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OIL AND WAR: THE ARTIFICES OF 20TH CENTURY HISTORY

OIL WATCH

“If we have to use force, it’s because we are Americans. We are the indispensable nation. When we can change things we should do so, and the rest of the world should follow.”

Madeleine Albright

The United States government believes it has legitimate interests wherever US companies are located. Many business interests are also government interests and, by extension, military interests. Thus, war becomes the mechanism for the control of strategic interests such as oil.

According to independent journalist Joe Vialls (1993), “For decades, the United States Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) has coveted global domination, not with the consent of the American people, but by directing the actions of the American president the way a child pulls the strings of a puppet. With the collapse of the USSR, the CIA recognized an opportunity and sought global domination through control of the world’s oil resources.”

Oil was the reason for the 1991 Gulf War, which served as a mechanism for Western countries, especially the United States, to destabilize OPEC, control the price of oil and create a new correlation of forces in favor of the US in the region which contains the world’s major oil reserves. One-and-a-half million Iraqis lost their lives in this war and 5,000 children died in the months following hostilities as a result of economic sanctions imposed on Iraq. At home, Iraq has unleashed a war on the Kurdish people whose territory contains significant oil reserves.

For the same reason, the United States declared war on the Vietnamese people. At the time, Mobil Oil Corporation was exploring off the coast of

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1 Ironically, the money Iraq received through the “Food for Oil” program, which provided for the sale of a fixed amount of oil, was used essentially to repair damages caused by the war in Kuwait and to cover costs incurred by the United Nations in pulling out of the country.
what the US referred to as “South Vietnam.” In the 1990s, Mobil obtained an exploration concession in the same field in which it has been working three decades earlier (Blue Dragon, 280 kilometers from the Mekong Delta), but later pulled out when it failed to discover commercially viable reserves.

In East Timor, significant petroleum reserves in the Sea of Timor prolonged Indonesia’s occupation, as well as Australia’s participation in the conflict in a bid to benefit from the distribution of reserves. East Timor has recently gained its independence.

In the tiny Spratley Islands, where oil reserves have been discovered, China, Vietnam, the Philippines, Indonesia, Malaysia and Brunei have staked claims, and there have been clashes between some of these countries as a result.

THE RESOURCE WARS IN AFRICA: THE LEGACY OF COLONIALISM

European countries colonized the African continent for the purpose of sacking it. When African nations achieved independence, a series of conflicts were yet to be settled and new conflicts came into being. The former colonizers were determined to continue benefiting from the territories they had once ruled in order to maintain control over resources. As a result, African countries were unable to stabilize politically through the creation of democratic states characterized by civil rights and sustainable social, economic and environmental policies. But above all, many of these nations have been unable to break the cycle of war.

This is the reason for the war in Angola, one of the major oil producers in Africa. The ruling Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (PMLA) has historically controlled the nation’s oil resources in Angola, whereas UNITA, a guerrilla organization financed by the United States, maintains control of the nation’s diamond resources. This never-ending war is a contest for oil, and it is financed on both sides by oil and diamonds.

UNITA’s primary military objectives are oil producing areas (which account for 90% of the national budget). New oil fields, especially those located in deep waters off shore, have attracted transnational oil companies, which generate the money the government needs to continue fighting the war.
After the colonial period ended, Portugal maintained a large standing army in Angola for the purpose of controlling oil and diamond resources; by the time independence arrived, the military force based in Angola was the largest on the continent. The bloody war for independence lasted for thirteen years during which Portugal allied itself with the racist South African government, where the foundation was laid for the creation of UNITAS in 1966.

With independence in 1975, three groups came into being: PMLA, backed by the USSR, Cuba and Eastern Europe, and UNITAS and the FNLA supported by the United States and South Africa. The United Nations recognized the government established by the PMLA, but a civil war broke out, with UNITAS supported by South Africa and the United States. Through the CIA, the US financed this group to the tune of a billion dollars between 1970 and 1980. During the civil war, which produced thousands of deaths, land mines were planted throughout the country and these have led to the maiming of 3.3 million Angolans.

