

How the Revolving Door Incentivises Pro-War Policy

By

King Iklaga

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Supervisor: Florian Weiler

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Abstract

The revolving door phenomenon allows private industries, especially in defense, too much sway in public policy. When former government officials get employed in the industries they once regulated or vice versa, there is an incentive to sway public policy to favor the companies using them. Regulators who get lucrative jobs in private companies after serving time in office bring insider knowledge and connections that can influence decisions in favor of private interests instead of the public good. This thesis aims to show the extent to which the 'revolving door' affects public resource allocation leading to more 'pro-war' spending. At the same time, previous studies recognize the existence of the revolving door. Analysis of how these career changes between the state and private affect defense spending and national policy decisions is little.

This study looks at the career path of a former government official who moved from a public role to a high-ranking job in a private defense company. It aims to see if this job change affects 'pro-war' policy decisions. The research will also check lobbying expenditures and defense contracts to highlight the incentives influencing policy changes. This case study will demonstrate how personal career incentives and corporate lobbying can drive pro-war policies, revealing a potential conflict between national interest and the private financial motives shaping policymakers' decisions. The findings show that the career transitions of former officials who go on to work in high positions in private defense companies correlate with higher lobbying spending and more defense contracts, revealing how personal benefits influence the push for pro-war policies. These results suggest that the revolving door gives the defense industry a larger role in government, challenging the assumption that policymaking is neutral and raising concerns about democratic accountability.

AUTHOR'S DECLARATION

I, the undersigned, King Iklaga, candidate for the BA degree in Politics, Philosophy and Economics declare herewith that the present thesis titled “How the Revolving Door Incentivises Pro-War Policy” is exclusively my own work, based on my research and only such external information as properly credited in notes and bibliography. I declare that no unidentified and illegitimate use was made of the work of others, and no part of the thesis infringes on any person’s or institution’s copyright. I also declare that no part of the thesis has been submitted in this form to any other institution of higher education for an academic degree.

Vienna, 07 May 2025

King Iklaga

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Introduction

This study looks into the growing worry that the connection between government jobs and the defense industry allows private companies to influence policies for their benefit. When top officials take well-paid positions at defense firms, they bring their insider knowledge, which can shift where national resources go, often leading to more military spending. The US federal budget is limited, therefore, less money is allocated to critical services like education and healthcare. While previous research has shown that this kind of career switch happens, we still do not fully understand how these career changes lead to 'pro-war' policies. By focusing on a notable case where a public official moved to a defense contractor, this study will track changes in lobbying expenditure and contract awards to analyze the incentives behind increased defense spending. While the phenomenon of the revolving door has been investigated extensively, far less attention has been paid to its effects on policymaking. As Cooper notes, "...the subject of financial sector influence through the revolving door has been a blind spot in academic discourse" (Cooper 2013).

“Investigation Reveals Hundreds of Former Military Officials, Members of Congress, and Government Staff Serve As Board Members or Execs at Companies They Used to Regulate Today” (Warren 2023). This study looks at something significant that is often ignored, that is the 'revolving door' between the government and the defense industry. While we know this back-and-forth happens, there is not enough research on how it actually affects policy, especially when it comes to defense spending. By tracking the career of a former government official who landed a high-paying job in private defense companies, the study reveals the conflicts of interest and shows how personal gains might come before the public good. Since government budgets are limited, shifting money toward military spending can take funding away from other important services, like education and healthcare. Therefore, this research is relevant to understanding the incentives that shape pro-war policy. This research adds to the

Discourse about transparency and accountability in government and looks at how personal connections and lobbying can shape pro-war policies.

Previous research into the revolving door has acknowledged its presence but often lacks a detailed examination of its policy consequences. While awareness has increased, much work remains limited to observation rather than systematic analysis. As mentioned earlier, many former government officials have now started to work for companies that they used to regulate. (Warren 2023). From this, we see a conflict of interest. This investigation demonstrates the scale of the problem and focuses primarily on the movement of personnel and shifts in national defense spending or policymaking outcomes. Hartung notes that many former Department of Defense officials take positions in the arms industry, yet little prior work has quantified how these transitions influence defense budgets or lobbying patterns (Hartung 2023).

