

# The Clintons, the Doles and the Dubai port deal: political duplicity and class interest

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While Senator Hillary Clinton, Democrat of New York, was attacking the Bush administration over the Dubai ports deal, her husband Bill was advising United Arab Emirates officials on how best to smooth over the controversy and push the deal through.

The role played by the former Democratic president in coaching the state-owned Dubai Ports World on how best to navigate the political waters that his wife was helping to roil in Washington was first reported by the *Financial Times* on Thursday.

The report was quickly picked up by the US broadcast and print media, which focuses on Hillary Clinton both for her celebrity status and her position as a leading candidate for the Democratic presidential nomination in 2008. It was also seized upon by sections of the Republican right as further fodder for their long crusade to portray the Clintons as uniquely lacking in political or personal morals.

Certainly the story reeks of political duplicity and avarice. Hillary Clinton, like a number of other leading Democrats, welcomed the furor over the ports deal as an opportunity to attack Bush from the right, portraying the Republican administration as weak on national security and lax in prosecuting the “war on terror.” The entire premise of this campaign is that the Dubai firm, the third largest ports operator in the world, is Arab-owned. It is a cynical attempt to whip up the anti-Arab chauvinism and fear that have been stoked by the administration and turn it against the White House itself.

She joined with several fellow Democrats in introducing legislation that would ban companies owned by foreign governments from running US ports and effectively kill the deal with Dubai Ports World. “In a post-9/11 world, we cannot afford to surrender our port operations to foreign governments,” Clinton

said in a statement. “Port security is national security and national security is port security.”

She welcomed the company’s agreement to accept a 45-day period of investigation as a first step towards stopping the transaction.

According to the *Financial Times* account, however, Dubai Ports World’s decision to voluntarily submit to the probe was taken on the advice of Bill Clinton as a means of clearing the air so that the deal could go through.

According to right-wing columnist Robert Novak, Clinton suggested that the Dubai officials hire his former White House press secretary Joe Lockhart to run public relations interference on the deal. Lockhart, who still works closely with Clinton, said he had turned down the offer.

Bill Clinton’s relations with the UAE are longstanding and lucrative. In 2002, he was paid \$300,000 to address a conference in the emirate and received \$450,000 for a more recent speech. The UAE has reportedly donated between half a million and a million dollars to the Clinton presidential library.

In a further connection, published reports indicate that Clinton may have brokered a partnership deal between a Dubai government-owned financial company and the private investment firm of Democratic fundraiser Ron Burkle. Clinton is a paid member of the board of directors of the company, Yucaipa.

Clinton has reciprocated by describing the dynastic regime in the UAE, where political parties are banned and the bulk of the population is made up of foreign laborers who enjoy no rights, as a “role model” for the Middle East and a “critical ally in the war on terror.”

Hillary Clinton maintained that she and her husband never discussed his contacts with the UAE and insisted that he “supports my position, a position that is rooted

in legitimate concerns about security.”

The contradiction between Hillary Clinton’s public outrage over the sale of the port operating company to Dubai and her husband’s close political and financial dealings with the Arab emirate is politically damning, but hardly unique.

Far more direct and profitable relations have been forged with the UAE over the Dubai ports deal by Clinton’s Republican opponent in the 1996 election, Bob Dole. The former Republican candidate’s wife, Elizabeth, is also a US senator, a Republican from North Carolina. She has declared that she has “serious concerns” about the port deal.

Bob Dole, a former Senate majority leader, is a partner in the law firm that played the key role in steering the Dubai deal through the federal bureaucracy, and has recently signed on as a paid lobbyist for Dubai. Elizabeth Dole, like Hillary Clinton, claims that she and her husband have never discussed the Dubai deal.

Also aiding the Dubai port company is the lobbying firm of Clinton’s former secretary of state, Madeleine Albright.

The Bush family’s own ties to the Emirates are longstanding and intimate. The Carlyle Group, the private equity firm that employed both Bush and his father, as well as a number of other former top Republican officials, has profited off of hundreds of millions of dollars in investments from a UAE state-owned investment firm. The president’s brother, Neil Bush, has forged his own lucrative connections with the UAE, making regular visits to Dubai and reportedly raising some \$23 million in state investments for his educational software company, Ignite.

In the context of these widespread and intimate financial connections between senior officials—including the past presidential candidates of both major political parties—and Dubai, the past two weeks of orchestrated political furor over the ports deal takes on a particularly seedy and sinister light.

A cynic might look at the Clintons and the Doles and say that what is involved is a form of family protection racket. The wives speak out publicly from the floor of the US Senate, warning of “security concerns” over the Dubai port deal, and thereby raising the cash value of the services their husbands perform privately for the emirs.

What is revealed here is the political life of a corrupt and reactionary oligarchy that controls the state and runs it for its own benefit. The leading political figures are either drawn directly from this ruling elite or rapidly elevated into it, making policy that benefits themselves and the fellow multi-millionaires and billionaires they represent.

These operations are largely hidden from the people, who are excluded from political power. The political establishment, unable to generate popular support for a system dedicated to enriching the top 1 percent, seeks to manipulate public opinion through lies and fear.

The ports deal has lifted the lid on the fraud that has been perpetrated upon the American people for nearly five years under the banner of the “war on terror.” The claim is that all of the government’s actions—wars of aggression abroad and attacks on democratic rights at home—are motivated by an overarching concern for the security of the public. On the contrary, the way in which this deal was pushed through and the role of senior figures of both parties in facilitating it demonstrate that the real driving force is private profit.



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