggests how abruptly the trend took off.

The expansion of the contractor force is, in one sense, simply an acceleration of a trend that first picked up speed after the end of the cold war in the 1990's. Largely because of troop cuts, the Pentagon began awarding contracts to private companies for logistics support, like delivering food and fuel to troops.

In the latest phase of this privatization, the major contract was awarded to the Halliburton subsidiary, Kellogg, Brown & Root, in 2001, and was expected to require about \$100 million in work a year, said Col. Tim Considine, deputy commander of the field support command at the Rock Island Arsenal, which oversees the contract. Instead, costs are expected to run to some \$6 billion in the 2004 fiscal year, largely because of the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan, he said.

But those contracts are focused strictly on noncombat roles and do not involve intelligence or interrogation. The use of contractors for such positions is much more recent, security consultants and former military and intelligence officers said.

The CACI contract at Abu Ghraib runs from Aug. 14, 2003, to Aug. 13, 2004, according to a summary of the contract prepared by Scott Northrup, Iraq country manager for CACI.

"The interrogator conducts tactical, operational and strategic interrogations," the summary says. It adds: "No CACI employees are in positions of authority."

"The way the process works is that the United States government sets forth their needs and what requirements are in terms of these skill sets," Mr. London said. "We put together a project team and roster, if you will, of team staff that we believe meets the terms and requirements and so on that are set forth.

"I have every confidence that the skill sets are such that you're dealing with experienced people to meet these interrogator requirements," he said. "You're not talking about people that have been picked up at the bus stop."

On Tuesday, Maj. Gen. Geoffrey Miller, deputy commanding general for detention operations in Iraq, praised the earlier work of civilian interrogators in Afghanistan and at Guantánamo Bay. Civilian interrogators in Iraq, he said, also seemed to be meeting that standard.□

But Representative Ike Skelton of Missouri, the senior Democrat on the Armed Services Committee said: "There was a crash course to hire these people. Unless we better understand what their duties and rules are, we could get in more trouble."

Joel Brinkley reported from Washington for this article, and James Glanz from New York.