Meanwhile, protected by the Portuguese army, the US based Gulf Oil Corporation expanded its operations, with investments growing from $150,000,000 in 1969 to $300,000,000 in 1975, providing a 50% increase in income for Portugal. Other US oil companies active in the country included Union Carbide, Texaco, Mobil and Argo Petro. In addition, Universal Leaf and Tobacco, First National City Bank of New York, Firestone, Chase Manhattan, General Electric and IBM also set up operations in Angola.

A peace accord was signed in 1991, and PMLA’s candidate was elected president in 1992. After a brief pause, UNITAS reignited the civil war, once again with the support of the US and South Africa. The group financed its activities with the contraband sale of diamonds, while the government used oil income to finance its army. The war in Angola is the result of US Cold War policies.

Today, the largest oil companies in the world have interests in Angola.

France’s former colonies have also been the victims of French oil companies. They are responsible, to a great extent, for the absence of political stability in the region. According to Liberation, a French newspaper, corporations such as ELF have been the secret weapon of French foreign policy.
The war for the liberation of Algeria, one of the bloodiest in the history of Africa, lasted for nearly a decade. Its underlying cause was the country’s oil wealth which, until 1968 when oil fields were nationalized, was exploited by French oil companies. Algeria achieved independence long after other French colonies such as Morocco and Tunis.

The fall of Mobutu Sese Soko in Zaire represented a change in the control of the country’s economy, from French and Belgian to US companies who supported the rise of Kabila.

Mobutu ruled the country for three decades. He received support from Western countries after the CIA-sponsored assassination of Patricio Lubumba. The US provided more than $300,000,000 in arms and more than $100,000,000 in military training.

After thirty years, Laurent Kabila overthrew him. He left the nation with a $14,000,000,000 debt. Evidence indicates that North American oil companies were behind the fall of their former ally. When Kabila came to power, Clinton immediately offered military aid. Today, the oil reserves of the new Democratic Republic of the Congo (the former Zaire) are controlled by US companies, including Chevron and UNOCAL, as well as the French-Belgian corporation TotalFinaElf.

In the Congo, French president Jacques Chirac called his colleague Denis Sassou Nguesso to congratulate him after his victory, achieved after a four-month bloody civil war. Sassou had overthrown the democratically elected Pascal Lissouba in a coup that resulted in widespread damage to Brazzaville, capital of the Congo.

Western diplomatic sources claim that Lissouba created alarm in Paris when he secretly negotiated an advance payment of oil with US Occidental Petroleum Corporation. Lissoube received a large sum of money in exchange for ceding rights to the Congo’s oil reserves to Occidental. The same diplomatic sources indicate that as a result, Elf began an aggressive campaign against Lissouba, which led to clashes in urban areas and, ultimately, the end of his rule.

According to French newspapers *Liberation* and *Le Canard Enchainé*, Elf financed Lissouba’s army and simultaneously provided money for Sassou, while shipping arms to the Congo through Gabon, another important source of oil for Elf.
The French company Elf produces 60% of its oil in the Gulf of Guinea and, just before the war in the Congo, operations had begun on the largest underwater platform in the world, located off the coast of the Congo. France has always viewed the Congo as an important source not only of oil but also of mineral and timber resources.

OIL AS A CATALYST OF INTERNAL CONFLICTS

The presence of natural resources, including oil and gas, in the lands of indigenous groups and ethnic minorities, and in areas populated by those traditionally excluded from power, has led to internal conflicts that in many cases have turned into civil wars.

Dominant groups have used these territories as a resource base, destroying the means of survival of their traditional custodians. In many cases, oil companies have fanned these conflicts, supporting one of the parties involved, in order to benefit their own interests.

This is the case of the Ijaw people of Nigeria who live in the Niger River Delta where Shell drilled its first well in 1956 in the community of Oloibiri. Since then, the Oloibiri, with a population of 12,000,000, have suffered unspeakable human rights violations as well as environmental degradation, and have lived with constant violence caused by clashes between oil companies and civil society leading to the deaths of many Ijaw. As a result, in December of 1998, the Ijaw people signed the Declaration of Kaiama, demanding an end to all oil activities (exploration and production), and the withdrawal of all transnationals from Ijawland. But the violence continues.

