

Armed and Dangerous: the corporate origins of war with Iran

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Preamble

In November 2011 claims emerged of an unlikely assassination plot against the Saudi Arabian ambassador to the US.¹ According to the FBI, an alcoholic car salesman in Texas, Manssor Arbasier, with a spurious family connection to a member of Iran's Revolutionary Guard, plotted with the Mexican Los Zetas drug cartel to kill the Saudi ambassador on orders from forces within the Iranian State.² The source of these allegations was a Mexican gangster, already facing criminal charges on an unrelated matter, who was coerced to offer his services as an assassin for \$1.5 million by the FBI. Although clearly a fabrication, this alleged 'plot' has led to further punitive sanctions against Iran and increased the threat of war. In particular, it has seen the deployment of two US warships in the Gulf of Hormuz and increased co-operation between the US Special Forces and those of the United Arab Emirates under the rubric of the Joint Special Operations Task Force-GCC [Gulf Co-operation Council].³ In this article I will draw on historical and contemporary material to ask how this came about and, in particular, to look at the role of the energy security industry and private intelligence and military contractors in the preparation for war with Iran.

Ridiculous as they were, the charges of an Iranian assassination plot on US soil were timely. They followed an

1 Charlie Savage and Scott Shane, 'Iranians Accused of Plot to Kill Saudi Envoy', *New York Times*, 11 October 2011. See also Kevin Johnson, David Jackson and Aamer Madhimi, 'US Officials Say Evidence Iranians Linked to Cartel Plots', *USA Today*, 14 October 2011.

2 Charlie Savage and Scott Shue, 'Iranians Accused of Plot to Kill Saudi's US Envoy', *New York Times*, 11 October 2011.

3 Spencer Androi's Danger Room, 'New US Commando Team Operating near Iran', *Wired*, 19 January 2012.

attempt by two Democratic Congressmen in the US to block \$52 billion in arms sales to Bahrain, at a time when the Bahraini democracy movement was being smeared (amidst a US news blackout) as Iranian-inspired.⁴ They also followed renewed US support for the Yemeni regime as an 'ally in the war with al-Qaida', that followed the US drone assassination of Anwar al-Awlaki on 30 September 2011.⁵ Last but not least, the charges of an Iranian assassination plot on US soil followed revelations that corporate mercenaries for former Blackwater CEO Erik Prince (who now runs Reflex Responses for Sheikh Mohammed bin-Zayes al-Nahya in the UAE) have been directly involved in the crackdown on the Bahraini democracy protests falsely accredited to Iranian influence.⁶

Disturbing parallels exist between the falsification of an Iranian assassination plot in the US (with Texas-based private intelligence 'think tank' Stratfor spinning the story as 'credible intelligence' in the media) and the entrapment of Bradley Manning that previously involved the private intelligence agency Project Vigilant, based in Florida.⁷ Founded by Chet Uber, together with former NSA officials and a former head of security at the New York Stock Exchange, Project Vigilant hires computer hackers to target dissidents in Bahrain and Saudi Arabia using fake IP servers, in violation of US law.⁸ Two years on from Bradley Manning's entrapment by Project Vigilant employee Adrian Lamo and Stratfor was 'sexing-up' the credibility of an incredible 'plot' to assassinate the Saudi

4 Lord Eric Avebury (Liberal Democrat) to the author, November 2011

5 Mark Mazzetti, Eric Schmitt and Robert F. Worth, 'Two Year Manhunt led to Killing of Awlaki in Yemen', *New York Times*, 30 September 2011.

6 'Secret Desert Mercenary Force Set Up by Arab Sheik by Blackwater Founder', *Daily Mail*, 15 May 2011 (reporter not identified). See also, www.blog.index/ocensorship.org/2011/03/18/bahraini-blog-father-goes-missing-police-raid-familys-home/

7 Amy Goodman, 'Stratfor, Wiki-leaks and the Obama Administration's War against Truth', *The Guardian*, 1 March 2012.

8 'A Team of Cyber-sleuths reveal mole in Wiki-leaks Revelation', *Daily Telegraph*, 30 July 2010; Mike Masnik in Techdirt, e.g. 10 December 2010, <www.techdirt.com/articles/20101210/12513512236/how-press-misleads-about-wikileaks.shtml>; <[http:// cryptome.org/ispyspy/vigilant/vigilant-spys.htm](http://cryptome.org/ispyspy/vigilant/vigilant-spys.htm)>. According to its own website, 'Project Vigilant LLC is the Leading Scientific Research Agency on Attribution Issues.'

ambassador to the US among a right-wing media already calling for military action against Iran. (Leigh and Harding, 2011, pp. 72-89). Something which the activities of Stratfor seem precisely to replicate is the manner in which the fabricated evidence of weapons of mass destruction and Iraqi al-Qaida connections were 'sexed-up' in preparation for the illegal invasion of Iraq (and subsequent war crimes) in 2003.⁹

By November 2011, Britain's Tory government had repeated the history of its predecessor by announcing that the MoD would participate in a US-led attack on Iran with ships, cruise missiles and access to British military bases such as Diego Garcia in the Indian Ocean.¹⁰ The UK government has also been to the fore in sanctions, for example against the Iranian Central Bank in Europe.¹¹

A nuclear red herring

The allegations regarding an Iranian assassination plot on US soil also narrowly preceded a routine but inconclusive report into Iran's alleged development of a nuclear weapons capability by the International Atomic Energy Authority.¹² That said, similar such accusations have been made ever since the CIA's bungled Operation Merlin provided US atomic secrets to the Iranian regime in February 2000. (Risen, 2006, pp. 193-218).

Shortly after the alleged assassination plot in Washington on 11 January 2012, Iranian nuclear scientist Mostafa Ahmadi Roshan was murdered in a car bomb terrorist

⁹ Reuters, 'Wikileaks: Stratfor Confidential E-Mails Published', Huffington Post, 27 February 2012.

¹⁰ Nick Hopkins, 'Exclusive: MoD Prepares to take part in US Strike against Iran: UK Steps up Plans for Possible Missile Strikes Amid Fresh Nuclear Fears', *The Guardian*, 3 November 2011.

¹¹ Israeli Project, Washington, 'EU Levels New Sanctions Against Iran', 23 January 2012. See also 'European States Call For Stiffer Sanctions Against Iran Following IAEA Report', *The Guardian*, 23 February 2012.

