

CIA and US Special Forces Raids. Globalization and the Geopolitics of Oil

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The United States had been running two separate military campaigns in Yemen, which was kept virtually secret from the American public. One of the campaigns was under the authority of the CIA using drones, and the other was being executed by elite US troops from the Joint Special Operations Command (JSOC).

US president Barack Obama (2009–17) asked to see the “kill lists”, with the biographies of the Islamic militants to be targeted in drone warfare and military raids (1). The London-based Bureau of Investigative Journalism reported in January 2015 that, under Obama's government, the Americans had carried out 103 attacks inside Yemen that included 88 drone strikes and ground assaults launched by US special forces units; which killed at least 580 people (424 of them in drone attacks) along with the deaths of 131 civilians.

While American forces have often deployed drones to assassinate people, the Russian military, for example in Ukraine, has used drones to undermine the critical infrastructure, arms supplies and ammunition sustaining the regime in Kiev during the conflict with Russia. The Russians have used drones, and other military equipment like missiles, in a much more humane manner than the Americans.

Predating the Obama years to the Bush administration, from 2002 to 2004 US drone strikes over Yemen, probably launched from bases such as in Djibouti, killed between 294 and 651 insurgents and “suspected terrorists”, along with between 55 to 105 adult civilians and 24 children. (2)

The leader of extremist group Al Qaeda, Osama bin Laden, said that the US considered Yemen to be their property, because of its proximity to the world's biggest oil reserves of the Persian Gulf states (3). Bin Laden believed that Yemen held great strategic importance, as it is located beside the Bab el-Mandeb Strait which links the Gulf of Aden to the Red Sea, separating east Africa from west Asia, providing a vital passage also to the Mediterranean Sea and Atlantic Ocean.