The presence of Shell and other oil companies in the Niger Delta has caused additional conflicts, such as that between the Ogoni, a people victimized by a brutally repressive system. The Ogoni created the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP) in response to this aggression. At the end of May 1995, the president of the MOSOP, Ken Saro-Wiwa, was taken into custody for the alleged murders of four Ogoni elders. Eventually, he was executed in extra-judicial proceedings together with eight community leaders who had organized against Shell due to the company’s destructive activities in Ogoni territory. Some sources claim that members of the “Operation for the Restoration of Peace and Order in Ogoni Territory killed Saro-Wiwa,” a committee created by the Nigerian government to protect Shell’s interests in the area.
Shell has admitted that it has asked for government assistance on a number of occasions in order to assure the continuity of its operations. On one of these, eighty people were killed when government forces opened fire on a peaceful demonstration against Shell.

Shell has produced crude in the Niger Delta for more than fifty years; the area represents 40% of its global operations.

Chevron is another company operating in the Niger Delta. The corporation has been taken to court in the United States for the deaths of two activists, killed by the company’s security force.

Another telling case is that of Aceh, in Indonesia. In that area in North Sumatra, Mobil provided for military support from the government to stop the secessionist Free Aceh Movement (GAM). This movement had been organized, in large part, as a result of the deterioration in the quality of life, the degradation of the environment and the violation of human rights resulting from Mobil’s operations in the area.

Most human rights violations suffered in Aceh have taken place in the north, and many victims have testified that Indonesia’s Special Forces (Kopassus) are responsible for said violations. Members of Kopassus are based in Camp Rancong, owned by the PT Arun Oil Company\(^2\). Others claim that they have been interrogated at Post 13, a facility provided by Mobil Oil.

Extra-judicial executions and disappearances take place in Aceh. Most of the disappearances have never been explained. A number of people have disappeared while in jail serving long sentences (Aditjondro, 1997).

In 1989, an estimated two thousand civilians died while in army custody in Aceh and the north of Sumatra. In that year, counter insurgency operations began against the armed resistance movement (Aditjondro, 1997).

The 1989-1993 period was the most difficult for the people of Aceh. Amnesty International charges that women and children were among those executed and that the murders took place both publicly and in secret. While violence has diminished in subsequent years, it has yet to come to an end.

Since 1991, at least 35 persons have been accused of subversion for supporting the separatist movement; they have been sentenced to 20-year prison terms. When military authorities freed hundred of persons jailed for

\(^2\) PT Arun is a partner of ExxonMobil in Indonesia.
alleged collaboration with Aceh Merdeka, they reported having been tortured and mistreated.

In 1998, more than one hundred mass graves were discovered in Aceh; one of these contained close to 200 bodies.

By the end of the 1980s, Aceh was providing approximately 30% of the oil and gas produced in Indonesia; this represented 11% of the country’s exports. However, 40% of the people of Aceh live in poverty, according to government figures.

The situation in Sudan is not widely known. For 34 of the 45 years since independence, the country has been immersed in civil war. An estimated two million people have died in the conflict, while 500,000 people are refugees and four million have been displaced from ancestral lands. Sudan is a country divided in geographical, cultural and religious terms. Sixty-five per cent of the population is African in origin, and 35% of the people are descendents of Arabs.

The nation’s dominant group is Muslim (about 70% of the population). Members of this group live in the north of the country and see the south as a source of goods and resources they cannot produce. This has led to differences with ethnic groups in the south who are primarily Christian and the result has been the longest civil war in Africa’s modern history.

Oil has a role in the current civil war in Sudan. In September 1999, Sudan became Africa’s newest oil exporter. The largest oil fields are in the south of the Upper Nile. A 1,540 kilometer pipeline built to transport oil has already been sabotaged by forces opposed to the government.

The crude is extracted in the south of the country and refined in and shipped from the north. This has led to rebellions among the southern populations who demand self-determination and the right to manage their natural resources. Intervention from imperialist European nations seeking greater control over oil production has exacerbated the situation.

Most of the profits generated by oil go to finance the war. Sudan spends $1,000,000 per day on war. Meanwhile, 3,100,000 Sudanese are chronically hungry and the nation’s foreign debt stands at $17,000,000,000.