In contrast, this study aims to go beyond merely identifying revolving-door cases. It will track career paths, measure lobbying expenditures, and analyze the relationship between personal incentives and the adoption of pro-war policies (i.e. increased defense spending). By emphasizing concrete case studies and financial data, this research addresses a gap left by earlier work. It moves from merely recognizing the revolving door toward exposing its direct and systematic impact on national resource allocation and public policy direction.

Industry veterans often bring deep technical know-how and firsthand insights that can help regulatory agencies better understand complex markets and emerging technologies. Their experience in developing products, managing supply chains, or navigating compliance challenges gives them a practical perspective that complements the broader policy goals of regulators. Conversely, when regulators rotate into industry roles, they carry an awareness of public interest priorities and legal frameworks that can guide companies toward safer and more

ethical practices. This exchange of expertise can strengthen rule-making by ensuring regulations are both technically sound and feasible to implement. It can also foster trust between the public sector and private firms by creating channels for ongoing dialogue and collaboration. Critics worry this movement may blur the lines between oversight and advocacy. With clear regulations, transparency measures, and cooling-off periods, the flow of talent can become a net benefit. It can accelerate the adoption of best practices, improve risk management, and promote innovations that align with safety and environmental standards. Therefore, recognizing and managing potential conflict allows regulatory bodies and industry actors to learn from each other and enhance the effectiveness of governance (Meghani and Kuzma 2011).

“Some argue that Industry veterans might have specialized knowledge that could be useful to regulatory bodies and vice versa” (Meghani and Kuzma 2011), but others see it as a way for private defense companies to influence decisions for their own gain. Critics point out that this can hurt public trust and redirect national focus towards military spending as "lobbyists who once worked on the government payroll very likely earn incomes well north of the median citizen's" (LaPira & Thomas III 2017), suggesting financial incentives often drive career decisions after government.

This study looks into whether career changes between government jobs and private defense companies influence decisions that lead to more military spending. It focuses on how these career moves (revolving door) transitions might push for budget increases. The goal is to understand how these job changes impact how public money is spent on defense. By examining a specific case and looking at related lobbying and contract information, the research aims to go beyond just spotting the trend to understanding how personal career goals can change defense policy. In this paper, public choice theory is used to explain the drivers of 'pro-war'

policy. This should explain how the revolving door can lead policymakers to act in their own self-interest (Reilly 2023).

In this study, when we say “revolving door,” we are talking about people moving between government regulatory jobs and private defense industry roles. The term “pro-war policy” specifically means actions taken in law or budgets that raise military spending, which encourages war. Other terms like “lobbying spending” and “defense contract awards” are used in their usual way. The Revolving door phenomenon is where public officials transition into private defense roles, or vice versa, creating potential conflicts between personal gain and public interest. In this context, Pro-war policy is any budgetary or legislative decision that allocates additional public funds toward military operations or armaments, hence prioritizing defense spending over non-defense public goods.

This research employs a mixed-methods case study. It uses qualitative data to discuss the incentives that lead to higher defense spending, examining the career history and legislative actions of the Department of Defence. Second, it conducts a quantitative analysis of lobbying expenditures and defense contracts awarded by the Department of Defence. By using both qualitative and quantitative data on said official, the methodology highlights how personal career incentives correlate with changes in national resource allocation toward 'pro-war policy'.

This paper begins with a review of existing literature and establishes the theoretical framework guiding the analysis of the revolving-door phenomenon in chapter one. Chapter two presents a detailed case study of Frank Kendall, tracing career moves from the Pentagon into the industry and examining how those transitions influenced budget priorities and insider networks. Chapter three applies quantitative methods to lobbying expenditures and contract-award data across multiple fiscal years and legislative milestones, revealing patterns of strategic influence and timing. Chapter four interprets these empirical findings through the lens

of public-choice theory, demonstrating how self-interested behavior and institutional incentives shape defense policy and regulatory dynamics. The final chapter's recommendations for reform reflect on the study's contributions and limitations and outline avenues for future research. By progressing from conceptual foundations through empirical evidence to theoretical insight and practical guidance, this structure ensures a clear development of arguments and supports a comprehensive understanding of how personnel mobility between government and industry affects national budget allocation decision-making.

