



The business of war

History textbooks fail to mention that over 20,000 millionaires were created by profiteering from World War I

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Editorial & Opinion



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The highly decorated war hero, Major General Smedley Butler, described a well-hidden secret in his classic book, *War is a Racket*. "I made Mexico safe for American oil in 1914 ... I helped in the raping of a half a dozen Central American republics for the benefit of Wall Street ... In China in 1927 I helped see to it that Standard Oil went its way unmolested." Butler came to see himself as a gangster, a muscle-man for the protection of business interests. History textbooks fail to mention what Butler saw as the main cause of the First World War: the more than 20,000 millionaires and billionaires created by war profiteering.

Butler writes that a "racket" is a deception: [WAR](#) is not what it appears to be to the majority of people. Only a small "inside" group knows the truth, and makes huge fortunes from war while the masses sacrifice their lives for fabricated causes. A recent article in *Foreign Policy* re-iterated the message that "War is still a racket" by showing how some groups are making trillions in profits from the perpetual war against terror.

As plans for war against [SYRIA](#) heat up, new myths are being manufactured to support it. In line with Butler's thesis, we must look past the smokescreens of the Islamic State (IS) and oppression of Syrians, and follow the money, to understand the reasons for the war. In 2009, Qatar proposed to build a pipeline through Jordan and Turkey to supply oil to Europe. Syrian President Bashar al-Assad turned this down, and instead signed his own death warrant by signing an agreement for an alternative pipeline which would run through Iran, Iraq and Syria. Oil interests opposed to this deal began funding rebel groups to overthrow Assad, to block this possibility. Sympathy for oppressed Syrians has nothing to do with the realpolitik of financing the war against Assad. In fact, the IS came into existence after a coalition of countries headed by the US began to provide arms and money to create a rebellion against Assad.

Exactly parallel to the IS, the origins of the Taliban lie in the massive funding and arms provided by the CIA to local Muslims to engage in jihad against Russia in Afghanistan. But we must dig deeper to find the profit motives behind the Afghan war. The story of the competition between US oil company Unocal and the Argentinian oil Company Bidas for building the oil pipeline through Afghanistan is too complex to describe here. Suffice it to say that when the Taliban became an obstacle to the planned Unocal pipeline, they were removed from the scene. Another major sin of the Taliban was to shut down opium production, which reduced world supply of heroin by more than 50 per cent, and led to multibillion dollar losses to the shadowy global narcotics industry, second only to the world oil industry.

In 1967, Colonel Muammar Gaddafi inherited one of the poorest nations in Africa. By the time he was assassinated, he had transformed Libya into one of Africa's richest nation. Prior to the US-led bombing campaign in 2011, Libya had the highest Human Development Index, the lowest infant mortality and the highest life expectancy in all of Africa. The country provided effective free health and education services to all citizens. Then Gaddafi committed an unpardonable crime: he announced plans to nationalise Libyan oil, depriving Western oil conglomerates of profits. He was duly punished for this audacity. Following a familiar pattern, rebels were armed and funded to create a rebellion against Gaddafi. The US-EU-Nato bombing blitz of 2011 destroyed hospitals, schools, energy and water infrastructure. As a result, a once prosperous country has been reduced to rubble, while Nato forces proudly proclaimed their success in defending democracy, and in creating a 'historic victory' for the people of Libya against an evil dictator.

Similarly, Iraq was one of the most advanced economies of this region. Saddam Hussein did not learn the lessons from history, and angered big oil by attempting to pursue independent policies for Iraqi oil. In line with Butler's thesis, false pretexts of WMDs were manufactured to cover the real reasons for the Iraq war. Many senior officials confirmed what Alan Greenspan said: "It is politically inconvenient to acknowledge what everyone knows: the Iraq war is largely about oil." The regime change operation, mounted for the "benefit of the Iraqi people" has resulted in complete chaos. Massive destruction of infrastructure has returned Iraq to the Stone Age, killing a million and destroying the power, water, hospitals, schools and other infrastructure to make the lives of the remaining 40 million citizens a living hell.

Current war budgets are sufficient to amply provide for basic needs of food, health, housing and education for all people on the planet. Thus learning to live together in peace has huge potential payoffs for humanity as a whole. However, the route to world peace suggested by General Smedley Butler's analysis is very different from what prevailing myths about the sources of violence would have us believe. The power of big business and the military-industrial complex to control government policy is clearly revealed in the failure of Barack Obama to keep many campaign promises which went against their interests. For instance, Obama promised to eliminate tax loopholes for oil and gas companies, but did not have any success in his attempts to this end. The powerful pharmaceutical industry also blocked his promised proposal to allow imports of medicine to compete with expensive domestic brands. Butler said that to end war, we must end the possibility of profiteering from war. Of his many creative proposals to this end, one is creating a global consensus that armies should only fight defensive wars, on their own territories. Butler's message remains ignored and unheard, even though it is of central importance to understanding how we can end wars and create global prosperity today.

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