

The Most Dangerous Game in the World: Oil, War, and U.S. Global Hegemony

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The attacks on September 11 and following American operations in Afghanistan have raised a host of questions, and touched a broad array of ongoing structural and conflictual developments about world politics. There is a fairly widespread consensus that “everything changed” on the day four airliners were hijacked and nearly 5000 people murdered. It has been claimed that “the attacks on the United States ... have incalculable consequences for domestic politics and world affairs” with “profound effects on the US economy as well as the world”.¹ It was described as “a wake-up call against the background of a period of indolence and self-satisfaction”.² “The new world order”, we were told, “is at war and everything is changed utterly – borders, cultures, powers, America, Middle East, Asia, China, Australia”.³ “The events of September 11” were “a terrible reminder that freedom demands eternal vigilance”.⁴ But, there is much less agreement about how to define the main features of this change. One conclusion drawn by Robert Keohane is “an understanding that new threats create new alliances” and that the US “has greater need for commitments from other states now than it had before September 11”.⁵ A similar trend has been pointed out by Steve Smith: “the September 11 terrorist bombings will be to usher in an era where US foreign policy is more multilateral than before, an era that indicates both the essential interconnectedness of world politics and the fact that the US can neither act as world policeman nor retreat into

isolation.”⁶ Others put emphasis on globalisation, and claim that “the old idea of international governance ... is now an actual possibility”.⁷ Similarly, Achilles Skordas like so many others sees a move “towards a disciplined international system of ‘benevolent hegemony’” after September 11.⁸ Some others read in September 11 and the following events a clear indication of an impending crisis of the world capitalist system in general and the US power in particular. What they are seeing in the recent events is “the death throes of a dying capitalism.”⁹ Yet some others are increasingly concerned with the identity questions as the main aspect of the recent events, and a “clash of civilisations” narrative of the relationship between the West and Islam has occupied centre stage. “11th September”, in the words of Anatol Lieven, “has ushered in a struggle of civilisation against barbarism.”¹⁰ It was described as an attack by “a fanatical group on civilised societies in general”.¹¹

This article is an attempt to contribute to understanding the reasons behind the U.S. operations in Afghanistan. It concentrates on the political economic motives, actions and their consequences of the major actor of the post-Cold War world, the USA. The essay sets out to answer a basic question: How can one read the recent war in Afghanistan as symptomatic of far-reaching structural trends in world politics? My argument is premised on two closely related observations. The first is that the link between the US operations in Afghanistan that began on 7 October 2001 and the events of September 11 is less self-evident than it at first appears. In other words, the plans for the American offensive in Afghanistan were not formulated in response to September 11, but existed prior to the terrorist attacks in the USA. Therefore, it could be argued that the attacks on September 11 provided the US with the opportunity to enter Afghanistan to further extend a project that had already started months, if not years, earlier. September 11 simply set off an explosion which was already in the making. If history had skipped over September 11, and the horrific events of that day had never happened, it is very likely that the US would have gone to war in Afghanistan anyway.

My second observation is derived from an understanding of the special geostrategic significance of Afghanistan. Why Afghanistan? Afghanistan occupies a strategic position in the geopolitical landscapes in general, and the geopolitics of the oil and natural gas resources in particular. Afghanistan has been in an extremely significant location spanning South Asia, Central Asia, and the Middle East. In addressing this issue, I will outline the economic and political significance of the international competition over oil and natural gas reserves of the region, central Eurasia, in which Afghanistan is located. In my opinion, the US administration has significant political/ military and economic reasons to try to turn Afghanistan into a base for American military operations in the region. There can be no doubting Afghanistan's strategic importance to the US.¹²

Were the US Military Operations in Afghanistan Simply A Response to the Attacks of September 11?

We have been told many times after September 11 that the day America was attacked “is a defining moment for humankind”¹³, and “everything changed” on that tragic day, and the world will never be the same again.¹⁴ The US military operations in Afghanistan, by this account, were hastily improvised in less than a month as a direct response to the attacks in America.

