

*Part Two of a two-part series*

**Players on a rigged grand chessboard: Bidas, Unocal and the Afghanistan pipeline**

**By Larry Chin**

Online Journal Contributing Editor

**The Bush Administration's Afghan carpet**

March 10, 2002—During the final months of the Clinton administration, the Taliban was officially a rogue regime. After nearly a decade of fierce competition between the US-supported Unocal-CentGas consortium and Bidas of Argentina, neither company had secured a deal for a trans-Afghanistan pipeline.

Immediately upon seizing the White House, George W. Bush resumed relations with the Taliban.

Bush stocked his cabinet with figures from the energy industry with long-time ties to Central Asia (including Dick Cheney of Halliburton, Richard Armitage of Unocal, Condoleeza Rice of Chevron), and rode into office on the largesse of corporations with vested interests in the region (Enron). Suddenly, the prospects for a trans-Afghanistan oil and gas pipeline that would help ensure American dominance of Eurasia, described by Zbigniew Brezezinski as “The Grand Chessboard,” began to improve.

The Bush family's involvement in the Middle East and Central Asian oil politics, and its deep ties to the Saudi royal and bin Laden families, span generations. Throughout his oil-soaked tenure as governor of Texas, George W. Bush colluded on a daily basis with oil and power companies, including Enron. In light of his close personal relationship with Enron CEO Ken Lay, it is reasonable to assume that Bush was aware of the company's Central Asian aspirations. Among Enron's many projects in the region was a \$2.5 billion trans-Caspian pipeline, for which the company conducted feasibility studies. (One recently unearthed letter between Lay and Bush on Central Asian projects can be found at: <http://thesmokinggun.com/archive/bushlay12.shtml>)

In their book “Bin Laden: The Forbidden Truth,” intelligence authorities Jean-Charles Brisard and Guillaume Dasquie believe that Bush's primary goal was to consolidate the position of the Taliban in order to secure US access to the oil and gas reserves in Central Asia. According to Brisard and Dasquie, Bush viewed the Taliban as “a source of stability in Central Asia that would enable the construction of an oil pipeline across Central Asia,” from the rich oil fields in Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and Kazakhstan, through Afghanistan and Pakistan, to the Indian Ocean.”

According to Brisard and Dasquie, and an investigation by journalist Greg Palast, Bush also blocked secret service and FBI investigations on terrorism, while bargaining with the Taliban for the delivery of Osama bin Laden in exchange for political recognition and economic aid.

Bush administration and Taliban officials met several times in Washington, Berlin and Islamabad. Each time, the Taliban refused Bush's conditions.

The last meeting took place in August 2001. Central Asian affairs representative Christina Rocca and a coterie of State Department officials voiced disgust and issued a threat to the Taliban ambassador: "Accept our offer of a carpet of gold, or we bury you under a carpet of bombs." Bush promptly informed Pakistan and India that the US would launch a military mission against Afghanistan before the end of October.

Weeks later, under questionable circumstances, jetliners would crash into the World Trade Center, the Pentagon and in Pennsylvania, killing some 2,000 Americans. The ensuing war on Afghanistan, and the "war on terrorism," would claim the lives of more than 5,000 Afghans, scatter (but not destroy) the Taliban and send Osama bin Laden and his Al-Qaeda network into hiding.

Bush's brutal "carpet of bombs" had done what years of Clinton administration jockeying had failed to do: topple a recalcitrant, uncooperative regime with nationalistic tendencies, and clear the key square of the Chessboard.

### **A Well-Timed Economic Collapse**

In Argentina, executives of the old Bridas Group (now part of BP Amoco/Pan American Energy) must have viewed the US war in Afghanistan with more than a little interest. It was Bridas that pioneered exploration in Turkmenistan. It was Bridas that came up with the idea of a trans-Afghanistan pipeline. Before the Clinton administration had declared war on the Taliban, it was Bridas that was best positioned to build the pipeline.

But no Argentine was in a good position to entertain such thoughts. In the summer of 2001, the Argentine economy collapsed.

