

FACT OR FOLK: EVALUATING COMMON THEORIES OF
PRIVATE INTERESTS AS THE CAUSE OF THE IRAQ WAR

by

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Despite theories of private interests as the cause of the Iraq War dominating the public discourse about the war, the academic debate over the true cause of this puzzling war neglects to seriously consider these folk theories. This thesis attempts to answer the question of what truth lays behind the common theories that the Bush Administration pushed to invade Iraq to benefit Big Oil, the arms industry, Halliburton, or because of neoliberal ideology. To accomplish this task, this research presents, critiques, and evaluates the best evidence available for each of these widely believed folk theories of private interests as the cause of the Iraq War.

While the arms industry theory and the neoliberalism theory add some interesting details to the story of the Iraq War, they make less than compelling cases that those parochial interests were significant causes of the war. Relatively strong evidence shows Big Oil and the Cheney-Halliburton connection to almost certainly have played significant role in the Bush Administration's decision to invade Iraq. By studying these folk theories of private interests as the cause of the Iraq War, private interests can be shown to have been a significant factor in the decision to invade Iraq despite the limits on the information available about the administration's motives.

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Introduction: Why Invade Iraq?

On February 15th of 2003, millions gathered around the world to protest the imminent invasion of Iraq by the United States and the Coalition of the Willing. These protesters carried signs proclaiming, “No Blood for Oil!” and other ant-war slogans.¹ Earlier that year, Member of Parliament and future Labor Party leader Jeremy Corbyn would declare unequivocally that “it’s a war about oil and it’s a war where the main beneficiaries will be the arms manufacturers.”² In 2009, future US Senator Rand Paul while speaking before college students claimed that Vice President Cheney pushed to invade Iraq to personally profit and to profit his former company, Halliburton.³ As the Bush administration’s justifications for the war fell apart following the invasion, the public, politicians, and scholars alike presented their theories to explain the true causes of the Iraq War. In the public sphere, many believe that private interests played a significant or even decisive role in the Bush Administration’s decision to invade Iraq. These beliefs constitute folk theories that manifest in the form of signs and chants at protests loudly asserting ‘No Blood for Oil’ and in the form of speeches railing against the military industrial complex. These folk theories which typically claim the US fought the Iraq War for the profits of some private interest captured the public’s imagination and perception of the Iraq War, but they are rarely examined in an academic context.

¹ “5 Photographs From The Day The World Said No To War,” Imperial War Museums, accessed May 6, 2021, <https://www.iwm.org.uk/history/5-photographs-from-the-day-the-world-said-no-to-war>.

² *Jeremy Corbyn — No War in Iraq! — 18 Jan 2003, 2003*, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ANNhzJIHJFc>.

³ David Corn, “Watch: Rand Paul Claims Dick Cheney Pushed to Invade Iraq so Halliburton Would Profit,” *Mother Jones* (blog), accessed May 6, 2021, <https://www.motherjones.com/politics/2014/04/rand-paul-dick-cheney-exploited-911-iraq-halliburton/>.

This thesis continues the work of answering the question of why did the United States invade Iraq? And more specifically, what role did private interests play in that fateful decision to go to war? The study of folk theories helps answer these crucial question by assessing the strengths and weaknesses of popular but underexamined theories. These popular theories make connections between Iraq's vast oil reserves and influential oil companies or the seemingly unnecessary war and the powerful military industrial complex or the fortune made by military contractors like Halliburton during the Iraq War and its former CEO, Vice President Cheney. This thesis investigates what truth can be found in these folk theories. Through this task of examining and reviewing the evidence available that supports common theories that private interests were a significant cause of the Iraq War, this thesis aspires to reveal what role private interests played the decision to invade Iraq. While the war cannot definitively be said to have been the results of private interests, significant evidence connects the Bush Administration's push for war with the oil industry and the reconstruction contractor Halliburton via Vice President Cheney. While the other theories investigated in this thesis reveal some interesting details about private interests and US foreign policy, these two private interests most likely played some role in the Bush Administration's push for war.

Falling from its initial level of 72% support among US citizens according to a Gallup poll from March of 2003, the Iraq War has widely been regarded a disastrous mistake.⁴ The lost lives, non-existent WMDs, the failure at nation building, prolonged

⁴ Frank Newport, "Seventy-Two Percent of Americans Support War Against Iraq," *Gallup*, March 24, 2003, <https://news.gallup.com/poll/8038/SeventyTwo-Percent-Americans-Support-War-Against-Iraq.aspx>.

insurgency, alienated allies, and wasted tax dollars have made the Iraq War a clear mistake in the eyes of the public. Along with countless Democrats, even Republican President Donald Trump would claim the war was “a tremendous mistake” and falsely assert that he had always been against the war.⁵ Despite the widespread condemnation of the Iraq War, there has not been an honest reckoning with the conditions that led to the Iraq War and policies implemented to avoid a similar event in the future. The Obama Administration generally held “a belief that we need to look forward as opposed to looking backwards” in relation to the Bush Administration’s policy.⁶ If private interests caused the Iraq War as these folk theories allege, nothing has been changed to prevent private interests from hijacking the state for their own ends again in the future. Corporate interests still influence government through embedding policy makers via the revolving door or by simply lobbying politicians. This research will ideally make progress toward identifying the conditions with domestic politics which lead to overextensions like the Iraq War and help prevent similar events from happening in the future. The popular theories examined in this thesis will be the Big Oil theory, the arms lobby theory, the Cheney-Halliburton theory, and the neoliberal, privatization theory.

The Gap between the Public Conversation and Academic Discourse

This project of cataloging and evaluating different folk theories of the origins of the Iraq War arises from the gap between the popular discourse surrounding the Iraq War and the academic discourse. A fair amount of distance should be expected between

⁵ Hope Yen, “AP FACT CHECK: Trump Spins Tales on Bin Laden, Iraq War,” *AP NEWS*, sec. Osama bin Laden, accessed May 6, 2021, <https://apnews.com/article/osama-bin-laden-donald-trump-ap-top-news-politics-abu-bakr-al-baghdadi-5541490f4ad945be8e9c0b46520da943>.

⁶ David Johnston and Charlie Savage, “Obama Reluctant to Look Into Bush Programs,” *The New York Times*, January 12, 2009, sec. U.S., <https://www.nytimes.com/2009/01/12/us/politics/12inquire.html>.

the public understanding of the Iraq War and the naturally more nuanced understanding in academia, but the commonality of belief in these folk theories in the public sphere makes the near silence on these theories in academia particularly interesting. For the most part, when academics discuss these theories, they either quickly dismiss them or the academic will dance around directly proposing a theory of private interests by clearly showing evidence that supports a theory of private interests while never making the type of absolutist statement about the veracity of a theory that the public commonly makes. Despite the silence in the formal literature, many academics “quietly propose that private US corporate interests in oil-related or war-related profits were the likely primary motives behind the war.”⁷ The idea that private interests played a crucial role in the decision to invade Iraq has salience in the public’s imagination and in the minds of some academics. However, the “fear of damaging their professional reputations and being labeled conspiracy theorists” likely causes academics to hesitate before diving into investigating these theories of private interests.⁸

Conspiracy Theory and Private Interests

Politicians often term theories of private interests as ‘conspiracy theories’ to make them seem like illogical and esoteric beliefs. Generally, “conspiracy theories are understood to be delusional beliefs produced by irrational individuals on the political fringe” and are not worthy of academic or any sort of serious consideration.⁹ The label of conspiracy theory effectively serves to silence and easily dismiss many hypotheses,

⁷ Jane K. Cramer and A. Trevor Thrall, *Why Did the United States Invade Iraq?* (Florence, UNITED STATES: Routledge, 2011), <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/uoregon/detail.action?docID=957709>.

⁸ Cramer and Thrall.

⁹ Tim Aistrophe, *Conspiracy Theory and American Foreign Policy*, *New Approaches to Conflict Analysis* (Manchester: University Press, 2016).

legitimate or illegitimate, which challenge the foreign policy decisions of those in power. Tony Blair, when asked about the cause of the Iraq War in the House of Commons in 2003, dismissed “the conspiracy theory that this is somehow to do with oil.”¹⁰ A conspiracy theory can be defined as “a belief that an event or situation is the result of a secret plan made by powerful people.”¹¹ This standard definition does not differentiate between entirely unreasonable claims like the earth being flat for example and the real conspiracies that have existed. The terminology of conspiracy theory presents a significant challenge as the obviously illegitimate and absurd theories can be lumped together with historically demonstrable conspiracies. The September 11th Attacks capture both sides of conspiracy theories. While not always discussed in these terms, the terrorist plan did constitute a conspiracy, but unsubstantiated theories of it being a result of a government conspiracy are frequently circulated.¹² The Iran-Contra Affair and Watergate stand out as just two among “the many historical examples of *actual* conspiracies that seemed unlikely” at the time but have, over time, been revealed to be true.¹³ The lumping together of legitimate and illegitimate conspiracy theories under the same label serves to delegitimize the more grounded ones and stigmatize their study. Parochial or private interests as a cause of war can be seen as a polite way to argue that a conspiracy existed and secretly operated to start a war. Most theories of private interests as the cause of war allege some form of conspiracy as actors within the state operate secretly on behalf of private, often financial, interests to “hijack the state”

¹⁰ “Engagements (Hansard, 15 January 2003)” (2003), <http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/2003/jan/15/engagements>.

¹¹ “Conspiracy Theory,” in *Cambridge Dictionary Online*, n.d., 11/24/2020, <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/us/dictionary/english/conspiracy-theory>.

¹² Aistrophe, *Conspiracy Theory and American Foreign Policy*.

¹³ Aistrophe.

and use foreign policy for parochial gains.¹⁴ The 1954 Guatemalan, US orchestrated coup marks the one of most demonstrable examples of this hijacking of foreign policy on behalf of private interests. In this case, the well-connected and influential United Fruit Company successfully lobbied the government to intervene in Guatemala to protect their assets from nationalization.¹⁵ In the years immediately following the coup, theories that proposed a conspiracy between the US state and the United Fruit Company could have been derided as just a conspiracy theory, but new revelations over the years have shown truth behind this ‘conspiracy theory.’ Conspiracy theory proves to be a broad and often silencing term which incorporates legitimate hypotheses that at least merit investigation and the absurd conspiracy theories that spring to mind when one first hears the term. Theories of private interests are theories of conspiracy, but they are not the irrational ‘conspiracy theories’ that the broad and silencing term implies.

Official Justifications and Academic Explanations

The consistent intrigue of the Iraq War comes in part from the complete inadequacy of the Bush Administration’s justifications for the war. The Iraq War clearly stands out as a major foreign policy event launched under false pretenses with some secret motive that both the public and academics have attempted to piece together. In the public sphere, the vague and unfounded association between Iraq and al Qaeda and humanitarian appeals about the brutality of Saddam Hussein’s regime helped justify the war. As the primary legal justification for the war, the Bush Administration alleged that

¹⁴ Jack Snyder, *Myths of Empire: Domestic Politics and International Ambition* (Ithaca, UNITED STATES: Cornell University Press, 1993), <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/uoregon/detail.action?docID=3138488>.

¹⁵ Stephen Schlesinger and Stephen Kinzer, *Bitter Fruit: The Story of the American Coup in Guatemala, Revised and Expanded* (Harvard University Press, 2005).

“Saddam Hussein possessed, or was aggressively pursuing, weapons of mass destruction (WMD).”¹⁶ In time, each one of these justifications fell apart. No evidence supported a connection between the Iraqi government and al Qaeda, but nevertheless, Vice President Cheney in 2001 interview on 60 Minutes insinuated a connection by discussing an alleged 2001 meeting in Prague between Iraqi intelligence and one of the 9/11 hijackers.¹⁷ The US’s own human rights abuses during the Iraq War make any claim of humanitarian intervention dubious. For example, under both Saddam Hussein and the US occupation, the notorious Abu Ghraib prison was used for torture. After the invasion, the US found no WMDs in Iraq and that justification was “proven to be false.”¹⁸ Additionally, a few leaked documents demonstrate the Bush Administration’s long-term focus on invading Iraq and a willingness to bend the facts to justify their decided course of action. The now infamous Downing Street Memo revealed that “the intelligence and facts were being fixed around the policy” of invading Iraq.¹⁹ In the hours following the September 11th terrorist attacks, Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld penned a memo querying whether the attacks were “good enough [to] hit SH[Saddam Hussein] at same time - not only UBL[Osama bin Laden]” and stating the need to “go massive - sweep it all up, things related and not.”²⁰ Time and these documents have shown the Bush Administration’s justifications to be faulty at best and

¹⁶ Joshua Kameel, “The Iraq War: Bad Intelligence or Bad Policy?,” *American Intelligence Journal* 32, no. 1 (2015): 79–86.

¹⁷ “Vice President Cheney on 60 Minutes II,” *CBS’s 60 Minutes*, November 14, 2001, <https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/vicepresident/news-speeches/speeches/vp20011114.html>.

¹⁸ Kameel, “The Iraq War.”

¹⁹ David Manning and Matthew Rycroft, “The Secret Downing Street Memo,” n.d., 3.

²⁰ Julian Borger, “Blogger Bares Rumsfeld’s Post 9/11 Orders,” *The Guardian*, February 24, 2006, sec. World news, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2006/feb/24/freedomofinformation.september11>.

fabricated at worst leading to the vigorous public and academic debates over the true causes of the Iraq War.

In the years following the invasion and the collapse of the official justifications for the war, academics forwarded a healthy number of theories to explain the “deeply puzzling decision” to invade Iraq.²¹ These hypotheses about the origins of the Iraq War cover a broad spectrum of theories on the causes of war. Some put forward explanations which attribute the war to the acute psychology of President Bush and a proposed desire to finish the job his father started in Iraq. Many emphasize the importance of the cadre of neoconservatives who rose to power in the Bush White House and the ideas they brought with them. Neoconservatism proposed using American military might “to promote the cause of political and economic freedom abroad” by forcibly toppling regimes opposed to those ideals.²² Others pinpoint a belief in exorcising the demons of the Vietnam War and reasserting American primacy within top policymakers as the cause of the war.²³ While usually featuring prominently in discussions over the causes of war, a standard, structuralist realist argument which attributes war to competition for power or security between states pursuing their national interest in an anarchic system remains conspicuously absent. In the New York Times on February 2nd of 2003, renowned realists John Mearsheimer and Stephen Walt presented the realist case against

²¹ John J. Mearsheimer and Stephen M. Walt, *The Israel Lobby and U.S. Foreign Policy* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2007).

²² Project for the New American Century, “PNAC-----Statement of Principles,” June 3, 1997, 2.

²³ Jane K. Cramer and Edward C. Duggan, “In Pursuit of Primacy: Why the United States Invaded Iraq,” in *Why Did the United States Invade Iraq?* (Florence, UNITED STATES: Taylor & Francis Group, 2011); Edward C. Duggan, “The War Lobby: Iraq and the Pursuit of U.S. Primacy” (Ph.D., United States -- Oregon, University of Oregon, 2011), <http://search.proquest.com/docview/907553652/abstract/7A141C6F58074BFEPQ/2>.

the Iraq War and for “vigilant containment.”²⁴ Under a realist paradigm, Mearsheimer and Walt lay out how the war would accomplish little and would reduce the US’s security and harm its national interests.²⁵ The Iraq War and its consequences have justified their concerns. Some like Michael Klare focus on the US’s doctrine of controlling the global flow of oil show why the US would have a national interest in invading Iraq as an addendum to realist theory.²⁶ Some lay out theories of parochial interests as an explanation for cases like the Iraq War where realism fails to easily explain the war. Jack Snyder puts forward a model for explaining this type of counterproductive overexpansion that wouldn’t be predicted under a realist framework.²⁷ “Though overexpansion hurts the society as a whole, it is attractive to some groups within society” and through some means, these narrow groups get their policy vision implemented.²⁸ Folk theories of private interests generally fall into this idea of a narrow interest pursuing their financial interests despite the costs to society or the country as a whole. These types of theories of private or parochial interests run into the challenge of explaining how a narrow and small interest can define foreign policy decisions for an entire state.

The most fleshed out and widely discussed theory of parochial interests within the academic discussion relating to the invasion of Iraq and U.S.’s Middle East policy

²⁴ John J. Mearsheimer and Stephen M. Walt, “Opinion | Keeping Saddam Hussein in a Box (Published 2003),” *The New York Times*, February 2, 2003, sec. Opinion, <https://www.nytimes.com/2003/02/02/opinion/keeping-saddam-hussein-in-a-box.html>.

²⁵ Mearsheimer and Walt.

²⁶ Michael T. Klare, “Blood for Oil, in Iraq and Elsewhere,” in *Why Did the United States Invade Iraq?* (Routledge, 2011). “The geopolitical objective of maintaining control over the entire Persian Gulf region” certainly could be seen as a reasonable explanation for the war. This particular accounting of the Iraq War places a great emphasis on the US’s desire to dominate the flow of oil and the Persian Gulf region.

²⁷ Snyder, *Myths of Empire*.

²⁸ Snyder.

more broadly is John Mearsheimer and Stephen Walt's Israel Lobby theory.²⁹ They see a basic contradiction in U.S. policy as it puts Israel's interests before the US's own and they claim that this is "due primarily to U.S. domestic politics and especially to the activities of the 'Israel lobby'" and that the Iraq War marks one such example of the effectiveness of the lobby.³⁰ They are aware of the twofold problem of assessing the Israel lobby as a parochial interest. They must tackle "the charge of antisemitism" which the lobby wields effectively to silence criticism of Israel.³¹ They also must clarify "the lobby's activities are not the sort of conspiracy depicted in antisemitic tracts like the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*."³² They argue the Israel Lobby is not a conspiracy at all, but just another interest within "the interest-group tradition that has long governed American political life."³³ Mearsheimer and Walt lay out how the Israel lobby sought the war and exercised power over the U.S.'s foreign policy decision making process. Through lobbying organizations like AIPAC, the lobby can "reward legislators and congressional candidates who support its agenda and to punish those who challenge it."³⁴ They further explain various direct connections between members of the Bush Administration and the lobby through prominent neoconservatives. This theory intersects with the neoconservatism based theory as for figures like "Paul Wolfowitz and Douglas Feith, the number two and three civilians in the Pentagon," protecting

²⁹ While this thesis primarily addresses theories of parochial interests where the private or parochial interest is a particular business or financial interests, the Israel lobby theory fits the broader paradigm of a narrow interest warping foreign policy to its own ends. The neoliberal theory discussed in this thesis bridged a similar gap between ideology and parochial interest.

³⁰ John J. Mearsheimer and Stephen M. Walt, "The Israel Lobby and U.S. Foreign Policy," *Middle East Policy* 13, no. 3 (September 22, 2006): 29–60.

³¹ Mearsheimer and Walt.

³² Mearsheimer and Walt.

³³ Mearsheimer and Walt.

³⁴ Mearsheimer and Walt.

Israel played an essential role in their neoconservative vision for the Middle East.³⁵ According to Mearsheimer and Walt, the Israel lobby exerted a clear influence over foreign policy decisions like the one to invade Iraq through both the legislature and the White House. They arrive at the conclusion that “the lobby’s actions were a necessary but not sufficient condition for war.”³⁶ While an unsatisfying conclusion, it indicates that by nature the study of parochial interests is unlikely to provide definite conclusions about the causes of war. The “overall persuasiveness of the Israel Lobby depends largely on its demonstrating the lobby’s power in presidential decisions on national security and high foreign policy issues” which isn’t entirely convincing.³⁷ While the Israel lobby clearly wielded a fair amount of influence, the evidence does not quite show that the lobby determined the actions of the chief policy makers behind the war like Cheney and Rumsfeld.

