

Afghan History: Al Qaeda, The Taliban and the Texas Oil Giants

Part II

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Global Research, April 14, 2011

14 April 2011

Region: [Asia](#)

Theme: [Oil and Energy](#), [Terrorism](#)

PART II

In the mid-1980's the UN tried to broker a peace deal in Afghanistan involving a complete Soviet withdrawal in return for an end to US and Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) support for the Afghan rebels. The Reagan Administration refused the UN deal. It wanted to "give the Soviets their Vietnam" as part of a grander scheme to rip apart the Soviet Union. It also wanted the socialist Karmal government out of Kabul. In 1986 US military aid to the *mujahadeen* increased dramatically to \$1 billion/year.

In 1988 the US and the Soviets signed the Geneva Accords which called for an Afghan arms embargo. Both countries ignored the deal and the fighting continued. *Mujahadeen* fighters routinely tortured and mutilated captured Russian and Afghan soldiers- often in the presence of American advisers. [1]

In 1989 the Soviets pulled out of Afghanistan. Their hand-picked Prime Minister Babrak Karmal had been replaced by the democratically-elected Mohammad Najibullah Ahmadzai in 1986. But Najibullah was also a socialist and democracy was never a State Department priority. He represented the Parchom faction of the Communist People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan.

Though the Soviets were gone, the US kept funding the guerrilla campaign against the duly-elected government in Kabul. In 1992 Najibullah was overthrown. One of seven fighting *mujahadeen* factions led by Burhaddin Rabbani took power. Six of the seven rebel groups laid down their arms and got behind Rabbani.

The one that did not was CIA-favorite Gulbuddin Hekmatyar's *Hezbi-i Isbmi*, which proceeded to soak the streets of Kabul in yet another round of blood. Though the UN now recognized the Rabbani-led faction as Afghanistan's legitimate government, the CIA still saw Rabbani as too much the leftist.

Hekmatyar's forces finally seized Kabul. Rabbani and his government fled north into the Mazar-i-Sharif region where, under the command of military chief Sheik Ahmed Shah Massoud, the ousted *mujahadeen* factions reconstituted themselves as the Northern Alliance. In 1995 *Hezbi-i Isbmi* suddenly stepped down, ceding Kabul to a new creation of Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) already in charge in Kandahar- the Taliban.

More than two million Afghans had died in the decade long war CIA war- its biggest covert

operation since Vietnam. US taxpayers spent \$3.8 billion prosecuting the genocide. The House of Saud matched that amount and the other GCC monarchs kicked in as well.

The US did nothing to help rebuild Afghanistan and the forces which the CIA created to fight their proxy war were increasingly turning their anger towards the West.

An October 1999 *coup* brought General Pervez Musharraf to power in Pakistan. Musharraf supported the rise of Islamic fundamentalism. He served on the board of Rabita Trust for the Rehabilitation of Stranded Pakistanis- an Osama bin Laden fundraising front. After the 9/11 terror attacks on the US, the Bush Administration gave Musharraf thirty-six hours to step down from the Rabita board. When he refused, the State Department simply removed Rabita from its list of groups that sponsor terrorism. [2]

Gulbuddin Hekmatyar joined many other *mujahadeen* leaders in expressing anger and contempt at the US for abandoning them. During the Gulf War, several *ex-mujahadeen* commanders supported Iraq. Following the war, the wealthy Saudi Osama bin Laden, who served as the House of Saud's emissary in recruiting Afghan Arab fighters, while putting his construction background to work in building the CIA's Khost, Afghanistan *mujahadeen* training camps in 1986, now called for a jihad against the "Crusader-Zionist Alliance". [3] Many of his fellow *ex-mujahadeen* fighters heeded his call and *al Qaeda* emerged as the ugliest Frankenstein yet.

In 1993 *al Qaeda* extremists led by Ramzi Yousef attempted to blow up the World Trade Center by planting a bomb in a parking garage below the towers. Six people died. A week prior to the bombing, a FAX was received in Cairo warning of an impending attack on US interests. The FAX was fittingly sent from Peshawar, where the CIA first recruited *mujahadeen*. It was signed by *al-Gamaa al-Islamiya* (Islamic Group), a *mujahadeen* faction.

In March 1993 an *ex-mujahadeen* member walked up to the security checkpoint at CIA headquarters in Langley and opened fire, killing two agents. In March 1995, two CIA agents working out of the US Embassy in Karachi were gunned down by another *mujahadeen* veteran. Both assailants used AK-47 assault rifles paid for by the Saudi government and supplied by the CIA. Surplus CIA-supplied *mujahadeen* hardware including Stinger missiles also made its way to Iran and Qatar.

