

A War for Greed

Avani Durve

Department of Political Science, Diablo Valley College

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Adjunct Professor John Kropf

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Abstract

Tensions between the United States and Iran have been an ongoing issue since the 1900s and have been steadily intensifying as the conflict between Israel and Iran grows. This current conflict and the past contentions with Iran have always been framed as being with the purpose of protecting the United States and Israel's national security against an overly aggressive and unstable country. This research paper uses the lens of class system theory to contest the argument that the United States and Iran conflict stems from a concern over national security and is instead fueled by economic incentives. Implementing this perspective, it is clear that this current conflict has been driven by United States aggression shaped by the monetary desires of the country's elite and that defending the United States and Israel is only a pretext for this aggression. Through discussing the monetary incentives of the war, this paper will show how the current conflict could have been averted if not for the influence of corporations and corporate greed.

A War for Greed

War is rarely as transparent as leaders make it out to be. While officials often tout conflicts as methods to maintain national security, defend citizens, and promote the ideals of the country, it can be seen throughout history that wars often arise due to conflicts over resources. The recent conflict with Iran can be viewed with a very similar lens. The official line for the current war is that Iran is an “imminent threat” and that the U.S. had to take action to stop Iran’s nuclear program and that the U.S. wants to enact a regime change to promote democracy in Iran (Bateman, Bush, 2026); however, conflicts are rarely that simple and idealistic. This paper will discuss why this current war with Iran stems not from the goal of spreading democracy and helping the people of Iran or to ensure the security of the American people, but the monetary interests of the American elite and the imperialistic notions of the American government.

The Roots of Animosity

In order to truly understand the conflict and its motivations, it is necessary to establish the history that preceded the war. Following the second world war, the British oil company, British Petroleum (BP) remained in Iran and continued extracting the country’s oil. However, this meant that much of Iran's resources and money were leaving the country due to foreign involvement. This was recognized by Mohammed Mossadegh who led a movement to nationalize Iran’s oil. He became the Prime Minister of Iran by popular demand and nationalized Iran’s oil reserves, leading to the removal of the British oil companies (Newman, 2012). While this made him popular in Iran for diverting money back into the country, his policies made him very unpopular with the British companies and government who feared the loss of revenue from his policies. This worry about economic losses led to them turning to the United States for help. The CIA in conjunction with British MI6 forces staged a coup in 1953 to overthrow Mossadegh from power.

While the coup had many components including turning the population against Mossadegh and having General Zahedi consolidate power, it resulted in the Shah, Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, being installed by U.S. forces as the new, Western friendly, leader of Iran. By the United States being the ones to destroy Iran's democratic government system and install the Shah by force, it made the Shah be portrayed as a Western, and specifically American, puppet (Roosevelt Institute for American Studies, 2026).

United States support for the Shah continued even as he became more autocratic and brutal. In fact, with the help of the CIA and Mossad, the Shah set up SAVAK, an intelligence agency and secret police aimed to target dissent against the Shah in Iran. These secret police actively worked to repress and deny the people of Iran freedom while allowing the elite to amass massive fortunes (Maloney, 2019). The American government's silence and even support throughout the Shah's increasingly autocratic and brutal rule cemented the hostility of the Iranian populace against the Western culture and the American government. Despite the active harm that was coming to the Iranian people by the decisions of the U.S. backed regime in Iran, the U.S. did not withdraw their support, debasing any claims that the U.S. acts as a proponent of democracy and Western values.

Even the economic policies the United States supported led to massive harm and exploitation of Iran and the Iranian people. With the support of the United States, the Shah set forth an economic plan called the "White Revolution" which led to massive economic growth largely through reinstating Western countries' access to Iranian oil reserves, as promised in 1953, fulfilling Western countries' goals of the coup. However, this sudden spike in the economy led to rapid inflation and a drop in the standard of living of most Iranians, leaving many citizens unemployed and in poverty (Afary, 2026). The ongoing U.S. support of these policies showed

the capitalistic and imperialistic ambitions and motivations rather than the more idealistic motivations of protecting democracy and the people's rights.

