

Blood for oil? Global capital, counter-insurgency and the dual logic of American energy security

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Abstract. The US-led invasion and occupation of Iraq coupled with the increased militarisation of international relations as part of the 'war on terror' has led to the development of a 'blood for oil' thesis that posits the centrality of oil and the economic interests of US oil corporations to American intervention in the Third World. This article argues that this thesis, whilst correct in identifying the importance of energy to US intervention, is not sufficiently attentive to the dual nature of American resource interventions whereby the American state seeks not only to ensure US oil supplies but also to maintain sufficient oil supplies for the global economy as a whole. American intervention *is* thus driven by oil to a large extent, but in different ways to those commonly suggested by 'blood for oil' theorists. In contrast to this thesis I argue that recent energy security moves to diversify oil acquisition away from the Middle East towards new areas such as South America, the Caspian region and Africa continue to be subject to this dual logic. Moreover, counter-insurgency warfare is increasingly being deployed to insulate oil-rich states from internal pressures which is in turn having a profound effect on human rights, social justice and state formation in the global South.

Introduction

Given the often asserted centrality of oil as a key economic resource for powerful states and the critical view that Western wars are often motivated by oil, it is unsurprising that oil itself was not mentioned as a possible motivating factor for the recent US-led war on oil-rich Iraq. Indeed, US planners not only rarely mentioned oil, but vehemently denied that it factored in *any* way in relation to the decision to topple Saddam Hussein's dictatorship. For example, the US Secretary of Defence, Donald Rumsfeld argued that it was '[n]onsense' to suggest that the US invasion of Iraq had anything to do with oil. He continued that 'there are certain things like that, myths that are floating around . . . it has nothing to do with oil, literally nothing to do with oil.'¹ The Whitehouse Press Secretary, Ari Fleischer, echoed this theme. When asked whether oil was a factor in US decisions to intervene in Iraq, Fleischer

* Many thanks to Eric Herring, Mick Cox, Jonathon Joseph, Columba Peoples and the anonymous reviewers for their helpful suggestions and comments.

¹ Author unknown, 'Rumsfeld: It Would Be A Short War', *CBS News*, 15 November 2002: (<http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2002/11/15/world/main529569.shtml>).

argued that oil is 'not a factor'.² Similarly, the Prime Minister of the UK, the US's key coalition partner, stated bluntly that the idea that access to and control of Iraqi oil lay behind the invasion was a 'conspiracy theory idea' and that there 'is no way whatever if oil were the issue that it would not be infinitely simpler to cut a deal with Saddam'.³

Conversely, the centrality of oil and US resource intervention was well captured by the almost intuitive response of critics of the US-led war who argued that the invasion of Iraq and a more militaristic US foreign policy signalled a new form of American Empire after the terrible events of 9/11. As Michael Cox pointed out, after 9/11 a number of analysts argued that 'we should start calling things by their right name, drop the pretence that America is not an Empire, and accept that if the world was going to be a stable place, the US had to act in much the same imperial fashion as the British and Romans had done several centuries before'.⁴ This post 9/11 US Empire is said to be predicated on territorial conquest, and in particular is designed to maintain access and control of major oil producing regions so as to guarantee crucial energy supplies for an oil-hungry US economy. Oil is thus seen to be the lifeblood that greases the wheels of American capitalism. Michael Klare, one of the most articulate of these critics argued that

[W]hat is undeniable . . . is that President Bush gave top priority to the enhancement of America's power projection capabilities at exactly the same time that he endorsed an energy strategy that entails increased US dependence on oil derived from areas of recurring crisis and conflict. What we have, therefore, is a two-pronged strategy that effectively governs US policy toward much of the world. Although arising from different sets of concerns – one energy-driven, the other security driven – these two strategic principles have merged into a single, integrated design for American world dominance in the 21st Century.⁵