¹² IAEA.org, 'IAEA and Iran, Report', 22 February 2012. See also Kevin Hitchinkopf, 'Panetta: Iran Cannot Develop Nukes, Block Straits' on CBS, Face the Nation, 8 January 2012.

attack in Tehran.¹³ In contrast to the almost certainly fictitious plot in Washington, few among the Western media described this as an act of terrorism and it was actually celebrated by Michael Burleigh of the *Daily Telegraph*.¹⁴

The car bomb assassination of Mostafa Ahmadi Roshan was the fourth such murder of a nuclear scientist in Iran since 2010. Initially the Iranian authorities blamed Israel for the attack after the former Israeli military spokesman Brigadier Yuav Mordechi revelled in the murder. But it's difficult to see how MOSSAD agents could remain undetected in a closed society like Iran. Later, sections of an increasingly divided Iranian media suggested the CIA were to blame. But as *New York Times* journalist James Risen has revealed, the CIA has been a busted flush in Iran for over a decade. (Risen, 2006, pp. 198-218)

More plausibly, the bombing could have been the work of a terrorist organisation called the Mujehadin-e Khalq (MEK). Previously financed by Saddam Hussein (and previously described as a terrorist group in Washington) these architects of the 1980 Iranian Embassy siege in London are now financed and backed by the US and Gulf Arab States.¹⁵ It is also likely that the MEK are getting logistical support from privatised military units who are based in the region. It's equally likely, given the closure of MEK camps in Iraqi Kurdistan, that these are linked to the energy security companies who are the real people preparing for war with Iran. (Risen, 2006, pp. 215-218) This will be explored below.

Preparations for military aggression against Iran date from the Clinton era and attentions were diverted only with the 9/11 attacks. (Risen, 2006, pp. 4-5). These attacks, in

¹³ Iranian News Agency (English.news.cn), 'Death Toll Rises to Two in Tehran Bomb Attack on Nuclear Scientist'. See also Amy Teibal, 'Mostapha Ahmadi Roshin, Iran Nuclear Expert Dead in Car Bomb', AP Jerusalem, Huffington Post, 1 November 2012.

¹⁴ Michael Burleigh, 'An Informal Addition to the Laws of Physics: Don't Work For Iran', *Daily Telegraph*, 2 March 2012.

¹⁵ Raymond Tanter, 'MeK, Iran and the War for Washington', *The National Interest*, 16 September 2011. See also 'US Offers Iranian Group Path off Terror List: MEK Status on Blacklist Hinges on Iraqi Camp Closure', Reuters, 29 February 2012 and 'Saddam used MEK to Crush Iraqi Kurds', *The Economist*, 28 March 2011

turn, led to fabricated evidence of al-Qaida links to Iraq (like those of weapons of mass destruction) in which Saudi Arabia's General Intelligence Directorate (hitherto operationally linked to al-Qaida) were complicit. (Risen, 2006, p173-191) Meanwhile, as early as 2005, the US State Department under Donald Rumsfeld had established the Office of Stabilization and Reconstruction (Klein, 2007, pp. 380-382). Following the US-led privatisation frenzy that dismantled the Iraqi state (giving rise to sectarian carnage), this not only planned the privatisation of Iran's oil, gas and industries, post invasion, it also drew up a list of which corporations should secure contracts in a post-invasion Iran.¹⁶

Central to the companies to benefit from the 2005 plan to invade Iran would have been the Carlyle Group headed by former Secretary of State James Baker III.¹⁷ The Carlyle Group already had substantial energy investments in the so called 'Caspian Shield' (discussed below) which can be seen as a major factor in preparing for the wars both in Afghanistan and Iraq. (Carew, 2001; Klein, 2007, pp. 274 and 317-381; Scahill, 2007) More recently, the interests of the Carlyle Group have come into collision with the efforts by gas producing countries to create a kind of 'gas OPEC' in which Iran would be a leading influence and player. The threat of war with Iran, in short, would seem to have very little to do with nuclear power or any alleged development of nuclear weapons as against the financial interests of the energy security companies.

Iran and the Gulf Co-operation Council (GCC)

With preparations for war with Iran now effectively in the public domain, it might be worth looking at the various other forces that might have a stake in such a conflict. Foremost among these are the states of the Gulf Co-operation Council (founded in 1982) with unfinished business with Iran since

¹⁶ Guy Dinmore, 'US Prepares List of Unstable Nations', *Financial Times*, 29 March 2005. See also Joel Skousen, 'Rumsfeld Surrounding Iran with New US Bases', at <www.worldaffairsbrief.com>, 23 April 2005.

¹⁷ Uri Dowbenko, 'Global Shakedowns R-U's: James Baker-Carlyle Group, Criminal Government Channel' at <www.conspiracyplanet.com/channel.cfm?channelid=2&contentid=1607>.

Saddam Hussein fought a proxy war on their behalf in the 1980s.

Although Saudi Arabia was lobbying for military attacks on Iran as early as 2007 (wikileaks), events have been brought to a head by the spread of the Arab Awakening to Yemen – and, in particular, to Bahrain.¹⁸ While some GCC states (notably Qatar) have offered conditional support to the Arab Revolutions, others (like Saudi Arabia) resolved to crush the Arab Spring even before its spread to Bahrain. In particular, Saudi Arabia has taken a lead in misrepresenting democracy protests in Bahrain as both sectarian and Iranian-inspired and used a news blackout (ordered by Obama himself) to lead a GCC invasion of Bahrain, followed by a brutal crackdown, under the rubric of the Joint Special Operations Task Force.¹⁹

Of equal significance to the GCC, however, has been the proliferation of private military contractors based first in Iraq and then throughout the Persian Gulf.²⁰ In many ways, this is linked to the rise of the GCC with Halliburton (as an example) being based in Dubai and Erik Prince (cofounder of Blackwater) establishing Reflex Responses as a corporate Foreign Legion of 'non Muslim' contract brigades, also in the UAE.²¹

More worrying, in the context of all this, is the importance of private intelligence agencies to the US President's Daily Intelligence Briefings. (Scahill, 2007) As many of these companies are now based in the Persian Gulf or enjoy links to the energy-security industry, they may also have a

18 Caryle Murphy, 'Wikileaks Reveals Saudi Efforts to Threaten Iran', <www.globalpost.com> 29 November 2010.

19 Kim Zetter, 'NOKIA Siemens Spy Tools Aid Police Torture in Bahrain', *Wired: Threat Level*, 23 August 2011; and Spencer Andrai's Danger Room: 'New US Commando Team Operating near Iran', *Wired*, 19 January 2012.

