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Probe of Saudi

Washington

Chairman John Stennis (Dem-Miss.) of the Senate Armed Services Committee began an inquiry yesterday into a Pentagon contract with a private corporation to train Saudi Arabian national guardsmen protecting oil fields.

Stennis said he asked Secretary of Defense James Schlesinger for an explanation after disclosure by the Associated Press on Saturday of a \$77 million Defense Department contract with Vinnell Corp. of Los Angeles.

Vinnell is recruiting for-

mer U.S. Special Forces soldiers and other war veterans for a 1000-man force to send to Saudi Arabi.

Major General Winant Sidle, Pentagon spokesman, said Vinnell Corp. will train the Saudi Arabian National Guard forces for "general internal security" as well as protection of oil fields.

Stennis told newsmen he had not heard before of any Defense Department contract with a private corporation to train military forces of a foreign country.

"It raises questions," he said.

In the House, Representa-

tive Lucien Nedzi (Dem-Mich.), chairman of the House Armed Services subcommittee on military personnel, said his group also "will go into it."

At the State Department, a spokesman said that the Defense Department frequently contracts with civilian companies to carry out aspects of its responsibilities under similar circumstances.

"We do have a number of programs in the economic and security fields in implementation of our long-standing policy in coopera-

Guard Training Opens

tion and support of Saudi Arabia," spokesman Robert Funseth said.

One such program, he said, is the modernization of the national guard.

Told that Senator Henry Jackson (Dem-Wash.) and Hubert Humphrey (Dem-Minn.) have called for an investigation of the contract, Funseth said, "We are always cooperative with Congress."

Jackson personally delivered to Stennis a letter asking for a thorough inquiry into the Saudi Arabian training contract.

Stennis declined to commit the committee to formal hearings, but promised to "find out what the facts are."

"We want to find out what gives," Jackson told newsmen. "A program of this kind should have been disclosed to Congress. It is a rather sad thing that we were not informed."

But Funseth said that the agreement with Saudi Arabia to modernize the Saudi national guard, announced last spring, was discussed at the time with the House Foreign Affairs and Senate For-

eign Relations committees.

Sidle, the Defense Department spokesman, said that the force being assembled by Vinnell Corp. will teach the Saudi Arabian guardsmen to fire various weapons, but will not train them in field tactics.

He said the same sort of services have been provided in Saudi Arabia before. He cited Northrop Corp. personnel teaching Saudi Arabian pilots to fly the F-5 fighter, and Raytheon Corp. personnel demonstrating the use of the Hawk antiaircraft missile.

The State Department an-

nounced last April 15 a \$300 million arms sale agreement between the United States and Saudi Arabia to modernize and re-equip the Saudi National Guard, supplying infantry weapons, communications equipment and other items.

Sidle said Saudi Arabia will pay the \$76.9 million involved in the Vinnell service contract, so "it won't cost the taxpayers a penny."

The Pentagon spokesman said Vinnell Corp. also had a prior training contract to instruct Vietnamese logistics troops in South Vietnam.

Associated Press