War and Workers' Power in the United States:
Labor Struggles in War-Provisioning Industries, 1993-2016

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Abstract – At the turn of the twenty-first century, a general disempowerment of industrial workers in the United States yielded pessimistic assessments of the labor movement. Yet, during the height of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, industrial war-provisioning workers in the United States engaged in a wave of largely successful struggles for a greater share of expanding war-profits. This paper investigates these strikes in war-provisioning industries from 1993 to 2016. I find a wave of offensive struggles between 2003 and 2009 that is indicative of an increase in these workers' structural bargaining power, due to growing state reliance on war-materials provisioning during wartime. Nevertheless, transformations in the organization of production and war-making made such empowerment ephemeral. I demonstrate how changes in military strategy—most notably, the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, the Obama "pivot" to East Asia, and escalating "great power" rivalry—affect the bargaining power of workers in war-provisioning industries.

Keywords: United States, strikes, war-economy, industrial workers, military-industrial complex

9,011 words

On April 10, 2000, workers at Lockheed Martin's F-16 fighter jet manufacturing plant in Fort Worth, Texas, went on strike. In the months leading up to the vote, the company had announced layoffs in the factory and, facing stagnating wages and increasing healthcare costs, the union was driven to defend the workers' livelihoods. Lockheed Martin, facing weak sales of its military aircraft and record-low profits, fought the striking workers—and won. The conflict ended with a union capitulation and workers returned to work with a lackluster contract. In contrast, three years later, in April 2003, the same union went on the offensive, demanding a greater share of the war-profits that had been flowing into the firm's coffers in the Bush era. Following a two-week strike that delayed the production of F-16s, Lockheed Martin agreed to greater wage increases and reductions in healthcare premiums. As one striking worker noted: "We have foregone a lot of raises over the last few contracts because our company had not been in a good position… But this year we absolutely are in a different position—there are record profits at Lockheed Martin. We are asking for a fair contract" (Blau, 2003).

This Fort Worth plant is not an outlier in its militancy: between 1993 and 2016, the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) reports 28 work stoppages at war-materials manufacturing plants in the United States, accounting for nearly 2.2 million working days lost. These stoppages occurred in the context of a neoliberal assault on the working class and during decades of deindustrialization—yet, like the 2003 Fort Worth example above, many of these strikes were offensive, not defensive, in character. In contrast to the general disempowerment of industrial workers in the Global North in this period, these strikes beg the question: What explains the wave of offensive struggles by industrial war-provisioning workers in the twenty-first century?

In this paper I investigate the relationship between war and workers' power at the point of production in the United States from 1993 to 2016 by examining these strikes. I use data on work

stoppages from the BLS—for which detailed information begins in 1993—to focus on war-provisioning manufacturing industries. Using this data as well as newspaper accounts, I present the trends in this industry over the past quarter-century. I then explain these trends through a broader analysis of the war-economy.

I find that the initial years of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan yielded relatively high power and rewards to workers in war-provisioning industries in the form of opportunities for struggle, an offensive character of struggle, and largely successful outcomes. Yet, by the end of the decade, this momentary empowerment had reversed as industrial war-provisioning workers reverted to defensive struggles. What accounts for this pattern? I argue that these shifts are explained by changes in workers' structural bargaining power, rooted in the changing nature of military procurement. More specifically, when military demand was high during the apex of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, the workers leveraged the state's reliance on them for a larger share of the war profits. Yet as these wars continued and U.S. policy shifted, pressing battlefield needs no longer drove military procurement, reducing the military's reliance on these workers' products and amounting to a disempowerment redux.

War and workers in the United States

By the turn of the twenty-first century, declining labor militancy, falling union densities, shrinking real wages, and growing job insecurity led to a growing sense of labor in crisis (e.g. Bluestone & Harrison, 1982; Eisenscher, 2002; Griffin, McCammon, & Botsko, 1990; Western, 1995). In recent decades, the struggles by industrial workers that have occurred in the United States have been largely defensive in character. "Deindustrialization" and "outsourcing" have caused

mass layoffs in industrial manufacturing in the Global North as productive capital relocated to cheaper locales in the Global South (Bluestone & Harrison, 1982; Harvey, 2001; Silver, 2003). Some have described this as a global "race to the bottom" as workers compete for jobs with ever lower wages (Godfrey, 1986; Mazur, 2000; Western, 1995). Even scholars who contested the global "race to the bottom" thesis recognized the "unmaking" of the industrial working class in the Global North (Silver, 2003).

At the same time, in a bid to overcome the "Vietnam syndrome," the U.S. government attempted to reduce the number of citizens involved in warfare by embracing more capital-intensive technologies, investing in special operations troops, and shunning mobilization of citizen-soldiers that characterized warfare since the industrial revolution. This "revolution in military affairs" (e.g., Bitzinger, 2008) coincided with the emergence of "new wars" (Kaldor, 1999) and a "new imperialism" (Harvey, 2003). In the decades of war that have followed these transformations, scholars and critics of the military-industrial complex have examined in detail some of the major changes to war-making and their political-economic impacts. Transformations in the organization of warfare including the end of the draft, an increase in use of "private military contractors," the emergence of "smart" bombs and drones, and the costs (both human and economic) have been the subject of much discussion (e.g. Bacevich, 2016; Dower, 2017; Garrett-Peltier, 2014; Hartung, 2011; Savell, 2018; Singer, 2008). A growing consensus has emerged that twenty-first century wars are being waged with a dramatic reduction in input from and reliance on the citizenry (see, especially, Bacevich, 2016).

