

Corporations, Targeted Lobbies, and US War Policy

by Ted Nace

Until its discrediting during the Vietnam debacle, a relatively small and tightly knit core of specialists managed the contours of foreign policy. This elite group, whose ranks included such names as Henry Stimson, George Kennan, and McGeorge Bundy, viewed its role as trustees and advocates of U.S. liberal capitalism generally, pursuing the broad policy of projecting US power onto the world stage and "containing" the Soviet Union.

The old foreign policy establishment can hardly be accused of being either pacifist or anti-capitalist. Its legacies include Hiroshima, the genocidal bombing of Korea, and support for dictatorship, massacre, and torture across the breadth of the Third World. But in allowing a certain degree of treaty-making and détente, it may not have been sufficiently attentive to the financial imperatives of "one customer" defense contractors like Lockheed Martin, whose bottom line depends on whipping up the sorts of periodic crises that best engender increased military spending. Thus, in the wake of Vietnam, military contractors developed a highly focused political tool that might most accurately be termed the "targeted lobby," something of a cross between a think tank, a PR campaign, and a lobbying group.

The granddaddy of the targeted lobbies that began appearing during the Carter Administration was the Committee on the Present Danger, set up in 1950 to lobby for rearmament and disbanded in 1953 when its members joined the Eisenhower administration and its proposals were largely adopted. In 1976, the CPD was revived, this time to oppose US-Soviet détente and promote aggressive rearmament.

By the 1990s, the use of targeted lobbies had been refined under the leadership of policy entrepreneurs like Bruce Jackson, who began his career as a military intelligence officer, worked at the Pentagon under Dick Cheney, then worked at Lockheed Martin. If there were a Nobel Prize for innovation in the service of the military-industrial complex, Jackson would surely merit a nomination for his ingenuity in solving the dilemma (from the defense industry's perspective) posed by the collapse of the Soviet Union. Jackson's solution was the notion of "NATO expansion," which he advanced through the US Committee on NATO. As new members such as Poland and Romania were admitted to NATO, each would have to "integrate" its armed forces with those of other NATO members. In practice, that meant purchasing all new equip-

ment (from contractors like Lockheed-Martin), with an overall price tag in the hundreds of billions.

Other notable successes among the targeted lobbies have been Frank Gaffney's Center for Security Policy, the lead group in pushing for a missile defense program worth as much as half a trillion in defense contracts; the Project for a New American Century, which until its disbanding in 2005 was the lead group advocating the aggressive unilateralism instituted by the Bush administration; and the Committee for the Liberation of Iraq, also organized by Bruce Jackson, and disbanded shortly after the invasion.

Today, the most influential of the targeted lobbies is the Foundation for the Defense of Democracies, founded two days after the 9/11 attacks and devoted exclusively toward shaping Bush's War on Terror. On March 13, 2006, Bush chose an FDD event as the venue for a major address articulating the direction of that war.

If one looks at American business as a whole, or even just within the ranks of the Fortune 500, what's startling is not the degree of overall corporate control over foreign policy, but rather the overwhelming political success of a handful of companies, mainly military and oil. Meanwhile, other business sectors, though hardly shrinking violets in the political realm, suffer from the effects of the fiscal distortions created by militarism. American auto companies, for example, feel the financial squeeze of health care obligations; in contrast to their overseas competitors, because in those countries overwhelming resources are not diverted toward military expenditures and they can afford the cost of universal health care.

Overall, the concentrated political power of the military-industrial complex has weakened American society to its core. One can only imagine the difference in the health, education, environment, and overall infrastructure of the United States had trillions not been diverted over the past decades toward such wasteful and destructive ends as National Missile Defense, the Iraq War, and gold-plated armaments.

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Bruce Jackson outside Washington's Metropolitan Club, the heart of the capital's deal making.

photo: US Moldova Foundation

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