Oil companies operating in Sudan include Talisman of Canada, the China National Petroleum Corporation and Petronas of Malaysia. A number of companies have left for security reasons or due to sanctions imposed on
Sudan by the United States in 1997. Chevron was exploring there in 1983, but in spite of services provided in the oil fields by a private security firm staffed by veterans of the Vietnam war, the company’s operations could not be protected.

According to some observers, the United States would back independence of the southern states of Sudan in order to create a barrier to Islamic expansion.

At the same time, Russia and Sudan have developed relations based on arms and oil. Slavneft of Russia/Belarussia, signed a $126,000,000 agreement with Sudan to undertake oil production activities. The agreement provides that Russia will give technical and military assistance to Sudan. Included in the technical assistance provided is training of Sudanese workers in the assembly of T-75 tanks in the industrial city of Giad. In addition, Minister of Defense Bakr iHassan presented a list of arms the Sudanese wanted to buy from Russia. A second arms purchase took place two years ago. The arms are financed by oil income, creating a vicious circle in which oil feeds the flames of war.

HOW OIL WRITES HISTORY

British Petroleum began its activities in Iran under the guise of the Anglo Persian Oil Company (the name was later changed to Anglo Iranian Oil Company or AIOC) at the beginning of the twentieth century with the complete support, including military assistance, of the British Empire. For fifty years, AIOC (or British Petroleum) fashioned Iranian politics according to its own interests. To maintain its hegemony, England established and brought down governments and supported insurgent movements such as the Bakhtiaris in oil producing areas, through the provision of arms and intelligence in order to create instability whenever the Irani government had to renegotiate the terms of its contract with AIOC. England provoked a number of confrontations with Iraq for oil resources in the south of the country, and with Russia for oil in the north.

When World War I broke out, England needed oil to mobilize its troops. The British government thus had an even greater interest in the oil reserves of Iran and the state invested in AIOC.

Iran’s oil was also a key element in the mobilization of British troops during World War II. The oil provided a source of energy. In addition, during the war years, the British government reduced the royalties Iran received for its oil from 3.7 million British pounds (in 1937) to 2.8 million
British pounds (in 1940). The Shah declared his dissatisfaction with a policy that reduced his nation’s earnings simply because the company involved was controlled by a government at war.

The US government, exerting diplomatic pressure, unleashed its own war to benefit its oil companies and assure them access to Irani crude. But it was only when British economic dominance came to an end at the close of World War II that the US managed to break the monopoly of British Petroleum. This effort finally succeeded with the fall of the nationalist government of Mossadeq in 1953, brought about with military support from the CIA whose chief officer for the Middle East was Kermit Roosevelt, and also through an international boycott of Iranian oil. The new government that took over gave 40% of the nation’s oil concessions to North American companies. British hegemony in Iran had come to an end.

Iraq has also been converted into war booty for Western powers as a result of its oil reserves. This nation was under the control of Turkey until World War I at the end of which it was turned over to England. The British government provided support to British Petroleum and Royal Dutch Shell and was successful for a time in blocking oil exploration by North American companies in Iraq. Finally, after extremely complex diplomatic negotiations, the two countries signed an agreement in 1929 dividing the world’s oil resources, and Iraq’s reserves were turned over to a consortium formed by Exxon and Mobil.

Rivalry between the US and England was exacerbated during World War II over who would control oil reserves in Saudi Arabia. Chevron came to an agreement with the US government providing for royalties to be paid to the king of Saudi Arabia from a war fund set up to support England, but when the British sent its geologists to Saudi Arabia in 1943, the money was paid directly to the monarch.

CONFLICTS IN CENTRAL ASIA

The latest conflict in Central Asia (Afghanistan) is related to access to and control over the vast oil resources of the region, both in the Caspian Sea and the Arabian Gulf. After successful exploration by Argentine company Bridas in Turkmenistan, the company signed a contract for the Keimar block near the Caspian and the Yashlar block near the Afghan border. In 1995, Bridas signed a contract to build a pipeline between Turkmenistan and Pakistan, which would run through Afghanistan, but work on the pipeline could not begin until negotiations were concluded with the Afghans who were engaged at the time in a civil war.
The following years, after intense negotiations with Afghan leaders, Bridas signed a thirty-year agreement with the government of Rabbani to build and operate the 875 mile natural gas pipeline. Bulgheroni, chief of Bridas, approached other companies, including UNOCAL, to form an international consortium. However, UNOCAL had plans of its own and subsequently formed a consortium which included the Saudi company Delta Oil, with strong ties to Saudi Prince Abdullah and King Fahd, the Russian company Gazprom and the state-controlled Turkish company Turkmenrozas. A deal was finally reached in 1995 for a 918 miles natural gas pipeline.

