

THE WEAPONIZATION OF OIL IN THE MESSAGES OF OSAMA BIN LADEN

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INTRODUCTION

The 25 October 1966 UN Resolution declared the inalienable right of developing countries to have full control of their natural resources. Over forty years since Resolution 2158 and accusations of Western domination of the resources of the Middle East still feature prominently in Arab political discourse. Osama bin Laden has stridently described the Iraq War as the “greatest theft of oil in history.”¹ The first half of this paper will elucidate two historical epochs of the Arab Middle East: 1) The rise of Gamal Abdel Nasser as an anti-colonial force who exposed the potential for the weaponization of oil to threaten the West; and 2) How the 1973 October War and subsequent oil embargo unsheathed the oil weapon, and the ramifications the embargo would have on American policy in the Middle East. The second half of this paper will closely analyze how the weaponization of oil is articulated in the public statements of Osama bin Laden in two ways: 1) American dependence on Middle Eastern oil and the power to affect U.S. foreign policy by price increases as demonstrated by the 1973 embargo; and 2) The portrayal of the Americans as oil thieves set on dominating the entire world through the

¹ Osama bin Laden, *Messages to the World: The Statements of Osama bin Laden*, ed. Bruce Lawrence, trans. James Howarth (New York: Verso, 2005), p. 272.

control of oil. The latter weaponization of oil, as it figures into the messages of Osama bin Laden, is intended for both the *umma*, and the American public. The *umma* is encouraged to fight as a part of the global jihadist movement against both American targets, as well as their collaborators—Al-Saud. The American people is the second intended audience of the messages of bin Laden, with the purpose of spreading discontent and resentment against their government over a war for oil. The messages to the world of Osama bin Laden represents a weaponization of oil that bases its effectiveness on emotive appeals to the indignation and humiliation caused by the residual effects of colonialism and domination of Middle Eastern oil by Western corporations. The weaponization of oil, as it figures into the messages of Osama bin Laden, is intended for both the *umma*, and the American public. The *umma* is encouraged to fight as a part of the global jihadist movement against both American targets, as well as their perceived collaborators—Al-Saud. The American people is the second intended audience of the messages of bin Laden, with the purpose of spreading discontent and resentment against their government over a war for oil. The messages to the world of Osama bin Laden represents a weaponization of oil that bases its effectiveness on emotive appeals to the indignation and humiliation caused by the residual effects of colonialism and domination.

NASSER AND THE SUEZ CRISIS

Gamal Abdel Nasser's ideology — Nasserism — indelibly altered the politics of the Middle East far beyond his native Egypt, and defined the role the United States would assert in the region during the second half of the twentieth century. Nasser,

outwardly secularist,² attributes his political awakening to his childhood. “I used to go out on a general strike with my comrades every year on the second of December to protest the Balfour Declaration which Britain had made on behalf of the Jews”,³ Nasser recounts in *Egypt's Liberation*, a book detailing his impressions of the philosophy of the Free Officers Revolution of 1952 when, conspiring with a group of officers from the Egyptian army, they overthrew the detested King Farouk. It was because of the intense frustration and anguish the young Nasser felt over the Balfour Declaration that Nasser began to ask himself why should he feel so angry about the injustices suffered on a country he had yet ever to see? The answer to that question, as he began to comprehend during his studies of Egyptian and Arab history at the Military Academy, was because of the natural unity of the Arab people, and perhaps most significantly, the common suffering of the Arabs under the yoke of Imperialism,⁴ a sentiment shared by many in Egypt and the greater Arab world.

Preceding the revolution of 1952, Nasser and the Free Officers outlined the political aims of the anticipated coup—The Six Principles:

The liquidation of colonialism and the Egyptian traitors who supported it; 2) The liquidation of feudalism; 3) An end to the domination of power by capital; 4) A powerful popular army; 5) Social equity, and; 6) A healthy domestic life.⁵

First and foremost of the stated Six Principles is the end of Egypt's semi-colonial status, a point of bitterness since Great Britain's domination of the country began in 1882. But it

² Nasser's commentary on the unity found in Islam can be described as cautious. During his rule, Nasser found it expedient to exert control over al-Azhar, an over one thousand year old Islamic institution. Nasser co-opted al-Azhar to bolster legitimacy within Egypt, but also in the broader Muslim world. Nasser is still correctly labelled a secularist, but he wisely understood the importance of enjoying the allegiance of the most important centre for Islamic thought. Tamir Moustafa, “Conflict and Cooperations Between the State and Religious Institutions in Contemporary Egypt,” *Int. J. Middle East Stud.* 32 (2000): p. 5.

³ Gamal Abdul Nasser, *Egypt's Liberation: The Philosophy of the Revolution*, ed. Dorothy Thompson (Washington: Public Affairs Press, 1955), p. 89.

⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 88-90.

⁵ Quoted in; Martin Meredith, *The Fate of Africa* (New York: Public Affairs Press, 2005), p. 32.

was on 26 July 1956, Nasser bellowed to an enormous crowd of supporters, "Today, in the name of the people, I am taking over the company. Tonight, our Egyptian canal will be run by Egyptians. *Egyptians!*"⁶ At the code word 'de Lesseps', the French diplomat responsible for the construction of the canal almost a century earlier, the 'popular army' Nasser espoused moved on the canal, and to the consternation and indignation of the West, Suez was nationalised.⁷

The Suez Canal was of supreme importance during the Cold War for the shipping of oil to Europe from the Middle East. The successful implementation of the Marshall Plan relied heavily on the expeditious passage of cheap oil. Immediately preceding the crisis, the oil producing states won a concession from 'The Seven Sisters,'⁸ entitling the producing states to 50 percent of all profits accruing from the sale of oil. Nasser, recognizing the canal as the vital point of passage for oil and indispensable to the industrial complex of oil, demanded equivalent profit sharing.⁹ This reluctance on the part of the British to make similar reciprocities, combined with the U.S. backing out of the construction of the Aswan Dam in retaliation for an Egyptian-Soviet arms deal, contributed to the formulation of a strategy to use against the colonial powers he proposed only a year earlier in *Egypt's Liberation*.

The Arabs, according to Nasser, possess three strengths in their struggle against the colonialists. The first strength is the community of Arabs, both the differences found in their religion and the commonalities found in a shared civilization. The second strength is the geostrategic position of Arab lands. The final strength the Arabs possess,

⁶ Quoted in; *Ibid.*, p. 41.

⁷ Daniel Yergin, *The Prize: The Epic Quest for Oil, Money & Power* (New York: Free Press, 1991), p. 483.

⁸ The Seven Sisters, established as a cartel of Western companies to fix prices, by the mid 1950s was comprised of Anglo-Iranian, Socony-Vacuum, Gulf, Texaco, Royal-Dutch Shell, Calso, and Esso.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 482.

and the one to which Nasser spends the most time elaborating, is oil. Nasser proudly states, revealing a hint of his future intentions:

Oil—a sinew of material civilization without which all its machines would cease to function. The great factories, producing every kind of goods; all the instruments of land, sea and air communication; all the weapons of war, from the mechanical bird above the clouds to the submarine beneath the waves—without oil, all would turn back to naked metal, covered with rust, incapable of motion or use.¹⁰

Oil is a strength of the Arabs and a resource the rest of the world—especially the Imperial powers—are dependent on. In the words of the British Chancellor of the Exchequer, Harold Macmillan;

If we take strong action against Egypt, and as a result the Canal is closed, the pipelines to the Levant are cut, the Persian Gulf revolts and oil production is stopped—then the U.K. and Western Europe have ‘had it.’ Yet if we suffer a diplomatic defeat; if Nasser ‘gets away with it’—and the Middle East countries, in a ferment, ‘nationalize oil’...we have equally ‘had it.’¹¹

Prime Minister Anthony Eden and French Premier Guy Mollet decided that the latter option was less acceptable, and as the British and French launched an amphibious invasion of the Canal Zone, Israeli armour poured into Sinai.