Given these transformations in the organizations of production and war-making, it is thus not surprising that the existing literature emphasizes the ways in which twenty-first century wars have a disempowering—or even repressive—effect on workers and citizens (e.g. Cowen, 2007;

Lafer, 2004; Ness, 2002). This amounts to a significant change from the twentieth century relationship between war and workers, in which wars were widely understood to have enhanced the bargaining power of workers. For example, the preparation for and waging of the world wars and the wars in Korea and Vietnam yielded an increase in domestic production, tighter labor markets, higher wages, and a rise in union membership (Dubofsky & McCartin, 2017: 279). Many argue that these wars were an important cause of declining inequality within the United States and that they catalyzed the growth of the U.S. welfare state and the advance of civil rights (Mettler, 2005; Parker, 2009; Piketty, 2014; Silver, 2003). These wars were associated with increased citizenship rights and benefits, as workers and citizens used their state's war-time reliance on them to steadily increase their strength (Silver 2003, 2015; Tilly, 1992, 1995).

In fact, Beverly Silver identifies cycles of struggle between workers, states, and capital which correspond to broader geopolitical transformations over the course of historical capitalism (Silver & Slater, 1999). By the advent of the First World War, states had become dependent upon workers for war-making, not only as soldiers (as Tilly, 1992, explains in detail), but also as *producers of war-time commodities* ranging from arms to textiles. Silver argues that this dependence constituted a major increase in the bargaining power of the working class. Workers used this bargaining power as a means of demanding new rights and protections in the form of a social compact with states and capital. Following each of the two World Wars, labor unrest peaked globally. Silver explains that "beneath the volatility of labour unrest was an important longer-term trend… the strengthening of workers' bargaining power vis-à-vis their governments" (2015, 24). Workers leveraged this strength for an increase in welfare provisions and socialization of the state. Ultimately, the enhanced bargaining power that the war-time demand had yielded to workers around the world forced a new norm of tripartite relations.

To understand the changing character of workers' struggles over time, Silver develops the concepts of workers' "associational" and "structural" bargaining power (Silver, 2003; cf. Wright, 2000). The former refers to power resulting from collective organization (for example, in unions or parties). The latter refers to workers' power which is accrued from their position in the economic system and is disaggregated into "marketplace bargaining power" (which results directly from tight labor markets) and "workplace bargaining power" (which results from the strategic location of a particular group of workers within commodity chains).

One source of war-provisioning workers' marketplace bargaining power is the state's demand for the goods they produce. Widely understood factors—such as labor market trends, changes in the organization in production, and outsourcing—play a key role in the empowerment and disempowerment of these workers. In addition, this paper distinguishes between demand that arises from large (and growing) military procurement budgets and the *use-value* of the products being procured. For war-provisioning workers during wartime, it is not simply the market demand for the goods being produced, but the *urgent reliance* on their continued supply that leads to empowerment. As we will see, changes in the uses of these commodities—largely as the result of shifting military strategy—have critical effects on these workers' marketplace bargaining power. But, in order to explain such changes in power, one must identify them. For that, we turn to workers struggles at the point of production.

War-provisioning workers' struggles

In this section, I use data on work stoppages from the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) and contemporaneous newspaper reports to investigate workers' struggles in war-provisioning

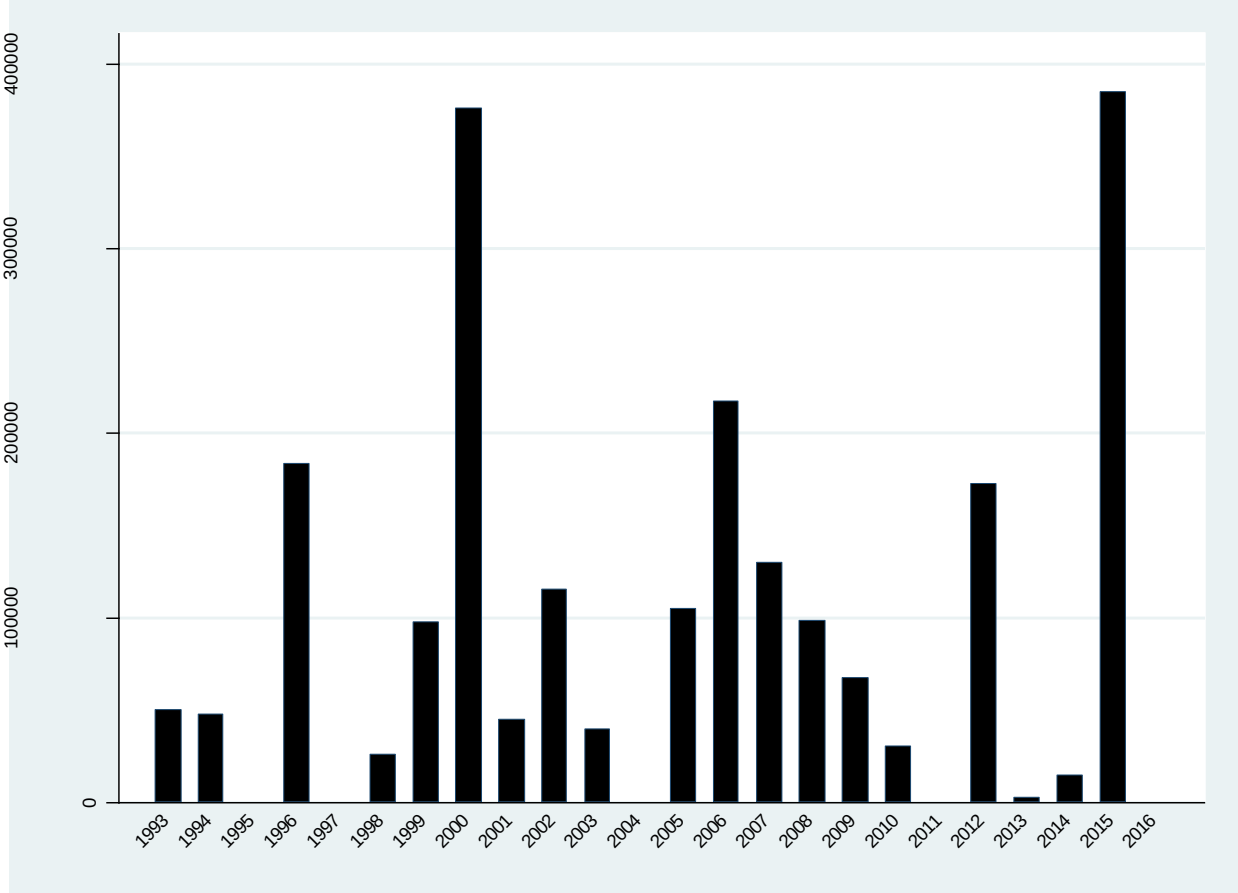
manufacturing industries. I find that workers in war-provisioning industries were empowered at the point of production by the initial years of the U.S. wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. This heightened bargaining power is indicated by the opportunities for struggle, the offensive character of those struggles, and their largely successful outcomes.

