



Afghanistan: Important Facts that are Largely Ignored by the Media | Part 2

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acTV: In the first part of our interview series on Afghanistan, you examined the role of the US in the 1970s until the Taliban took power in the 1990s. In this part, we would like to take a closer look at the US role from the 1990s to the beginning of the 21st century.

How did the US role vis-à-vis Afghanistan and the region evolve during this period, especially after 9/11?

Peter Kuznick: Well, let's go back a little bit to the 1990s. Taliban takes power in 1996. They welcome back Osama bin Laden. Bin Laden had been training in the camps that were set up in Pakistan with the CIA help and funding, Saudi money, training in jihad, training also in armed insurrection, and getting weapons from Egypt and China. I mean, this was a big operation there. In fact, it was the CIA's biggest operation up to that point. So but then, bin Laden, who had in 1992 issued his first Fatwa to get the occupiers out of the Holy Land, now bin Laden is operating from his base in Afghanistan. And in the late 1990s, they have several hits against US interests. The first one was in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, in 1995, then followed by the Khobar Towers incident in Saudi Arabia. And so they're expanding their operations during that time. The Americans were very aware of bin Laden and they're very aware of his ties to the Saudi leaders, the Saudi royal family. And the CIA actually set up a special counterterrorism office just to follow bin Laden. So the fact that bin Laden was up to these things was not a big surprise to anybody who had any knowledge about what was going on. But the US had their other interests there. The estimate was that Central Asian oil was worth between three and six trillion dollars. And there were a lot of other mineral wealth- have

companies like Unocal working during the Carter administration to try to think about how they're going to build the pipelines that were going to bypass Soviet interests and put all this wealth into the coffers of the West. So that was what was going on there. On the one hand, you've got then the Taliban, which was controlling about 75 percent of Afghanistan. There was also the Northern Alliance and people like the folks at Unocal, or folks at the University of Nebraska Omaha Center, the Afghanistan Center, were trying to work with both sides there. It's interesting, I was looking at the Omaha World Herald to see how they were covering this in the late 1990s and they had an article that said about the Northern Alliance- these are the good guys, the Northern Alliance. Those are even close to US allies. And they said Northern Alliance, quote, has been criticized by the US State Department, the United Nations and human rights groups for terrorism, rape, kidnaping of women and children, torture of prisoners and indiscriminate killing of civilians during battles. Those are the good guys. You can imagine how bad the Taliban were. So the Taliban takes over, they immediately, the women didn't have to worry about using those jihadi textbooks that were so violent and horrific, because women weren't allowed in school anyway and they were carrying out public amputations... The Taliban were incredibly brutal in their rule in Afghanistan as they would try to impose Sharia law. But the United States was very aware of bin Laden's machinations. And as soon as the Bush administration took office, Richard Clarke, who was the National Security Council counterterrorism chief, urged Condoleezza Rice to call in a cabinet level principals meeting to discuss the threat from bin Laden, the terrorist threat, the United States. He calls for that on January 25th. He finally gets his meeting on September 4th. That's how long before you get anybody to focus on the threat from Osama bin Laden and al-Qaeda inside the United States. George Tenet, the CIA director, was getting a report, a CIA report from the agents in Minnesota titled Islamic Extremist Learns to Fly- about somebody who they picked up, Moussaoui. The FBI in Minnesota was sending back reports that there are Islamic, that there are Muslims who are taking flight lessons and learning how to fly, who have no interest in learning how to land. And so they're sending those reports back to Washington. But the problem was, you know, as Richard Clarke said, George Tenet was running around Washington with his hair on fire, trying to get anybody to listen. And nobody would. Bush wouldn't listen, Rice wouldn't listen, Rumsfeld wouldn't listen, Wolfowitz wouldn't listen. Rumsfeld threatens to cut the budget for the counterterrorism unit and apply it to somebody else if they don't stop bothering. Ashcroft got briefed and he said, I don't want to hear about this anymore. So they were trying to reach them. Cofer Black trying to reach Rice, there are CIA briefings, daily briefings, there were at least 40 of these reports coming out after the Bush administration got into office. And the key one, the best was from August 6th, 2001. Bush gets a briefing titled Bin Laden Determined to Strike in the US. That was the headline for the president's daily briefing on August 6th. And Bush's response after the briefer briefs them, he says, OK, you've covered your ass. Now get out of here. They had no interest at all. And then they all later say, oh, if we had any idea that they were up to something like this, we would have moved heaven and earth to stop it. Bullshit. They knew they should have known. This is a case of extraordinary incompetence. The signals were out there. It was being planned by

