

A USER'S GUIDE TO THE CRISIS OF CIVILIZATION

And How to Save It

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PlutoPress
www.plutobooks.com

First published 2010 by Pluto Press
345 Archway Road, London N6 5AA and
175 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10010

www.plutobooks.com

Distributed in the United States of America exclusively by
Palgrave Macmillan, a division of St. Martin's Press LLC,
175 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10010

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British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN 978 0 7453 3054 9 Hardback
ISBN 978 0 7453 3053 2 Paperback

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data applied for

This book is printed on paper suitable for recycling and made from fully managed
and sustained forest sources. Logging, pulping and manufacturing processes
are expected to conform to the environmental standards of the country of origin.

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Designed and produced for Pluto Press by
Chase Publishing Services Ltd, 33 Livonia Road, Sidmouth, EX10 9JB, England
Typeset from disk by Stanford DTP Services, Northampton, England
Printed and bound in the European Union by
CPI Antony Rowe, Chippenham and Eastbourne

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At first glance, the idea that international terrorism is somehow directly linked to the escalation of the global ecological, energy and economic crises discussed in the preceding chapters seems far-fetched. This chapter shows that the phenomenon cannot be understood without examining at least three intertwining issues: 1) the over-dependence of the global political economy on hydrocarbon energies in service of industrial (and 'post-industrial') capitalist social relations of production, consumption and finance; 2) the function of covert Western military intelligence policies in calibrating low-intensity warfare to control potentially recalcitrant populations in strategic regions, in order to diversify and secure hydrocarbon energy supplies; 3) the function of covert Western military intelligence policies in facilitating criminal activities, particularly drug trafficking, which play an instrumental role in shoring up the global economy. All these issues, further, make no sense without recognizing their deeper context in the structure of the global political economy as hitherto explored, and the immense financial pressures they place on states and their corresponding national security apparatuses to equate 'security' with 'prosperity' – with the latter defined, of course, in rather narrow terms relevant only to an elite minority.

I begin by first establishing the link between geopolitical control of certain strategic regions, and the 'security' of energy supplies for the centres of modern industrial civilization. I then extend this analysis to explore how Western covert operations have often been mobilized to exert this geopolitical control. Unfortunately, these covert operations – which continue today in the Middle East and Central Asia – have facilitated the activities of interconnected extremist, terrorist and criminal networks worldwide. In the context of escalating global crises, which may have amplifying effects on both the use of covert action and the scope of terrorist activity, this all has profoundly destabilizing implications for international security.

HYDROCARBON OVER-DEPENDENCE

National Security and Resource Control: The Making of Foreign Policy

The convergence of the preceding four global crises represents an imminent and catastrophic threat to the national security of all countries, and the human security of communities everywhere, far outweighing the threat currently posed by international terrorism. Yet despite this, government defence expenditures are overwhelmingly focused on fighting a 'War on Terror', in which the threat of international terrorism inspired by Islamist extremism is believed to be a

danger to Western civilization, thus requiring the establishment of new and comprehensive security architectures in far-flung strategic regions, as well as at home in the form of intensified community policing and surveillance. Comparatively, government expenditures on preventing or mitigating dangerous global warming, preparing for peak oil, transforming global food production, and restructuring the neoliberal economic system represent a tiny fraction of the sums invested in sustaining a permanent state of global warfare.

Yet the threat of international terrorism is, like these other global crises, also tied to the very structure of the global political economy. Indeed, it is integral to over-dependence on hydrocarbon energy, particularly petroleum. This systemic over-dependence has led to the evolution of a very specific type of Western foreign policy strategy designed to maintain a monopoly over the world's resources.

In general, US and UK foreign policies have been guided by principles described in the 1940s in a series of planning documents of the War and Peace Studies Project, a joint initiative of the US Department of State and the Council on Foreign Relations. US policy planners, preparing for the reconstruction of world order after the Second World War, identified a minimum 'world area', control of which was deemed to be 'essential for the security and economic prosperity of the United States and the Western Hemisphere'. The US aimed 'to secure the limitation of any exercise of sovereignty by foreign nations that constitutes a threat' to this world area, which included the entire Western Hemisphere, the former British Empire and the Far East. This objective was premised on 'an integrated policy to achieve military and economic supremacy for the United States'. So the concept of 'security interests' was extended beyond traditional notions of territorial integrity to include domination of regions considered 'strategically necessary for world control'. State Department planners, recognizing that 'the British Empire as it existed in the past will never reappear', candidly argued that 'the United States may have to take its place'. 'Grand Area' planning, as it was then known, aimed to fulfil the 'requirement[s] of the United States in a world in which it proposes to hold unquestioned power'. Meanwhile, Britain would be brought in as a 'junior partner', within the 'orbit' of American control.¹

This underlying framework of concepts, despite important variations and evolution over time, has remained fundamentally constant throughout the postwar period, as evidenced by a series of unclassified documents from the Office of the Secretary of Defense dating from the early to late 1990s. A consistent theme of these documents is that the US should maintain global 'pre-eminence'.² This entails ensuring that other powers recognize the established unipolar order, and do not seek to increase their power in the international system. Thus, a 'first objective is to prevent the re-emergence of a new rival' to US global pre-eminence, by working 'to establish and protect a new order that holds the promise of convincing potential competitors that they need not aspire to a greater role or pursue a more aggressive posture to protect their legitimate interests'. This world order must 'account sufficiently for the interests of the advanced industrial nations to discourage them from

seeking to overturn the established political and economic order' under US hegemony. In particular, this means the US must also 'endeavour to prevent any hostile power from dominating a region whose resources would, under consolidated control, be sufficient to generate global power', these regions including Western Europe, East Asia, the former Soviet Union and the Middle East. It is paramount to maintain 'the sense that the world order is ultimately backed by the US'.³

This strategic framework has, then, obvious implications for specific regions, the Middle East being one where the US seeks 'to prevent any hostile power from dominating', and whose resources might 'generate global power'. The principal interest in the region, of course, is oil, the first reserves of which were discovered by the British in Persia in 1908. The UK controlled most Middle East oil until the end of the Second World War, after which the US secured its sphere of influence in Saudi Arabia.⁴ Although this led to significant US-UK tension, it was eventually resolved through British compliance with American primacy, expressed in 1945 by US planners in the form of a joint approach with the UK:

[O]ur petroleum policy towards the United Kingdom is predicated on a mutual recognition of a very extensive joint interest and upon control, at least for the moment, of the great bulk of the free petroleum resources of the world... US-UK agreement upon the broad, forward-looking pattern for the development and utilisation of petroleum resources under the control of nationals of the two countries is of the highest strategic and commercial importance.⁵

In 1947, policy planners stated that the US should 'seek the removal or modification of existent barriers to the expansion of American foreign oil operations' and 'promote... the entry of additional American firms into all phases of foreign oil operations'.⁶ By 1953, the US National Security Council stated the US position as follows: 'United States policy is to keep the sources of oil in the Middle East in American hands.'⁷

It is precisely in this context that Anglo-American policy has tended to ally itself with the most authoritarian regimes in the region to maintain the supply of petroleum to the West as cheaply as possible, aided by the willingness of these regimes to control their societies through force and coercion. Thus, secret British Foreign Office documents confirm that the Gulf sheikhdoms were largely created by the British to 'retain our influence' in the Middle East. This required not only protection from external threats, but also from internal overthrow. Hence, Britain had to 'counter hostile influence and propaganda within the countries themselves'. Police and military training would help in 'maintaining internal security'. Similarly, US foreign policy planners concurred that Anglo-American regional interests would be preserved by countering challenges 'to traditional control in the area', to sustain the 'fundamental authority of the ruling groups'.⁸

Oil Addiction and National Insecurity

US strategy thus required a policy of sustaining local authoritarian regimes and countering indigenous democratic aspirations, thus maintaining the regional framework of order through which US energy interests would be protected. Yet this has had two principal unintended implications.