Interest in the trans-Afghan pipeline was based on more than simple economics. There was also a geopolitical interest: military control of the Euro-Asian region (including the Middle East and the former Soviet republics of Central Asia). The United States was particularly interested in control of oil production and transport. This was one reason for US military intervention in the 1990s in the Balkans, the Caucasus and the Caspian Sea.

In 1992, eleven oil companies controlled 50% of oil investments in the Caspian region; they included British Petroleum, Amoco and ARCO (three companies subsequently merged to form BP), UNOCAL, TexacoChevron (also merged), Exxon-Mobil, Pennzoil and Phillips. There are additional companies and political consultants working in Central Asia with the full support of the US Departments of State and Energy, and these include oil company associations.

Principal advisors in the area include Brezezinski, a consultant for Amoco who designed the Afghan-Soviet war in the 1970s. Henry Kissinger advises Unocal and Dick Cheney has been an advisor for Halliburton and the US-Azerbaijan Chamber of Commerce. Unocal’s envoy in Central Europe was Robert Oakley, a US intelligence and defense official.

Subsequently, a consortium led by UNOCAL obtained another contract for the construction of a 1,050 miles pipeline to pass through Afghanistan and connect Dauletabad and a port in Pakistan on the coast of the Arabian Sea.

Although UNOCAL had an agreement with the government, the contract Bridas had with Afghanistan was still in force. The CIA solved this problem and a group supported by the Taliban. After a visit by a high US State Department official in the autumn of 1996, the Taliban entered Kabul and overthrew the Rabbani government. Nevertheless, UNOCAL considered the possibility of running the pipeline through Afghan territories controlled by the Northern Alliance.
Since the contract with Bridas had to be renegotiated, UNOCAL immediately implemented a program of humanitarian aid and installed a cell phone system between Kabul and Kandahar, while USAID made a large contribution to a Taliban education program. For its part, Bridas worked with a number of important leaders in Saudi Arabia. The rivalry between UNOCAL and Bridas began to reflect a conflict between members of the Saudi royal family. Until 1997 neither company signed an agreement. The Taliban government presented demands beyond royalties, including infrastructure such as highways and energy generating facilities, and the reinstatement of the state petroleum company which had been abolished by the Soviets. UNOCAL was not prepared to comply with these demands. Bridas, on the other hand, offered higher royalties and a pipeline for local use; the company also enjoyed the support of Osama Bin Laden. In addition, the Bridas plan did not depend upon outside financing whereas UNOCAL’s proposal would have required loans from Western institutions such as the World Bank, which would have put the Taliban in a vulnerable position vis-a-vis the demands of Western governments.

Bridas sold 60% of its holdings in Latin America to Amoco (now BP), to strengthen its position. Meanwhile, the Russian company Gazprom pulled out of the UNOCAL consortium, forcing the company to look for new partners in South Korea and Japan while fending off criticism leveled in the US by human rights groups. Attacks on the US embassy in Kenya and the subsequent US bombing of that Central Asian country led to the breaking off of diplomatic relations between the US and Afghanistan. This ended UNOCAL’s contract negotiations with the Taliban, and the Saudi company Delta was unable to continue as the consortium’s leader.

After the events of September 11 and the fall of the Taliban government, the situation changed. In May 2002, the presidents of Pakistan, Turkmenistan and Afghanistan signed an agreement to build and maintain a 1,460 kilometers natural gas pipeline. At the same time, the president of the World Bank began to consider a $100,000,000 loan to finance the project.

It is believed that Afghan has considerable hydrocarbon reserves. During its occupation of the country, the USSR estimated natural gas reserves at five trillion cubic feet.

The Afghan oil fields that have not been exploited include Jorqaduq, Khowaja, Gogerdak and Yatimtaq, all located within nine kilometers of the Shebrghan people in the northern province of Jowzjan.
Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan together have 115 billion barrels of proven oil reserves and eleven trillion cubic meters of gas. Until now, Russia has maintained exclusive control of oil transport in the region, a situation the US would like to change.