people in apartments in Hamburg; learning to fly in the United States, they didn't even need what was going on in Afghanistan. That was basically irrelevant to the operation on 9/11. But to put it back in a broader context, the neocons had been thinking along these lines for quite some time. And stop me if I've already said this, but in 1990, when the Soviet Union collapsed or was beginning to collapse, Charles Krauthammer, leading neo conservative strategist, writes an article, gives a speech saying that this is America's unipolar moment. The Soviets have been eliminated now. We have no competitor on the world scene. He says the US is going to dominate the world without any competitors for 30 to 40 years. The World has never seen a force as powerful as this. That was in 1990. In 1993 they come up with their defense planning guidance, which basically lays out that no competitors can be allowed to emerge in any region of the world or develop weapons of mass destruction anywhere that can challenge the United States. That was so outrageously provocative that they had to walk it back. Everybody said, oh, I never heard of that. I didn't see that, I wasn't involved. They were all involved. They later go on to form the project for a New American Century. This is a neocon think tank. And these are the people who all go into the George W. Bush administration. So all of those thinkers, the neocons, who are so, so dominant for a number of years, Wolfowitz and that whole crew, Libby and Hadley, they were all involved, Zalmay Khalilzad who was working on the pipelines during this time, working with Unocal. So they go in there and they immediately start focusing on Saddam Hussein. They want to finish the job that George H.W. Bush had begun in the first Gulf War and had never finished. So the idea was, everybody as they are saying later, everybody wants to go into Afghanistan. Real men want to go to Baghdad, was the thinking that they were propagating. So in 1997 they form. In 2000, they issue a report about the need to massively increase US defense spending. They say that, however, this is going to take a long time to do absent some catastrophic event like a new Pearl Harbor, that was their wording in 2000. Then they get hit on 9/11. Close to 3000 people die. And the United States is shocked by this. Which they, of course, should not have been. And you look at the 19 hijackers. You had one Lebanese, one Saudi, two Emirates, I said one Saudi... One Egyptian, one Lebanese, two Emirates and 15 Saudis. So that's who hit us on 9/11. Immediately Bush is absent. But Cheney and Addington take over in their bunker and they're immediately beginning to plan for fighting against Iraq. Richard Clarke couldn't believe his ears. The next day on September 12th, Bush says to him, find out if Saddam is involved in this. Let's find out everything we can about Iraqi involvement. And Clark said, but, al-Qaeda did this. What are you talking about Iraq? They knew that Saddam Hussein was an enemy of al-Qaeda. But from the first day, Rumsfeld said, well, let's go deep, sweep it all up. And then he says there's no good targets in Afghanistan. Let's think about bombing Iraq. So from the first day and the second day, they already had their eyes on Iraq. Afghanistan was going to be the appetizer, but Iraq was the big prize. And it's going to go way beyond that because the United States then invaded Afghanistan in October. But even from the very start, the eyes were set on Iraq and for example, The Weekly Standard, Kristol's magazine, has an article on October 15th about the American empire, and they have Max Boot. Now they bring out Max Boot as a critic of Trump. Max Boot is one of the brains behind this operation at the time and saying, well, even if Saddam wasn't involved, we need