Firstly, it has generated entrenched grievances among Middle Eastern populations based on the recognition that official US regional policy has been opposed to genuine democratization in order to guarantee access to cheap petroleum supplies. A 2004 Zogby International poll found that less than 10 per cent of people surveyed in Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates approved of US foreign policy. When asked to indicate their 'first thought' about the United States, the most common response was 'unfair foreign policy'. Yet simultaneously they continued to view US popular culture, science and technology, and the American people in favourable terms.⁹ Grievances about US foreign policy are, however, exploited by the ideology of extremist networks like al-Qaeda to justify their terrorist activity. Osama bin Laden has repeatedly described the authoritarian regimes across the Middle East as illegitimate client states of the West that should be overthrown through violent action. Al-Qaeda ideology attempts to justify terrorism as a form of resistance against the political repression of Muslim populations by these regimes.¹⁰

Secondly, extensive historical and empirical evidence confirms that al-Qaeda terrorist networks have been, and continue to be, covertly sponsored by several key Muslim states in the Middle East and Central Asia, such as Saudi Arabia and the Gulf states, Pakistan, Algeria, Azerbaijan, and Turkey, among others.¹¹ By directly and indirectly sponsoring these regimes, the US is essentially supporting al-Qaeda's state sponsors. Yet this relationship is a direct consequence of the global political economy's over-dependence on oil. In short, industrial civilization's oil addiction has generated a structural entanglement with dictatorial oil-exporting regimes that are cultivating terrorist networks which target the core centres of power in the West. This contradictory policy was candidly described in 2006 by US Navy Commander Thomas D. Kraemer, who has served in the Pentagon for the Director of Naval Intelligence, in a paper published by the US Army War College Strategic Studies Institute:

America is buying billions of dollars of oil from nations that are sponsors of, or allied with, radical Islamists who foment hatred against the United States. The dollars we provide such nations contribute materially to the terrorist threats facing America... In the War on Terror, the United States is financing both sides. While spending billions of dollars on US military efforts in the war, we are sending billions more to nations such as Saudi Arabia... where the cash is used to finance training centers for terrorists, pay bounties to the families of suicide bombers, and fund the purchase of weapons and explosives. Oil revenues in these countries underwrite new media outlets that propagandize hatefully against the United States. They

pay for more than 10,000 radical madrassahs set up around the world to indoctrinate young boys with the idea that the way to paradise is through murderous terror.... Men energized by oil-revenue resources killed 3,000 American civilians on September 11, 2001 (9/11), and continue to kill large numbers of Westerners in Iraq and elsewhere. We are thus subsidizing acts of war against ourselves... America is hamstrung because any forceful action on our part... could result in the disruption of oil supplies that the world economy completely depends on. We cannot stand up to those who support our enemies because we rely upon those supporters for the fuel that is our own lifeblood.¹²

But the precise character of this oil-dependent structural relationship with terrorism does not end there, and in fact has an even more disturbing component which will constitute the main focus of the rest of this chapter. In Central Asia, the Balkans, the Middle East, North Africa, the Asia-Pacific, and the Caucasus, a wealth of government and intelligence sources confirm that militant Islamist networks affiliated to al-Qaeda have been used as mercenaries by Western security agencies in promotion of geostrategic ambitions. The nominal usefulness of al-Qaeda elements for Anglo-American geostrategy has in many cases granted them a temporary operational immunity, permitting them to expand throughout the post-Cold War period. This process began during the Cold War, but contrary to the conventional wisdom *accelerated during the post-Cold War period*, and even continued after 9/11 *until today*. In other words, *Western hydrocarbon energy security has systematically undermined Western national security*.

This has radical implications for our understanding of national security. It suggests that, like other global crises, the threat of international terrorism is directly linked to the unequal structure of the global political economy, its over-dependence on hydrocarbon energies, and the overt and covert military intelligence strategies developed by Western states to control global energy supplies. As long as this structure and associated militarization strategies remain in place, so too will the threat of terrorism, as well as the even more pressing dangers of other global crises. In this sense, the militarization strategies of the 'War on Terror' are inherently self-defeating, and doomed to fail. Ultimately, security from terrorism will require the same sort of systemic transformation of the global political economy as that demanded by other global crises.

AL-QAEDA AND POST-COLD WAR WESTERN COVERT OPERATIONS

Al-Qaeda and Unconventional Warfare Doctrine

According to the conventional wisdom, Osama bin Laden and al-Qaeda were supported by the West during the Cold War to facilitate the expulsion of the Soviet Union's occupying forces from Afghanistan. This strategy ended in 1989 after the collapse of the USSR, after which bin Laden turned

against his former supporters. His extremist ideological goals led al-Qaeda to mount increasingly devastating attacks on Western targets around the world throughout the 1990s, culminating in the 9/11 terrorist attacks, and followed by other insurgent operations in Madrid, London, Bali, Istanbul, Bombay and elsewhere.

The problem with this narrative is that the West never genuinely severed its military intelligence connections to al-Qaeda. During the Cold War, Anglo-American ties to al-Qaeda were localized in a single area, Afghanistan. After the Cold War, such ties proliferated in strategic regions around the world. Indeed, the globalization of al-Qaeda terrorist networks was a function of covert Western military intelligence interventions to secure Western regional interests.

In September 1999, Graham Fuller, former Deputy Director of the CIA's National Council on Intelligence, alluded to the continuing covert use of Islamism to promote US interests while countering Russian and Chinese influence:

The policy of guiding the evolution of Islam and of helping them against our adversaries worked marvelously well in Afghanistan against the Red Army. The same doctrines can still be used to destabilize what remains of Russian power, and especially to counter the Chinese influence in Central Asia.¹³

The policy that 'worked well' in Afghanistan, and which Fuller argued should be transplanted to counter Russian and Chinese influence, was precisely the sponsorship of al-Qaeda as a mercenary force to conduct US covert operations. The implication is that, after the Cold War, al-Qaeda operations were seen as integral to a new doctrine of covert destabilization, to be implemented in new theatres of operation strategically close to Russian and Chinese influence – namely Eastern Europe, the Balkans, the Caucasus and Central Asia. Notably, Fuller is also one of the individuals identified in the State Secrets Privilege Gallery of former FBI translator and whistleblower Sibel Edmonds – banned by the US government from publicizing information on US state collaboration with Islamist extremists released during her testimonials before various US House and Senate Committees.¹⁴ In a recent interview, Edmonds herself confirmed:

I have information about things that our government has lied to us about. I know. For example, to say that since the fall of the Soviet Union we ceased all of our intimate relationship with Bin Laden and the Taliban – those things can be proven as lies, very easily, based on the information they classified in my case, because we did carry very intimate relationship with these people, and it involves Central Asia, all the way up to September 11.¹⁵

Edmonds reveals that Turkey acted as a primary intermediary in the Central Asian operations, with assistance from Pakistan and Saudi Arabia. The idea was to sideline China and Russia, and undermine popular resistance to US influence by appealing to Central Asian aspirations for an Islamic and Turkic

resurgence. She says that al-Qaeda and the Taliban were used by the US as proxies in 'a decade-long illegal, covert operation in Central Asia by a small group in the US intent on furthering the oil industry and the Military Industrial Complex'.¹⁶ In an interview with former CIA official Philip Giraldi, Edmonds further elaborates on classified conversations she translated 'that suggested the CIA was supporting al-Qaeda in central Asia and the Balkans, training people to get money, get weapons, and this contact continued until 9/11'.