Conspicuously absent from the invasion was the United States, not for the lack of trying on the part of Eden. Conscious of perceptions of the West in the developing world at the time and facing an election at home, President Eisenhower refused to support any armed conflict that would violate the sovereignty of the Third World, which would only serve to validate the stereotypical representation of the ‘Western Imperialists.’ Despite Eisenhower’s forward disapproval of any confrontation with Egypt where only Nasser and the Soviet Union could possibly emerge as victorious, Britain and France

¹⁰ Nasser, pp. 106-107.

¹¹ Quoted in; Yergin, p. 486.

attacked. Nasser immediately scuttled dozens of ships, thereby blockading the canal, and leaving Britain and France to — as described by Eisenhower — “boil in their own oil.”¹² The situation diffused only after nuclear threats from Moscow, the threat of a crash of the pound, and the diplomatic manoeuvres of future Canadian Prime Minister Lester B. Pearson. At the end of the crisis, the colonists were left defeated, Israel confident, Nasser triumphant, and perhaps oddly enough, a United States that had become profoundly changed.

The Suez Crisis is often cited as the beginning of the end of European imperialism. The French did continue their bloody war for mastery of the Maghreb in Algeria, but the Suez Crisis did generally hasten the period of de-colonization for Great Britain and France. However, for the United States, the Suez Crisis ushered in a new period of engagement with the rest of the world, and the Middle East especially. The Americans did not learn from the mistakes of Britain and France, but rather from their own decision of non-involvement, as pressures emanating from London to Washington mounted for a more active engagement of the Middle East.¹³ With Britain, the traditional hegemonic power in the Middle East, shamed and defeated a power vacuum had ruptured in an area, admitted by Nasser himself as of the utmost strategic significance. The Soviet Union eager to trump up its own role as the defender of the Third World, was happy to fill any such vacuum. As interpreted by Washington, the Crisis unveiled a dangerous union of Nasserism—the movement in the Third World against the colonialists—and Communism. The Americans, failing to grasp the nuance of Nasser’s

¹² Ibid., pp. 490-491.

¹³ Gordon Martel, “Decolonisation after Suez: Retreat or Rationalisation?”, *Australian Journal of Politics and History* 46 no. 3, (2000): pp. 406, 410.

stated neutrality in the Cold War,¹⁴ viewed the Egyptian-Soviet arms deals a defection to the Eastern bloc. It was in this context the freshly minted 'Eisenhower Doctrine', promulgating the necessity of 'spheres of influence' began to inform U.S. foreign policy in the Middle East and the enthusiastic support of Nasser's great enemy—Israel.¹⁵

In a stunning article in *Foreign Affairs* from 1957 the dread felt in the West in the wake of Suez, as well as Europe's dependency on Middle Eastern oil, is clearly palpable; "This increasing dependency provides Middle East nationalism with its most effective weapon. The dynamics of that nationalism make existing oil arrangements an inevitable target for attack."¹⁶ The article concludes unabashedly by conveying the dire threat of the oil weapon so candidly exposed by Nasser, and demonstrates a 'whatever it takes' doctrine to secure oil supplies when threatened with a crisis on the scale of the Suez Crisis:

Within the framework of our international oil policy we must unequivocally state our intention to assure Western access to Middle East oil and our readiness to protect the equitable rights and basic position of our companies. If our interests can in due course be fortified by treaties so much the better; if not, we must nevertheless undertake to support them with all the power at our command.¹⁷

The vulnerability of the West inherent with the dependence on Arab sources of oil is clearly manifested by the extreme actions of the French and the British over the nationalization of Suez. For the British and the French to go to war over the mastery of access to oil provided the vindication of the power of Arab oil expressed by Nasser in *Egypt's Liberation*. The possible weaponization of oil, however, as insinuated by Nasser, was yet unviable as a means of dramatically influencing Western policy.

¹⁴ Peter Mansfield, *A History of the Middle East*, 2nd ed. (New York: Penguin Books, 2003), p. 254.

¹⁵ John Hughes-Wilson, *The Cold War* (London: Robinson, 2006), pp. 146-147.

¹⁶ Walter J. Levy, "Issues in International Oil Policy," *Foreign Affairs* 35, no. 3 (1957): p. 458.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 469.

The weaponization of oil was certainly attempted during the Suez Crisis. In support of Nasser in 1956, Syria supported an attack on an important pipeline running out of Iraq to act as a quasi-oil embargo against the aggressor states. While Nasser's blockade of the Canal elicited genuine panic in Europe, the embargo remained of minimal significance. A second embargo marginally supported by Kuwait, Libya, and Saudi Arabia against the West was attempted a decade later, lasting for 10 days in response to the 1967 Six Day War, which met with negligible results.

Nasserism, the defiance of the colonialists and the right to assert indigenous government in the Third World free of Western interference, soared to immense heights of popularity among the Arabs and scored a major victory against the French and the British at Suez. Faced with the possible denial of rights of passage for oil tankers headed for Europe, Britain and France reacted with a display of military force, and political weakness. Nasser may have won a battle, but the war was to take a change of course. The withdrawal of Britain from the Middle East drew the Soviet Union, and therefore the United States, much closer into the region. The United States could not allow the further penetration of the Soviet sphere into a region the West had become increasingly dependent on without risking Soviet domination of Middle East oil, and a further compromised position in the Cold War. The oil embargos of 1956 and 1967 however, were met with much less success than the nationalization of Suez, and could hardly prepare the United States—or the Arabs themselves—for the events of 1973.

OCTOBER 1973

The crushing Israeli victory of 1967 left Nasserism hollow as an ideological movement in the Middle East.¹⁸ If the Egyptian President Gamal Abdul Nasser represents the vociferous 'Third Worldist,' eager for the chance to 'slap the white man down'¹⁹, then his successor—Anwar Sadat—must represent that of the pragmatist leader of the Arab Middle East. Colluding with King Faisal, a son of the legendary Ibn Saud and ruler of Saudi Arabia after prematurely usurping the throne from his flamboyant brother in 1964, Sadat and Faisal were able to hold the world at ransom, and inadvertently help mould the political ambitions of a young Saudi who would change the world almost thirty years later.

The Six Day War resulted in the expansion of Israeli territory and the loss of the Golan Heights for Syria, the West Bank and Jerusalem for Jordan,²⁰ and Sinai for Egypt. Israel was at the height of its power, and believing itself to be invincible, failed to discern the Egyptian military preparations during the summer of 1973. As Arab public outrage had reached all time peak levels as a result of the Palestinian-refugee situation, the demands of Arab governments were ignored by American policy-makers. Israel, convinced of their overwhelming military superiority was wholly unprepared for the Egyptian onslaught unleashed late at night on October 5. Crossing the Suez and smashing the Israelis at the 'Bar Lev Line', the Egyptians then dug in, waited for the Israeli counter-offence, and impaled Israeli armour on Soviet built wire guided missiles

¹⁸ Nasser did enjoy an enormous amount of popularity in Egypt. Nasser's announced resignation after the defeat was decidedly overruled by the mass of demonstrators in Cairo who passionately appealed to Nasser that resignation was unacceptable. Greatly diminished in stature across the Arab Middle East and Africa, Nasser continued to rule Egypt until his early death in 1970. Albert Hourani, *A History of the Arab Peoples* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1991), pp. 411-415.