Challenges

A few challenges immediately present themselves when investigating the role of private interests as the cause of the Iraq War. First, finding definitive evidence that shows a precise, causal connection between a private interest and the war proves difficult. A clear revelation or decisive evidence of private interests playing a crucial role in the decision making behind the Iraq War would be disastrous for the politicians and industries involved. Accordingly, private interests and government officials prove to be cagey and secretive about their connections and conversations. Vice President

³⁵ Mearsheimer and Walt, *The Israel Lobby and U.S. Foreign Policy*, 2007.

³⁶ Mearsheimer and Walt, “The Israel Lobby and U.S. Foreign Policy,” September 22, 2006.

³⁷ Jerome Slater, “Explaining the Iraq War: The Israel Lobby Theory,” in *Why Did the United States Invade Iraq?* (Taylor & Francis Group, 2011), 100–113.

Cheney as one of the chief decision makers behind the war exemplified this secretive behavior as his motives and precise beliefs remain difficult to discern. The presence of multiple interests being at play within the Bush Administration or even within a single actor makes motives even harder to pinpoint. Strong evidence shows decision makers like Cheney to have ideological commitments that led to them pushing for the war as well as financial interests in the war for example. Naomi Klein's theory centered around neoliberal ideology presents a highly entangled version of this where she argues that for the proponents of this ideology, private, business interests and the national interest are one and the same.³⁸ If, in the future, some leaked document proved the war to have been the direct result of the Bush Administration working to aid a private interest, this research evaluating multiple theories of private interests would be unnecessary, but no definitive evidence has surfaced. A leaked email or tell-all memoir from someone intimately involved in the decision-making process could provide more certain evidence of the war's origins.

Methods

The challenges that arise in this type of research into private interests shape the form this thesis takes. While no universal and formulaic method exists across the evaluation of all the theories considered due to their diversity, a common approach can be seen. Each section attempts to pinpoint and precisely describe a popular theory of private interests as the cause of the Iraq War before presenting the best evidence available to support that theory and weighing the strength of that evidence. The

³⁸ Naomi Klein, *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism* (Macmillan, 2007).

presentation of the evidence in support of each theory will follow a generally consistent process of showing a particular private interest's incentives to support the war and what benefits, typically profits, they reaped from the decision to go to war. Next, the influence of the particular interest in the US foreign policy making process will be demonstrated with a particular focus on imbedded actors within the Bush Administration which fundamentally made the decision to invade Iraq. Many in academia, the public, and former Bush Administration officials like Colonel Lawrence Wilkerson describe "a 'Cheney-Rumsfeld cabal' that hijacked US foreign policy" and thus, the beliefs, interests, and actions of these actors should be given the most weight.³⁹ Each section will also show what evidence directly connects the influential private interest and this decision before assessing the merits of the theory in question in light of the evidence available. Despite these commonalities, each section varies significantly as each theory differs. Some require a specific refutation of a common reason for their academic dismissal and others fall into a particular narrative that must be established. This thesis aspires to honestly present and evaluate a set of common theories of private interests as the true cause of the Iraq War. By presenting the Big Oil theory, the arms lobby theory, the Cheney-Halliburton theory, and the neoliberal ideology theory, significant progress can be made toward divining whether private interests played a role in the decision to invade Iraq and to what extent these interests influenced policy, but a certain limit to what this research can reveal remains as key motivations and pieces of information are unknown.

³⁹ Dana Milbank, "Colonel Finally Saw Whites of Their Eyes," *Washington Post*, October 20, 2005, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2005/10/19/AR2005101902246.html>.

Evaluating the Big Oil Folk Theory

Before and after the initial invasion of Iraq, catchy phrases like ‘No Blood for Oil’ featured prominently in anti-war protests and many accept oil as the definitive cause of the war without a particularly in-depth analysis or even a precise explanation of why and how oil caused the invasion of Iraq.⁴⁰ In colloquial discussion about the Iraq War and its causes, the subject of oil will inevitably arise. This folk theory makes the obvious connection between Iraq’s immense oil reserves and self-serving, influential American oil companies, but as folk theories, they do not examine the situation all the evidence available to support or refute the hypothesis that oil or more specifically, Big Oil, caused the second Gulf War.⁴¹ While many academics have skirted around considering this hypothesis at all, those that discuss it tend to have “summarily dismissed the ‘oil hypothesis’ without analysis.”⁴² Some academics when offering their own explanation for the Iraq War quickly refute the folk “oil hypothesis” with a brief explanation of how oil companies would prefer to just trade with Iraq and the assertion that little to no evidence exists of oil companies pushing the Bush Administration toward war. This section will attempt to complicate and refute the rapid dismissal of the “oil hypothesis” by showing how American oil companies stood to benefit from an invasion of Iraq as compared to the lifting of sanctions. Next, it will demonstrate how oil companies wielded significant influence over the Bush Administration before finally presenting the evidence that exists of these companies

⁴⁰ “5 Photographs From The Day The World Said No To War.”

⁴¹ ‘Big Oil’ refers to the massive oil companies which extract and sell petroleum around the world. In the context of this research, a particular focus is placed on American oil companies as they have the most sway on politicians in the US. Exxon Mobil and Chevron are two among the many companies that together form ‘Big Oil.’

⁴² Cramer and Thrall, *Why Did the United States Invade Iraq?*

using their influence to push the administration toward the war. While conclusive evidence does not exist of Big Oil being the driving or primary force behind the war as many in the public believe, a fair amount of evidence exists to show the industry's interest in the war and their actions which may have contributed to the decision to invade Iraq. Through leaked documents and other sources, a picture of the oil industry working to cause the Iraq War can be pieced together, but due to the shroud of secrecy which cloaked the administration and industry's actions, definitive proof remains elusive.

This section will evaluate the common hypothesis that profit-seeking oil companies and their allies in the White House pushed for the Iraq War and reveal the complicated reality of the relationship between Big Oil and the Iraq War. It should be noted that this section will deal with oil as the folk theory sees it: a source of profit for self-interested corporations.⁴³ The theory which will be evaluated in this section differs from but remains interconnected with other oil theories which argue oil's geostrategic value or its importance to a stable global economy motivated the US to seek control over Iraq and its oil.⁴⁴ Despite the value of these alternative oil theories, this section focuses on just the narrow hypothesis that the US invaded Iraq "to ensure that U.S. companies would have access to Iraqi oil" at the behest of a small cadre of powerful decision makers with strong ties to the oil sector within the Bush Administration.⁴⁵ This section will start by refuting the claim that Iraq War had nothing to do with oil as many politicians in the

⁴³ Antonia Juhasz, "Why the War in Iraq Was Fought for Big Oil," CNN Digital, March 19, 2013, <https://www.cnn.com/2013/03/19/opinion/iraq-war-oil-juhasz/index.html>.

⁴⁴ Klare, "Blood for Oil, in Iraq and Elsewhere."

⁴⁵ Edward C. Duggan, "The War Lobby: Iraq and the Pursuit of U.S. Primacy" (Ph.D., United States -- Oregon, University of Oregon, 2011), <http://search.proquest.com/docview/907553652/abstract/7A141C6F58074BFEPQ/2>.

United States and Britain asserted during the early years of the war by showing that oil factored into the decision making process in at least some capacity as proven by evidence which came to light over the years. Having established that oil factored into the decision making in some capacity, this section will discuss and complicate the common refutation of the Big Oil hypothesis that oil corporations “wanted to make money, not war,” and preferred the lifting of sanctions to military intervention as a means of accessing Iraqi oil.⁴⁶ Next, this section will discuss how the control over Iraqi oil played out in the years following the invasion and the refutation to the Big Oil folk theory this raises as “the invasion and occupation of Iraq has not created the bonanza for multinational oil and gas corporations that many anticipated.”⁴⁷ The evidence indicates that a plan existed for American oil companies to dominate Iraqi oil and this plan along with the Bush Administrations’ nation building project fell apart. Finally, this section will examine the extent to which the oil industry held influence over the Bush Administration and what evidence exists of the industry using that influence to lobby for the invasion of Iraq. The folk theory that attributes the Iraq War to the influence of oil companies, while not entirely convincing primarily due to lack of smoking gun evidence, deserves far more consideration than the academics and politicians who quickly dismiss it grant. The evidence available shows both a financial interest in the war from Big Oil and demonstrates some collaboration between the Bush Administration on Iraq policy. Despite many questions remaining about the administration’s relationship with Big Oil, the evidence suggests the industry did play a role in the decision to invade Iraq.

⁴⁶ John J. Mearsheimer, *The Israel Lobby and U.S. Foreign Policy* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2007).

⁴⁷ Eric Bonds, “Assessing the Oil Motive After the U.S. War in Iraq,” *Peace Review* 25, no. 2 (April 2013): 291–98, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10402659.2013.785769>.

It's not not about Oil

In the lead up to and the years immediately following the war, those in the governments primarily responsible for the invasion of Iraq frequently denied that the war had anything to do with oil as so many anti-war protesters claimed. In Britain, Tony Blair in December of 2003 claimed the war had “nothing to do with oil.”⁴⁸ In the United States, Donald Rumsfeld in a 2002 interview called the idea that the US targeted Iraq due to its oil reserves “nonsense” and he claimed that “it has nothing to do with oil, literally nothing to do with oil.”⁴⁹ “Bush administration officials were adamant in their insistence that oil played no role in the US planning” or motivations for the invasion and eventual occupation of Iraq.⁵⁰ To openly reveal an oil motive while still in power, even a geostrategic or stability oriented motive, would be scandalous and delegitimize their policy and the war. These denials would likely come from these politicians regardless whether oil factored into the decision making process or not as they would seek to dissuade the idea of oil being the motive for the war either way. The public denial of the invasion of Iraq having anything to do with oil while expected stands in sharp contrast with the raw evidence that at the very least some members of the Bush Administration focused on planning for the fate of Iraq’s oil reserves before the invasion.

⁴⁸ “Engagements (Hansard, 15 January 2003)” (2003), <http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/2003/jan/15/engagements>.

⁴⁹ Donald H. Rumsfeld, Interview with Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld on Infinity Radio, 14 November 2002, interview by Steve Croft, Radio, November 14, 2002, <https://www.mtholyoke.edu/acad/intrel/bush/infinity.htm>.

⁵⁰ Michael T. Klare, “Blood for Oil, in Iraq and Elsewhere,” in *Why Did the United States Invade Iraq?* (Routledge, 2011).

In 2007, Alan Greenspan, the longtime Chair of the Federal Reserve, wrote that “I’m saddened that it is politically inconvenient to acknowledge what everyone knows: The Iraq war is largely about oil.”⁵¹ While not coming from an individual directly involved in foreign policy, Greenspan’s book makes a rare acknowledgement of the importance of oil in the decision to invade Iraq. Greenspan went on to clarify that oil and Iraq were “important for the global economy” rather than as a lucrative cash grab for American companies as folk theories tend to suggest.⁵² General John Abizaid who served as the commander of US CENTCOM from 2003 to 2007 gave a speech about the Iraq War where he admitted that “Of course it’s about oil, we can’t really deny that.”⁵³ Like with Greenspan’s admission, precisely what role oil played in Abizaid’s opinion remains unclear. Nevertheless, the mere acknowledgement of oil as an important factor marks a sharp departure from the Bush Administration’s outright denial of oil as a factor.

Beyond just a written acknowledgement of the importance of oil in relation to the decision to invade Iraq by a high-ranking member of the Bush Administration, pieces of information have come to light in the years after the war which show “U.S. decision makers were keenly interested in Iraqi oil before the war” despite their public denial of that interest.⁵⁴ Vice-President Cheney’s Energy Task Force demonstrates the administration’s interest in Iraqi oil before the war. Cheney chaired the highly secretive

⁵¹ Alan Greenspan, *The Age of Turbulence: Adventures in a New World* (Penguin, 2008).

⁵² JoAnne Allen, “Greenspan Clarifies Iraq War and Oil Link,” Reuters, September 17, 2007, <https://www.reuters.com/article/uk-greenspan-idUKN1728646120070917>.

⁵³ Gerry Shih and Susana Montes, “Roundtable Debates Energy Issues,” *Standard Daily*, October 15, 2007. US CENTCOM is the US military’s command over all of the Middle East as well as parts of North Africa and Central Asia.

⁵⁴ Eric Bonds, “Assessing the Oil Motive After the U.S. War in Iraq,” *Peace Review* 25, no. 2 (April 2013): 291–98, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10402659.2013.785769>.

task force which included and met with executives from top oil companies such as British Petroleum and Exxon.⁵⁵ The task force examined maps of Iraqi oil fields and lists of the foreign companies who held the contracts controlling those oil fields in early 2001. “The efforts made by American forces to seize Iraqi oil fields in the early days of the fighting and to establish control over other elements of Iraq’s far-flung petroleum infrastructure” reveal that the Bush Administration prioritized controlling Iraqi oil to some extent, but whether oil represented a security concern or economic concern for private interests remains unclear.⁵⁶ It stands to reason that “the largest oil consuming country in the world would not invade the country with the second largest oil reserves in the world and perhaps the least explored oil prospects in the world without any consideration of the possibilities for oil” and to deny oil outright as a factor makes the Bush Administration seem more suspicious than an acknowledgement of oil as a valuable strategic resource.⁵⁷ These instances show that oil factored heavily into the considerations of the Bush Administration before the war which contradicts the public line taken by the administration, however, oil’s exact role is less clear.

⁵⁵ “Meetings With Vice President Cheney’s Energy Task Force (Washingtonpost.Com),” The Washington Post, 2006, https://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/politics/documents/cheney_energy_task_force.html.

⁵⁶ Michael T. Klare, “Oil, Iraq, and American Foreign Policy: The Continuing Salience of the Carter Doctrine,” *International Journal* 62, no. 1 (2006): 31–42, <https://doi.org/10.2307/40204243>.

⁵⁷ Edward C. Duggan, “The War Lobby: Iraq and the Pursuit of U.S. Primacy” (Ph.D., United States -- Oregon, University of Oregon, 2011), <http://search.proquest.com/docview/907553652/abstract/7A141C6F58074BFEPQ/2>. The ordering of the sizes of various oil reserves is a fairly debatable topic as they can be defined and distinguished in a handful ways such as “conventional oil reserves.”

Invading Iraq: Potentially Profitable for Oil Companies or not?

Tony Blair, in denying securing profits for oil companies as a motive for the invasion of Iraq, stated that it would be “infinitely simpler to cut a deal with Saddam.”⁵⁸ Academics often use this argument to quickly dismiss the Big Oil Folk Theory and the question of “Why wouldn’t U.S. oil corporations just buy it from Iraq” does have some merit.⁵⁹ Oil companies seek to profit from the extraction and sale of oil and will happily do business with unsavory regimes to ensure the flow of oil and profits.⁶⁰ Oil companies, if they sought Iraqi oil, would simply “demand an end to Iraqi sanctions in order to facilitate trade” rather than lobby for a controversial and costly war which could jeopardize oil production in the region through creating instability.⁶¹ This argument has strong logical underpinnings and some evidence exists of the oil lobby seeking to lift sanctions to gain access to Iraqi oil. As the CEO of Haliburton, Dick Cheney “consistently opposed unilateral American sanctions” as they stopped American companies from being able to do business in and profit off of rogue states like Iraq.⁶² Some reports also indicate that “Saddam Hussein wanted to make a deal” which would give American companies rights to Iraqi oil and minerals in early 2003 in an attempt to prevent the invasion, but no serious deal was ever on the table.⁶³ At a quick glance,

⁵⁸ “Engagements (Hansard, 15 January 2003)” (2003),

<http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/2003/jan/15/engagements>.

⁵⁹ Norman Solomon, *Target Iraq: What the News Media Didn’t Tell You* (New York: Context Books : Distributed by Publishers Group West, 2003).

⁶⁰ John J. Mearsheimer, *The Israel Lobby and U.S. Foreign Policy* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2007).

⁶¹ Norman Solomon, *Target Iraq: What the News Media Didn’t Tell You* (New York: Context Books : Distributed by Publishers Group West, 2003).

⁶² Christopher Marquis, “The Record: Over the Years, Cheney Opposed U.S. Sanctions,” *The New York Times*, July 27, 2000, <https://archive.nytimes.com/www.nytimes.com/library/politics/camp/072700wh-cheney-embargo.html>.

⁶³ James Risen, “THE STRUGGLE FOR IRAQ: DIPLOMACY; Iraq Said to Have Tried to Reach Last-Minute Deal to Avert War,” *The New York Times*, November 6, 2003, sec. World,

lifting sanctions seems like a much more surefire path to accessing Iraqi oil as compared to invasion, but a handful of factors which the proponents of this refutation neglect to consider made an invasion a much more lucrative prospect for oil companies than just the lifting of sanctions.

Before complicating this refutation, Big Oil's interest in Iraqi oil should be established. As the CEO of Halliburton, future Vice President Cheney gave a speech in 1999 in which he laid out exactly why the Middle East "is still where the prize ultimately lies" in terms of oil production.⁶⁴ Chevron CEO Kenneth Derr, in a 1998 speech, stated that "Iraq possesses huge reserves of oil and gas-reserves I'd love Chevron to have access to."⁶⁵ Iraq's immense and underdeveloped oil reserves made it an obvious target for American oil companies in a world rapidly running out of new oil fields to develop.⁶⁶

Under the Clinton Administration in the 90s, lobbying for the lifting of sanctions seemed to be the most plausible avenue to access Iraqi oil, but after the arrival of the Bush Administration and the terrorist attacks of September 11th, invasion became a serious option. Without the window granted by 9/11, the Bush Administration would have struggled to build the case for war as the nonexistent but widely believed connection between Al Qaeda and Iraq in part justified the war in the eyes of the

<https://www.nytimes.com/2003/11/06/world/struggle-for-iraq-diplomacy-iraq-said-have-trying-reach-last-minute-deal-avert.html>. There was never a serious deal on the table and this report seems to rely on only a handful sources.

⁶⁴ Dick Cheney, "Speech at the Institute of Petroleum Autumn Launch,"

<https://www.resilience.org/stories/2004-06-08/full-text-dick-cheney-speech-institute-petroleum-autumn-lunch-1999/>.

⁶⁵ Antonia Juhasz, *The Tyranny of Oil: The World's Most Powerful Industry--and What We Must Do to Stop It*, 1st Harper paperback ; updated. (New York : Enfield: HarperPaperbacks ; Publishers Group UK distributor, 2009).

⁶⁶ Juhasz.

public.⁶⁷ One can see how lifting sanctions may have been the most expedient path to Iraqi oil in the nineties, but after 9/11 and realizing “the futility of eliminating the sanctions regime,” the oil industry may have seen invasion as the best way to access Iraq’s reserves.⁶⁸ Additionally, the years of sanctions and public condemnations of Saddam Hussein’s regime would make a sudden shifting to normalizing relations and lifting sanctions politically infeasible.

Exactly who held the oil contracts in Saddam’s Iraq must also be considered. Before the American invasion, Iraq “signed several multi-billion-dollar deals with foreign oil companies, mainly from China, France and Russia.”⁶⁹ Companies like the Russian Lukoil and the French Total Fina Elf dominated Iraqi oil through deals signed with Iraq’s national oil company.⁷⁰ Likely because of these contracts, both France and Russia opposed the US’s invasion. If Iraq maintained these contracts, American companies would be left out of Iraqi oil far into the future even if the US lifted sanctions. Dick Cheney, his Energy Task Force, and oil executives possessed an acute awareness of this fact as they poured over the lists of these contracts in 2001.⁷¹ The overthrow of the Hussein regime presented an opportunity to toss out those contracts under a new, friendly government and grant American companies a chance to control Iraqi oil in a way just lifting sanctions could not.