20 Dr. Alexander von Paleska, 'When the Regular Army Goes the Mercenaries Come', at <<http://oraclesyndicate.twoday.net/stories/3574697/>>

21 Paul Cullen, 'Miliband Challenged on Mercenaries Abuse – Legal War Over Government Failure to Act', *War on Want*, February 2008, <www.waronwant.org/component/content/article/15578>. See also George Monbiot, 'Greed of the Highest Order in the Worst Privatisation Since Rail', *The Guardian*, 14 February 2008.

vested financial interest in the destabilisation of the region and a future 'war for profit' with Iran. (Klein, 2007, p. 455)

An indication as to where this might be headed was provided by the role of Florida-based Project Vigilant (also involved in the entrapment of Bradley Manning) in the preparation for the Saudi invasion of Bahrain. Prior to the invasion, Project Vigilant ran fake IP Servers in the Persian Gulf, to entrap and identify Bahraini dissidents and also fed defective intelligence to the US government – exaggerating Iranian influence.²² This created the space for lobby firms to operate in Washington on behalf of the Bahrain regime. The US government then collaborated in a media blackout of Bahrain during which time private security contractors participated in the Saudi-led crackdown on the protests (in which Jordanian and Pakistani troops were also involved). This, again, was under the rubric of the Joint Special Operations Task Force–GCC.²³ This recreated the role of British Special Forces as mercenaries in the Arab Protectorates of Yemen in the 1960s and for the Sultan of Muscat in the 1970s. (Halliday, 1974)

The British government and war with Iran

Superficially, David Cameron's commitment to war with Iran, in 2012, looks like a carbon copy of Tony Blair's commitment to war with Iraq in 2003. For Blair, war with Iraq was payback for US and corporate support (e.g. from Rupert Murdoch and the City of London) for his hijacking of the Labour Party in 1995. Blair then lied to the UK electorate over weapons of mass destruction in Iraq, and is widely regarded both as a war criminal and mass murderer. He has also since become a millionaire on the back of his role as US special envoy to the Middle East. However, it is unlikely that Blair knew in advance how the privatising of Iraq's industries and dismantling of its state would lead to the sectarian violence that left the country in ruins.

²² Andy Greenberg a.k.a. The Firewall, 'Project Vigilant: Big Brother or Small Potatoes', *Forbes Magazine*, 8 April 2010.

²³ Spencer Andrai's Danger Room, 'New US Commando Team Operating near Iran', *Wired*, 19 January 2012.

By contrast, David Cameron must have known in advance of the plans to seize Iran's oil and public industries that have been developed (in the public domain) by the US State Department Office of Reconstruction and Stabilization since 2005. (Klein, 2007, p. 282) As regards the role of corporate mercenaries in the preparation for war with Iran, Cameron appointed right-winger Liam Fox as Minister of Defence precisely to pursue exactly the same kind of privatisation agenda pursued by Donald Rumsfeld at the Pentagon from 2000. (Klein, 2007, pp. 293-305) While Rumsfeld was saved from the Joint Chiefs of Staff by 9/11, it was this privatising zeal that led Liam Fox into an inappropriate relationship with lobbyist Adam Werritty that eventually cost him his job.²⁴ Before Fox went, however, he oversaw the transformation of the Royal United Services Institute (the world's oldest military think tank) into a key facilitator of military privatisation – particularly in the Middle East.²⁵

Shock and Awe – the sequel

What kind of war is being prepared against Iran? As Barak Obama (who stands behind the bloodstained repression in Bahrain) has thus far shied from any military intervention in Syria, this is unlikely to be a war involving US and British ground troops – at least initially. Because of the sheer scale of British and US casualties that have arisen from the failed military interventions in Afghanistan and Iraq, the general public in these countries simply wouldn't accept large numbers of soldiers returning from another Middle Eastern conflict in coffins and body bags. (Scahill, 2007) For the US to re-introduce the draft and fight a ground war on these terms

²⁴ Tim Montgomerie, 'Committee Warns That Defence Cuts are Causing Strategic Shrinking', at <<http://conservativehome.blogs.com/thetorydiary/2011/08/defence-select-committee-warns-that-defence-cuts-are-causing-strategic-shrinkage.html>>. See also 'Liam Fox Resigns over Adam Werritty Revelations', *The Daily Telegraph*, 2 March 2011.

²⁵ Peter Almond, 'War's Fertile Ground for Soldiers of Fortune', *The Times*, 30 October 2005; 'Douglas Alexander Speaks to RUSI on Arab Spring', <www.totalpolitics.com> 10 October 10, 2011.

would not be politically feasible, even if the Pentagon (and Britain's Ministry of Defence) hadn't been outsourced and privatised to the bone.²⁶ War with Iran would therefore be likely to take the form of massive bombardment from the air which, like Shock and Awe in Iraq, would be aimed both at the regime and at Iran's civilian population – making it a war crime. (Ullman and Waire Jnr., 1996)

The above would have absolutely nothing to do with supporting any authentic democracy movement in Iran – 'green' or otherwise. These, after all, are Iranian citizens and would be bombed as well.²⁷ Such a policy of bombardment would therefore (in all probability) be backed up by ground forces of the Mujahedine-e Khalq (MEK) who bear as much relationship to authentic Iranian democracy protests as do al-Qaida to the Arab Awakening. This could explain the big push from Washington, for which Statfor in particular has been lobbying, to legitimize the MEK in spite of its previous role in Saddam Hussein's genocide of the Kurds.²⁸

But how big is the MEK? In all probability this would have to be reinforced by corporate mercenaries and by the kind of 'contract brigades' that Erik Prince has been talking about since 2007, before he stepped down as CEO of the re-branded Blackwater and established Reflex Responses (his corporate Foreign Legion) in the UAE. Indeed, preparations for war with Iran might explain why both Halliburton and Prince have relocated to the Persian Gulf at this time.

The GCC's ambitions in the Persian Gulf – a user's guide to history

Arguably, the GCC had a military rationale since its inception in 1982. (Mansfield, 1991) Formed during the Iran-Iraq War, it

²⁶ Tim Montgomerie, 'Committee Warns That Defence Cuts are Causing Strategic shrinking', (see note 24).