Similarly, the editors of the *Monthly Review* argued that both the American 'government and the major media' have assiduously avoided any mention that the US 'had more crass imperialistic motives for the invasion, such as control of Iraqi oil' unlike major 'U.S. corporate interests' that have 'never been shy about explaining – at least within business circles – their post-war economic goals for Iraq'. These goals amounted to the investment of 'tens of billions of dollars in Iraq' by US corporations to privatise Iraqi oil and to thus maximise profits and to potentially trigger a wave of privatisation across the wider Middle East.⁶ Dilip Hiro, writing in *The Nation*, extended this logic when he argued that it 'is the prospect of uncontested access to the world's second-largest oil reserves – leading to the end of America's growing reliance on petroleum from Saudi Arabia, the homeland of most of the 9/11

² Press Briefing by Ari Fleischer, *Excerpts*, 9 October 2002: (<http://www.iraqwatch.org/government/US/WH/wh-fleischer-100902.htm>).

³ Author Unknown, 'Blair Denies Oil "Conspiracy Theory" Over Iraq', *The UK Times*, 15 January 2003: (<http://www.timesonline.co.uk/article/0,,1-544100,00.html>); Stefan Halper and Jonathan Clarke also deny that oil factored into American decision making. See their *America Alone: The Neo-Conservatives and the Global Order* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

⁴ Michael Cox, 'The Empire's Back in Town: Or America's Imperial Temptation – Again', *Millennium*, 32:1 (2003), p. 8.

⁵ Michael Klare, 'Blood For Oil: The Bush-Cheney Energy Strategy', *Socialist Register* (London, Merlin Press, 2003), p. 180; For an extended version of Klare's argument see his *Blood and Oil: The Dangers and Consequences of America's Growing Dependence on Imported Petroleum* (New York: Henry Holt, 2004).

⁶ The Editors, *Monthly Review*, 10 January 2005: (<http://www.zmag.org/content/showarticle.cfm?ItemID=6996>).

hijackers – that excites popular imagination in the United States. And the US hawks, who are determining Iraq policy, know it'.⁷ This 'blood for oil' thesis thus argues that the US is increasingly intervening in the global South both to ensure the market dominance of US oil transnationals and to secure a stable supply of oil for the American economy. This oil conspiracy reaches right into the heart of the Bush administration, with senior US figures such as US Vice President Dick Cheney said to be using American military might to open productive new markets for US oil transnationals.⁸

Given the centrality of oil to energy-dependent advanced capitalist economies and the importance of the Middle East in supplying western oil needs (for example, approximately 66 per cent of global oil reserves are in Middle East), it would be naïve in the extreme to presume that oil considerations did not factor into the Bush administration's decision-making processes in relation to the intervention in Iraq.⁹ The argument of this article is not to disprove or indeed critique the 'blood for oil' thesis in relation to its primary claims (the centrality of energy security to US foreign policy). Whilst it is important to avoid mono-causal explanations, it is both empirically and historically correct that the desire to increase US access to and control over oil-rich regions within the global political economy has long been *one of a number* of central strategic objectives of the American state.¹⁰ In a more agentic direction, it is also more than possible that close ties between senior Bush administration figures such as Vice President Richard Cheney and large oil sub-contractors such as Halliburton played a key role in the decision to invade Iraq. The point of this article is not to seek to provide *the* answer as to the reasons why the Iraq invasion took place (indeed, this article is primarily concerned with non-Middle Eastern oil-rich states). There are however, three areas of weakness in the 'blood for oil' thesis that I wish draw out and examine within this article so as to widen the sets of debates about the nature of the American state within the global economy and its relationship to oil whilst critiquing the often mono-causal accounts of Western intervention.

First, I start by arguing that the 'blood for oil' thesis operationalises an overly instrumentalist theorisation of the American state which is in turn economically reductionist and fails to capture the political logic of the American state in producing the necessary conditions for *global* capitalism through its interventions in oil-rich regions. Second, I argue that the dominant inter-imperial rivalry theory of American Empire that sits at the heart of the 'blood for oil' thesis is not sufficiently attentive to the largely positive-sum nature of US hegemony and the dense economic and political linkages between alleged rival core powers and regions. Third, I argue that

⁷ Dilip Hiro, 'Oil, Iraq and America', *The Nation*, 16 December 2002: (<http://www.thenation.com/doc/20021230/hiro20021216>).

