

The Blurred Line Between War and Business

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Global Research, May 07, 2018

[Truthdig](#) 6 May 2018

Theme: [Global Economy](#), [Intelligence](#), [US NATO War Agenda](#)

Featured image: Then-Vice President Dick Cheney introduces President George W. Bush at the Black Tie and Boots Inaugural Ball in Washington in 2005. (David Bohrer / White House)

In 2009, Rand Paul [called out Dick Cheney](#) for supporting the invasion of Iraq to benefit his former company, Halliburton, claiming that Halliburton had received a billion-dollar no-bid contract. KBR, or Kellogg Brown & Root, a subsidiary of Halliburton, was neck-deep in [military contracts](#) with the United States government, under a no-bid [LOGCAP III](#) (Logistics Civil Augmentation Program) agreement, a contingency-based contract invoked at the convenience of the Army. Let's not forget that the official narrative of [weapons of mass destruction](#) was the lie sold to the American people to justify an oligarchical class growing wealthier through creating war.

In November 2002, a \$7 billion LOGCAP contract was given to KBR for [extinguishing oil well fires](#) in Iraq. In 2003, the Army Corps of Engineers awarded a public bid contract with a maximum value of [\\$1.2 billion to KBR](#) to continue repairing the oil infrastructure in southern Iraq. In 2004, the Army Corps handed KBR yet another contract, with the value of [\\$1.5 billion](#), to cover engineering services in the U.S. Central Command's area of operations in Iraq and Afghanistan. The contract had a \$500 million ceiling for the first year and four one-year options, each with an annual ceiling of \$250 million. In 2004, KBR received more orders under the LOGCAP contract for work in Afghanistan, which added up to [\\$489 million](#). And then there is the [\\$400 million in payments](#) KBR made in subcontracting private securities services like [Blackwater in Iraq](#).



In 2004, the public was made aware of Halliburton's monopoly on billions of dollars in Iraq contracts and in the accumulation of tremendous influence over state matters. Or as Rand warned: the dangerous powers given to large corporations when they "get so big that they can actually be directing policy." The funneling of vast fortunes to KBR was an egregious problem the government ignored. Major media also gave a pass to [these contracts](#), with no questions asked about the larger structures within government that made this all possible.

In total, [\\$138 billion](#) was awarded in federal funds to private contractors for the Iraq War,

with Halliburton receiving more than \$39.5 billion of the federal contracts related to the Iraq military invasion and occupation between 2003 and 2013. There were three other primary contractors in Iraq: [Blackwater Worldwide](#), a mercenary army responsible for [countless murders](#) and massacres of Iraqis; [CACI International](#), which received \$66.2 million in state funds while being accused of the beating, starvation, sexual assault, sleep deprivation and torture of [detainees in Abu Ghraib](#) prison outside Baghdad; and [Titan Corp.](#), which supplied interpreters to [Abu Ghraib](#) and also was implicated in human rights abuses at the prison.

KBR was not alone in these kinds of dealings. The [Carlyle Group](#), a Washington-based private equity firm and defense contractor, has had its hand in bringing together private investment and war, largely orchestrated by former heads of state. In a 2001 Guardian article, Oliver Burkeman and Julian Borger document what they call the "[ex-presidents' club](#)," naming former U.S. Secretary of State James Baker, former British Prime Minister John Major and one-time World Bank treasurer Afsaneh Masheyekhi.

"Among the companies Carlyle owns are those which make equipment, vehicles and munitions for the US military, and its celebrity employees have long served an ingenious dual purpose, helping encourage investments from the very wealthy while also smoothing the path for Carlyle's defense firms," the report states.

While Carlyle was the focus of [numerous exposés](#) around the time of the [U.S. invasions](#) of Iraq and Afghanistan, major media has provided limited follow-up coverage, and the company has been allowed to "rebrand" itself as an "[investment group](#)." Some might argue "coincidence," with so many specialized contractors making deals and forming policy with the U.S. government, but it does look suspicious when, for instance, on Sept. 11, 2001, [The Carlyle Group](#) was set to hold an [investor meeting in Washington](#) with the guest of honor being Shafiq bin Laden, brother of Osama bin Laden. We know the bin Laden family had [close ties to George W. Bush](#); in addition, there were [many economic and political links](#) between the Saudi Arabian regime and the financing of 9/11. It is impossible to deny the systemic problems of corruption that occur when private corporations are allowed to dictate government policy.

Tweaking George Santayana's infamous quote to reflect today's reality,

"Those who get away with injustices in the past are condemned to repeat it."