For the US, the significance of the region lies in the fact that Caspian crude could provide a counterweight to the leadership maintained by OPEC countries in the fixing of crude oil prices. This role was previously exercised by North Sea oil, but reserves there are far below those of the Caspian, and the US believes that it would be easier to control production in the Caspian in light of the institutional weakness of the countries in the region.

Currently, more than forty projects are being developed in Kazakhstan and Azerbaijan, involving eleven US companies, 24 companies from other Western countries and two Russian companies. Chevron leads a consortium that includes ExxonMobil and LukArco (joint ventures between Lukoil of Russia and Arco, now merged with BP-Amoco) in the Tengiz field, the largest in Kazakhstan, with ten billion barrels of crude. US companies control 75% of operations.

At the same time, oil income will probably attract other US companies to these countries (service companies, secondary industries, etc.).

The European company Agip, member of a consortium that includes BP, TotalElf-Fina and Royal Dutch Shell, is developing a gas field in Kashagan in the same country, and thus the situation involves rival groups. Both consortiums depend on the pipeline that runs through Russia from Grozny in Chechenya to Novorossisk in the Black Sea.

Chechenya is also involved in a war because in order for the Russians to maintain control over the oil transport, it must maintain control over Chechenya. Because the pipeline runs through Russia, the Russians control energy transport and prices and thus can also maintain political control over the region. For example, Russia cuts oil supply to Georgia whenever it wants to impose policies on that country.

Chechenya is also the country through which pipelines take Siberian crude to the Black Sea.

US and European groups want to end Russian hegemony in the transport of crude. Those interested in building new pipelines include TotalFinaElf, which would like to build a pipeline in Kazakhstan ending in Iran. In
Azerbaijan, a consortium lead by BP is planning a multi millon dollar pipeline to run from Baku (Azerbaijan) through Tbilisi (Georgia) to Cayhan (Turkey), ending in the Mediterranean. Other potential pipeline routes are also being studied.

THE BALKAN WAR

Crude oil leaves from the Black Sea and eventually comes to the Mediterranean. This is where the countries of the former Yugoslavia come into the picture. The US’s interest in the region is based on the desire to consolidate its presence in southern Europe. To achieve this objective, they are going to establish a transport, communication and pipeline corridor which joins the Black Sea with the Adriatic coast (the Trans-Balkan pipeline, or AMBO)\(^3\), and assure the supremacy of these countries—in conjunction with England—over other countries of the European Union.

Who is behind the Balkan pipeline? BP and ChevronTexaco are the leaders of a consortium, which controls the project. They are competing with European oil companies TotalFinaElf and ENI, which have significant interests in the oil fields of Kashagan in the northeast of the Caspian in Kazakhstan.

Brown & Root Ltd. (the British subsidiary of Halliburton, in which US Vice President Dick Cheney has significant investments) did a feasibility study for the pipeline. Subsequently, a high Halliburton executive was named executive director of AMBO. This company was awarded the service concession for support of US troops in Kosovo during the construction of the Bondsteel base, the largest US military base overseas since Vietnam. Coincidentally, the legal firm associated with the company now includes former president Clinton.

Another strategic project is the Baku-Cehyan pipeline, which will run through Turkey and is also in the hands of US companies. Both projects depend on US military presence, both in the Caspian and in the Balkans.

According to some observers, Washington hopes to separate the three countries involved in the AMBO project from German influence and from French, Belgian and Italian oil interests.

These countries have been involved in the “Southern Balkans Development Initiative” (SBDI) to facilitate the flow of public and private capital in

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\(^3\) The pipeline would pass through Bulgaria, Macedonia and Albania.
order to implement the initiative. A Memorandum of Intent has been signed Bulgaria, Albania and Macedonia; as a result, these countries renounce their sovereignty over the pipeline and the communications corridor, ceding all rights to the Anglo-American consortium.

The AMBO pipeline is tied to another strategic project, known as “Corridor 8,” which was part of an initial proposal, the “Stabilization Pact for the Balkans” which included highway, railroads, electricity and telecommunications infrastructure. As for existing infrastructure, it is to be deregulated under the supervision of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank.