⁶⁷ Eugene Secunda, *Selling War to America: From the Spanish American War to the Global War on Terror* (Westport, Conn.: Praeger Security International, 2007).

⁶⁸ Edward C. Duggan, “The War Lobby: Iraq and the Pursuit of U.S. Primacy” (Ph.D., United States -- Oregon, University of Oregon, 2011), <http://search.proquest.com/docview/907553652/abstract/7A141C6F58074BFEPQ/2>.

⁶⁹ Peter Beaumont and Faisal Islam, “Carve-up of Oil Riches Begins,” *The Guardian*, November 3, 2002, sec. World news, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2002/nov/03/iraq.oil>.

⁷⁰ Norman Solomon, *Target Iraq: What the News Media Didn’t Tell You* (New York: Context Books : Distributed by Publishers Group West, 2003).

⁷¹ “Maps and Charts of Iraqi Oil Fields,” *Judicial Watch*, accessed November 18, 2020, <https://www.judicialwatch.org/maps-and-charts-of-iraqi-oil-fields/>.

Finally, “the ‘de-monopolization’ or the ‘de-nationalization’ of the Iraqi National Oil Corporation” could lead to profits that were far greater than anything that could be accomplished by working through Iraq’s national oil company.⁷² By privatizing the Iraqi oil industry, US oil companies would “see vast possibilities beyond making limited profits buying oil from a nationalized company.”⁷³ Instead of being forced to work through the Iraqi National Oil Corporation and Saddam Hussein if the US lifted sanctions, an invasion could allow for the privatization of Iraqi oil industry. The US pushed for the privatization of Iraqi oil throughout the occupation under the guise of “restructuring.”⁷⁴ Despite the evidence that indicates the oil lobby wanted to lift sanctions to access Iraqi oil, the existing Iraqi contracts being dominated by foreign competitors and the possibility for privatizing the Iraqi oil industry made an invasion of Iraq a more appealing policy to the oil industry as compared to the lifting of sanctions in post-9/11 world which provided the window necessary for war.

The Plan versus What Happened in Iraq

The Bush Administration had a specific vision for how the invasion, occupation, and reconstruction of Iraq would play out. To their credit, the American military quickly invaded Iraq and toppled Saddam Hussein’s regime with few military difficulties, but from that point on, the administration’s plan fell apart. While American oil companies have not dominated Iraqi oil or experienced a particular boon in profits,

⁷² Eric Bonds, “Assessing the Oil Motive After the U.S. War in Iraq,” *Peace Review* 25, no. 2 (April 2013): 291–98, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10402659.2013.785769>.

⁷³ Norman Solomon, *Target Iraq: What the News Media Didn’t Tell You* (New York: Context Books : Distributed by Publishers Group West, 2003).

⁷⁴ Eric Bonds, “Assessing the Oil Motive After the U.S. War in Iraq,” *Peace Review* 25, no. 2 (April 2013): 291–98, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10402659.2013.785769>.

this results from the failure of the Bush Administration to enact its plan rather than proving that the administration lacked designs to maximize profits for American oil corporations by invading Iraq.⁷⁵ Oil prices, however, which some cite as a sign of oil companies profiting, grew from \$27.77 per barrel in 2003 to \$92.57 in 2008.⁷⁶ The invasion of Iraq and the “subsequent hike in oil prices” gives some credence to the idea the oil companies benefitted from the decision to invade Iraq, but the profits of oil companies from Iraq proves to be far less evident the lay proponent of the Big Oil hypothesis would anticipate.⁷⁷ The result of “higher prices and greater profits” fits the Big Oil theory, however the oil industry never realized their alleged goal of controlling Iraqi oil production.⁷⁸

The Bush Administration proposed a transformative vision for Iraq which included transforming Iraq into a Western style, free market democracy and part of that process would be privatizing Iraq’s oil industry. For some important decision makers within the Bush Administration such as Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz, “Ahmed Chalabi, the leader of the Iraqi National Congress,” featured prominently as a potential future leader of Iraq after an American invasion.⁷⁹ As an Iraqi exile, Chalabi spent years pushing for the invasion of Iraq and actively participating in the creation

⁷⁵ Eric Bonds, “Assessing the Oil Motive After the U.S. War in Iraq,” *Peace Review* 25, no. 2 (April 2013): 291–98, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10402659.2013.785769>.

⁷⁶ Kimberly Amadeo, “Oil Price History Over the Decades,” *The Balance*, accessed March 15, 2021, <https://www.thebalance.com/oil-price-history-3306200>.

⁷⁷ Dag Harald Claes, “The United States and Iraq: Making Sense of the Oil Factor,” *Middle East Policy; Washington* 12, no. 4 (Winter 2005): 48–57, <http://dx.doi.org.libproxy.uoregon.edu/10.1111/j.1475-4967.2005.00223.x>.

⁷⁸ Mearsheimer and Walt, *The Israel Lobby and U.S. Foreign Policy*, 2007.

⁷⁹ Norman Solomon, *Target Iraq: What the News Media Didn’t Tell You* (New York: Context Books : Distributed by Publishers Group West, 2003); Sewell Chan, “Ahmad Chalabi, Iraqi Politician Who Pushed for U.S. Invasion, Dies at 71,” *The New York Times*, November 3, 2015, sec. World, <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/11/04/world/middleeast/ahmad-chalabi-iraq-dead.html>.

and propagation of the myth that Iraq possessed WMDs.⁸⁰ In both Chalabi's mind and the minds of some members of the Bush Administration, Chalabi would lead Iraq after an American invasion and Chalabi started to trade on this status as heir apparent in Iraq before the war even started.⁸¹ In October of 2002, Chalabi reportedly "met executives of three US oil multinationals to negotiate the carve-up of Iraq's massive oil reserves."⁸² Other indications of the plan for Iraq come from Bush Administration aligned think tanks like the Heritage Foundation which put forward "a road map for the privatization of Iraq's nationalized oil industry."⁸³ The State Department established the "Working Group on Oil and Energy, a cadre of pro-American expatriate Iraqi oil managers" to create "the guidelines for the privatization of the Iraqi oil industry."⁸⁴ A clear plan existed for the privatization of the Iraqi National Oil company which, if implemented, would have parceled out control over Iraqi oil fields to, primarily American, foreign companies. Even in 2006, the US continued to angle for the privatization of Iraqi oil when the Iraq Study Group's report argued that "the United States should assist Iraqi leaders to reorganize the national oil industry as a commercial enterprise."⁸⁵ American companies before the war stood to benefit from the overthrow of Saddam Hussein as the US planned to not only open up Iraq to American companies but to privatize the

⁸⁰ Sewell Chan, "Ahmad Chalabi, Iraqi Politician Who Pushed for U.S. Invasion, Dies at 71," *The New York Times*, November 3, 2015, sec. World, <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/11/04/world/middleeast/ahmad-chalabi-iraq-dead.html>.

⁸¹ Norman Solomon, *Target Iraq: What the News Media Didn't Tell You* (New York: Context Books : Distributed by Publishers Group West, 2003).

⁸² Peter Beaumont and Faisal Islam, "Carve-up of Oil Riches Begins," *The Guardian*, November 3, 2002, sec. World news, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2002/nov/03/iraq.oil>.

⁸³ Peter Beaumont and Faisal Islam, "Carve-up of Oil Riches Begins," *The Guardian*, November 3, 2002, sec. World news, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2002/nov/03/iraq.oil>.

⁸⁴ Klare, "Blood for Oil, in Iraq and Elsewhere."

⁸⁵ The Iraq Study Group, James A. Baker, and Lee H. Hamilton, *The Iraq Study Group Report* (Westminster: Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group, Vintage Digital, 2006).

national oil company under a new Iraqi government as well. Some oil companies likely felt confident in their ability to profit from the invasion of Iraq as after meeting with Ahmed Chalabi, as he promised to “reward the US for removing Saddam with lucrative oil contracts.”⁸⁶

Despite these plans to privatize Iraqi oil and hand out the spoils to American corporations, the Bush Administration and its various representatives in Iraq failed to achieve the oil privatization they sought. The United States via the Coalition Provisional Authority in Iraq pushed for the privatization of Iraqi oil like other previously state-owned enterprises. But the Iraqi people would not “accept privatization of the oil sector.”⁸⁷ Labor unions formed “the main opposition to the occupation's economic agenda” which centered around the Iraqi National Oil company for the obvious reason of the prominence of oil in Iraq.⁸⁸ The Iraqi oil industry became an “important symbol of Iraq's national identity, and, more importantly, the only source of income capable of financing the country's post-occupation reconstruction.”⁸⁹ While the Bush Administration succeeded in privatizing many other functions of the Iraqi government, they failed with the all-important oil industry due to labor strikes in the context of the insurgency. The privatization and carve up of the Iraqi National Oil Company would galvanize the anti-American insurgency and confirm the resisters of the American occupations’ suspicions of the US’s intentions to take Iraqi oil by force.⁹⁰

⁸⁶ Beaumont and Islam, “Carve-up of Oil Riches Begins.”

⁸⁷ Nayna J. Jhaveri, “Petroimperialism: US Oil Interests and the Iraq War,” *Antipode* 36, no. 1 (2004): 2–11, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8330.2004.00378.x>.

⁸⁸ David Bacon, “Iraq’s Workers Strike to Keep Their Oil,” *Dollars & Sense*, no. 272 (September 1, 2007): 27–30.

⁸⁹ Bacon.

⁹⁰ Klein, *The Shock Doctrine*.

Over the years following the invasion of Iraq, the US would learn it “could not privatize Iraq’s oil by fiat when Iraqi politicians refused to do it themselves.”⁹¹ The Bush Administration failed to privatize the Iraqi National Oil company as it planned and thus, the Iraqi people denied American oil companies the windfall they may have expected from the invasion of Iraq.

A state of flux defines the history of who held Iraqi oil contracts since the invasion of Iraq. In 2008, “Exxon Mobil, Shell, Total and BP the original partners in the Iraq Petroleum Company” before its nationalization in the 70s along with a number of other Western companies received “no-bid contracts to service Iraq’s largest fields.”⁹² Their return would seem to confirm the common suspicion “among many in the Arab world and among parts of the American public that the United States had gone to war in Iraq precisely to secure the oil wealth these contracts seek to extract.”⁹³ Western dominance, however, did not last long as the makeup of international companies holding contracts in Iraq rapidly diversified. Nearly two decades after the start of the war, French, Chinese, Russian, British, Dutch, Malaysian, American, and other foreign oil companies all work contracts to extract petroleum from Iraq.⁹⁴ The American dominance proponents of the Big Oil theory predicted never materialized, but ExxonMobil does work the lucrative West Qurna Field which remains the single most

⁹¹ Eric Bonds, “Assessing the Oil Motive After the U.S. War in Iraq,” *Peace Review* 25, no. 2 (April 2013): 291–98, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10402659.2013.785769>.

⁹² Andrew E. Kramer, “Deals With Iraq Are Set to Bring Oil Giants Back (Published 2008),” *The New York Times*, June 19, 2008, sec. World, <https://www.nytimes.com/2008/06/19/world/middleeast/19iraq.html>. While the Iraqi National Oil company was founded in 1966, the task of fully nationalizing Iraqi production was not completed until 1972.

⁹³ Kramer.

⁹⁴ “List of Oil and Gas Fields in Iraq | Iraq Business News,” February 12, 2015, <https://www.iraq-businessnews.com/list-of-oil-and-gas-fields-in-iraq/>.

profitable oil field in Iraq.⁹⁵ The Iraq “War has not resulted in a bonanza for U.S. oil companies” due to the failures of the Bush Administration in implementing their plan for Iraqi oil rather than a lack of intent.⁹⁶ The old contracts reviewed by Cheney and the industry executives on his task force from the Saddam Hussein regime were thrown out, but American oil companies failed to permanently supplant them.

Conflict of Interests, Cooperation, but no Definitive Causal Link

While far from the clear-cut case proponents of the Big Oil theory propose, American oil companies did have an economic interest in the decision to invade Iraq, but the evidence showing them pushing for that decision proves to be extant but less than airtight. Several connections can be drawn between the Bush Administration and the American oil industry. Some scholars and many journalists characterize Bush and Cheney as “oil politicians” who worked in government but often represented the interests of the oil industry.⁹⁷ They operate under the assumption that there was “no distinction between the national interests of the United States and that of the domestic oil industry” and in pursuit of this unified interest, they allegedly use the government to enact policies like tax subsidies, removing regulations which harm the oil industry, or even war to benefit Big Oil.⁹⁸ The Iraq War represents a potential zenith of the merging of US interests and oil industry’s interests in the minds of these crucial “oil politicians.”⁹⁹ “Former energy company officials” pervaded the highest levels of the

⁹⁵ “List of Oil and Gas Fields in Iraq | Iraq Business News.”

⁹⁶ Bonds, “Assessing the Oil Motive After the U.S. War in Iraq.”

⁹⁷ Duggan, “The War Lobby.”

⁹⁸ Duggan. Naomi Klein forwards a similar characterization of national and private interests being merged in the minds of policy makers in her “shock doctrine” theory.

⁹⁹ Duggan.

Bush Administration.¹⁰⁰ President George W. Bush founded Arbusto Energy, a relatively small oil exploration firm. Vice President Cheney spent the time between the first and second Bush Administration running Haliburton, an oil and gas services company. Condoleezza Rice, the National Security Advisor turned Secretary of State, served on the Chevron board of directors until 2001.¹⁰¹ A clear set of connections existed between the oil industry and the Bush Administration. In the 2000 election, “Bush has raised 15 times more money from oil and gas interests than Vice President Al Gore” which shows a clear preference from the oil industry for one of their own.¹⁰² The oil industry felt they would have “a bold and willing partner in securing and maintaining access to oil” in a George W. Bush administration and made a significant effort to ensure his electoral success.¹⁰³ While the career and campaign connections between the Bush Administration and the oil industry reveal a potential conflict of interests and how the oil industry likely expected favorable policy from the new administration, it far from confirms the idea the Bush Administration decided to invade Iraq on behalf of oil companies.

Vice President Cheney’s Energy Task Force provides some evidence of cooperation and communication between the Bush Administration and the oil industry before the invasion of Iraq. In the early days of the Bush Administration, President Bush formed the Task Force to be headed by Cheney with a goal to “develop a national

¹⁰⁰ Juhasz, *The Tyranny of Oil*.

¹⁰¹ Katty Kay, “Analysis: Oil and the Bush Cabinet,” January 29, 2001, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/americas/1138009.stm>.

¹⁰² John M. Broder, “Oil and Gas Aid Bush Bid For President (Published 2000),” *The New York Times*, June 23, 2000, sec. U.S., <https://www.nytimes.com/2000/06/23/us/oil-and-gas-aid-bush-bid-for-president.html>.

¹⁰³ Juhasz, *The Tyranny of Oil*.

energy policy designed to help the private sector, and, as necessary and appropriate, State and local governments, promote dependable, affordable, and environmentally sound production and distribution of energy for the future.”¹⁰⁴ The inclusion of aiding the private sector as an explicit goal further demonstrates the Bush Administration’s interest in supporting the oil industry. The Report of the National Energy Policy Development Group(Cheney’s Energy Task Force) also advised the President to urge other oil producers in the Middle East to “open up areas of their energy sectors to foreign investment.”¹⁰⁵ In the spring of 2001, Vice President Cheney’s task force met with a wide array of individuals and groups. Oil and gas business executives featured heavily as the task force met with executives from Exxon Mobil, BP, and Shell among others.¹⁰⁶ In 2002, the Commerce Department turned over documents from the Spring 2001 meetings of the Energy Task Force. These documents reveal that Cheney’s Energy Task Force reviewed maps of Iraqi oil fields and a list of “Foreign Suitors for Iraqi Oilfield Contracts.”¹⁰⁷ The list of foreign companies which stood to receive all of the Iraqi oil contracts if Saddam Hussein remained in power represents an explicit problem faced by American oil companies which an invasion could solve. Iraq threatened to completely block the American oil industry from accessing “the third largest reserves of conventional petroleum in the world,” while foreign competitors like Russia’s Lukoil and France’s TotalFinaElf received the majority of the Iraqi contracts. While these

¹⁰⁴ “Report of the National Energy Policy Development Group” (Washington, DC: National Energy Policy Development Group, May 2001).nat

¹⁰⁵ “Reliable, Affordable, and Environmentally Sound Energy for America’s Future.”

¹⁰⁶ “Meetings With Vice President Cheney’s Energy Task Force (Washingtonpost.Com),” *The Washington Post*, 2006, https://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/politics/documents/cheneys_energy_task_force.html.

¹⁰⁷ “Maps and Charts of Iraqi Oil Fields” (Commerce Department, March 2001), <https://www.judicialwatch.org/maps-and-charts-of-iraqi-oil-fields/>.

documents show some collaboration and joint focus on Iraqi oil from the Bush Administration and the oil industry, they do not show anything definitive about the decision to go to war. According to some oil industry officials, in October of 2002, “Mr. Cheney's staff held a meeting in October with Exxon Mobil Corporation, ChevronTexaco Corporation, ConocoPhillips, Haliburton,” and others, but the companies and government officials involved deny this meeting happened.¹⁰⁸ If this meeting occurred, it would place Cheney and his staff in the room with oil executives much closer to the start of the war.

Jane Mayer uncovered perhaps the most blatant connection between the decision to invade Iraq and the oil industry in the form of a February 3, 2001 memo from a “high-level N.S.C. official” concerning Cheney’s Energy Task Force.¹⁰⁹ This revealing memo directed “the N.S.C. staff to cooperate fully with the Energy Task Force as it considered the ‘melding’ of two seemingly unrelated areas of policy: ‘the review of operational policies towards rogue states,’ such as Iraq, and ‘actions regarding the capture of new and existing oil and gas fields.’”¹¹⁰ This memo reveals a level of cooperation between the members of the Energy Task Force which included plenty of oil industry representatives and the Bush Administration on foreign policy toward countries like Iraq in particular. There is not a “smoking gun that uncovers an oil company executive sitting down with George W. Bush and telling him to invade Iraq or Iran so that the oil company can have the nation’s oil,” but this example of collaboration

¹⁰⁸ Nick Walsh et al., “US Begins Secret Talks to Secure Iraq’s Oil Fields,” *The Guardian*, January 23, 2003, sec. World news, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2003/jan/23/usa.oil>.

¹⁰⁹ Jane Mayer, “Contract Sport,” *The New Yorker*, February 8, 2004, <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2004/02/16/contract-sport>.

¹¹⁰ Mayer.

comes close.¹¹¹ Despite their insistence to the contrary, the Bush Administration focused on Iraqi oil and even discussed it with representatives from the industry and seemingly involved them in foreign policy.

The secrecy of the Bush Administration and of Cheney's Energy Task Force has played a significant role in creating and fostering the public suspicion of the administration and their relationship with Big Oil. A perfectly legitimate meeting could have happened between Cheney and members of the oil industry. Some level of communication and consultation between government and industry experts makes sense, but if these meetings were innocent, a transparent approach would help dispel the suspicion of the public. Instead of taking a transparent approach, Cheney's Task Force took the opposite approach of maximum secrecy and the few details available of their activities result from Freedom of Information Act requests and investigative journalism rather than voluntary transparency.

