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War, Inc.

by Mike Ferner

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coordinator, Program on Corporations, Law & Democracy (POCLAD)

"So what is our mistake? We are also human beings. Treat us like human beings," says Gulalae, a 37 year-old Afghan mother living in the dust, hunger and fear of the Shamshatoo refugee camp in Pakistan. She calls Osama bin Laden an "outsider" and says that because of him, "Afghanistan is made into a hell for others." [1]

Grim does not begin to describe the conditions Gulalae and her family endure. In one three-month period, in just one district of Shamshatoo, bacteria-related dehydration killed a child nearly every day. The misery in this refugee city is like a grain of sand on the beach of suffering that is Afghanistan. But Americans know little of it.

If you watch mainstream press accounts of "America's New War" you'd never know that as of Christmas, 2001, civilian deaths from U.S. bombing in Afghanistan surpassed 3,700 -- more than were killed in the attacks of September 11. The toll from unexploded cluster bombs, land mines, destroyed water and sewer systems and depleted uranium shells will no doubt reach into the hundreds of thousands. Add the additional innocents marked for retaliation as the international cycle of violence continues, and our war to end terrorism seems calculated to do just the opposite.

So why are we fighting? Of all the ways we could have responded to the attacks in New York and Washington, why war?

Numerous psychological, cultural and historical arguments can be mustered to answer that question, but the following does as well as any and better than most: "War is a racket. It always has been. . . . A racket is best described as something that is not what it seems to the majority of people. Only a small 'inside' group knows what it is about. It is conducted for the benefit of the very few, at the expense of the very many."

Words of a radical peacenik? Only if a Marine Corps Major General qualifies as such. In his twilight years General Smedley Butler unburdened his soul as did other career militarists, such as Admiral Hyman Rickover, who admitted that fathering the nuclear Navy was a mistake and Robert McNamara, who almost found the words to apologize for overseeing the Viet Nam war. Unlike Rickover and McNamara, Butler named names and exposed for whom the system works.

"I helped make Mexico safe for American oil interests in 1914. I helped make Haiti and Cuba a decent place for the National City Bank boys to collect revenues in. I helped in the raping of half a dozen Central American republics for the benefit of Wall Street. I helped purify Nicaragua for

the International Banking House of Brown Brothers in 1902-1912. I brought light to the Dominican Republic for the American sugar interests in 1916. I helped make Honduras right for American fruit companies in 1903. In China in 1927 I helped see to it that Standard Oil went its way unmolested."

Butler acknowledged that he'd spent most of his 33 years in the Marines as "a high class muscle man for Big Business, Wall Street and the bankers. In short, I was a racketeer, a gangster for capitalism." [2]

Thus did Butler simply and effectively expose a largely unknown truth -- how the military serves the strategic interests of property in the corporate form.

Much more commonly known is the corrupt practice of war profiteering.

"Only twenty-four at the [Civil] war's beginning, [J. Pierpont] Morgan perceived from the first that wars were for the shrewd to profit from and poor to die in . . . He received a tip that a store of government-owned rifles had been condemned as defective and with the simplicity of genius he bought them from the government for \$17,500 on one day and sold them back to the government on the next for \$110,000 . . . A Congressional committee investigating his little deal said of him and other hijacking profiteers, 'Worse than traitors are the men who, pretending loyalty to the flag, feast and fatten on the misfortunes of the nation.'" [3]

Lest examples from yore lead one to believe such traditions are no longer observed, consider the case of Eagle-Picher Technologies Corporation. The company produces sophisticated batteries to power the guidance systems of "smart" bombs. Workers claim they were ordered to cover up defects on millions of batteries -- defects that would ultimately cause the guidance systems to fail. [4] How many Afghani civilians were killed by bombs "guided" by defective Eagle-Picher Corp. batteries?

In Afghanistan as in every war, corporations [5] play a central role to protect their interests -- whether those interests are the profits from waging war or the geostrategic spoils of war.