The increasing autocracy of the Shah, the rapid push away from the traditional values held by many citizens, and a poorer standard of living resulted in widespread disapproval of the Shah and his policies. Even secular intellectuals, those who initially supported the Shah in his push towards Western culture, began supporting overthrowing the Shah and supporting the religious scholars, those who sought a more theocratic government that embraced traditional values. At the forefront of the religious scholars was Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini who was previously arrested and then exiled to Iraq for his dissidence against the Shah's reform policies. From Iraq he gave many speeches against the Shah, accusing him of abandoning Iranian Shia cultural values and highlighting his dependence on the United States and Israel. Fueled by the Ayatollah, citizens across the political spectrum began protesting against the Shah and going on strike. As protests increased, the Shah and his family fled the country and his government collapsed to be replaced by the Ayatollah who declared Iran as an Islamic Republic in 1979 (Afary, 2026).

As an Islamic Republic, Ayatollah Khomeini installed himself as the Supreme Leader and consolidated power by repressing opposing political groups and maintaining control over all major political positions. This led to the rise in power of the Mullahs, members of the clergy that were strong supporters of the Ayatollah (Branigan, 1980). Under the Mullahs, Iran adopted a very stringent anti-West stance that perpetuated through the populace eventually leading to the Iranian hostage crisis in 1979 where Iranian students took hostages in the United States embassy to demand the extradition of the former Shah from the U.S. This sentiment in the government against Western cultural values has remained even as the Iranian citizens demand change such as

with the Woman, Life, Freedom which was quickly suppressed (Afray, 2026). Despite this rejection of Western thinking, the Iranian government did condemn the September 11th attacks against the United States, and the people of Iran held vigils for those that died in the attacks. This condemnation of terrorist attacks against the United States indicates that Iran had very little desire to threaten the security of the American people (Slavin, 2021). Additionally, most of the organizations Iran is affiliated with that are labeled as terrorist organizations are groups that are localized to the Middle East and seem more interested in minimizing American influence in the region rather than threatening U.S. national security (McDonnell, 2026).

Prior to the Islamic Revolution, Israel and Iran had been close allies, partly due to Israel's backing of the Shah. However, with the rise of the Ayatollah, Iran-Israel relations soured when the new Iran government demonstrated support for a Palestinian cause, condemned Israel for their invasion of Palestine, and refused to recognize the Israeli state. Israel's continued attacks in Gaza and Lebanon and the two countries jockeying for power in the region have led to Iran backing and funding the group Hamas in Palestine and Hezbollah in Lebanon. These groups create an "Axis of Resistance" that opposes Israel and Israel's expansion into its neighboring Arab countries (Motamedi, 2026). The funding of these groups on Iran's part and the war and oppression of the Palestinian people on Israel's part has grown the animosity between these two countries.

Since then, the animosity between these states continues to grow as Israel continues to fight Hamas and Hezbollah and the Iranian state continues to show support for these organizations. The conflict between the countries only grew with Hamas's invasion into Israel and Israel's brutal response that created a humanitarian crisis in Gaza. However, despite the brutality of Israel's actions, the United States remains a staunch ally and supporter of Israel. This

support remained even as Israel coordinated attacks against Iran and Irani-backed leaders against the advice of the United States (Jacoby & Bourg, 2026).