[B]etween 1997 and 2001, [the conversations] had to do with a Central Asia operation that involved bin Laden... It was always 'mujahideen,' always 'bin Laden' and, in fact, not 'bin Laden' but 'bin Ladens' plural. There were several bin Ladens who were going on private jets to Azerbaijan and Tajikistan. The Turkish ambassador in Azerbaijan worked with them.

There were bin Ladens, with the help of Pakistanis or Saudis, under our management. [A senior US government official] was leading it, 100 percent, bringing people from East Turkestan into Kyrgyzstan, from Kyrgyzstan to Azerbaijan, from Azerbaijan some of them were being channeled to Chechnya, some of them were being channeled to Bosnia. From Turkey, they were putting all these bin Ladens on NATO planes. People and weapons went one way, drugs came back.¹⁷

After 9/11, indications of the continuation of this strategy have surfaced from different quarters. A classified document prepared in August 2002 by the Pentagon's Defense Science Board for then US Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld, leaked to the *Los Angeles Times*, recommended the creation of a 'super-Intelligence Support Activity' called the 'Proactive, Preemptive Operations Group (P2OG)', bringing together 'CIA and military covert action, information, warfare, and cover and deception'. The organization would expand on an existing highly classified Pentagon covert action agency, known as the Intelligence Support Activity, which had operated in Afghanistan and elsewhere in the 1980s and 1990s. According to the *Times*, the revamped body would 'launch secret operations aimed at "stimulating reactions" among terrorists and states possessing weapons of mass destruction' – that is, '*prodding terrorist cells into action* and exposing them to "quick-response" attacks by US forces'. The Board even proposed 'creating a "red team" of diabolical thinkers to *plot imaginary terror attacks on the United States so the government can plan to thwart them*'. One key role for US counterterrorism agents would be 'duping al Qaida into *undertaking operations*' and attempting to 'stimulate terrorists into *responding* or moving operations'.¹⁸

According to Seymour Hersh, by early 2005 the P2OG strategy described here had been fully activated, with several pilot covert operations already under way. Under the Defense Secretary's direction, the Pentagon had consolidated control over, and greatly expanded the scope of, Special Forces operations. Citing a Pentagon consultant as well as former and active US military intelligence officers, Hersh reported that:

US military operatives would be permitted to pose abroad as corrupt foreign businessmen seeking to buy contraband items that could be used in nuclear-weapons systems. In some cases, according to the Pentagon advisers, *local citizens could be recruited and asked to join up with guerrillas or terrorists. This could potentially involve organizing and carrying out combat operations, or even terrorist activities.* [emphasis added]

He refers to a series of articles by John Arquilla, a professor of defense analysis at the Naval Postgraduate School in Monterey, California, and a RAND terrorism consultant, elaborating on this strategy. ‘When conventional military operations and bombing failed to defeat the Mau Mau insurgency in Kenya in the 1950s’, muses Arquilla, ‘the British formed teams of friendly Kikuyu tribesmen who went about pretending to be terrorists. These “pseudo gangs”, as they were called, swiftly threw the Mau Mau on the defensive, either by befriending and then ambushing bands of fighters or by guiding bombers to the terrorists’ camps’. He goes on to advocate that Western intelligence services should use the British case as a model for creating new ‘pseudo gang’ terrorist groups, purportedly to undermine ‘real’ terror networks. ‘What worked in Kenya a half-century ago has a wonderful chance of undermining trust and recruitment among today’s terror networks. Forming new pseudo gangs should not be difficult.’¹⁹

More recently, a restricted US Army Special Operations Field Manual, leaked in December 2008, confirms that the penetration and mobilization of criminal and terrorist networks is a fundamental pillar of US unconventional warfare (UW), defined as: ‘Operations conducted by, with, or through irregular forces in support of a resistance movement, an insurgency, or conventional military operations’. The US has a ‘tested capability to use UW’ going back to World War II. The document clarifies that:

UW must be conducted by, with, or through surrogates; and such surrogates must be irregular forces.... These forces may include, but are not limited to, specific paramilitary forces, contractors, individuals, businesses, foreign political organizations, *resistance or insurgent organizations*, expatriates, *transnational terrorism adversaries*, *disillusioned transnational terrorism members*, *black marketers*, and other social or political ‘undesirables.’

Furthermore, the ‘strategic purpose’ of UW is ‘to gain or maintain control or influence over the population’. The document elaborates on this as follows:

UW generally assumes that some portion of the indigenous population – sometimes a majority of that population – are either belligerents or in support of the UW operation. *UW is specifically focused on leveraging the unwillingness of some portion of the indigenous population to accept the status quo* or ‘whatever political outcome the belligerent governments impose, arbitrate, or negotiate’. *A fundamental military objective in UW*

is the deliberate involvement and leveraging of civilian interference in the unconventional warfare operational area (UWOA).

Further, the document points out that although UW is distinct from irregular warfare (IW), 'UW is a component and method of prosecuting IW'. Among the variety of 'constituent activities' belonging to IW, the document lists the following: *'Insurgency. COIN [counterinsurgency]. UW. Terrorism. CT [counterterrorism]... PSYOP [psychological operation]... Transnational criminal activities, including narco-trafficking, illicit arms-dealing, and illegal financial transactions that support or sustain IW.'*²⁰ In summary, UW is a form of covert action conducted largely through surrogate criminal and terrorist networks, which seeks to mobilize political violence as a tool to influence the political choices of civilian populations.

A wealth of evidence in the public record confirms that UW doctrine has manifested in a policy of collaboration with Islamist extremist networks throughout the post-Cold War period, as was advocated by Graham Fuller. This policy was designed to destabilize strategic regions in such a way as to compel local populations to accept integration into the global political economy along lines favourable to US investors, particularly with regard to control of hydrocarbon energy resources.