The BLS has compiled detailed information on all work stoppages (consisting of at least 1000 workers) at the firm level between 1993 and 2016. I have identified all recorded work stoppages in war-provisioning industries, which include all manufacturing firms for war planes, ships, and weapons systems.[1] Because data is reported at the firm level with information about specific facilities, I am able to categorize work stoppages even within the same firm (for example, by determining if a striking Boeing plant produces civilian or military aircraft). A complete list of the included work stoppages can be found in Table 1.

Figure 1 presents the working days lost from work stoppages in war-provisioning industries. There is a clear pattern of work stoppages in the war-provisioning industries with two peaks, in 2000 and 2015, each approaching 400,000 working days lost. Although there is a significant reduction in work stoppages between 2001 and 2004, there is a resurgence in 2005 to 2009 and then again in 2012 and 2015.

[1] Allegheny Technologies, Inc. (ATI), is included in this review despite not *directly* producing war planes, ships, or weapons systems. ATI is a specialty metals firm responsible for supplying aerospace and defense production. According to filings with the Securities and Exchange Commission, over 50% of ATI's total sales are in aerospace and defense (Allegheny Technologies, 2017). As such, work stoppages at ATI are included in this paper.

Figure 1: Working days lost from work stoppages, war-provisioning industries, 1993-2016 (Source: BLS)



I use the work stoppages identified by the BLS as a guide to analyze newspaper accounts of these capital-labor conflicts in war-provisioning industries. I find that conflicts in war-provisioning industries saw a shift to an offensive character following the outbreak of war in 2003. Yet, by 2008, these struggles revert to a defensive character. In using "defensive" and "offensive" to describe the character of struggles, I build from a large tradition of literature in social protest studies (e.g. Hung, 2011; Silver, 2003; Tilly, 1978). For my purposes, offensive struggles are characterized by demands for increases in wages or benefits, while defensive struggles are characterized by demands against the reduction or elimination of wages or benefits and against outsourcing, automation, or other labor-reducing changes to the production process.

Table 1: Work-stoppages in war-provisioning industries, 1993-2016 (Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics, n.d.)

Year	Company	State(s)	Union	Workdays lost	Mostly offensive?
1993	Douglas Aircraft	CA	IAM	13600	
1993	Allied Signal	VA	IBT	36800	
1994	General Dynamics	MI, OH, PA	UAW	48000	
1996	Pemco Aeroplex	AL	UAW	183700	
1998	Honeywell	MN	IBT	26000	
1999	Ingalls Shipbuilding	MS	MTC	98000	✓
2000	Lockheed Martin	TX	IAM	29900	
2000	Raytheon	MA	IBEW	77500	
2000	Bath Iron Works	ME	IAM	182400	
2000	Olin	IL	IAM	86400	
2001	Pratt and Whitney	CT	IAM	45000	
2002	Lockheed Martin	GA, MS, WV	IAM	101500	
2003	Lockheed Martin	TX	IAM	40000	✓
2005	Lockheed Martin	GA	IAM	18000	✓
2005	Boeing	CA, FL, AL	IAM	87200	✓
2006	Sikorsky Aircraft	CT, FL	IBT	108000	✓
2006	Bombardier Learjet	KS	IAM	16500	✓
2006	Raytheon	AZ	IAM	93100	✓
2007	Northrop Grumman	MS	IBEW	130000	✓
2008	Hawker Beechcraft	KS	IAM	98800	✓
2009	Bell Helicopter Textron	TX	UAW	67500	
2010	Boeing	CA	UAW	30600	
2012	Lockheed Martin	TX	IAM	172800	
2013	Bell Helicopter Textron	TX	UAW	2600	
2014	Army Fleet Support	AL	IAM	15000	
2015	Allegheny Technologies	OH, PA, WV	USS	281600	
2015	Consolidated Nuclear Security	TX	OPEIU	28800	
2015	Allegheny Technologies	OH, PA, WV	USW	74800	

The work stoppages themselves thus become sites of observation for broad and inter-related social processes. In the most basic sense, these work stoppages are cases of labor-capital conflict and, given these cases' theorized importance to the national economic and security interest, are instances through which one can observe the changing tripartite relationship between capital, labor, and the state. As such, I am using the offensive or defensive character of these conflicts as proxies for understanding relatively high and relatively low workers' structural

bargaining power in these industries. While such an operationalization is imperfect, it can be useful in identifying both change over time within a single industry.