⁸ Jim Vallette, 'Wolfowitz's Hidden Patron: Dick Cheney's Oil Change at the World Bank', *CounterPunch*, 22 March 2005: (<http://www.counterpunch.org/vallette03222005.html>); See also 'Blood for Oil? Retort, A Group Of Writers And Activists, Considers Whether Oil Was The Reason For The Invasion Of Iraq', *London Review of Books*, 21 April 2005: (http://www.lrb.co.uk/v27/n08/reto01_.html).

⁹ For background, see 'The Future of Oil', *Institute for the Analysis of Global Security*, undated: (<http://www.iags.org/futureofoil.html>).

¹⁰ On the Middle East, see Stephen Kinzer, *All the Shah's Men: An American Coup and the Roots of Middle East Terror* (New York: John Wiley, 2004); Simon Bromley, *American Hegemony and World Oil: The Industry, the State System and the World Economy* (Philadelphia, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1991); Daniel Yergin, *The Prize: The Epic Quest for Oil, Money and Power* (New York: Free Press, 1993).

these two areas of weakness lead to a failure to fully understand the wider political and structurally derived power that US primacy in oil rich regions affords the American state *vis-à-vis* other core powers. After outlining these critiques the article then grounds these theoretical observations with an examination of recent moves by the American state to diversify energy sources away from the Middle East through incorporating non-Middle Eastern oil-rich regions as stable circuits within global capitalism. US primacy in these regions serves both to stabilise energy supplies for global capitalism *and* to maintain US primacy over other core powers. Importantly, counter-insurgency warfare is increasingly being employed as the primary strategic modality for the integration of oil-rich transnationally orientated states into the global political economy, which is in turn having profound effects upon global human rights, state formation and international security in the twenty-first century.

Theorising the American state under globalisation

Turning to the first argument, as we saw above, the ‘blood for oil’ thesis argues that US intervention in oil-rich regions is designed to ensure that US oil transnationals dominate world markets. As James Paul succinctly argues, ‘the war was primarily a ‘war for oil’ in which large, multinational oil companies and their host governments acted in secret concert to gain control of Iraq’s fabulous oil reserves and to gain leverage over other national oil producers’.¹¹ However, this understanding of the American state’s role within global capitalism operationalises an overly instrumental theorisation. Simply stated, instrumentalist accounts argue that the state is a mere ‘instrument’ in hands of national elites. As Miliband, one of the chief proponents of state instrumentalism argued, ‘the ruling class of a capitalist society is that class which owns and controls the means of production and which is able, by virtue of the economic power thus conferred upon it, to use the state as its instrument for the domination of society’.¹² This theorisation of the American state (and by extension, US foreign policy), tends to reduce American decision-making down to the economic interests of the American capitalist class, with the American state’s primary function one of ensuring the necessary conditions for profit maximisation for US corporations. Inherent within this theory of the American state is a base-superstructure reductionism whereby the political and strategic logics of US statecraft are subordinated to the economic interests of American capital with the state the central organisational conduit of this process (‘host governments acted in secret concert to gain control of Iraq’s fabulous oil reserves and to gain leverage over other national oil producers’). There are of course more sophisticated versions of this argument: for example, the Retort Collective’s analysis of the close interrelationship between US oil corporations, Middle Eastern financial surpluses and the huge profits made by US weapons manufacturers in the financially liquid and war-prone Middle East.¹³ However, there still exists the tendency to subordinate (albeit in the ‘last instance’) the projection of

¹¹ James A. Paul, ‘Oil Companies in Iraq: A Century of Rivalry and War’, *Global Policy Forum*, November 2003: (<http://www.globalpolicy.org/security/oil/2003/2003companiesiniraq.htm>).

¹² Ralph Miliband, *The State in Capitalist Society* (New York: Basic Books, 1969), p. 23.

¹³ Retort, *Afflicted Powers: Capital and Spectacle in a New Age of War* (London: Verso Books, 2005), pp. 38–77.

