

## chapter four

# Islam, Oil, and September 11<sup>th</sup>

## An Essay Addressed to the Antiglobalization Movement

I write this essay to participate in a discussion within the antiglobalization movement on the events of September 11. I am anguished about the lives lost in the bombings of that day. I am also concerned about the scenario that is in front of us:

- Massive bombings of Afghanistan and plans for protracted warfare against a list of countries (perhaps as many as sixty, according to President Bush) presumably supporting terrorism or lodging terrorists.
- The escalation of xenophobia especially against Arabs, but targeting all immigrants.
- The demonization of the anti-globalization movement, accused of being an enemy of “civilization,” and being indifferent to or even condoning the massacre on September 11.
- New, widespread restrictions on civil liberties, including the suspension of habeas corpus for a wide variety of people and the use of military tribunals for non-citizens certified as “terrorists.”

What can we in the antiglobalization movement do in this situation?

Our first task has obviously been to stop the escalation of violence, and mobilize against a US-led war on Afghanistan or any other country the Bush administration picks to be a target for its “war” on “terrorism.” We also need to build solidarity with the Arab and immigrant communities in the US now under attack physically and ideologically. Finally, we must defend our hard fought for civil liberties and the freedom of public space and motion.

These generalized anti-war, anti-racist and pro-civil liberties responses, however correct, are not enough. We must gain a better understanding of what has happened and why, since any confusion on this point can have the most serious consequences for the antiglobalization movement. Even though the hijackings and mass murders of September 11 were destabilizing for the Bush administration, it is determined to use them as a political opportunity to transform the definition of dissent here in the US and to project the US military into the oil-rich former republics of Soviet Central Asia. A purely generalized politics is doomed to taking a reactive stance in this historical situation, even when the Bush administration's hasty military moves and political contradictions begin to unravel.

This essay is inevitably going to be tentative and hypothetical, given our present lack of precise knowledge concerning the details of the crimes. Also, my aim is classification and explanation, but not vilification. The legal and moral facts are enough. The killings of September 11 constituted one of the worst one-day massacres in the last decade, probably only those in the first days of the Rwandan genocide of the Tutsis can rival it in terms of numbers. The thousands of murders are a major crime against humanity and, though the immediate perpetrators are dead, their accomplices, if they had any, should be captured and prosecuted in the appropriate courts without the US government committing similar crimes against the humanity of other countries. That this last proposition is a matter of controversy in the US at this moment shows how perilous are the times we are in!

## Oil, Globalization, and Islamic Fundamentalism

On a broad level, the events of September 11, 2001 can be traced back to the economic, social, and cultural crisis that has developed in North Africa, the Middle East, and West Asia in the aftermath of the Gulf War and, prior to it, the accelerating process of globalization, starting in the late 1970s.<sup>1</sup> The first aspect of this crisis has been the impoverishment of urban workers and agriculturists in this area, due to Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs) and import liberalization, dating back to Egypt's "open door" policy that cost the life of Anwar Sadat and saw the emergence of Islamic fundamentalism as a new political force.<sup>2</sup>

From the Cairo's "bread riots" of 1976, to the uprisings in Morocco and Algeria of 1988, both crushed in blood baths, to the more recent anti-IMF riots in Jordan and Indonesia, the difficulties of merely staying alive for workers has become more and more dramatic, causing major splits within the capitalist classes from Morocco to

Indonesia as to how to deal with this rebellion from below (Midnight Notes 1992). A further element of crisis has been the situation in Palestine. This too was made more intense by the Gulf War expulsion of Palestinians from Kuwait and Israel's response to Palestinian demands with more settlements, the attempted usurpation of Jerusalem, and escalating repression. Regardless of their actual disposition towards the Palestinians, this situation has become a cause of great embarrassment for these ruling classes, revealing, as it does, their duplicity and the shallowness of their commitment to Islamic solidarity.

The most important factor of crisis has been the hegemonic role of the US in the region, as exemplified by the devastation of Iraq, the US government's proprietary relationship to the management of oil resources in the Middle East, and the building of US bases right in Saudi Arabia, Islam's most sacred land. On all these counts, deep divisions have developed within these ruling classes pitting pro-American governments—often consisting of royal dynasties in the Arabian Peninsula—against a new generation of dissidents within their own ranks who, in the name of the Koran, have accused them of being corrupt, of squandering the region's resources, of selling out to the US, of having betrayed Islam, all the while offering an alternative "social contract" to the working classes of North Africa, the Middle East and West Asia and using their wealth to create a multinational network of groups stretching through every continent and often taking on a life of their own. For we must remember that every capitalist ruling class, however draconian in rhetoric, comes to power with a divisive "deal" for some part of the working class. Even the Nazis offered guaranteed employment and ultimately free *lebensraum* to the "Aryan" workers, if they joined in the oppression of their fellow workers. The Islamic fundamentalist ruling classes in waiting are no exception.

As a social program, Islamic fundamentalism has distinguished itself, in addition to its unmitigated bolstering of patriarchal rule, for its attempt to win over the urban populations through the provision of some basic necessities such as schooling, healthcare, and a minimum of social assistance. These initiatives were undertaken often in response to the ending of government subsidies and programs in these areas which was dictated by the SAPs designed by the neoliberals in the World Bank and IMF.<sup>3</sup> Thus, for example, it is the Islamic fundamentalist networks that organize health care and education in the Palestinian "territories," almost functioning as an alternative government to the PLO at the grassroots level.<sup>4</sup>

Over the last decade as the crisis in the Middle East and internationally has intensified, so has the antagonism of the Islamic fundamentalist networks against the US and its domestic supporters in the different Islamic countries. But this conflict has been stalemated in key countries. In Algeria, for example, the Islamic Salvation Front, which grew rapidly after the anti-SAP riots of 1988 and almost took state power electorally in 1991, was stopped by a military coup. For the last decade, through a horrendous civil war where between 60,000 to 70,000 were killed, the Algerian Islamic fundamentalists have been decisively weakened by attrition and military repression. In Egypt, the Mubarak regime has used direct repression as in Algeria as well a system of microscopic social surveillance to defeat the fundamentalist "tide." For "the [Mubarak] government acted to stem the proliferation of private mosques and associated charitable foundations and to end their extragovernmental autonomy" (Faksh 1997: 54). The result has been a major defeat of fundamentalism in, perhaps, the second most important Islamic state.

