

In the spring of 2007 a tiny military contractor with a slender track record went shopping for a precious Beltway commodity.

The company, Defense Solutions, sought the services of a retired general with national stature, someone who could open doors at the highest levels of government and help it win a huge prize: the right to supply Iraq with thousands of armored vehicles.

Access like this does not come cheap, but it was an opportunity potentially worth billions in sales, and Defense Solutions soon found its man. The company signed Barry McCaffrey, a retired four-star army general and military analyst for NBC News, to a consulting contract starting June 15, 2007.

Four days later the general swung into action. He sent a personal note and 15-page briefing packet to David Petraeus, the commanding general in Iraq, strongly recommending Defense Solutions and its offer to supply Iraq with 5,000 armored vehicles from Eastern Europe. "No other proposal is quicker, less costly, or more certain to succeed," he said.

Thus, within days of hiring McCaffrey, the Defense Solutions sales pitch was in the hands of the American commander with the greatest influence over Iraq's expanding military.

"That's what I pay him for," Timothy Ringgold, chief executive of Defense Solutions, said in an interview.

McCaffrey did not mention his new contract with Defense Solutions in his letter to Petraeus. Nor did he disclose it when he went on CNBC that same week and praised the commander Defense Solutions was now counting on for help — "He's got the heart of a lion" — or when he told Congress the next month that it should immediately supply Iraq with large numbers of armored vehicles and other equipment.

He had made similar arguments before he was hired by Defense Solutions, but this time he went further. In his testimony to Congress, McCaffrey criticized a Pentagon plan to supply Iraq with several hundred armored vehicles made in the United States by a competitor of Defense Solutions. He called the plan "not in the right ballpark" and urged Congress to instead equip Iraq with 5,000 armored vehicles.

"We've got Iraqi army battalions driving around in Toyota trucks," he said, echoing an argument made to Petraeus in the Defense Solutions briefing packet.

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