In 1996 bin Laden operatives bombed Khobar Towers military barracks at a US base in Saudi Arabia. Bin Laden Construction had built the facilities. In 1997, two days after a US court convicted the Pakistani responsible for the shootings at CIA headquarters, four auditors with Texas Union Oil Company were gunned down in Karachi.

In 1998 bin Laden loyalists blew up US Embassies in Kenya and Tanzania within minutes of one another. Hundreds died. In 2000 *al Qaeda* operatives crashed a raft full of explosives into the side of the destroyer USS Cole as it docked in Yemen, where bin Laden's family originated. Twenty-six US sailors died.

The US was finally forced to apply public pressure on the Pakistani government, which was still hosting the CIA Frankensteins. Clinton CIA Director James Woolsey said Pakistan was close to being placed on the State Department's list of states that sponsor terrorism. This public pressure further angered the Pakistani people, who had watched as the CIA created and grew these narco-terrorists for a decade, using their country as a training ground. Now the US wanted to offload their culpability onto the Pakistani people. The *mujahadeen* were

furious.

Jordanian *mujahadeen* Abu Taha put it this way, "The United States is a bloodsucker...and Pakistan is the puppet of America." Another *mujahadeen* veteran, Abu Saman, said, "We were not terrorists as long as we and the Americans had the same cause- to defeat a superpower. Now it doesn't suit the American and Western interests so we are branded terrorists." [4]

In 1994 the Taliban sprang forth from religious schools known as *madrassas* in Northwest Pakistan. The schools were run by *Jamiat-Ulema-i-Islami*- an Islamic fundamentalist group with close ties to Pakistani ISI and funded by the Saudi government. The Taliban launched raids from Pakistani soil, just as the *mujahadeen* had, gaining notoriety when they freed a Pakistani military convoy captured inside Afghanistan. Within a year they controlled one-third of Afghanistan, establishing a provisional government in Kandahar.

The Rabbani government was ousted in Kabul by Hekmatyar's *Hezbi-i Isbmi*. In 1995 as Taliban forces advanced on Kabul, Hekmatyar's troops handed over control of Kabul to the Taliban. A Western diplomat said of the Taliban, "Clearly the Pakistanis are playing some kind of role". [5]

When the Taliban came to power in 1996, saying they would establish an "Islamic emirate", planes landed in Kabul carrying Taliban leaders and seven top-ranking Pakistani military officers. [6] Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and the UAE immediately recognized the Taliban.

The Four Horsemen (Exxon Mobil, Chevron Texaco, BP Amoco & Royal Dutch/Shell) took a shine to the Taliban, viewing them as a "stabilizing force in the region". They were eager to convince the feudalists of the importance of building a gas pipeline across Afghanistan to the Indian Ocean from the vast natural gas fields of Turkmenistan, which borders Afghanistan to the north.

The Rabbani government had been negotiating with an Argentinean consortium called Bridas to build the pipeline. This angered the Four Horsemen, who backed a Unocal-led consortium known as Centgas. In 2005 Unocal became part of Chevron. Many citizens of Kabul were convinced that the CIA had brought the Taliban to power on behalf of Big Oil. [7]

The Four Horsemen were busy exploiting their new Caspian Sea oil and gas reserves in the newly formed Central Asian Republics just north of Afghanistan. Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan contain vast crude oil reserves estimated at over 200 billion barrels. Neighboring Turkmenistan is a virtual gas republic, containing some of the largest deposits of natural gas on earth. The biggest gas field is at Dauletabad in the southeast of the country near the Afghan border. All told there are an estimated 6.6 trillion cubic feet of natural gas in the Caspian Sea region.

The Centgas consortium also planned to build a pipeline which would connect oil fields around Chardzhan, Turkmenistan to the Siberian oilfields further north. [8] Turkmenistan also has vast reserves of oil, copper, coal, tungsten, zinc, uranium and gold.

With Rabbani out of the picture, Centgas began negotiating in earnest with the Taliban for rights to build their pipeline from Dauletabad across Afghanistan and Pakistan to the port of Karachi, where a US Naval base was in the works on a 100-acre site given mysteriously handed over to Omani Sultan Qaboos.

The Four Horsemen brought with them to Central Asia some loyal Saudi business partners. Saudi billionaire Sheik Khalid bin Mahfouz- owner of BCCI and National Commercial Bank and an enthusiastic supporter of the *mujahadeen*- embraced the Taliban. Bin Mahfouz- whose net worth is over \$2 billion- controls Nimir Petroleum, a partner with Chevron Texaco in developing a 1.5 billion barrel Kazakhstan oil field. A Saudi Arabian government audit found that bin Mahfouz' National Commercial Bank had transferred over \$3 million to Osama bin Laden charities in 1999. [9]

Saudi-owned Delta Oil was a partner with Amerada Hess in Azerbaijan oil ventures. Delta-Hess is part of a Bechtel-led group building the \$2.4 billion Caspian Pipeline Consortium's trans-Turkey pipeline to the Russian Black Sea port of Novorosisskyk. Delta Oil is also a partner in Centgas.