Defensive struggles in the 'inter-war' period

The struggles of workers in war-provisioning industries in the 1990s share many characteristics with the well-known story of industrial workers' disempowerment in the last decades of the twentieth century. The work stoppages during the "inter-war period" between the end of the 1990-91 Gulf War and the start of the twenty-first century wars, for example, were primarily characterized by defensive struggles of war-provisioning workers, fighting against layoffs and restructuring, driven by relatively lower profit margins by defense firms and weapons manufacturers during a period of relative peace. With the expansion of the military-industrial complex following the attacks of September 11, 2001 and the ramp up to the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, we see a shift in war-provisioning workers' conflicts. While before the outbreak of war, these workers were waging defensive struggles against outsourcing, deskilling, and layoffs, the struggles from 2003 to 2009 are more offensive in nature, pursuing increased wages, better healthcare, and a fairer share of the war-profits.

While there were few strikes in war provisioning industries in the 1990s, those that did occur were mostly defensive in character: for example, a 1996 strike at Pemco Aeroplex broke out over organizational changes that would have set the stage for layoffs (Aerospace Workers, 1996). It was in 2000 that the first major wave of struggles occurred. That April, Lockheed Martin machinists struck as their regular contract ended; their primary demand was for wage increases. But the strike happened in the context of falling profits for the defense contractor in the late 1990s. Particularly hard-hit was the company's F-16 division, as demand in the U.S. plummeted.

Lockheed had been able to find some foreign government buyers but the lack of a war-time stimulus at home caused reductions. Between January 2000 and April 2000, Lockheed had laid off about 500 workers (Lockheed workers, 2000). The strike ended with lackluster raises and union capitulation on healthcare and pensions.

Workers also struck at Raytheon that year. The Massachusetts factories of Raytheon were well-known for their production of the Patriot missiles, which had largely been credited with the U.S. victory in the 1991 Gulf War (Raytheon workers, 2000). The defense firm was based in Massachusetts and had recently received tax breaks to keep manufacturing jobs there—yet Raytheon still had been steadily shifting jobs from the state to cheaper locales in the west. The company deployed a massive private security force to suppress the strikers and the five-week picket was characterized by reports of brutality from these forces towards the strikers (Leonard, 2000). Even more telling, the largest strike of this wave was at the Bath Iron Works, which was a subsidiary of defense firm General Dynamics. The Iron Works were only one of two shipyards responsible for constructing the Navy's advanced destroyers and produced about two ships per year. Thus, the months-long strike of nearly 5,000 workers was far more disruptive to the company and to the Navy than the others in this period. Despite this, the demands were still defensive: Although the company had not yet announced layoffs, the workers were concerned with a new proposal to cross-train the workers. Such cross-training, the workers argued, was a process of deskilling and a precursor to layoffs (Maine Shipyard, 2000).

Offensive struggles and the Iraq war

These work stoppages in the 1990s (through 2002) are characterized by defensive struggles like those that are generally accepted to have characterized other industries in this period. Yet,

starting in 2003, struggles became more offensive in nature, pursuing increased wages, better healthcare, and a fairer share of the war-profits. A 2003 strike at the same Lockheed Martin plant (still producing F-16 fighters) in Fort Worth illustrates this shift. The strikers fought for increased healthcare and wages, as opposed to the earlier struggle, in which the strikers fought against layoffs (Contract Ends, 2003). What's more, as one strike captain told local news: "We have foregone a lot of raises over the last few contracts because our company had not been in a good position…But this year we absolutely are in a different position—there are record profits at Lockheed Martin. We are asking for a fair contract" (Blau, 2003). This points not only to a shift towards offensive struggles, but also to a sense of injustice—the outbreak of war had created soaring profits for defense firms like Lockheed, and the workers wanted a larger share.

Comparable offensive struggles occurred in the following years. In 2005, a 92-day strike at Boeing over health premiums disrupted the company's Delta rocket program and delayed the launching of Boeing-made satellites (Fleishauer, 2005; Galvin, 2006). At Bombardier's Learjet facility in Wichita, workers rejected a contract from the firm against the recommendation of their union leadership, saying that the proposed wage increases were not enough (Strike at Learjet, 2006). One worker noted that "We're tired of being lied to, told one thing and doing another…I wanted more. They preach world-class company, but they didn't pay us world-class" (Galer, 2006). At the time, it had been four years since the last wage increase. Union officials acknowledged that "three years ago, workers accepted wage freezes and other concessions because Bombardier needed to cut costs," but now workers were inclined to fight (Galer, 2006). The strike concluded with a win for the workers at a total 11 percent increase in pay and caps on health care premiums (International Association of Machinists, 2006).

A Raytheon missile facility in Arizona faced similar circumstances: while the company offered a nine-percent increase in wages, workers decided that it was not enough to offset the rising cost of healthcare. After deciding not to strike in a prior contract dispute in 2003 that resulted in a lackluster deal for the workers, the union was ready to go on the offensive in 2006. Said one worker: "They're making a lot of money off us, and all we want is a little respect." Another said that recently "the company made big profits, and what they're showing with this contract is they don't want to give any of that profit to us" (Stauffer, 2006). After a 70-day strike, the workers won additional bonuses to offset healthcare costs (Raytheon strike, 2007). Other examples abound: Workers striking for better healthcare at Sikorsky aircraft plants in 2006 delayed helicopters which were bound for Iraq and Afghanistan and acknowledged this as source of their power: "They do depend on our aircraft," one striker said, "but it's not our fault that we're out here" (Cowan, 2006).