Evaluating the Big Oil Factor

Academics like Mearsheimer and Walt who quickly dismiss the Big Oil theory out of hand and the common belief in this theory by the public both prove too absolutist. A real foundation exists for "the intuitive connection between oil and the Iraq war," but no definitive evidence exists which connects the oil industry and the Bush Administration's decision to go to war.¹¹² The nature of this research makes definitive conclusions unlikely as that would require novel, decisive evidence such as a confession from the chief decision-makers behind the war in Iraq or a key, leaked document. It

¹¹¹ Juhasz, *The Tyranny of Oil*.

¹¹² Jhaveri, "Petroimperialism."

stands to reason if the war was in fact about securing profits for oil companies as the folk theory suggests, they would go to great lengths to conceal that motive and the evidence that could confirm it. The people behind the decision to invade Iraq like Rumsfeld deny oil as a motive, but quotes from other officials, the administration's actions, and the logical connection between the oil hungry US and the oil rich Iraq disprove this notion. The changing circumstances between the 90s and 2000s, the existing foreign contracts, and the possibility of privatizing Iraqi oil complicate the refutation to the Big Oil theory centered around a supposed preference from oil companies to just lift sanctions and buy oil from Saddam's Iraq. The Bush Administration planned to privatize Iraqi oil and parcel out the lucrative oil reserves to, primarily, American companies, but its plans fell apart in the face of insurgency and resistance from labor groups in Iraq. The lack of a windfall of profits from the Iraq War for the oil industry resulted from the failure of the Bush Administration's plans, not a lack of plans to benefit the industry.¹¹³ While no definitive evidence exists of the Bush Administration deciding to invade Iraq on behalf of oil companies, strong connections existed between the administration and the industry. Some documents even show a collaborative focus from the industry and administration in Cheney's Energy Task Force on Iraqi oil. In all, the Big Oil theory of private interests deserves far more consideration than academics give it, but it remains uncertain as the Iraq War did not result in massive profits for the oil industry as the theory predicts and no damning evidence exists of the Bush Administration deciding to invade Iraq at the behest of Big

¹¹³ As established in this section, the lack of profits results from the failure of the Bush Administration to enact their plans, but it would be a more convincing theory overall if the oil industry had more clearly benefitted from the war. The lack of profits is not a refutation in and of itself, but the presence of massive profits would improve the case.

Oil. Cheney's Energy Task Force and the leaked information about their meetings with energy executives make it hard to believe Big Oil did not play at least a minor role in the decision to invade Iraq.

The Arms Lobby and the Iraq War

The military industrial complex surfaces fairly frequently in the minds of the public as a cause of the Iraq War. The common arms lobby theory of the invasion of Iraq argues that influential defense manufacturing contractors used their influence over the government to push for the war to maximize their profits. This fits into a larger folk theory of US foreign policy which ascribes seemingly constant foreign wars and high military spending to the powerful arms industry which profits from that state of affairs.¹¹⁴ While widely believed to be true based on a cursory glance at American military spending and the industry's influence, scholars rarely consider "the influence of the traditional arms makers" as an important factor in the decision to invade Iraq.¹¹⁵ It can be shown that the arms industry had some incentives push a the decision to invade and significant political influence over the executive branch and the legislature, however little evidence points to arms manufacturers as being a definitive, decisive, or even significant factor behind the war. The evidence available indicates that the influence of the arms lobby likely generally biased the US government toward militaristic foreign policy decisions like the invasion of Iraq.

This section will first place the arms lobby theory in the context of another lobby theory which emphasize the influence of certain special interest groups within American domestic politics. It will use the Israel lobby as a model for evaluating the influence of a particular lobby over the decision to invade Iraq. Next, it will show what

¹¹⁴ William D. Hartung, "Eisenhower's Warning the Military-Industrial Complex Forty Years Later," *World Policy Journal* 18, no. 1 (2001): 39–44.

¹¹⁵ Solomon Hughes, *War on Terror, Inc.: Corporate Profiteering from the Politics of Fear* (London ; New York: Verso, 2007).

incentives arms manufacturers had to drive the decision to invade Iraq. After showing that incentives existed for the military-industrial complex to push for war, this section will show what influence the arms lobby wielded in domestic politics over both the executive branch and the legislature. Finally, it will discuss the lack of direct evidence of this private interest being the primary or a significant cause of the Iraq War. The arms lobby or the military industrial complex refers to the American defense and aerospace contractors such as Lockheed Martin, Northrup Grumman, or Raytheon which build the weapons of war used by the US military. Generally speaking, there are three types of military contractors: “rebuilding and support contractors; private security contractors; and weapons makers,” but this section will just discuss the “weapons makers”.¹¹⁶ Some versions of this theory argue that the Defense Industry pushed for the Iraq War to stave off a post-Cold War reduction in military spending, but the US’s military interventions in the Balkans and the ongoing War in Afghanistan already proved this concern of the industry’s to be unfounded.

Comparing Lobbies

The arms lobby is just one among many lobbies representing narrow interests which play the political game of lobbying politicians to implement their preferred policies. As another lobby theory which attempts to explain the Iraq War, Mearsheimer and Walt’s Israel lobby theory provides a useful framing through which to investigate the arms lobby theory.¹¹⁷ They make the case that the Israel lobby, through its influence in the legislature and the White House, created the conditions necessary for the war,

¹¹⁶ William D. Hartung, “The Military-Industrial Complex Revisited: Shifting Patterns of Military Contracting in the Post-9/11 Period,” *Costs of War*, 2012.

¹¹⁷ Mearsheimer and Walt, *The Israel Lobby and U.S. Foreign Policy*, 2007.

although they do not conclude that the Israel lobby definitively caused the war.¹¹⁸ While the Israel lobby clearly holds significant power in American domestic politics, the case can be made that “oil companies and the arms industry exert far more economic and ideological influence over Washington’s policy in the Persian Gulf region than does the Israel lobby.”¹¹⁹ Mearsheimer and Walt show that the Israel Lobby had strong connections to the Bush Administration and through lobbying organizations like AIPAC held the “ability to reward legislators and congressional candidates who support its agenda and to punish those who challenge it.”¹²⁰ The same can be said for the arms lobby. However, it should be noted that the interests of the Israel lobby and the arms lobby do intersect in maintaining “massive arms shipments to Israel” which keep Israel secure and weapons manufacturers’ profits high.¹²¹ The strength of the Israel Lobby theory in particular can be found in its connections to high profile neoconservatives within the Bush Administration who became prominent proponents of the war such as Paul Wolfowitz.¹²² Another comparative strength of the Israel Lobby can be found in its superior unity in aims and actions as compared to the arms lobby. While the arms lobby may share the general goal of increased military spending, each firm also competes with other elements of the industry for the same contracts. The Israel lobby theory provides a blueprint for the analysis of the influence of a particular lobby within US politics which can be used as a partial guide for examining the arms lobby folk theory. Comparing

¹¹⁸ Mearsheimer and Walt.

¹¹⁹ Stephen Zunes, “The Israel Lobby: How Powerful Is It Really?,” *Mother Jones* (blog), accessed January 25, 2021, <https://www.motherjones.com/politics/2006/05/israel-lobby-how-powerful-it-really/>.

¹²⁰ Mearsheimer and Walt, “The Israel Lobby and U.S. Foreign Policy,” September 22, 2006.

¹²¹ Zunes, “The Israel Lobby.”

¹²² Mearsheimer and Walt, *The Israel Lobby and U.S. Foreign Policy*, 2007.

these two lobbies can help reveal the relative merits of the arms lobby theory and provide a model on how a lobby's influence can be measured.

A Profitable War?

In colloquial discussions, many assume war and profit to be one and the same for American arms manufacturers, but what incentives truly existed for the arms lobby to push for the invasion of Iraq? The popular argument goes that war needs weapons therefore the firms that sell weapons will support, push for, or even cause wars to maximize their profits. While this simplistic argument can be appealing, the arms lobby's incentives to push for the 2003 invasion of Iraq prove to be less obvious but still extant. This subsection will describe the precise scenario facing the arms industry in the early 2000s which made pushing for war particularly attractive. It will also describe how the Iraq War and to a broader extent the Global War on Terror have played out in a near ideal manner for the arms lobby.

American weapons manufacturers primarily rely on government contracts to produce weapons for their profits. The folk theory often follows the logic that war uses up weapons and thus, the military will have to buy more. But in the case of Iraq, the war itself used up relatively few weapons as the US easily won the military conflict in Iraq before the struggle of occupation began.¹²³ The profits of the arms industry depend upon the US military spending billions of dollars purchasing and maintaining a wide

¹²³ The folk argument would say that in a war the US will use some number of missiles and will accordingly need to buy more missiles from a defense contractor. Thus, contractors prefer war because war will create a demand for more weapons and while this would be true for some prolonged land wars as seen in the 20th century, the Iraq War does not fit this model of a war which burnt through a lot of weaponry. Of course, some weapons were used up in the invasion and occupation of Iraq, but majority of military spending was in excess of what was needed to actually fight the Iraq War.

array of weapons from defense contractors. The arms industry makes up the largest part of “the network of interests benefitting from military spending” and they consistently fight to maintain high military spending through the arms lobby.¹²⁴ For the most part, the lobby succeeds in its efforts as the military budgets and the profits of defense producers have consistently grown despite some minor dips since the end of World War II. The F-35 Fighter program demonstrates the strength of the lobbying power of Lockheed Martin in particular. Since the launch of the program in 1997, technical problems have marred the project and it has continually grown more and more expensive with little to show for it. During this time, Lockheed Martin spent millions on lobbying the members of Congress who were responsible for funding the program.¹²⁵ Their lobbying efforts kept a flailing program alive demonstrating the arms lobby’s acute ability to affect policy.¹²⁶ The arms lobby clearly seeks higher military budgets, but it might not need to push for war to achieve that goal. The existence of high military budgets is “predicated on (and justified by) the presence of an external enemy” and this can be just a threat or an active war.¹²⁷ Throughout the Cold War, the enemy presented by the Soviet Union along with the series of smaller wars justified a massive military budget. The habit of threat inflation in “corporate-backed conservative think tanks” which owe their funding to the defense industry serves this goal of increasing

¹²⁴ Ronald Cox, “The Military-Industrial Complex and U.S. Military Spending After 9/11,” *Class, Race and Corporate Power* Volume 2 (June 1, 2014): 1–22.

¹²⁵ Raymond Arke, “Too Big to Fail: With Millions Invested, the F-35 Is Here to Stay,” *OpenSecrets News*, April 3, 2019, <https://www.opensecrets.org/news/2019/04/too-big-to-fail-with-millions-invested-the-f-35/>.

¹²⁶ It should be noted that successfully lobbying to start a war is on an entirely different scale of influence needed as compared to just maintaining an admittedly expensive weapons program.

¹²⁷ Cox, “The Military-Industrial Complex and U.S. Military Spending After 9/11.”

budgets.¹²⁸ Threat inflation can lead to war inadvertently, but war itself rather than just a threat provides the justification for increased military spending and the resulting increased profits for arms makers. Demonstrating the connection between the arms industry and the Iraq War relies on the necessity of “political justification” for military budgets.¹²⁹ In the United States, the military budget must be justified somehow and absent a great power rival like the Soviet Union provided during the Cold War, the military budget lacks a clear justification. The arms lobby’s chief task is to maintain high military spending to maximize profits for the industry by whatever means necessary, but in certain situations, just a threat may not be enough to justify an ever-growing military budget and pushing for war may be necessary to maintain high profits.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the United States faced no peer rival or significant security threat from any other state. Some critics allege that this unipolar moment which they see as extending into the 2000s created a need for a new justification for military spending. The Iraq War served this role in maintaining the profits of the arms industry according to this theory. In the immediate post-Cold War period, many expected a reduction in military spending and a “peace dividend” where the money once spent on arms racing and competing militarily with the USSR could be invested in non-military government programs and generally work for the domestic betterment of the US.¹³⁰ Of course, any reduction to military spending would jeopardize the profits of the military-industrial complex, but without any clear rival or threat

¹²⁸ William Hartung and Michelle Ciarrocca, “The Military-Industrial-Think Tank Complex,” *Multinational Monitor* 24, no. 1/2 (February 1, 2003): 17.

¹²⁹ Cox, “The Military-Industrial Complex and U.S. Military Spending After 9/11.”

¹³⁰ Daniel Wirls, *Irrational Security The Politics of Defense from Reagan to Obama* (Baltimore, MD, USA: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010).

presenting itself in the late nineties, politicians would likely struggle to justify massive military spending to their constituents. The military budget “which declined by 17 percent under George H.W. Bush and by 12 percent during the first term of the Clinton Administration” could not be brought to even greater heights and greater profits for the industry without a new justification for high spending.¹³¹ No severe drop off would occur as the military intervention in Bosnia kept the military budget roughly level for the second Clinton term. But in a post 9/11 world, the military-industrial complex could have seen the opportunity to push the US toward “a massive military buildup under the cover of the politics created by that crisis and the wars.”¹³² Under the cover of the terror created by the September 11th attacks, the opportunity arose to push for wars which would increase the US’s defense spending and the weapons industry’s profits. War justifies the massive expansion of the military budget and the subsequent increase of defense industry profits in the eyes of the public.

Like in the Big Oil theory, the arms lobby saw the possibility for lucrative profits with the Iraq War, but unlike in the oil theory, the defense industry achieved their alleged goal of new record profits. In a war marked by chaos and things not going as planned, contractors of all stripes proved to be “the only real winners” and the arms industry experienced massive gains.¹³³ The military spending of the US “increased by about 70 percent during the presidency of George W. Bush” and the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq played a large part in this increase.¹³⁴ In 2001, the US military

¹³¹ Cox, “The Military-Industrial Complex and U.S. Military Spending After 9/11.”

¹³² Wirls, *Irrational Security The Politics of Defense from Reagan to Obama*.

¹³³ Joseph E. Stiglitz, *The Three Trillion Dollar War: The True Cost of the Iraq Conflict*, 1st ed. (New York: WWNorton, 2008).

¹³⁴ Wirls, *Irrational Security The Politics of Defense from Reagan to Obama*.

budget was \$331 billion dollars.¹³⁵ By the end of the Bush Administration, military spending had jumped up to close to \$700 billion dollars a year.¹³⁶ It can be difficult at times to assess exactly what spending was due to the war in Iraq, due to the war in Afghanistan, or due to the War on Terror more broadly. However, the US clearly spent staggering amounts on “new weapons procurement” throughout the War on Terror which “totaled over \$215 billion from 2004 through 2010.”¹³⁷ Skyrocketing military spending indicates increased profits for the firms receiving the billions of dollars in weapons contracts being doled out.

Top defense contractors clearly benefitted the increasing military spending of era in part justified by the Iraq War. Weapons contractors such as “Lockheed Martin, Northrop Grumman, General Dynamics, Raytheon, and United Technologies” experienced an incredible increase in the value of their stocks.¹³⁸ These large contractors in particular “have seen their Pentagon awards nearly double between FY2001 and FY2008” and the value of their shares reflected this increase.¹³⁹ Their growth outperformed the stock market at large.¹⁴⁰ Daniel Wirls argues that the Global War on Terror “was the functional equivalent of a new Cold War insofar as it committed the United States politically and economically to an undeclared war to be fought by a variety of means around the globe over an indefinite period” and this type

¹³⁵ “U.S. Military Spending/Defense Budget 1960-2021,” accessed February 14, 2021, <https://www.macrotrends.net/countries/USA/united-states/military-spending-defense-budget>.

¹³⁶ “U.S. Military Spending/Defense Budget 1960-2021.”

¹³⁷ Hartung, “The Military-Industrial Complex Revisited: Shifting Patterns of Military Contracting in the Post-9/11 Period.”

¹³⁸ Wirls, *Irrational Security The Politics of Defense from Reagan to Obama*.

¹³⁹ Hartung, “The Military-Industrial Complex Revisited: Shifting Patterns of Military Contracting in the Post-9/11 Period.”

¹⁴⁰ Wirls, *Irrational Security The Politics of Defense from Reagan to Obama*.

of permanent military engagement serves the interests of the arms industry.¹⁴¹ Few groups desired the chaotic insurgency and the continual state of war which followed the invasion of Iraq, but the arms industry was perfectly content with how the war in Iraq has played out as instability rather than successful reconstruction necessitated more military spending.¹⁴² If the Iraq War ended quickly with a stable democracy in place, it wouldn't serve to justify further spending on weaponry. Permanent engagement and simmering conflict in Iraq help justify the growth of military budgets and profits for the industry in pursuit of the elusive goal of winning in Iraq. The arms lobby is generally incentivized to prefer a general wartime state which serves to justify and enable a constantly increasing military budget as seen in the Bush years. The arms industry stood to benefit from the invasion of Iraq before the war and they have experienced lucrative profits in part due to arming the US military in its Middle Eastern excursions, but it remains unclear if the Iraq War was absolutely necessary to justify this novel level of spending.

Influencing Policymakers

The arms lobby like the Israel lobby or any other special interest group engages in a few strategies to influence policymakers toward their policy preferences.

“Revolving door culture” embeds individuals with strong connections, even conflicts of interests, to the defense sector within the executive branch where they can help define

¹⁴¹ Wirls.

¹⁴² A hypothetical scenario exists where the failures of the US policy in the Middle East leads to a reduction in military spending due to public backlash. Popular discontent with the Iraq War could have turned toward reducing military budgets as reaction and rectification of policy of the Bush Administration, but this has obviously not come to pass as military budgets and the profits of the defense sector remained high with some fluctuations in the Obama years and returned to consistent increases under the Trump Administration.

national security policy.¹⁴³ Mearsheimer and Walt describe a system of carrots and sticks with which the Israel lobby rewards and punishes legislators and incentivizes them to support Israel in Congress to avoid electoral consequences.¹⁴⁴ However, the Israel Lobby as Mearsheimer and Walt describe acts with a degree of cohesion that the arms lobby cannot match as different defense firms' interests often come in conflict with each other. Through these means, the arms industry exercises a great deal of influence over the foreign policy decision making process in the US.

The "revolving door" describes the "movement of government officials into positions with the very corporations they had been involved in regulating and steering millions or even billions of dollars to during their period of government service."¹⁴⁵ Some aspects of the conflicts of interests of the Bush Administration have been well documented, but few of these discussions capture the extent to which individuals with strong connections to the arms industry pervaded the Defense Department as "32 members of the Bush Administration worked for weapons contractors before taking office."¹⁴⁶ These individuals often carried not just their experience and connections in the defense industry, but some maintained financial connections to their former firms.¹⁴⁷ One cannot help but think these connections biased decision makers toward decisions like the one to invade Iraq which benefitted these corporations.¹⁴⁸ The Defense Policy

¹⁴³ Duggan, "The War Lobby."

¹⁴⁴ Mearsheimer and Walt, *The Israel Lobby and U.S. Foreign Policy*, 2007.

¹⁴⁵ Hartung, "The Military-Industrial Complex Revisited: Shifting Patterns of Military Contracting in the Post-9/11 Period."

¹⁴⁶ Duggan, "The War Lobby."

¹⁴⁷ Hartung and Ciarrocca, "The Military-Industrial-Think Tank Complex."

¹⁴⁸ The bias driven by the conflicting interests created by the revolving door can occur in decision makers explicitly or implicitly. Their time in the private sector may just unconsciously bias their world view toward decision making that benefits their old companies or perhaps, they could be consciously trying to serve themselves and their friends at their former employers..