These setbacks have not been dramatically reversed by the fundamentalists who seized state power in Sudan and Afghanistan, for in both countries they inherited, and were not able to end, long-standing civil wars. The lingering civil war in Afghanistan led to the demise of the fundamentalist regime there, of course, once the US and the local powers (Russian, Iran and Pakistan) agreed on its termination and supplied the opposition with weapons (Russia) and air-support (the US).

But stalemate does not mean defeat, and there is no doubt that Islamic fundamentalism continues to have an attraction within the ruling circles of the wealthiest Islamic nations. This internal contradiction has created a tangled net of consequences which are now embarrassing and endangering many people in the US government and in the governments of the Middle East. For they have financed and trained the very generation of dissidents who are now so violently turning against them. On the one side, a portion of the Middle Eastern oil revenues has been used to finance assaults on symbols of the New World Order, because of the divided loyalties of the Middle Eastern ruling classes; on the other, the US government has financed and trained many members of this dissident branch of the Middle Eastern ruling classes in its effort to destabilize the Soviet Union in Afghanistan.

The governmental and informal financial and military support of armed Islamic fundamentalists did not end with the Soviet pullout from Afghanistan in 1989. These militants played important economic, military and ideological roles that forwarded US policy against Yugoslavia (in Bosnia and Kosovo) and against Russia (in Chechnya,

Dagestan, Uzbekistan) up until September 10, 2001. The deal apparently was: do the dirty work of fighting and destabilizing secular communist, socialist and nationalist regimes in Eastern Europe, Caucasia and Central Asia and you will get rewarded. These “free floating” militants did the US’s dirty work for twenty years, but they obviously increasingly were convinced that the US had not delivered. They were not given their proper reward: taking power at the center of the Islamic world, the Arabian Peninsula.

This complicity and deal-making is why, perhaps, the Bush administration is so hesitant to do what would be natural after such a massive intelligence and security failure attested to by the September 11 crimes: *get rid of the incompetents*. That would be difficult, for many of those who have been brought back in power into George W. Bush’s administration were the ones who were responsible, during his father’s presidency, for the training and financing of the very organizations they now hunt under the banner of “terrorism.” Therefore, the executive dynasties in both the US and Saudi Arabia must both be worried about “family members” who have been compromised by their past connections to the networks they now claim to be responsible for the events of September 11. This goes up to the President’s family. For example, the *Wall Street Journal* (9/28/01) reported that the President’s father as well as other close associates of the President like former Secretary of State James Baker do work for the bin Laden family business in Saudi Arabia through the Carlyle Group, an international consulting firm.

The crude and desperate attempts by ideologists of the Bush administration to somehow connect, in ever more arcane ways, the antiglobalization movement with the Islamic fundamentalists is fueled by desire to distract public attention and hide an anxiety on its side which is summed up in the question: when will the long list of *real* connections between “terrorist network” the Bush administration is hunting and its own personnel be revealed? That is why, perhaps, President Bush harkened back to his childhood memories of “Wanted Dead or Alive Posters” (with the emphasis on “DEAD”) when speaking of Osama bin Laden and his associates. It is also why the military tools being used to “hunt” for bin Laden, like the “Daisy Cutters” being dropped in the vicinity of suspicious caves, are meant to bury the suspected criminals instead of bringing them to light. For the administration’s legitimacy would be undermined, if they ever spoke the truth.

This “anxiety of influence” is also a deep motivation for the emphasis on secrecy in the judicial proceedings being planned for the people certified as “terrorists” *before*

their trials in administrative INS courts or military tribunals. The Bush administration accurately justifies this secrecy as a way to “protect” government personnel who have had questionable relations with the “terrorists” being tried. But part of what is being protected is the frequent cooperation between the Islamic fundamentalist “terrorist network” and the agents of US foreign policy over the last two decades.

## Why now and why so desperate?

These generalized facts concerning the hidden civil war within the oil producing countries from Algeria to Iran serve to describe the context of the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon. For I am assuming that the immediate perpetrators of the attacks were committed to some branch of Islamic fundamentalism. But these facts do not help us understand why the attacks took place in September 2001 and why the resistance to the US took such a desperate form. For these attacks are symptoms of desperation not of power, as they will likely lead to a devastating US military response with predictable results: the destruction of thousands of Islamic fundamentalist militants along with a tremendous collateral damage on the people of Afghanistan and many other countries in North Africa, the Middle East and West Asia. Who on the ground can survive in such a maelstrom? Indeed, the actual perpetrators and their accomplices, whoever they are, must have been very desperate to take such a risk with their own network and the lives of millions of people of the region. It is also probable that many (perhaps most) people even in the most militant Islamic fundamentalist circles object to the bombings in New York and Washington DC, if not for moral, then simply for strategic reasons, knowing full well that their hard-fought for achievements might all go up in smoke as a result these actions.

Certainly the developments after September 11 justified such forebodings. Within a couple of months, the Taliban rule over Afghanistan was demolished, thousands of militants were slaughtered and no fundamentalist uprising occurred in response to the US bombing of a Muslim country anywhere on the planet. If the Osama bin Laden group planned the crashes of September 11, then it surely over-reached. If an even more desperate set of militants did it, then the bin Laden group is paying for a collective desperation it shared.

