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Labor Dept.: 1,001 Contractors Have Died in Iraq

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WASHINGTON — More than 1,000 civilian contractors have been killed in Iraq since the U.S.-led invasion.

In response to a request from Rep. Jan Schakowsky, D-Ill., the Labor Department revealed that 1,001 civilian contractors have died in Iraq since the U.S. invasion.

So far in 2007, at least 231 contractors working for U.S. firms have died in Iraq.

Those contractor fatalities are in addition to the 3,668 military personnel the Defense Department had counted as killed in Iraq.

"We are not getting the full picture" of the cost of the war in Iraq, Schakowsky said in a recent interview.

Another 76 civilian contractors have died in Afghanistan since the start of operations there, the Labor Department said.

Besides those killed, 4,837 workers in Iraq and 879 in Afghanistan suffered injuries severe enough to require hospitalization.

The report did not identify which companies employed the workers, or their nationalities.

Houston-based KBR, the Pentagon's largest military contractor working in Iraq, has had 50,000 employees in Iraq since the invasion.

More than 100 of the company's employees and contractors have been killed in Iraq, Kuwait and Afghanistan.

"Obviously, all of our employees that work in the region perform their work under harsh and dangerous conditions."

The civilian contractor figures are compiled by the Labor Department's Division of Longshore and Harbor Workers' Compensation.

But these numbers likely do not tell the whole story.

"The data show the number of cases reported to the (Labor Department), not the number of injuries or deaths."

Labor Department officials have not responded in recent weeks to inquiries from the Chronicle about the data.

The Labor Department only provided the numbers after Schakowsky called personally to request the data.

The United States has about 162,000 troops serving in Iraq. Military families have long complained about the high cost of the war.

By using civilian contractors, the Pentagon is able to send fewer troops to Iraq, since the civilians can perform many of the same tasks as soldiers.