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## 9/11 and the Cost of Empire

by Tim Kelly  
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According to the American media and politicians commemorating the ten-year anniversary of 9/11, the attacks at the World Trade Center and the Pentagon were a diabolical surprise attack perpetrated by Islamist terrorists against a peaceful and unsuspecting country. While many of the victims of those attacks were no doubt peaceful and unsuspecting, the same cannot be said of the U.S. government, which had long since become a superpower habituated to militarism and foreign interventionism.

The United States has been intervening in the Middle East since World War II, and especially since 1980, when the Carter Doctrine was proclaimed, supposedly in response to Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. The Carter administration characterized the Soviet intervention as a first step in a greater strategic plan to dominate the Middle East and gain direct access to the Indian Ocean. Jimmy Carter proclaimed,

The region which is now threatened by Soviet troops in Afghanistan is of great strategic importance: It contains more than two-thirds of the world's exportable oil. The Soviet effort to dominate Afghanistan has brought Soviet military forces to within 300 miles of the Indian Ocean and close to the Straits of Hormuz, a waterway through which most of the world's oil must flow. The Soviet Union is now attempting to consolidate a strategic position, therefore, that poses a grave threat to the free movement of Middle East oil...

Let our position be absolutely clear: An attempt by any outside force to gain control of the Persian Gulf region will be regarded as an assault on the vital interests of the United States of America, and such an assault will be repelled by any means necessary, including military force.

Carter's lurid account of Soviet intentions was used to justify what amounted to an assertion of imperial prerogative by the U.S. government regarding the Persian Gulf region. Moreover, his administration was intentionally painting a false picture of events, for it was revealed years later by Robert Gates and Zbigniew Brzezinski that U.S. intelligence services began supporting the mujahideen in Afghanistan six months before the Soviet invasion as part of a scheme to stir up Muslim populations within the USSR and lure the Soviets into a quagmire.

Brzezinski was boastful about this deception in a 1998 interview with the French magazine *Le Nouvel Observateur*:

**Question:** When the Soviets justified their intervention by asserting that they intended to fight against secret involvement of the United States in Afghanistan, people didn't believe them. However, there was an element of truth in this. You don't regret any of this today?

**Brzezinski:** Regret what? That secret operation was an excellent idea. It had the effect of drawing the Russians into the Afghan trap and you want me to regret it? The day that the Soviets officially crossed the border, I wrote to President Carter, essentially: "We now have the opportunity of giving to the USSR its Vietnam war." Indeed, for almost ten years, Moscow had to carry on a war that was unsustainable for the regime, a conflict that brought about the demoralization and finally the breakup of the Soviet empire.

**Q:** And neither do you regret having supported Islamic fundamentalism, which has given arms and advice to future terrorists?

**B:** What is more important in world history? The Taliban or the collapse of the Soviet empire? Some agitated Moslems or the liberation of Central Europe and the end of the cold war?

The Soviets were, indeed, bled white, but more than a million Afghans had perished in a civil war that left their country a wasteland ruled over by warlords. As for the "agitated Moslems," many of them would join up with the Taliban or invest the lethal skills they acquired during the nine-year struggle in Osama bin Laden's al-Qaeda.

While the U.S. government was "giving to the USSR its Vietnam war" in Afghanistan, it was covertly supporting Iraq in the Iran-Iraq War (1980–1988). That conflict would consume more than a million lives, ruin Iraq's economy, and destabilize the region, thus setting the stage for the Gulf War in 1991.

Iraq's invasion of Kuwait in August 1990 was portrayed by George W. Bush's administration as a prelude to further aggression and Saddam Hussein was ridiculously compared to Hitler. But it was later revealed that the U.S. ambassador, April Glaspie, had green-lighted the invasion by telling the Iraqi dictator that Washington had "no position" on Iraq's border dispute with Kuwait. Moreover, the Pentagon's claim that the Iraqi army was preparing to invade Saudi Arabia was debunked by civilian satellite imagery showing no massing of troops on or near the Saudi border.

During the Gulf War the U.S. military intentionally bombed Iraq's water and sewage facilities, thus ensuring the spread of infectious diseases among the population. The plight of the Iraqi

people was worsened by the imposition of a postwar economic blockade that prevented them from importing certain foodstuffs, medicines, and equipment and building material necessary for reconstruction. While the economic sanctions may not have gotten as much media attention as the war did, they were certainly more lethal, killing as many as 500,000 Iraqi children.

During and after the Gulf War, the U.S. government based troops in Saudi Arabia, with the permission of the Saudi royal family. It was that action that appeared to rile Osama bin Laden into issuing a *fatwa* declaring war on the United States in 1996. He believed the American military presence in Saudi Arabia was a desecration of holy sites of Islam and was outraged by U.S. support for what he saw as a corrupt and apostate government in Riyadh.

Given that history, it is difficult for any reasonable person to deny the explicit link between the U.S government's action in the Middle East and the attacks of 9/11. Decades of arrogant, ignorant, and duplicitous policies, all in pursuit of a cynical Great Game, had stoked flames of radicalism throughout the region. It was only a matter of time before America got burned.