Board, a group created by the Bush Administration to advise the Pentagon, had nine members with ties to the Defense Industry, four of whom were registered lobbyists.¹⁴⁹ Vice President Cheney's connection to Haliburton is well known, but his wife, Lynne, "served on Lockheed's board of directors from 1994 until January 2001, accumulating more than \$500,000 in deferred director's fees in the process."¹⁵⁰ Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz and Undersecretary of Defense Douglas Feith, two prominent proponents of the war, both did paid consulting and advising work for Northrop Grumman.¹⁵¹ Beyond these high profile, names who are often credited with being among the driving forces for the invasion of Iraq, "former executives, consultants or shareholders of top U.S. defense companies" filled out the Bush Administration's national security apparatus and could have used their newfound political positions to push for policies which would benefit their former companies in the defense sector.¹⁵² "Secretary of the Air Force James Roche," for example, served as an executive for Northrup Grumman for over fifteen years before accepting his position with the Bush Administration.¹⁵³ Peter Teets, Undersecretary of the Air Force and Director of the National Reconnaissance Office, spent decades working for Lockheed Martin and its pre-merger predecessor, Martin Marietta, including a stint as its president and CEO right before moving into the Bush Administration in 2001.¹⁵⁴ The Bush

¹⁴⁹ "Advisors of Influence: Nine Members of the Defense Policy Board Have Ties to Defense Contractors," Center for Public Integrity, accessed August 23, 2020, <https://publicintegrity.org/national-security/advisors-of-influence-nine-members-of-the-defense-policy-board-have-ties-to-defense-contractors/>.

¹⁵⁰ Hartung and Ciarrocca, "The Military-Industrial-Think Tank Complex."

¹⁵¹ Hartung and Ciarrocca.

¹⁵² Hartung and Ciarrocca.

¹⁵³ Hartung, "The Military-Industrial Complex Revisited: Shifting Patterns of Military Contracting in the Post-9/11 Period."

¹⁵⁴ Hartung and Ciarrocca, "The Military-Industrial-Think Tank Complex."

Administration drew heavily upon the defense industry for candidates for positions within the Defense Department.

The arms lobby influences American legislators in the same way any American special interest group does. “In America, corruption takes on a more nuanced form than it does elsewhere” as interest groups purchase influence in the Capitol through campaign contributions and lobbying.¹⁵⁵ Interest groups reward politicians with campaign contributions if they support the group’s interests. If a politician works against the interest group by trying to reduce military spending for example, the interest group can punish them by funding a challenger in the next election. In the early 2000s, the arms industry contributed “more than \$7 million each election cycle to Congressional campaigns.”¹⁵⁶ To put the lobbying efforts of the defense industry in context with the Israel lobby, “Northrop Grumman alone spends seven times as much money in its lobbying efforts annually than does AIPAC and Lockheed Martin outspends AIPAC by a factor of four.”¹⁵⁷ Mearsheimer and Walt describe the Israel lobby having an “unmatched ability to play this game of interest-group politics,” but by the numbers, that lobby wielded less influence than the defense industry in pure terms of spending money on lobbying.¹⁵⁸ Like any other interest group, the arms lobby pushes legislators toward their preferred policies which includes wars like Iraq through a system of rewards and punishments.

¹⁵⁵ Stiglitz, *The Three Trillion Dollar War*.

¹⁵⁶ Zunes, “The Israel Lobby.”

¹⁵⁷ Zunes.

¹⁵⁸ Mearsheimer and Walt, “The Israel Lobby and U.S. Foreign Policy,” September 22, 2006.

The “initiative to lease 100 aerial refueling tankers from Boeing” at the price of \$26 billion marks a clear example of industry influencing policy.¹⁵⁹ The industry’s lobbying of Senator Ted Stevens(R-AK) got the amendment added to the defense budget bill and the two Democratic Senators from Boeing’s home state of Washington jumped aboard to support the defense industry in their state.¹⁶⁰ As the Chairman of the Defense Policy Board “Richard Perle wrote an op-ed praising the Boeing tanker deal after the company invested \$20 million in Perle’s investment firm” further demonstrating how the industry influences policy makers.¹⁶¹ While the addition of a particular spending initiative to the defense budget is far from starting a war, this case demonstrates how the industry can affect policy.

Evaluating the Connection between the Arms Lobby and the Iraq War

The previous two subsections have established two key things. First, the arms industry had a motive to push for the invasion of Iraq as it would increase military spending and provide the justification for this spending just by its nature of being a war. This came to pass as the Iraq War helped drive both the military budget and weapons contractor profits to new highs. Second, the arms lobby held influence over both the executive branch through embedding its former members in the Bush Administration and the legislative branch through a standard system of lobbying. The arms industry had both an incentive to push war in general and the means to influence power toward their preferred policy. But no significant evidence exists to show that the arms lobby caused

¹⁵⁹ Hartung, “The Military-Industrial Complex Revisited: Shifting Patterns of Military Contracting in the Post-9/11 Period.”

¹⁶⁰ Hartung.

¹⁶¹ Hartung.

the war or even pushed for it. The lack of evidence of this connection can be expected to an extent as openly revealing this sort of conspiracy to launch a war on behalf of corporate interests would damage both the politicians and industries involved. But the US system of business influencing policy does not require the explicit dealing one associates with corruption. The existence of “an overlapping relationship between the boards of directors of the largest seven defense contractors, conservative policy planning organizations funded by these contractors, personnel in the Defense Department, and high-level cabinet executives within the administration of George W. Bush” creates a government which makes decisions to benefit the arms industry without needing to make it explicit.¹⁶² Based upon similar evidence to the arms lobby theory, Mearsheimer and Walt came to the conclusion that the Israel lobby’s “actions were a necessary but not sufficient condition for war.”¹⁶³ A reasonable conclusion may be that while not causing the war, the arms lobby can “color the world view of the decision makers” and paved the way for the decision to invade Iraq.¹⁶⁴ Secretary of State Colin Powell’s Chief of Staff, Colonel Lawrence Wilkerson, in a 2016 interview described “a penchant on behalf of the Congress to bless the use of force more often than not because of the constituencies they have and the money they get from the defense contractors.”¹⁶⁵ This marks a distinct example of someone who served in the Bush Administration describing the influence of the defense industry on policy in congress. The arms lobby

¹⁶² Cox, “The Military-Industrial Complex and U.S. Military Spending After 9/11.”

¹⁶³ Mearsheimer and Walt, “The Israel Lobby and U.S. Foreign Policy,” September 22, 2006.

¹⁶⁴ Duggan, “The War Lobby.”

¹⁶⁵ Ben Norton, “‘We Are the Death Merchant of the World’: Ex-Bush Official Lawrence Wilkerson Condemns Military-Industrial Complex,” *Salon*, March 29, 2016, sec. News, https://www.salon.com/2016/03/29/we_are_the_death_merchant_of_the_world_ex_bush_official_lawrence_wilkerson_condemns_military_industrial_complex/.

cannot be said to be the definitive cause of the Iraq War or even a cause at all cause, but this special interest did clearly exercise influence over the foreign policy decision making process and the real policy enacted matches the arms industry's preference for war. The arms lobby's influence likely biased decision makers in the executive branch and legislature in favor of the invasion of Iraq, but the evidence does not show the war to have been fought on behalf of this private interest. The arms lobby likely played a subtle role in the lead up to the Iraq War by removing barriers like gaining Congressional approval for the war. The in-depth study of the arms lobby folk theory reveals the argument to be primarily based on the circumstantial connection between the Iraq War and increased military spending, but the influence of the arms lobby in subtly tilting foreign policy toward wars should not be ignored.

Reconstruction Contracting and the Cheney-Halliburton Theory

Many in the public believe the US fought the Iraq War to benefit Vice President Cheney's personal interests. Due to the connection between one of the architects of the war, Vice President Cheney, and the company he used to run, Halliburton, which happened to be the single highest earning contractor of the war, many speculate the Vice President pushed for the invasion for own profit. In more academic terms, the theory argues that the sector of "rebuilding and support contractors" which the US government brought in to support the military occupation and rebuild Iraqi infrastructure after the invasion drove the decision to invade through their connections and influence in American politics.¹⁶⁶ This section will investigate this theory and the influence of the key firms in this sector and their connections to the decision to launch the 2003 Iraq War. While the strongest evidence of a connection between the decision to invade Iraq and reconstruction contractors proves to clearly be the Cheney-Halliburton relationship, it is also important to investigate the idea that other reconstruction companies also influenced the decision, as possibilities beyond the most obvious should not be unnecessarily precluded from consideration. So, first step in this process is examining Bechtel, the second most profitable American contractor, and its connections to the Bush Administration. Despite its extensive influence, the evidence shows Bechtel to be an unlikely culprit as a cause of the Iraq War for a couple of reasons.¹⁶⁷ After examining Bechtel, this section will turn to Halliburton and show both

¹⁶⁶ Hartung, "The Military-Industrial Complex Revisited: Shifting Patterns of Military Contracting in the Post-9/11 Period."

¹⁶⁷ The study of Bechtel, a well-established and influential company, helps demonstrate the extraordinary nature of Halliburton's profitable experience in Iraq. Despite a long history of working for the US government in and around Iraq, Halliburton clearly trounced Bechtel in contracting during the Iraq War.

its lucrative profits from the invasion of Iraq and its connection to one of the key actors behind the decision to invade Iraq. This necessitates both an in-depth summary of the well-known aspects of the relationship between Vice-President Cheney and Halliburton as well as its less well-known elements.

The invasion of Iraq created the conditions where massive contracts could be handed out to rebuild Iraq and support the US occupation, therefore, a little background on these conditions is necessary before discussing the evidence about these contractors. The state of Iraq immediately after the invasion and in the years that followed should be established to better understand the role of firms like Bechtel and Halliburton in Iraq. The first Gulf War, over a decade of sanctions, and the 2003 invasion of Iraq devastated both key civilian infrastructure and oil production infrastructure, leaving them in shambles. Infrastructure would need to be rebuilt to turn Iraq into a model democracy as some in the Bush Administration envisioned. Oil production, for example, functioned at a fraction of the maximum capacity possible and the already inconsistent access to electricity in Iraq become even more unstable. To resolve these issues, US government agencies like USAID contracted companies to complete infrastructure projects. Additionally, the occupying force in Iraq and the novel Coalition Provisional Authority needed support in terms of providing meals, housing, and the countless other tasks needed to maintain the occupation . Many authors have written a great deal about what life was like in Iraq following the US invasion and they tend to focus on what life was like in the Green Zone in Baghdad which was the headquarters of the American

This comparison rules out one possible cause and helps highlight the strength of the Cheney-Halliburton Theory.

occupation and rebuilding effort.¹⁶⁸ The Green Zone like other US military bases could be described as “a Halliburton-run city-state” where the Houston based company ran most aspects of life and created a miniaturized taste of the US for American soldiers, officials, and contractors in the volatile Baghdad.¹⁶⁹ Rebuilding Iraq after the invasion and supporting the occupying American personnel, civilian and military, created a booming industry for American companies. While finding the precise total of contracts that went to these firms can be difficult, “private or publicly listed firms received at least \$138 billion of U.S. taxpayer money for government contracts for services that included providing private security, building infrastructure and feeding the troops” as of 2013.¹⁷⁰ Between 2003 and 2007, “U.S. government agencies obligated a total of \$85 billion for contracts principally performed in the Iraq theater” according to a Congressional Budget Office report.¹⁷¹ While that number includes the security contractors as well as reconstruction and support contractors, the majority of that total went to reconstruction and support contractors.¹⁷²

¹⁶⁸ Rajiv Chandrasekaran, *Imperial Life in the Emerald City: Inside Iraq's Green Zone*, 1st ed. (New York: Alfred A Knopf, 2006); Pratap Chatterjee, *Iraq, Inc.: A Profitable Occupation*, Seven Stories Press 1st ed., An Open Media Book (New York: Seven Stories, 2004).

¹⁶⁹ Klein, *The Shock Doctrine*.

¹⁷⁰ Angelo Young, “Former Halliburton Subsidiary Received \$39.5 Billion In Iraq-Related Contracts Over The Past Decade,” *Business Insider*, March 19, 2013, <https://www.businessinsider.com/halliburton-company-got-395billion-iraq-2013-3>, <https://www.businessinsider.com/halliburton-company-got-395billion-iraq-2013-3> Young. A number of challenges present themselves in trying to assess contracting totals. Some figures look at just Iraq and others include Afghanistan and the War on Terror in general. Studies examine different time frames and thus arrive at different totals. Security contractors and reconstruction contractors are lumped together and sometimes they are counted separately. While these challenges make getting one number that encapsulates contracting in Iraq difficult, it is clear it was massive industry.

¹⁷¹ “Contractors’ Support of U.S. Operations in Iraq” (Congress of the United States Congressional Budget Office, August 2008).

¹⁷² The business of reconstruction and support contractors was often linked with the work of private security contractors as those security contractors would be hired as security for rebuilding and support firms and their personnel.

Investigating a Possible Bechtel Theory

During the first Gulf War, the US government contracted Bechtel to put out fires and restore Kuwaiti oil fields which it accomplished in a relatively effective manner.¹⁷³ This previous experience in Iraq made them a likely candidate to receive valuable contracts during the second US invasion of Iraq. Bechtel, an engineering and construction company, rarely surfaces as a potential private interest cause of the Iraq War as Halliburton does, but it was the second largest contractor with the US government in the early years of the Iraq War and possessed significant connections to the Bush Administration worth considering. Bechtel, while not commonly known itself, completed or has been a part of many of the best-known engineering and construction feats in the US and globally such as the Hoover Dam and the Channel Tunnel.

Contracts in Iraq

Bechtel received lucrative contracts from the US government during the Iraq War to rebuild Iraqi infrastructure. These contracts were primarily focused on civilian infrastructure as the contract to “Restore Iraqi Oil”(RIO) crucially went to their chief competitor, Halliburton.¹⁷⁴ In 2003, Bechtel won a contract from USAID to rebuild infrastructure that was “capped at \$680 million over 18 months,” though Bechtel would go on to earn more than just that initial contract.¹⁷⁵ In 2004, Bechtel won a second contract from USAID to rebuild Iraqi national infrastructure which would have “a total

¹⁷³ Matthew L. Wald, “Amid Ceremony and Ingenuity, Kuwait’s Oil-Well Fires Are Declared Out,” *The New York Times*, November 7, 1991, sec. World, <https://www.nytimes.com/1991/11/07/world/amid-ceremony-and-ingenuity-kuwait-s-oil-well-fires-are-declared-out.html>.

¹⁷⁴ Sheryl Elam Tappan, “An Oversight Hearing on Contracting Abuses in Iraq,” § Senate Democratic Policy Committee Hearing (2004).

¹⁷⁵ Pratap Chatterjee, “Bechtel Wins Iraq War Contracts | Corpwatch” (Corpwatch, April 24, 2003), <https://corpwatch.org/article/bechtel-wins-iraq-war-contracts>.

value of up to \$1.8 billion.”¹⁷⁶ Bechtel made the decision to pull out of contracting in Iraq in 2006, just three years after getting into the Iraq reconstruction business due to a number of employees being killed during the insurgency.¹⁷⁷ For their time in Iraq, Bechtel received “a total of \$2.3 billion, a sum that included its undisclosed fee.”¹⁷⁸ While Bechtel made a nice profit in Iraq, the sum appears paltry in comparison to Halliburton’s earnings.

Connections to Government

Pratap Chatterjee does an excellent job of outlining the extensive connections between Bechtel and the Bush Administration which he describes as an “incestuous relationship.”¹⁷⁹ The revolving door between business and government was ubiquitous in the case of Bechtel. President Bush appointed Riley Bechtel, of the Bechtel Family and the Chairman of Bechtel, as “a member of President Bush's Export Council to advise the government on how to create markets for American companies overseas.”¹⁸⁰ Former Bechtel President and “former secretary of state George Schultz headed up the Committee for the Liberation of Iraq” and wrote op-eds urging for the invasion of Iraq.¹⁸¹ “Jack Sheehan, a senior vice president at Bechtel” served on the Defense Policy Board.¹⁸² The list continues as “Daniel Chao, another Bechtel senior vice president,”

¹⁷⁶ “Usaid Awards Bechtel National Iraq Infrastructure II Contract,” Bechtel Corporate, January 6, 2004, <https://www.bechtel.com/newsroom/releases/2004/01/usaid-awardsiraq-infrastructure-2-contract/>.

¹⁷⁷ David M. Streitfeld, “Bechtel Calls It Quits after More than 3 Years in Iraq,” *Los Angeles Times*, November 3, 2006, <https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-2006-nov-03-fi-bechtel3-story.html>.

¹⁷⁸ Streitfeld.

¹⁷⁹ Chatterjee, “Bechtel Wins Iraq War Contracts | Corpwatch.”

¹⁸⁰ Chatterjee. Incidentally, the Iraq War did create a new market for firms like Riley Bechtel’s to profit off of.

¹⁸¹ Klein, *The Shock Doctrine*. The Committee for the Liberation of Iraq was specifically created to build the public case for the war and contained many individuals with strong connections to firms that would later profit from the war.

¹⁸² Chatterjee, “Bechtel Wins Iraq War Contracts | Corpwatch.”

served on the “advisory board of the US Export-Import Bank.”¹⁸³ A specific connection existed between Bechtel and USAID, the agency which awarded Bechtel its largest contracts. Andrew Natsios, the head administrator of USAID while Bechtel was in Iraq, had an established relationship with the firm through their work on the “Big Dig” in Boston while he served as the Chairman of the Massachusetts Turnpike Authority.¹⁸⁴ While this list of individuals does show a connection between the administration and Bechtel, the names and positions which Chatterjee brings up are not in positions particularly close to the levers of power. Once upon a time, George Schultz would have been of significance, but by the early two thousands, he was far removed from his days as president of Bechtel or as Secretary of State. More compelling than just showing the connections between Bechtel and government is the evidence of Bechtel making plans for Iraq in 2002. On April 21 of that year, “Terry Valenzano, the man who ran Bechtel's construction business in Saudi Arabia, flew into Kuwait City to meet with Jay Garner, the Pentagon official appointed to oversee Iraq.”¹⁸⁵ The Bush Administration selected Jay Garner to oversee the Office for Reconstruction and Humanitarian Assistance which was intended to govern the reconstruction of Iraq until that plan was scrapped for Paul Bremer's Coalition Provisional Authority. This meeting shows a direct connection between a Bechtel representative and one of the individuals responsible for planning a post-war Iraq months before the war would start. Overall, Bechtel like any other massive multinational corporation had strong connections to the government and they

¹⁸³ Chatterjee.

¹⁸⁴ Chatterjee. This connection does not necessarily imply an impropriety, but merely, an established and familiar relationship between Bechtel and the government official responsible for awarding them contracts in Iraq.

¹⁸⁵ Chatterjee.

did receive relatively lucrative contracts in Iraq, but it seems unlikely these connections yielded anything more than helping earn their USAID contracts.

Second to One

In the wake of the invasion of Iraq, Bechtel sought the contract to “restore Iraqi Oil, or RIO, program,” but according to Sheryl Tappan, a former consultant for Bechtel National Marketing & Business Development, it was a non-competitive bidding process where Bechtel never had a chance.¹⁸⁶ Tappan was “responsible for the proposal that won Bechtel the Iraq civil infrastructure reconstruction contract from USAID”, and in congressional testimony, she described a non-competitive bidding process for the RIO contract.¹⁸⁷ She spoke about how the Army Corps of Engineers misled Bechtel, neglected to provide information to Bechtel, and generally “ignored our federal laws and regulations and the procedures that normally ensure fair play.”¹⁸⁸ In another piece of congressional testimony, Bunnatine Greenhouse, an Army Corps of Engineers whistleblower, confirmed the non-competitive nature of the bidding process for the RIO contract.¹⁸⁹ She described a process “plagued by conflict of interest” and how the Army Corps of Engineers removed her from her position for speaking out about this.¹⁹⁰ Bechtel being pushed out of the bidding process for the lucrative RIO contracts indicates that they were not even the most influential firm in the business of receiving reconstruction and support contracts. The Department of Defense awarded the “\$7

¹⁸⁶ Tappan, An Oversight Hearing on Contracting Abuses in Iraq.

