

## **American pariah forced to buy 'allies'**

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### **US paying allies to fight war in Iraq**

NEW DELHI: The tale of massive fraud and embezzlement of millions of dollars by the US military in its operations in Iraq continues. Testifying before the US Congress Committee on Oversight and Government Reform on 22 May, Mary Ugone, deputy inspector general of accounts in the Pentagon said that an audit of \$8.2 billion spending related to the Iraq war showed that \$7.8 billion had been improperly spent.

Over 180,000 payments, mostly since the war started in 2003, were made by the defense department to contractors for everything from bottled water to vehicles to transportation services.

In her testimony, Ugone also revealed that \$135 million were given to forces from three countries UK, South Korea and Poland to facilitate their participation in the war. This is the first time that the US has officially admitted paying its allies in the so-called Coalition of the Willing that invaded Iraq in March 2003.

In his opening statement, Henry Waxman, chairman of the committee, said that wounded soldiers are getting notices from the Pentagon to return signing bonuses with interest since they had not completed the full term. "There is something very wrong when our wounded troops have to fill out forms in triplicate for meal money while billions of dollars in cash are handed out in Iraq with no accountability," he said.

In an earlier report released in November 2007, the Inspector General had concluded that the Defense Department couldn't properly account for over \$5 billion in taxpayer funds spent in support of the Iraq Security Forces. It said that thousands of weapons, including assault rifles, machine guns, and rocket-propelled grenade launchers were unaccounted for, and millions of dollars had been squandered on construction projects that did not exist.

Ugones testimony gave detailed examples of the bizarre manner in which US defense officials doled out huge amounts of money without recording where it was going. In one case a sum of \$320 million was paid an Iraqi official for paying salaries with only an incompletely filled voucher signed by one official. Since no details of the spending plan were attached as required by Pentagon rules the auditors have no clue as to where the money went. This payment was made from assets seized from Iraq.

Auditors found that the Pentagon gave away \$1.8 billion from seized Iraqi assets. There were 53 vouchers noting these payments but not even one adequately explained where the money went.

In another instance, two vouchers, one for \$5 million and the other for \$2.7 million showed payments to a vendor for goods and services provided except that there were no details of what goods or services were actually delivered.

Over \$2.7 billion was spent on providing equipment and services to the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF). The auditors found that \$2 billion of this was not properly accounted for. For example, 31 heavy

tracked recovery vehicles costing \$10.2 million were given to the ISF, but 18 of them could not be traced because identification numbers were not recorded.

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