The prime reason Israel provides for attacking Iran remains that it wants to prevent Iran from acquiring a nuclear bomb despite there being very little evidence that Iran is diverting uranium to a nuclear weapon. Israel's push for a U.S. backed war with Iran is often met with the United States instead trying for a deal with Iran that limits its nuclear program. However, Israeli attacks on Iran's nuclear facilities have shut down the progress of these talks in the past (Jacoby & Bourg, 2026). Currently, peace talks with Iran about the current conflict have been halted due to Israel's continued attacks in Lebanon (Shamim, 2026). However, in terms of Iran's actual nuclear ambitions, Iranian political analyst, Ali Alizadeh, claims Ayatollah Khamenei has made Iran into "a threshold state" where Iran can develop a bomb quickly in the case that they are threatened with a nuclear attack by either the United States or Israel (Adley, 2026). However, there is very little evidence that Iran is secretly actually taking the effort to make a nuclear bomb (Kerr, 2026), indicating that the United States and Israel are currently safe from Iranian nuclear activity or threats. Progress towards an active nuclear bomb may have also been hindered by the fact that many, including Ayatollah Khamenei, claimed that such a nuclear weapon goes against Islam. While this may not have actually hindered progress towards a nuclear weapon, it does indicate that Iran is unwilling to actually produce a nuclear weapon unless it really needs it since such a weapon is ideologically opposed even at the highest level of government (Khalaji, 2023). So, while Iran might still be a threat in the Middle East, especially to Israel, there does seem to be very little evidence of their capabilities to produce a nuclear weapon that can be a threat to Israel, unless they see the need to reciprocate a threat of nuclear attack.

Despite the evidence to the contrary, one of the main official reasons for the attack of Iran in February was to prevent Iran from gaining a nuclear weapon. This begs the question of does the United States actually have ulterior motives for its attack on Iran?

Class System Theory

Class system theory is a system level theory and therefore argues that war and conflicts happen because of systemic motivations that apply to all actors in international relations rather than based on motivations that stem from the cultures of states or the psyche of those in power. Particularly, this theory argues that war is a form of exploitation of the poor by the rich that control countries and ultimately push them to go to war with each other so that the rich can increase their own wealth. This notion can also expand to imperialism where essentially rich and stronger countries conquer, or in modern cases exert political and economic influence and control over, weaker countries to utilize their natural resources or cheap labor in a way that will make the richer country more economically powerful while usually draining the poorer countries of their wealth and economic power (Genest, 2006).

In the case of Iran and the United States, the war is pushed for by the corporations that benefit from war. These are the same corporations that fund politicians' careers and have major lobby groups that can push politicians to enact policies that favor their business interests. With such financial pressure, the greed of politicians and companies is what drives war. However, with Iran, there is an added layer of financial motive. Iran contains the third largest oil fields in the world meaning that they are in control of an essential resource especially in the face of rising energy needs (Newman, 2012). Currently the oil in Iran is owned by the state meaning it is inaccessible for U.S. companies to access and utilize (U.S. Energy Information Administration, 2021). Under the control of the United States, oil companies could draw vast amounts of wealth

from these oil fields. These factors must be considered to get a holistic view of why the conflict with Iran actually began.

Israel, Iran, and the United States

While Iran is not a major threat for the United States without nuclear weapons, Iran does pose a threat to Israel. This makes Israel a very motivated party in a war with Iran and would greatly benefit from U.S. involvement in such a war. In fact, even when the United States is working to broker deals with Iran such as those that limit Iran's nuclear capabilities, Israel is opposed to and even works to end peace talks. For example, in 2025 when the United States and Iran started talks about a treaty, Israeli leaders who had initially tried to take action against Iran were visibly uncomfortable. Additionally, near the end of the peace talks, Israel launched an operation that destroyed underground military bunkers without the approval of the United States due to intelligence that Iran was racing for a nuclear weapon, despite almost no evidence of this effort. Even in the U.S. and Israel attacks in 2026, Israel was the one that pushed for them. There is evidence that Prime Minister of Israel, Benjamin Netanyahu claimed that he and his military were going to launch attacks against Iran. He then gave the ultimatum that the United States would be dragged into war with Iran due to their close alliance regardless of their support (Jacoby & Bourg, 2026). These actions by the Israeli government indicate that it was, at least in part, Israel's influence and its close alliance with the United States that pushed the United States to the initial conflict with Iran.