Defensive struggles redux

These offensive struggles during the initial years of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan eventually gave way to renewed defensive struggles. For example, in 2009, unionized workers at military helicopter manufacture Bell Textron went on strike over proposed increases to healthcare costs and the elimination of unionized custodial positions (Huber, 2009). In 2010, workers at a Boeing plant constructing C-17s walked out over proposed cuts to pensions and increases to healthcare costs. Boeing's harder line came as the U.S. military stopped buying C-17s and international sales became the primary revenue stream (Hennigan & Olivarez-Giles, 2010).

Other defensive struggles in these years abound: A 2012 contract negotiation at Lockheed Martin's F-35 fighter jet production plant resulted in a strike when the company attempted to eliminate the workers' pensions, reportedly at the urging of the U.S. Department of Defense

(Shalal-Esa, 2012). In the previous contract negotiations, the union had agreed to give up medical benefits for retired workers. Despite high profits and the expectation of expanded production on the project, the workers were eventually forced to accept the elimination of pensions for new hires (Drew, 2012). Helicopter mechanics at Fort Rucker in Alabama went on strike in April 2014 over "working conditions, eroding seniority rights and overtime procedures" (Gore, 2014). Despite military officials stating that "this dispute is impacting our ability to train aviators," five months after the strike ended, the company began to lay off workers (Griffin, 2014). The company—Army Fleet Support—listed "recent decreases" in the military's helicopter use as the pretext for the layoffs. Similarly, workers at the Consolidated Nuclear Security Panex plant—which is the "only facility in the U.S. responsible for the assembly, disassembly and replenishment of the nation's nuclear weapons stockpile"—went on strike in 2015 over the plant's attempts to reduce health coverage and eliminate pensions (Ault & Rashada, 2015).

Empowerment, then disempowerment

After reviewing the struggles of this period, their character, and their outcomes, one can identify a pattern. Prior to the outbreak of the twenty-first century wars, workers in war-provisioning industries were waging defensive struggles and conceding to the demands of capital. The years of 2001-2003 saw a significant reduction in work stoppages by war-provisioning workers (what Stohl, 1980, might call a "rally around the flag" response following the events of September 11, 2001). After the outbreak of the Iraq war in 2003, there was an increase in work stoppages by war-provisioning workers. These work stoppages were different in character from the earlier wave: demands were now offensive; workers wanted a fairer share of the new war-profits. In this wave, workers leveraged their structural position in the war-effort. As the war dragged on, work stoppages continued—but, unlike the wave in the mid-2000s, these struggles

were again defensive in nature. This pattern is clear from the presentation of these work stoppages in Table 1.

Given this pattern, we are left with the following questions: What explains the empowerment of war-provisioning workers between 2003 and 2009? And, even more puzzling, why were these workers disempowered after 2009—notwithstanding the continuation of the U.S. wars in the Greater Middle East? It is to these questions that this paper now turns.

Explaining the pattern: Changing state reliance

In the 1990s, as the military-industrial complex underwent an existential reorganization following the end of the Cold War, profits were low and state demand for war-materials was falling. It is thus not surprising that war-provisioning workers were not shielded from the restructuring and "unmaking" plaguing other industrial workforces. But what explains the pattern of momentarily heightened workers' power at the point of production during the initial years of the war, followed by a reversal by the end of the decade—despite the fact that the wars continued to drag on?

After the invasion of Iraq in 2003, military procurement boomed, stimulating the war-provisioning industry. The materials being produced were necessary for the war-effort in Iraq and Afghanistan. Thus, this increase in procurement, combined with the reliance of the military on these workers for their products, led to a structural empowerment of these workers—who leveraged that power for a larger share of the soaring war profits. The state's reliance on war-provisioning workers from 2003-2009—during which time workers were empowered and engaged

in offensive struggles—is illustrated in part by responses from state officials to work stoppages. For example, in the lengthy 2006 United Technology-owned Sikorsky strike, representatives intervened to end the strike. As *Forbes* reported:

> Connecticut's Congressional delegation sent a letter to union leaders, declaring that they were 'deeply troubled' that the strike has trudged on for over a month—threatening the pipeline of badly-needed Black Hawks and U.S. Navy Seahawks. The letter was, significantly, copied to [the CEO of United Technologies]—who evidently read the writing on the wall: Wartime requirements will render Sikorsky expendable, in favor of contracts with Boeing and Lockheed Martin (Levine, 2006).

Other cases did not require direct intervention, but firms felt the same pressure: for example, the strike at a Georgia Lockheed Martin facility in 2005 threatened to "embarrass" the company as the Air Force's planned testing deadline approached (Lockheed workers, 2005). Of course, the U.S. government did not solely offer a conciliatory approach to workers disrupting war-provisioning. Just as in the twentieth century, state officials pressured and repressed striking workers as often as they pressured capital to acquiesce (see, for examples, Lafer, 2004, 335-339).