Although the European Union’s Minister of Transport declared “Corridor 8” a part of the political integration of these countries into the EU, feasibility studies have been carried out by US companies, including Bechtel, Enron and General Electric, with financial support from the US government.

The strategy for the region includes militarization of the corridor. This fact was admitted by former president Clinton’s Secretary of Energy.

Robert Forwick, chief of the OSCE mission in Macedonia, began talks with the leader of the rebel National Liberation Army (NLA), Ali Ahmeti. He participated in putting together an agreement between Ahmeti and the leaders of the Albanian political parties which form part of the transition government. This agreement contributed significantly to instability in Macedonia and opened the way for greater US intervention via “humanitarian and military aid.”

According to Chossudovsky (1999), the CIA is behind the NLA and KLA (Kosova Liberation Army) rebel groups, whose members carried out terrorists attacks against the security forces of Macedonia. Two rebel commanders responsible for terrorist attacks in the Tetevo region were trained by British Special Forces in the north of Albania between 1998 and 1999 (Walker, 2001).

While the NLA received arms made in America, Germany donated arms to the Special Forces of Macedonia. This conflict between Germany and the US in military matters in the Balkans is a reflection of divisions in the Western military industrial complex between, on the one hand, the US and England and, on the other, France and Germany. Oil is intimately related to this process because the corridors for pipelines and transport leaving the Caspian Sea must be protected.
There were at least two wars related to oil in the 1940s in Latin America: the war of the Chaco, as a result of which Paraguay lost a part of its territory containing significant oil reserves, and the war between Ecuador and Peru.

In the 1980s, the civil war in Guatemala was centered in the Izxcan, the region from which the indigenous population was evicted and where oil exploration is taking place today.

Why did England go to war with Argentina over the Malvinas? At the time of the war, people believed that the real reason for hostilities was oil. Today, years after the war, Argentina and Great Britain have undertaken joint off-shore activities in the region, in a “Specific Cooperation Area.” Four companies, Shell, Amerada Hess, LASMO and the Canadian International Petroleum Corporation, are leading international consortia in the first round of exploration in the Malvinas.

But the most recent case involving war and oil is Plan Colombia, the objective of which is to control oil production in that country. Plan Colombia is being implemented in the Putumayo region of the Amazon where, although oil production is relatively modest, the new concessions awarded suggest that reserves could well be greater than those proven to date. Ecopetrol directly manages most production, but partnerships have been formed with US companies.

The problem in the region is the continual sabotage of oil infrastructure carried out by irregular armies in the country, resulting in significant economic losses for the oil companies. In other areas of Colombia, this type of attack has affected companies such as Occidental and BP. President George Bush has announced that Plan Colombia will include providing protection for Occidental.

With the so-called Andean Initiative, the US will control oil and gas production in five Andean-Amazon countries. All of the five countries are characterized by circumstances worrisome to the US: insurgency in Colombia, reactivation of OPEC by Chavez in Venezuela, the indigenous movement in Ecuador, resurgence of the peasant movement in Bolivia, and the renewal of civil society in Peru after the fall of Fujimori.
As regards Hugo Chavez, a number of analysts have suggested that it was the role he plays in oil policies that led to the coup attempt in April 2002. Since he came to power in 1998, his policies have irritated Washington, especially his role in the rehabilitation of OPEC and the stabilization of oil prices in March 2000, as a result of which said prices quadrupled in relation to their 1999 levels. At the same time, Venezuela’s new constitution, supported by Chavez, prohibits the privatization of the state oil company. Chavez has also signed an agreement with Cuba providing for the sale of crude at subsidized prices and he has also replaced the state’s petroleum officials.

PLAN PUEBLA PANAMA

National and foreign business interests come together in an area that extends from the Isthmus of Tehuantepec in the southeast of Mexico to Panama. This region contains an extraordinary range of biological diversity, one of the most impressive in the world. And it is here that transnational corporations have joined hands to implement a multinational project.

The intervention in the area includes three programs: the Puebla Panama Plan, the Mesoamerican Biological Corridor and the New Horizons military operation.