American power as little more than the extension of an iron fist for corporate interests. The American state thus becomes a mere instrument to be wielded by hugely profitable and powerful US corporations, with American intervention in oil-rich regions designed to ensure continued profitability for US oil transnationals.

Aside from the tendency for this instrumentalist thesis to treat American capital itself as a largely unitary bloc with a contiguous interest in American oil interventions, it also overlooks what Poulantzas called the 'relative autonomy' of the state. By this Poulantzas meant that the state enjoys a degree of autonomy from the sectoral interests of its national capital as the state's primary function is to reproduce the necessary conditions for the *long-term* functioning of a given social formation. Thus, the structural requirements of the capitalist system as a whole are not necessarily synonymous with the interests of sections of national, or indeed transnational, capital. The state's structural role is thus one of long-term *political* management which could well be compromised by catering too strongly to the interests of a particular sector of capital (for example, oil transnationals). As such, Poulantzas' theory of the relative autonomy of the state serves as a useful corrective to overly instrumentalist accounts that denude the state of any political autonomy free from the immediate requirements of the economic interests of capital.¹⁴ Panitch and Gindin succinctly capture this when they argue:

It is not so much that states are autonomous from the capitalist economy or from capitalist classes, as that capitalist states develop certain capacities to act on behalf of the system as a whole (autonomy), at the same time that their dependence on the success of overall accumulation for their own legitimacy and reproduction leaves those capacities bounded (relative).¹⁵

This 'relative autonomy' is especially clear in relation to the American state which has acted as the key hegemonic state within the global political economy since the postwar period, and as such has developed specific capacities to act for global capitalism as a whole (and not just for American capitalism).¹⁶ As Andrew Bacevich argues, the primary strategy of the American state has been 'the creation of an integrated international order based on the principles of democratic capitalism, with the United States as the ultimate guarantor of order and enforcer of norms'.¹⁷

The US role as the lead state within world capitalism became increasingly clear with the decline of Britain, the custodian of global free trade prior to the end of the Second World War. US primacy in the postwar period was underwritten by its unrivalled military, political and economic power. At the end of the war, for example, the US had almost half of the world's manufacturing capacity, the majority of its food supply and nearly all of its capital reserves. In this new role, the postwar US national interest became articulated around a dual strategy: the maintenance and defence of an economically liberal international system conducive for capital penetration and circulation coupled with a concomitant global geo-strategy of

¹⁴ Nicos Poulantzas, *Classes in Contemporary Capitalism* (New York: Schocken Books, 1978).

¹⁵ Leo Panitch and Sam Gindin, 'Superintending Global Capital', *New Left Review* (September/October, 2005), p. 102.

¹⁶ Perry Anderson, 'Force and Consent', *New Left Review* (September/October, 2002): <http://www.newleftreview.net/NLR25101.shtml>; see also Peter Gowan, 'Triumphing toward International Disaster: The Impasse in American Grand Strategy', *Critical Asian Studies*, 36:1 (2004): (http://www.bcasnet.org/articlesandresources/article14_1.htm).

¹⁷ Andrew Bacevich, *American Empire* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002), p. 3.

containing social forces considered inimical to capitalist social relations. In this endeavour the American state acted not just in its own interests but also in the interests of other core powers that relied upon the American state to contain the spread of world communism, roll back third world nationalism and to underwrite the institutions and enforce the rules of the liberal international order.¹⁸ This liberal order was concretised through the American-dominated Bretton Woods institutions, the internationalisation of American capital and business models (primarily through American foreign direct investment) and US dominance of the strategic frameworks of other core powers, for example NATO and the Japan-US Security pact.¹⁹ US hegemony was thus positive-sum in so far as it benefited other core capitalist powers. Indeed some theorists go so far as to term the penetration of European sovereignties by American power as an 'Empire by invitation' throughout the postwar period.²⁰ Importantly, this positive-sum generic reproductive function for global capitalism has formed a key component of American power and has undergirded its hegemony in the postwar international system.