Thus, the initial empowerment of war-provisioning workers following the invasion of Iraq was based in a similar relationship to the state that industrial workers in the twentieth century had had. Yet the core differences—notably, the smaller size of the workforce (as a result of automation and subcontracting)—should not be overlooked.[2] While some increased reliance on these workers

[2] On the eve of U.S. entry into World War II in 1941, it is estimated that about 7 million Americans were employed in government-classified "war industries"—estimated at about 11% of the entire U.S. workforce (Felser, 1947). In

was inevitable—changes to the production process had not completely replaced industrial workers—the Bush administration did everything possible to reduce the impact of the war on U.S. worker-citizens. The "Vietnam syndrome" was still a specter haunting Washington. As Bacevich (2016, 224) notes, the Bush administration saw any involvement of the American people as "inconvenient… likely to infringe on their own freedom of action" and "a net liability."

Later, a shift in U.S. strategy with the Obama administration meant a draw down for the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and "pivot" away from the Greater Middle East and towards East Asia. War-provisioning workers continued to produce war-materials, but they were largely not useful in the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan and were instead intended for "great power" conflict with the likes of Russia or China—the lack of a pressing military use-value meant that the state had reduced its reliance on these workers, and their ability to disrupt military operations was significantly diminished. Despite the continued near-monopolization of the market and consistent demand, the changing use-value of these products—no longer pressing battlefield requirements—led to a reduction in workers' marketplace bargaining power. This combined with an expansion in international outsourcing and, in 2011, military spending cuts, to further handicap these workers' structural power.

International outsourcing

When pressing battlefield needs arose, the Bush administration avoided turning to U.S. industrial workers whenever possible. For example, in Iraq, the army found itself struggling to confront the use of "improvised explosive devices" (IEDs). These weapons were inflicting serious

contrast, on the eve of U.S. entry into the Iraq War in 2002, just over 675,000 Americans were employed in war-provisioning industries, as calculated from BLS—or approximately 0.4% of the entire U.S. workforce.

damage on military vehicles. After years of reinforcing the existing Humvees to little success, in 2007 the military developed the "Mine-Resistant, Ambush-Protected vehicle" (MRAP). As Hasik (2016, 2017) shows, these developments—the reinforcement of existing Humvees and the development of new vehicles—required a specialty steel (3/8-inch plate) that was not being produced in great quantities in the U.S.—U.S. firms were only producing about 30,000 tons annually. The U.S. military suddenly required 252,000 tons annually. Instead of mobilizing domestic industry, which the U.S. government had been wont to do in earlier conflicts, the military looked elsewhere—to Russian, Indian, Canadian, Swedish, and Israeli firms—for meeting their demand.

This became standard procurement procedure by the 2010s, when the military's policy states that "where [U.S.-sourced components] are not [necessary for security reasons], the U.S. taxpayer expects…cost-effective procurement, including sourcing from foreign companies…" (Andrews, 2013). This is a far cry from U.S. government policy during the twentieth century wars, which saw laws such as the Buy American Act (expanded in 1941 and 1973) protect U.S. manufacturing—and ensure continued reliance on U.S. war-provisioning workers (Grasso, 2012).

In fact, there are at least fourteen manufacturing categories in which the U.S. military relies heavily on imported minerals or technologies (Adams, 2013). Examples which have garnered the most attention from critics are those that came from potential adversaries of the United States, like China, which was found to have been the sole producer of the propellant found in hellfire missiles—a weapon of choice in the wars in the Greater Middle East. China was also the producer of over 90 percent of all specialty glass which is required for U.S.-made night-vision goggles, a significant portion of the copper-nickel tubing, and nearly the entire supply of both lithium-ion batteries and telecommunications equipment (Andrews, 2013). A disclosure in 2014 showed that

the U.S. military "repeatedly waived laws banning Chinese-built components on U.S. weapons in order to keep the… F-35 fighter program on track" (US put China-made, 2014). Parts made in China were used in the radar system, landing gears, and other hardware. The main component in question was an inexpensive magnet that was also produced by several U.S. companies—but the military procurer said waivers were issued to cut costs and keep the production on track. These findings led politicians to express concern that "American firms are being shut out of the specialty metals market, and that a U.S. weapon system may become dependent on parts made by a potential future adversary" (US put China-made, 2014). Military leaders, such as Ret. General John Adams, point to the "growing reliance on global manufacturing supply chains to fulfill our national defense needs" as a massive threat (Adams, 2015).

The increased reliance on Chinese products and materials has garnered attention because of the potential implications of relying on a geopolitical rival for military goods. Given the recent escalation of tensions between the U.S. and China, such as the clash over Chinese firm Huawei's role in the development of wireless technology that the U.S. government claims is a threat to national security, China's role as a supplier may be undergoing a transformation (Pham, 2019). But Chinese products are far from the only examples of war-materials outsourcing. Reliance on components from allied countries—such as NATO and Japan—has skyrocketed in the past decades (e.g. Adams, 2013).

In short, the expansion of international outsourcing—from both U.S. allies and adversaries—over the course of the twenty-first century amounts to a steady structural disempowerment of war-provisioning workers. Such changes to the production process result in the loosening of labor markets, as the ability to hire workers in other locales grows, and in a weakening of the strategic location of U.S. war-provisioning workers in the commodity chain, as

other sources of commodities are created. This allows the U.S. to continue to wage its "forever wars" in the Greater Middle East while still reducing reliance on U.S. industrial workers. As such, this outsourcing diminishes these workers' structural bargaining power in general over the course of these decades, even as the wars (initially) increased that power.

Use-values and military necessity

The state's demand for war commodities is a significant part of the explanation of the changing character of struggles by workers in the war-provisioning industries. But, as I have just shown, outsourcing circumvents U.S. industrial workers despite continued demand. This highlights the importance of investigating other factors—besides demand, pure and simple—to understand the pattern of struggle in this period. Notably, industrial war-provisioning workers' power is determined not just by the quantity of demand for their products but also by the *use-value* of the commodities produced—especially the extent to which the military relies on their continued supply for pressing battlefield concerns.