¹⁸⁷ Tappan.

¹⁸⁸ Tappan.

¹⁸⁹ Bunnatine H. Greenhouse, “Testimony of Bunnatine H. Greenhouse,” § Oversight and Government Reform (2009), <https://www.whistleblowers.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/greenhouse.whistleblower.hearing.pdf>.

¹⁹⁰ Greenhouse.

billion, sole source, cost plus contract” for the RIO program to Kellogg, Brown, and Root (KBR), a subsidiary of Halliburton in a non-competitive bidding process.¹⁹¹ Bechtel played second fiddle to Halliburton and its subsidiary, KBR, in earning Iraq contracts as it was “earning three times as much as Bechtel” or much more in Iraq at varying points in time.¹⁹² Despite Bechtel’s profits and influence, the conversation surrounding reconstruction contractors and the causes of the Iraq War focus on Halliburton for good reason as its earnings and influence during the Iraq War outstrips any of its rivals making it the clear focus of any theory of support or reconstruction contracting as a cause of the Iraq War.

Halliburton Contracting: A History

Founded as an oilfield services company in 1919, Halliburton, and its subsidiaries such as Kellogg, Brown, and Root, have done big business selling everything needed to extract and transport petroleum along with a number of other services. While some aspects of the history between Dick Cheney and Halliburton are well known, others are not. To fully understand Halliburton’s contracting in Iraq, one needs to look back farther than the start of the second Bush Presidency or even Cheney’s time running Halliburton. As the Secretary of Defense under George H.W. Bush, Dick Cheney commissioned “a \$3.9 million strategy for providing rapid support to twenty thousand troops in emergency situations” from Halliburton.¹⁹³ The Defense Department ordered “\$5 million to do a follow up study” from Halliburton on the

¹⁹¹ Greenhouse.

¹⁹² Chatterjee, *Iraq, Inc.*

¹⁹³ Chatterjee.

prospects of outsourcing the support of American troops around the world.¹⁹⁴ These studies resulted in the Logistics Civil Augmentation Program (LOGCAP). LOGCAP outsourced the duty of running the key aspects of day-to-day life in the US military abroad to corporations. It included everything from doing laundry to supplying fuel to providing meals for US soldiers at bases around the world. In 1992, “Halliburton was selected by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to implement the plan that it had drawn up” and it received the first LOGCAP contract and went onto provide support to the US military in the Balkans in the 90s.¹⁹⁵ After George H.W. Bush lost in the election in 1992 and “the obligatory year outside the government-industrial complex,” Dick Cheney became the CEO of the company which had been the beneficiary of his efforts to outsource support functions as the Secretary of Defense.¹⁹⁶ This epitomizes the revolving door where government officials move “into positions with the very corporations they had been involved in regulating and steering millions or even billions of dollars to during their period of government service.”¹⁹⁷ Cheney, while in office, collaborated with Halliburton to design a program for outsourcing military support functions and then, Halliburton promptly won the contract for the program it designed and start reaping profits from supporting the US military abroad. But the jump from the Department of Defense to Halliburton would not be Cheney’s last time through the revolving door.

¹⁹⁴ Chatterjee.

¹⁹⁵ Chatterjee.

¹⁹⁶ Chatterjee.

¹⁹⁷ Hartung, “The Military-Industrial Complex Revisited: Shifting Patterns of Military Contracting in the Post-9/11 Period.”

Halliburton in Iraq

While as always, the numbers differ a bit on what exactly Halliburton earned from its contracts in Iraq, it clearly made a killing. Halliburton received at least “\$39.5 Billion In Iraq-Related Contracts” as of 2013.¹⁹⁸ To put that number in context, some worried about the conflict of interest between Cheney and Halliburton before the war when it was believed Halliburton could receive “the estimated \$1.5 billion in contracts to rebuild the oil industry.”¹⁹⁹ That initial estimate pales in comparison to the total from the entire war or even just the specific contract to Restore Iraqi Oil.²⁰⁰ Halliburton via KBR became “the largest Pentagon contractor in Iraq” through the seemingly preferential treatment of the Department of Defense whereas Bechtel lost out in unfair bidding processes.²⁰¹ Halliburton through its subsidiary KBR clearly operated on another scale as compared to their competitors.²⁰² Beyond the no-bid or non-competitive nature of Halliburton receiving contracts, the “Cost-plus-award-fee” nature of many of their contracts proved to be problematic as it incentivized waste and inefficiency.²⁰³ In a cost-plus contract, the government pays the contractors for all of its costs plus a fee of a couple percent to ensure the company profits. Under this type of contract, “the company does not care how much it spends, because under its contracts,

¹⁹⁸ Young, “Former Halliburton Subsidiary Received \$39.5 Billion In Iraq-Related Contracts Over The Past Decade.”

¹⁹⁹ Norman Solomon, *Target Iraq: What the News Media Didn't Tell You* (New York: Context Books : Distributed by Publishers Group West, 2003).

²⁰⁰ Greenhouse, Testimony of Bunnatine H. Greenhouse.

²⁰¹ James Risen, “Use of Iraq Contractors Costs Billions, Report Says,” *The New York Times*, August 12, 2008, sec. Washington, <https://www.nytimes.com/2008/08/12/washington/12contractors.html>.

²⁰² KBR receiving massive contracts in Iraq is not entirely unusual as it was a well-equipped and experienced engineering firm, but how it outstripped equally or better equipped and experienced firms like Bechtel and Parsons in contracting makes the situation a little more suspicious. If KBR were an uniquely well-suited company for this type of contracting work, their outsized role would be more explicable, but in reality, they were similarly suited to the contracts available in Iraq as their competitors.

²⁰³ Chatterjee, *Iraq, Inc.*

the military pays Haliburton for costs plus a small profit margin” of 1 or 2 percent depending on the exact contract.²⁰⁴ Cost-plus contracts result in inefficiency, waste, and fraud as the cost-plus model incentivizes companies to spend as much as possible to increase the profit amount they receive as the percent fee. Chatterjee puts it simply, “the more money the company spends, the more profit it can make,” which undermines any argument about the efficiency of outsourcing to corporations like Halliburton.²⁰⁵ In testimony before Congress, Henry Bunting, a former Halliburton contractor, stated that his superiors would often say “don’t worry about price, it’s cost plus.”²⁰⁶ Chatterjee’s account of the Green Zone in Baghdad confirms this attitude as he chronicled examples of Halliburton contractors ordering expensive embroidered towels and driving empty trucks back and forth to rack up higher costs and higher profits.²⁰⁷

The LOGCAP program which Cheney and Halliburton pioneered became the firm’s single biggest contract in Iraq and followed the cost-plus model. In 2001, the LOGCAP III contract was awarded to Kellogg, Brown, and Root. Between the start of the war in 2003 and the end of the contract in 2007, the army dedicated “\$22 billion to the LOGCAP contract for services rendered in the Iraq theater” by KBR.²⁰⁸ LOGCAP and the RIO contract were the two single biggest contracts received by KBR in Iraq, but they also received a number of smaller contracts in Iraq. Due to their massive “contracts to rebuild Iraq’s oil infrastructure and provide logistical support to U.S.

²⁰⁴ Chatterjee.

²⁰⁵ Chatterjee.

²⁰⁶ Sen Byron L Dorgan et al., “Democratic Policy Committee Hearing on Iraq Contracting Abuses,” § Democratic Policy Committee (2004).

²⁰⁷ Chatterjee, *Iraq, Inc.*

²⁰⁸ “Contractors’ Support of U.S. Operations in Iraq.” The LOGCAP III contract’s full value was \$35.7 Billion when including American operations in Afghanistan as well as those in Iraq.

troops in Iraq,” Halliburton’s profits grew exponentially from 2002 to 2006.²⁰⁹ Halliburton’s value reflected the success of its contracting in Iraq as “the company’s stock price rose from \$10 before the war in Iraq to \$41 three years later.”²¹⁰ In 2007, Halliburton, facing increased scrutiny for its work in Iraq and connections to the Bush Administration, sold Kellogg, Brown, and Root for a gain of “\$933 million” at the peak of its value.²¹¹ One could speculate this sale came at the height of the subsidiary’s value and before an election year that could shake up the White House and potentially cut off the firm’s earnings. While it can be difficult to track and calculate Halliburton’s profits from Iraq, the war is clearly “the single most profitable event in Haliburton’s history.”²¹² As the largest contractor of the war, Halliburton made massive profits that would not have been possible without the invasion of Iraq.

The Cheney Connection

The connection between Dick Cheney and Halliburton became well publicized and widely believed to be a conflict of interests. This subsection will show what connections existed between the Vice President and Halliburton throughout his tenure in the White House. Cheney consistently claimed he had “no financial ties to Halliburton” while in office, but the evidence suggests otherwise.²¹³ After joining the Bush ticket in the 2000 election, Cheney negotiated an early “retirement package,

²⁰⁹ Hartung, “The Military-Industrial Complex Revisited: Shifting Patterns of Military Contracting in the Post-9/11 Period.”

²¹⁰ Klein, *The Shock Doctrine*.

²¹¹ Bloomberg News, “Sale of KBR Bolsters Profit at Halliburton,” *The New York Times*, July 24, 2007, sec. Business, <https://www.nytimes.com/2007/07/24/business/24halliburton.html>.

²¹² Klein, *The Shock Doctrine*.

²¹³ Mike Allen, “Cheney’s Ties to Halliburton,” *Washington Post*, September 26, 2003, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/2003/09/26/cheney-s-ties-to-halliburton/be76c502-1298-4f82-b716-04e12210d243/>.

including stock and options, worth millions more than if he had simply resigned.”²¹⁴

The least significant aspect of this financial connection was the deferred salary paid to Cheney. The number varies a bit depending on the source reporting this salary, but Cheney received, roughly, a “deferred compensation of \$147,579 in 2001 and \$162,392 in 2002, with payments scheduled to continue for three more years.”²¹⁵ This salary was only slightly less than the salary for being Vice-President. More significantly, Cheney kept “189,000 Halliburton shares and 500,000 unvested options even as he entered the vice presidency.”²¹⁶ As previously discussed, when the Halliburton stock price jumped from “\$10 before the war in Iraq to \$41 three years later,” Cheney stood to profit from his significant holdings in Halliburton stock.²¹⁷ According to a report by the Congressional Research Service, these connections constituted “continuing financial interests in the Halliburton Co.” despite Cheney’s claims to the contrary.²¹⁸

Vice President Cheney played a key role in making the decision to invade Iraq. Dick Cheney and Donald Rumsfeld are widely considered “the most prominent backers of the U.S. invasion of Iraq” inside of the Bush Administration.²¹⁹ It is certainly concerning that one of the individuals who played “a decisive role in driving the United States to invade Iraq” stood to profit from that decision.²²⁰ KBR and Halliburton’s

²¹⁴ Mary Williams Walsh, “Shriving of Pensions After Halliburton Deal,” *The New York Times*, September 10, 2002, sec. Business, <https://www.nytimes.com/2002/09/10/business/shriving-of-pensions-after-halliburton-deal.html>.

²¹⁵ Allen, “Cheney’s Ties to Halliburton.”

²¹⁶ Klein, *The Shock Doctrine*.

²¹⁷ Klein.

²¹⁸ Allen, “Cheney’s Ties to Halliburton.”

²¹⁹ Stephen Zunes and John Gershman, “The U.S. Invasion of Iraq: Not the Fault of Israel and Its Supporters,” *Foreign Policy In Focus*, January 3, 2006, https://fpif.org/the_us_invasion_of_iraq_not_the_fault_of_israel_and_its_supporters/; Cramer and Thrall, *Why Did the United States Invade Iraq?*

²²⁰ Duggan, “The War Lobby.”

profits from Iraq resulted “directly from Cheney’s steering the country into war with Iraq.”²²¹ The public discusses this connection frequently due to the conflict of interest of one of the chief decision makers behind the war who also held a significant financial stake in one of the companies which would go on to profit the most from the war by receiving no-bid contracts which do indicate a level of corruption by themselves. However, some ascribe Cheney’s interest in the invasion of Iraq to a desire to reassert American primacy or to a broader privatization agenda which subsumes individual private interests.²²² Additionally, no smoking gun proves Cheney’s decision to push for the invasion of Iraq stemmed from his personal interest in accumulating wealth or aiding his former company.

No definitive evidence exists to prove this theory beyond a doubt; however, some evidence shows that Cheney possibly played a role in ensuring Halliburton received the RIO contract. A Defense Department email obtained by the Time Magazine from March 5th, 2003 showed that Pentagon “‘action’ on a multibillion-dollar Halliburton contract was ‘coordinated’ with Cheney's office.”²²³ The email directly links Cheney’s office with the non-competitive bidding process in which Halliburton won the RIO contract. While the evidence of this is just a single email with vague language, it certainly indicates Cheney utilized his position in power to benefit his former company. Despite not proving that Cheney’s personal interests to be a cause of the war, it reveals that he did undertake actions while in office to benefit Halliburton

²²¹ Klein, *The Shock Doctrine*.

²²² Cramer and Thrall, *Why Did the United States Invade Iraq?*; Duggan, “The War Lobby”; Klein, *The Shock Doctrine*.

²²³ Timothy J. Burger and Adam Zagorin, “Iraq The Halliburton Connection: The Paper Trail: Did Cheney Okay A Deal?,” *Time*, June 7, 2004, <http://content.time.com/time/subscriber/article/0,33009,994408,00.html>.

and therefore, himself. Cheney not only had significant financial interests in Halliburton, but some evidence exists of the Vice President using his position to aid Halliburton. As a possible counterpoint, the Cheney-Halliburton theory relies on just one actor and their interests which weakens the theory regardless of the importance of that one actor. The theory would be more convincing if other significant members of the Bush Administration also possessed close connections to Halliburton.²²⁴ Regardless, an undeniable connection existed between one of the primary architects of the Iraq War and one of the companies that benefited the most from the war.

Before concluding, the recurring theme of the Bush Administration and Cheney's opacity and unwillingness to take action to dispel the concerns of critics should be briefly addressed. If Vice President Cheney wanted to truly demonstrate his lack of financial interests in Halliburton and subsidiaries, a complete and crystal clear divestment from Halliburton before taking office would mark a concrete action to dispel public concerns. Cheney "refused to answer a request from Democrats in Congress that he provide an accounting of any communications he and his staff have had with Halliburton or actions they have taken on Halliburton contracts," but if he truly had not taken any actions to benefit Halliburton, he could have revealed these communications.²²⁵ The secrecy of Cheney in relation to his private interests invites suspicion as he clearly could have taken actions to be transparent and prove that he was not acting on behalf of a private interest.

²²⁴ If this were the sole cause of the war, Cheney would have to convince other members of the Bush Administration under this theory making it much more dubious. Different actors likely had different motives for pursuing the same goal of invading Iraq.

²²⁵ David E. Rosenbaum, "A Closer Look at Cheney and Halliburton," *The New York Times*, September 28, 2004, sec. U.S., <https://www.nytimes.com/2004/09/28/us/a-closer-look-at-cheney-and-halliburton.html>.

Evaluating the Cheney-Halliburton Theory

The folk theory which connects Vice President Cheney and his relationship with Halliburton to the origins of the Iraq War is popular and widely believed. Unlike some popular folk theories, the facts justify the public's suspicion and allegations of conspiracy. Before investigating the Halliburton theory, this section examined Bechtel, one of Halliburton's competitors. Like many other large US companies, Bechtel had significant connections to the government and profited from the invasion and reconstruction of Iraq, but no evidence indicates Bechtel played a key or even minor role in causing the invasion of Iraq. The evidence supporting the Halliburton folk theory is relatively straightforward. Halliburton received billions of dollars in government contracts in Iraq. Vice President Cheney, one of the chief architects of the war, used to be the CEO of Halliburton and maintained a significant financial connection to the company during his time in office through deferred salary and stock options. One of the key actors behind the war in Iraq stood to financially benefit from the invasion and reconstruction of Iraq. Additionally, Halliburton appeared to have received many of its contracts without fair competition and some evidence points toward Cheney ensuring his former company received the most valuable Pentagon contracts.

It cannot be definitively said whether Cheney operated purely to benefit his personal interest and as a representative of a private interest, but the evidence shows the Vice President and his former company benefited from his decision making. Despite the lack of concrete proof, the conflict of interests at play cannot be discounted in discussing the motives of Vice President Cheney in his role as one of the chief

architects of the Iraq War. While his true motives remain unknowable, Cheney's financial interest in Halliburton surely weighed upon his decision making to some degree.

Neoliberal Ideology, Privatization, and the Invasion of Iraq

One overarching theme exists throughout many of the theories of private interests discussed thus far, a focus on privatization. In some cases, such as that of the arms lobby theory, private companies already dominated the production of weapons before the start of the Iraq War, but other interests like private military contractors of the security, support, and reconstruction varieties all saw massive increases in contracts and profits due to the war. This theory put forward by some academics and journalists argues that the Iraq War continued the neoliberal movement through enabling the further privatization of US and Iraqi state functions.²²⁶ Proponents of this theory trace the ideological origins of neoliberal economic theory from the Cold War via its disciples such as Donald Rumsfeld to the Iraq War which enabled their dream of privatizing war. Born as a reaction to the Keynesian economic policy of the New Deal and Great Society eras, neoliberalism promises less government regulation and the privatization of state functions. According to neoliberal theory, “the avoidance of state regulation” leads to intense competition between firms to provide the best goods and services for the public and government at the lowest prices.²²⁷ First, this section will draw a clear line from the birth of the neoliberal movement to the decision to invade Iraq. Next, it will show how privatization pervaded every aspect of the American invasion and occupation of Iraq. Finally, this section will discuss the necessity of the invasion of Iraq to the neoliberal agenda and tackle the challenge of deciphering

²²⁶ Klein, *The Shock Doctrine*.

²²⁷ Milton Friedman, “Neoliberalism and Its Prospects,” *Hoover Institution Library Archives* collected Works of Milton Friedman Project records (February 17, 1951), <https://miltonfriedman.hoover.org/internal/media/dispatcher/214957/full>.

whether a genuine belief in neoliberal ideology drove the decision to go to war or whether it just served as a vehicle for the types of private interests discussed in previous sections. Privatization rears its head in any isolated discussion of a single parochial interest as the cause the Iraq War and its commonality across and incorporation of multiple theories make this theory somewhat compelling despite the issues that arise when trying to determine whether ideology or interests drove decision making.²²⁸ The privatization theory of the Iraq War brings together multiple theories of private interests under one banner and shows a comprehensive agenda for privatizing and profiting from the military apparatus as a chief goal of the Bush Administration which they largely accomplished through the invasion of Iraq.

The Origins of the Neoliberal Movement: Friedman and Rumsfeld

Naomi Klein in her book “The Shock Doctrine” places the Iraq War as a new zenith of the neoliberal movement whose origins she traces back to the free market ideology of Milton Friedman. According to Friedman, neoliberal economics would “seek to use competition among producers to protect consumers from exploitation, competition among employers to protect workers and owners of property, and competition among consumers to protect the enterprises themselves.”²²⁹ The neoliberal project encouraged the privatization of previously state-run functions to maximize efficiency through competition. This theory rose to prominence during the 80s in Reagan’s United States and Thatcher’s United Kingdom where previously state run

²²⁸ Naomi Klein argues that neoliberal ideology generally serves as vehicle for private interests, but it should be tested whether this is true in the case of the Iraq War. Did privatization just serve to benefit private interests or was there a genuine belief in neoliberal, efficiency through competition?