Clearly something very important was in process of occurring that the perpetrators of September 11 needed desperate and inherently uncertain measures to thwart. What was it? The clue is in the national composition of the hijackers. If the US Justice Department is to be believed they were all citizens of Arab nations. Fifteen were Saudi

citizens, two were from the United Arab Emirates, one was from Egypt and one from Lebanon (*Associated Press Online* 11/23/2001). Even though there is a paucity of information about them, they were clearly not the “wretched of the earth.” They were mostly from professional or well-to-do families in the center of the Arab world. They were literate, well-traveled and sophisticated people far from the Koran-memorizing poor boys in the *madradas* of Pakistan. But they were involved in a life-and-death politics that they totally identified with. Although they did not leave a detailed manifesto behind, these facts lead me to conclude that if they were desperate, they were desperate about the politics not of Afghanistan, Chechnya or Pakistan, but of their own countries.

If my hypothesis is right, then, the source of this desperation are events at the geographical center of Islam, Saudi Arabia, which echoed throughout the Islamic world.

My view is that the political factors motivating the mass murder and suicides of September 11 involved the oil industry and structural adjustment in the Arabian Peninsula. Here is the story.

Beginning in 1998 (after the collapse of oil prices due to the Asian Financial Crisis), the Saudi monarchy decided, for “strategic reasons,” to globalize its economy and society beginning with the oil sector. The oil industry had been nationalized since 1975, which means that foreign investors were allowed to participate only in “downstream” operations like refining. But in September 1998 Crown Prince Abdullah met in Washington DC with senior executives from several oil companies. According to Gawdat Bahget, “The Crown Prince asked the oil companies’ executives to submit directly to him recommendations and suggestions about the role their companies could play in the exploration and development of both existing and new oil and gas fields” (Bahget 2001: 5). These “recommendations and suggestions” were then submitted to a Supreme Council for Petroleum and Mineral Affairs in early 2000 (after being vetted by the Crown Prince), and, by mid 2000, the Saudi government began to cautiously respond to them, by ratifying a new foreign investment law. Under the new law, “tax holidays are abolished in favor of sweeping reductions in tax on profits payable by foreign entities, bringing them nearer to levels that apply to local companies. Wholly owned foreign businesses *will have the right to own land*, sponsor their own employees and benefit from concessionary loans previously available only to Saudi companies” (Bahgat 2001: 6, my emphasis) [*Nota bene*: it is obvious why “the right to own land” would be a red flag for anyone committed to the sacred character of

the Arabian Peninsula.] The Middle Eastern financial experts were literally falling over themselves in their effort to highlight the new Investment Regulation. One described it in the following words, "Keep your fingers crossed, but it looks as if Saudi Arabia is abandoning almost seventy years of restrictive, even unfriendly policy toward foreign investment" (MacKinnon 2000). This law constituted, in effect, a NAFTA-like agreement between the Saudi monarch and the US and European oil companies.

At the same time as this law was being discussed, a ministerial committee announced that up to \$500 billion of new investments would be deployed over the next decade to change the form of the Saudi national economy. \$100 billion of this investment was already promised by foreign oil companies.

In May of 2001 the first concrete step in this stepped up globalization process was concluded when Exxon/Mobil and Royal Dutch/Shell Group led eight other foreign companies (including Conoco and Enron from the US) took on a \$25 billion natural gas development project in Saudi Arabia. The financial press noted that the deal would not be very lucrative in itself, but that "It's part of a long-term ploy of the oil companies, [which] want ultimately to get access again to Saudi crude" (*LA Times* 5/19/2001).

Thus, by the summer of 2001, the Saudi monarchy cast the die and then legally, socially and economically entered the Rubicon of globalization (but with its "fingers crossed," undoubtedly). It "globalized" not because the Saudi Arabian debt, though large, was unmanageable (as was the case with most other countries which bent to the globalizing dictates of the IMF) but because, faced with a intensifying opposition, the King and his circle realized that only with the full backing of the US and European Union could they hope to preserve their rule in the coming years.<sup>5</sup> In other words, confronted with significant social problems and an insurrectional element within its own class that could not be defeated by open confrontation, since it took on the garb of Islam too, the Saudi Arabian government seems to have decided that a rehaul of its economy would defeat its dangerous opposition through attrition and would further solidify its alliance with US and European capital. The strategy was aimed at reducing the large and growing unemployment rate among its young citizens, its dependence on oil exports, and its huge foreign labor force (in 1993 there were 4.6 million foreign workers out of a total population of 14.6 million; today they are approximately 6-7 million in a population of about 22-23 million) by "getting the economy moving again."<sup>6</sup> This required a radical departure from the clientelistic methods of social control the Saudi monarchy had used in the past to keep social peace, which was made possible until recently by its immense oil wealth. But this wealth is not infinite

and indeed was declining on a per capita basis—for example, GNP per capital fell from approximately \$13,000 to \$8,000 from 1983 to 1993 and has since continued to fall to less than \$7,000 in 1998, a very weak year for oil prices [(Cordesman 1997: 64), for the GDP data of 1998 (Anonymous 2000)]. Inevitably, this initiative would impact the economic policies of the other oil producing governments in the region, especially the Gulf Cooperation Council states—Oman, Qatar, UAE, Bahrain, and Kuwait.