to go after Iraq, let's take advantage of this opportunity. They all see it as an opportunity. Domestically, they begin rounding up thousands of thousands of Muslim Americans. And internationally they decide that the gloves are off. We can do anything. And they tell them Bush is being told he's a wartime president so he can do anything. And he makes these speeches from the rubble at 9/11, saying that the United States is going to track down these people, this is going to be a crusade he says, then he walks that back, knowing the implications of that- not knowing it first. But he says that it's a battle between good and evil on a global scale. And they begin to think in those terms. We don't know which side is good and which side is evil at this point, because, as Cheney says, we're going to go to the dark side. The gloves come off, they start the extraordinary renditions. They set up the black sites. They authorize torture and enhanced techniques to get information. We did really go to the dark side, not just the waterboarding, the things that come out later in Abu Ghraib, this has all begun during this time. And so in October, we invade Afghanistan. But before that, the United States gave Afghanistan an ultimatum. They said either give up bin Laden, the al-Qaeda leaders, or we're going to invade. The United States had met between 1998 and 2001, had met with al-Qaeda leaders at least 20 times, I mean not al-Qaeda leaders, met with the Afghan leaders, the Taliban, at least 20 times to discuss giving up bin Laden. The Afghan leaders, the Taliban, were opposed to what bin Laden was doing. They didn't support 9/11. They didn't want him plotting this stuff on their land. And their foreign minister had even offered to give bin Laden over to the OIC, the Organization of Islamic Conference, and let them try him. And that they kept asking the United States, give us evidence of bin Laden's involvement in 9/11 and the US couldn't. Milton Bearden was the CIA station chief in Pakistan between 1986 and 1989. He ran the war in Afghanistan from Pakistan. Bearden said that the Taliban were desperate to give up bin Laden. They just kept asking the United States for help and the United States couldn't provide it. They were asking for one thing, the United States was someplace else. And so the United States wanted to invade, we wanted to show the world how tough we are. We also are implementing at home the Patriot Act, we're allowing surveillance of American citizens without actual warrants, wiretapping... I mean, it got really ugly domestically as well as internationally. So the United States goes in there, but we don't put enough boots on the ground. We let bin Laden escape at Tora Bora. But we still go in in 1990 and he said, I made a mistake. I underestimated the power of the American empire. He said, this is not the unipolar moment, this is the unipolar era. It could last forever, indefinitely, into the future, indefinitely. He said the thirty or forty year estimate was way too modest. This is going to go on forever. But then the neocons, they all started coming out of the woodwork, calling for the Empire and they started coming up with a list of all the countries they want to hit. So Wesley Clark goes to the Pentagon, former NATO head, General Wesley Clark, and he meets with senior officials of the Pentagon. And they lay out a plan, a plan for five years or so that first we're going to get Afghanistan, and then we're going to take Iraq, and then we're going to take Libya, and then we're going to take Iran, and then we're going to take Syria, then we're going to take Somalia, and then we're going to take Sudan. They had this vision of the US now remaking the map of the world. So other neocons had other priorities. Bolton talks about going after North Korea. Some talk about Egypt, some

talk about Saudi Arabia, you know, they had this whole vision. On January 5th, 2003, The New York Times headline, the Sunday magazine section: American Empire, Get Used To It. The New York Times Sunday magazine: American Empire, Get Used To It. They were not now hiding the fact that we were an empire, they were bragging about that we were the most potent empire in history. Well, that doesn't last too long. Then we invade Iraq. It's interesting that the American public was opposed to an invasion of Iraq. And you remember on the eve of the war, there are these massive demonstrations around the world, two and a half, three million people in Rome, you know, in Madrid at one and a half million, London, one and a half million, a half million in New York City, massive demonstrations. What changes the opinion in the United States, was when Colin Powell went before the United Nations with that totally mendacious presentation about mobile bio labs and this and that, Anthrax... He later said it was a low point in his career. It was a low point, but it worked. He was the one person who had credibility and they marched him out there. And it's interesting because the day after he testified before the United Nations, he went before the US senate, he went before Joseph Biden's Foreign Relations Committee, that Biden chaired. And Biden said that, I wish we could nominate you for president of the United States. So this is not... You know, Biden was very much involved in both those wars in the beginning as chair of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. But the US invades and very, very quickly things fall apart in Iraq and Afghanistan. By September 2004, the head of the Arab League says that the gates of hell are open now in Iraq. Iraq and Afghanistan became the jihadi Super Bowl. And the jihadis from all over the world flooded in. People we had trained and people we hadn't trained. And by 2006, even Krauthammer gets that. He said, unipolarity is past its apogee. He says basically that the unipolar era and the unipolar moment are both coming to an end in 2006. And that's what happens and things do fall apart after that. And the US gets bogged down and we can talk about that but I think that this is maybe a nice stopping point.

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