According to French writer Olivier Roy, "When the Taliban took power in Afghanistan, it was largely orchestrated by the Pakistani secret service (ISI) and the oil company Unocal, with its Saudi ally Delta". [10]

In January 1998 Centgas agreed to pay the Taliban government \$100 million a year to run their gas pipeline across Afghanistan. Centgas arranged high-level meetings in Washington between Taliban officials and the State Department.

Representing Unocal was Zalmay Khalilzad, who was Assistant Undersecretary of Defense in the Bush Sr. Administration and worked at Cambridge Energy Research Associates before working at Unocal. Khalilzad was born in Mazar-i-Sharif to wealthy Afghan aristocrats. His father was an aide to King Zaher Shah. Khalilzad also worked at Rand Corporation- long a CIA asset. [11] Khalilzad left his post at Unocal to join the National Security Council in the Bush Jr. Administration. [12] In 2002 Bush appointed Khalilzad as the first US envoy to Afghanistan in over 20 years. The first item on his agenda was to revive talks on building the Centgas pipeline.

Bin Mahfouz was under investigation for funding Osama bin Laden's *al Qaeda* terror network. He was represented in the US by Washington law firm Akin, Gump, Strauss, Hauer & Feld. The firm represents the House of Saud and the world's largest Islamic charity- the Saudi-based Holy Land Foundation for Development and Relief. Within three months of the 911 terror attacks, Treasury had frozen the assets of the Saudi foundation. Akin, Gump successfully defended bin Mahfouz when the BCCI scandal broke. Three partners at the firm are good friends of President George W. Bush. Partner James C. Langdon is one of Bush's closest friends. George Salem was involved in Bush campaign fundraising. Barnett "Sandy" Cress was appointed by Bush to head a White House-sponsored education initiative. [13]

According to French intelligence analyst Jean-Charles Brisard, President Bush Jr. blocked US Secret Service investigations into US-based *al-Qaeda* sleeper cells while he continued to negotiate secretly with Taliban officials. The last meeting was in August 2001 just five weeks before 911. Bush wanted the Taliban to deliver bin Laden in return for US and Saudi economic aid and support for the Taliban. [14]

Deputy FBI Director John O'Neill resigned his post in July 2001 to protest the Bush Administration's cozying up to the Taliban. Brisard says O'Neill told him, "the main obstacles to investigating Islamic terrorism were US corporate interests and the role played by Saudi Arabia." O'Neill took a job as Chief of Security at the World Trade Center in New York and was killed during the 911 attacks. [15]

According to the French newspaper *Le Figaro*, the CIA met with bin Laden several times during the months prior to 9/11. According to the *Washington Post*, the CIA met with Taliban leader Mullah Mohammed Omar's envoy Rahmattullah Hashami in July 2001. Hashami offered to hold on to bin Laden until the CIA could capture him but, according to the *Village Voice*, the Bush Administration turned down the offer. That same month the CIA met with *Jamiat-i-Islami* leader Qazi Hussein Ahmed.

The US government gave \$43 million in aid to the Taliban in 2000 and \$132 million in 2001. The Taliban were told by the Bush White House to hire a Washington PR firm to scrub up their image. The firm was headed by Laila Helms- niece of former CIA Director and BCCI crony Richard Helms. Big Oil representatives were present at the Bush-Taliban negotiations, where one official told the Taliban at that last August meeting, "You either accept our offer of a carpet of gold, or we bury you under a carpet of bombs." [16]

Even after the 9/11 terror attacks, President Bush omitted the names of two House of Saud-funded groups- International Islamic Relief Organization and Muslim World League- who financed *al Qaeda* from a list of groups whose assets would be frozen by the US Treasury. [17]

As French intelligence analyst Brisard noted, "The American addiction to Saudi oil and arms money threatens to undermine national security in the West".

Next Week: Part III: The Grand Chessboard, Drugistan & Restoring the Petromonarchy

NOTES

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[13] Mulvihill, Wells and Meyers

[14] *Bin Laden: The Forbidden Truth*. Jean-Charles Brisard and Guillaume Dasquie. Paris. 2001

[15] Ibid

[16] Ibid

[17] Nordland and Bartholet. p.45

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