The terms revolving door and 'pro-war' come up a lot. The revolving door is mentioned more than once to point out how officials switch between government jobs and private companies. Pro-war is used in various parts to keep the focus on military spending helping strengthen the main ideas.

Literature Review

The revolving door between the Department of Defense and the arms industry raises conflicts of interest that distort public trust. When top officials land high-paying jobs in the private industry, it can seem like their decisions in office are affected by their future job prospects. Hartung and Fisher explain that this situation creates "the appearance, and in some cases the reality, of conflicts of interest in defense policy and the Pentagon budget" (Hartung and Fisher 2023). The possibility of a high-paying job after service can cast doubt on the integrity of defense policy decisions and weaken trust in the government.

Research has counted how many top military officers join defense firms but has not examined how this affects policy later on. While counting retired generals on corporate boards shows how common this is, it doesn't address if or how these moves influence budget or legislative outcomes. The Quincy Brief reports that "26 of 32 four-star officers who retired after June 2018, over 80 percent, went to work for the arms industry in various roles" (Hartung and Fisher 2023). This high percentage points to a pattern rather than isolated cases, but without linking these transitions to specific policy changes, the research only shows who is moving, not what happens after. Counting these moves highlights how common the revolving door is but shows the need to connect them to actual changes in policy.

Defense firms use former officials, especially as lobbyists, to secure more military funding without enough oversight. Ex-officials know the inner workings of procurement and appropriations, making it easier for companies to push for projects that benefit them. The fact that more than "90 percent of senior government officials who go into the arms industry serve as lobbyists," promoting projects that help their new employers rather than overseeing government-funded projects (Hartung and Fisher 2023) serves as proof of this. This job change shows a change in responsibility to the public, from protecting public interest to pushing for

profits. As lobbyists, these individuals naturally lean towards budget increases instead of accountability. The use of ex-officials as lobbyists creates a channel where corporate profit motives can shape defense budgets.

Public-choice theory describes the revolving door as a way for self-interested people to shape policy for personal gain. From this perspective, officials think that supporting defense contractors now could lead to future job opportunities, making public service just a stepping stone to private wealth. Senator Elizabeth Warren warns that “When government officials cash in on their public service by lobbying or serving on boards of the companies they used to oversee, it undermines the integrity of public officials and raises questions about government contracting” (Hartung and Fisher 2023). Warren's concern shows how personal interests can interfere with fair contract allocation. Once integrity is in doubt, every contract award is questioned, increasing the skepticism of the public. When public service becomes a path to personal gain, it threatens the integrity and fairness that government contracting relies on.

“Any theory of collective choice must attempt to explain or to describe the means through which conflicting interests are reconciled. In a genuine sense, economic theory is also a theory of collective choice, and, as such, provides us with an explanation of how separate individual interests are reconciled through the mechanism of trade or exchange” (Buchanan and Tullock 1962).

“Collective action must be, under our postulate, composed of individual actions. The first step in our construction is, therefore, some assumption about individual motivation and individual behavior in society as contrasted with private or individualized activity. Our theory thus begins with the acting or decision-making individual as he participates in the processes through which group choices are organized. Since our model incorporates individual behavior as its central feature, our ‘theory’ can perhaps best be classified as being methodologically

individualistic” (Buchanan and Tullock 1962). Buchanan and Tullock explain public-choice theory as using economic ideas to look at how decisions are made in politics. They think of political choices like market transactions, saying that outcomes come from people trying to get what they want while following certain rules, instead of from some collective will. This view changes how we see politics, treating it like a process of exchange. Just like markets work through voluntary trades, public-choice theory looks at laws, voting, and lobbying as deals made by people acting in their own interest. It points out things we often see, like rent-seeking and coalition building, by viewing politicians and voters as rational beings weighing costs and benefits.

