Mr. Speaker, I rise today to decry our

unprecedented use of unaccountable private security contractors in

Iraq.

By some estimates, there are over 50,000 private security personnel

working in Iraq. These contractors operate outside U.S. and Iraqi law,

raising animosity toward Americans in the field and losing us hearts

and minds in Iraq.

The activities of one of the most prominent contractors, Blackwater,

highlight why they are a counterproductive influence in Iraq, and their

activities must be curtailed.

Two weeks ago, Blackwater personnel guarding a State Department group

were involved in a shootout that resulted in the deaths of as many as

17 Iraqis. Yesterday, the Government Reform Committee disclosed that

Blackwater has been involved in 195 escalation of force incidents since

2005; and in 80 percent of those, Blackwater fired the first shots.

These incidents, combined with others, clearly indicate that we need to

stop putting contractors in Iraq and bring those there under control,

which is why I have introduced legislation to freeze the number of

contractors operating in Iraq at September 1 levels. And I am a proud

cosponsor of the bill we will vote on today, the MEJA Expansion Act, to

bring these contracts under control.