If it works, this strategy would deal a decisive blow to the Islamicist opposition, undermining its ability to recruit converts who would be employed in the upper echelons of a “globalized economy and society” instead of being driven to despair by political powerlessness and long periods of unemployment. But the introduction of foreign ownership of land and natural resources, backed up by large investments, and the hiring of more expatriates from Europe and the US, would force a major social change.<sup>7</sup> The cat-and-mouse game that the Saudi monarchy had played with the fundamentalist dissidents (by which the King and his dynasty claimed to be even more fundamentalist than them) would end. Whatever hopes the Islamic opposition in the ruling classes of the Arabian Peninsula had ever harbored of getting their governments to send the American troops packing and turning their oil revenues into the economic engine of a resurgent Islam were facing a historic crisis in the summer of 2001. Without a major reversal, the members of the Islamic fundamentalist opposition would have to face the prospect of a total civil war in their own countries or face extinction. Certain elements—whether they were individuals or groups, I cannot know now—of this opposition decided that only a spectacular action like the September 11 hijackings and destruction of thousands of people in New York and Washington could turn back the tide. Perhaps they hoped that if enough turmoil and uncertainty can be generated by the attacks in the US, they will generate a strategic US retreat from the Arabian Peninsula just as the bombing in Lebanon in 1983 led to the US pull out there.

Certainly the Saudi monarchy has responded to September 11 with a desperation of its own, by picking up the pace of globalization in a number of vital areas. Prince Abdullah, the chairman of the Saudi Arabian General Investment Authority, said on November 6, “We must not let terrorism, acts of violence and conflict distract us from doing our daily work and planning for the future. We are on the brink of becoming one of the most exciting markets as restructuring gathers pace.... We want to allow the whole economy to be plugged into what is happening in the rest of the world” (*Middle East Economic Digest*, 11/16/2001). A few days later the formation of a new regulatory body for the power sector was announced which would explicitly be concerned with the protection of potential foreign investors. These are not abstract beings, for the

very international oil companies that are investing in the natural gas initiatives mentioned before, like Exxon/Mobil and Royal Dutch/Shell Group, are planning to invest heavily in new power stations (*Middle East Economic Digest*, 11/16/2001). Along with this news came further details concerning the new Water Ministry that will be charge of “liberalization of the water sector and the introduction of foreign investment in desalination” (*Middle East Economic Digest*, 11/09/2001). Thus, one of the most important impacts of September 11 has been the Saudi monarchy’s hurry to pass control over their country’s Power and Water to the hands of international investors, especially the international oil companies.

On the basis of this analysis, then, the September 11 attacks on New York City and Washington DC were the “collateral damage” of a struggle over the fate of oil politics in its heartland: the Arabian Peninsula.

## The US Military Penetration of Central Asia

It is important that we understand the political and economic aims of the hijackers and their accomplices, but it will be even more important for us to be clear about the Bush administration’s agenda. For one need not indulge in conspiracy theories to recognize that the Bush administration will use the events of September 11 as best as it can to forward its program (while acknowledging that the shock of the destruction of lives and property on that day has profoundly destabilized President Bush’s pre-September 11 domestic economic and social agenda).

There are two clear territories which the Bush administration has strategically used the death and destruction of September 11 to move on: a conceptual restructuring of the political horizon and a geo-political thrust into the former Central Asian republics of the USSR which became nation states in 1991. These states, especially Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan, have significant oil and gas reserves. “The proven and possible energy reserves in or adjacent to the Caspian region—including at least 115 billion barrels of oil—are in fact many times greater than those of the North Sea and should increase significantly with continuing exploration. Such plentiful resources could generate huge returns for US companies and their shareholders. American firms have already acquired 75 percent of Kazakhstan’s mammoth Tengiz oil field, which is now valued at more than \$10 billion” (Kalicki 2001: 121). These countries, along with the former and present Caucasian republics, form the southern border of Russia’s “Near Abroad” which the US has been aiming to penetrate militarily for some time

both for immediate economic purposes and for the ultimate goal of disintegrating Russia itself into a set of pliable statelets.

The minute President Bush named Osama bin Laden as “the prime suspect” and “his” camps in Afghanistan as the training ground for the terrorists that destroyed the Twin Towers every diplomatic move aimed at setting up forward military bases and fly-over rights to attack bin Laden also doubles as a tool for the US military occupation of Central Asia itself. After all, we are being told equivocally by the administration both that bin Laden is the center of the evil and that even his capture (“DEAD or alive”) will not end the threat of terrorism from that quarter. Therefore, the military campaign against both bin Laden and terrorism in Afghanistan (we are assured) will be quite prudential and take months, even years to accomplish. Perhaps the most damaging thing that might happen to this double-edged US government campaign would be for bin Laden and his circle to depart from the scene while leaving behind a well-documented history of their involvement with the US government over the last twenty years! Certainly the rapid military collapse of the Taliban regime has been more destabilizing to this plan than its continuation. Victory, in this case, is more dangerous for US long-term purposes than stalemate.

The recognition that this US war against Osama bin Laden and his supporters in the Taliban government is also a way to realize one of the main post-Communist goals of US foreign policy was immediately apparent to analysts of the oil industry and critics of the NATO war in Yugoslavia after September 11. The new “Great Game,” a.k.a. “the war for oil and destabilization in Central Asia” reading of the Bush administration’s moves, was easily documented because much of the relevant material required for this interpretation had been researched in 1999 when many were trying to understand the motivations of the Clinton administration’s involvement in the war against Yugoslavia above and beyond its ostentatiously decried (and newly found) concern for Kosovars’ human rights [cf. for example, (Chossudovsky 2001), (Federici and Caffentzis 2000), (Talbot 2000)]. It became clear then that one of the reasons the US attacked Yugoslavia (one of the few remaining Russian allies in Europe) was to impress on the Russians that it will use all of its might to discourage them from interfering with its investments in Caucasia and Central Asia. It is now a foregone conclusion that anyone interested in understanding Afghan-centered aspects of the Bush administration will have to take into account the “oil factor” (especially given the direct involvement of many members of the Bush administration, like ChevronTexaco’s Condoleeza Rice, in the oil companies that are heavily invested in this area.)