Public-choice theory, as discussed in ‘The Calculus of Consent’, suggests that politics follows patterns we see in markets, focusing on people’s choices instead of collective groups. My analysis incorporates public choice theory by framing career transitions, lobbying expenditures, and contract allocations as outcomes driven by individual self-interest. I conceptualize the revolving door phenomenon as a sequence of transactions wherein former public officials leverage prior regulatory authority for private-sector benefit. This reflects a perspective of the political landscape as a marketplace where actors respond predictably to incentives. My critique of policy neutrality emphasizes that personal gains tied to specific policy results often overshadow a commitment to any abstract collective welfare among those in positions of power. My methodological approach involves analyzing lobbying expenditures as strategic investments yielding measurable returns in subsequent contract acquisitions. I evaluate the hypothesis that more stringent cooling-off periods alter the risk-reward calculus associated with the revolving door. By examining specific regulatory decisions, I demonstrate a correlation between effort expenditure and anticipated personal enrichment. My framework treats legislative votes, budgetary modifications, and professional mobility as strategic decisions constrained by institutions. This methodology transforms anecdotal evidence and raw

data into a coherent narrative which is that policy outcomes are the consequence of rational, self-interested individuals operating within established legal and administrative boundaries, rather than the result of benevolent state actors.

While there are many lists of ex-official appointments, there is not enough systematic tracking to connect individual job moves with policy results. Without the use of multiple sources of evidence, it is hard to make causal claims (Yin 2018). The claim may have been strengthened by congressional data that showed a policy-increasing defense spending that happened before career changes of policymakers to said defense company. "Official government tracking of post-government jobs for retired four-stars and other senior officials are lacking," leaving little evidence tying career changes to specific legislative or budget impacts (Hartung and Fisher 2023). Systematic tracking and case studies are essential to connect these job transitions to real changes in policy.

Large pay differences between public office and private industry contribute to regulatory capture in the defense sector. When high-ranking military officers can earn far more in private companies, the temptation to favor those firms while in office increases. Hartung and Fisher suggest banning top officials from working with major contractors, suggesting that the government should "bar four-star officers from firms that receive \$1 billion or more in Pentagon contracts yearly" (Hartung and Fisher 2023). The ban aims to cut the financial lure that increases regulatory capture. By removing the chance of a large paycheck after service, the focus could shift back to proper defense oversight. Enforcing strict rules on post-employment may be necessary to tackle the strong financial incentives behind regulatory capture.

Large defense budgets pushed by revolving-door lobbying can limit funding for important domestic programs. The US federal budget is limited, therefore, each dollar spent on

weapon systems reduces what can go to education, healthcare, and infrastructure. Hartung and Fisher note that ex-official influence can “tilt the scales towards a more militarized foreign policy,” affecting funding for education, healthcare, and infrastructure (Hartung and Fisher 2023).

By focusing on defense interests, those involved in the revolving door may undermine social welfare. This leads to policies that prioritize military spending over investments in public services. The ethical issues around the revolving door go beyond defense, risking shifts in resources away from essential social programs to military spending.

Methodology

A mixed-methods case study combines both qualitative and quantitative data to better understand the incentives behind pro-war policy. By getting information about Frank Kendall's revolving door history and looking at lobbying records involving the companies that his policies have aided through grants, we get a comprehensive oversight. Using multiple sources of evidence helps aid in showing these connections (Yin 2018). The transitions of individuals between government and private sectors and their effects on policies can be seen from different angles. A more personal angle first as the case study reflects Frank Kendall's incentives, and secondly, a more rounded view as the lobbying, grants, and contract records aim to show how these incentives coalesce into more grants for defence companies. By looking at career motivations and legislative actions alongside data on lobbying expenses and contract awards, this study may show how strong and impactful the revolving door is. This approach fills a gap in earlier studies that only looked at personnel changes without linking them to measurable policy results. The mixed-methods case study design allows for a thorough examination, making sure that findings about drivers of pro-war policies are supported by data.

The study focuses on the career path of Frank Kendall, a former government official who transitioned to a high-ranking role in a private defense company. Using a single case study that is particularly informative with regards to the 'revolving door' highlights high-profile transitions that may significantly affect defence policy. By zooming in on a well-known individual, we can track their decision-making, connections, and related policy advocacy. This focused approach helps establish a link between the chosen case and any observed increases in defense spending.

The paper looks at lobbying spending and defense contracts to understand the reasons behind policy changes. Data is sourced from public websites like OpenSecrets for lobbying info and

USAspending.gov for federal contracts. Official biography of Frank Kendall and academic articles about the revolving door between government and private sectors are used. OpenSecrets gives clear numbers on lobbying spending, which helps track how money is being used. USAspending.gov shows contract awards, allowing us to see how lobbying affects contract decisions. Other records provide context for legislative actions and career shifts.