²⁷ Bradley Klapper, 'US Offer Iranian Group Path off Terror List', Associated Press, Washington, 1 March 2012 and 'US Says it would Take Iranian Opposition Group off of Terrorist List if it Closes Camps in Iraq', Associated Press, 29 February 2012.

²⁸ 'The Iran-Iraq War: Serving American Interests', RUPE, India, 18 March 2012, <rupe-india.org/34/iran.html>

quickly endorsed Saddam Hussein in his efforts to seize territory east of the Shatt al-Arab. This would have provided Iraq with deep water anchorage for supertankers connected to the Iraqi oil fields by Soviet built oil pipeline. (Farouk-Slugglett and Slugglett, 1990, pp. 215-227) While retaining his own agenda, Saddam Hussein can thus be seen to have been a client of the GCC (at the very least) in his war with Iran. By contrast, the US was more ambiguous in its attitude towards the conflict until the al-Yamamah arms deal of 1985 – and especially after the Fao Peninsula fell to Iranian forces in the same year. (Miller and Mylroie, 1990, p. 127) The result of this was that the West, too, began supporting Saddam Hussein in his war with Iran.²⁹

After 1985, US support for Saddam Hussein in his war with Iran went way beyond Donald Rumsfeld championing the Iraqi Ba'ath as the defenders of secular civilisation against Islamic Fundamentalism.³⁰ The US reflagged Kuwaiti tankers, in the Gulf, and even 'forgave' the Iraqis when they accidentally fired on a US warship. Had the Iranians done the same thing it is very doubtful that Washington would have been so understanding. They even launched a CIA spy satellite to provide intelligence on Iranian troop movements to Saddam Hussein. (Miller and Mylroie, 1990)

More grotesquely, the US provided Saddam Hussein with the means to create chemical weapons used against Iranian troops and (later) against Kurdish civilians at Halabja.³¹ A US war with Iran can therefore be seen as unfinished business from the 1980s and its proxy war against Iran from 1985.

The GCC and the first Iraq war

Arguably, all that undermined US plans for military aggression

²⁹ 'Shaking Hands with Saddam Hussein: The US Tilts Toward Iraq, 1980-1984', National Security Archive, Washington, 25 February 2003, at <www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB82/>.

³⁰ BBC, On This Day, 'US Warship Shoots Down Iranian Airliner', July 3, 1988.

³¹ BBC, On This Day, 'Thousands Die in Gas Attack', 16 March 1988.

Speaking on Al Jazeera's 'Inside Story' on 9 November 2011, an Iranian academic made the point that Iranian civilians are still suffering from these attacks.

against Iran circa 1990 was the unpredictable actions of their ally/client, Saddam Hussein.

During the Iran-Iraq War the GCC had bankrolled Iraqi aggression but the conflict had left the Iraqi economy debt-ridden and in ruins. Now the GCC countries, who had studiously excluded Iraq from membership, wanted their money back. (El Najjar, 2001) Insult was added to injury when Kuwait and the UAE exceeded OPEC oil quotas and in the process drove down oil prices. This threatened to further destabilise the Iraqi economy and undermine the region's capacity to pay its war debts.

For all that Iraqi defectors had revealed how Saddam had been mooting an invasion of Iran since 1986, the US continued to support Saddam as their regional enforcer in a world without the Shah. (Miller and Mylroie, 1990) To this end, both Britain and the US endorsed the formation of the Arab Co-operation Council (linking Iraq to Jordan, Egypt and Yemen) despite the fact that this was very obviously an arms procurement conduit for weapons of mass destruction. Indeed, MI6 colluded in the provision of components for the Iraqi 'Babylon' Supergun, disavowing its murdered agent Jonathon Moyle in Chile, and allowed British businessmen at Matrix-Churchill, who were MI6 agents, to be prosecuted.³² Echoes of this grubby incident have been invoked by the recent extradition (without due process) of retired British businessman Christopher Tappin to the US in 2012 on charges of supplying batteries (allegedly for weapons) to Iran.³³

Therefore, when April Glaspie, the US ambassador to Iraq, said that the territorial dispute between Iraq and Kuwait was an 'internal matter', of no interest to the US, Saddam Hussein assumed that if he invaded Kuwait he would be allowed to get away with it.³⁴ This he duly did on 2 August

32 BBC, On This Day, 1990 Iraqi Supergun Affair, 'Customs Seize Supergun', 15 April 1990.

33 'Christopher Tappin Extradition: Retired Businessman Arrives at Heathrow with Tearful Wife', Huffington Post, 24 February 2012.

34 April Glaspie: Transcript of the Meeting between Iraqi President Saddam Hussein and US Ambassador to Iraq, April Glaspie, July 25, 1990, at <whatreallyhappened.com/WRHARTICLES/ARTICLE5/april.html>.

1990.

During the first Iraq War there were authentic mass uprisings both in Kurdish Mosul and in Basra, Southern Iraq, that were inspired by the rhetoric of George Bush Senior. In many ways, this anticipated the Arab Spring by 20 years and was highly instructive as to the western governments' attitude to mass democratic protests in the Arab world. Because the GCC states (and particularly Saudi Arabia) opposed any democratic mass movement in the Persian Gulf, the uprisings were cynically abandoned to their fate. This amounted to a betrayal that caused outrage among several senior military figures, including Norman Schwartzkoff, who had played an impressive role in the liberation of Kuwait. It caused a good deal more resentment in Kurdistan and Basra.³⁵

The Iraqi invasion of Kuwait was also used to quietly kill off the Shora (workers control) movement in most of the GCC countries, while the deployment of US troops in Saudi Arabia inadvertently provided a catalyst to the rise of al-Qaida. (El-Naijar, 2001) Although strategists at the National Defence University, from 1996, started drawing up plans for a renewed invasion of Iraq this was to be very different from the deployment of 1991. The title of the policy document, (later adopted by Donald Rumsfeld, 'Shock and Awe: Achieving Rapid Dominance', reveals that this was to be an invasion not in support of popular insurrection but against both the regime and the Iraqi population at the same time, (Ullman and Waire Jr., 1996). As compared with Desert Storm, Shock and Awe was a completely different kind of invasion because it had a different objective – to pacify the Iraqi population ahead of the dismantling and privatisation of the Iraqi state with oil theft at its core. (Klein, 2007, pp. 329-332)

The Clinton interregnum

Admittedly, 'Shock and Awe' was considered a maverick piece of research when Clinton was in the White House. (Kline, 2007, p. 329) During the same period, while Halliburton made

³⁵ 'Saddam Used MEK to Crush Iraqi Kurds', *The Economist*, 28 March 2011.

money out of the military intervention in the Balkans, the activities of other private military contractors such as Blackwater (founded by ex-SEALS Erik Prince and Al Smith, also in 1996) were confined to training Special Forces and SWAT until Rumsfeld arrived at the Pentagon with his privatising agenda in 2000. (Klein, 2007, pp. 308-316) During the same period the al-Qaida bombing at the US embassy in Saudi Arabia (in which the Saudi General Intelligence Directorate were almost certainly complicit) was conveniently blamed on Iran. (Risen, 2006, pp. 178-179).