²²⁹ Friedman, “Neoliberalism and Its Prospects.”

functions like transportation were sold off or outsourced to private firms.²³⁰ Klein connects the predominant privatization ideology to foreign policy as well as domestic policy as she ascribes US foreign interventions like Chile in 1973 to “*neoliberal geopolitics*” which mandate the privatization of state industries on a global scale.²³¹ Neither coal mines in Britain nor copper mines in Chile can be publicly owned under the global neoliberal order. These early days of neoliberalism start to demonstrate the “relationship between US military policy and neoliberal economic ideology” which would reach new heights with the Iraq War according to Klein.²³² But as this section will show, the disciples of Friedman who made the decision to invade Iraq would take neoliberal foreign policy further than ever before.

Donald Rumsfeld had “a particularly close connection with Milton Friedman” and Friedman’s neoliberal ideology greatly influenced his beliefs.²³³ Rumsfeld attended Friedman’s lectures at the University of Chicago and praised Friedman throughout his career.²³⁴ Reciprocally, Friedman approved of Rumsfeld’s politics and thought of Rumsfeld as one the best and most ferocious warriors for his free market ideology. Friedman reportedly urged Reagan to select Rumsfeld to be his Vice President and “called choosing Bush over Rumsfeld the worst decision of Reagan’s presidency.”²³⁵

²³⁰ Klein, *The Shock Doctrine*.

²³¹ Matthew Sparke, Anna Secor, and Susan Roberts, “Neoliberal Geopolitics,” *Antipode* 35, no. 5 (2003): 12.

²³² Aaron Ettinger, “Neoliberalism and the Rise of the Private Military Industry,” *International Journal* 66, no. 3 (2011): 743–64.

²³³ Klein, *The Shock Doctrine*.

²³⁴ Donald H. Rumsfeld, “Secretary of Defense Donald H. Rumsfeld Speaking at Tribute to Milton Friedman” (White House, Washington, D.C., May 9, 2002).

²³⁵ David A. Graham, “George H.W. Bush’s Feuds With Donald Rumsfeld and Dick Cheney Go Back 40 Years,” *The Atlantic*, November 5, 2015, sec. Politics, <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2015/11/george-hw-bush-dick-cheney-donald-rumsfeld-iraq-jon-meacham/414343/>.

After leaving his first stint as the Secretary of Defense under President Ford, Rumsfeld launched a successful career in the private sector, and he maintained his strong belief in the privatization of government functions into his next government job in the second Bush Administration.

Having returned to the position of the Secretary of Defense now under George W. Bush, Rumsfeld announced a bold new agenda to streamline and cut the costs of the US military through privatization and outsourcing. On September 10th of 2001, Rumsfeld made a speech declaring war upon the Pentagon bureaucracy by comparing it to Soviet style, inefficient centralized planning.²³⁶ He asserted that the Department would be scoured for “functions that could be performed better and more cheaply through commercial outsourcing.”²³⁷ In this speech, Rumsfeld described his novel vision for how the US military could be run more like a nimble and efficient business through contracting out many of its functions to private firms. This speech despite its massive implications and aggressive assault of the Pentagon bureaucracy itself as essentially un-American would go largely overlooked due to the terrorist attacks which occurred the very next day. In a 2002 article in *Foreign Affairs*, Rumsfeld reiterated his call for a “a revolution in military affairs” to transform the US military into Rumsfeld’s vision for a 21st century military which relies heavily upon contracting.²³⁸ Rumsfeld wanted a military and Defense Department where individuals would “behave less like bureaucrats and more like venture capitalists.”²³⁹ Decades after Rumsfeld first became

²³⁶ Donald H. Rumsfeld, “Defense Business Practices | C-SPAN.Org,” <https://www.c-span.org/video/?165947-1/defense-business-practices>.

²³⁷ Rumsfeld.

²³⁸ Donald H. Rumsfeld, “Transforming the Military Essay,” *Foreign Affairs* 81, no. 3 (2002): 20–32.

²³⁹ Rumsfeld.

an adherent of Friedman's neoliberal ideology, he launched the project "of applying 'market logic' to the US military" through privatizing or outsourcing all but the core, warfighting functions of the military.²⁴⁰ On September 10th of 2001, Rumsfeld, however, didn't have a great deal of optimism about succeeding in this task as he stated, "We will not complete this work. In one year or five years. Or even eight years. An institution built with trillions of dollars over decades of time does not turn on a dime."²⁴¹ But Rumsfeld's pessimism about the chances of largely privatizing the US military during his tenure as the Secretary of Defense proved to be unwarranted as the Iraq War allowed for a rapid privatization of military functions.

Unlike Rumsfeld, Vice President Cheney, another one of the key architects behind the Iraq War, lacks the clear ideological connection to the neoliberal movement. Cheney got his start as "a protégé of Rumsfeld's in the Ford administration" and it can be reasonably asserted that the driving economic ideology of his mentor likely influenced Cheney's beliefs.²⁴² The decisions Cheney made throughout his career generally fall in line with neoliberal ideology despite the typically cagey Cheney not making his beliefs clear to the entire world. The creation of the "Army's Logistics Civil Augmentation Program (LOGCAP)" as engineered by Secretary of Defense Cheney in the first Bush Administration which outsourced the basic support functions necessary to maintain the US military's presence abroad to private corporations fits perfectly with Rumsfeld's goal of privatizing the military. Rumsfeld claimed that privatization would make the US military more streamlined, efficient, and cheaper for the taxpayer which

²⁴⁰ Klein, *The Shock Doctrine*.

²⁴¹ Rumsfeld, "Defense Business Practices | C-SPAN.Org."

²⁴² Klein, *The Shock Doctrine*.

seems like a reasonable goal, but in reality, the military budget skyrocketed during Rumsfeld's second tenure as the Defense Secretary. In fact, even before the 9/11 attacks that launched the Global War on Terror or declaring a war on the bureaucracy, Rumsfeld "had just asked Congress for an 11 percent budget increase."²⁴³ The US military's contractors would quickly become known for the exact opposite of the efficiency promised by Rumsfeld as contractors throughout the early years of the Iraq War would be mired by corruption and waste scandals of varying scales. The non-competitive nature of the bidding process for massive contracts in Iraq indicates that the Bush Administration did not even make a genuine effort to maximize efficiency through privatization as it relies on multiples bidders and fair competition.²⁴⁴ Some ascribe the "enthusiasm for further privatizing national security" found in the Bush Administration to "commercial concerns and lobbying," but these cannot be easily distinguished from the ideological beliefs of decision makers.²⁴⁵ The origins of Rumsfeld's neoliberal beliefs can be traced back decades and in the earliest years of the Bush Administration, he made it an explicit goal for his tenure. The Iraq War would realize Rumsfeld and Friedman's neoliberal dream as applied to the US military.

Realizing the Privatization Dream in Iraq

The Iraq War provided the opportunity for the Bush Administration to apply "the corporatist principles of the [neoliberal] counterrevolution" to the fullest extent possible in privatizing every function of the military and the new Iraq that could be

²⁴³ Klein.

²⁴⁴ Ann R. Markusen, "The Case Against Privatizing National Security," *Governance* 16, no. 4 (October 2003): 471, <https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-0491.00225>.

²⁴⁵ Markusen.

privatized.²⁴⁶ Before discussing the privatization of US military functions, the potentially lucrative market of privatizing previously state-owned businesses in newly ‘liberated’ Iraq should be briefly discussed. The biggest possible prize in the privatization of Iraq was the Iraqi National Oil Corporation.²⁴⁷ After invading Iraq and toppling Saddam Hussein, “U.S. and British officials have pushed legislation that would effectively privatize Iraqi oil production,” but they failed in those efforts as Iraq fell into chaos.²⁴⁸ In the context of the anti-American insurgency and the struggle against the privatization of Iraqi oil by the workers in the industry, the Iraqi people forced the US to abandon its plans for the privatization of Iraqi oil despite the US’s desire to open it up to foreign domination.²⁴⁹ While the privatization effort by the US and its Coalition Provisional Authority failed with oil, they succeeded everywhere else in Iraq. “The widespread privatization of public enterprises, which combined with allowing for 100% foreign ownership of Iraqi companies” made the Iraqi economy a lucrative opportunity to profit as the neoliberal movement spread by force to the previously state dominated and isolated Iraq.²⁵⁰

Under Rumsfeld, “the US undertook a deliberate policy of military privatization and deregulation in Iraq” where the US military privatized or outsourced previously state run military functions.²⁵¹ In 2007, “an internal Department of Defense census on

²⁴⁶ Klein, *The Shock Doctrine*.

²⁴⁷ Bonds, “Assessing the Oil Motive After the U.S. War in Iraq.”

²⁴⁸ Bonds.

²⁴⁹ Klein, *The Shock Doctrine*.

²⁵⁰ Stephen Zunes, “The US Invasion of Iraq: The Military Side of Globalization,” *Globalizations* 6, no. 1 (March 2009): 99–105, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14747730802692625>.

²⁵¹ Ettinger, “Neoliberalism and the Rise of the Private Military Industry.”

the industry found almost 160,000 private contractors were employed in Iraq.”²⁵² During the occupation of Iraq, the number of private contractors surpassed the number of US military personnel, marking an enormous shift toward the private sector in US military operations.²⁵³ As of 2013, “private or publicly listed firms received at least \$138 billion of U.S. taxpayer money for government contracts for services that included providing private security, building infrastructure and feeding the troops.”²⁵⁴ These contractors can be broadly divided between “rebuilding and support contractors” and “private security contractors.”²⁵⁵ Rebuilding, reconstruction, and support contractors received government contracts to complete various infrastructure projects in Iraq and provide support for the military occupation as discussed in the previous section on reconstruction contractors. Private security contractors conducted security operations such as guarding important personnel from the State Department or infrastructure projects. These industries received billions of dollars in government contracts following the 2003 invasion of Iraq to conduct tasks that had been previously handled by the military itself.

Privatizing Reconstruction

Reconstruction and support contracting experienced a massive boom due the behemoth task of rebuilding the devastated country of Iraq and “the sheer scale

²⁵² Peter W. Singer, “The Dark Truth about Blackwater,” *Brookings*, November 30, 1AD, <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/the-dark-truth-about-blackwater/>.

²⁵³ Heidi M Peters, “Department of Defense Contractor and Troop Levels in Afghanistan and Iraq: 2007-2020” (Congressional Research Service, February 22, 2021).

²⁵⁴ Young, “Former Halliburton Subsidiary Received \$39.5 Billion In Iraq-Related Contracts Over The Past Decade.”

²⁵⁵ Hartung, “The Military-Industrial Complex Revisited: Shifting Patterns of Military Contracting in the Post-9/11 Period.”

involved in supporting 150,000 U.S. troops in Iraq and surrounding nations.”²⁵⁶ The Iraq War brought the LOGCAP program of outsourcing the support of US military operations to new heights from its origins in Cheney’s Department of Defense in the early nineties and its first test in the Balkans. As the Secretary of Defense, Dick Cheney worked with Halliburton to develop the LOGCAP to privatize the support functions necessary to maintain an overseas military presence.²⁵⁷ The US military when abroad needs food, laundry, housing, and countless other relatively mundane services provided and historically, these had been handled by the military itself. “From 2003 through 2007, the Army obligated more than \$22 billion to the LOGCAP contract” which Kellogg, Brown, and Root, a subsidiary of Halliburton had received.²⁵⁸ It would eventually have “a cumulative value of \$35.7 billion.”²⁵⁹ LOGCAP was the single biggest reconstruction or support contract in Iraq, and it marks the distinct privatization of a previously government run function. Despite the cost-savings promised by neoliberalism, the Congressional Budget Office “determined that Army support units could perform LOGCAP tasks during wartime for virtually the same costs as contractors.”²⁶⁰ During his time in Iraq as a journalist, Pratap Chatterjee recorded countless instances of waste and inefficiency from private reconstruction contractors as their cost-plus contracting model encouraged them to spend as much as possible.²⁶¹ While private security contractors did earn billions, reconstruction and support

²⁵⁶ Hartung.

²⁵⁷ Chatterjee, *Iraq, Inc.*

²⁵⁸ “Contractors’ Support of U.S. Operations in Iraq.”

²⁵⁹ Ettinger, “Neoliberalism and the Rise of the Private Military Industry.”

²⁶⁰ “Contractors’ Support of U.S. Operations in Iraq.”

²⁶¹ Chatterjee, *Iraq, Inc.*

contractors received the vast majority of the “at least \$138 billion” spent on military contracting in Iraq.²⁶²

Private Security Contractors

Private security contractors flooded into Iraq in the years following the initial invasion for contracts to provide security for various officials and projects. Most of these contractors were former members of various militaries who turned to the lucrative field of security contracting after leaving the armed forces. Companies like Blackwater and DynCorp paid their employees upwards of a thousand dollars a day for conducting security activities in Iraq.²⁶³ While the industry did exist before the Iraq War, this war put the private security industry on the map and made Blackwater, the biggest and most infamous private contractor, a household name. After the start of the Iraq War and the insurgency which gave the US military fits in trying to control cities like Fallujah, Blackwater’s business exploded. The US government increasingly relied on private security contractors to protect officials like the head of the Coalition Provisional Authority, Paul Bremer, and infrastructure. George Jackson, a Blackwater Executive, claimed that Blackwater had experienced growth of “300%” in a relatively short period.²⁶⁴ It can be difficult to assess the exact value of the contracts Blackwater received from the government as much of that information was not entirely public in the cases where Blackwater received contracts from the CIA and other less public organizations. However, Blackwater received close to 500 million dollars for its work

²⁶² Young, “Former Halliburton Subsidiary Received \$39.5 Billion In Iraq-Related Contracts Over The Past Decade.”

²⁶³ “Contractors’ Support of U.S. Operations in Iraq.”

²⁶⁴ “U.S. Security Contractor Cites Explosive Growth Amid Iraq War,” *Associated Press*, October 12, 2004.

for the State Department from 2004 to 2006.²⁶⁵ The private security industry thrived in the failures of the US to quickly establish a stable state after the invasion of Iraq. The insurgency, combined with a desire to keep uniformed troop levels low, created a need for private security personnel to conduct functions such as guarding officials and protecting convoys going from where the US's occupation was run in the Green Zone to the Baghdad airport.²⁶⁶ Blackwater wasn't the only private security contractor that won big in Iraq as DynCorp which dabbled in both support and security contracting received and mismanaged a "\$1.2bn contract for training Iraqi police."²⁶⁷ The Congressional Budget Office estimated that "total spending by U.S. agencies and U.S.-funded contractors for private security services ranged between \$6 billion and \$10 billion over the 2003–2007 period."²⁶⁸ Instead of relying on uniformed troops and government employees, contractors allowed the Bush Administration "to sell a politically viable war policy to domestic audiences by maintaining low levels of uniformed troop level."²⁶⁹ Contractors kept the official troop level relatively low despite the situation in Iraq's rapid deterioration. Like other forms of contracting, the Bush Administration presented private security contractors as a cost saving and efficient market-based solution as neoliberal theory encourages, but hiring security contractors proved to be roughly equivalent in costs to using military personnel according to the Congressional Budget

²⁶⁵ Majority Staff to Members of the Committee on Oversight and Government Reform, "Additional Information about Blackwater USA," Memorandum, October 1, 2007.

²⁶⁶ Jeremy Scahill, *Blackwater: The Rise of the World's Most Powerful Mercenary Army* (New York, NY: Nation Books, 2007).

²⁶⁷ "US-Iraqi Contract 'in Disarray,'" October 23, 2007, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/americas/7057629.stm>.

²⁶⁸ "Contractors' Support of U.S. Operations in Iraq."

²⁶⁹ Ettinger, "Neoliberalism and the Rise of the Private Military Industry."

Office.²⁷⁰ Private security contracting became a lucrative industry due to the war in Iraq, while yielding few benefits for taxpayers and leading to the well-publicized problematic conduct of private security contractors in Iraq. While not quite active combat, the privatization of security functions marks a step toward Rumsfeld's vision of privatizing warfare as it further reduced the role of government in war in favor private enterprises.

Connecting Neoliberalism and the Decision to Invade Iraq

During Rumsfeld's time as Secretary of Defense in the Bush Administration, the role of private contractors experienced extreme growth as contractors took on a massive role in post-invasion Iraq. In the September 10th, 2001 speech where Rumsfeld outlined his plan for future of the military, he seemed to think that privatization and transforming the military to fit the neoliberal vision would take years to accomplish. At this point, Rumsfeld clearly had a goal to "shrink the role of government and expand the role of the private sector, especially in the realm of America's war-making ability," but Rumsfeld stated this task would be accomplished slowly over the years.²⁷¹ One would expect that radically transforming a massive and entrenched organization like the US military to be a long and arduous process. However, through what Klein describes as the power of "shock," privatization occurred at a rapid rate.²⁷² After 9/11, the War in Afghanistan, and the Iraq War, the US military radically shifted toward private contracting. The shock of the invasion of Iraq created the opportunity not just for the remaking of Iraq itself but for the privatization of the invading military as well. For

²⁷⁰ "Contractors' Support of U.S. Operations in Iraq."

²⁷¹ Duggan, "The War Lobby."

²⁷² Klein, *The Shock Doctrine*.

Iraqi industries, the Hussein regime needed to be toppled and its laws erased to open them up privatization.²⁷³ In peace time or even with just the War on Terror, the transformation which incorporated private military contractors into the US military would not have been possible.²⁷⁴ The post-invasion project of nation building and fighting an insurgency were the tasks that brought in billions of dollars in contracts for firms like KBR and Blackwater and made them a central part of the US's warfighting apparatus. The "neoliberal model of defense economics" which shrinks the task of the military to just combat operations and contracts everything else out could not have been quickly implemented without the Iraq War.²⁷⁵ Simply put, the Iraq War created an opportunity for military contractors to swoop in and become an integral part of the US military's overseas presence as envisioned by Rumsfeld. The invasion of Iraq created the tasks of occupying and rebuilding Iraq. The decision to invade Iraq manufactured the conditions in which contractors could be brought in to handle the unfolding, artificial crisis. The Iraq War expanded and cemented some already extant aspects of military privatization. For example, LOGCAP II which ran from 1997 to 2001 was "worth a total of \$102 million."²⁷⁶ LOGCAP during the Iraq War would be expanded to be worth over \$20 billion.²⁷⁷ Iraq created an opportunity for Rumsfeld to hand off more and more military duties to private contractors. War, disaster, or crisis bring with the intense destruction a possibility for radical change. Through the Iraq War, Rumsfeld

²⁷³ For more information about the goal of privatizing Iraqi industries and the state owned oil company in particular, see the section discussing the merits of the Big Oil Theory.

²⁷⁴ Klein, *The Shock Doctrine*.

²⁷⁵ Julie MacLeavy and Columba Peoples, "Workfare–Warfare: Neoliberalism, 'Active' Welfare and the New American Way of War," *Antipode* 41, no. 5 (2009): 890–915, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8330.2009.00701.x>.

²⁷⁶ Ettinger, "Neoliberalism and the Rise of the Private Military Industry."

²⁷⁷ "Contractors' Support of U.S. Operations in Iraq."

achieved his vision for a military that heavily relied upon private contractors years ahead of schedule.