My premise is that the decisions shaping the US military campaign in Afghanistan show a remarkable continuity based on an ongoing, pre-September 11 evolution in approaches to global system. I argue that the Bush administration was seeking a war in Afghanistan as a means for achieving global geopolitical goals. The causes for the war in Afghanistan cannot be found by looking only at September 11 and the events of the last few months. The roots are much broader and deeper. To see the whole picture we must return to the central fact of recent history – the fall of the state-socialist regimes in 1989. The way the US exercised its hegemonic power in the world politics in relation to its military operations in *Alternatives: Turkish Journal of International Relations, Vol.1, No.2, Summer 2002* 49

Afghanistan was very much a continuation of a policy started at the end of the Cold War. In other words, there was a significant change in the world power configuration, but this happened not on September 11, 2001, but at least 10 years earlier, with the collapse of the Soviet bloc. In the words of Eric Hobsbawm, the collapse of the Soviet power in world politics “destroyed the ... system that had stabilized international relations for some forty years.”¹⁵

The dramatic and unprecedented events that took place in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union in 1989-91 radically transformed geopolitical and geoeconomic contexts of the world politics. The geopolitical context was transformed because with the dismantling of the Soviet Union in 1991, the bipolar structure of global politics disappeared together with the Cold War. The collapse of the Warsaw Pact has created a zone of conflicting interests stretching from Germany in central Europe to China in east Asia. In the absence of the other superpower, the US has found itself the master of a new world, in which it enjoys unassailable dominance. At a second level are major regional powers that are pre-eminent in areas of the world, but none is likely to match the US in the key dimensions of power – military, economic, and technological – that secure global political dominance. This global dominance does not simply derive from the US’s quantitatively greater military power. It derives from how this military might is deployed politically to shape the political and economic context of world politics. The US has the ability to control, through its military power, political leverage and its control over globe’s significant economic resources, the regional peripheries of its major allies.

No less important was the transformed geo-economic context. Countries of Eastern Europe and former Soviet Union have opened for big multinational corporations to flood in, to exploit the natural resources and to invest in their development, thereby transforming the conditions for capital accumulation since 1991. The collapse of the Soviet control over the

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natural and human resources of this strategic region has resulted in the emergence of a high-stakes game of money and politics that includes such heavyweight players such as the US, Russian, and Chinese governments, along with the world's biggest multi-national corporations.

Eurasia, the vast lands between China and Germany, has emerged as the world's axial super-continent, which is now serving as the decisive geopolitical chessboard, both for political/military and economic reasons. Eurasia accounts for 75 percent of the world's population, 60 percent of its GNP, and 75 percent of its energy resources. Collectively, Eurasia's power overshadows even America's.¹⁶ On the level of global economic relations, the lure of enormous oil reserves in the Caspian Sea basin has made the region the focus of fierce competition between multinational companies and the governments of powerful states. The geopolitics of the region is therefore a significant matter. On a lighter note, it is even the setting and plot device for the latest James Bond movie.

The leading political power in this competition is the US, whose military spending is greater than all the military spending of the next 13 countries ranked beneath it. Yet the US share of the world trade and manufacturing is substantially less than it was during the Cold War. Since the end of the Cold War, the US has been facing a decline in its economic strength relative to the European Union, and East Asian economic group of Japan, China and the Southeast Asian "tigers". The major US interventions since 1989 should be viewed not only as reactions to "ethnic cleansing" or "international terrorism", but opportunistic responses to this post-Cold War geopolitical picture. This is one central reason why military power is now so often the choice of the US administration.¹⁷ Andre Gunder Frank, in an article written in June 1999, identified this strategic trend in post-Cold War US foreign policy as "Washington sees its military might as a trump card that can be employed to prevail over all its rivals in the coming struggle for resources."¹⁸