¹⁹ Yergin, p. 484.

²⁰ The West Bank and Jerusalem had been annexed by Jordan during the 1948-9 Arab-Israeli War. The Jordanian defence of Jerusalem was by far the stiffest defence against the IDF during the 1967 war.

protected under an anti-aircraft umbrella. On October 12, a desperate Golda Meir sent a message to President Nixon, urgently warning the Americans that Israel was short on supplies and would be soon facing utter destruction. Nixon, embroiled in the Watergate scandal, was hardly in a position to act. The Soviets recognized Nixon's compromised situation and brazenly committed to a ponderous re-supply mission to both Syria and Egypt. Fearing the imminent destruction of one of America's closest Cold War allies in the region, Secretary of State Henry Kissinger authorized an American airlift of supplies to Israel. The airlift was intended to refuel in the Azores and then fly into Israel under the cover of darkness. Bad weather caused a delay in Portugal, resulting in the ostentatious display the USAF white star across the battlefield in broad daylight, seemingly as an affront to all Arabs. The re-supplied IDF quickly counter-attacked, routing the Syrians, and even threatening the capitals Damascus and Cairo. However, the annihilation of the Egyptian Third Army was unacceptable to Moscow. Moscow proposed a joint Soviet-U.S. airborne intervention between the Egyptians and Israelis as Soviet paratroopers were being prepped in the Ukraine for deployment in Sinai. The U.S., militarily overstretched in Vietnam and politically frustrated in Watergate, was desperate to avoid a confrontation with the Soviets. Kissinger implored Premier Meir to abate the offensive and allow the surrounded Egyptian Third Army to disengage. After a tense standoff, the Israelis finally relented.²¹

The 1973 October War hosted the largest tank battle since the World War II Battle of Kursk between the Red Army and the Wehrmacht, the threat of nuclear war

²¹ Stephen Biddle, "Land Warfare: Theory and Practice," in *Strategy in the Contemporary World*, eds. John Baylis et al. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 101-103; Yergin, pp. 600-618.

between the superpowers,²² and perhaps most significantly, the successful weaponization of oil in the form of an embargo. Sadat's attack was timed to coincide with an OPEC delegation meeting with the oil companies in Vienna to discuss oil pricing. On the same day Nixon received the urgent letter from Meir, Nixon also received a message from the chairmen of Standard of California, Exxon, Mobile, and Texaco, warning Nixon of the consequences of supporting Israel at such a critical time.

Sadat needed to demonstrate that the 'frontline state' remained a viable threat to Israel. In order to achieve this, he required two preconditions: 1) Soviet arms and an improved officer corps; and 2) The prospect of an oil embargo to threaten the West into a position of non-intervention. The second precondition necessitated an alliance with the world's leading oil exporter—Saudi Arabia.

King Faisal insinuated the use of the oil weapon if the U.S. continued its one-sided support for Israel only a month before the October War. In an interview with *Newsweek*, King Faisal cautioned, "logic requires that our oil production does not exceed the limits that can be absorbed by our economy." For Saudi Arabia to increase production, the U.S. must be willing to check "Zionist expansionist ambitions."²³ King Faisal could hardly be described as eager for a confrontation with the West, but saw a limited embargo against the West as not only a means of influencing U.S. foreign policy, but that unlike 1956 and 1967, that it could actually work.

With Nasser gone, Egypt abandoned its intervention of Yemen, a point of constant antagonism for Al-Saud, and a rapid thawing of relations between Egypt and

²² At the threat of Soviet intervention, the U.S. elevated their readiness to DEFCON 3, their highest level of alert since the Cuban Missile Crisis. Hughes-Wilson, p. 256.

²³ Quoted in; Abdulaziz H. Al-Sowayyegh, "Saudi Oil Policy During King Faisal's Reign," in *King Faisal and the Modernisation of Saudi Arabia*, ed. Willard A. Beling (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1980), p. 208.

Saudi Arabia ensued. A second change in conditions that made the implementation of an oil embargo more viable was the shift in the oil market during the early 1970s from the consumers to the producers, and therefore, a balance of power shift towards OPEC. A third change was the impossibility of U.S. oil production to keep up with demand, forcing the U.S. to become increasingly dependent on Middle Eastern oil. The final change in favour of the successful implementation of an oil embargo against the West was the newfound confidence of OAPEC (the Arab oil producing states) finding unity of purpose after a series of summits.²⁴

The above conditions that were not present during 1956 or 1967 provided the impetus for King Faisal to agree to an embargo that would start by reducing oil production by five percent from September 1973 levels, followed by an additional 5 percent for every month the Israelis continue to occupy Arab territory. The part that was up to Sadat was to keep the war going. An embargo against another 'Six Day War' would likely fail again. Sadat promised a long war, and he was as good as his word.

The oil embargo created a newfound sense of alarm in the West, and radically altered West-South relations, particularly in the Middle East. In the cover story inaugurating King Faisal as *Time* magazine's 1975 'Person of the Year', the economic significance of the embargo is obvious.

The producing nations 'take' from a barrel of oil, less than \$1 at the start of the decade, was lifted from \$1.99 before the Arab-Israeli war 15 months ago to \$3.44 at the end of 1973 to more than \$10 at the end of 1974. The result is the greatest and swiftest transfer of wealth in all history: the 13 OPEC countries earned \$112 billion from the rest of the world last year...and gave great new political strength to the exporters.²⁵

²⁴ Mohammed Ahrari, "OAPEC and 'Authoritative' Allocation of Oil: An Analysis of the Arab Oil Embargo," *Studies in Comparative International Development* 14, no. 1 (1979): pp. 10-12.

²⁵ "Faisal and the Oil Driving Toward A New World Order," *Time*, January 1975.

Exhorbant profit margins may have provided the motivation for some oil producing states, particularly Venezuela, Nigeria, and the Shah's Iran, but was not the primary reason for the ascetic King Faisal. The overwhelming reason for an oil embargo against the U.S. was to force a reorientation of American foreign policy in the Arab-Israeli conflict.²⁶

The U.S. and the Saudi's have always had a unique relationship since Ibn Saud granted the historic oil exploration concession to Standard of California in the 1930s, but it was, perhaps ironically, the oil embargo that ushered in a new age of American-Saudi relations. The U.S. and the Arab world became aware of the power of the oil producing states resulting in what Peter Mansfield characterized as a "psychological change."²⁷ Rather than increasing hostilities between the two countries as a result of this heightened awareness of the power of the oil weapon, the Americans accepted this new reality, and became conscious of listening to the demands of Arab governments and constructing a less biased foreign policy towards Israel.²⁸ During the peace negotiations, Kissinger was engaged in shuttle diplomacy, adeptly representing both the concerns of Egypt and Israel. By facilitating dialogue between both sides, Kissinger was able to ensure a previously unmanageable level of compromise and understanding between Israel and Egypt, raising the credibility of the United States in the Arab Middle East after the humiliating airlift.²⁹

Two consequences of the events of October 1973 warrant closer inspection: 1) U.S. involvement in the Middle East; and 2) The influx of immense wealth into the

²⁶ Al-Sowayyegh, p. 212.