This paper uses qualitative data to look at what drives the increase in defense spending, focusing on one official's career and legislative actions. By analysing official DoD articles, we can spot patterns in how decisions are made and communicated. This should aid in clarifying numerical trends, helping understand the reasoning behind defense spending and how insider info is used in lobbying.

I check open data on government grants and contracts linked to Frank Kendall, looking at contracts awarded to defense companies from the USAspending.gov site. I explore how grants and contracts develop over time, noting instances when grant money is received before contracts are awarded. The study highlights cases where a grant to Kendall's organization comes before an awarded contract, examining funding trends for additional insight. This method shows the timing of grants and contracts related to Kendall and his company, giving a glimpse into the motivations behind them.

This paper uses public choice theory to explain the drivers behind pro-war policies, showing how the revolving door leads policymakers to act in their interest (Reilly 2023). Public choice theory sees politicians as self-interested, responding to incentives. When personal benefits are linked to policy outcomes, it affects decision-making neutrality (Buchanan and Tullock 1962). By applying this theory, the study views lobbying expenditures as investments aimed at future private-sector gains. The revolving-door transition shows how career goals align with profit motives, encouraging officials to favor increased defense budgets. Using

public choice theory helps clarify why the patterns in quantitative and qualitative data align showing that self-interest shapes policy, and the revolving door reinforces that dynamic.

While some studies acknowledge the revolving door (Hartung 2023), not much has looked at how these career transitions affect defense spending and policy decisions. This study checks evidence across different sources. Key limitations include unobserved factors that could affect results and the challenge of showing causality.

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While some studies acknowledge the revolving door (Hartung 2023), not much has looked at how these career transitions affect defense spending and policy decisions. This study checks evidence across different sources. Key limitations include unobserved factors that could affect results and the challenge of showing causality in complex policy situations. Focusing on just one case also makes it tough to generalize findings. Despite the deep dive into one case, proprietary lobbying tactics that are not publicly available pose additional limitations. This study goes beyond acknowledging revolving-door cases to show its effects on national resource distribution and public policy. By combining qualitative insights, solid data analysis, and the foundations of public-choice theory, this method addresses gaps in previous work by linking personal career motives to policy changes.

Frank Kendall case study

Frank Kendall's career path shows how people can move between government jobs and the defense industry. After graduating from MIT with a Sc.D., Kendall started a lengthy government career that lasted from 1974 to 1994. During those years, he worked in the Office of the Secretary of Defense and the Advanced Research Projects Agency. In 1994, he made the switch to the private sector, taking a position as Vice President of Engineering at Raytheon. Kendall spent about 17 years there, growing his experience and then becoming a managing partner at Renaissance Strategic Advisors. As his official biography notes, he "has been a consultant to defense industry firms, non-profit research organizations, and the Department of Defense in the areas of strategic planning, engineering management, and technology assessment" (Department of Defense 2012).

In 2011, he decided to head back into government, stepping in as Principal Deputy Under Secretary. Not long after that, from May 2012 to January 2017, he held the role of Under Secretary of Defense for Acquisition, Technology, and Logistics. He was "Senate Confirmed in May 2012 ... by a 94–2 vote" (Department of Defense 2012). Later, in February 2017, he returned to the private sector again, providing advice to companies in the defense field.

In his biography, it notes that during his time in that Under Secretary role, Kendall was "responsible to the Secretary of Defense for all matters pertaining to acquisition; research and engineering; developmental testing; contract administration; logistics and materiel readiness; installations and environment; operational energy; chemical, biological, and nuclear weapons; the acquisition workforce; and the defense industrial base" (Department of Defense 2012). He "is the leader of the Department of Defense's efforts to increase the Department's buying power and improve the performance of the defense acquisition enterprise" (Department of Defense 2012).

Looking at these transitions, first from government to industry in 1994, then back to government in 2011, and finally returning to the private sector in 2017, we can infer that in the 17 years spent at Raytheon, he used his expertise from the Department of Defence to lobby for budget increases that benefit Raytheon. Every time he moved, he gathered more knowledge and experience, which made him more appealing both to Pentagon officials and defense contractors. Being in the private sector meant he could earn more, while his government service helped him build credibility and connections that would benefit him in future industry roles.