Unimpeded access to affordable energy has always been a paramount strategic interest of the US administration, and so far US is the dominant power in controlling the oil and gas resources of Eurasia. The leading position of the US stems from its ability to control the sources of and transport routes for crucial energy and other strategic material supplies needed by other leading industrial states. Because of its positions in the Middle East and its sea and air dominance in the Eastern Mediterranean, the Atlantic, the Pacific, and the Indian Ocean, the US has so far been enjoying a strong military and political command. For reasons both of world strategy and control over natural resources, the US administration is determined to safeguard this dominant position and permanent role in Eurasia. The immediate task of the US administration in “volatile Eurasia” has been described as “to ensure that no state or combination of states gains the ability to expel the US or even diminish its decisive role.”¹⁹ Stated US policy goals regarding energy resources of Eurasia include breaking Russia’s monopoly over oil and gas transport routes, promoting US energy security through diversified supplies, encouraging the construction of multiple pipelines that go through US-controlled lands, and denying other potential powers dangerous leverage over the Central Asian oil and natural gas resources.²⁰

The attack on America on September 11 provided an added incentive to the US administration to increase its grip over the region as well as to remind the world of America’s capacity for political-military control. Indeed, what happened on September 11 could have come out what seemed to be the “wild fantasies” developed by American strategic analysts as they sought to justify a new active military role in the post-Cold War world. During the 1990s, great efforts were spent in imagining new “worst case scenarios” stemmed from new post-Soviet threats. US security planners have come up with all sorts of “evil” new ways of possible threats, from chemical warfare to biological weapons, and from hijacked vehicles and truck bombs to cyber-terrorism (jamming 911 services, or shutting down electricity or

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telecommunications, or disrupting air traffic control, etc.). Particular importance has been given to the notion of “rogue states” that own “Weapons of Mass Destruction” and sponsor terrorism. To defend the US interests against all these new, and mostly imaginary, threats, new hi-tech combat techniques have been developed and employed during the 1990s. America’s supremacy in bombs and planes and satellites and tanks have made the prospect of US casualties remote. Main aspect of this new US military performance is based on the use of high technology either directly to attack an enemy, or to support a proxy, say some Iraqi Kurdish groups in northern Iraq, the KLA in Kosovo, or the Northern Alliance in Afghanistan. The rapid victory – in the Gulf War ten years ago, in Kosovo in 1999, and in Afghanistan recently – at a minimal cost to American lives has helped to lay the ghost of Vietnam.

It is interesting that the map of “terrorist sanctuaries” and so-called enemy rogue states is “a map of the world’s principal energy resources”.²¹ A few days before September 11, the US Energy Information Administration documented Afghanistan’s strategic “geographical position as a potential transit route for oil and natural gas exports from Central Asia to the Arabian Sea”, including the construction of pipelines through Afghanistan.²²

The life-and-death struggle to monopolise energy resources lies at the heart of this struggle, because oil remains the lifeblood of modern world economy. Superpower status naturally requires control of oil at every stage – discovery, pumping, refining, transporting, and marketing. The Washington-based American Petroleum Institute, voice of the major US oil companies, called the Caspian region “the area of greatest resource potential outside of the Middle East.”²³ Dick Cheney, Vice-President to George Bush, speaking of the Caspian Sea basin in 1998 when he was working for the oil industry, commented, “I cannot think of a time when we have had a region emerge as suddenly to become as strategically significant as the Caspian.”²⁴ Oil is clearly not the only force in action, but it is an important piece of a

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complicated political/ military and economic struggle. Afghanistan has long had a key place in US strategic plans to secure control of the vast oil and natural gas resources of Eurasia.

Oil and natural gas resources of Eurasia

The Caspian Sea basin has received considerable attention over the past ten years, both because of its potential as a significant source of oil and natural gas for world markets, and because of the international competition that has emerged over the control of its resources. The Caspian, which is the world's largest inland sea, is roughly 700 miles from north to south and 250 miles across, lying directly between the states of Central Asia and the Transcaucasus. It is a salt-water body, connected to the Black Sea by the Volga and Don rivers, the artificial Volga-Don canal, and the Sea of Azov, a branch of the Black Sea. Before the end of the Soviet Union in 1991, only two independent states – the Soviet Union and Iran – bordered the Caspian Sea basin. Now, five states – Azerbaijan, Iran, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, and Russia – adjoin the region.

