

WASHINGTON, DC (January 24, 2010) – A troubling report from the Congressional Research Service found that private security contractors, like Blackwater, comprise nearly one-third of the armed force in Afghanistan and nearly one-fifth in Iraq. Rep. Jan Schakowsky, D-IL, wrote to Secretary Robert Gates following the release of the report urging him to scale down security contractors and return those functions to U.S. military forces. The report, “The Department of Defense’s Use of Private Security Contractors in Iraq and Afghanistan: Background, Analysis, and Options for Congress,” was released January 19, 2009.

“Our reliance on private security contractors has created a situation that jeopardizes the national security of the United States and threatens our mission in Iraq and Afghanistan. The proliferation of private security contractors on inherently military missions is troubling on several levels. It is dangerous to rely on hired guns to provide vital security services in war zones, and I believe that the United States must move toward responsibly returning these essential armed functions to U.S. government and military personnel.”

LETTER ATTACHED BELOW:

January 22, 2010

Dear Secretary Gates:

I am writing to express my concern about our increasing reliance on armed private security contractors for inherently governmental functions. I strongly believe that it is dangerous to rely on hired guns to provide vital security services in war zones and that the United States must move toward responsibly returning these essential armed functions to U.S. government and military personnel.

In a recent report entitled “The Department of Defense’s Use of Private Security Contractors in Iraq and Afghanistan: Background, Analysis, and Options for Congress,” the Congressional Research Service estimates that contractors in Iraq may make up approximately 13 to 18% of the Department of Defense’s armed force in Iraq and 22 to 30% of the Pentagon’s armed force in Afghanistan.

As you know, I have long opposed the use of private security contractors for inherently governmental functions, particularly in combat zones. It is inexcusable that as much as one-third of our military’s armed force in Afghanistan may be contractors. These men and women are not part of the U.S. military or government. They do not wear the uniform of the United States, though their behavior has, on numerous occasions, severely damaged the credibility and security of our military and harmed our relationship with other governments.

While I continue to oppose the use of armed contractors for mission-essential functions, I am particularly concerned that lucrative contracts for extremely sensitive tasks continue to be awarded to companies with a history of serious abuse. Recent news reports have stated that Xe, the company formerly known as Blackwater, is being considered for a contract potentially worth \$1 billion, to train Afghanistan’s national police.

It is unacceptable that the United States government continues to contract with Xe, despite the company's history of abuse and misconduct, including excessive use of force against civilians. The behavior and actions of both the company's leadership and a number of individuals employed by the company have harmed our mission in Iraq and Afghanistan and endangered the lives and welfare of our troops and diplomatic personnel serving overseas. Given this company's history of abuse and in light of recent allegations, I once again urge you not to award further contracts to Xe and its affiliates and to review all existing contracts with this company.

I strongly believe that the United States military must act to reduce its reliance on armed private security contractors. I urge you to review the recent CRS report and hope you will join me in working to return mission-essential armed functions to U.S. government and military personnel.

Thank you for your consideration, and I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Jan Schakowsky

Member of Congress