While Israel's influence was definitely pushing the United States to attack Iran, this brings the question of why the United States allowed itself to get pulled into war with Iran and why it continues to support Israel in its war with Iran considering that the United States is the superpower in the relationship. If Iran was a threat to the national security of the United States or

to the safety of its citizens, such as if Iran was producing a nuclear weapon or was supporting terrorist organizations that were targeting U.S. national security rather than working to stop U.S. influence in the region (Slavin, 2026), U.S. aggression is justifiable as simply defending itself. However, there is very little evidence of Iran actually posing a threat to the United States other than hindering its ability to exert influence in the Middle East. One explanation of why the United States is interested in aggression against Iran could be the influence of powerful corporations within the United States. Another explanation also addresses the reasons for American presence in the region: the vast oil reserves in the Middle East. Controlling these reserves would prove to be financially invaluable to U.S. energy and oil companies, indicating that appeasement of oil companies likely plays a role not only in why the United States is interested in the region, but why it is motivated to attack Iran.

The Military Industrial Complex

While war does bring death and destruction there are always those that benefit from it as well. Private contractors often have exclusive access to contracts to offer “services” during war times such as run dining halls, transporting supplies, and even interrogating prisoners. During peace times these services cannot be sold to the government causing these contractors to lose massive amounts of money during peace time. The movie “Iraq for Sale: War Profiteers” discusses the exorbitant amount of money spent on private contractors during the war in Iraq. These companies deal with no bid contracts that are given to them at very high prices. Additionally, these contracts were cost-plus-percentage-of-cost (CPPC) contracts meaning as the contractor spent more money for the project, even if the expenditure was not justified, the money they earned increased. In fact, there was evidence of contractors intentionally buying wrong supplies, giving employees impractical and unused cars, and even putting employees in danger

during supply runs to increase their spending since that increase would result in increased profits for the company (Greenwald, 2006). This blatant overspending to increase profits indicates that these contractors are heavily financially motivated and solely care about their monetary gain rather than the morality of their actions or even human life. Furthermore, considering that these no-bid contracts, and therefore the potential for massive financial gain are mainly present during wartime, these companies are heavily motivated to go to war regardless of the cause since it's established that their sole goal is financial gain.

Many war contractors are also connected to high-ranking government officials, even having personal connections to the people responsible for making policies and going to war. These connections tip the scales in favor of the contracting companies, putting the decision of whether or not the United States goes to war more into the hands of the contracting companies rather than the actual government officials tasked with the job. The movie "Iraq for Sale: War Profiteers" also discusses how many of these contractor companies "retain" high ranking officials including those who work in the Pentagon or in the state department. In this case, retaining these officials means that they are able to maintain the loyalty of these officials to their company regardless of the immorality of the business's actions. Furthermore, the movie also discusses how many of these contracting companies have former, high-ranking military personnel on their boards (Brave New Films, 2006). This means that they can not only more easily get contracts but also have influence and leverage over the people who decide when and how to go to war. This interconnectedness and leverage means that the people that head the contracting companies can decide when the country will go to war and when they do ensure that they are the ones to get the contract. Even if a war does not seem justified or like the rational choice for the national security of a country and the defense of its citizens, these companies have

the capabilities to push for outcomes that will benefit them financially. This makes the actual process of going to war a matter of how much the contracting companies have to push so that they can be given a contract and exploit the war for their own gain.

Contracting companies are not the only ones that benefit from war or an increased military budget. Weapons manufacture often benefit directly from the United States going to war and inevitably will want to push for conflict to increase their monetary gain. In his second term, President Trump proposed increasing the defense budget to \$1.5 trillion dollars (Norton, 2026). Much of this money goes into the military industrial complex and weapons manufacturers to achieve “dominance” on many fronts. This includes investment into things like aircrafts, drones, and ships all of which contribute to the United States’ military superiority and to ensure the United States will be “prepared to meet our adversaries” (U.S. Department of War, 2026). While the types of investments may be diverse, the number of companies that actually produce large defense systems has shrunk down to only a handful of companies as defense subsidiaries have been consolidated within a few parent companies such as Lockheed Martin (Allen & Berenson, 2024). With already so much investment in defense and an emphasis on preparing to meet adversaries of the United States, the scale tipping from preparedness to actual conflict would result in even more money spent on the military industrial complex. Furthermore, considering how many different companies and industries would benefit from an increase in military spending, it is inevitable that these companies would push for a war, influencing the people who actually decide the matters of war and peace to choose war. Government officials also cannot risk antagonizing these defense companies since there are very few in the United States that are able to produce all the weapons that the United States needs. Without these companies selling machinery to the United States, the government will have to go to foreign companies for defense