Argentina owed \$132 billion to the IMF, foreign lenders, banks, pension funds and investors. In July 2001, riots and a general strike brought the country to a standstill.

With the approval of George W. Bush, the IMF cut off Argentina's \$1.3 billion aid. Wall Street executives and analysts simply shook their heads, writing off Argentina as another case of "hopeless Third World bungling." Merrill Lynch, Deutsche Bank and Salomon Smith Barney were brought in to "restructure the country's international debt exchange."

Virtually unreported in the western media was evidence of a crippling flight of approximately \$26 billion out of Argentina by foreign banks. Most of the money went to the United States.

Federal judges Norberto Oyarbide and Maria Servini de Cubria immediately launched investigations (which are still underway). Among the targets of these probes are Citibank (Citigroup), London-based Hong Kong Shanghai Bank, Bank of Boston, Fleet Boston and Banco Rio (Spain)— banks tied to money laundering and on whose boards sit prominent movers and shakers connected to the highest levels of US and world governments.

It is true that Argentina's problems were long in the making. After a decade of "free market reforms" begun under Carlos Menem (massive privatizations, deregulation, draconian austerity and restructuring measures), the nation was at the mercy of multilateral institutions (International Monetary Fund and the World Bank), and foreign banks and lenders.

Still, the timing of the capital flight, between August and November 2001, coincides with other unusual global financial activity over the same period: a global recession, a crashing US stock market, 9/11/ "war"-related disruptions, and Enron looting.

One investigator, Sherman Skolnick, postulates a direct connection between Argentina's plunder and the Afghanistan pipeline. "How do you wreck a pipeline deal for Afghanistan of a competitor group?" he writes. "Simple. You wreck Argentina's business interests."

### **Securing the Chessboard for the Empire**

Just after US bombs began to fall on Afghanistan, the US representative to Pakistan, Wendy Chamberlain, visited Usman Aminuddin, Federal Minister of Petroleum and Natural Resources, to talk about the "proposed Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan gas pipeline project that 'will open up new avenues of multi-dimensional regional cooperation, particularly in light of recent geopolitical developments in the region.'"

In November 2001, the White House released a statement hailing the official opening of the first new pipeline by the Caspian Pipeline Consortium, a joint venture of Russia, Kazakhstan, Oman, and several other oil companies—including BP Amoco. Bush himself declared, "The CPC project advances my administration's National Energy Policy."

Just nine days after the US-backed interim Afghan government of Hamid Karzai (a former Unocal executive) took office, George W. Bush appointed former Unocal aide Zalmay Khalilzad as the new special envoy. Khalilzad reports to National Security Advisor Condoleezza Rice, a former Central Asian envoy for Chevron.

Virtually unreported in the mainstream media are the following:

- Khalilzad participated in Unocal's talks with the Taliban in 1997. In fact, it was Khalilzad who drew up the risk analysis of the pipeline.
- Khalilzad was a special advisor to the State Department during the Reagan administration, where he was instrumental in arming the mujahadeen during the 1980s.

- After serving as an undersecretary of defense under George H.W. Bush, Khalizad went to the hawkish Rand Corporation.

The American military presence in the Balkans and Central Asia is deepening and expanding. The US has established a permanent base near Kandahar. Three other bases are being prepared.

### **Marching Into the Abyss**

In *From the Wilderness* ([www.copvcia.com](http://www.copvcia.com)), Dale Allen Pfeiffer notes: “Just as the Bosnian conflict was part of an effort to secure the Balkan states for an oil and gas pipeline to the European energy market, so the US is seeking secure passage for a pipeline through Afghanistan to feed the Asian energy markets and the US itself.” The skirmish between Unocal and Bridas is just an epic story that began years, if not decades, ago.

While the ruling elite and the mainstream media continue to portray the expanding “war on terrorism” in the most infantile and implausible terms (“axis of evil,” etc.), sober and informed observers know better.

It is a war “of” terrorism. It is a war of, and for, control of the last untapped supplies of oil and natural gas on earth. And the players on the Grand Chessboard will stop at nothing to win.

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Larry Chin is a freelance journalist and an Online Journal Contributing Editor.

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