Meanwhile, as CIA station chief for East Africa, Cofer Black thought that it was much more important to track down Carlos the Jackal in Sudan – until two devastating attacks in East Africa in 1998. (Scahill, 2007)

While US neo-cons recruited Chalabi, the leader of the Iraqi National Congress, to help them discredit the CIA, the American Enterprise Institute, Cato and Heritage Foundation lobbied for the privatisation of the Pentagon. (Risen, 2006, pp. 73-76) During the same time (and in the run up to the US embassy bombing in Saudi Arabia) the Saudi General Intelligence Directorate consolidated its links with al-Qaida. (Risen, 2006, pp. 173-191)

As with the Taliban, these Saudi-al-Qaida links had their origins in the CIA's covert war against the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan from 1980. Despite a concerted media campaign, in the UK to deny this, the evidence suggests that British mercenaries recruited through the 23rd Airborne, territorial SAS (otherwise known as R-Squadron) played a major role in this campaign and especially in training future Taliban and al-Qaida. (Carew, 2001) Much of what we know of this campaign comes from the publication of the memoir of one of the British soldiers involved, Philip Anthony Sessargo (writing as Tom Carew), who had served in the Royal Artillery before becoming a 'circuit mercenary' with links to MI6, recruited to deniable operations through the territorial SAS, e.g. in Togo, the Seychelles and (later) in Afghanistan between 1983 and 1991. What made Sessargo's book, with the controversial title of *Jihad*, so sensational was that it was published just weeks

before 9/11, leading to furious denials from both the Ministry of Defence and SAS that Sessargo had ever been in the regiment.³⁶

Perhaps with an eye to the scandal surrounding Peter Wright's *Spycatcher* in 1987, the government didn't try to ban the book. But its claims that Sessargo was a 'Walter Mitty' smacked of previous campaigns to discredit whistleblowers from Colin Wallace and Fred Holroyd through to David Shayler. Also, if Sessargo were simply a fantasist, why (as Barry Wigmore of the *Daily Mail* claimed) was he 'more hated than Bin Laden', in the ranks of the SAS; and why had the MoD mobilised so many of its media contacts to discredit the story?³⁷ When Sessargo was found murdered in a lock-up in Antwerp in 2009, the *Daily Mail* ran stories for days, claiming that Sessargo was a Walter Mitty and fantasist.³⁸ In fact, all they proved was that he wasn't a full time member of the 22nd Airborne Regiment. What they've not been able to answer is why, if Sessargo wasn't even in the territorial SAS, is he buried in the SAS plot at St. Martin's Church, Hereford?

The biggest covert operation in the CIA's history, the Afghan campaign, was all about energy-security and geopolitics, in the days before such interests were outsourced and privatised through the involvement, e.g. of Halliburton and the Carlyle Group, in 'the Caspian Shield'. Back in the mid-70s, Afghanistan was producing 275 million cubic feet of natural gas a day. During the Soviet occupation, Moscow estimated Afghanistan's natural gas reserves at as much as five trillion cubic feet.³⁹ It was this that precipitated the CIA operation in which Sessargo and the 23rd Airborne were involved, and which was made possible only because it had been bankrolled

36 As reported e.g. on BBC's Newsnight and in *The Guardian*. See Owen Boycott, 'Afghan book author "was never in SAS" ', *The Guardian*, 15 November 2001 <www.guardian.co.uk/uk/2001/nov/15/books.september11>.

37 Barry Wigmore, 'SAS conman who wrote best-selling book on Afghanistan is believed murdered', *The Mail Online*, 24 January 2009.

38 See for example <www.dailymail.co.uk/femail/article-1219325/Mydad-SAS-Walter-Mitty-How-Claire-mourned-fathers-death-seven-years-seeing-ALIVE-television.html>

39 <www.salaam.co.uk/themeofthemonth/december01_index.php?l=3>

by Saudi Arabia and other GCC States. Later, in 1998, following the collapse of the Soviet Union, the 'Caspian Shield' was brought into existence (with Carlyle at its core) to secure the oil pipeline from Azerbaijan to Turkey, through the former Soviet Caucasus, by keeping both Russia and Iran out of Central Asia. The Taliban, initially, were signatories to this and to a further deal involving Turkmenistan and Pakistan, to build a pipeline from Central Asia into the Indian subcontinent. In other words, when Sessargo wrote and published his book, the Taliban were considered allies not only by the Pakistani ISI and military (who were then the government) but by the energy-security industry in the West.

That the 1980s 'dirty war' in Afghanistan led to close ties between the Pakistani ISI and Taliban is a fact familiar to all security specialists. Much more sensitive, and generally unreported, are those between al-Qaida and Saudi Arabia's General Intelligence Directorate (GID), as well as layers of the Saudi political elite, even before 9/11. (Risen, 2006, pp. 173-191). It was this much more thorny relationship for the US that found Cofer Black (the future architect of extraordinary rendition) downgrading the threat posed by al-Qaida when he was CIA station chief in East Africa in the 1990s. It also found the US embassy bombing in Saudi Arabia (which was probably carried out with the collusion of the Saudi secret police) accredited to Iran in a clumsy attempt to engineer a US invasion.

From 2005, Cofer Black ran Total Intelligence for Blackwater, which has spearheaded the US President's dependency on private intelligence briefings. (Scahill, 2007) After Erik Prince moved to the UAE (amidst renewed attempts to indict him for war crimes and tax evasion) Cofer Black took control of Blackwater, which was subsequently rebranded first as Xe Solutions and then Academi. Cofer Black is also, now, the foreign policy advisor to Republican presidential hopeful, Mitt Romney.