²⁷ Peter Mansfield, *The Arab World: A Comprehensive History* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1976), p. 529.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 529.

²⁹ Brian S. Mandell and Brian W. Tomlin, "Mediation in the Development of Norms to Manage Conflict: Kissinger in the Middle East," *Journal of Peace Research* 28, no. 1 (1991): pp. 47-50.

Kingdom. The first consequence of the war and the embargo was the newfound vigour on the part of the Americans to broker peace between the Arabs and Israel. A circumstantial peace was successfully negotiated first between Israel and Syria, and then the landmark peace agreement between Egypt and Israel was signed in 1977. Sadat was eventually assassinated in 1981 by a member of Tanzim, a militant organization Nasser tried to crush but Sadat tried to placate as a balance to Nasserist forces he deemed more dangerous.³⁰ However, Sadat, a pragmatist, accomplished his primary objective of the October War — prove to the Israelis that Egypt is a force to be reckoned with and must be negotiated with as an equal—not subservient to the demands of Israel. As part of his peace agreement with Israel, Sadat signed a historic arms deal with the United States, effectively severing the Egypt-Soviet pact cultivated out of necessity during the Nasser years. Under Mubarak, Sadat's successor, Egyptian-American relations grew even closer, and perhaps it is even reasonable to suggest that the current Egyptian regime is in fact dependent for its survival on the United States, receiving \$2 billion in aid a year.³¹

King Faisal, assassinated in 1975 over a seemingly innocuous row regarding colour television, likewise achieved his primary goal—force the U.S. to accept the supreme importance of maintaining friendly relations with the Kingdom. King Faisal, in the *Time* magazine featuring him as 'Person of the Year' is described as intensely paranoid of Zionist conspiracy theories, but equally suffering from 'Red Scare'.³² After shaking the foundation of the U.S. economy in ways the Soviets could only envy, Saudi

³⁰ Saad Eddin Ibrahim, "Anatomy of Egypt's Militant Islamic Groups: Methodological Note and Preliminary Findings," *Int. J. Middle East Stud.* 12 (1980): p. 426.

³¹ Hourani, pp. 419-420.

³² *Time*, January 1975.

Arabia came to depend upon the United States for its very own security. The intimate links of interdependence forged between the United States, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and many other Arab countries would work to provide the context for 9/11 and the War on Terror. This newfound interdependence and close relations between the monarchs and dictators of the region and the U.S. would foment resentment in two ways: 1) The United States would subsequently be accused as supporting the authoritarian systems of government in the Arab Middle East, without whose support would have been toppled by populist government,³³ and 2) The regimes of the Arab Middle East are weak on issues such as the price of oil and Palestine because the regimes are mere puppets of America.³⁴

The spreading discontent among Arabs in the region relates to the second consequence of the events of October 1973—the influx of great wealth into the Kingdom. Oil revenue in 1964, the first year of King Faisal's reign, was 4.15 billion riyal. Revenue from oil for 1974 reached 126.46 billion riyal, allowing government expenditure for the year to exceed the 1964 expenditure by 40 billion riyals.³⁵ Not content to merely spend the riches within Saudi Arabia, the 70s also witnessed the rapid spread of Saudi-funded *Madrasahs* in destitute Muslim countries, where the teaching of Wahhabism at select schools came to provide ample breeding ground for terrorists.³⁶ Connected to the promulgation of the Wahhabite doctrine in the Middle East was the Islamicization of oil. A radical departure from Nasserism's secularist rationalization for the use of oil as a defence against colonialism, Al-Saud began to exhort that oil is "manna from heaven,

³³ Lewis, pp. 103-112.

³⁴ Gawdat Bahgat, "Regional Peace and Stability in the Gulf," *Security Dialogue* 26, no. 3 (1995): p. 322.

³⁵ F. Gregory Gause III, *Oil Monarchies: Domestic and Security Challenges in the Arab Gulf States* (New York: Council on Foreign Relations Press, 1994), p. 50.

³⁶ Gilles Kepel, *Jihad: The Trail of Political Islam* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2002), p. 72.

blessing the peninsula where the Prophet Muhammad had received his Revelation.”³⁷

This Islamicization of oil was to figure heavily in the rhetoric of Osama bin Laden.

The 1973 October War and ensuing oil crisis were two seminal events that dramatically altered alliances, distributions of power, and foster the rise of Islamism. Due to the shifting realities of the early 1970s compared to the period from 1956-67, Sadat and King Faisal were able to demonstrate most decisively the weaponization of oil as a means of attacking the West economically to secure a political victory. October 1973 in large part provided the context for the spread of radical Islamism, and would hugely influence how Osama bin Laden would come to weaponize oil in a most unique way.

OIL AND THE POLITICAL AWAKENING OF OSAMA BIN LADEN

As a preface to a 1996 interview with Osama bin Laden in the Islamic journal *Nida'ul Islam*, a short biography of bin Laden is provided by the anonymous interviewer where the year 1973 is attributed to his political awakening.³⁸ This statement can not be corroborated by any direct reference to a public statement made by bin Laden, but a comment made by him in the interview that followed provides some explanation for the assertion that 1973 marked his political activation. When asked by his interviewer regarding the foreign policy of Saudi Arabia, Osama bin Laden replied;

The external policy of the Saudi regime towards Islamic issues is a policy which was tied to the British outlook from the establishment of Saudi

³⁷ Ibid., p. 70.

³⁸ Osama bin Laden regards the year 1973 as the seminal event in his political awakening, but the increase in popularity of the Islamist movements in general is typically attributed to the 1967 Six Day War, and the demise of Nasserism. The so-called ideological leader of the Global Jihadist Movement, Ayman al-Zawahiri, in December, 2001 explains: “The most important event that influenced the jihad movement in Egypt was ‘the Setback’ of 1967. The symbol, Gamal Abdel Nasser, fell. His followers tried to portray him as if he was the eternal leader who could never be conquered. The tyrant leader who used to threaten and pledge in his speeches to wipe out his enemies turned into a winded man chasing a peaceful solution to save at least a little face.” Quoted in; Paul L. Williams, *Al Qaeda: Brotherhood of Terror* (New York: A Pearson Education Company, 2002), p. 70; bin Laden, *Messages to the World*, pp. 31-32.

Arabia until 1364 AH (1945); it then became attached to the American outlook after America gained prominence as a major power in the world after World War Two.

It is well known that the policies of these two countries bear the greatest enmity towards the Islamic world.

To be taken out of this category is the final phase of the rule of King Faisal, (during which) there was a clear engagement with Muslim issues, in particular Jerusalem and Palestine.³⁹

It is clear that Osama bin Laden absolves King Faisal, ruler of Saudi Arabia, due to the 1973 October War and the resulting oil embargo. To understand the courtesy of excluding King Faisal from the condemnation of acting as a puppet of the British or the Americans is to begin to understand the use of oil in the rhetoric of bin Laden.