The Caspian Sea basin of Central Asia, located in the centre of Eurasia, is a region of complexities, rich in the diversity of peoples, nations and cultures. The cultural and historical heritage of the region goes back further than many European countries. The region has always had a romantic appeal for foreigners. Thousands of years ago the routes connecting northern and eastern Europe with Asia Minor and the Greek colonies passed through here. The Argonauts were the first “foreign tourists”, so to speak, to visit the Black Sea coast of the Caspian region. Prometheus, who brought fire to mankind in defiance of Zeus, was said to have been chained to a cliff in the region.²⁵

The attraction of the region in modern times is related to its natural resources, especially the vast oil and natural gas reserves. From antiquity to the mid-nineteenth century,

the region was one of the best-known oil regions in the world. Before the arrival of the Russians, petroleum extraction was very primitive. For centuries petroleum traders had to extract the petroleum with rags and buckets. The tsarist government anticipated the modern petroleum industry, and it drilled a well for oil at what is now the giant Bibi-Eibat field in Azerbaijan in 1871. It was towards the end of the 19th century when the area had its first contact with Western capital. The rich oil potential in the region attracted important foreign companies. By the late 1800s, two competing families came to invest in the Caspian oil industry. The Nobel brothers arrived on the scene first, to be followed by the French branch of the Rothschild family.²⁶ In 1898 Russia became the largest oil-producing country, and held this position until 1902. At the beginning of the twentieth century, more than 50 percent of the world's oil was produced in the Caspian region.²⁷

After the Russian Empire ended and a revolutionary government was set up in Russia, the region endured a period of turmoil during the Russian Civil War until the Bolsheviks seized control in the Caspian region in 1921.²⁸ With Stalin's First Five-Year Plan in 1927, the Soviet state assumed full responsibility for central planning, determining the sites, method of extraction, as well as the amount of production, and modes of transport. In 1928, oil production surpassed the former 1901 peak. The Soviet oil industry grew substantially during the First and Second Five-Year Plans. The vast majority of the production came from the Caspian region.²⁹

The oil from this region played a major strategic role during the First and Second World Wars. Protecting oil fields of the Caspian was an Allied priority in the First World War. During the Second World War, oil from the Caspian Sea basin was an essential target of Hitler's expansionist policies. Following the 1939 German-Soviet Pact, Soviet oil from the Caspian Sea basin accounted for a third of Germany's imports. Hitler's attempt to secure the oil wells of the Caspian collapsed in the face of the fierce resistance of the Red Army.

As a result of the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, the vast oil and gas resources of the region have been opened again to western companies, and the governments of the powerful states of the West have designed policies to influence this competition. A race has begun amongst the powerful transnational corporations of the world to secure control over the black gold of the region. It is believed that the world's largest reservoir of untapped oil and gas is to be found in the southern republics of the former Soviet Union – Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan and Turkmenistan. Even though the reports over possible and confirmed reserves of mineral deposits differ widely, the interest in the region is enormous.³⁰ At stake in this contest are billions of dollars in oil and natural gas revenues and the vast geopolitical and military advantages that fall to the power(s) which gain(s) a dominant position in the region.

Two basic questions loom over the future of this important resource: who owns the rich oil and natural gas resources? And who will have the control over the transportation of the Caspian oil and gas to world markets? The answers will greatly contribute to shape the re-configuration of the world economy in this century and the international order that governs it.