The plan includes the south of Mexico, Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua, Costa Rica and Panama. Its purpose is to integrate the southeast of Mexico with Central America by opening a series of logistical corridors made up of transport infrastructure including highways, seaports and airports, as well as communications infrastructure that includes fiber optic systems and energy infrastructure for the generation of electricity and the flow of hydrocarbons through pipelines.

On February 16, 2001, from his ranch, San Cristobal, Vicente Fox “discussed the details of PPP with US president George Bush,” who promised support for the project. Subsequently, the existence of PPP was officially announced on March 12, 2001.

Plan Puebla Panama has a number of components. The first is an attempt by US capital to control the Pacific basin through the creation of interoceanic corridors in order to have access to markets in Asia. This geoeconomic plan includes the expulsion of millions of peasants from their lands so that these can be turned over to industries which will be established along the corridors, especially maquiladores, where US and
Asian merchandise will be assembled and then shipped to the dynamic centers of the world economy.

Another objective of the corridors is rapid access to natural resources, especially the biodiversity of the region. The Mesoamerican Biological Corridor “has as its objective the integration of conservation policies through the establishment of biological connectors among the protected natural areas of southeast Mexico to avoid the biological isolation of these and to guarantee the equilibrium of land and marine ecosystems under the guise of sustainable development,” according to the World Bank which is financing the creation of the biological corridor. This corridor is located in a strategic zone for the appropriation of Latin America’s biodiversity.

As for energy resources, the Mexican portion of the region includes Campeche, Chiapas, Quintana Roa, Tabasco and the Yucatan, from which more than 90% of the nation’s oil resources are extracted. In addition, the greater part of the infrastructure for the generation of electricity is located in the same area. All the Central American countries involved in the plan have proven oil reserves. The plan will strengthen control over these, and includes the construction of a series of natural gas pipelines, including the Mesoamerican pipeline.

The final objective of the plan is military control. On February 15, 2001, the Guatemalan congress authorized “exercises” between the armies of the US and Guatemala in El Peten, the oil region that borders on Chiapas and also includes the biological corridor. These exercises are part of the strategy developed by the armed forces of the US, and officially known as New Horizons.

The New Horizons operation, developed by US armed forces in Central America, has as its immediate predecessor the “exercise” undertaken jointly by the Salvadoran army between February and May of 2002. This exercise was carried out in the department of Chalatenango and directed by Coronel Clayde Leavelle. According to information from the US embassy in El Salvador, he was sent as the commanding officer of the Personnel and Administration Batallion 324 to Ryad, Saudi Arabia in 1990, as part of the Desert Storm support group. Furthermore, he was the secretary general of the head team of the Tenth Personnel Command and assistant to the commander in chief of the Tenth Operations Battalion. Colonel Clayde Leavelle’s education includes basic and advanced courses as official of artillery in aerial defense, master of parachuting in the rapid aerial combat forces, and training for officers of the medical corps and as general adjunct officer, as well as other courses at the US Navy War School.
In El Salvador, within the context the New Horizons 2000 exercises between February and May, the “Santa Fe Joint Task Force” built four schools, two kitchens and a clinic, drilled ten wells and rehabilitated several kilometers of roads. According to reports on these activities, “the tasks were undertaken by members of the armed forces of the United States, El Salvador and, for the first time, members of the Guatemalan army.” The report adds that “in addition, more than 30,000 persons and 10,000 animals received medical attention from medical and veterinary teams participating in the exercises.”

In Nicaragua, $10,000,000 has been budgeted for New Horizons 2002. Contrary to declarations made in Guatemala, the US government will also cooperate in Nicaragua in combating drug trafficking and terrorism.

According to Cesar Montes, secretary of the United Democratic Left of Guatemala, congressional approval of New Horizons in his country is “the historic embarrassment of the new millennium”; Montes believes that the presence of 12,000 US soldiers participating in military exercises was “technically, an invasion.”

Although Plan Puebla Panama, the Mesoamerican Biological Corridor and New Horizons appear to be three distinct initiatives, the three projects demonstrate affinities not only in terms of stated ecological, social and humanitarian concerns but also, and principally, in their interest in the Mesoamerican region. These affinities are worrisome in terms of the true economic reasons for the initiatives and their consequences for the subordination of this extensive region to the interests of transnational capital.

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