Pluralism and the Power Elite

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In the Boston Globe's article entitled "Senator secures extended production of F-15 jets" author Dan Morgan describes the political process and key issues surrounding the proposed policy of Senator Christopher Bond. The key political elements of this issue are only fully realized when they are seen through the lens of a political theory. Thus, for this purpose one must deduce what political theory fits the paradigm of events most accurately and therefore explains what truly is going on. Two very distinctly different, almost diametrically opposed, theories can be used to describe this political process, one having a focus on the people in the highest positions of power, the other focusing on the various organizations that are lead by the masses.

C. Wright Mills is the major proponent of what he calls the "Power Elite". His theory essentially says that all decisions and subsequent policies that are created are derived from the upper echelon of society which operates out of three different spheres of the populace: the Economic sphere, the Political sphere; and the Military sphere (Mills, 8). First, in order to understand each of these spheres, one must first have a clear definition of what an "elite" really is, or more specifically what C. Wright Mills is referring to when he uses this term. Mills, in this instance is defining the term "elite" as being those individuals that hold the highest places of office, the highest ranks in the military, and those with the largest corporations. These are individuals with high educational status, generally tending to come from wealthy families, and have many friends in other high offices. Mills also explains that it is often through their means of acquiring their positions that many of these individuals meet other soon-to-be elites from the one of the other three branches. As Mills eloquently puts it, these elites are "members of a top social stratum, as a set of groups whose members know one another, see one another socially and at business, and so, in making decisions, take one another into account" (Mills, 11).

Mills further explains that each of these branches work together to form the policies that the citizens are effected by at the local, state, and federal levels of government. However, these three groups are not necessarily working together for nothing. Much to the opposite, each group needs something from the other

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groups. The Economic group of elites needs the help of the Military elites by way of their continued patronage of weapons and materials which keep the Economic elites wealthy and in power. Furthermore, the Military Elites need the Political elites to provide them with governmental policies and initiatives which allow for the purchases of new weaponry and the like (Mills, 9). Further still, the theory continues by explaining that it is the proverbial "iron triangle" (i.e. the connection that each of these groups share with one another) that re-enforces and provides the ultimate source of power for the elites in each group, and as a whole (Lecture 9/2). It is in this shared control that the "Power Elites" maintain their dominance over the policies that are created within the United States (Mills, 10).

On the other hand, David Truman, a major proponent of the theory of Pluralism, focuses his explanation on the various interest groups and other institutions that attain power through majority rule. Truman contends that power in the United States is ostensibly dictated by the people, by and through their respective interest groups. In this instance, Truman defines the term "interest group" as being a body of people that has formed through a collective and cohesive way of thinking about a very specific topic (Lecture 9/2). Truman further argues that interest groups are formed as a product of democracy, in that because there are very few mediums that people can individually get their point projected, society eventually forms pockets of interests and these pockets advocate at a much stronger level. This essentially means that although people at the individual level have a very hard time accomplishing much in a democratic government, groups of people with a common interest can achieve almost anything if they can get enough people in their group.

Herein lie the fundamental differences between the two theories, and where the instant policy decision needs to be examined the most. The "Power Elite" theory focuses on a very small, finite group of people with an incredible amount of *individual power,* whereas Pluralist theory suggests power is delegated to an expansive amount of people, through the actions of a cohesive group, with very limited power in individuals, but a much greater power in the people as a whole.

Therefore, the pertinent question that needs to be asked is: was this policy created as an act of the Power Elite (certain individuals) or by way of the interest groups (the extensive will of the people)? A review of the events described in the article would seem to suggest the former for at least three reasons concomitantly: 1. The key players involved; 2. The main focus or product of the policy; and 3. The inherent reasons for the policy itself.

The key players involved in the production of this policy are, in fact, the highest ranking officials of economics, politics, and military. For the economic branch of the triangle, Boeing Co. as well as Lockheed Martin Corp. are the "Power Elites" that have their hand in the decision making of this policy. In this particular policy there are competing interests in the economic branch, one company taking the side of the Political branch, the other taking the side of the Military branch. As for