Forget for a moment the indictable war profiteers like J.P. Morgan and consider just one instance of how war wealth, generated legally, empowers the few "inside the racket" to benefit economically and politically at the expense of the many. The du Pont Corporation will suffice.

Compared to some of its fellow racketeers, the du Pont Corporation's profits during WWI look downright patriotic. The company whose gunpowder saved the world for democracy saw its average annual pre-war profit jump from \$6,000,000 to nearly 10 times that amount during the war.

By the mid-1920's the du Pont family had bought nearly a quarter of all General Motors Corporation stock. Not only did this investment pay off handsomely during GM's successful campaign to destroy urban mass transit systems [6], but who better than a du Pont to run President Eisenhower's Bureau of Public Roads and develop the National System of Interstate and Defense Highways along with Eisenhower Defense Secretary (and former GM President), Charles Wilson?

If war profits are invested this carefully, imagine how much planning goes into the geostrategic spoils of war? For a peek inside this game there are few better tour guides than President Carter's National Security Advisor, Zbigniew Brzezinski.

Having also served on President Reagan's Defense Department Commission on Integrated Long-Term Strategy, Brzezinski is well-qualified to write *The Grand Chessboard: American Primacy and Its Geostrategic Imperatives*.^[7] It's one of those books that begs the question, "why would anybody actually put this stuff in writing?"

Brzezinski describes the Europe-Asia landmass as the key to global dominance. He asserts that the fall of the Soviet Union cleared the way for the U.S. to become the first non-Eurasian power to dominate this critical area, "and America's global primacy is directly dependent on how long and how effectively its preponderance on the Eurasian continent is sustained . . ."^[8]

In 1977 he named the Central Asian "stans" as the next center of conflict for world domination, and in light of expected Asian economic growth, he called this area around the Caspian Sea "infinitely more important as a potential economic prize: an enormous concentration of natural gas and oil reserves -- dwarf[ing] those of Kuwait, the Gulf of Mexico, or the North Sea . . . in addition to important minerals, including gold."^[9]

The former member of Reagan's National Security Council reasoned: "It follows that America's primary interest is to help ensure that no single power comes to control this geopolitical space and that the global community has unhindered financial and economic access to it."^[10]

He further deduced: "That puts a premium on maneuver and manipulation in order to prevent the emergence of a hostile coalition that could eventually seek to challenge America's primacy."^[11] Leaving nothing to doubt, he clarified "To put it in a terminology that harkens back to the more brutal age of ancient empires, the three grand imperatives of imperial geostrategy are to prevent collusion and maintain security dependence among the vassals, to keep [satellites] pliant and protected, and to keep the barbarians from coming together."^[12]

For those foolish enough to imagine an Earth not ruled by the U.S., he warns that "America's withdrawal from the world -- or because of the sudden emergence of a successful rival -- would produce massive international instability. It would prompt global anarchy."^[13]

Brzezinski warns to "keep the barbarians from coming together," and predicts "global anarchy" if U.S. dominance is threatened. The cold warrior's language, while picturesque, is not as precise as that used by Thomas Friedman, foreign affairs columnist for the *New York Times*. "Markets function and flourish only when property rights are secure and can be enforced . . . And the hidden fist that keeps the world safe for Silicon Valley's technologies to flourish is called the US Army, Air Force, Navy and Marine Corps."^[14]

With a Silicon Valley reference, Friedman updates General Butler's "I helped make Mexico safe for American oil interests" comment. But updates aside, oil retains its century-old rating as the imperial standard -- with now Afghanistan at center stage. And UNOCAL Corporation for one does not hesitate to demand that Afghanistan be made safe for American oil interests.