The strategic complexity of UW doctrine, however, goes much further, and other outcomes may involve dominating the profit circuits of organized crime, as well as subordinating potential rivals to the US and thereby consolidating the US-dominated unipolar order. According to a confidential 2009 report to the Norwegian Foreign Ministry by Professor Ola Tunander – a defence consultant and Research Professor at the International Peace Research Institute in Oslo (PRIO) – covert Western sponsorship of terrorist networks under UW doctrine is also concerned with controlling profits from organized criminal activities, especially drug trafficking: 'In several states and not least in the USA, there are significant war elites that actually seek to introduce military conflicts in order to run them and profit from them.' As 'the economy of war (weapons and drugs) is as important as the world's oil economy', US covert forces may play a central role in 'calibrating the violence in various areas at a certain level to gain hundreds of billions of dollars in profits from weapons and drug trafficking'. In some cases, therefore, to prolong the war, US strategy is to 'support both sides in the conflict'. But apart from the objective of war profiteering, this strategy also has the deeper geopolitical objective of protecting a US-dominated unipolar order against economic multipolarity and the rising power of major rivals. 'The USA's superior military strength and intelligence hegemony could only be translated into power and real global strength if there were ongoing conflicts – wars and terrorist attacks – that threatened the multipolar power structure of the economic-political world order', continues the Norwegian report:

Accordingly, from a European or Chinese or Japanese point of view, every US war, wherever it is fought, is not just directed against a local insurgent

or an anti-American ruler, it is directed against the economic-political multipolar power structure that would give Europe, China and Japan a significant position in the world.

By fanning the flames on both sides in strategic regions, US forces are able to 'increase and decrease the military temperature and calibrate the level of violence' with a view to permanently 'mobilize other governments in support of US global policy'.²¹

According to the US Army special operations field manual cited above, 'UW has been conducted in... Operation ENDURING FREEDOM(OEF)/Afghanistan in 2001 and Operation IRAQI FREEDOM (OIF)Iraq in 2003'.²² These themes will be explored below by focusing on how post-9/11 UW doctrine appears to involve the co-optation of Islamist terrorist groups in Afghanistan and Iraq.

Afghanistan and Pakistan: Endless Insurgency

Afghanistan is a crucial strategic region in terms of Central Asian pipeline politics. Osama bin Laden moved back to the country from Sudan in June 1996, after being offered protection by Pakistan on the condition that he firmly align his forces with the Taliban. The move was 'blessed by the Saudis'.²³ According to the leading expert on the subject, Ahmed Rashid – a correspondent for the London *Telegraph*, *Far Eastern Economic Review* and *Wall Street Journal* – the United States supported the Taliban from 1994 to 1998 as a vehicle of regional American influence. Between 1999 and 2000, US continued to support them, albeit more cautiously.²⁴ Radha Kumar, director of the Project on Ethnic Conflict, Partition and Post-Conflict Reconstruction at the Council on Foreign Relations, points out that this was because the Taliban:

was brought to power with Washington's silent blessing as it dallied in an abortive new 'Great Game' in central Asia... Keen to see Afghanistan under strong central rule to allow a US-led group to build a multi-billion-dollar oil and gas pipeline, Washington urged key allies Pakistan and Saudi Arabia to back the militia's bid for power in 1996.²⁵

US sponsorship of the Taliban was confirmed as late as 1999 and 2000 in Congressional hearings, confirming that the policy was 'based on the assumption that the Taliban would bring stability to Afghanistan and permit the building of oil pipelines from Central Afghanistan to Pakistan.'²⁶ US officials held several 'track-two' meetings with the Taliban from 2000 to summer 2001, where they tried to pressure the Taliban to join a federal government with the Northern Alliance as a condition for financial aid and international legitimacy. By then, they knew the Taliban would never bring the stability needed for the pipeline project. According to one meeting participant, then Pakistani Foreign Minister Niaz Naik, US officials threatened the Taliban with military action in October 2001 if they failed to comply with the federalization plan. But the Taliban had no intention of conceding power to its

rivals, and rejected the plan. The war on Afghanistan was therefore not really a response to 9/11, but had been planned for at least a year before the terrorist attacks. As a close observer of Afghan politics, I had documented as early as January 2001 an unfolding US operational war plan for Afghanistan, rooted in a wider geostrategy going back several years.²⁷

Post-9/11, there remains keen interest in the pipeline project. Regional oil and gas supply agreements have been signed and the Asian Development Bank – of which the US is one of the largest shareholders – is putting up the funds. ‘Since the US-led offensive that ousted the Taliban from power’, reported *Forbes* in 2005, ‘the project has been revived and drawn strong US support’ as it would allow the Central Asian republics to export energy to Western markets ‘without relying on Russian routes’. Then US Ambassador to Turkmenistan Ann Jacobsen noted: ‘We are seriously looking at the project, and it is quite possible that American companies will join it.’²⁸ The problem remains that the southern section of the proposed pipeline runs through territory that is still *de facto* controlled by Taliban forces – explaining current US and British efforts to use Pakistan as a forward base for the projection of military forces into Afghanistan to rout remaining Taliban fighters.²⁹



Figure 5.1 Trans-Afghan Pipeline.

Source: BBC News. Available from http://www.ca-c.org/online/2004/journal_eng/cac-05/07.ziyeng.shtml

However, this is not necessarily the only factor. Although British forces have led US, European and local forces in attempts to eradicate Afghanistan's burgeoning drug trade after the Taliban was toppled, as the *Sunday Telegraph* reported, ‘to British officials’ embarrassment, the level of opium cultivation during their stint at the helm has reached an all-time high of nearly half a million acres’.³⁰ Before 9/11, the Taliban had in fact banned the cultivation of opium poppies with significant success. Yet after the October invasion, US forces reversed the ban. By 2003, under the reign of US-sponsored Northern Alliance warlords, Afghanistan ‘retook its place as the world’s

leading producer of heroin'.³¹ Indeed, the US frequently foiled British counter-narcotics efforts. An early example was CIA pressure on President Hamid Karzai to dismiss the late Mohammed Daud as governor of the Helmand province, which produces over 60 per cent of the world's opium. British military commanders complained that Daud was a central figure in their counter-narcotics campaign: 'The Americans knew Daud was a main British ally, yet they deliberately undermined him and told Karzai to sack him.'³²

Indeed, both senior British and American officials worked to undermine their own professed anti-opium campaign in different ways. According to Thomas Schweich – former US Counternarcotics Ambassador to Afghanistan – Karzai, the Pentagon, the CIA, and elements of the British military systematically sabotaged counter-narcotics measures: 'They (the Western military) didn't want anything to do with either interdiction or eradication.' Similarly, Robert Charles, Assistant Secretary of State for International Narcotics and Law Enforcement, noted: 'We could have destroyed all the [heroin] labs and warehouses in the three primary provinces – Helmand, Nangarhar and Kandahar – in a week', but the measures were blocked by Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld.³³

This should not be surprising, given that US and British officials had carefully selected ardent veteran drug traffickers to return to power in the new 'post-Taliban' Afghanistan. War correspondent Philip Smucker reports that 'When the Taliban claimed Jalalabad' several years ago, Haji Zaman 'had fled Afghanistan for a leisurely life in Dijon, France'. During his tenure in Jalalabad, Zaman was 'at the top of the heroin trade'. But in late September 2001, 'British and American officials, keen to build up an opposition core to take back the country from the Taliban, met with and persuaded Zaman to return to Afghanistan'.³⁴

According to former senior Indian intelligence official Bahukutumbi Raman, who has testified several times as an expert witness before US Congressional Committees, Zaman's ally in the drug trade, Haji Ayub Afridi, was simultaneously released from a Pakistani jail 'reportedly at the request of the CIA', returning to Afghanistan to play his part in US designs. Raman names another major figure in the drug trade, Haji Abdul Qadeer, who 'was the CIA's choice as the Governor of the Nangarhar province [in 2001] in which Jalalabad is located'. During the war against Soviet occupation:

[Qadeer] played an active role under the control of the CIA and the Directorate-General For External Security (DGES), the French external intelligence agency, in organising the heroin trail to the Soviet troops from the heroin refineries of Pakistan owned by Haji Ayub Afridi, the Pakistani narcotics baron, who was a prized operative of the CIA in the 1980s.