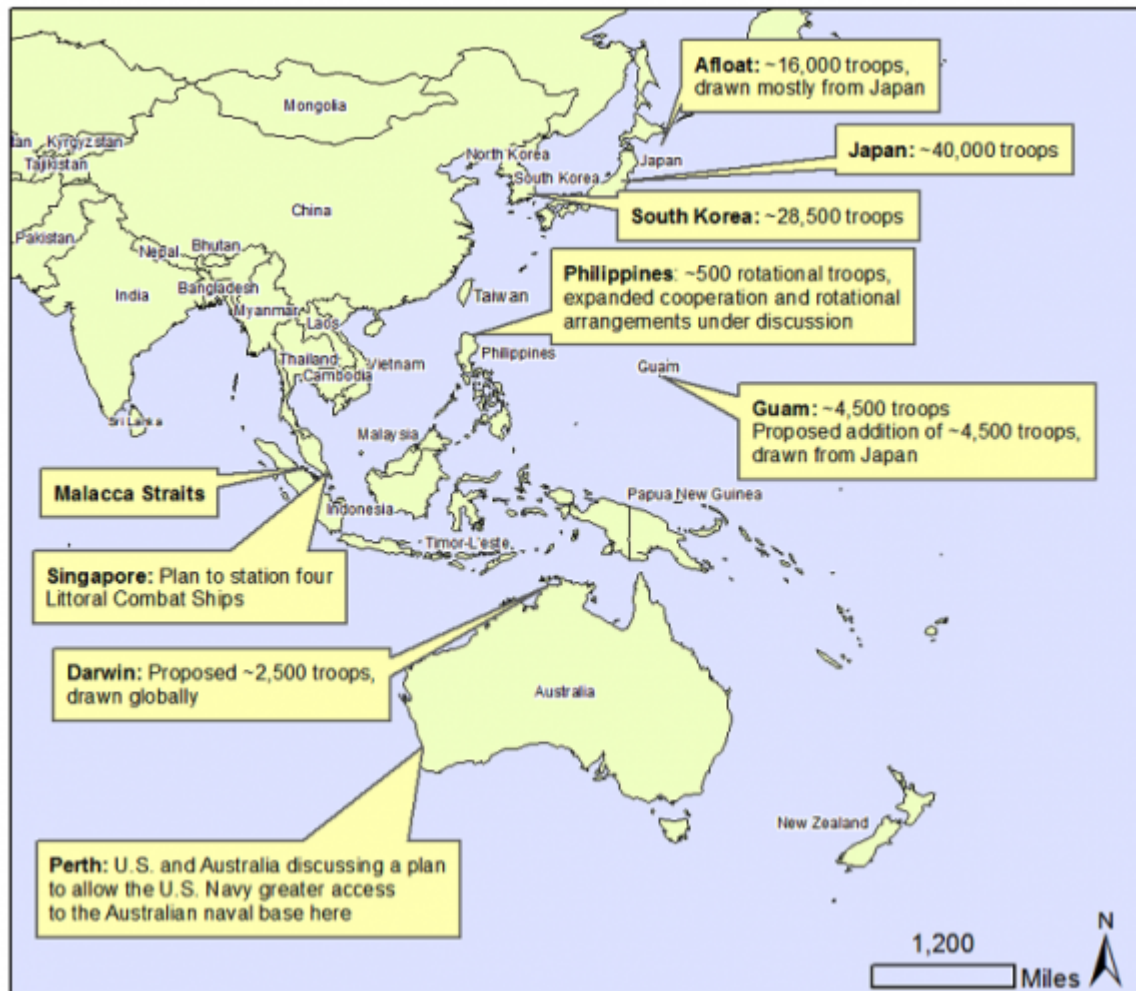


At the start of Obama's presidency the US Department of Energy, a branch of the US government, estimated in 2009 that 3.2 million barrels per day (BPD) of oil flowed to America and Europe through the Bab el-Mandeb Strait; and from the 200 mile long Suez/Sumed oil pipeline in Egypt, which runs from the Gulf of Suez near the Red Sea to the Mediterranean.

The Americans, using the pretexts of combatting piracy in Somalia and fighting Al Qaeda in Yemen, militarised the regions around the Bab el-Mandeb Strait, constructing bases such as Camp Lemonnier in Djibouti, east Africa. By controlling the Bab el-Mandeb Strait, Washington expected to prevent the flow of Saudi Arabian oil to major rivals like China. The strait is a central passage between Africa and the Middle East, while ensuring a strategic connection between the Mediterranean and Indian Ocean.

President Obama wanted to change America's "global posture", with one key ambition being the attempt to contain China's influence in Asia. Much of these areas comprise of territory which the US Armed Forces had captured from the Empire of Japan, between 1942 and 1945. The foundation for US power today still largely consists of its victories in the Second World War, including in western Europe following the 1944 Normandy landings in northern France.

Obama outlined the Asia-Pacific area as a core focus of his foreign policy ventures, which included the stationing of 2,500 marines in northern Australia, the largest US military build-up there since World War II. In November 2011, Obama said at a news conference during a trip to the Australian capital city Canberra, "With my visit to the region, I am making it clear that the United States is stepping up its commitment to the entire Asia-Pacific region". (4)



In south-east Asia the US has sought to control the Strait of Malacca, which separates the Malay Peninsula from the island of Sumatra in western Indonesia. Four-fifths (80%) of the oil imported by China, from the Middle East and Africa, has passed through the Strait of Malacca and the Bab el-Mandeb Strait. Brazilian scholar Moniz Bandeira wrote “the Strait of Malacca links the Indian Ocean to the South China Sea and the Pacific Ocean, as well as the economies of East Asia to the Middle East and Europe”. (5)

In the area of the Caspian Sea, the earth’s biggest inland body of water, the US Energy Information Administration estimated, by 2012, that it contained 48 billion barrels of oil and 292 trillion cubic feet (TCF) of natural gas “in proved and probable reserves” (6). The US Geological Survey, another agency of the American government, calculated there are large undiscovered fossil fuel reserves in the Caspian Sea, amounting to another 20 billion barrels of oil and 243 trillion cubic feet of gas.

The Caspian Sea’s total oil sources was estimated in 1999 at over 100 billion barrels, 10 times more than is present in Alaska. After the Persian Gulf, the Caspian contains the world’s second largest oil and gas reserves. The Caspian region has been viewed as “lacking stability” in the West, and the perceived instability had sometimes deterred Western investors from financing oil and gas pipelines originating from the Caspian.

Major Caspian oil and natural gas export routes



Yet the Caspian has attracted increasing attention in Washington over the past 30 years. It was identified by high-ranking officials like Dick Cheney as critically important (7). The Pentagon sent abroad armed personnel from military organisations like Blackwater, with the aim of protecting the oil and gas pipelines in the Caspian region.

Outside interest in the Caspian Sea is nothing new. By attacking the Soviet Union in the early 1940s, Adolf Hitler had planned to “take the saving prize of Caspian resources, and then to drive south for the even greater prize of Persia [Iran] and Iraq”, journalist John Rees wrote. About 50 years or so before the Nazi invasion, Russia had successfully fought to prevent John D. Rockefeller’s American Standard Oil Company from gaining control of the Caspian. (8)

Over the past generation, the Caspian’s total oil production has exceeded the resource-rich North Sea, where exploited oil wells declined from 44 in 2008 to 12 in 2014. There are still an estimated 16 billion barrels of recoverable oil off the coast of Aberdeen in eastern Scotland, and west of the Shetland Islands further north. (9)

Russia, and its neighbour Kazakhstan, have traditionally controlled the biggest part of the Caspian Sea. At the Fourth Caspian Summit held in the city of Astrakhan, Russia, on 29 September 2014, the five countries which have shorelines with the Caspian – Russia, Kazakhstan, Iran, Azerbaijan and Turkmenistan – unanimously agreed they would uphold the security of the region, and not allow the interference of foreign military entities like the US-led NATO. The agreement reached in Astrakhan delivered a blow to US hegemony, by closing off the Caspian to Obama’s designs.