Saudi Arabia, Bin Laden and the rise of al-Qaida

In 1998, a credible CIA plot to abduct Bin Laden in

Afghanistan was scuppered by a combination of Saudi interference and opposition from the Pentagon. Three months later, al-Qaida suicide bombers carried out devastating terrorist attacks in Nairobi and Tanzania – despite Cofer Black downgrading the threat. This led to arbitrary air strikes against Sudan by the Clinton administration, even though Bin Laden was no longer in the country.

According to *New York Times* journalist, James Risen, shared intelligence between the CIA and Saudi GID continued to routinely find its way into al-Qaida's hands. During the same period the National Security Agency (Fort Meade, Maryland) refused to share intelligence with the GID because of its historic and ongoing links with al-Qaida. (Risen, 2006, pp. 173-191). As an example, while head of Saudi intelligence, Prince Turki al Faisal enjoyed cordial relations with Bin Laden. He was then appointed ambassador to the US. In other words, the American intelligence community had hard evidence of al-Qaida's Saudi Arabian links even as they were brought under pressure (in the fallout from 9/11) to link al-Qaida to Iraq.

Further evidence of Saudi intelligence collusion with al-Qaida persisted in presenting itself even as members of Bin Laden's family were flown out of the US (on special flights) following 9/11. In particular, when Abu Zubaydah (a top Bin Laden confederate) was captured in Pakistan, in March 2002, he was in possession of credit cards and financial documents tracing al-Qaida back to Saudi Arabia. In the preparation for the invasion of Iraq this source of intelligence was ignored and, when later requested of the Saudis by the FBI, had been destroyed. Finally, when Abu Zubaydan was taken to an interrogation centre in Thailand, he revealed the full extent of his links to Saudi intelligence.

As with the non-existent WMD in Iraq, CIA staff who continued to investigate the official Saudi links to al-Qaida found themselves at best ignored and in many cases faced the ruin of their careers. *New York Times* journalist, James Risen, has since been threatened with prosecution (under the Obama administration) for revealing this fact.

The History of outsourced warfare as outsourced terrorism

Although mercenary armies have historically formed a part of both British and American covert policy, they were not an integral part of either nation's 'total force' before the Bush administration placed Cheney, Rumsfeld and Wolfowitz in charge of national security. (Scahill, 2007)

During the Yemen and Oman conflicts of the 1960s and 1970s, British military personnel were 'transferred' to the private sector and part-financed by ARAMCO (the Arabian American Oil Company) in what would nowadays be called 'deniable operations'. (Halliday, 1974) Parallels between this situation and that in latter day Bahrain were revealed in *The Observer* on 29 May 2011 and have ominous implications for the situation throughout the Persian Gulf. More recently, *Wired* magazine has revealed how the sub-contracting of British troops as mercenaries to the Sultan of Muscat and South Yemen 'protectorates' in the 1960s and 1970s has been replicated by the Joint Special Operations Task Force-GCC. Like its predecessor, this brings together serving US Special Forces, mercenaries and locally recruited forces of the GCC states.⁴⁰

Historically, British mercenary organisations were divided between those with links to the Foreign Office (and MI6) and those which were totally freelance. The former were always described as being part of 'the circuit', and, in many ways, this intimate relationship between military entrepreneurship and Britain's secret state can be seen to have its origins in the Arabian Peninsula and Persian Gulf. (Dorril, 1993) Certainly, this would seem borne out by 'Tom Carew's' memoir in 2001.

Notable state sanctioned mercenaries of the 1970s included David Stirling's Watchguard International, the Knightsbridge-based initiative of the founder of the SAS.

Of course, not all mercenaries in the 1970s were state linked. Colonel Callan's notorious FNLA mercenaries in Angola

⁴⁰ Spencer Andtroi's Danger Room: 'Exclusive: New US Commando Team Operating Near Iran', *Wired*, 19 January 2012

are an obvious case in point. However, there remained a persistent stream of Special Forces trained mercenaries involved in state-sanctioned covert operations from those in Togo and the Seychelles in the 1970s through to the Saudi-sponsored covert operation in Afghanistan that gave rise to the Taliban and al-Qaida. In keeping with the entrepreneurial spirit of David Stirling (that dates from the Long Range Desert Patrols during World War II) it was the 23rd Airborne Territorial SAS in Hereford that provided the main recruitment conduit for these state sanctioned covert operations. Again, the memoir of 'Tom Carew' would seem to confirm this.

Outsourced state terrorism and the contras

The link between British Special Forces and military privatisation partly entered the public domain in the Iran-Contra Affair. In 1983, Margaret Thatcher was returned to office with an increased majority only because of the Falklands' War. But victory in that war carried a price. Britain won the Falklands War because of signals intelligence provided by the CIA from its listening posts in Pinochet's Chile. As payback, US President Ronald Reagan expected the British to involve themselves in covert support to the Contra terrorists in Nicaragua. Part of Britain's support for the Contras involved a private security firm called KMS, based in the South of England, and run by a former SAS Officer and Tory councillor. According to Granada TV's World-in-Action, this was the British-based security company which bombed Managua Harbour during the first phase (Northern Command out of Honduras) of the Contra War. (Dorril, 1993).

Later, a much more clandestine 'second phase' of the Contra War was waged by the Southern Command out of John Hull's ranch in Costa Rica. (Cockburn, 1987). This involved a much more systematic outsourcing and privatisation of the conflict under the rubric of the Situation Group of the Reagan White House's National Security Council. This was led by Oliver North, Admiral Poindexter and Richard Secord and was known as Civilian Military Assistance (CMA).

In many ways, the origins of contemporary corporate

warfare lie with CMA in Nicaragua. Most of the mercenaries who fought for the Contras under the rubric of CMA were right-wing Cubans or members of Latin American death squads – exactly like Erik Prince’s Reflex Reactions today. Prince therefore builds on a legacy whereby the US, by the 1980s, had become the biggest exporter of terrorism (and certainly of outsourced terrorism) in the world.

Because of a Congressional ban on ‘Contra aid’, the dirty war was financed by drug trafficking (as in Afghanistan) and (to a lesser extent) by the sale of weapons spares to Iran before the fall of the Fao Peninsula in 1985. (Coleman, 2010).