And so it goes. In 2017, The Carlyle Group purchased [CMC Networks](#), Africa's largest network connectivity provider, based in Johannesburg. In 2016, [Carlyle invested](#) in the U.K.-headquartered provider of digital automation intelligence solutions, [Testplant](#), now [Eggplant](#). Carlyle has gone from private military contractor to private equity group to data systems mogul. Carlyle's interest in big data and security has been covered by [Jeffrey St. Claire](#), who notes,

"Two Carlyle companies, Federal Data Systems and US Investigations Services (USIS), hold multi-billion dollar contracts to provide background checks for commercial airlines, the Pentagon, the CIA and the Department of Homeland Security."

There is little *not* to worry about here.

Peter Eisner, former managing director of the Center for Public Integrity, questions the ethics of private industry making profits while advising the president of the United States. When speaking of George H.W. Bush's involvement with The Carlyle Group, [Eisner notes the conflicts of interest](#) that blur the lines between public policy and business:

“What hat is former president Bush wearing when he tells Crown Prince Abdullah not to worry about U.S. policy in the Middle East? What hat does he use when he deals with South Korea, and causes policy changes there? Or when James Baker helps argue the presidential election in the younger Bush's favor?”

Now skip to the recent breaches of online user data and the abuses of alleged democracies in creating draconian laws authorizing the spying on its citizens. On the one hand, we have the 2016 case where the [FBI tried to oblige Apple](#) to create a backdoor interface that would allow access to an [iPhone](#). On the other hand, the same government that spies on private citizens also takes [Mark Zuckerberg](#) to task for [similar abuses of data](#) at Facebook. From the Iraq and Afghanistan invasions in the early 2000s, the U.S. government and private sector have numerous conflicts of interest—some might say, a [collusion](#)—between private industries making a killing from war and a cabal of current and former politicians who ushered forth this gold rush.

Among the most flagrant examples of corporate and governmental malfeasance is the Trump administration's link to the recent Cambridge Analytica scandal. President Trump's erstwhile chief strategist, Steve Bannon, oversaw the collection of data by Cambridge Analytica, according to a [former employee](#). U.S. national security adviser John Bolton also is linked to this scandal, given that his [super PAC](#) has paid Cambridge Analytica over \$1.1 million since 2014 for “research” and “survey research.” Bolton [has spoken openly](#) of how his super PAC's execution of “advanced psychographic data” would help elect “filibuster-proof” majorities in 2018.



More recently, Bannon, when he was a Trump adviser in the White House, pushed the proposal of [Erik Prince](#) (image on the left), Blackwater's founder, to deploy [private military contractors](#) in Afghanistan, where 6,000 contractors plus U.S. special operations troops and support personnel would embed with local Afghan units. Beyond this, we have the Trump administration also considering Prince's plan to build a [mercenary force in Syria](#), despite Prince's conflicts in the [United Emirates](#), where he brought into the country several hundred Colombians posing as construction workers to fight in Yemen. When it emerged that Prince has collaborated with Oliver North and former CIA officer John R. Maguire to develop a plan

to create a [private spy network](#) to circumvent the CIA, the White House opened its doors. All this plus [a 2017 meeting](#) in the Seychelles with the United Arab Emirate's Crown Prince Mohammed bin Zayed Al-Nahyan, CEO of the Russian Direct Investment Fund Kirill Dmitriev and Prince that ended in a [House Intelligence Committee hearing](#).

Journalist Josh Marshall, from Talking Points Memo, has noted how [Prince regularly uses](#) "ex-military and intelligence operatives to build parallel national security forces that operate for profit and outside the rule of law." However, operating outside the law seems to be more the rule than the exception if we are to honestly approach the common pattern repeating itself wherein U.S. foreign policy and private industries collaborate. We cannot ignore that SCL/Cambridge Analytica (which could be [reborn under a new name](#) after announcing it is [shutting down](#)) works on the tracking, analysis and manipulation of popular opinion abroad related to both U.S. and U.K. military and diplomatic services, any more than we can negate the [questionable ties](#) between SCL and Republican billionaire Robert Mercer, his daughter Rebekah Mercer and Bannon (Mercer's business partner), who later became Donald Trump's de facto campaign manager.

While everyone worries about his or her data being safe on Facebook, this recent chapter of history is a repeat of the cyclical [media stories](#) that every now and then convince us that we [should be worried](#), even if we aren't quite sure why. Facebook is the cover story here. But we need to insist on answers to the vast conflicts of interest that are dotting American foreign policy. They have created an industry where those who should have nothing to do with big data and private militia are running the show.

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