At that time, Qadeer and Afridi were 'close associates in running this drug trade with the blessings of the CIA'. Others associated with the trade were 'Haji Mohammed Zaman and Hazrat Ali', both of whom resurfaced in November 2001 as US proxies against the Taliban. In other words, the 'post-

Taliban' re-narcotization of Afghanistan occurred under the auspices of the Anglo-American intervention, not in spite of it as is conventionally assumed.

Raman cites 'reliable sources in Afghanistan' for his claim that the Anglo-American 'war on drugs' in Afghanistan is a sham:

The marked lack of success in the heroin front is due to the fact that the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) of the USA, which encouraged these heroin barons during the Afghan war of the 1980s in order to spread heroin-addiction amongst the Soviet troops, is now using them in its search for bin Laden and other surviving leaders of the Al Qaeda, by taking advantage of their local knowledge and contacts. These Pakistani heroin barons and their Afghan lieutenants are reported to have played an important role in facilitating the induction of Hamid Karzai into the Pashtun areas to counter the Taliban in November, 2001. It is alleged that in return for the services rendered by them, the USA has turned a blind eye to their heroin refineries and reserves.³⁵

There is thus growing evidence that the emergence of the Afghan narco-state under US-UK tutelage is not simply an unfortunate byproduct, but part of a wider pattern of Western intelligence liaisons with drug-trafficking networks. As former senior US Drug Enforcement Agency official Dennis Dayle has remarked: 'In my 30-year history in the Drug Enforcement Administration and related agencies, the major targets of my investigations almost invariably turned out to be working for the CIA.'³⁶

Fortune magazine thus observes that 'several past and present cabinet ministers, senior law enforcement officials, and even Karzai's own brother are widely suspected of profiting handsomely from the poppy trade, overseeing growing operations or enabling transport of the yield across and out of the country'.³⁷ The total annual revenue generated from the Afghan heroin trade has been estimated at \$400 billion, 95 per cent of which accrues not to Afghan farmers and traders, but to 'business syndicates, organized crime, and banking and financial institutions', largely in the consuming nations (hence only \$4 billion accrues to Afghanistan).³⁸ Leading expert on terrorism financing Dr Loretta Napoleoni reports the existence of a US-backed Islamist narco-trafficking route across Central Asia: 'While the ISI [Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence] trained Islamist insurgents and supplied arms, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, several Gulf states and the Taliban funded them...Each month, an estimated 4–6 metric tons of heroin are shipped from Turkey via the Balkans to Western Europe.'³⁹

Former FBI translator Sibel Edmonds, in testimony before classified Congressional hearings, has identified senior US officials that played a key role in the international narcotics trade, and received large payments of heroin money. She specifies the role of US, Pakistani and Turkish intelligence in controlling the trade in north Central Asia.⁴⁰ Edmonds further reveals direct US and NATO military complicity: 'A lot of the drugs were going to Belgium with NATO planes. After that, they went to the UK, and a lot came to the US via

military planes to distribution centers in Chicago and Paterson, New Jersey.⁴¹ Her allegations are corroborated by local sources. According to Russian Ambassador to Afghanistan Zamir Kabulov, US military transport aviation 'is used for the delivery of drugs from Afghanistan to the American airbases, Ganci in Kyrgyzstan and Incirlik in Turkey'. Anonymous Afghan sources say: '85 per cent of all drugs produced in southern and southeastern provinces are shipped abroad by US aviation.' Officials in Afghanistan's security services also claim that the US military acquires drugs through local officials connected to Afghan field commanders presiding over heroin production.⁴²

Indeed, over the last decade, concrete evidence has emerged, verified by British and European authorities, confirming direct CIA complicity in illicit narco-trafficking, including the use of 'extraordinary rendition' planes. In January 2010, the *Independent* reported:

Evidence points to aircraft – familiarly known as 'torture taxis' – used by the CIA to move captives seized in its kidnapping or 'extraordinary rendition' operations through Gatwick and other airports in the EU being simultaneously used for drug distribution in the Western hemisphere. A Gulfstream II jet aircraft N9875A identified by the British Government and the European Parliament as being involved in this traffic crashed in Mexico in September 2008 while en route from Colombia to the US with a load of more than three tons of cocaine.

In 2004, another torture taxi crashed in a field in Nicaragua with a ton of cocaine aboard. It had been identified by Britain and the European Parliament's temporary committee on the alleged use of European countries by the CIA for the transport and illegal detention of prisoners as a frequent visitor in 2004 and 2005 to British, Cypriot, Czech, German, Greek, Hungarian, Spanish and other European cities with its cargo of captives for secret imprisonment and torture in Iraq, Jordan and Azerbaijan.⁴³

This suggests that control of the Afghan heroin trade plays at least an equal role in Anglo-American military strategy to that of dominating the Trans-Afghan pipeline route. But to complicate matters further, the Pakistani ISI continues to be integrally involved in the military, intelligence and financial support of al-Qaeda, including the insurgency in northwest Pakistan and Afghanistan. As US intelligence expert George Friedman observes: 'Pakistan was the key, because it had the closest connections to Al Qaeda and the least cooperative intelligence service, in spite of the apparent cooperation of Pakistan's President Musharraf.'⁴⁴ It is partly this situation which has led to the heightened political instability and internal conflict in Pakistan, with the US putting pressure on the Pakistani Army to rout Taliban forces from the Swat valley while continuing to covertly sponsor al-Qaeda affiliates elsewhere.