infrastructure which would raise questions about whether this infrastructure could be compromised because of tampering from foreign actors or why the government is moving away from domestic investment. This would give defense manufacturers immense leverage and control over government officials and those in control of the military, putting these companies in a unique position to advocate for a war that would astronomically increase their monetary gain. In the perspective of the current conflict with Iran, the increase in military funding aligns very well with the onset of the conflict, indicating that this rise in military spending, which defense manufacturers would directly benefit from and would likely push for, may have been in anticipation of the ongoing conflict suggesting that the military industrial complex had a hand in the start of the war.

The war with Iran in particular benefits defense manufacturers, providing a greater incentive to push for war. Israel receives a large amount of military aid. In fact, Israel received \$18 billion dollars in military aid in 2024. This aid gets redirected back to the American defense companies, allowing these companies to make massive amounts of money from the aid that goes to Israel (Hartung & Semler, 2025). War with Iran means that the amount of military aid money that goes to Israel drastically increases which in turn increases the amount Israel spends on defense equipment. Therefore, a war with Iran, specifically, would be greatly beneficial to these companies due to the additional revenue they would receive from the United States' proxy. Based on the monopolies and influence that these companies hold in government, it would make sense that they would push for a conflict in the Middle East, especially with Iran. It also partly explains why the United States remains involved with Israel: the large amounts of money defense companies make off of Israel.

The sway of these defense contractors on whether or not the United States goes to war is further exacerbated by the fact that defense companies are large contributors to politicians' campaign funds, giving the companies control over decisions of entering conflicts and money allocations. Defense companies spend about \$285 million on the campaign funds of politicians in key defense committees. This is in addition to the money that the leaders in these companies spend personally on campaign funds as well as the money these companies spend on lobbyists (Auble, 2021). By giving large donations to politicians' campaigns, these companies have strong control on whether or not these politicians stay in power. With this level of control, these companies are able to cultivate connections and influence in key positions including positions in congress that determine where funding is directed and make decisions on foreign policy and aid as well as key members in the executive branch. By holding such influence in the government by deciding which politicians get elected and holding financial support as leverage, these companies can advocate for war with officials who make those decisions as well those that direct military aid to countries such as Israel which can also spark war due to their ongoing conflict with Iran.

The military industrial complex is not the only group with lobbyists and campaign donations that can push for war. The pro-Israel lobby is a powerful group that has also donated about \$14.8 million to campaigns in the past (Open Secrets, 2024). By donating large amounts to politicians' campaigns, this group holds tremendous influence over the politicians that make decisions regarding foreign policy. In this case rather than working for their own financial gain, this group caters to politicians' want for financial gain. By being able to cater to these needs, this has connections and sway over key officials that make decisions about Israel, specifically Israel's defense against Iran. Iran is a threat to Israel even without nuclear weapons since their missiles can reach Israel. This means that involving the United States in a war with Iran, a much more

powerful country that has the capabilities to cripple Iran, would be in the best interest of Israel and the pro-Israel lobby. With the monetary influence they have over the government officials that allocate money to Israel's military aid as well those that are actually responsible for military decisions, they have the power to at least partly cause a United States and Iran conflict. This means that they have the influence to push for decisions such as the one that has started the current United States and Iran conflict, attacking Iran and assassinating the Ayatollah.

Iran's Oil Reserves

While the current state of the war might be a disaster for oil companies, success at the beginning of the war and fulfillment of the original goals would have been greatly financially beneficial for U.S. based oil companies. Iran is home to the third largest proven oil fields in the world; however, they are currently controlled by the state due to the previous efforts to nationalize the oil industry (U.S. Energy Information Administration, 2021). People in positions of power in U.S. oil and energy companies have shown interest in regaining control of Iranian oil fields (Blumenthal, 2026), though, even if the United States were to repair relations with Iran and resume trade, U.S. oil companies would be unable to drill or refine oil due the nationalization of the industry. However, President Trump has shown interest in forcing a regime change in Iran and presented that as one of his initial goals in starting the conflict (Bateman & Bush, 2026). Oil and energy companies have shown interest in the prospect of a regime change (Blumenthal, 2026). If U.S. oil companies had access to Iran's oil fields again, their financial gain would be astronomical. The only way that these companies would have access to those resources would be through a more Western friendly regime that abolished the idea of nationalized oil and let in foreign companies. Regime change being one of the central goals of the Trump administration for their attack indicates that one of the underlying motivations is increasing the profits of U.S.