The debate over funding for the F-22 combat plane is illustrative. Senator Barney Frank sarcastically noted that the prominent view in Washington was "the government does not create jobs when it funds the building of bridges or important research or retrains workers, but when it builds *airplanes that are never going to be used in combat*, that is of course economic salvation" (quoted in Krugman, 2009, emphasis added). Frank is identifying a key transformation that explains the war-provisioning workers' shift back to defensive struggles around this time: the materials produced by war-provisioning workers in these years are increasingly not used in contemporaneous war-making. This means that the government is not increasing its *reliance* on workers despite continued *demand* for the products.

While the F-22 sparked Frank's cogent remark, the F-35—constructed at the same Ft. Worth Lockheed-Martin plant which experienced a work stoppage in each of the three periods discussed above—is perhaps the best example. The F-35 model—despite being the most technologically advanced in the world—is not destined for combat and, by many estimations, never will be. According to a Pentagon report, it is "not effective and not suitable across the required mission areas and against currently fielded threats" (Grazier & Smithberger, 2016; cf. Ciralsky, 2013). Moreover, despite massive spending on the F-35, procurers have also invested in a different fighter jet—the F-15X—for the sole purpose of stimulating a "robust industrial base" and maintaining "multiple providers in the tactical aircraft portfolio." The defense department thus contracted with both Lockheed-Martin for the F-35 and Boeing for the F-15X—not because the government has a pressing need for either (let alone both) of these fighters, but because such contracting is profitable for weapons manufacturers (Pawlyk, 2019).

The review of workers' struggles above clearly demonstrates the effect of this change on workers' power. In the late 1990s, the F-16s being produced at the Fort Worth plant were largely destined for foreign buyers, thus the workers were not able to leverage their usefulness for U.S. war-making. At this time, their struggles were defensive in nature and resulted in layoffs for workers. After the twenty-first century wars began, these airplanes were destined for combat and thus the workers were able to leverage that reliance into structural empowerment. The 2003 struggle at this same plant was offensive in character and workers demanded a greater share of the war-time profits. Yet, we see a change after this plant begins to produce the F-35: With the government not urgently relying on the production of this airplane—i.e., with a change in the use-value of the commodity—when the same workers struck (defensively) in 2012 over reductions in pensions and healthcare, they lost their struggle. *Despite a near-monopoly on supply and a*

strategic location in the commodity chain, the workers' marketplace bargaining power was eroded as a result of the changing use-value of the commodity being produced.

What we see in the story of this plant is a microcosm for the trends explored in this paper: In the 1990s, the U.S. government was not purchasing the plant's airplanes, so workers did not see in an increase in bargaining power. After the outbreak of war, the government was purchasing—and required—the plant's airplanes, and workers were able to leverage that reliance into a larger share of the war-profits. Finally, in recent years, the plant has begun to construct a new model that is largely unnecessary for current warfare—leading to a reduction in workers' power vis-à-vis the initial years of the war.

The F-35 is one of the most egregious, but far from the only, example of this phenomenon. The Army's new Humvee is currently "not operationally suitable" after years and billions of dollars of development (Whiteman, 2019). The failure of the F-35 and the new Humvee to adequately replace supposedly antiquated military vehicles is matched by the Navy's attack submarines and the Army's Chinook helicopters (Thompson, 2019). Moreover, despite an overwhelming stockpile of six thousand tanks and requests from the army to shift funds elsewhere, Congress continues to demand the production of more (Matthews, 2019).

There are two major causes for this shift in the use-value of war-materials. First is standard pork-barrel politics, as congressional representatives resist cuts directed at their districts—even if the products from the defense-funded manufacturers are largely useless to present military operations (e.g. Hartung, 2011, 2018; Matthews, 2019). Instead of investing in procurement that is required for combat operations—or, more unthinkably, cutting the defense budget—Congressmembers "prefer to protect spending and jobs in their districts. The result is funding for

weapons systems the armed forces don't want, bases and facilities they would like to close, and bloated, inefficient back office—that is, noncombat—operations" (Matthews, 2019).[3] In these cases, the use-value of the war-materials are found in the political gains from their purchase.

Second, and just as importantly, this period saw a shift in U.S. grand military strategy, in which Bush's "Second American Century" was replaced by Obama's "America's Pacific Century"—among other changes, this meant that the conflicts in the Middle East were to take a backseat to rivalry with China. The "pivot" to East Asia coincided with a drawdown in the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and a ramp-up of rivalry with the likes of China and Russia.[4] This was a significant policy shift with ramifications for the military-industrial complex.

As the U.S. turned its gaze from the Middle East to East Asia, a change occurred in the defense industrial base. As Andrew Bacevich (2018) argues, the technology being developed and the products being built in these plants (and by these war-provisioning workers) are designed with great power conflict in mind—not the types of imperial policing actions that characterize the period. In this sense, the use-value of these commodities is as a deterrent—not as an urgent battlefield necessity. The emphasis on advanced technology with no present battlefield use-value

[3] This amounts to "what former defense secretary Robert Gates termed a 'gargantuan, labyrinthine bureaucracy' in the Pentagon, [with] manufacturers and subcontractors for each weapons system carefully distributed across congressional districts and backed by aggressive lobbyists, members of Congress determined to protect constituents' jobs, and military leaders loyal to the weapons systems they trained on and commanded" (Matthews, 2019).