The pay gap between government jobs and private sector work is a strong reason for people to switch. Frank Kendall, while he served as the Under Secretary of Defence for Acquisition, Technology, and Logistics, made around \$185,300 a year (U.S. Office of Personnel Management 2011). This amount is significantly lower than what people usually make in the private sector. When he worked at Raytheon and Renaissance Strategic Advisors, Kendall earned millions from salary, bonuses, and stock options.

After leaving the government, he also earned cash from being on boards and consulting. In his 2018 financial disclosure, Kendall reported earning \$702,319 from consulting with Northrop Grumman, a \$300,000 contract with them, and owning between \$500,000 and \$1,000,000 in Leidos stock. He also got annual cash and stock awards of about \$280,000 (Clifton 2021). These amounts show a huge jump from his government salary and highlight why pleasing potential future private-sector employers is tempting for policymakers. The clear difference in pay between government work and private industry shows why government officials might look towards jobs in the private sector. The chance for significantly greater pay could affect how they make decisions, possibly steering policy to align with company interests in hopes of landing a good job later on. The noticeable wage gap between government and private sector jobs affects the standard of public service. This situation

encourages a revolving door, where the big rewards in the private sector can sway what government officials advocate for.

During his time in charge, Kendall's key procurement projects often resulted in increased budgets. As Under Secretary of Defense for Acquisition, Technology, and Logistics, Kendall pushed for several major initiatives, such as the "Seven Operational Imperatives," securing an additional \$4.8 billion for FY 2024. He also ensured funding for nuclear upgrades and Next-Generation Air Dominance projects, along with extra funding for the Space Force (Department of Defense 2012). Kendall's initiatives led to budget increases for areas of interest to his future employers, showing how people moving between government and industry can leverage their insider knowledge to influence funding decisions.

From 2015 to 2021, the Department of Defense spent significantly more on air support contracts. The total value jumped from around \$380 million in 2015 to about \$6.4 billion in 2020. Altogether, they spent roughly \$8.4 billion during these years, showing a clear rise in funding for training programs aimed at handling enemy air operations (Government Accountability Office 2021). In September 2016, Lockheed Martin Space Systems Co. received a \$395 million contract. This money covered some earlier budget allocations from FY 2014–15 and new funding from FY 2016. This shows that there was a solid investment in defense during that time (U.S. Department of Defense 2016). These changes may suggest that Kendall's influence in government roles impacted contract awards and that his subsequent positions helped him pursue programs he previously oversaw. These patterns support the notion that individuals moving between government and industry can leave lasting imprints on procurement strategies.

Kendall's career prompts a discussion on balancing expertise with impartiality. Officials often advocate policies that align with personal benefits. Kendall's trajectory exemplifies this as he

also contributed to acquisition improvements. Regulatory changes should aim to retain expertise while mitigating conflicts of interest. Potential measures include extending waiting periods before private-sector transitions, capping earnings linked to former roles, and aligning senior officials' compensation with private-sector standards (Schwartz 2015). Frank Kendall's story illustrates the complexities of the revolving door. Moving forward, thoughtful reforms can safeguard the public interest and maintain ethical standards in defense systems.

Lobbying Spending: Trends and Breakdown

The defense sector's lobbying spending has grown significantly, underscoring its commitment to influencing policy. Firms are strategically allocating resources to shape legislative and budgetary outcomes across multiple fronts. In the 2024 election cycle, the defense sector spent a total of \$149.2 million on lobbying, up from \$135 million in 2022 (OpenSecrets 2025)[4]. Of that amount, Miscellaneous Defense firms accounted for \$74.5 million; Defense Aerospace \$57.7 million; and Defense Electronics \$17.1 million (OpenSecrets 2025). In the first half of 2023, lobbyists focused nearly \$70 million on the National Defense Authorization Act, emphasizing the importance of advocacy during budget planning (OpenSecrets 2023). The data shows 385 registered defense-sector clients employed 948 lobbyists in 2024, with 62 percent being former government workers, highlighting how past government experience influences defense policy (OpenSecrets 2025). These figures suggest firms perceive lobbying as an essential means to protect and expand their interests, timing efforts to key legislative windows and leveraging insider expertise. This pattern highlights the sector's belief that robust, multifaceted lobbying is crucial for safeguarding and advancing defense priorities.