Just as Musharraf backtracked on public assurances to crack down on the ISI's sponsorship of al-Qaeda, the current Pakistani Army chief, General Ashfaq Pervez Kiani, has also been similarly implicated. General Kiani served as head of the ISI from 2004 to 2007. During this period, the ISI 'presided over

the development of a major logistical and training program for the Taliban forces'. The programme was revealed by a NATO report 'of a two-week battle by NATO forces against a determined Taliban offensive in Kandahar province in September 2006'. The NATO account 'described two ISI training camps for the Taliban near Quetta in Pakistan's Balochistan province. It also documented the provision by the ISI of 2,000 rocket-propelled grenades and 400,000 rounds of ammunition – just for that one Taliban campaign.' Further evidence that ISI assistance to Taliban forces continued after Kiani's appointment replacing Musharraf as Pakistan's top army general 'was compiled in an intelligence assessment circulated to the top national security officials of the George W Bush administration in mid-2008'. Indeed, US intelligence intercepted a communication in which Kiani referred to a senior Taliban leader, Maulavi Jalaluddin Haqqani, as a 'strategic asset' – although Haqqani's insurgent network 'has been a key target for the US campaign of Predator drone strikes in Pakistan during 2008 and 2009'. Despite this, 'senior officials of the Barack Obama administration have persuaded the US Congress to extend military assistance to Pakistan for five years without any assurance that the Pakistani assistance to the Taliban had ended'. Rather than demanding that military assistance should be conditional on evidence that the ISI had ended support to al-Qaeda and Taliban forces, the new legislation provided an unconditional \$6 billion in military and economic aid over five years, requiring only a certification by the secretary of state that Pakistan is 'making concerted efforts' against the Taliban.⁴⁵

In effect, through the ISI, the US is subsidizing the Afghan insurgency, and thus prolonging the war – raising the question of the war's role in legitimizing both 1) a continued substantive US military presence in the region, and 2) the compliance of key US allies, particularly the UK and Western Europe, with the geopolitical demands of the 'War on Terror'.

THE 'REDIRECTION': AL-QAEDA SPONSORSHIP IN THE MIDDLE EAST AFTER 2003

Iraq: Covert Action and Sectarian Violence

Since the invasion of Iraq in 2003, unconventional warfare strategies linking US military intelligence to al-Qaeda terrorist networks shifted to a new theatre of operations – primarily to the Middle East and Central Asia. Much of the destabilization of Iraq under sectarian conflict was due to this change.

In early 2006, then Senator Joseph Biden – now Obama's vice-president – proposed that the solution to intensified sectarian conflict in Iraq was to partition the country into three ethnically composed autonomous regions, each with their own limited authority for self-rule, but with a central government in charge of 'common interests'. Late the following year, the Senate officially approved a 'soft' partition plan. What is not so well known is that from the very beginning, senior American planners envisaged that in the long term Iraqi territory would be divided to facilitate the Anglo-American military occupation. Fragments emerged in late 2002 of a plan to fracture Iraq along

ethnic and religious lines in order to facilitate control of oil reserves and allow population control. Al-Qaeda-affiliated groups financed by Saudi Arabia and Pakistan, and in some cases directly supported by highly classified US military intelligence operations, were mobilized with the effect of initiating and accelerating the dynamic of sectarian conflict in accordance with the carve-up plan.

Richard Perle, who then chaired the Defense Policy Board, the prominent Pentagon advisory group, issued a briefing for Pentagon officials in September that year. *Ha'aretz* reported that, according to a 'top official in the Israeli security services':

[Perle] showed two slides to the Pentagon officials. The first was a depiction of the three goals in the war on terror and the democratisation of the Middle East: Iraq – a tactical goal, Saudi Arabia – a strategic goal, and Egypt – the great prize. The triangle in the next slide was no less interesting: Palestine is Israel, Jordan is Palestine, and Iraq is the Hashemite Kingdom.⁴⁶

This outrageous vision advocated a total reconfiguration of power across the Middle East, including a greatly expanded Israel fully encompassing the Occupied Territories; the expulsion of the Palestinians to Jordan; and the incorporation of the Sunni areas of Iraq with Jordan to form a wider pro-US Sunni Arab Hashemite Kingdom.

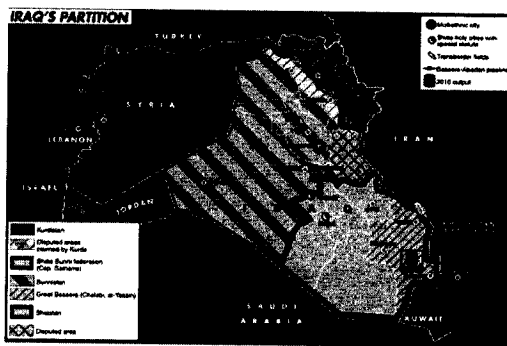


Figure 5.2 US Plan for the Partition of Iraq.

Source: Heartland: Eurasian Journal of Geopolitics (December 2005). Available from <http://temi.repubblica.it/limes-heartland/iraqs-partition/1106>

According to the private American intelligence firm, Stratfor, this was a highly influential plan. Stratfor reports that the Bush administration was ‘working on a plan to merge Iraq and Jordan into a unitary kingdom to be ruled by the Hashemite dynasty headed by King Abdullah of Jordan’. The plan was ‘authored by US Vice-President Dick Cheney’ as well as ‘Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz’, and was first discussed at ‘an unusual

meeting between Crown Prince Hassan of Jordan and pro-US Iraqi Sunni opposition members in London in July [2002]'. Iraq would be *de facto* ethnically partitioned into three autonomous cantons: The central and largest part of Iraq populated by Sunni Arabs would be joined with Jordan, and would include Baghdad, which would no longer be the capital. The Kurdish region of northern and northwestern Iraq, including Mosul and the vast Kirkuk oilfields, would become its own autonomous state. The Shi'ite region in southwestern Iraq, including Basra, would make up the third state, or more likely it would be joined with Kuwait. Stratfor outlined the perceived advantages for the US as follows (see Figure 5.3):

First, the creation of a new pro-US kingdom under the half-British Abdullah [king of Jordan] would shift the balance of forces in the region heavily in the US favor. After eliminating Iraq as a sovereign state, there would be no fear that one day an anti-American government would come to power in Baghdad, as the capital would be in Amman [Jordan]. Current and potential US geopolitical foes Iran, Saudi Arabia and Syria would be isolated from each other, with big chunks of land between them under control of the pro-US forces. Equally important, Washington would be able to justify its long-term and heavy military presence in the region as necessary for the defense of a young new state asking for US protection – and to secure the stability of oil markets and supplies. That in turn would help the United States gain direct control of Iraqi oil and replace Saudi oil in case of conflict with Riyadh.⁴⁷

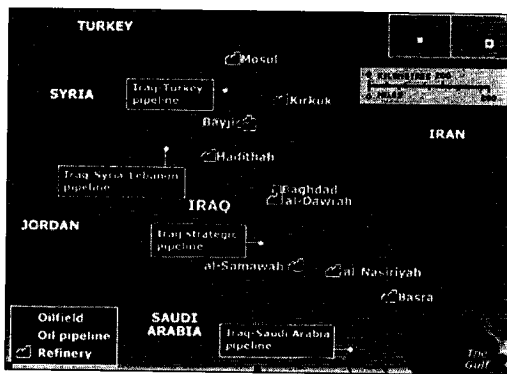


Figure 5.3 US Plans for Iraq Pipeline.

Source: BBC News. Available from http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/1/shared/spl/hi/middle_east/02/iraq_key_maps/img/maps/iraq_oil_map485.gif

Such tripartite partitioning of an entire country could never be achieved peacefully. Violent conflict along sectarian lines is inevitable if this were to be achieved. The task of 'eliminating Iraq as a sovereign state' by fracturing the country along ethnic and religious lines, in other words, was *precisely*

the postwar strategy being explored by Dick Cheney as the most effective means of securing American control over the country, and the wider region.