At stake in this competition is far more than the fate of the resources of the Caspian Sea basin of Central Asia. Caspian oil is “non-OPEC oil”, meaning that supplies from this region are less likely to be affected by the price and supply policies applied by the oil-exporting cartel.³¹ Flows of large volumes of Caspian oil through non-OPEC lands would erode the power of OPEC, as well as its ability to maintain high oil prices and to use oil as a mode of political blackmail.³²

US strategists do not simply want to obtain oil, which is a simple matter if one has money. They want to eliminate all potential competitors, safeguard the area politically and militarily, and control the flow of oil to the big world markets in the West and in Southeast Asia. The transfer of oil from the Caspian-Caucasus to world markets is no easy matter, *Alternatives: Turkish Journal of International Relations, Vol.1, No.2, Summer 2002* 56

primarily because the Caspian Sea is landlocked. With the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, multinational oil companies and governments of the leading world powers have woven a tangled web of competing pipelines. Leading the charge were B.P. and Amoco (which merged in 1998), UNOCAL, Texaco, Exxon, Pennzoil and Halliburton. It is the “pipeline map” around the oil and natural gas resources of the region that connects the Balkans to Afghanistan.³³

From the Balkans to Afghanistan

The Balkans is considered to be central to the “pipeline map”, because oil destined for Western Europe must pass through them at one point or another.³⁴ During the 1999 Kosovo war, some of the critics of NATO’s bombing of Yugoslavia alleged that the US and its allies in the West were seeking to secure a passage for oil from the Caspian Sea. This claim was mocked by the British Foreign Secretary Robin Cook, who observed that “there is no oil in Kosovo”. This observation was, of course, true but irrelevant to the claim. The oil reserves of the Caspian are a long way from the Balkans, but the routes by which this oil must come to the markets in the West are not. In 1997, BP and the Texas Halliburton Company proposed a pipeline that would go from Burgas in Bulgaria through Skopje in Macedonia to Vlore, a port in Albania.³⁵ This would be one of the shortest and least expensive of the possible routes. All these give the necessity of security in the Southeastern Europe an additional direct economic importance, adding to the primary strategic concerns that stand behind the bombing of Yugoslavia in 1999. Geography makes the Balkans region a key stepping stone to oil interests in Eurasia.³⁶

It was claimed that the main globalistic objective of the US-led NATO operations in Kosovo was to pacify Yugoslavia so that transnational oil corporations can secure the oil transportation route from the Caspian Sea through Yugoslavia, into Central Europe.³⁷ After the NATO’s bombing campaign in March 1999, the US spent 36,6 million dollars to build

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Camp Bondsteel in southern Kosovo. The largest American foreign military base constructed since Vietnam, Camp Bondsteel was built by the Brown & Root Division of Halliburton, the world's biggest oil services corporation, which was run by Dick Cheney before he was made Vice-President.³⁸ On 2 June 1999, the US Trade and Development Agency announced that it had awarded a half-million dollar grant to Bulgaria to carry out a feasibility study for the pipeline across the Balkans.³⁹

Rivalries being played out here will have a decisive impact in shaping the post-communist Eurasia, and in determining how much influence the US will have over its development.⁴⁰ This situation has worldwide and not just regional consequences. For instance, the expansion of US influence in Eurasia poses a direct and immediate threat to China, because, among other factors, the expansion of the Chinese economy is directly dependent on access to petroleum. China's oil needs are expected to nearly double by 2010, which will force the country to import 40 percent of its requirements, up from 20 percent in 1995.⁴¹

Driven by a burgeoning demand for energy, the Chinese government has made securing access to the largely untapped reserves of oil and natural gas in the Caspian region a cornerstone of its economic policy. China's focus is the construction of a 4200 km network of gas and oil pipelines running from China's western province of Xinjiang to the major east coast metropolis of Shanghai. In 1997, the China National Petroleum Corporation (CNPC) acquired the right to develop two potentially lucrative oilfields in Kazakhstan, outbidding US and European oil companies. Feasibility studies are also underway for the construction of over 3000 kilometres of gas pipeline from Turkmenistan to Xinjiang by the state oil holding company, PetroChina Co. This east-west pipeline is China's biggest infrastructure project after the Three Gorges Dam.⁴² China's influence in the Caspian oil politics has increased as a result of a recent business deal in Azerbaijan: two subsidiaries of China National Petroleum

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Corporation bought the 30 percent stake owned by the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development in two oil fields, the Kursangi and Karabagli fields, in Azerbaijan for 52 million US dollars as part of China's move to diversify its resource base.⁴³