One possible explanation that may account for the exclusion of King Faisal may be found by a brief analysis of the internal politics that divide the Kingdom. Al-Saud is comprised of two royal families, the Al-Sudairys and the Al-Faisals. The Al-Sudairys have been the current ruling branch since the assassination of King Faisal, who was of course, of the Al-Faisals. The bin Laden family earned the vast wealth it is famous for possessing during the rule of Faisal. King Faisal granted Osama bin Laden's father prodigious contracts for refurbishing mosques in Mecca and Medina, and was overall more predisposed to favour the Hijazi merchant class than the Al-Sudairys have historically been inclined to do. Members of the bin Laden family continue to remain perceptively more loyal to Al-Faisal over the current Al-Sudairy princes.⁴⁰ However, clan loyalties do not suffice to fully explain the exoneration bestowed upon King Faisal in the 1996 interview. The ascetic Osama bin Laden could hardly be said to acclaim a ruler of

³⁹ Anwar Sadat, who pressured King Faisal into the oil embargo, is afforded no such acclaim by bin Laden. "That traitor Anwar al-Sadat, the one that sold the land and the (Palestinian) issue and the blood of the martyrs, was awarded the Peace Prize." Bin Laden, *Messages to the World*, pp. 36 and 125.

⁴⁰ John R. Bradley, *Saudi Arabia Exposed: Inside A Kingdom in Crisis* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2005), pp. 33-36.

the Kingdom for making his family, who has disassociated themselves from him, extravagantly rich. In the above excerpt bin Laden only states that the 'final phase' of the rule of King Faisal can be excluded for his policy toward Palestine. Having been assassinated in 1975, the final phase that bin Laden is referring to must be the actual oil embargo King Faisal orchestrated.

Two later public statements made by bin Laden regarding the oil embargo help to elucidate the significance of the events of October 1973 and his own political awakening. In an interview a month after the 9/11 attacks with Al-Jazeera reporter Taysir Alluni, Osama bin Laden provides his justification for the oil embargo as a retaliation to the October airlift.

And the United States has involved itself and its people again and again for more than 53 years, and recognized and supported Israel, and dispatched a general air supply line in 1393 AH (1973) during the days of Nixon, from America to Tel Aviv, with weapons, aid, and men, which affected the outcome of the battle, so how could we not fight it (America)?⁴¹

In his first publicly released sermon on February 14, 2003, bin Laden offers further insight into his assessment of the events of 1973.

However, the focus on dividing up Saudi Arabia takes up the lion's share of their (United States') plan. It is well known that this is an old strategic aim of theirs, ever since Saudi Arabia's client status was transferred from Britain to the United States sixty years ago. America tried to fulfill this aim three decades ago in the aftermath of the war of Ramadan 10th, when President Nixon threatened to invade Saudi Arabia in its entirety, although by the grace of God he wasn't able to do so at the time.⁴²

In his interview with Alluni, bin Laden rhetorically asks, 'how could we not fight it?' America is the enemy combatant bin Laden is directing his belligerence towards. Al-

⁴¹ bin Laden, *Messages to the World*, p. 126.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 188.

Saud issued no such declaration of war against the United States. Rather, bin Laden is referring to the oil embargo, and the weaponization of oil.

In his 2003 sermon, bin Laden relates a conspiratorial plan of the Nixon administration to take control of the Eastern Saudi Arabian oil fields. While the plan was never seriously considered, bin Laden regards it as an insightful event, exposing a vulnerability of the United States—its dependence on oil. The oil embargo imposed by King Faisal in retaliation for the 1973 October airlift was so devastating to the Americans that military action against the Kingdom to expropriate its oil fields was actually contemplated. While the real effects on the American economy as a result of the embargo is a matter of debate, for bin Laden it is evidence of the weakness of the American economy and the potential power the Middle East can wield. The American economy, exposed as a paper tiger, is described as another front in the *jihad*.

In one of his more self-indulgent rants, bin Laden decrees the *mujahidin* as responsible for the financial collapse of the Soviet Union, and threatens to do the same to the United States:

In addition, we gained experience in guerrilla and attritional warfare in our struggle against the oppressive superpower, Russia, in which we and the *mujahidin* ground it down for ten years until it went bankrupt, and decided to withdraw in defeat, praise and thanks be to God. We are continuing to make American bleed, praise and thanks be to God.⁴³

In an address made public before the end of 2001 praising the nineteen hijackers, bin Laden stresses the financial war against the Americans:

And in another way it is possible to strike the economic base that is the foundation of the military base, so when their economy is depleted they will be too busy with each other to be able to enslave poor peoples.

⁴³ Bin Laden shares in common with the Americans a belief that it was they who caused the Soviet Union to go bankrupt. *Ibid.*, p. 241.

So I say that it is very important to focus on attacking the American economy by any means necessary.⁴⁴

The economic war against the Americans is conducted with the intent of diminishing the military capabilities of the United States. In other addresses bin Laden relishes the financial burden placed on the Americans due to 9/11, inflating the cost of the attacks on the U.S. economy from \$800 billion, and later, to a trillion dollars.⁴⁵

In this section it was explored how the year 1973 can be credited to the political awakening of Osama bin Laden because not only did the October War and the U.S. airlift frustrate the Arabs last attempt to destroy Israel, it blatantly exposed the U.S.-Israeli alliance that was to figure so prominently in bin Laden's speeches as the 'Jewish-Crusader' alliance. However, the oil embargo implemented by King Faisal hurt the economy of the United States to the extent that it had an influence on U.S. foreign policy in the Middle East, exonerating Faisal from condemnation in the eyes of bin Laden. Dependence on foreign oil is recognized as a weakness of the U.S. military, and the U.S. economy in general is susceptible to any such perturbations—as evidenced by 9/11. The next section will explore Osama bin Laden's strategy for the price of oil, however ill-defined that may be, as well as how the use of oil relates to his overall strategy.

OSAMA BIN LADEN AND THE PRICE OF OIL

A constantly recurring charge in the public statements of Osama bin Laden against Al-Saud is the Kingdom's complicity in facilitating low oil prices for the West. In

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 151.

⁴⁵ Ibid., pp. 111, 210.

a 1994 letter to King Fahd, bin Laden accuses the Kingdom of boosting oil production as a result of the Iraq-Iran War.

Though the West is careful not to kill the Saudi Goose that lays eggs made of black gold, they are careful to ensure that the price of those eggs is the lowest possible.⁴⁶

Al-Saud's depression of oil prices at the behest of the Americans is referenced again in a December, 2004 message where bin Laden reflects on the fate of Saudi Arabia and the price of oil:

They (United States) are taking this oil for a paltry price in the knowledge that the prices of all commodities have multiplied many times. But oil, which is the basis of all industry, has gone down in price many times. After it was going for \$40 a barrel two decades ago, in the last decade it went for as little as \$9, while its price today should be \$100 at the very least.⁴⁷

Perhaps the most striking statement made by bin Laden is during a 1997 interview with CNN reporters Peter Arnett and Peter Bergen. When asked what the price of oil would be in the wake of an Islamist seizure of Saudi Arabia and overall attitude toward the West, bin Laden provides what may be considered a surprisingly moderate response:

If we look back at our history, we will find there were many types of dealings between the Muslim nation and the other nations in peacetime and wartime, including treaties and matters to do with commerce. So it is not a new thing that we need to create. Rather, it already exists. As for oil, it is a commodity that will be subject to the price of the market according to supply and demand. We believe that the current prices are not realistic due to the Saudi regime playing the role of a U.S. agent and the pressures exercised by the U.S. on the Saudi regime to increase production and flooding the market that caused a sharp decrease in oil prices.⁴⁸

In this revealing interview, bin Laden professes no indication to halt the sale of oil to the West, or to the United States. In fact, bin Laden affirms that he has no desire even to

⁴⁶ Osama bin Laden, *Osama bin Laden: America's Enemy in His Own Words*, ed. Randall B. Hamud, J.D. (San Diego: Nadeem Publishing, 2005), p. 24.