It is no surprise then to find US covert action supporting the escalating sectarian violence in Iraq as a tool for consolidating the occupation. The strategy received semi-official acknowledgement in the November 2005 edition of the *US Joint Special Operations University Report*, in which Thomas H. Henriken, a senior fellow at the university and a former member of the US Army Science Board, reported:

The post-invasion stage in Iraq also is an interesting case study of fanning discontent among enemies, leading to 'red-against-red' firefights (this color-coding derives from US training exercises, in which red designates enemy combatants and blue designates friendly forces). Like their SOG predecessors in Vietnam, US elite forces in Iraq turned to fostering infighting among their Iraqi adversaries on the tactical and operational level...

Events during fall 2004 within the central Iraqi city of Fallujah showcased the wily machinations required to set insurgents battling insurgents. ... But Fallujah was hardly a unified camp – the city seethed with internecine tensions. [Abu Musab al-]Zarqawi's strict Salafi beliefs clashed with the more moderate Sufi views of the Sunni residents. Additionally, the Zarqawi jihadis and nationalistic Fallujans disagreed over the use of terror tactics. Both wanted the Americans out of Fallujah and out of Iraq, but they differed on the methods.... Evidence of factional fighting between the residents came to light with nightly gun battles not involving coalition forces. *US psychological warfare (PSYOP) specialists took advantage of the internal warring by tapping into Fallujans' revulsion and antagonism to the Zarqawi jihadis. The PSYOP warriors crafted programs to exploit Zarqawi's murderous activities – and to disseminate them through meetings, radio and television broadcasts, handouts, newspaper stories, political cartoons, and posters – thereby diminishing his folk-hero image. Battles among anti-coalition forces killed enemy combatants and heightened factionalism. Thus, red-on-red battles enhanced the regular blue-on-red engagements by eliminating many insurgents.*⁴⁸

The 'dissemination' of the 'murderous activities' of al-Qaeda's Zarqawi as part of US covert operations to escalate sectarian conflict in Iraq appears to have been part of a much wider strategy for influencing the Iraqi population. In November 2004, a joint statement was released on several Islamist websites on behalf of Zarqawi, al-Qaeda's leader in Iraq, and Saddam Hussein's old Ba'ath Party loyalists. Zarqawi's network had 'joined other extremist Islamists and Saddam Hussein's old Baath party to threaten increased attacks on US-led forces'. Zarqawi's group said they signed 'the statement written by the Iraqi Baath party, not because we support the party or Saddam, but because it expresses the demands of resistance groups in Iraq'.⁴⁹

The statement formalized what the *Sunday Times* had already reported, citing post-Saddam Iraqi intelligence and US military officials: 'Al Qaeda

terrorists who have infiltrated Iraq from Saudi Arabia and other Arab countries have formed an alliance with former intelligence agents of Saddam Hussein to fight their common enemy, the American forces.' Al Qaeda leaders 'recruit from the pool' of Saddam's former 'security and intelligence officers who are unemployed and embittered by their loss of status'. After vetting, 'they begin Al-Qaeda-style training, such as how to make remote-controlled bombs'. Both Saudi Arabia and Pakistan appear to be integrally involved in the operation. 'The alliance, known as Jaish Muhammad – the army of the prophet Muhammad – is believed to be responsible for increasingly sophisticated attacks on US soldiers.' Jaish Muhammed is smuggling 'millions of dollars, weapons and hundreds of Arab fighters across the desert border with Saudi Arabia'.⁵⁰

Jaish Muhammed is a notorious al-Qaeda affiliated network based in Pakistan with close links to the Pakistani ISI.⁵¹ Indeed, the connection was corroborated in February 2005 by Pakistani military sources who revealed that 'the US has... resolved to arm small militias backed by US troops and entrenched in the population' involved in the Iraqi insurgency. The US had secretly 'procured Pakistan-manufactured weapons, including rifles, rocket-propelled grenade launchers, ammunition, rockets and other light weaponry'. Consignments were bulk loaded onto US military cargo aircraft at Chaklala airbase, arriving from and departing for Iraq. 'The US-armed and supported militias in the south will comprise former members of the Ba'ath Party' – the same people recruited and trained by Zarqawi's al-Qaeda network in Iraq. A Pakistani military analyst noted that the reason US-made arms were not being supplied was to conceal US complicity:

A similar strategy was adopted in Afghanistan during the initial few years of the anti-USSR resistance [the early 1980s] movement where guerrillas were supplied with Chinese-made AK-47 rifles [which were procured by Pakistan with US money], Egyptian and German-made G-3 rifles.

Military sources added that their destination was not the Iraqi security forces 'because US arms would be given to them'. Rather, the US is playing a double game to 'head off' the threat of a 'Shi'ite clergy-driven religious movement'.⁵² Notably, the US appropriation of Pakistani military resources to support elements of the Iraqi insurgency coincides with the ISI's sponsorship of al-Qaeda and Taliban forces in the same period, under Gen. Pervez Kiani's leadership.

The insurgency therefore consisted of two contradictory elements – a genuinely indigenous resistance movement, and a much smaller, insidious, alien element responsible for terrorist violence, among whom were operatives co-opted by US military intelligence in coordination with regional allies. This suggests that destabilization was not merely a consequence of US incompetence – but also part of a plan to use unconventional warfare as a tool to influence the Iraqi population in favour of a permanent US security presence.

Iraq, Lebanon, and Iran: Arc of Destabilization

These covert policies, beginning around 2004, were intensified throughout 2006, and reintensified in 2008, across a large swathe of the Middle East and Central Asia. Seymour Hersh discovered that the Bush administration was actively sponsoring al-Qaeda-affiliated groups across these regions to counter regional Shi'ite Iranian influence. Moreover, much of the finances for these covert operations were being funnelled by Saudi Arabia through Iraq, with US connivance:

This administration has made a policy change, a decision that they are going to put all of the pressure they can on the Shiites, that is the Shiite regime in Iran... we are interested in recreating what is happening in Iraq in Lebanon, that is Sunni versus Shia... we have been pumping money, a great deal of money, without congressional authority, without any congressional oversight, Prince Bandar of Saudi Arabia is putting up some of this money, for covert operations in many areas of the Middle East where we think that the – we want to stop the Shiite spread or the Shiite influence.

They call it the 'Shiite Crescent.' And a lot of this money... has gotten into the hands – among other places, in Lebanon, into the hands of three – at least three jihadist groups. There are three Sunni jihadist groups whose main claim to fame inside Lebanon right now is that they are very tough. These are people connected to al Qaeda who want to take on Hezbollah...

So America, my country, without telling Congress, using funds not appropriated, I don't know where, by my sources believe much of the money obviously came from Iraq where there is all kinds of piles of loose money... We are simply in a situation where this president is... supporting groups indirectly that are involved with the same people that did 9/11, and we should be arresting these people rather than looking the other way.⁵³

Hersh's reporting indicates that al-Qaeda-affiliated networks remain useful as mercenary proxies for Anglo-American regional geostrategy in the Middle East. Even the international structure of state-sponsorship is unchanged, with the US at the helm, Saudi Arabia providing the funds, and Pakistan providing military intelligence support, although the bulk of finances for these operations were being funnelled through Iraq.

