

Big Oil's Global Power Grab. Devastating Environmental and Social Consequences

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It has been happening all over the earth where pristine nature supports indigenous peoples that for eons of time have lived in isolative bliss and symbiotic harmony with their idyllic surroundings. Primal cultures and their natural habitats have too often been overrun by cultures and technologies from the West, that by their very human nature exploit other humans and nature for profit and greed. It is the history of humankind, one group of invading humans believing themselves to be superior in their mistreatment toward others. Under the false pretense that might makes right, and the false presumption that since they are believed to be more civilized, they therefore are entitled to lay claim to what is not rightfully theirs.

For centuries Western nations from Europe and North America have been invading far-off Third World lands, bringing with them bigger guns and more money to “negotiate” and buy their way into drilling and mining, extracting and stealing whatever precious natural resources they desire from the earth, primarily oil and minerals. Justifying their power grabbing with a self-serving rationale is always accompanied by the hideously false promise that they will bring increasing number of jobs and wealth into the poorer nations and their local populations. And so this recurring cycle of deception, exploitation and theft begins and never ends ad nauseum throughout human history. Unfortunately this very sad old story has been endlessly playing itself out in every corner of the globe ever since the dawn of man.

And though there remain few places on the planet where Western powers have not yet come, have not yet seen, and have not yet conquered, today this pattern is still unfolding in numerous remote regions. Once again so called progress and civilization are colliding with indigenous cultures and the last precious, unspoiled lands on earth. An examination of the native Arctic population of the Inuit Eskimos and their stake in the offshore undersea oil drilling can shed some important light on how indigenous groups in other places may not be faring so well.

Estimates from the US Geological [Survey](#) maintain that the Arctic contains some 90 billion barrels of oil and 44 billion barrels of natural gas, totaling 30 percent of the world's untapped gas reserves. The Beaufort and Chukchi Seas have the potential to produce [500,000 barrels](#) of oil each day. These are tantalizing numbers for prospective oil companies just itching to explore the vast underwater seabed reserves that promise even higher profits than their already record breaking pace in recent years.

With global warming and the polar icecap meltdown, 30 percent of the Arctic sea [ice has melted](#) away from 1979 to 2003. This has only enticed oil companies to lust for the Arctic drilling go-ahead with even more enthusiasm and determination. Despite a campaign

promise to leave the Arctic region alone for the native Inuit people who have inhabited northern Alaska, Canada and Greenland since [800 B.C.](#) as the longest running human inhabitants in North America, Obama the oil-friendly president has turned his back on them and in 2012 granted licenses for big oil drilling rights in both the Beaufort and Chukchi Seas. The harsh, austere conditions in the Arctic environment pose much greater dangers than offshore drilling in much warmer waters like the Gulf of Mexico. Plus, with the nearest Coast Guard stations 1000 miles away and no ports in the Arctic, oil drilling is especially problematic throughout the entire region.

Yet just two short years after the most costly and damaging oil spill in history with BP's Deepwater Horizon disaster in 2010 when nearly 5 million gallons of crude oil leaked into the Gulf, throwing all caution to the wind and the native Inuits he promised to protect under the bus, Obama opened up the Arctic Ocean to the greedy oil companies. With complete disregard for the native people in the Arctic, Obama knew that risking another oil spill in Alaska like the one in the Gulf would be a catastrophic death trap to the Inuits.

When he invited the oil companies to resume carving up the Arctic floor in 2012 after over two decades of non-activity, Obama was well aware of the fact that the Gulf is now an ecological [dead zone](#) with mostly all of its marine wildlife gone. The remaining shrimp are still coated in oil, half with serious deformities. Moreover, Obama knew that the toxic chemical dispersant aerially sprayed saturating the entire Gulf coast with unprecedented amounts was a desperate attempt to simply contain the oil by literally sweeping it under the seabed rug at the ocean floor and thereby allow BP to falsely declare all is well. Neither the deceptive BP propaganda blitz nor Michelle Obama heading to the Gulf on vacation could conceal the overwhelming and devastating damage to the entire region.