[4] This "pivot" is often dated to 2011, but the shift had been underway since Obama came into office. A better start date is perhaps the "AirSea Battle" memo in 2009 (to become doctrine in 2010), which outlined a strategy for military victory against China (Perry, 2015).

meant that the military was not relying on these workers for urgent delivery of these war-materials—for example, the F-35 production schedule, planned for completion in 2010, had been delayed several times already by 2012, with full production capacity not scheduled until 2019, and less than a fifth of the purchased planes completed (Ciralsky, 2013; Lockheed Martin, 2019). Under this *status quo*, there are no significant repercussions for firms to miss deadlines. As such, incentives to push defense firms to acquiesce to workers' demands significantly diminished, as did war-provisioning workers structural bargaining power at the point of production.

This is a trend that has undoubtedly continued during the Trump administration. Between 2016 and 2019, defense spending has increased over $100 billion. The largest increase has been in the research and development of new, cutting-edge weapons (Thompson, 2019). But, as above, investing in the development of new weaponry delays the production of updated war-materials that could have present battlefield use-values. Procurement expert Loren Thompson (2019) argues:

> [Military] planners have become so enamored of new warfighting technologies that they are spending… on R&D rather than bending metal… All of the new technologies are intriguing, and might help America to stay ahead of Russia and China on future battlefields. But we are skipping a step by not taking advantage of the Trump budget boost to buy more of the weapons we need in the near term to replace an increasingly aged arsenal.

This is an argument that is supported by a RAND report which found increasing complexity and the desire for cutting edge technological advancement as the main source of rising military supply prices (Arena, et al., 2018)—technological complexity that is unsuitable for current U.S. military adversaries with whom asymmetrical combat capabilities already exist. Therefore, although the

Trump administration has dramatically increased defense spending from the Obama years, it is unlikely that we will see a renewed structural empowerment of these industrial war-provisioning workers so long as their products do not have a pressing battlefield use-value.

Conclusion

That war-provisioning workers are militant in the face of dual transformations in the organization of production and in war-making does not, on its own, constitute an interesting finding. Labor scholars have long studied defensive struggles by industrial workers as they face assaults on their livelihoods from capital. Instead, it is the wave of offensive struggles waged by these workers during the height of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan (between 2003 and 2009) and the subsequent reversion to defensive struggles that are the most striking findings of this study. I have argued that the offensive wave is indicative of an increase in the structural bargaining power of these workers, as the result of the growth in state reliance on war-materials provisioning during wartime. I have also shown that the disempowerment of these workers after 2009—despite the continuation of U.S. "forever wars"—can be attributed to the expansion of outsourcing and the shifting use-value of the commodities produced by these workers.[5]

[5] The same reorganization of war-making that has allowed the unrestricted expansion of the U.S. "forever wars" in the Greater Middle East has resulted in a reduction in reliance on workers who produced commodities such as manned vehicles (like Humvees, transport, and fighter planes), night vision goggles, body armor, and small ammunition. These changes reduced the number of "boots on the ground" through, for example, the substitution of capital-intensive technologies, such as unmanned drones. In this sense, it is possible that the recent disempowerment of the war-provisioning workers reviewed in this paper was complemented by an empowerment of an even smaller niche of

Moreover, this paper has demonstrated the ways in which foreign policy and military strategy has tangible effects on the structural bargaining power of workers. As antidote to Bush's "Project for a New American Century," the Obama administration began to "pivot" away from the "hot" wars in the Greater Middle East and towards the "cold" conflicts in East Asia. This pivot meant the use-value of these war-materials changed—with the reduction in urgent reliance on these products to wage war, the ability of these workers to disrupt military operations diminished. The recent emphasis on development and production of war-materials designed for a future "great power" conflict with the likes of Russia or China has amounted to a reduction in pressing reliance on the commodities produced by war-provisioning workers and, as a result, their disempowerment.

The effects of the Trump administration's military strategy on war-provisioning workers, from this perspective, are mixed. Trump has rejected the "pivot" to East Asia in the diplomatic sense, but has nonetheless escalated tensions with China and, perhaps, with the help of the Democrats, Russia. As explained above, this has meant the largest portions of the Trump military spending increases have gone towards research and development of technologies designed for "great power" conflict. So long as such conflict remains "cold," then we will likely not see a renewed increase in these workers' structural bargaining power. At the same time, the Trump administration has surrounded himself with hawks eager to escalate imperial "policing" wars in the Greater Middle East and beyond. Throughout his term, war with North Korea, Venezuela, or Iran has, at times, seemed imminent. It is likely that any significant expansion of military operations would put pressure on defense firms to deliver war-materials. Either escalation—in

workers involved in the production of technologies like drones—but this question is beyond the scope of this paper, as no workers at such production plants engaged in work stoppages during the period under consideration.

great power conflict or in imperial policing—would (at least temporarily) increase these workers' structural bargaining power.

But the broader transformations in the organization of production and in war-making cut two ways. As the state relies less and less on the working class to wage war, the U.S. military is given greater freedom of movement—just as the Bush administration intended. But these same transformations have resulted in a smaller segment of the U.S. working class dependent on the military-industrial complex for their livelihoods. While in previous periods, the welfare and power of the U.S. working class as a whole was linked to U.S. war-making, the present juncture may provide opportunities for workers to find more stable sources of empowerment. Such a delinking from the military-industrial complex would not only provide emancipation from the ephemeral empowerment yielded by war-making but would also begin the process of disentangling the material interests of the U.S. working class from death and destruction of U.S. empire.

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