

how did the great depression affect the united states? Invitation to Steal: War Profiteering in Iraq

Posted by Earl Evleth - 2008/06/26 21:45

FPIF Commentary Invitation to Steal: War Profiteering in Iraq William D. Hartung | May 28, 2008 Editor: Miriam Pemberton Foreign Policy In Focus www.fpiif.org The heavy reliance on private contractors to do everything from serving meals and doing laundry to protecting oil pipelines and interrogating prisoners has been a major factor in the immense costs of the Iraq war. By one measure, there may be more employees of private firms and their subcontractors on the ground in Iraq than there are U.S. military personnel. One of the main rationales for using private companies to carry out functions formerly done by uniformed military personnel - a practice that has been on the rise since then Defense Secretary Dick Cheney commissioned a study that led to the contracting out of all Army logistics work to Halliburton in the 1990s - was that it would save money. But in Iraq, the combination of greedy contractors and lax government oversight has resulted in exorbitant costs, many of them for projects that were never completed. The first sign that something was terribly wrong with the contracting process for the war was the awarding of a no-bid, cost-plus contract to Halliburton, allegedly to pay the cost of putting out oil fires in Iraq. Rep. Henry Waxman started asking questions about the contract after he learned that it could be worth up to \$7 billion over x years. He rightly questioned how a no-bid deal justified on the basis of potential short-term emergencies could have such a long duration at such a high price. Only then was it revealed that the contract also covered the task of operating Iraq's oil infrastructure. Given the long-term nature of this larger task, Waxman argued that this aspect of the work be taken away from Halliburton and subjected to competitive bidding. It was several years before his recommendation was implemented, and even then Halliburton received what at least one potential competitor - Bechtel - viewed as an unfair advantage. While few contracts matched the size of Halliburton's oil deal, the use of cost-plus awards was widely emulated. A cost-plus award is virtually an invitation to pad costs, as profits are a percentage of funds spent - in other words, the more you spend, the more you make. This problem has been compounded by a lack of auditors to scrutinize these contracts. For example, in one zone of Iraq, only eight people were assigned to oversee contracts worth over \$2.5 billion. Halliburton's other major contract in Iraq is for the Logistics Civil Augmentation Program (LOGCAP). Under this arrangement, Halliburton supplies virtually all of the Army's non-combat needs in the field, from building and operating bases to repairing and maintaining combat vehicles. LOGCAP operates on a variation of the cost-plus contracts, and it has exploited this arrangement to the fullest. Among the overcharges engaged in by the company have been the following: overcharging by more than a dollar a gallon for fuel shipped into Iraq from Kuwait; billing the government for three times as many meals as it actually served the troops at several of the bases it runs; leasing SUVs for its personnel at a cost of \$7,000 per month; and charging \$100 each for doing a bag of laundry. These are just a few examples among dozens in which Halliburton took advantage of the "fog of war" to line its pockets. The company's attitude was summed up by company whistleblower Henry Bunting, who indicated that when he raised questions with his supervisor about Halliburton's lavish expenditures of government money he was told "don't worry about it, it's cost-plus." In all, Halliburton has been by far the greatest beneficiary of the Iraq war, with war-related contracts exceeding \$8 billion, several billion of which has not been adequately accounted for. Although a number of changes were made in response to the company's record of fraud and abuse - from taking away its fuel supply contract to splitting the work for operating Iraq's oil infrastructure into three parts - these measures were a classic case of too little, too late. Reforms designed to prevent "another Halliburton" will be discussed below. Large firms like Halliburton were not the only ones to exploit the war for excess - and in some cases illegal - profits. One of the most notorious examples involved Custer Battles, named after its founders Scott Custer and Michael Battles. When the two men went to Iraq in search of contracts, they had no capital, no employees, and no experience in the security business. But they did have a knack for marketing, billing themselves "Green Berets with MBAs." Shortly after arriving in Iraq, Custer Battles received a lucrative contract to provide security for the Baghdad airport. As an example of just how loose controls were, one early payment to the company was made in the form of \$2 million in shrink wrapped \$20 bills, transferred to the firm in exchange for a handwritten receipt. A film of two Custer employees playing football with a brick of the shrink wrapped bills provided one of the most enduring images of greed and corruption generated by the Iraq occupation contracting fiasco. Even as rumors of poor performance on the airport security contract began to circulate, Custer Battles received another major contract, this time for delivering the new Iraqi currency to key points around the country. This effort was characterized by shoddy working conditions, unpaid subcontractors, and the use of broken down trucks that could not carry out their mission. Finally, after revelations by whistleblowers who had worked for the firm, the extent of Custer Battles corruption was exposed. In addition to failing to provide the security and transport services it was contracted to do, internal company documents showed that it had routinely charged for at least twice the value of services supplied by padding bills and funneling subcontracts to phony companies. While all of this was going on, Mike Battles was paying himself \$3 million as head of the company. These were far from isolated incidents, but the extent of the problem might never have been known without the creation of the Special Inspector General for Iraq Reconstruction (SIGIR). IG Stuart Bowen and his staff did scores of audits of every aspect of the reconstruction effort, from building schools to restoring electric service to providing security for a wide range of projects and activities. They discovered a pattern in which contract dollars were spent out in full while only a fraction of the promised work had been completed. While some of this gap can be accounted for by the violence and insecurity that was rampant in significant parts of Iraq from early on in the occupation, this cannot begin to account for the shoddy performance of major and minor contractors alike. To cite just one example of a company that was roundly criticized in SIGIR audits, the Parsons Corporation - the second largest Iraq reconstruction contractor after Halliburton - is worthy of mention. The company completely botched or failed to deliver on hundreds of millions of dollars worth of contracts to build health clinics, fire stations, prisons, and a