The reason for this is neither that Afghanistan's subsoil is the source of oil or natural gas nor that it lies in the path of the only or even the most efficient pipeline from the Caspian Sea region to the international market. It is important not to be fetishistic about oil and energy. Capitalism can do without oil as it can do without gold. The only fetishism it requires is the commodity form and the only energy it absolutely needs is human energy.

The development of an oil industry in the Central Asian area under the aegis of the US would be important because it would be the basis of integrating this region into the world market controlled by US-EU dominated agencies (WTO, World Bank, and IMF) and into the military sphere of NATO. The importance of the US troops in Uzbekistan and French Mirage bases in Tajikistan, ostensibly to search and destroy Al Qaeda "cells" in Afghanistan, is not that they are guarding the profits of National Security Advisor Rice's ChevronTexaco shares (although that is always a nice perk). It is two-fold: (1) the realization of a US geo-political dream to apply pressure on both China and Russia in previously inaccessible areas where they are very vulnerable: Western Islamic China and Southern Islamic Russia, and (2) the creation and integration of an oil-producing proletariat in Central Asia which would join the surplus-producing population of the planet.

That is, the imposition of an oil industry in Central Asia can be the basis of "selling" larger strategic interests and social-capital concerns to the corporate and financial powers of the US and Europe. Thus the entrance of NATO forces there, so far from the Atlantic, has a dual purpose. First, oil production is essentially martial for it requires (a) the violent displacement of the indigenous population, (b) a militarization of the production and transport areas, (c) the disciplining of highly skilled (often foreign) workers employing very expensive, easily sabotaged capital equipment. The existence of NATO troops in Central Asia overseeing these jobs of repression will make investors and oil companies more willing to invest in the region. Moreover, oil profits are a product of both rent and a transfer of surplus from less capital-intensive industries throughout the world. [(Massarrat 1980), (Caffentzis 1992)]. They tend to make the ruling classes receiving them very rich, very quickly and very unjustly. Hence, they are vulnerable ideologically and politically to all sorts of redistributive revolutionary movements. The NATO forces can become the counter-revolutionary "protection" of these local ruling classes, assuring "stability" for their international partners and getting a cut of the oil profits for their role. Thus they would be simply expanding their protection racket from the Arabian Peninsula to Central Asia.

Second, the NATO troops in Central Asia generate a destabilizing presence within Russia and China. They make it difficult for both countries' governments to rest comfortably within their borders for the military might of NATO gives support to secessionist movements.

This is not to say that this geo-political thrust into Central Asia was high up on the Bush administration's agenda prior to September 11. The expansion of drilling rights within the US was one of its first oil-related initiatives and preoccupied it throughout the summer of 2001. Indeed, Jan Kalicki, a "point man" in the Clinton administration on Central Asian oil, wrote an article for the September/October 2001 *Foreign Affairs* complaining about Bush's back sliding in Central Asia. After detailing the Clinton administration's accomplishments, he fretted that they "are now at risk of unraveling due to inadequate attention from the Bush administration and restrictive US policies. In contrast to the Clinton administration's vigorous support of Caspian energy initiatives, the Bush team seems to have placed those issues on the back burner" (Kalicki 2001: 130). Kalicki ended his article with the following words: "For the US to squander its past success and future potential in the region through complacency and inattention would be a serious mistake." He is undoubtedly now pleased by the swift end of Bush's "complacency and inattention" to Central Asia after September 11 and welcomes a return to oil business as usual there.

## The Bush Administration's "War" on "Terrorism"

There is another territory that the Bush administration forcefully moved into after September 11 that is more abstract, but perhaps even more important for our movement. It is the territory of words and thoughts. By declaring the piracy, murders and devastation in New York City, Washington DC and Western Pennsylvania on September 11 an "act of war" and the start of its own "war on terrorism," the Bush administration is attempting to restructure the conceptual future of humanity for many years to come. By imposing a false dichotomy—you must approve my policies or you are on the terrorists' side—on the moral conscience of majority of people on the planet who are stunned, frightened and disgusted by the mass murder of September 11, President Bush hopes to take these consciences hostage, using the thousands dead in New York and Washington as talismans. This moral hocus pocus will fail in the long run, of course, because the overwhelmingly large number of people on this planet do not fit into the "us" versus "them" model that Bush's war configuration of September 11 requires. Most reject, heart and soul, both futures offered by either capitalist

globalization or its desperate Islamic militant opponents. There will be, in the meantime, innumerable attempts by the administration to equate dissent from the Bush policies as complicity in, or condoning of, or indifference to the dead of September 11.

These attempts at intimidation and equation of dissent with terrorism will eventually fail, largely due to their own contradictions. We did not have wait too long for them to reveal themselves. After all, high officials of the Bush administration financed, armed and trained the now decried "terrorist network" of Islamic militants, not the antiglobalization movement!

The semantic strain between Bush's "war" description of September 11 immediately ran into conflict with the way that these acts are being considered by the relevant authorities, the NYC Police Department, the courts, the insurance companies and the FBI. These acts are being investigated as crimes. Suspects are being questioned, material witnesses who might flee are being kept in prison, the sites of the crashed airliners are being treated as crime scenes and are being searched for evidence. The insurance companies have been blocked from using their "acts of war" loopholes to stop payment of claims. Most importantly, Congress has not passed a declaration of war against any party. But the Bush administration is using the "atmospherics" of war to opportunistically justify the violation of many civil and human rights ranging from bombing of rioting prisoners in Afghanistan to using military tribunals to try people arrested in the US "homeland."

You might say, "Crime or war, is this is not just a semantic quibble?" On the contrary, the way in which these events are described is a "life and death" decision. For the description of an event has implicit in it many moral and practical consequences, some obvious and others unforeseen.