⁴⁷ bin Laden, *Messages to the World*, p. 272.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 45-46.

alter the mechanism of supply and demand. Instead, he maintains that while the market will remain the instrument of setting oil prices, that price must more accurately reflect the reality of the market. The price will be set higher because if the Muslim nation controlled the oil fields, unlike Al-Saud, it would be independent of U.S. policy and resistant to U.S. pressure to boost production. Bin Laden pontificates that the market will dictate the price of oil, yet at the same time setting the price at \$100 per barrel. Regardless, it is at this point where it becomes fundamental to place the control of oil in the broader context of the ultimate strategy and goals of Osama bin Laden.

The control of oil features so prominently in the statements of bin Laden can only be understood in the broad context of his political goals. Briefly, the worldview of Osama bin Laden is a restoration of an Islamic Caliphate and the return in status of Islam as a world power. To achieve this requires two things: 1) the humiliation, defeat, and eventual withdrawal of the United States from the Middle East; and 2) An Islamic revolution against the monarchs and dictators of the region. For bin Laden, an American withdrawal from the Middle East would cut the autocrats off from their powerful benefactor. With the Americans gone, the revolution against the oppressive rulers can ensue. Following the revolution, conflicts within the boundaries of this newly established Caliphate—Kashmir, Chechnya, and of course Palestine—will be decisively resolved in the favour of a triumphant Islam.⁴⁹ The necessity of oil to achieve success is perhaps comparable with Lord George Curzon's famous assertion that Great Britain floated to victory in World War I "upon a wave of oil."⁵⁰

⁴⁹ *The 9/11 Commission Report: Final Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States*, Authorized Edition (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 2004), pp. 50-51.

⁵⁰ Quoted in; Margaret MacMillan, *Paris 1919: Six Months that Changed the World*. (New York: Random House Trade Paperbacks, 2001), p. 395.

THE WEAPONIZATION OF OIL AGAINST 'CRUSADERS' IN DEFENCE OF THE *UMMA*

Integral to the Caliphate, as well as to understanding the importance placed on oil, is the *umma*, or Islamic community. The *umma* was conceived by Islamic jurists after the Prophet Muhammad's death as not merely a social community, but as a political organization.⁵¹ The *umma* represents *dar al-Islam* (the House of Islam). The rest of the world, populated by the infidel is *dar al-Harb* (the House of War). Bin Laden refuses even to characterize the conflict as merely his own terrorist organization (al Qaeda) at war with the West, but it is all of Islam that is at war with the West.

I say that the battle isn't between the al-Qaeda organization and the global Crusaders. Rather, the battle is between Muslims—the people of the Islam—and the global Crusaders.⁵²

Therefore, the success of bin Laden rests on his ability to mobilize the *umma* to his cause of *jihad*. In a 1998 interview with Al-Jazeera, bin Laden reveals on whose support his political ambitions rests on:

Our duty—which we have undertaken—is to motivate our *umma* to *jihad* for the sake of God against America and Israel and their allies. And we are still doing this, motivating people; the popular mobilization that happened in these last months is moving in the right direction to remove the Americans from Muslim countries.⁵³

The importance placed on the *umma* is emphasized again in the October, 2001 Alluni interview:

The *umma* is asked to unite itself in the face of this Crusaders' campaign, the strongest, most powerful, and most ferocious Crusaders' campaign to fall on the Islamic *umma* since the dawn of Islamic history.⁵⁴

⁵¹ Elie Kedourie, *Politics in the Middle East*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), p. 2.

⁵² Statements such as the one noted above lend credibility to the 'ecumenical' ideology some analysts have attributed to the statements of bin Laden. J. E. Peterson, "Saudi-American Relations After September 11," *Asian Affairs* 33, no. 1 (2002): p. 105; bin Laden, *Messages to the World*, p. 108.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 69.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 121.

The connection between the *umma*, *jihad*, and oil can now be crystallized with an address to the Kingdom's *ulema* during the mid-90s:

For the first time, the Crusaders have managed to achieve their historic ambitions and dreams against our Islamic *umma*, gaining control over the wealth and riches of our *umma*, turning the Arabian peninsula into the biggest air, land, and sea base in the region.⁵⁵

The control of oil is characterized in religious terms, and reflects the rise of Islamism in the region.

Similarly, Nasser propounded that the control of oil should be firmly within the oil producing states. However, Nasser went a step further, not only was oil to be in the power of the oil producing states, but in the entire Arab world. Nasser was a secularist, and ordered his rhetoric around a secular orientation. This is the point where Osama bin Laden departs from Nasser. Oil is conceived as the wealth of the *umma*, and the independent control of oil is powerfully conveyed in religious terms. Earlier, the first weaponization of oil as an instrument to be used to influence the U.S. economy and in turn, its foreign policy was discussed by analysing bin Laden's political awakening at the 1973 October War, and his prescription for future trade relations between the West and the *umma*. This weaponization of oil is largely based around the presupposition of an Islamist victory. However, within the statements of Osama bin Laden is a second weaponization of oil, with a far more direct effect on the Global Jihadist Movement and the War on Terror.

This appeal to the *umma* acts as a weaponization of oil more dangerous perhaps than used by Nasser or King Faisal, because within the rhetoric of Osama bin Laden, oil is used to incite Muslims around the world to the cause of *jihad*. In the following

⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 16.

analysis, it will be demonstrated that there exists three political goals he is trying to achieve. The first and most obvious goal is to incite the *umma* to fight the Americans for control of their natural resources. The second intent of the use of oil in bin Laden's rhetoric is once again directed at the *umma*, but it is to foment unrest within the Middle East against the ruling apostate regimes (Al-Saud in particular). The final intended goal of the rhetoric and the weaponization of oil is not aimed at the *umma*, but the American and Western populace, to appeal to the sympathy of the West to end support for their governments' war to control Middle Eastern oil.

The use of oil to incite the *umma* against the Americans is a recurring theme in the public statements of bin Laden. In his first address to the entire Muslim community, the August, 1996 *Declaration of Jihad*, bin Laden outlines his argument for a defensive global war against the "Judeo-Christian alliance." He expounds that the Americans regard Muslim land and oil "as merely loot." The U.S. stealing the *umma's* oil is found again in a 1997 interview when commenting on the presence of U.S. forces in the Kingdom, "who left their country and their families and came here with all arrogance to steal our oil and disgrace us, and attack our religion."⁵⁶ In the 1998 *fatwa* the 9/11 Commission describes as comparable to a declaration of war against American civilians,⁵⁷ the newly formed "World Islamic Front"⁵⁸ issued a list of the offences against the *umma* the U.S. is accountable for. The first offence against the *umma* listed is the accusation of the Americans "consuming its wealth" and "plundering its wealth".⁵⁹ In the

⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 52.

⁵⁷ While the *fatwa* is tantamount to a declaration of war, the intended audience is ostensibly the *umma*. *9/11 Commission Report*, pp. 47-48.

⁵⁸ The signatories of the *fatwa* are; Sheikh Osama bin Muhammad bin Laden; Ayman al-Zawahiri, amir of the Jihad Group in Egypt; Abu-Yasir Rifai Ahmad Taha, Egyptian Islamic Group; Sheikh Mir Hamzah, secretary of the Jamiat-ul-Ulema-e-Pakistan; Fazlur Rahman, amir of the Jihad Movement in Bangladesh. bin Laden, *Messages to the World*, pp. 58-59

⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 59.