In March 2007, Hersh elaborated his findings in *New Yorker* magazine, citing White House insiders and other US government officials, all confirming in perhaps the clearest terms possible that the US was deliberately attempting to control al-Qaeda terrorist activity through Saudi Arabia (among others), in an attempt to re-direct the network against Iran:

The 'redirection,' as some inside the White House have called the new strategy, has brought the United States closer to an open confrontation with Iran and, in parts of the region, propelled it into a widening sectarian conflict between Shiite and Sunni Muslims.

To undermine Iran, which is predominantly Shiite, the Bush Administration has decided, in effect, to reconfigure its priorities in the Middle East. In Lebanon, the Administration has cooperated with Saudi Arabia's government, which is Sunni, in clandestine operations that are intended to weaken Hezbollah, the Shiite organization that is backed by Iran. The US has also taken part in clandestine operations aimed at Iran and its ally Syria. A by-product of these activities has been the bolstering of Sunni extremist groups that espouse a militant vision of Islam and are hostile to America and sympathetic to Al Qaeda...

The clandestine operations have been kept secret, in some cases, by leaving the execution or the funding to the Saudis, or by finding other ways to work around the normal congressional appropriations process, current and former officials close to the Administration said...

This time, the US government consultant told me, Bandar and other Saudis have assured the White House that 'they will keep a very close eye on the religious fundamentalists. Their message to us was "We've created this movement, and we can control it." It's not that we don't want the Salafis to throw bombs; it's who they throw them at – Hezbollah, Moqtada al-Sadr, Iran, and at the Syrians, if they continue to work with Hezbollah and Iran.'⁵⁴

Of course, as former CIA official Robert Baer points out, controlling the Saudis is an impossible task.⁵⁵ Nevertheless, the policy escalated throughout 2008 with bipartisan support. Early that year, George W. Bush signed a Presidential Finding informing US Congress of his authorization of 'a covert offensive against the Iranian regime... across a huge geographic area – from Lebanon to Afghanistan', to be financed by an additional \$300 million. Diverse anti-Shi'ite and anti-Iranian groups were to be sponsored, among them many al-Qaeda affiliates, but also including Kurdish nationalists, Awwaz Arabs in the southwest of Iran, and Mujahideen-e-Khalq – an Iranian terrorist group on the State Department's and EU's lists of proscribed terrorist organizations.⁵⁶ Despite the legislative opportunity to challenge the covert programme, neither Republican nor Democrat Congressional representatives did so. Indeed, under Obama's presidency the programme has not ceased. On the contrary, Obama retained Bush's Defense Secretary, Robert Gates – the architect of Bush's Iran policy who strongly favours continued covert action as a more viable mechanism of pressure than direct intervention.⁵⁷

Manipulating Terrorism

Al-Qaeda-affiliated groups have frequently functioned as mercenary proxies mobilized in the service of a distinctive form of Anglo-American imperial expansionism, aimed largely at consolidating control over strategic energy reserves, not just during the Cold War, but also after, into the post-9/11 era. The same addiction to oil that underlies the crises of climate change and peak oil has also led us into a geopolitical dance of death with Osama bin Laden. The same trajectory of covert action has intersected with the centres of international heroin production and trafficking, while also functioning to

‘calibrate levels of violence’, in the words of Oslo analyst Ola Tunander, to facilitate profiteering from regional war economies and, more importantly, to exert geopolitical pressure on potential US rivals. *Al-Qaeda is not simply an enemy out there. It is an intrinsic feature of the global political economy, like a tumour spawned by its own host.*⁵⁸

There is no doubt that these covert practices, enacted through key states like Saudi Arabia and Pakistan, continue to foster Islamist terrorist activity across the world. Thus, at the heart of the material infrastructure underlying al-Qaeda activity lies a network of different regional states each with their own interests, which in turn are conduits of Western military and financial aid. Not only has the ‘War on Terror’ failed entirely to dismantle this infrastructure, it continues to strengthen it.

Instead of trying to transform the global political economy and its increasingly dangerous over-dependence on oil, our governments are pointing to Islamist extremism as the principal threat to our security. This is not to deny the reality of this threat, but to point out that al-Qaeda’s operational reach is being exacerbated by precisely the same oil addiction and global political economy that are in crisis today. In the process, governments are using the threat of terrorism as a way of deflecting attention from the failures of the system. This, of course, raises profound questions about the legitimacy and integrity of Western national security policy. The truth is that UW strategies are largely not subject to regulation by the public face of the state – at the levels of parliament, cabinet, or even conventional military intelligence. They belong to its deeper, invisible dimension, where we find the nexus between a highly unaccountable, and as such enormously powerful, subsection of the ‘security’ agencies, private military and defence contractors, energy companies, and entrenched international criminal networks.⁵⁹

This grants us a distinct insight into the way the phenomena of violent extremism and international terrorism will be exacerbated by the escalation of global ecological, energy and economic crises. Given the increasing pressures placed on state militaries in the face of intensifying social upheaval and civil disturbance due to these crises, it is likely that the US will increasingly rely on UW to pursue its strategic aims.

However, this will also entail increased difficulties in efforts to manipulate terrorist groups as proxy forces. The cases reviewed above explore how Islamist terrorist networks have been selectively co-opted by Western military intelligence services in the pursuit of strategic and economic interests throughout the post-Cold War period, and even after 9/11. Yet it is important to recognize the inherent limitations of these covert practices. Clearly, Al-Qaeda networks in strategic regions are not simply front groups consciously operating on behalf of Western intelligence agencies, but are co-opted through the recruitment and mobilization of particular intelligence assets as part of clandestine HUMINT (human intelligence) operation techniques. These assets act either as double or triple agents in senior positions in target groups, attempting to steer these groups in directions favourable to the strategic interests of the agencies on whose behalf the

agents operate.⁶⁰ This means that the continuity and apparent authenticity of these terrorist groups fundamentally relies on their success within the regional socio-cultural context, in exploiting a local groundswell of political grievances to recruit foot soldiers for their operations. Thus, the majority of the group's members are unlikely to be aware that the group is susceptible to covert manipulation from outside. Ultimately, this means that UW doctrine's advocacy of co-opting terrorist networks remains a highly dangerous activity that constantly threatens to bring about unanticipated consequences.⁶¹

The problem is dual: 1) As global crises escalate and intensify, they will increasingly aggravate social upheaval, and thus the political grievances that provide recruiting fodder for extremist and terrorist networks. As these grievances escalate, they will magnify the internal pressure on these groups and amplify their ability to act outside of US interests. 2) The escalation of global crises will also create qualitatively *new* grievances, and novel forms of social polarization based on 'identity politics': as social anxieties, fears and frustrations proliferate, political and community leaderships of all kinds will find it increasingly useful and sensible to mobilize on the basis of ethnic, religious and class identities that allow groups to impose order and control.

This means that the escalation of global crises will create space for social groups in general to respond by resorting to ideological extremes that legitimize violence against 'Others.' These trends will lead to new hubs of extremist and terrorist activity operating beyond the original remit of US power, particularly in Central Asia and the Middle East where covert policies of selective co-optation of extremist and terrorist networks persist. Civilian populations of major core powers with a geopolitical stake in these regions – the US, UK, EU, Russia, China, and India – will face the brunt of this impact.

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Chapter 6

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