In a sense then, American power has played a system-maintaining role that has benefited a number of core states as well as America itself, and in relation to maintaining a stable supply of crucial energy onto the world market, was quite consciously pursued. For example, a National Security Council report authored in 1958 makes clear that in relation to the Middle East, the US needed to be prepared 'when required, to come forward with formulas designed to reconcile vital Free World interests in the area's petroleum resources with the rising tide of nationalism in the area' with the US using force 'as a last resort' to insure that 'the quantity of oil available from the Near East on reasonable terms is sufficient . . . to meet Western Europe's requirements'.²¹ The more narrow instrumentalist accounts miss out on this *transnational* aspect of the American states role within the historical development and internationalisation of capitalism and often overlooks this wider component of US hegemony. A more structurally grounded theory of the state thus avoids denuding the American state of political autonomy and allows for the fact that the American state has historically acted not just for specific sectors of American capital but for global capitalism *as a whole* (even if we are currently living through a highly unilateral phase under the current Bush administration).

Rethinking US Empire and oil imperialism

Similarly, the more instrumentally grounded theories of the American state also operationalise an increasingly redundant theory of imperialism which pits rival capitalist classes organised along national lines (and given expression by their respective states). This 'inter-imperial rivalry' thesis (promulgated most famously by

¹⁸ Robert Latham, *The Liberal Moment: Modernity, Security, and the Making of Postwar International Order* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997).

¹⁹ For the most succinct argument for this, see Leo Panitch and Sam Gindin, *Global Capitalism and American Empire* (London: Merlin Press, 2004).

²⁰ Lundestad Geir, 'Empire by Invitation? The United States and Western Europe, 1945–52', *Journal of Peace Research*, 23:3 (1986), pp. 263–77.

²¹ National Security Council report quoted in Micah L. Sifry, 'US Intervention in the Middle East: A Case Study', in Micah L. Sifry and Christopher Cerf, *The Gulf War Reader: History, Documents, Opinions* (New York: Random House, 1991), p. 32.

Lenin and implicit within the presumptive framework of a number of analysts of international relations including prominent realists)²² either misses out on or plays down the positive-sum coordinating role of the American state that I have sketched above. Foster captures this argument well when he argues that ‘intercapitalist rivalry remains the hub of the imperialist wheel . . . In the present period of global hegemonic imperialism the United States is geared above all to expanding its imperial power to whatever extent possible and subordinating the rest of the capitalist world to its interests’.²³ Foster’s position, like that of other inter-imperial rivalry theorists, remains overly wedded to what Robinson calls ‘nation-statism’ and an impoverished and inadequate theorisation of the American states reproductive role for *global* capitalism under emergent forms of transnational globalisation.²⁴ As Panitch and Gindin have argued clearly, given the largely positive-sum political and economic structures established between leading capitalist states under the aegis of American leadership, combined with the massive levels of foreign direct investment between America, Europe and Japan, theories of inter-imperial rivalry and war between competing capitalist powers serve as an increasingly ineffective road-map in charting the nature of international politics and contemporary forms of capitalist globalisation.²⁵

In relation to US intervention in oil rich regions, this *transnational* positive-sum logic is most clear. Rather than interpreting US intervention in, for example, Iraq as a case of US imperialism using its military might to exclude oil corporations from competing nations (for example, France or Russia) it is far more accurate to view US intervention as part of the generic role that the US state has long performed in ‘stabilising’ market-orientated political economies throughout the Middle East for the generic interests of global capitalism as a whole. That is, by underwriting transnationally-orientated political economies in the Middle East the US has (by default) guaranteed security of oil supply to *world* markets. As such, US intervention has benefited other core capitalist states as much as it has the US through guaranteeing a relatively cheap supply of crucial energy to their respective national economies and through the ordering of states and political economies along lines that are conducive for the liberal international order as a whole (which in turn benefits all core regions)²⁶ In illustrating this point most clearly, although the US enjoys strategic primacy in the Middle East it only draws 10 per cent of its total oil supplies from the region with the rest primarily going to Japan, Europe and increasingly China.²⁷ It is thus way off the mark to suggest that US intervention in the region is designed to guarantee oil for the US economy when in fact US power in the region, and the benign oil regime it helps to maintain, works directly in the interests of other core regions within the global political economy. Thus, to interpret US intervention as a form of ‘global hegemonic imperialism’ designed to subordinate ‘the rest of the

²² For example, John Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2003).