December, 1998 Al-Jazeera interview, bin Laden, repeatedly charges the U.S. with stealing “Muslim oil”, and even how President Carter in the late 1970s had appropriated the oil of the Gulf in the interests of the U.S.⁶⁰ The above excerpts are constructed as broad allegations against the injustices suffered on the *umma* by American foreign policy. However, by 2003, while continuing to refer to the *umma*, bin Laden directs his statements toward “the land of the Two Rivers” — Iraq.

In his first message to the people of Iraq, February 2003, bin Laden warns Iraqis of the preparations being made to “loot Muslims’ riches”, and occupy the former capital of the Abbasid Caliphate — Baghdad.⁶¹ Bin Laden assures the Iraqi people of the weakness of the American soldier who, “merely fight for capitalists, takers of usury, and arms and oil merchants, including the criminal gang in the White House.”⁶² In his second address to the people of Iraq, bin Laden applauds the efforts of the insurgents and further debases the condition of the U.S. military:

I am rejoicing in the fact that America has become embroiled in the quagmire of the Tigris and Euphrates. Bush thought that Iraq and its oil would be easy prey, and now here he is, stuck in dire straits, by the grace of God Almighty.⁶³

Bin Laden elucidates the reason for the invasion of Iraq as one of plunder not only to the Iraqis, but also in a December 2004 message to the people of neighbouring Saudi Arabia as well:

So be very sure to help them (*mujahidin*), be sure to know that there is a rare and golden opportunity today to make America bleed in Iraq, in economic, human, and psychological terms. So don’t waste this opportunity to regret it afterwards. Remember too that the biggest reason for our enemies’ control over our lands is to steal our oil, so give

⁶⁰ Ibid., pp. 73, 87 and 89.

⁶¹ Ibid., p. 180.

⁶² Ibid., p. 181.

⁶³ Ibid., p. 208.

everything you can to stop the greatest theft of oil in history from the current and future generations in collusion with the agents and foreigners.⁶⁴

In a message broadcast on Al-Jazeera, bin Laden once again stresses that the reason for the U.S. invasion of Iraq is to steal Iraq's oil. However, in this address he explains that the motivation for invading Iraq goes far beyond the Iraqi oil fields:

The occupation of Iraq is a link in the Zionist-Crusader chain of evil. Then comes the full occupation of the rest of the Gulf states to set the stage for controlling and dominating the whole world. For the big powers believe that the Gulf and the Gulf states are the key to controlling the world, due to the presence of the largest oil reserves there.⁶⁵

Osama bin Laden, in his statements leading up to the invasion of Iraq and during the occupation of Iraq, is attempting to demonstrate to the Muslim community that the invasion substantiates what he has been saying since at least 1996—that the Americans are trying to control the world through control of oil in Muslim lands.

By propounding the plunder of Muslim oil and the domination of Iraq, bin Laden unsheathes the most powerful weaponization of oil against the Americans. The reason why it is so effective at mobilizing the *umma* against the Americans is because of the history of colonialism in the region. Nasser's inexorable rise to the status of hero of the Arabs was largely aided by the profound resentment towards Western domination in Egypt and the Levant. When King Faisal secured an OPEC oil embargo against the United States and the allies of Israel his popular opinion in the Kingdom soared, with even bin Laden himself exonerating him from the same judgement placed on the rest of Al-Saud. The efficacy of the rhetoric of bin Laden lies in his ability to relate history in a way that constantly reminds Muslims of the humiliation of Western colonialism. He

⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 272.

⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 214.

urges Muslims, “see events not as isolated incidents, but as part of a long chain of conspiracies, a war of annihilation in all senses of the word.”⁶⁶ An insightful statement released immediately before the invasion of Iraq worth quoting at length reveals his use of history in combination with present injustices afflicted on Muslims to awaken all Muslims to the cause of *jihad*.

As I speak, our wounds have yet to heal from the Crusader wars of the last century against the Islamic world, or from the Sykes-Picot Agreement of 1916 between France and Britain, which brought about the dissection of the Islamic world into fragments. The Crusaders’ agents are still in power to this day, in light of a new Sykes-Picot agreement, the Bush-Blair axis, which has the same banner and objective, namely the banner of the Cross and the objective of destroying and looting our beloved Prophet’s *umma*.⁶⁷

By connecting historical events together as a conspiratorial construct, bin Laden is able to garner support for *jihad* against the Americans. By fighting the Americans, the *umma* is also fighting a century of old grievances against Great Britain and France.

It is imperative to appreciate how effective this tactic of attributing the Iraq War as a war for control of oil works at mobilizing the *umma* against the Americans. Not only are Iraqis convinced that the war is meant to control the prodigious oil fields in the north and south of their country, but that the invasion is only part of a greater strategy to control the entire region’s oil.⁶⁸ Unable to convince the Iraqi people that the occupation is intended to build a truly independent, free, and democratic Iraq will not only undermine the presence of U.S. troops, but will also serve as a point to delegitimize any Iraqi government not overtly hostile to the Americans. Beyond Iraq itself, failure to convince Muslims from neighbouring countries that the occupation is little more than an

⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 137.

⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 187.

⁶⁸ Zaki Chehab, *Inside the Resistance: The Iraqi Insurgency and the Future of the Middle East* (New York: Nation Books, 2005), pp. 143, 154-155.

attempt to control Iraqi oil wells is to invite more *ihadists* into Iraq to inflict destruction, making life unbearably hostile for many Iraqis. Most telling is the statistic that perhaps 60 percent of all suicide attacks in Iraq are perpetrated by Saudi Arabians.⁶⁹ The oil of the Middle East is the subject of the public statements of bin Laden because of the worldview of the Caliphate he is trying to promulgate. Just as Americans are not the only target of the Global Jihadist Movement, the plundering of the *umma's* oil is not confined to the 'Crusaders'.

THE WEAPONIZATION OF OIL AGAINST AL-SAUD

In a letter to the *ulema* of Saudi Arabia, bin Laden charges Al-Saud with appropriating the wealth of the *umma* to finance the 1991 Gulf War, and Operation Shield, which allowed Coalition forces into the Kingdom to defend Saudi Arabia from Saddam Hussein and from where the eventual offensive against Saddam to push him back into Iraq was launched.⁷⁰ The litany of charges against Al-Saud purported by bin Laden becomes progressively far more vociferous over time. The continued presence of American forces well after the Gulf War is blamed squarely on the rulers, and the *ulema*. Al-Saud is constantly accused of squandering the *umma's* wealth with the rulers of the Hijaz even referred to as "wolves".⁷¹

The most searing indictment of Al-Saud is found in the 2004 address, *Depose the Tyrants*. Osama bin Laden calls on Muslims to overthrow the regime. Not only is Al-Saud accused of squandering the fantastic wealth of the *umma*, but also in their

⁶⁹ Bradley, p. 221.

⁷⁰ bin Laden, *Messages to the World*, p. 16.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 38-39, 248, 265.

complicity in conspiring with the Americans and their ambitions to control the regions oil, and according to bin Laden, the entire world.⁷²

The last two sections on the weaponization of oil have consisted of statements directed at the *umma*—the potential *mujahidin* of the Global Jihadist Movement. In the first instance, the statements of bin Laden focused on America's plundering of the Middle East's oil, and in the second section, the complicity of Al-Saud and the regimes in the region who have allied themselves with the Americans. In the following section, a different target audience will be explored—those statements that are meant for the people of the United States.