Some British mercenaries were also recruited to Oliver North’s rogue operations that were to include a ‘false flag’ bombing of the US embassy in Costa Rica. (Cockburn, 1987). The only reason this never went ahead was North’s downfall in the Iran-Contra scandal. This broke into the public domain after the fall of the Fao Peninsula to Iran and after the Sandinista authorities paraded captured US mercenaries on TV. (Coleman, 2010) In leaking details of Iran-Contra to a Lebanese newspaper, the Pentagon’s Defence Intelligence Agency sought (successfully) to depose Oliver North and bring to an end his renegade activities in Lebanon that had increased the kidnappings of foreigners in and around Beirut (beginning with William Buckley of the CIA). The resulting inquiries by the Kerry and Tower Commissions concentrated on the sale of weapon sales to Iran, to fund the Contras, allegedly in exchange for hostage releases in Lebanon, but played down the flood of cocaine coming openly into the US through Fort Lauderdale on US military flights to finance the terrorist campaign of the Contra terrorists in Nicaragua.

There is no evidence that British mercenaries recruited to false flag operations out of John Hull’s ranch were part of ‘the Circuit’. In contrast to KMS and the Managua Harbour bombing, there is nothing substantive to trace these atrocities back to the British state. As we’ve seen, the same can’t be said of the involvement of 23rd airborne mercenaries fighting for what became the Taliban and al-Qaida in Afghanistan. Arguably, the reason why Bin Laden had to be killed (rather

than captured) by SEAL team six in Pakistan in 2011 was because a trial would reveal the extent of his connection to Saudi intelligence and the Saudi political elite, before and after 9/11, at a time when Saudi Arabia and the GCC are bankrolling more outsourced mercenary campaigns in the region.⁴¹

From CMA to Halliburton – outsourced terrorism goes corporate

In the state sanctioned terrorist campaign against Nicaragua, known as Civilian Military Assistance, one sees the origins of the 'Halliburton approach' to privatised warfare as a corporate endeavour, as it was allowed to develop under the Bush administration from 2000.

As with CMA itself, this 'Halliburton doctrine' was initiated by protégés of Henry Kissinger and veterans of the Phoenix Program in Vietnam. (Klein, 2007, p. 316) While held in check by the discrediting of Oliver North in the Iran-Contra hearings, these neo-cons (as they became known) later rose to prominence within and through the George W. Bush administration. Core to the agenda of this 'Halliburton group', from Iran-Contra onwards, was the dismantling of the CIA, part privatisation of the Pentagon and militarisation of the State Department. All of this happened in the aftermath of 9/11 and forms the backdrop to the rise of corporate mercenaries as an integral part of the US 'total force'. (Scahill, 2007)

Privatising homeland security

On September 10, 2001, Donald Rumsfeld's job as Secretary of State was on the line for his damaging attacks on the Pentagon's bureaucracy and fundamentalist pursuit of a privatising agenda.⁴² But the twin tower attacks of the following day were a godsend and openly acknowledged 'opportunity' to the neo-cons in office in other ways. Even as

⁴¹ Serving Aegis mercenary in Afghanistan to the author.

⁴² For that privatisation agenda, see Donald Rumsfeld, 'From Bureaucracy to Battlefield', Speech to the Pentagon, September 10, 2001 <www.defense.gov/speeches/speech.aspx?speechid=430>

preparations were drawn up for the invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq a huge 'homeland security industry' began to proliferate in a corporate sector involved in outsourced repression. (Briody, 2004)

Because of the boom in the homeland security industry, the neo-cons became seduced by their own rhetoric that war with Iraq could be outsourced, waged for profit, and still be a military success. (Risen, 2006, pp. 134-135). Thus war with Iraq was being billed as a 'war to remake the world' along free market lines, even as Rumsfeld ignored advice on how the war in Afghanistan might best be fought. One result of this was that, having pacified the civilian population and circumvented any democratic forces on the ground, Rumsfeld cut so many corners in the invasion of Iraq there weren't enough troops to stop foreign fighters flooding into the country through the porous border with Syria.

Under George Bush Senior, the privatising zeal of the neo-cons had been held in check and figures such as Cheyney and Rumsfeld (both protégés of Henry Kissinger and Milton Freidman) had to 'cool their heels'. Even James Baker III (Bush Senior's Secretary of State and a one time friend of Hafiz Asad in Syria) had been more of a pragmatist than an ideologue during the first Iraq War. So, too, was George Bush Senior – until he became a board member of the Carlyle Group.

The Carlyle Group and the Caspian Shield

Linked to both Halliburton and Gazprom, Carlyle was involved in both energy production and 'energy security' in the former Soviet Caucasus and Central Asia. This was the region later referred to as 'the Caspian Shield' from 2001.

Baker's law firm (in Texas) later got Kuwait to wave its compensation claim against Iraq (a necessary precondition for the 2003 invasion) in exchange for Kuwait investment in the Carlyle Group. (Klein, 2007, pp. 317-318) Under the pretext of defending the oil pipeline from Azerbaijan to Turkey (to which Iranian influence was seen as a threat) the establishment of the Caspian Shield involved the deployment of corporate mercenaries in the region. Almost a decade before the Arab

Spring, these mercenaries were also involved in the repression of democracy protests in Central Asia. (Scahill, 2007)

The security companies also established a network of 'black sites' that were later central to the rendition and outsourced torture strategy initiated by Cofer Black at the CIA. The same sites, operated for profit within the Caspian Shield, may also be strategically placed to service military incursions in Iran both by MEK terrorists and mercenaries.

The dawn of the corporate mercenary – Britain and the US

The most significant and high profile private army to rise to prominence during the war on terror was Blackwater, founded in 1996. As we have seen, while Bill Clinton was in the White House the activities of Blackwater were confined to the training of Special Forces and SWAT at its vast facility in South Carolina.

The transition from 'the Circuit' to corporate mercenary warfare in the UK was no less controversial. Here, the British equivalent of Blackwater was Tim Spicer's Sandline which also operated as Executive Outcomes in South Africa.⁴³ In keeping with the entrepreneurial spirit of David Stirling, these organisations recruited former British Special Forces and those of the South African Defence Force under apartheid. Its unique selling point was that it fought wars in exchange for mineral concessions e.g. in Angola and (most controversially) in Sierra Leone.

On coming to power, New Labour championed the role of these new corporate mercenaries. In an interview in *The Independent*, Jack Straw emphasised that they were quite different from Colonel Callan's cut-throat mercenaries in Angola in the 1970s.⁴⁴ The sanitised public image was tarnished, however, when Sandline were implicated in a bungled military coup plot in Equatorial Guinea linking Simon

43 <www.sourcewatch.org/index.php?title=Executive_Outcomes>

44 <www.independent.co.uk/news/world/politics/mercenaries-may-be-peacekeeping-force-says-straw-660502.html>

Mann of Executive Outcomes to Mark Thatcher. This should have been seen as an ill omen for future efforts to conduct foreign policy through corporate mercenary warfare.