companies and appeasement of the oil companies. Considering the oil companies hold considerable power and money, tailoring foreign policy to appease them could only help the Trump administration by gaining the backing of powerful donors. There is also large amounts of historical precedent, with even just Iran, of the U.S. taking such actions which would benefit oil companies. While it is possible that claiming regime change as a motivator of the attack was driven with more humanitarian goals, it is highly unlikely considering that the United States has supported and even installed highly oppressive regimes, such as the Shah's regime prior to the Islamic revolution, given that their leaders allow U.S. companies to harvest the country's resources. Furthermore, the claim of a regime change is a bold and threatening statement, not to be made lightly, indicating that the administration likely did mean to enact a regime change, even taking the first steps to this goal by assassination of the Ayatollah. If the administration did not mean to enact this change for humanitarian causes, which would be very unlikely, it is very likely that they did so to increase the profits of U.S. companies.

While it could be argued that it is unlikely the war with Iran happened even in part due to oil interest since the closure of the Strait of Hormuz hurts oil companies, the United States miscalculated Iran's ability to close the strait meaning that the drive to attack Iran was fueled by benefiting the oil companies with regime change in Iran. According to Edward Fishman, author of the book "Chokepoints," U.S. assessments of the strait were that Iran would have to use physical blocks to control the strait which they would be unwilling to do as it would also shut down their shipment of oil. However, Iran was able to circumvent that issue by increasing the risk of going through the strait by implementing drone surveillance and attacks over the strait. This would allow ships carrying Iranian oil to still be able to navigate the strait safely but largely block other, U.S. aligned companies and countries (Amanpour and Company, 2026). This means

that even though the war has been proven to be a failure for the American oil industry, in the beginning, the assessment would have been that the oil companies can only gain from this war.

War and Money

The current war between the United States and Iran could have easily been averted. Much of the war's onset seems to be driven by Israeli motivation to go to war with Iran and drag the United States with it. While it is in Israel's national security interests to attack Iran, it is far from the security interests of the United States to fight Iran. Yet, the United States finds itself dragged into conflict at the hands of Israel repeatedly despite being the superpower in the relationship. The United States could easily withdraw support and yet it reliably backs the Israeli government's actions and provides continuous aid to the country despite there being little evidence of a direct threat by Iran on the United States, indicating different underlying motivations, namely increasing the revenue of U.S. companies in the defense and oil sector. Defense companies can only gain from ongoing conflict and withdrawing support for Israel directly diminishes their profits. Oil companies, on the other hand, were thought to also only be able to gain from a war with Iran; however, closing the Strait of Hormuz changed that outlook, which also may be why the United States is now consistently pushing for ceasefires and peace treaties that will prevent the block in the Strait of Hormuz or specifically taking action to remove the blockade.

At least for the United States, this war with Iran was very preventable since it was not based on the need for security and was only driven by greed and financial motivations. While the war may have been driven by desire to strengthen the American economy and therefore the United States as a country, this war only shows how much the United States has fallen as a major

power especially in the Middle East by showing what little control it has over the countries it deems its proxies and its inability to control the region.

This war drastically reduced U.S. hegemony in the region and worldwide. It is clear that while the United States wanted to be the one to exert control over the region, including in Iran, it overestimated its capabilities. This is a massive embarrassment for the United States on the world stage as it allowed its own economy and economies of its allies to fall while the economies of its adversaries, such as China, remain largely untouched (Black, 2026) due to China's preparedness for the conflict. Due to the resulting fall of the global economy, this conflict has alienated the United States to its allies, further decreasing U.S. hegemony.

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