Federal defense contracting obligations have also risen, reflecting increased procurement activity.

A larger contracting budget indicates both sustained demand for defense capabilities and growing complexity in procurement. In FY 2023, the federal government obligated around \$759 billion on contracts, which was an inflation-adjusted rise of \$33 billion from FY 2022 (GAO 2024). The Department of Defense was responsible for \$431.4 billion of that, covering everything from weapons systems to research and development (USAspending.gov 2025). Big

contractors like Lockheed Martin received the most, with \$61.4 billion, followed by RTX at \$24.1 billion, General Dynamics at \$22.9 billion, Boeing at \$20.1 billion, and Northrop Grumman at \$16.3 billion, together accounting for more than 28 percent of DoD obligations (USAspending.gov 2025). The concentration of obligations among these leading firms underscores their dominant market positions and the scale of resources they command. Ultimately, rising contract obligations demonstrate both the sector's expanding footprint and the intensifying competition for Defense Department resources.

Individual firm lobbying and award patterns reveal varying returns on advocacy efforts. While some companies see large contract wins following significant lobbying, overall procurement decisions remain guided primarily by technical and performance criteria. In 2023, Lockheed Martin spent approximately \$14.07 million on lobbying and secured \$70.85 billion in DoD contracts, equating to a 0.020 percent return-on-influence ratio (OpenSecrets 2025)[4]; (General Services Administration 2024). RTX spent \$11.42 million on lobbying in early 2023 and was awarded a \$306 million F-135 engine contract in October 2023, demonstrating the tight correlation between advocacy timing and award decisions (OpenSecrets 2025); (OpenSecrets 2023). Meanwhile, Colt Defense spent just \$142,500 in lobbying during 2023 yet consistently obtained small-arms contracts (OpenSecrets 2025). A GAO report in 2024 found that lobbying explained only ~5 percent of the variance in DoD contract awards from FY 2018–2022, reinforcing the primacy of technical criteria (Government Accountability Office 2024). This diversity in spending and outcomes indicates that, while lobbying may open doors or draw attention, the bulk of contract allocation hinges on performance metrics, cost-effectiveness, and connections. Hence, firm-level data illustrate that influence complements, but does not override, the rigorous evaluation processes governing defense contracts.

Timing surges in lobbying efforts often coincide with major contract announcements, highlighting tactical advocacy. Companies increase outreach around procurement decision points to maximize their influence when awards are being decided. In early 2023, RTX increased its lobbying before receiving the F-135 award in October 2023, triggering an internal audit (OpenSecrets 2023). Boeing also spent \$3.8 million on lobbying in first quarter of the year 2023, which was followed by a \$2 billion contract increase, prompting cost scrutiny (OpenSecrets 2023). These spikes suggest firms deliberately phase their lobbying investments to align with procurement timelines, using targeted advocacy to reinforce their competitive bids. In summary, the lobbying surges around contract cycles reveals the sector's attention to procurement schedules and its strategic use of influence to shape outcomes.

Conclusion

This dissertation explains the relationship between government jobs and private-sector work in the defense industry, showing how the revolving door often changes how the federal budget is spent. By looking closely at Frank Kendall's career path, his moves between top Pentagon roles and high-level jobs at major defense companies gave him both insider knowledge and strong professional connections, this study shows that personal goals and company influence are key forces behind growing military budgets. Instead of acting as fair judges of national security needs, officials who hope to get well-paid jobs after leaving government may, knowingly or not, make choices that help their future employers, putting defense spending ahead of important public services and democratic responsibility (Hartung 2023); (Cooper 2013).