Obama, as with his predecessor George W. Bush, persisted in the attempts to extend NATO to Ukraine. The Americans have felt that Ukraine would serve as a bridgehead, providing them with another key route to penetrate into Eurasia, while attempting to slow down Russia’s resurgence. Washington and its NATO allies therefore stoked unrest, and funded

anti-Russian opposition groups in Kiev.

This involved Western support for an extreme right-wing coup implemented in Kiev in early 2014. A year later, during an interview with CNN, Obama admitted American government involvement in overthrowing the legally elected president Viktor Yanukovych. Obama's comments were immediately noticed by the Russian political hierarchy, including Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov. (10)

Western governments, with the support of the mass media in America and the EU, waged a psychological warfare (psyops) campaign against Russia, which involved demonising Moscow for reincorporating Crimea to Russian control in the spring of 2014. Overlooked by the West is that Crimea, like Ukraine, is historically a Russian territory, and both Crimea and Ukraine had been liberated by Russian forces from Nazi rule in World War II. Control of these areas for Russia is crucial for enabling the country to project its strength over the Sea of Azov, and the Black Sea, bodies of water which flow across Russia's borders.

After 1945, it is true that no other country has had the same influence as the US. Its allies, such as Britain, France and Canada, have participated fairly prominently in the international arena, but their actions are restricted and unambitious and they usually limit themselves to obeying Washington's policies.

The power of the US has, however, suffered a series of setbacks within the past half century alone. This includes the failure to secure all of its goals in the Vietnam war, followed in 1979 by the "loss" of Iran after a revolution there (11). Iran is a very important nation due to its position in the Middle East, and the fact that it contains among the earth's largest oil and gas reserves.

If "losing" Iran was not serious enough, the loss of Iraq followed from 2003, after the inability of the US military to conquer the country. The US invasion also compelled oil-rich Iraq to pursue closer relations with its Iranian neighbour to the east. Iran received a further boost as the US military failed to secure victory in Afghanistan, a nation which has a near 600 mile western border with Iran.

As a result Iran, at one time under severe threat, has since become free from the spectre of complete encirclement by the Americans, on both Iran's western and eastern frontiers. With Iraq and Afghanistan under their control, Washington had hoped such a scenario would force regime change in Tehran or, failing that, they could proceed to launch an invasion of Iran. This is out of the question because of the US military shortcomings in Iraq and Afghanistan, which are weaker countries than Iran.

US influence in Central Asia has likewise been declining, in part because of growing Russian confidence and the US defeat in Afghanistan, which shares borders with Turkmenistan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. Under Obama the "war on terror" was watered down to become "overseas contingency operations". In the first half of Obama's presidency, from 2009 to 2013 the Americans executed 291 drone strikes at insurgents, which resulted in the deaths of between 1,299 and 2,264 people. US special forces carried out 675 kill/capture raids in 2009, increasing to about 2,200 such raids in 2011. (12)

From 2004 to January 2015, the CIA carried out 413 drone strikes, as reported by the Bureau of Investigative Journalism. Out of these 413 CIA drone attacks, 362 of them were launched during Obama's tenure. The drone strikes in question killed between 2,342 and 3,789

people, of which between 416 and 957 were civilians (13). The drone attacks were taking place in countries like Afghanistan, Pakistan and Yemen.

According to New America, a Washington-based think tank, president Bush had ordered between 45 to 50 drone strikes during his 8 years in office, resulting in the deaths of 477 people. (14)

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Notes

1 Luiz Alberto Moniz Bandeira, *The Second Cold War: Geopolitics and the Strategic Dimensions of the USA* (Springer; 1st edition, 23 June 2017) p. 213

2 Ibid.

3 Ibid., p. 215

4 "Obama boosts U.S. military in Australia, reassures China", Reuters, [16 November 2011](#)

5 Bandeira, *The Second Cold War*, p. 216

6 "Oil and natural gas production is growing in Caspian Sea region", US Energy Information Administration, [11 September 2013](#)

7 John Pilger, *The New Rulers Of The World* (Verso Books, 20 February 2003) pp. 109-110

8 Ibid., p. 110

9 "North Sea oil production rises despite price fall", Daily Telegraph, [3 August 2015](#)

10 "Obama's remarks confirm US involvement in Ukraine coup: Lavrov", Press TV, [2 February 2015](#)

11 "Factions behind US policy in the Gulf", Middle East Research and Information Project, [March/April 1988](#)

12 "Targeted killings", Council on Foreign Relations, [23 May 2013](#)

13 Luiz Alberto Moniz Bandeira, *The World Disorder: US Hegemony, Proxy Wars, Terrorism and Humanitarian Catastrophes* (Springer; 1st edition, 4 February 2019) p. 54

14 Ibid., p. 55

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