

By William Blum

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I have written on more than one occasion about the value of preaching and repeating to the choir on a regular basis. One of my readers agreed with this, saying: “How else has Christianity survived 2,000 years except by weekly reinforcement?”

Well, dear choir, beloved parishioners, for this week’s sermon we once again turn to Afghanistan. As US officials often make statements giving the impression that the American military presence in that sad land is definitely winding down – soon to be all gone except for the standard few thousand American servicemen which almost every country in the world needs stationed on their territory – one regularly sees articles in the mainstream media and government releases trying to explain what it was all about. For what good reason did thousands of young Americans breathe their last breath in that backward country and why were tens of thousands of Afghans dispatched by the United States to go meet Allah (amidst widespread American torture and other violations of human rights)?

The *Washington Post* recently cited a Defense Department report that states: The United States “has wound up with a reasonable ‘Plan B’ for achieving its core objective of preventing Afghanistan from once again becoming a safe haven for al-Qaeda and its affiliates.”

“Preventing a safe haven for terrorists” – that was the original reason given back in 2001 for the invasion of Afghanistan, a consistency in sharp contrast to the ever-changing explanations for Iraq. However, it appears that the best and the brightest in our government and media do not remember, if they ever knew, that Afghanistan was not really about 9-11 or fighting terrorists (except the many the US has created by its invasion and occupation), but was about pipelines.

President Obama declared in August 2009: “But we must never forget this is not a war of choice. This is a war of necessity. Those who attacked America on 9/11 are plotting to do so again. If left unchecked, the Taliban insurgency will mean an even larger safe haven from which al Qaeda would plot to kill more Americans.” [2](#)

Never mind that out of the tens of thousands of people the United States and its NATO front have killed in Afghanistan not one has been identified as having had anything to do with the events of September 11, 2001.

Never mind – even accepting the official version of 9/11 – that the “plotting to attack America” in 2001 was devised in Germany and Spain and the United States more than in Afghanistan. Why didn’t the United States bomb those countries?

Indeed, what actually was needed to plot to buy airline tickets and take flying lessons in the United States? A room with a table and some chairs? What does “an even larger safe haven” mean? A larger room with more chairs? Perhaps a blackboard? Terrorists intent upon attacking the United States can meet almost anywhere. At the present time there are anti-American terrorist types meeting in Libya, Syria, Turkey, Pakistan, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, London, Paris, and many other places. And the Taliban of Afghanistan would not be particularly anti-American if the United States had not invaded and occupied their country. The Taliban are a diverse grouping of Afghan insurgents whom the US military has come to label with a single name; they are not primarily international jihadists like al-Qaeda and in fact have had an up-and-down relationship with the latter.

The only “necessity” that drew the United States to Afghanistan was the desire to establish a military presence in this land that is next door to the Caspian Sea region of Central Asia – reportedly containing the second largest proven reserves of petroleum and natural gas in the world – and build oil and gas pipelines from that region running through Afghanistan.

Afghanistan is well situated for such pipelines to serve much of South Asia and even parts of Europe, pipelines that – crucially – can bypass Washington’s *bêtes noires*, Iran and Russia. If only the Taliban would not attack the lines. Here’s Richard Boucher, US Assistant Secretary of State for South and Central Asian Affairs, in 2007: “One of our goals is to stabilize Afghanistan, so it can become a conduit and a hub between South and Central Asia so that energy can flow to the south.”

[3](#)

Since the 1980s all kinds of pipelines have been planned for the area, only to be delayed or canceled by one military, financial or political problem or another. For example, the so-called

TAPI pipeline (Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India) had strong support from Washington, which was eager to block a competing pipeline that would bring gas to Pakistan and India from Iran. TAPI goes back to the late 1990s, when the Taliban government held talks with the California-based oil company Unocal Corporation. These talks were conducted with the full knowledge of the Clinton administration, and were undeterred by the extreme repression of Taliban society. Taliban officials even made trips to the United States for discussions. [4](#)

Testifying before the House Subcommittee on Asia and the Pacific on February 12, 1998, Unocal representative John Maresca discussed the importance of the pipeline project and the increasing difficulties in dealing with the Taliban:

The region's total oil reserves may well reach more than 60 billion barrels of oil. Some estimates are as high as 200 billion barrels ... From the outset, we have made it clear that construction of the pipeline we have proposed across Afghanistan could not begin until a recognized government is in place that has the confidence of governments, leaders, and our company.

When those talks with the Taliban stalled in 2001, the Bush administration reportedly threatened the Taliban with military reprisals if the Afghan government did not go along with American demands. On August 2 in Islamabad, US State Department negotiator Christine Rocca reiterated to the Taliban ambassador to Pakistan, Abdul Salam Zaeef: "Either you accept our offer of a carpet of gold [oil], or we bury you under a carpet of bombs." [5](#) The talks finally broke down for good a month before 9-11.

The United States has been serious indeed about the Caspian Sea and Persian Gulf oil and gas areas. Through one war or another beginning with the Gulf War of 1990-1, the US has managed to establish military bases in Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, Oman, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Kazakhstan.

The war against the Taliban can't be "won" short of killing everyone in Afghanistan. The United States may well try again to negotiate some form of pipeline security with the Taliban, then get out, and declare "victory". Barack Obama can surely deliver an eloquent victory speech from his teleprompter. It might even include the words "freedom" and "democracy", but certainly not "pipeline".

“We are literally backing the same people in Syria that we are fighting in Afghanistan and that have just killed our ambassador in Libya! We must finally abandon the interventionist impulse before it is too late.” – *Congressman Ron Paul, September 16, 2012* [6](#)

How it all began: “To watch the courageous Afghan freedom fighters battle modern arsenals with simple hand-held weapons is an inspiration to those who love freedom. Their courage teaches us a great lesson – that there are things in this world worth defending. To the Afghan people, I say on behalf of all Americans that we admire your heroism, your devotion to freedom, and your relentless struggle against your oppressors.” – *President Ronald Reagan, March 21, 1983*

2. *Talk given by the president at Veterans of Foreign Wars convention, August 17, 2009* [7](#)

3. *Talk at the Paul H. Nitze School for Advanced International Studies, Washington, DC, September 20, 2007* [8](#)

4. See, for example, the December 17, 1997 article in the British newspaper, *The Telegraph*, “Oil barons court Taliban in Texas”.
[9](#)

5. *Pepe Escobar, Asia Times, September 12, 2012 (Information Clearing House)* [10](#)

6. *The Hill, daily congressional newspaper, Washington, DC* [11](#)