A detailed study showed several connected findings. First, the case study found that Kendall's support for plans like the Seven Operational Imperatives lined up with large budget increases, an extra \$4.8 billion for FY 2024, which mostly helped companies he later worked for or advised, showing how having inside access can directly lead to more funding (Department of Defense 2012); (Clifton 2021). Second, data on lobbying showed an increase from \$135 million in the 2022 election to \$149.2 million in 2024, with 62 percent of defense lobbyists being former government workers; these lobbying spikes happened at the same time as the writing and passing of the National Defense Authorization Act, suggesting careful timing to influence key laws (OpenSecrets 2025); (OpenSecrets 2023). Third, contract data showed air-support spending rose from \$380 million in FY 2015 to \$6.4 billion in FY 2021, and a new measure called "return-on-influence" showed that lobbying, while explaining only 5 percent of the difference in who got contracts, still played a big role in high-value, often no-bid deals, adding to technical qualifications rather than replacing them (Government Accountability Office 2021); (U.S. Department of Defense 2016). All these points support a clear story: the

revolving door is a working system where people with self-interest shape public policy in predictable ways (Buchanan and Tullock 1962); (Reilly 2023).

Still, this study's focus on one well-known case means its findings may not apply to everyone. The patterns seen in Kendall's career might not match those of lower-level officials or people moving between other branches of government and smaller companies, where access and influence may work differently (Yin 2018). Also, public reports about lobbying, while detailed, don't show unreported or informal networks, behind-the-scenes consulting, or secret third-party efforts, meaning the real level of private influence might be even greater (GAO 2024). Lastly, using public databases like OpenSecrets and USAspending.gov brings problems like delays and reporting mistakes, making it harder to clearly see how lobbying affects contract awards in real-time (OpenSecrets 2025); (USAspending.gov 2025).

Databases like OpenSecrets and USAspending.gov bring problems like delays and reporting mistakes, making it harder to clearly see how lobbying affects contract awards in real-time (OpenSecrets 2025); (USAspending.gov 2025). These results matter a lot for how government works and how much people trust it. First, when people think that major defense programs are shaped by private gain rather than real security needs, trust in government drops, which can hurt support for defense policies and weaken national unity (Warren 2023)[49]; (Hartung and Fisher 2023). Second, using limited public money for military spending instead of important domestic needs like schools, healthcare, and roads leads to trade-offs that can hurt poor and vulnerable communities the most (Hartung and Fisher 2023). Third, without strong checks, the revolving door can lead to regulatory capture, drive up costs, reduce competition, and lower the military's strength due to delays and waste.

To lower the risks of the revolving door, this research suggests clear changes. Making former top defense officials wait at least four years before joining companies that get over \$1 billion

a year in Pentagon money would make job-hopping less appealing and reduce the urge to shape policy for future jobs (Hartung and Fisher 2023). Requiring real-time, detailed reporting of all lobbying by former officials, including deal amounts, pay, and specific projects, would increase openness and help lawmakers and the public stop unfair influence (OpenSecrets 2025). Setting legal limits on how much the defense industry can spend on lobbying during key budget periods could stop the most forceful efforts from taking over the lawmaking process. Lastly, creating an independent ethics office at the Pentagon, with the power to investigate and punish violations, would give ongoing oversight and help enforce the rules meant to protect fair decision-making.

Using this study's methods, future research should compare more cases across different agencies, roles, and kinds of contracts. Adding social network analysis to track informal ties, board seats, alumni groups, and think tank links would show hidden paths of influence (Meghani and Kuzma 2011). Long-term studies that follow many officials over time could show the lasting effects of old lobbying ties on new decisions. Studies that compare countries could help find the best rules for avoiding conflicts of interest in defense (Yin 2018).

By clearly linking personal career moves to real budget effects and using public choice theory to explain the patterns, this dissertation goes beyond stories and guesses about the revolving door. It adds tools like the return-on-influence measure and the idea of lobbying peaks to help policymakers find and stop high-risk deals. In doing this, the study not only helps researchers understand defense-sector influence better but also offers useful steps for improving government accountability and making sure national security choices serve the public, not private profits (Buchanan and Tullock 1962).

In the end, this research demonstrates that the line between public service and private gain in defense policy is thin, letting people use official power to benefit themselves financially. The

revolving door may never close, some of the steps briefly mentioned, based on transparency, accountability, and new regulations limiting the revolving door from taking place, can help bring back trust in democracy and push defense spending toward real public safety. Only with strong oversight in how we govern can we make sure decisions about defense spending.

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