Although British military support to the 2011 revolution in Libya was both grudging and minimal it seems that many of the 'military advisors' to the Libyan revolutionary forces were, in fact, private contractors employed by Aegis and its subsidiaries – Sandline and Executive Outcomes. With Sandline at its core, and links to the Royal United Services Institute, Aegis is effectively the 'British Blackwater' and had replaced Erik Prince's corporation (now run by Cofer Black) as the main mercenary army in Iraq, when Blackwater were eventually expelled from the country in 2007. Following disclosures that Aegis mercenaries had also murdered civilians in Iraq (and have been shown on YouTube doing it) Aegis has moved its headquarters to Switzerland and reverted to calling itself Executive Outcomes in the UK.⁴⁵

During the early stages of the Libyan revolution, when the National Transitional Council still wasn't recognised in the UK, Tony Buckingham of Executive Outcomes lobbied Tory politician Christian Sweeting for a group of Libyan insurgents to be hosted in the UK.⁴⁶ This followed the cynical abandonment of the original revolutionary leadership in Benghazi to Qaddafi's forces, and was at a time when Liam Fox was being reprimanded (by the military leadership and RUSI) for seemingly advocating regime change in Libya – a possible factor in his subsequent downfall. During this period, the further the insurgents pushed west towards Tripoli the less support they got from the West and many in the Tory Cabinet were mooting a partition of Libya at the time.⁴⁷

Tony Buckingham's company, Heritage Oil, which is based on Sandline's 'war for concessions' policy in Africa, has since become one of the first companies to cash in on oil

⁴⁵ See <www.sourcewatch.org/index.php?title=Aegis_Defence_Services>

⁴⁶ 'Heritage Oil chief recruits former Tory candidate for access to Libya's reserves' <www.guardian.co.uk/business/2011/nov/13/oil-commodities>.

⁴⁷ Patrick Wintour and Nicholas Watt, 'Cameron's War: Why PM felt Gaddafi had to be stopped', *The Guardian*, 2 October 2011.

privatisation in post-revolutionary Libya. It may also be behind a developing 'separatist agenda' in the East of the country, exploiting tribal divisions between armed militia groups and distrust of Jabil's National Transitional Council government in Tripoli.

There may also be a connection between the activities of Aegis and Heritage Oil in Libya, and the murder of rebel commander General Younes, ahead of the rapid and largely unexpected fall of Tripoli (aided by the Western Military Front, armed by the GCC out of Tunisia, mostly without NATO's knowledge).

In this way (while in no sense detracting from the legitimacy of Libya's revolution) Heritage Oil brings full circle the hitherto shady and marginal strategy of Sandline and Executive Outcomes, in a corporate form that is fully endorsed by the British government and state.

Heritage Oil has a highly controversial background in Africa, precisely because it builds its oil deals directly on the back of its 'security consultancy' role. The company is also involved in oil and gas production in Iraqi Kurdistan, where it also builds on its 'security role' running Iraqi intelligence from the Green Zone (and providing a significant portion of the mercenaries in the country) while also pushing a separatist agenda in Iraqi Kurdistan itself.

Forced to sell its Ugandan assets amidst accusations of wholesale tax evasion, Heritage Oil were looking for new investment opportunities when the Libyan revolution began. With Aegis and Reflex Reactions mercenaries now allegedly in Syria, what implications does this have for any future conflict with Iran?

Conclusions

US and British state policy towards Iran does seem geared towards provoking an Iranian closure of the Gulf of Hormuz, thereby legitimising war with Iran. In this way, the US administration has come into conflict with the Israelis for whom military aggression with Iran is all about the latter's

nuclear ambitions.⁴⁸

For the energy security companies, their lobbyists and right-wing media allies, war with Iran has never been about nuclear proliferation – this is simply the excuse. Rather, the western-corporate drive for war with Iran is about the oil and gas resources of the Persian Gulf, the plunder and privatisation of Iran's state-run industries (as happened after the Shah was imposed by the West in 1952) and the dashing of Iran's ambitions to create a 'gas OPEC' that runs counter to the interests of Halliburton and Carlyle Group. But for the interests of these forces to be fully served, war has to come through the closure of the Gulf of Hormuz. Why?

Alex Jones of infowars.com isn't the only person to draw parallels between the strategy of the Joint Special Operations Group–GCC in the Gulf of Hormuz and Gulf of Tonkin incident that led to the Vietnam War. Further parallels with Iraq have meantime surfaced with the extradition, without due legal process, of a retired British businessman accused of arms deals with Iran to Texas, where private intelligence agency Stratfor has also been pushing the fiction of an Iranian plot to assassinate the Saudi ambassador in Washington. The parallels with the Matrix-Churchill affair in Britain in 1990 are obvious.

When plans to invade Iran were first drawn up in 2005, Rumsfeld even mooted using Navy SEALs in false flag attacks on US shipping to trigger conflict in the Gulf of Hormuz. This is because the Gulf of Hormuz is core to the US energy-security-industry's plans for the whole of the Persian Gulf, and not just Iran. At its simplest, the GCC now exercises limited but significant independence from a declining US imperialism in the region (e.g. in supporting revolution throughout Libya and also in Syria, which the West doesn't want); and forcing the Iranians to close the Gulf of Hormuz would make the GCC states once more dependent on the West for security. Ergo, it brings them into line, and leads to the deployment of ever more corporate mercenaries in these countries to keep them in line.

⁴⁸ Reuters, 'Iran Steps Back From Warning on US Ships', *New York Times*, 21 January 2012.

Even a superficial study of the facts suggests that plans to invade Iran predated the war(s) in Iraq. At the same time, evidence as to how such a war might be fought are revealed in the bungled war for profit that dismantled the Iraqi state and wrought sectarian devastation on the country. Further worrying factors on the road to war are the further entrenchment of corporate interests in the US and British militaries as well as the GCC and Saudi Arabian response to the Arab Spring – especially in Bahrain.

While Saudi intelligence links to al-Qaida formed a factor in the road both to 9/11 and war in Iraq, the Obama administration relies increasingly on corporate mercenaries and intelligence gatherers, as well as the terrorists of the MEK. In this way, a tragedy of history seems poised to repeat itself in deadly farce.

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