Theoretically, oil and gas pipelines to China from Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan could be extended to link into the pipeline networks of both Russia and Iran. This model has been dubbed the "Pan Asian Global Energy Bridge", a Eurasian network of pipelines linking energy resources in the Middle East, Central Asia and Russia to Chinese Pacific coast. China's pipeline network has the potential to bring about a significant strategic realignment in the region. Central Asia with its huge reserves of oil, and natural gas, and strategic position is already a key arena of sharp rivalry between the US, major European powers, Russia, Japan and China. All of the major powers, along with transnational corporations, have been seeking alliances, concessions and possible pipeline routes in the region. In the midst of this increasing competition, open conflict between the superpower US and important regional power China seems highly likely.⁴⁴

Another significant regional power, Russia, controls most of the export routes of the Caspian oil at the moment. In the words of Russian Defence Minister Igor Sergeev, in November 1999, "the West's policy is a challenge to Russia with the aim of weakening its international position and ousting it from strategically important regions."⁴⁵ Disputes over oil were at the heart of Russia's earlier decision to go to war against Chechnia in December 1994, because its sole operational pipeline for Caspian oil, which goes directly through troubled Dagestan and Chechnia, was under threat from the Islamic separatist forces of Chechnia. It can therefore be argued that Russia has important geo-economic reasons for establishing a firm control over Chechnia, and these are essentially related to Russia's worries over the control of the resources of the Caspian.⁴⁶ Russia's concerns over Chechnia grew as a result of the US-NATO war against Serbia and the subsequent NATO occupation

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of Kosovo. Tensions with Russia escalated in the course of Russia's military campaign in Chechnia soon after. The Russian intervention in Chechnia in 1999 was meant to be a warning to the US and NATO, and the other likely candidates to rebel against Russia in the post-Soviet space, that Russia was still a mighty military force to be reckoned with. There are recent suggestions that there may be a *quid pro quo* between the US and Russian administrations with Russians providing intelligence support to American troops in Afghanistan and the US turning a blind eye from a brutal Russian occupation in Chechnia.⁴⁷ It has been claimed after September 11 that "the carnage in Chechnya [Chechnia] now became a front-line of the battle fought by the entire international community against terrorism".⁴⁸

The US has a very wide range of instruments essentially derived from its structural control over the political-military and economic context of global inter-state system. In Eurasia, the US administration sees its military might as a trump card that can be employed to prevail over its rivals in the struggle for political hegemony and resources. Powerful geopolitical and geoeconomic interests are fuelling the American war drive. Some commentators argue that the real motive for America's determination to operate in Afghanistan is related to its direct interest in the natural resources of Central Asia.⁴⁹ If the Balkans is a major key to transportation of the vast Caspian oil reserves, Afghanistan is another key.⁵⁰ Experts say that Afghanistan with its strategic location offers the most convenient route for pipelines. A 790-mile oil and gas pipelines across Afghanistan that would carry Caspian Sea basin's oil and natural gas south to the Pakistani coast on the Arabian Sea will reduce US dependency on the volatile Gulf oil zone controlled by the OPEC.⁵¹

On 10 September 2001, *Oil and Gas Journal*, an US-based oil industry publication, reported that Central Asia represents one of the world's last great frontiers for geological
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survey and analysis, “offering opportunities for investment in discovery, production, transport and refining of enormous quantities of oil and gas resources. Central Asia is rich in hydrocarbons, with gas being the predominant energy fuel. Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, especially, are noted for gas resources, while Kazakhstan and Azerbaijan are the primary oil producer.”⁵² Frank Viviano of the *San Francisco Chronicle* wrote on 26 September:

The hidden stakes in the war against terrorism can be summed up in a single word: oil. The map of terrorist sanctuaries and targets in the Middle East and Central Asia is also, to an extraordinary degree, a map of the world’s principal energy sources in the 21st century. ... It is inevitable that the war against terrorism will be seen by many as a war on behalf of America’s Chevron, Exxon, and Arco; France’s TotalFinaElf; British Petroleum; Royal Dutch Shell and other multinational giants, which have hundreds of billions of dollars of investment in the region.⁵³