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Posted by Earl Evleth - 2008/06/26 21:45

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the depression, largely because liquidity increased and people had the money to spend. The same idea existed after WWI, the nation wanted nothing more to do with war. Wars are not generally good for economies. They spend borrowed money in wasteful ways. And infrastructures ignored.

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FPIF Commentary Invitation to Steal: War Profiteering in Iraq ... Stealing from the treasury is as old as taxation. It is wide spread. Here are examples in medical care. <http://www.csmonitor.com/2008/0325/p01s02-usgn.htm> http://www.city-journal.org/html/16_2_medicaid_fraud.html <http://www.libertypost.org/cgi-bin/readart.cgi?ArtNum=102182> Here are a few examples of various kinds in various ways. <http://www.capitaldistrict-lp.org/ExampleTOC.shtml> Governing has become a way to get privileges for some at the expense of others. (<http://www.capitaldistrict-lp.org/what.shtml> Dollars in the common treasury are like fish in the common sea - anyone who can will harvest to extinction. That is why socialism is fundamentally corrupting and can not work. The Fed is making a lot of paper fish. This is an illusion of wealth. The real fish are gone.

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Posted by Jerry Okamura - 2008/06/26 21:45

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Posted by Donna Evleth - 2008/06/26 21:45

From: Jerry Okamura <okamuraj...@hawaii.rr.com> Organization: Road Runner High Speed Online
http://www.rr.com Newsgroups: alt.activism.death-penalty,soc.retirement Date: Wed, 18 Jun 2008 05:43:50 -1000
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Posted by Jerry Okamura - 2008/06/26 21:45

Organization: Road Runner High Speed Online <http://www.rr.com> Newsgroups: alt.activism.death-penalty,soc.retirement Date: Wed, 18 Jun 2008 05:43:50 -1000 Subject: Re: Invitation to Steal: War Profiteering in Iraq Why wage war with another country? Do you wage war because you believe that is what has to be done to accomplish some goal, or do you wage war because it may affect the economy of your country? Was the Second World War bad for the economy of the United States, or is it partly responsible for energizing our economy? The relationship between war and economics is complicated. It is true that the Second World War brought the United States out of the great depression of the 1930s. But this was not the reason that World War II was fought, it was because of the attack on Pearl Harbor, which was a declaration of war by Japan, followed by the declaration of war by Hitler, who, for once, honored a treaty he had signed with another power. The result of these declarations of war did energize the economy. Everyone was mobilized in this effort, housewives who did home canning, saved fats and turned them in to the butcher, knitted afghans for the wounded. Children who bought savings stamps each week at school. The whole population which submitted to rationing of gasoline and sugar, and put up with shortages of other things like eggs. Unfortunately, in subsequent wars, including the current one in Iraq, there was none of this kind of energizing. President Bush did not ask for sacrifices, he asked that everyone go out on a shopping spree at the mall. I would really like to be able to pinpoint the moment in American history when shopping became a recreational sport, mainly for women. It certainly wasn't during World War II. Let me suggest that the sacrifices that leaders ask of their citizens, depends on the sacrifices that need to be made in order to win the war. If the sacrifices are not needed (in the eyes of a leader) they will not ask for what they believe is not required.

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Posted by Donna Evleth - 2008/06/26 21:45

From: Jerry Okamura <okamuraj...@hawaii.rr.com> Organization: Road Runner High Speed Online <http://www.rr.com> Newsgroups: alt.activism.death-penalty,soc.retirement Date: Wed, 18 Jun 2008 13:48:17 -1000 Subject: Re: Invitation to Steal: War Profiteering in Iraq Let me suggest that the sacrifices that leaders ask of their citizens, depends on the sacrifices that need to be made in order to win the war. If the sacrifices are not needed (in the eyes of a leader) they will not ask for what they believe is not required. Sacrifices are very unpopular, and most leaders - of both parties, BTW - don't have the courage ot ask for them. Donna Evleth - Hide quoted text -- Show quoted text -

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Posted by Capitalist Pig - 2008/06/26 21:45

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