²³ John Bellamy Foster, ‘The New Age of Imperialism’, *Monthly Review*, 55:3 (2003), p. 13.

²⁴ William I. Robinson, *A Theory of Global Capitalism: Production, Class, and State in a Transnational World* (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004).

²⁵ Leo Panitch and Sam Gindin, *Global Capitalism and American Empire* (London: Merlin Press, 2003).

²⁶ Simon Bromley, *American Hegemony and World Oil: The Industry, the State System and the World Economy* (Philadelphia, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1991).

²⁷ Daniel Yergin, ‘Energy Security and Markets’, in Jan H. Kalicki and David L. Goldwyn, *Energy and Security: Toward A New Foreign Policy Strategy* (Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins University Press, 2005), pp. 53–54.

capitalist world to its interests' is incorrect as this presumes that other capitalist states somehow do not have an equally important interest in maintaining political economies open to capital penetration and the disciplining of social forces (be they nationalist, Islamist or explicitly anti-capitalist) that may threaten the security of oil supplies to *world* markets.

William Robinson's work has done the most to outline this emergent form of a transnational state structure.²⁸ In relation to US oil interventions, Robinson argues that under contemporary forms of globalisation the US state no longer acts for US interests but instead seeks to 'maintain, defend, and advance the emergent hegemony of a global bourgeoisie and its project of constructing a new global capitalist historical bloc'.²⁹ Robinson contends that we are thus witnessing a nascent transnational state structure (TNS). In relation to the Iraq intervention, and in sharp distinction to Foster's position, Robinson argues that the Bush Administration's plan was in fact a 'blueprint for the transnational agenda in the region' by opening up Iraq as a productive (and oil-rich) circuit for global capital investment. As such, the intervention was not a 'US imperialist plan to gain the upper hand over French, German, and Russian competition' through monopolising Iraq's natural resources including its crucial oil reserves.³⁰ Robinson's transnational thesis sits well with the argument outlined above except in one crucial aspect: whilst Robinson's work serves as a useful corrective to instrumentalist accounts of the American state, his work goes too far in the other direction when it attempts to escape the still bounded geopolitical logics of the interstate system. That is, whilst US strategic and political preponderance in oil-rich regions does effect a transnational outcome for other core capitalist powers, this preponderance also entrenches US hegemony with US political and military dominance in the Middle East forming a key plank of postwar US hegemony *vis-à-vis* other leading capitalist states within the global political economy. This is largely because the US derives enormous structural power through its (and its proxies) capacity to play 'cop on the beat' in a region where democratic, nationalist or radical Islamist social forces threaten a stability geared towards the generic interests of the West as a whole. Thus, whilst US intervention in the region does benefit a number of capitals there is also a significant and abiding logic of 'national interest'. Importantly however, this logic of national interest is not reducible to just the interests of major US oil transnationals (as instrumentalist accounts would have it). As David Harvey has shown, there is a major political and strategic motivation attached to US intervention in so far as US primacy in oil-rich regions gives it undeniable structural power over other potential rivals within the capitalist core (and emerging zones such as China).³¹ Zbigniew Brzezinski, President Carter's former National Security Adviser, captured this logic when he argued:

America has major strategic and economic interests in the Middle East that are dictated by the region's vast energy supplies. Not only does America benefit economically from the

²⁸ William I. Robinson, *A Theory of Global Capitalism: Production, Class, and State in a Transnational World* (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004).

²⁹ William Robinson, 'Capitalist Globalization and the Transnationalization of the State', in Mark Rupert and Hazel Smith, *Historical Materialism and Globalization* (London: Routledge, 2002), p. 215.