Within a week of the commencement of war in Afghanistan, the Bush administration discussed the shape of a post-Afghan government to do deals over oil and gas pipelines. *The New York Times* reported on 15 December that, “the State Department is exploring the potential for post-Taliban energy projects in the region, which has more than 6 percent of the world’s proven oil reserves and almost 40 percent of its gas reserves.”⁵⁴ President Bush’s appointment of a former aide to the U.S.-based oil company UNOCAL, Afghan-born Zalmay Khalilzad, as special envoy to Afghanistan, is particularly interesting in this context.⁵⁵ The nomination underscores the real economic and financial interests at stake in the US military campaign in Afghanistan.⁵⁶ Khalilzad is intimately involved in the long-running US efforts to obtain direct access to the oil and gas resources of the region. As an adviser for UNOCAL, Khalilzad drew up a risk analysis of a proposed gas pipeline from the former Soviet republic of Turkmenistan across Afghanistan and Pakistan to the Indian Ocean. Richard Butler, an American diplomat in residence at the Council on Foreign Relations, has explained this as “the war in Afghanistan ... has made the construction of a pipeline across Afghanistan and Pakistan politically possible for the first time since Unocal and the Argentinean company *Alternatives: Turkish Journal of International Relations, Vol.1, No.2, Summer 2002* 61

Bridas competed for the Afghan rights in the mid-1990s.”⁵⁷ So many business deals, so much oil and natural gas, all these giant multinationals with powerful connections to the Bush administration. It doesn’t add up to a conspiracy theory, but it does mean that there is a significant money subtext to the “Operation Enduring Freedom”.⁵⁸ In the words of Zoltan Grossman, “it is not a conspiracy; it is just business as usual.”⁵⁹

It is far too soon to digest or analyse the full meaning of the recent events, and the exact outcome of the present manoeuvres in Eurasia and its impact on the global strategic equation is not yet clear. But, the increasingly heavy involvement of the US administration, significant regional powers, and transnational corporations in the area underscores the central importance of the oil and natural gas resources of the region and the potential for sharp conflicts over the control of the resources.⁶⁰ The growth of regional antagonisms will be heightened, not attenuated, as the region is integrated more into the global system of production and trade.⁶¹ We are before the re-composition of the geostrategic map, not only of Eurasia, but of the world, in a manner not seen since the highest moments of colonialism. As the stakes in this competition for control increase, the risk of dangerous clashes becomes a threatening reality.⁶² The region has four nuclear-armed countries – Russia, China, Pakistan and India⁶³ - making it a dangerous potential flashpoint of global significance. America’s war in Afghanistan has already upset the delicate balance of enmity between old foes India and Pakistan, who fought three major wars in the recent past, and increased the militarisation of the entire Asian region.⁶⁴

Real risk of military confrontation continues in south Asia, as India and Pakistan simultaneously mass soldiers at their border and escalate the conflict in Kashmir. Since the end of the Cold War, Washington has deliberately contributed to fuelling the India-Pakistan conflict. The US has military cooperation agreements with both India and Pakistan, and keeps selling weapons to both countries. Sanctions against both Pakistan and India –

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imposed after their nuclear tests in 1998 – were dropped by President Bush immediately after September 11. While India and Pakistan are moving along the dangerous line of a nuclear war, the US and its allies are quietly laying gas pipelines, selling weapons and pushing through their business deals.