Untangling Interests from Ideology

It can be difficult to discern whether actors like Rumsfeld and Cheney were driven by neoliberal ideology or pure, narrow self-interest to make the decision to invade Iraq. The overlap between an ideology that emphasizes privatization and acting in service of private interests makes the actions from either motivation hard to discern. For example, Kellogg, Brown, and Root's success in Iraq could result from the Bush Administration's genuine belief in privatization or it could just stem from Vice President Cheney's narrow interests in the company. Klein argues that these decision makers mentally merge the interests of American companies with the good of the US overall.²⁷⁸ She claims that Vice President Cheney, under neoliberal ideology, would see the interests of Halliburton and the US as the same.²⁷⁹ This idea cannot be proved definitively as neoliberal ideology and the private interests of those behind the war remain entangled. One indication toward the influence of private interests being a stronger factor than neoliberal ideology is the failure to establish something resembling "the competitive order" envisioned by Friedman.²⁸⁰ Kellogg, Brown, and Root won non-competitive bidding processes for massive contracts in Iraq, undermining any possibility for the efficiency driving competition promised by neoliberal theory.²⁸¹ While this offers some evidence in favor of private interests as being the true cause of

²⁷⁸ Klein, *The Shock Doctrine*.

²⁷⁹ Klein.

²⁸⁰ Friedman, "Neoliberalism and Its Prospects."

²⁸¹ Greenhouse, Testimony of Bunnatine H. Greenhouse.

the war rather than ideology, the two remain deeply intertwined and hard to separate. Different actors likely had different motives as Rumsfeld was a more prominent proponent of neoliberalism for example, while Cheney seems to fit the model of someone pursuing their narrow interests. Neoliberalism likely had some effect, but the material actions of the Bush Administration did not reflect the pursuit of efficiency through competition.

The Neoliberalism Narrative

Klein's popular theory presents a satisfying explanation for the Iraq War which places it into a larger narrative of the ideological project of neoliberalism. The theory begins with the origins of the neoliberal movement during the Cold War where Donald Rumsfeld became a fervent supporter of Milton Friedman's project. The narrative then jumps to Rumsfeld's clear intent in earliest stages of the Bush Administration to privatize large aspects of US military, a task he saw as likely to span multiple administrations. But due to the Iraq War, as managed by Cheney and Rumsfeld, this neoliberal dream could be realized years ahead of schedule due the shock of the Iraq War which enabled the rapid and radical transformation of the US's warfighting apparatus to one that hands out billions in contracts to private firms each year. The Iraq War provided the necessary shock and opportunity to implement Rumsfeld's vision for the US military according to proponents of this theory like Naomi Klein. The neoliberal narrative tells a satisfying story with clear historical origins that result in the Iraq War. This narrative has made this theory popular, but an honest review of the evidence raises a few complications. First, while the logic behind the theory of 'shock' makes sense, it is unclear whether the Iraq War was necessary to implement Rumsfeld's vision as the

crisis of the 9/11 Attacks and the Afghanistan War already fueled the privatization of the US military. A second complication to this theory is the lack of evidence of a good faith implementation of free market competition to maximize efficiency as prescribed by neoliberal economics. The reality shows that, in the case of at least some major contracts in Iraq, nothing resembling a free-market competition existed and outsourcing seemed to be means of benefiting private companies rather than serving the public good. Klein argues that for neoliberals like Rumsfeld the national interest and private interests are one and the same, but one cannot assess the mindset of Rumsfeld or other decisionmakers with certainty. However, the evidence indicates neoliberalism served as a vessel for handing out large contracts to well connected firms rather than an ideology followed for the good of the American people. Despite these complications, Klein's theory presents a perhaps uniquely satisfying narrative that tells a compelling story which cannot be entirely discounted, despite the evidence showing private interests to be a more significant factor than this ideology.

Conclusion: Fact or Folk?

After reviewing these different theories of private interests as the cause of the Iraq War, a few things can be said definitively about the role of private interests. First, many private interests before the Iraq War saw the potential for enormous profits in an Iraq free of Saddam Hussein and many private interests earned massive profits in Iraq, primarily through government contracts. Second, these private interests wielded immense political power both over the legislature and, most importantly, within the Bush Administration. Through the revolving door, private interests embedded different actors with strong lingering connections to the private interests which stood to profit from the war. In the cases of some theories of private interests, the evidence reveals a level of collaboration and planning on Iraq policy between the Bush Administration and private interests. Definitive proof that private interests drove the decision to invade Iraq does not exist, but these folk theories, for the most part, are not unfounded. The intensive review of folk theories indicates that significant evidence does show that certain private interests profited greatly from the war and held enough influence to likely sway policy makers. By their very nature, definitive proof of these theories remains elusive as the theoretical conspirators would go to great lengths to prevent their public confirmation as demonstrated by Vice President Cheney's secretive behavior. These theories do not warrant academic dismissal as in the case of the Iraq War, many questions remain, and these theories of private interests help fill in the gaps. Colonel Lawrence Wilkerson, Colin Powell's Chief of Staff, provides additional confirmation of these theories broadly as he stated that "it is now private interests that benefit most from our use of military force" and these benefitting private interests seem

to have influenced the Bush Administration's decision to use military force in Iraq.²⁸² It can be asserted with a reasonable degree of certainty that private interests, along with a bevy of other factors, played a role in the decision to invade Iraq in at least some capacity, but not all theories of private interests and the invasion of Iraq prove to be equally meritorious.

Reviewing the Big Oil Theory

Was the Iraq War really 'Blood for Oil' as so many claim? The Big Oil theory which alleges the United States fought the war on behalf of oil companies to gain control over Iraqi petroleum reserves, while widely believed in the public, has been ritually ignored or quickly dismissed by academics. However, some do concede that it is "easy to reach the conclusion that the Bush administration's primary motive was to gain control over the Iraqi oil industry and to parcel it out to American energy firms."²⁸³ The public makes a connection between Iraqi petroleum, profit hungry oil companies, and a Bush Administration with strong connections to and instances of cooperation with Big Oil. A few academics refute this folk theory by pointing out lifting sanctions as an alternative and easier method of accessing Iraqi oil and that the invasion of Iraq did not yield massive profits as the theory would predict. But a careful study of the circumstances can make these refutations far from the final word on the subject. Changing circumstances and the possibility of privatizing Iraqi oil made invasion a uniquely tempting option for oil companies. Before the invasion, the plan seemed to be for Ahmed Chalabi to be the new leader of Iraq, for him to "privatize Iraq's oil", and

²⁸² Norton, "We Are the Death Merchant of the World."

²⁸³ Klare, "Blood for Oil, in Iraq and Elsewhere."

then, give Big Oil control over Iraqi oil production.²⁸⁴ The Bush Administration, Big Oil, and Chalabi failed to realize this plan as the people of Iraq resisted the US's efforts to gain control over their oil and as the situation deteriorated due to the insurgency, the plan fell apart. The glimpses available of Vice President Cheney's secretive Energy Task Force provide the most compelling evidence for this theory. The evidence shows the Vice President, one of the key forces behind the decision to invade Iraq, meeting with members of the oil industry and reviewing existing Iraqi oil contracts which notably went to French and Russian companies.²⁸⁵ A leaked memo even reveals a level of collaboration between this Task Force and the National Security Council.²⁸⁶ These leaked documents show a distinct relationship between the Bush Administration and the oil industry on Iraq policy regardless of the many gaps in our knowledge due to their secretive nature. Despite the academic dismissal of this theory, the public's general suspicion and belief that the war was fought on behalf of Big Oil proves to be relatively well founded. While it cannot be definitively proven what role the oil industry played in causing the war, Big Oil almost certainly played a role in pushing the US to invade Iraq.

Reviewing the Arms Lobby Theory

Many in the public believe the folk theory that the United States fought the Iraq War on behalf of the arms industry or due to the military-industrial complex. The theory argues that the powerful industry influenced the Bush Administration to invade Iraq to maximize their profits from selling weaponry to the US government. What supports this theory is the massive increase in military spending during the Bush years which led to

²⁸⁴ Bonds, "Assessing the Oil Motive After the U.S. War in Iraq."

²⁸⁵ "Maps and Charts of Iraqi Oil Fields."

²⁸⁶ Mayer, "Contract Sport."

greater profits for well connected firms like Lockheed Martin and Northrup Grumman. However, finding a precise causal link between the war and the industry proves difficult. The industry needed some form of justification for higher military spending and a war provides that, but just the threat of an external enemy also serves as a justification.²⁸⁷ The military-industrial complex likely preferred a wartime footing as it justifies higher military spending, but nothing precisely connects the industry to wanting to invade Iraq as the War in Afghanistan and the War on Terror already justified military spending in the eyes of the public. The arms lobby exerted a fair amount of influence over US policy through lobbying and the revolving door, but their influence did not quite reach the top level of the Bush Administration in the way that some other private interests do. No evidence directly connects the arms lobby with the decision to invade, but proponents of this theory would argue that the military-industrial complex's nature makes that type of explicit connection unnecessary. But overall, despite its popularity, the arms lobby theory of private interests proves to be unconvincing as a cause of the Iraq War. The most that can be said is that the arms lobby's influence generally clears the way for and encourages war generally, but little evidence connects this particular interest to the Iraq War specifically.

Reviewing the Cheney-Halliburton Theory

During the Bush Administration, the public and the media dedicated a tremendous amount of coverage to the connection between the highest earning contractor of the Iraq War, Halliburton, and its former CEO, Vice President Cheney.

²⁸⁷ Cox, "The Military-Industrial Complex and U.S. Military Spending After 9/11."

This section evaluated the theory that the Cheney-Halliburton connection led to the war as well as the theory that reconstruction contractors at large played a role in the decision to invade Iraq. First, this section examined Bechtel, the second most profitable reconstruction and support contractor in Iraq. While Bechtel had some interesting connections to the Bush Administrations, they failed to secure the biggest contracts due to unfair bidding processes and, generally, never possessed the influence necessary to be a driving force behind the war in Iraq. Halliburton, on the other hand, proves to be a different story as the firm earned close \$40 billion in contracts and received many of them through non-competitive bidding processes like the one for the lucrative RIO contract.²⁸⁸ Vice President Cheney as the former CEO of Halliburton maintained a financial interest in Halliburton during his time in office through deferred salary and stock options. As proponents of this popular theory quickly point out, this maintained connection demonstrates that one of the chief decision makers behind the war possessed a direct financial interest in and profited from the invasion of Iraq. The most compelling piece of evidence that shows this conflict of interest in action comes in the form of a leaked memo revealing that Cheney's office at least partially coordinated the non-competitive RIO bidding process which led to the \$7 billion contract going to Halliburton.²⁸⁹ While this example does not confirm that Cheney pushed for the war for personal gain, it demonstrates Cheney's willingness to use his position for personal gain and profit of his former company. In the public discourse surrounding the Iraq War, many have seen the connection between Vice President Cheney and Halliburton as

²⁸⁸ Young, "Former Halliburton Subsidiary Received \$39.5 Billion In Iraq-Related Contracts Over The Past Decade."

²⁸⁹ Burger and Zagorin, "Iraq The Halliburton Connection."

definitive proof of the Iraq War being launched on behalf of private interests. The popularity of this theory proves to be reasonable despite the folk theory rarely delving into all the minutiae. Definitive proof of Cheney's motives does not exist, and he can be shown to have had significant ideological motivations such as the pursuit of primacy, but his personal, private interest in the war cannot be discounted.²⁹⁰ It remains unknowable exactly what went on in Cheney's head as he pushed for the decision to invade Iraq, but it can definitively be said he stood to profit from the decision. The Halliburton-Cheney theory shows the most precise connection out of any theory between a private interest which benefitted from the war and the decision to invade, and thus, this theory proves to be relatively convincing and should not be ignored as a significant factor in the decision-making process that led to the invasion.

Reviewing the Neoliberalism Theory

Naomi Klein's theory of the Iraq War that she puts forward in *The Shock Doctrine* combines multiple theories of private interests under the banner of neoliberal ideology. She discusses and unites multiple private interests such as the various forms of military contractors and oil companies under the general banner of the movement toward privatizing and outsourcing government functions. The theory weaves a historical narrative that finds its origins in the neoliberal movement born during the Cold War from Milton Friedman's economic theories. The theory tracks Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld as an adherent of neoliberal economics, but the influence of the Friedmanite belief in privatization existed throughout the Bush Administration. The

²⁹⁰ Cramer and Duggan, "In Pursuit of Primacy: Why the United States Invaded Iraq."

Bush Administration and Rumsfeld undertook a monumental project of privatizing and outsourcing military functions which resulted in record profits for firms like Halliburton and Blackwater. The theory argues that the Iraq War provided the shock or opportunity necessary to rapidly make progress on this neoliberal project in the Department of Defense. Klein merges this ideological belief in privatization with the type of private interests theory primarily discussed in this thesis by arguing that these politicians view the interests of American businesses as indistinguishable from the national interest. Despite the significant presence of neoliberal ideology in the Bush Administration, the real policies of the administration resemble policies implemented to increase profits for certain private interests rather than a good faith effort to maximize efficiency and benefit American taxpayers as prescribed by Friedman's work. From Klein's perspective, this fits the general trend of the implementation of privatization policies, but it does not fit neoliberal ideology. While Klein's theory centered around neoliberal ideology tells a satisfying story that could help explain the Iraq War, the evidence tends to indicate that privatization and outsourcing served as means of benefitting well connected corporate interests rather than a genuine ideological motive as demonstrated by the Bush Administration's actions. Neoliberal ideology likely played a role in Rumsfeld's motivations and Klein presents a compelling narrative, but the evidence points to private interests rather than neoliberal ideology being more significant force behind the outsourcing of military functions.

Fact or Folk?

Despite its popularity, the arms lobby theory of the Iraq War fails to provide a particularly convincing case that it played a significant role in the Bush

Administration's decision to invade Iraq.²⁹¹ The neoliberal 'shock' theory tells an interesting story and crafts a satisfying, decades spanning narrative which shows clear ideological motives within decision makers as manifesting in the invasion of Iraq, but the evidence tends to show that neoliberal ideology tended to serve private interests rather than an ideological goal. The Big Oil theory is perhaps the most popular folk theory of the origins of the Iraq War, yet academics tend to quickly dismiss it with a few logical refutations. As this thesis has shown, these refutations can be complicated and even debunked. A fair amount of evidence supports the Big Oil theory as the administration and industry had a plan for lucrative profits from a newly privatized Iraqi oil industry and Big Oil collaborated with the Bush Administration on Iraq policy to at least some degree. No smoking gun exists and much of the administration and industry's communications remain shrouded in secrecy, but some proponents of this theory argue that the evidence available is sufficient to declare the Iraq War to have been fought for Big Oil despite the lack of damning evidence.²⁹² Due to the lack of evidence, a definitive statement cannot be made about the extent of role of Big Oil in the decision to invade Iraq, but this parochial interest clearly played some role and this theory should not be quickly discounted. A perhaps even more compelling theory is the Cheney-Halliburton connection. The chief architect of the war maintaining a financial interest in the company that profited the most from the war demands suspicion. Again, no definitive evidence shows this private interest motivated Cheney's push for the

²⁹¹ While the arms lobby cannot be pinpointed as a proximate cause of the decision to invade Iraq, the close study of its policy preferences and significant influence do indicate that enables aggressive wars through its general preference for a wartime footing as to justifying spending. A different research project could make the argument that the arms lobby subtly pushes for war more broadly despite the lack of evidence connecting to it the Iraq case.

²⁹² Juhasz, *The Tyranny of Oil*.

invasion, but it cannot be discounted as significant factor. The arms lobby theory and the neoliberal theory bring some interesting ideas to the discussion, but they fail to provide the same level of compelling evidence as found in the Big Oil and the Cheney-Halliburton theories.

The secretive and conspiratorial nature of these theories makes definitive evidence an impossibility unless new information comes to light, but the careful examination of these folk theories show they are not the unfounded beliefs academics often discount them as. In both the Big Oil theory and the Cheney-Halliburton theory, the evidence shows a strong connection between a private interest and the Bush Administration's decision-making process in the lead up to the invasion of Iraq. It can be reasonably asserted that private interests did play some role in the decision to invade Iraq, but the extent of their influence cannot be entirely divined with the information available. Hypothetically, behind the closed doors of Cheney's Energy Task Force, the administration could have engaged in overt scheming in their meetings with representatives from oil companies as some speculate. Alternatively, these meetings could have more subtly influenced Iraq policy. Similarly, it cannot be discerned whether Cheney was the scheming, purely self-interested actor that many critics of the Bush Administration made him out to be or whether his lingering financial interest influenced his actions subtly or whether his connection truly had no impact on his policy choices. However, it is hard to imagine that Cheney's maintained interest in Halliburton, totaling in millions of dollars, did not consciously or unconsciously impact his decision making. As expected, this research brushes up against a limit to what can be asserted about the role of private interests due to the fragmented nature of the information available about

the motivations and actions of the key actors behind the decision to invade Iraq. The Bush Administration took steps to ensure that a cloud of secrecy would occlude the public's view of their decision-making even after the end of the administration. For example, the Bush Administration "lost" 22 million emails including many from the lead up to the Iraq War. Despite the limit of unknowable true intentions, private interests clearly played at least some role causing the invasion of Iraq.²⁹³ Private interests can be said to have played a significant role among multiple other factors in causing the Iraq War, but the exact of their role remains unclear.²⁹⁴

The conditions and mechanisms which allowed private interests to "hijack the state" and warp foreign policy to their own ends with the Iraq War remained more or less in place even after the Iraq War grew unpopular.²⁹⁵ Officials in crucial foreign policy making roles regularly jump between business and government. Various private interests affected by US foreign and military policy spend millions each year lobbying politicians. The Iraq War represents a rare convergence of different factors which led to the major event of war, but the mechanisms by which private interests likely influenced foreign policy to suit their own ends remain in place. No perfect policy solution exists to resolve the issue of private interests warping foreign policy to the detriment of the US and its people. However, concrete steps to prevent phenomena like the revolving

²⁹³ Nina Burleigh, "George W. Bush's White House 'Lost' 22 Million Emails," *Newsweek*, September 12, 2016, sec. U.S., <https://www.newsweek.com/2016/09/23/george-w-bush-white-house-lost-22-million-emails-497373.html>.

²⁹⁴ It should also be noted that the different interests or reasons motivated different supporters of the war within the Bush Administration. Lower-level members of the Bush Administration like Paul Wolfowitz, Richard Perle, and Douglas Feith were clearly ideological neoconservatives who supported the war with strong beliefs in protecting and aiding Israel. Cheney and Rumsfeld most likely arrived at the same support for the war for different reasons to the neoconservatives.

²⁹⁵ Snyder, *Myths of Empire*.

between business and government would make it more difficult for private interests to warp foreign policy for their own benefit. Furthermore, the connection between the profits of private interests and war creates a problematic situation where private interests are incentivized to push for military action. The general profiteering off war makes private interests using their influence to push foreign policy toward war inevitable. The privatization of war as discussed in the section neoliberal ideology exacerbates this problem as more and more industries rely on the US being in state of war for their profits. Profiting from war creates a fundamental contradiction between private interests and the common good as companies like the ones discussed in this thesis may push for wars that harm the common to maximize their own profits.

While the exact extent of the influence of private interests in the Iraq case remains unclear, the evidence demonstrates that certain private interests influenced US policy toward the decision to invade Iraq for their own ends. In the absence of a perfect answer to the question of why the Bush Administration decided to invade Iraq and manufacture the justification needed to do so, the role of private interests cannot be discounted as significant evidence shows crucial actors maintaining strong connections to and communicating with private interests who stood to profit from or did profit from the invasion of Iraq. Folk theories of the causes of the Iraq War which ascribe the decision to invade to the undue influence of private interests often present flawed arguments and limited evidence, but a core of truth exists within their key claim of private interests being a cause of the Iraq War.

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