There are important consequential differences between crime and war. Thus, a crime is an action done in violation of a state's laws (though not necessarily on its territory) by *particular* agents. Once a crime has been committed, the sequential consequences of investigation, indictment, apprehension, trial and then, perhaps, conviction and punishment are rather clear and are ruled over by an elaborate set of rules, laws and institutions. Most importantly, this sequence is built to be an inherently finite structure, which might, however, by accident, never come to a conclusion (e.g., when the agent responsible for the crime is never apprehended). That is why it is particularly revealing that the first name of the US government used to refer to its effort to apprehend the accomplices of the hijackers and many other allied terrorists

was “Operation Infinite Justice.” One of the great virtues of Justice is that it is finite and aims to bring an end to a harm done. Consequently, “infinite” justice can not be justice in a human sense.<sup>8</sup>

War, on the other hand, is an inherently infinite structure (what we in the US now call, “open ended,” and what one 19th century theorist of war called, “total”) that might, however, by accident, come to an end, say, with a peace treaty or the annihilation of one or both of the opposing warring parties. But it need not end. Moreover, the rules of prosecuting war are always open to question, since they are largely the result of agreements of states which are not at war but which might, as matter of defending their sovereignty, use their sovereignty to declare these rules null and void for themselves in the midst of war.

Why did the high-ranking members of the Bush administration chose “war” not “crime” in the hours after the crashes? At first glance this decision might have been rooted in the particular aspects of the events themselves. First, the quantitative dimension of the one-day killing and deliberate property destruction is unprecedented in recent US history. Second, the immediate perpetrators died committing the acts (one wonders what would have been the response if the immediate perpetrators had survived and were on the loose). Their collective suicide opened the logical possibility that they planned September 11 by themselves and that the people who supported them did not even know that they had such an audacious and risky idea in mind. Under these circumstances, if the event was categorized as a crime, then it would be a crime without living culprits—a consequence that could hardly be palatable to many in or out of the Bush administration. Finally, the choice of targets was symbolically aimed at the central economic, military and, if speculation concerning the destination of the fourth plane is accurate, political sites of the US. The hijackers seemed to think of themselves as heroic warriors striking at the heart of the US and Bush agreed with their self-description. So the spectacular logic of the hijackers was echoed by the Bush administration in its first assessment of these acts as acts of war.

But there are other, more general reasons for the Bush administration personnel’s choice of words, I believe. They concluded very early on that the hijackers were not some sort of nihilistic group deciding, *a la* “Fight Club,” to go to their deaths in an abstract blaze of glorious horror nor were they representatives of the homeland militia movement (as the perpetrators of the Oklahoma City bombing of 1995 proved to be and as the subsequent anthrax attacker(s) is (are) suspected to be). Though the September 11 perpetrators left no formal proclamation that accompanied their act, the

Bush administration saw that it was a political action and it was part of the US government's ongoing struggle against dissidents in Saudi Arabia and other Middle Eastern nations which it been carrying out since the Gulf War to keep its military and economic presence in the oil fields of the Arabian Peninsula. Since the word "war" captures the sense of a grand struggle (even though it is normally reserved for confrontations of nations), and since the Bush administration is committed to keeping and/or increasing control of the oil resources of that geographical arc from Saudi Arabia to Kazakhstan, "war" felt to them to be the obvious word to use in this context. The prominent members of the Bush administration might then see these acts in a poetic sense to genuinely be acts in a struggle they are individually and vigorously engaged in, and so it would be quite natural for them to express themselves in such a language (after all, President George W. Bush's father, National Security Advisor Rice and Vice President Cheney were deeply and directly involved in the oil industry in the recent past).

But perhaps the most important reason for use of the word "war" is that it gives the Bush administration the right to exercise extraordinary powers both domestically and internationally. Consider how "the war on drugs" has been so effectively used to justify interventions in countries as varied as Colombia, Panama and Afghanistan while the dimensions of the legal and penal counter-revolution in the US perpetrated under the banner of "the war on drugs" is staggering to this day.

One hesitates to contemplate what a parallel intensification of an unbounded "war on terrorism" will do to the prison populations and civil liberties of the US But we must, for already a set of new laws and Presidential dictates have changed the juridical terrain literally overnight since September 11 and have abolished our basic civil and human rights. Perhaps the most important is the abolition of the Habeas Corpus protection to people certified as "terrorist."

One of the problems of this change is that Habeas Corpus is often taken to be an obscure legal concept. It is not. Habeas Corpus protection is simply everyone's basic human right to demand that the legal system show just cause for detaining the body of anyone. It is an old right in English law (and later US Constitutional law). Its application gradually expanded due to manifold struggles from feudal barons, to the bourgeoisie, to workers and eventually, especially in the desegregation battles of the 1950s and 1960s, to the descendants of slaves. Throughout its almost millennium-long history it has been suspended, eviscerated or abolished in times of crises. This path of denying legal status to detained people began in earnest in recent US history in 1996

with the Anti-terrorism and Effective Death Penalty Act which severely limited the ability of death-row prisoners to appeal to the Federal courts to rule on the justice of their detention by state or local authorities. The USA-PATRIOT Act of last month has made it legal for the US government to detain without a court order non-citizens it has certified as terrorists, defined as those the Attorney General “has reason to believe may further or facilitate acts of terrorism ... or any activity that endangers the national security of the US” This is an abolition of Habeas Corpus for non-citizens and an invitation to tyranny, of course, justified as a precaution necessary for public safety (Linebaugh 1999). Even though it is directed at non-citizens, it deprives citizens an important secondary civil right: their right to know the government’s reasons for depriving anyone of their liberty.