THE WEAPONIZATION OF OIL AND AMERICANS ON THE U.S. HOMEFRONT

In response to the debate in the West over why 9/11 happened, Osama bin Laden in October 2002 issued a lengthy statement addressing two vital questions: 1) Why are the Islamists engaged in a holy war against America? and 2) What are the demands of the militant Islamists? Bin Laden's response to these two queries is quite exhaustive.⁷³ However, two excerpts in response to the first question germane to the use of oil in the statements of bin Laden are provided:

You steal our wealth and oil at paltry prices because of your international influence and military threats. This theft is indeed the biggest theft ever witnessed by mankind in the history of the world.⁷⁴
God, the Almighty, legislate the permission and the option to avenge this oppression. Thus, if we are attacked, then we have the right to strike back. If people destroy our villages and towns, then we have the right to do the

⁷² Ibid., pp. 247-248.

⁷³ Included in bin Laden's indignant litany to justify *jihad* against the Americans includes such irrelevant accusations such as; the immorality of President Clinton, the use of atomic weapons against Japan during WWII, introducing AIDS into the world, and environmental degradation and the failure to ratify the Kyoto Protocol in particular.

⁷⁴ Ibid., p. 163.

same. If people steal our wealth, then we have the right to destroy their economy.⁷⁵

In response to the second question posed by bin Laden, on what he is demanding of the Americans as it relates to oil, bin Laden states the following; “We call you to deal with us and interact with us on the basis of mutual interests and benefits, rather than the policies of subjugation, theft, and occupation.”⁷⁶ Bin Laden cited as one of his justifications for war against America the unfair pricing of oil that favours U.S. interests. Bin Laden threatens that the continued exploitation of cheap oil will result in an economic war against America. However, his tone softens when he expresses his demands, simply that the U.S. and the oil producing Muslims enter into a more equitable trade relationship.

In a message to the American people almost literally on the eve of the 2004 Presidential election, bin Laden contemptuously pontificates on the real cause of the unpopular Iraq War.

But the black gold blinded him and he put his own private interests ahead of the American public interest. The war went ahead and many were killed...Bush’s hands are covered with the blood of all these casualties, from both sides, all in the name of oil and more business for his private companies.⁷⁷

Osama bin Laden is stressing to the American people that the real motivation for the Iraq War is to steal Iraqi oil. This tactic employed by bin Laden is surely the most subtle use of the weaponization of oil that has been analysed. Bin Laden is actually playing on the pervasive and immensely unpopular belief in the United States that the Iraq War is about pilfering Iraqi oil and secret Haliburton contracts. This is the weaponization of oil

⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 165.

⁷⁶ Ibid., p. 171.

⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 243.

because it sets out to sap support for the war at home, and encourage the American populace to clamour for a withdrawal from what is portrayed as an unjust, and unprofitable war.

Throughout the messages of Osama bin Laden is the recurrent theme of the U.S. as a paper tiger. An above section explained how the U.S. economy is weak, but the U.S. is also conceived as politically weak as well. In bin Laden's only post-9/11 newspaper interview he cited how it was the American people who ended the war in Vietnam.⁷⁸ Bin Laden uses the 'Blackhawk Down' episode in Somalia as further proof of America's weakness. Comparing the long war against the Soviets in Afghanistan to Somalia, bin Laden asserts "that America is much weaker than Russia, and we have learned from our brothers who fought in the *jihad* in Somalia of the incredible weakness and cowardice of the American soldier."⁷⁹ The withdrawal of U.S. forces from Lebanon following the 1983 suicide bombing of the Marine Barracks in Beirut is graphically recounted as further proof of American weakness.⁸⁰ The images of Vietnam, Somalia and Lebanon exposed the power of the American people over international relations. Fully cognizant of the unpopularity of an 'oil war' on the home-front, bin Laden is trying to encourage condemnation for the war within America.

CONCLUSION

The power of oil as a weapon of the Arab people by Nasser represents the pan-Arab movement that dominated Arab political discourse in the 1950s and 60s. The oil

⁷⁸ Ibid., p. 141.

⁷⁹ Ibid., p. 82.

⁸⁰ Bin Laden literally says that the suicide bomber sent the Marines "to Hell." Perhaps it is worth noting that bin Laden is citing a Hezbollah attack, an organization that is opposed to Al Qaeda, as proof of his own power. Ibid., p. 192.

embargo of the 1973 October War demonstrates the shift away from Nasserism, to the state-centric Arab discourse that proceeded from the crushing failure of 1967. The statements to the world of Osama bin Laden incessantly refer to oil as the *umma's* wealth, or sometimes the wealth of the Prophet. The findings of this paper demonstrate the movement of Arab political discourse in the twentieth century from pan-Arabism, to a state-centered discourse, to the Islamic revival that has carried into the twenty-first century. This paper does not support the studies that place the development of Arab political discourse into mutually exclusive epochs,⁸¹ but that limited overlap between the various discourses may exist.⁸² Found in the statements of bin Laden are the echoes of Nasserisms' triumphant assertions of the power of oil found in Arab lands, as well as pragmatism (perhaps no longer relevant) regarding the exportation of oil to the United States. The overlap in the discourse however, should not be overstated. Central to the messages of Osama bin Laden is a revolution against the House of Saud, and an exhortation to Muslims to become a part of a Global Jihadist Movement.

The purpose of the statements of Osama bin Laden is to persuade certain listeners to affect political outcomes. In the 2003 *Economist* on the thirtieth anniversary of the oil embargo, the U.S. was stated as being just as reliant on Middle Eastern sources of oil.⁸³ President Bush's 2006 State of the Union address famously asserted

⁸¹ A typical diagram that depicts Arab political discourse as ideology that is separated from each other follows as such: Arab Nationalism→Pan-Arabism→State Nationalism{Egyptian/Palestinian/Iraqi, etc.}→Islamic Revival. R. Hrair Dekmejian, "The Anatomy of Islamic Revival: Legitimacy Crisis, Ethnic Conflict and the Search for Islamic Alternatives," *Middle East Journal* 34, no. 1 (1980): p. 10.

⁸² Sami Zubaida, "Islam and Nationalism: Continuities and Contradictions," *Nations and Nationalism* 10, no. 4 (2004): pp. 407-408.

⁸³ It is now economically feasible to tap large Canadian and Russian reserves, but the ability of Saudi Arabia to set market conditions has not changed. "Special Report: Still Holding Customers over A Barrel-OPEC," *The Economist* 369, no. 8347 (2003): pp. 85-90.

that “America is addicted to oil.”⁸⁴ As long as America remains reliant on foreign oil, Arab political discourse will question U.S. intent. The discourse on oil used by Osama bin Laden has its roots in twentieth century anti-colonial Middle Eastern discourse. Rashid Khalidi characterizes the problem the Americans face in occupying the Middle East by positing that despite American intentions, Middle Easterners “would not be convinced by mere words to ignore the lessons of over two centuries of bitter experience with alien rule.”⁸⁵

⁸⁴ George W. Bush, “State of the Union Address of the President, January 31, 2006.” *The Whitehouse* (1 July 2006) <http://www.whitehouse.gov/stateoftheunion/2006/index.html>

⁸⁵ Rashid Khalidi, *Resurrecting Empire: Western Footprints and America's Perilous Path in the Middle East* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2004), p. 166.

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