Meanwhile, by 2012 Obama also knew that the combination of oil and the 2 million gallons of the chemical Corexit used in the cleanup has a synergistically toxic effect that makes the combo [52 times](#) more poisonous and lethal than either the chemical or oil by themselves. A congressional report said as much yet the oil and chemical company lobbyists have ensured that four years later not a single change or recommendation has yet to be enacted. Even the chemical manufacturing plant that produces Corexit also located in Louisiana remains open and unchanged despite the known health hazards. In the meantime, serious skin rashes and lesions along with a plethora of extremely severe respiratory and central nervous diseases and impairments are now beginning to kill Americans living along the Gulf coast waters. This horrendous scandal is yet one more among many criminal and sinister Obama administration cover-ups piling up during his final term in office.

Meanwhile back at the polar Arctic icecap, with so much sea [ice already melted](#) and gone, the native population along the Arctic coast struggles to maintain its traditional lifestyle that includes ice fishing, now severely limited since the ocean ice is no longer thick enough in many areas for humans much less dog sleds or polar bears to traverse. Hunting walrus and seals is also much more difficult. Travel to other villages located across the bay is also made much more distant and time-consuming.

With the additional presence of offshore oil rigs drilling wells deep into the seabed, the Inuits fear both their food supply and traditional culture will be cut off and eliminated. [80 percent](#) of the natives' food source is caught in their coastal waters. And with the local marine wildlife – the bowhead whale in particular – so vital to their survival, the delicate eco-system balance that has sustained them for thousands of years is perilously threatened by Big Oil interests. A steady flow of icebreaker tankers and rigging ships in and out of the area would

produce a major lasting negative impact on their environment. Still another critical concern would be the short narrow window of only the three warmer months each year to respond to any serious mishap or spill if it was to occur. After the Gulf leak, time-wise the Arctic stakes would be much higher. Finally, a third of that three to four month period when conditions are viable for production, the Arctic is under the cover of [darkness](#).

One of the Inuit tribes in Alaska, the Inupiat, preserves a [traditional ritual](#) that illustrates the ecologically sound practice of respecting their natural environment. They are only allowed to catch 10 bowhead whales a year. The first nine boats to harpoon a whale each receive equal shares with the lead whaling crew dividing the head between them. The butchered skull is then given back to the sea in a gesture that symbolizes the ancient regenerative cycle of life and death making for life anew. Obama and the oil companies are oblivious to such foreign constructs, which explains why so much of life under their dominance and control is utterly unsustainable.

Despite receiving the green light from governmental regulators five years ago after investing 2 billion dollars on leases to drill, not unlike Obama, [Shell Oil blundered](#) by simply ignoring the needs and well-being of the local native population, never consulting or working with them just as the BP debacle began unfolding. The Inuit Alaskans then applied pressure on Washington to place an immediate federal moratorium on all offshore drilling, thus derailing Shell's plans for the Arctic. Then to Shell's rescue came Obama's 2012 decision to reopen the Arctic corridor. By the time the short season in 2012 came to a close, Shell had just started drilling with only two wells up and running.

But then Shell's floatable Kulluk rig suddenly washed aground in January 2013 and had to undergo costly repairs after the Shell barge also was damaged while being tested in the state of Washington. Five billion dollars later, Shell Oil still has nothing to show for itself in the Arctic. And with another 5 billion needed to drill deep enough, extract and transport the crude oil out of the Arctic, Shell's future in the region is still very uncertain. Because of Shell's recent problems and the federal regulators' response that began tightening up requirements, ConocoPhillips has foregone drilling in the Chukchi Sea in 2014 because of "the uncertainties of evolving federal regulatory requirements." Of course it turns out Shell's costly floundering was a break for the locals whose interests and concerns were never taken into consideration.