## Looking Back Carefully

The events of September 11 and their consequences have been a tremendous blow against the antiglobalization movement, since it has given governments all over the planet the opportunity to close public spaces and to repress dissent from whatever source in the interests of “public safety.” In order to regain the initiative we must understand our situation: the antiglobalization movement is in a struggle against both the supranational agencies of globalization, which are now draping themselves in US flags, and the dissident rulers-in-the-wings of the Middle East, who drape themselves in Islamic flags and want a better world-class deal for themselves and their “followers.” To begin to move again we must free ourselves to re-see our own past in order to understand our future in this context.

But the horror of the September 11 events have frozen many minds, as it was meant to do. A first step in liberating ourselves mentally is to ask questions and to imagine an alternative reality. Could it have been different? Was there another historical possibility that did not lead to the murder of thousands of people in New York and Washington? We are often told that thinking counterfactually is a vain exercise and, like Orpheus in Hades, we should not look back, otherwise we will lose the future. But if Orpheus did look back at Eurydice, carefully, he might have saved both her and later himself.

Let us remember our own story. From Seattle in November 1999 to Genoa in July 2001, the antiglobalization movement expressed in the First World the recognition that the supranational agencies (IMF, World Bank, WTO, G8) which claimed to deal with the economic and political problems of humanity are illegitimate on two counts: (a) they

have failed to solve these problems (e.g., the Third World debt has increased dramatically since the Debt Crisis of the early 1980s) and (b) they have no democratic responsibility to humanity (e.g., the IMF and World Bank are largely controlled by their largest shareholders: the US, Japan and the EU countries). The antiglobalization movement which had started in the mid-1980s with the resistance against structural adjustment in the countries of the Third World had finally surfaced in the streets of the First.<sup>9</sup>

The antiglobalization movement challenged these supranational agencies in a nonviolent manner to change their course and to democratize themselves before it was too late. It demanded that they look carefully into the face of the world and make a dramatic gesture, e.g., canceling the whole Third World debt. The Seattle demonstrations in November 1999 and those that followed were so important as we look back because they brought the demands of the Third World into the streets of the First. They showed that the interests of the poor and dispossessed of Asia, Africa and the Americas were taken seriously enough in Europe and North America that hundreds of thousands of people were willing to risk arrest, beatings and torture to project these interests as well as their own into the precincts of the powerful. At the very least, these demonstrations were able to stop the supranational agencies from causing further damage by passing new rules and regulations.

But that was the problem: though the antiglobalization movement was able to block or disrupt their meetings, the supranational agencies stonewalled the movement's positive demands. Neither massive debt cancellation, nor fairer trade provisions nor a "Marshall Plan for the World" nor the abolition of the World Bank and IMF were launched in response to the movement's efforts (whatever the debates within the movement about the effectiveness of these demands). On the contrary, the economic and political crises caused by globalization have intensified in the last two years. Moreover, the official response to the movement has become increasingly violent and repressive. This violence reached a climax in Genoa in July with the police's killing of Carlo Giuliani, their maiming and torture of hundreds of protesters, and their beating of thousands of others.

At this moment, we must ask the question: What would have happened if, instead of this repression, there was a decision to cancel all Third World debt at the Genova G8 meetings in July 2001? Imagine.

There were, however, not only two forces in confrontation in 2001—the circle of globalizing capitalists and the antiglobalization movement consisting of thousands of

peasant, worker, feminist, environmental and human rights groups across the planet—there was a third: the military Islamic fundamentalist, representing with arms the political demands of the dissident members of the Islamic ruling class. This group was and is committed to mortal violence, patriarchy and reassertion of the Islamic ruling class's control of the energy resources of their region from Algeria to Indonesia against the claims of the transnational oil companies and their own people's claims. It stepped into the vacuum of despair the stalemate between the antiglobalization and the supranational agencies of globalization inevitably generated, driven by its own crisis as outlined above.

On the basis of looking back carefully, then, I conclude that we in the antiglobalization movement must not be caught between the huge bombs of Bush and the smaller bombs of Islamic fundamentalism or be the grass trampled by the lopsided struggle between the giant and the small elephants. For at the moment, at least, our movement is the only one capable of leading an escape from the hellish dialectic of homicide and suicide that the forces of global capital and the perpetrators of the September 11 massacres have launched into oblivion.

## Looking Forward

According to my hypothesis, then, not only have thousands of people in NYC and Washington DC been killed as pawns in a power struggle in the ongoing "oil wars" of the Middle East, the attack on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon has brought us back to the political structure that prevailed during the Cold War; that is, a structure where we in the antiglobalization movement have to confront both sides, since neither side represents the interests of working people in any part of the world, including the Middle East. The Islamic Fundamentalists' misogynous treatment of women—culminating with the politics of domestic enslavement embraced by the Taliban—the autocratic way in which Sharia Law has been imposed on many unwilling citizens; the atrocity of the punishments inflicted on those who break it (including capital punishment); and the chauvinistic brand of Islam imposed at all social levels by self-proclaimed Islamic fundamentalist governments like Sudan's (before the imprisonment of Hassan Turabi) and Afganistan's (before the deposing of the Taliban)—all speak unequivocally on this point.

In this context, the priority of the antiglobalization movement is to offer an anti-war, anti-patriarchal alternative to the deadly politics of the fundamentalists and their

globalizing adversaries by showing that we can address the issues that have led to this situation:

- *Control of natural resources.* Why should the US and Europe claim possession of the resources of the world as if they were their birth-right? How can the population of North America and Europe continue to be blind to the social cost of the oil they put in their cars, and the economic and social inequities built upon it?
- *The construction of a Palestinian homeland.* For how long will generations of Palestinians have to grow up in refugee camps with nothing to hope for and the burning, unquenchable anger of the terrible injustice done to them—an injustice reaffirmed with every new Israeli settlement in what was once their land?
- *The politics of WB/IMF.* Can we afford a globalization program that reduced the people of vast regions to refugees, paupers, and immigrants? Can we allow a world where the majority are displaced from their lands, their basic means of survival, and are forced to migrate across the world in a new diaspora resembling the slave trade?