"From the outset, we have made it clear that construction of our proposed (\$2.5 billion Afghanistan) pipeline cannot begin until a recognized government is in place that has the confidence of governments, lenders and our company. UNOCAL envisions the creation of a Central Asian Oil Pipeline Consortium . . . that will utilize and gather oil from existing pipeline infrastructure in Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan and Russia." [15]

Smedley Butler learned that in war "nations acquire additional territory if they are victorious. They just take it." With today's popularity of corporate leasing programs, getting the use of additional territory -- call it property -- can be more profitable than actually acquiring it. But the end result is the same. "This newly acquired territory is promptly exploited by the few -- the self-same few -- who wrung dollars out of blood in the war. The general public shoulders the bill."

A modicum of historical perspective explains why America's New and Improved War is not a surprise. It's not just oil. It's not just acquiring territory or the use of territory. It's property and property rights consistently trumping human rights. The names change. The song has remained the same throughout our history.

For instance, check out a few lines of our Constitution: Article 4, Section 2. Imbedded into the most fundamental law of our land is the duty to return property -- in the form of slaves and indentured servants -- to its owners. Or read Article 1, Section 10, the Contracts Clause. According to Peter Kellman, "The meaning is clear: the obligation of the government, as stated in the Preamble to the Constitution, to promote the 'general welfare' is secondary to the private law, the law of contracts." [16] Or ask yourself why First Amendment rights of freedom of speech and assembly do not apply when you're at work? Or why corporations have more free speech rights than people?

Try this at home. Make your own list of how our world would look if America was a functioning democracy, actually governed by "we the people;" if human rights trumped property rights; if the vast decency, wisdom and compassion of the American people and not the interests of the propertied elite guided our foreign and domestic policies.

Here are a few things I'd put on my roster:

- We wouldn't be bombing one of the poorest nations on earth, killing thousands of civilians who had absolutely nothing to do with the inexcusable attacks of September 11.
- General Motors Corp. would not be allowed to replace mass transit systems with oil-addicted highways and automobiles.
- Representatives from UNOCAL and other corporations would not be able to buy their way into congressional offices and write legislation.

Not only could we generate a stunning agenda, we can actually begin making some fundamental improvements once we start finding ways to make the peace movement a democracy movement, and the environmental movement a democracy movement, and the labor movement a democracy movement, and . . .

You get the picture.

Footnotes

1. Vanessa Gezari, Cold, Despair Envelope Refugees, (*Toledo Blade*, November 4, 2001)
2. Smedley Butler, *War is a Racket*, 1935. (Gainesville: Crisis Press, 1995)
3. Boyer and Morais, *Labor's Untold Story*, (Pittsburgh: UE Press, 1953) p. 19
4. *CBS News*, December 6, 2001
5. In the modern era corporations play a central role but pre-dating corporations, the propertied elite were the ones on the "inside" of the racket. Have you ever examined close-up details of the suits of armor worn by feudal lords -- the finely-tooled, exquisitely-jointed steel produced by arms manufacturers of the 14th Century? Even then, the cream of technology and wealth went into weaponry.
6. *Taken for a Ride*, (New Day Films, 1996)
7. Zbigniew Brzezinski, *The Grand Chessboard: American Primacy and Its Geostrategic Imperatives*, (NY: HarperCollins, 1997)
8. *Ibid* pp. xiii-xiv
9. *Ibid* pp. 124-25
10. *Ibid* p. 148
11. *Ibid* p. 198
12. *Ibid* p. 40
13. *Ibid* p. 30
14. Thomas L. Friedman, *The Lexus and the Olive Tree: Understanding Globalization*, (NY: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2000), p. 373
15. Testimony by John J. Maresca Vice President, International Relations UNOCAL Corporation, to the House Committee on International Relations, Subcommittee on Asia and the Pacific, February 12, 1998. <http://www.ratical.org/ratville/CAH/linkscopy/Maresca2USG.html>
16. Peter Kellman, *Building Unions: Past, Present and Future*, (Croton-on-Hudson: Apex Press, 2001), p. 15

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