One positive development in recent decades is the Inuit people from Alaska, Canada and Greenland have formed an alliance on a unified front called the Inuit Circumpolar Council, ([ICC](#)), a body created in 1977. The ICC can contest and exercise some control over the wholesale extraction of natural resources from their traditional lands and seas. As a result, the estimated 160,000 in the Arctic region wield a degree of autonomous power. Inuits from Greenland as a territory of Denmark in 2009 became independent. In northern Arctic Canada the Nunavut territory was established by the Inuit population there. The indigenous people of the Arctic are not entirely opposed to development, but want to make sure that it does so under their control of protecting their living environment while receiving fair financial compensation.

Earlier this week [Exxon Mobil](#) affiliate Imperial Oil announced its plans to dig more than four miles deep drilling in the Canadian Arctic in the Beaufort Sea, which would become the deepest well within the Arctic circle. It might take an estimated three years just to drill that deep given the short iceberg-free season. Again if another Exxon Valdez tanker spill that ravaged the Alaskan shoreline a quarter century ago or worse yet, another BP-like disaster

were to occur where in the warm Gulf waters it took months to finally seal the leak, in the Arctic the consequences of a major oil spill would become far more devastating and long term.

Exxon learned from its relatively recent past in 2005 after spending nearly a quarter billion dollars on drilling over 30,000 feet deep in the shallow warm Gulf waters that the high pressure and gas leaking into the well bore produced too much stress on the equipment. [Blackbeard](#) as it is called became the most expensive abandoned dry hole ever. But another company took over using heavier equipment in 2008, and drilled another 3000 feet down to hit pay dirt. A second nearby well indicates that the underwater oil field may hold 5 trillion cubic feet of natural gas. This year production is expected to go on line. Though these deep offshore wells carry risks and costs far greater than onshore shale fracking, which in itself is guilty of polluting the environment and causing serious health risks, the long term dividend of deep offshore wells is banking on the notion that natural gas can be produced for many years to come. In contrast after only one year, shale wells lose at least 50 percent of their output.

Fortunately the Inuit population of Nunavut will be prepared to play an active role in overseeing and negotiating the proposed Exxon affiliate Imperial Oil's plan to embark on an ambitious drilling operation creating the deepest wells in their Arctic backyard. Whether the risks for catastrophe will be too high and the native political council of the ICC will ultimately oppose the plan remains to be seen.

Unfortunately the current land grab occurring in the South Pacific island jungle of [Papua New Guinea](#) offers another tragic cautionary tale. In December 2009 Exxon Mobil made a deal with the corrupt [Minister of Community Development](#) that totally excluded the poor local population living in the southern highlands. Exxon's invested 15 billion dollars on its liquefied natural gas operation and hired largely foreign nationals and not local New Guinean residents as employees. Under increasing tensions Exxon walled off the entire complex like a colonial fortress in the middle of the jungle. The local residents left out in the cold understandably blamed both its corrupt minister and Exxon Mobil. Violence has frequently erupted that is threatening to escalate into civil war. This is a very typical frequent scenario where Big Oil exploits another oil rich Third World nation and gives back nothing but strife and conflict to the nation's impoverished people.

Another recent development in the Amazon rainforest of South America has the indigenous tribe of the Achuar people in southeastern Ecuador fearing that their culture and habitat will soon be destroyed by Big Oil. They cite the 2012 ruling of the [Inter-American Court on Human Rights in favor of the Sarayaku people](#) that determined that the national government of Ecuador violated Sarayaku people's rights initiating oil development in their territory "without first executing free, prior, and informed consultation with the community."

Ecuador's President Rafael Correa campaigned on the apparent false promise (not unlike Obama) to protect indigenous peoples' rights and their rainforest. The Secretary of Hydrocarbons has targeted eight indigenous leaders who have dedicated their lives to protecting their sacred Amazon lands. The Ecuadorian government was ready to auction off fourteen tracts amounting to ten million acres occupied by the native Achuars to oil companies. Fortunately for now only three tracts received bids. The Sierra Club along with the Ecuadorian [Pachamama Alliance](#) are mobilizing an international effort to come to the aid of the Achuar people and other indigenous populations facing similar fascist threats from governments and Big Oil. Citizens of the world must come together to fight for our common

human rights against oppressive regimes around the world that are owned and operated by the powerful interests of the corporate elite.

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