From the collapse of the former Yugoslavia and various post-Yugoslav wars, to American/ NATO responses to numerous political and economic crises in the post-Soviet space, and more recently to America's "war on terrorism" in Afghanistan, there is an important underlying thread. Although these various wars and conflicts have /had certain regional dimensions, they are primarily the US response to the opportunities and challenges opened by the demise of the Soviet Union. All have been connected to one big central course of action: the manoeuvres of the US, and its allies in Europe, over the division of resources and political/ military control of Eurasia. All these interventions have enabled the US to gain a strong foothold in the lands between Europe to the west, Russian Federation to the north, and China to the east, and turn this strategic region increasingly into an American "sphere of influence".⁶⁵

The strengthening of this global control is as much about politics as economics. As William Wallace summarises, this "hegemony rests upon a range of resources, of hard military power, economic weight, financial commitments, and the soft currency of hegemonic values, cultural influence and prestige."⁶⁶ It is not just the scale and power of its military might. The US hegemony also rests on the ability to homogenise the political cultures of its allies around sets of ideological values and cultural perceptions constructed to serve US interests. Most of these are symbolic structures loosely connected to the Second World War experience embodying such highly sensitive symbols as "Hitler", "genocide", "ethnic cleansing", "totalitarianism versus freedom and democracy", "individual rights", etc.⁶⁷ With the demonisation of political Islam during the Gulf War "Islamic fundamentalism", and

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recently “axis of evil” have been added to these as the dominant hate themes. This value structure has been repeatedly and effectively embedded within the Western political cultures through repeated international polarisations and military interventions after the end of the Cold War, from the military campaigns in the Gulf to various Yugoslav wars, and finally to military operations in Afghanistan. Taken together all these military-political, economic, and cultural capacities of the American power, the foreign policy autonomy of its allies have been reduced to near zero.

The US is exploiting the dismantling of the Soviet bloc most aggressively. It is inserting itself into the strategic regions of Eurasia and anchoring US geopolitical influence in these areas to prevent its competitors from doing the same. The ultimate goal of the US strategy is to establish new American spheres of influence and eliminate any obstacles who stand in the way. At the level of economic control, involved in the re-integration of the post-Soviet space into world capitalist system is the absorption, by massive transnational corporations, of large investment in valuable natural resources of Eurasia that are vital to the US and its allies. The vast oil and natural gas resources of the Caspian Sea basin are now being practically divided among the major multinationals.⁶⁸ This is the fuel that is feeding renewed militarism, which leads to new wars of conquest by the US and its allies against local opponents, as well as ever-greater conflicts among the US and major regional powers, such as China and Russia. Were any of its adversaries – or a combination of adversaries- to effectively challenge US supremacy in this region, it would call into question the US hegemony in world affairs. For the US, the most effective way to enforce world domination is through use of its mighty military machine. This is the key to understanding the development of global politics since the end of the Cold War. America’s war against the Taliban in Afghanistan is the latest in a series of wars of aggression that have played out in this strategically significant super-continent. The recent war in Afghanistan has significantly

increased the US hegemonic control over the lands of Eurasia. Bush's "war on terrorism" has resulted in the projection of US military power even further in the region. Under the cover of this war, Central Asia is splattered with new American fortresses, the Pacific and Indian Oceans are patrolled by aircraft carriers and accompanying fleets of awesome size. Hundreds of US Special Operations Forces have been shipped off to the Philippines to train and help government forces in active combat with the Islamic Abu Sayyaf guerrillas. US Special Forces are also being sent to the former Soviet Republic of Georgia where a small number of Arab and Chechen fighters are supposedly hiding out. The US military power "is now dominant and its limitations are minimal".⁶⁹ Never in history has the military supremacy of a single power been so big.⁷⁰

All these are significant developments regarding the security architecture of the post-Cold War world. The expansion of the US hegemonic control, however, did not start with the attacks of September 11, but had already been in place since 1989.⁷¹ The hi-jacked planes crashing into the World Trade Centre and the Pentagon have provided an additional rationale for the unilateral action to the US administration to increase its political/ military control in this region. Anti-terrorism has replaced anti-communism as the new millennium's all-purpose rationale for providing US military/ political and economic expansion over the globe. Therefore the key to understand the events of the recent developments after September 11 lies in the post-Cold War realities and dynamics of US global hegemony. The defence of American economic and geopolitical interests worldwide was the main underlying reason for the American "war against terrorism".

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