Further, it is crucial that the anti-globalization movement begin to build a connection with the Middle East—by addressing its more urgent demands. For it is plausible that had this process been more advanced it would be far more difficult for the perpetrators of the September 11 massacre to portray all the people in the US as enemies of Islam, and by the same token it would be more difficult now for the US government to contemplate indiscriminate bomb attacks on nations in North Africa, the Middle East and West Asia. This making of connections will present many difficulties, logistic and otherwise; but a starting point is to make a connection with the immigrant Middle Eastern and West Asian communities in our own countries. The crucial point is to avoid the situation that prevailed during the Cold War, when for half a century the Russian working class and the workers of North America and Europe had nearly no contact, except sporadically, through the mediation of communist parties with the result that by the 1990s, even the seemingly most militant among the Soviet Union's workers—the miners—could be fooled by “experts” from the AFL-CIO into accepting privatization, as happened in the last days of the Soviet Union.

The power of the antiglobalization movement is in its potential to build a real, not simply ideological, political struggle of the world's working people against the plans of

globalizing capitalism. Farmers from India, trade unionists from Canada, students from Europe marched, talked and organized together in the great antiglobalization events of the last two years. This increasing unification of people across barriers of all kinds—geographical, religious, gender, political—has challenged the agendas of both the Islamic fundamentalists and the capitalist globalizers. The suicidal attack on Washington and New York and the Bush administration's response, therefore, also are attacks on the antiglobalization movement because they both are calculated to bring increasing divisiveness and despair within a planetary working class that was beginning to see, articulated in both words and images, an alternative non-violent, non-chauvinist, non-racist, and non-sexist reality taking shape. It is crucial that we do not let the war drums and increasing restrictions on civil liberties and the freedom to move across borders succeed in erasing the movement's organizing achievements.

December 2001

## Notes

1. There have been many problems in describing the unbroken succession of nations states which, according to naive political geography, begins with Morocco in the west and ends with Pakistan in the east. It is not Arab, but is it Islamic? Doesn't such a description succumb to orientalism? After all, we do not describe the arc of nations from Chile to Russia through Ireland and Iceland as "Christendom," even though the dominant religious affiliation of their populations (if they have any) is some brand of Christianity. But if not Arab and not Islamic, then what? I have chosen as nominalist a path as possible in this essay, with the full recognition of its problems.
2. Again, a definitional problem rears its head: what is Islamic fundamentalism? Given that there are many groups and movements claiming to be Islamic fundamentalists or being described as Islamic fundamentalists, the definitional effort is difficult. For the purposes of ideological categorization, the Islamic fundamentalists seek to establish an Islamic state which is to be modeled on the way of life of the early Muslim community. Of course, we must remember Marx's old consumer advice: be wary of the words of the tailor who is trying to sell you a coat! For an excellent analysis of Islamic Fundamentalism and its political and ideological limitations see (Faksh 1997).

3. Ironically enough, this conjuncture of a “faith-based” provision of social services with neoliberalism found in Islamic Fundamentalism is paralleled by the rise of “compassionate conservatism” championed by George W. Bush which promised a new “faith-based” deal to the workers in the US in the late 1990s. As he said in his campaign speech on July 22, 1999: “We must apply our conservative and free-market ideas to the job of helping real human beings—because any ideology, no matter how right in theory, is sterile and empty without that goal.” He planned to do it by disbursing federal funds “not just to states, but to charities and neighborhood healers” in such a way that “we will never ask an organization to compromise its core values and spiritual mission to get the help it needs” (Quoted in (Olasky 2000: 221). To continue the analogy, compassionate conservatives, like Islamic fundamentalists, are some of the last, hardcore defenders of the death penalty on the planet and indeed both are interested in bringing back corporeal punishment into the penal regime as well.
4. For the role of Hamas, the major Islamic Fundamentalist organization in Palestine, in the social reproduction see (Nusse 1998).
5. In mid-2000, when oil prices were historically high, the national debt was approximately 115% of GDP of about \$150 billion (Bourland 2000).
6. For an trenchant description of the crisis the long-term social, demographic and economic trends forebode for the Saudi monarchy, published on the eve of the decision to go forward on the path of globalization, see (Cordesman 1997: 47-76).
7. A little noticed development in Saudi Arabia might indicate the surprising tangents produced by the new legislation. In November of 2000, two car bombings in Riyadh left one British man dead and five other foreigners injured. Was it a the result of Islamic dissident action? Perhaps that was the first reaction, but in February of 2001 Bill Sampson, a Canadian, confessed to the crime along with Alexander Mitchell, a Briton, and Raf Schyvens, a Belgian. The Saudi government claimed that the three murdered and maimed their victims as part of a turf war over the country’s illegal alcohol trade. Whatever the truth of this accusation, the alcohol business in Saudi Arabia is a very lucrative business—“a litre bottle of locally brewed wine or beer costs \$60, a case of Budweiser \$259, and a bottle of Johnny Walker Black Label Scotch goes for \$225” (Fennell and Snider 2001: 18)—and will get more lucrative now that the new Investment Regulation has given foreign companies headquartered in non-Islamic countries a green light to bring in their own employees.

8. The name "Operation Infinite Justice" was changed because of objections by Muslim scholars who pointed out that only Allah had the capacity for infinite justice. This was Koranic slip similar to Bush's early reference to the attack on Afghanistan as part of a "crusade" against terrorism.
9. For a discussion of the slow growth of the antiglobalization movement from the Third World to the First, see the "Introduction" of (Midnight Notes 2001) and (Federici and Caffentzis 2001).

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