

Defense Contractors' Lobbyists and the Pentagon

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President Obama uttered some hallowed words in his quest for change that lobbyists “won’t find a job in my White House.” Contrary to his short-lived slew of vows and various murmurs, William J. Lynn III, a recent lobbyist and former top executive for defense contractor Raytheon, was nominated to be deputy defense secretary, the second most powerful official in the Pentagon and a decision led by both Obama and Secretary of Defense Robert Gates. The news was nothing new but its arrival was as sure as screeching bullet piercing the hearts of hope-enthusiasts as they braced themselves, once again, for more broken promises.

Even if Lynn has agreed to [sell his stock and undergo an ethics review](#) for 1 year, it’s short of assuring others that his previous stint with Raytheon would hinder his objectivism as the Pentagon’s 2nd top official. Nothing would restrict the deputy secretary of defense from doing business from his former employer, as reported by the Associated Press, lampooning Obama’s lobbying ethics rule. Public Citizen’s Craig Holman, in a report from [thehill.com](#), rejected the waiver as “inappropriate,” and that there were plenty of capable and qualified people “who don’t work for major defense contractors.”

In March 2008, [The Boston Globe](#) reported that the 10 interceptor missiles planned to be used in the missile shield in Poland would feature Raytheon technology. This is not a surprise since Raytheon reigns amongst the top 5 U.S. defense contractors, [scoring \\$18.3 billion](#) with the U.S. government in 2007 in lucrative contracts, and is a key supplier of missiles and radar equipment. Raytheon currently provides weapons and artillery research, advanced technology platforms, and the development of space and ground [missile defense systems](#).

Should Lynn be officially tapped as deputy defense secretary, it would grant him some oversight and involvement with the controversial missile shield in Poland and the Czech Republic, a situation which has strained relations between Moscow and Washington. With Lockheed Martin, Boeing, and Raytheon as main contractors, dismantling the missile shield seems unlikely, with both Gates and Lynn only pushing forward with the venture.

Part of the alarming upswell included this once unfathomed ability of Obama and his team relenting on their own ethics rule, where a good segment of top staff are former lobbyists. Mark Patterson, Treasury Secretary Timothy Geithner’s choice for his chief of staff, was a former lobbyist from financial giant Goldman Sachs; both Patterson and Lynn were but a few of the later questionable nominations to raise many arched brows in Washington.

Mythical assumptions color the expectations of those who take the promises of Obama’s executive orders at face value. The option to grant waivers was already built into the

order. Aside from the executive order on torture being laden with [loopholes](#), even his executive order on lobbying is [bereft of any guarantees](#). This was precisely what allowed the Obama train to ram in waivers and allow former lobbyists on board. One of the strings attached to the executive order for lobbying is that waivers can be approved and granted if it is in the “public interest.” Section 3(b) of Obama’s executive order titled Ethics commitments by Executive Branch Personnel briefly probes the definition of “public interest”:

“The public interest shall include, but not be limited to, exigent circumstances relating to national security or to the economy. De minimis contact with an executive agency shall be cause for a waiver of the restrictions contained in paragraph 3 of the pledge.”

Defined within just one sentence, the meaning of “public interest” and the criteria of exigent – or *urgent* – circumstances leaves it gapingly open to interpretation. One can only wonder the reasoning behind the Office of Management and Budget’s decision, which is the authority of granting judgement of whether an appointee receives a waiver or not.

Washington insiders and watchdog groups aggressively eyeing the nominations fear that the waivers may begin piling up, snowballing Obama’s intentions of living up to his own expectations. “It would be more honest if they admitted they made a mistake and came up with a narrower rule,” says Melanie Sloan from the Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington, in a report from Politico.com. “Obviously, they can’t live with the rule, which is why they keep waving the magic wand and making exceptions. They’re saying one thing and doing another. It’s why the public is skeptical about politicians.”

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