

Senate Democratic Policy Committee Hearing

“Abuses in Private Security and Reconstruction Contracting in Iraq: Ensuring Accountability, Protecting Whistleblowers”

Donald Vance

Former Private Security Contractor

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Good morning. I would like to thank the distinguished members of this committee for the opportunity to testify before you today.

I am a 30 year-old Navy veteran. In 2005, I chose to go to Iraq as a civilian to help with the American efforts to rebuild the country. While in Iraq, I worked for a couple of private military contractors. Among the jobs I am most proud of, I helped secure aid workers and assisted in the first free elections in Iraq.

Despite those positive experiences, there was much that the private contractors did that appeared, at the very least, to be suspicious. This was particularly the case when I worked at Shield Group Security (SGS). SGS was a private military contractor that derived its profits, in part, from the United States government through subcontracts with Iraqi government agencies and other corporations. SGS is currently operating in Iraq, albeit under a different name.

Because of the suspicious activity I witnessed at SGS, when I was home in Chicago in October 2005, I contacted my local FBI agency and met with FBI agent Travis Carlisle. After meeting with Agent Carlisle, upon my return to Iraq, I began voluntarily providing the FBI with information on the corruption that I observed. I would provide the FBI with real-time reporting of any incident that I witnessed that I thought appeared suspicious, including forwarding emails, capturing documents on memory sticks and taking photographs, whenever possible. I later also began reporting to United States government officials in Iraq.

The incidents of corruption that I witnessed and reported on were alarming. I observed SGS bribing Iraqi officials to secure weapons for SGS. I observed another American, who was also working for SGS, provide liquor to United States soldiers in exchange for United States weapons and ammunition. I observed United States State Department officials buy weapons from and meet in secret with SGS and local sheikhs. And I observed SGS amassing an unnecessarily large quantity of weapons.

One incident of corruption that I particularly remember was when a large, well-known defense contractor purchased two anti-aircraft guns from SGS. This sale raised concern and suspicion because United States military forces have complete air control over Iraq. It is still a mystery what these weapons were being used for and where they ultimately went.

Because of the information that I possessed, and because of my unwillingness to condone the corruption in the company, I became a target within SGS. SGS officials took measures to ensure that I could not leave the compound in the Red Zone on which SGS was located. When I called the United States government for help, they came to the compound to rescue me. But what started as a rescue, ended up a nightmare.

That night I was taken to the United States Embassy and debriefed. I told the agent that questioned me everything that I had witnessed. I also told him that I was informing for the FBI. Instead of contacting the FBI to verify the information that I provided, these government officials blindfolded and handcuffed me and took me into detention. According to a Department of Defense spokesperson, they did not bother to contact the FBI until three weeks into my detention. To this day, even through Freedom of Information Act requests, no government official has explained what was asked of the FBI regarding myself and what the FBI said in response.

I spent the next 97 days in hell at Camp Cropper. I was placed in isolation. I was denied food and water. I was denied sleep. I was also denied requested, and much needed, medication. There was intolerably-loud heavy metal and country music blaring into the cells. The lights in the cells were always on. The guards would threaten me and physically assault me. For example, the guards would walk me into walls while I was blindfolded and handcuffed, “shake down” my cell for contraband and threaten to use excessive force if I did not obey all of their orders. Finally, for the first few weeks I was at Camp Cropper I was denied a phone call. No one in my family knew where I was, if I was alive or if I was dead.

During the time that I was at Camp Cropper, I was interrogated constantly. Before each session, I would ask for an attorney. This request was invariably denied. Instead, I was interrogated by a host of United States government personnel, including FBI agents, Navy Criminal Investigative Service officers, as well as possibly CIA and DIA agents. The interrogations shared no consistent focus but covered a broad range of topics, including the corruption I had witnessed and the U.S. officials on whom I had reported.

According to the government, I was being held as a security internee because of my affiliation with SGS, certain members of which the government believed were selling weapons to insurgents. To the best of my knowledge, none of those high-level SGS officials on whom I was reporting were ever interrogated by the United States military.

The only opportunity I had to “challenge” my designation as a security internee was at a Detainee Status Board. But at that Status Board, I had no attorney, I was not allowed to see the majority of the evidence concerning me, to present witnesses or physical evidence that I had requested or to cross-examine adverse witnesses. It was an entirely empty proceeding.

Three months after I was initially detained, and after alleged subsequent “re-examination” of my case, the government decided to release me. Before I was released, however, I had one final interrogation. The main focus of that interrogation was what I was going to do when I got home: Was I going to write a book? Was I going to tell the press? Was I going to get an attorney?

The final insult came when the government actually released me: Rather than secure my safe return home, the government gave me a twenty dollar bill and dumped me at the Baghdad Airport to fend for myself, without the documentation I needed to return to the United States. I had to dodge several threats before I could leave Iraq and return to the United States.

I started reporting to the FBI because I wanted to help the United States ferret out corruption in Iraq. But I have learned that if you “inform on the bull, you will get the horns.” I only hope that by bringing this experience to the attention of the public, no one will have to endure the nightmare that I have experienced.

Thank you for inviting me to testify before this committee and I welcome any questions that you may have.