³⁰ William Robinson, *A Theory of Global Capitalism: Production, Class and State in a Transnational World* (Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins University Press, 2004), p. 140.

³¹ See David Harvey's *The New Imperialism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

relatively low costs of Middle Eastern oil, but America's security role in the region gives it indirect but politically critical leverage on the European and Asian economies that are also dependent on energy exports from the region.³²

Thus, neither state instrumentalist accounts that posit the purely economic basis of US oil primacy or, on the other hand, theories of the US state acting on behalf of a newly emergent transnational capitalist class fully capture the nature of American oil interventions. Instead, it is perhaps more profitable to view US primacy in oil-rich regions as being subject to a *dual logic* whereby the American state is subject to both a transnational and a national interest which guide its interventions and it is through this optic (that of making the world safe for global capital which in turn reinforces primacy) that we should interpret US hegemony and its linkage to strategic preponderance in oil rich regions.³³ In short, the American state derives enormous structural power because it guarantees and underwrites capitalist social relations in oil-rich regions that in turn serves the interests of other core states.

So far this article has examined US intervention in the oil-rich Middle East and made a number of arguments about the wider structural logic of US statecraft. Throughout the postwar period the American state has underwritten a political order largely through military aid and training to a number of recipient militaries in oil-rich regions. Given the continued necessity for oil as a global strategic commodity and the fact that oil is often located in areas where states have fragile social bases, it is perhaps unsurprising that this relationship between military aid and oil has continued. Interestingly throughout the post-Cold War era, and especially since 9/11, the American state has actively pursued a policy of energy security through a process of diversification. That is, the US has been increasing its presence in other oil-rich regions outside the Middle East. The key regions are located in South America, Central Asia and Africa. Given the increased instability in the Middle East and the ever increasing reliance by core powers on foreign oil, US planners are becoming ever more anxious in relation to stabilising these energy supplies to world markets. As part of the so-called 'war on terror' we are witnessing an increased militarisation of the relationship between energy, global capitalism and US intervention and whilst US counter-insurgency tends to be seen as a Cold War strategy, it is increasingly being wedded to this process of energy security whereby oil-rich regimes are in receipt of millions of dollars worth of US military aid and counter-insurgency training. It is to these areas that I now turn and I show that US intervention in these regions is still subject to the dual logics that I described above. I also detail the ways in which this new strategy of energy diversification is impacting upon human rights and social justice in the global South.

Transnational conflicts and energy diversity

Prior to 9/11, senior US planners had recognised that energy security was becoming even more important to US interests. In early 2001, US Secretary of Energy Spencer

³² Zbigniew Brzezinski, 'Hegemonic Quicksand', *The National Interest*, 74 (Winter 2003/04), p. 8; For an extended discussion, see his excellent *The Choice: Global Domination or Global Leadership* (New York: Basic Books, 2004).

³³ For more on this see my 'The Heart of Empire? Theorising US Empire in an Era of Transnational Capitalism', *Third World Quarterly*, 26:2 (2005), pp. 217–36.

Abraham stated that the US faces ‘a major energy supply crisis’, over the next two decades. Abraham continued that the ‘failure to meet this challenge will threaten our nation’s economic prosperity, compromise our national security, and literally alter the way we live our lives’.³⁴ In charting US oil dependency the *National Energy Report*, authored in May 2001 by US Vice President Dick Cheney, predicted that US reliance on foreign oil would continue to increase in the future. The report argued that ‘the share of US oil demand met by net imports is projected to increase from 52 per cent in 2000 to 64 per cent in 2020. By 2020, the oil for nearly two of every three gallons of our gasoline and heating oil could come from foreign countries.’ Tellingly, the report recommended that the US should make ‘energy security a priority of our trade and foreign policy . . . The security of US energy supply is enhanced by several factors characterising our diplomatic relationships . . . These factors range from geographic proximity and free trade agreements to integrated pipeline networks, reciprocal energy-sector investments, shared security commitments, and, in all cases, long-term reliable supply relationships’.³⁵ Aside from US domestic consumption, however, the report goes on to argue that the US should take the lead in seeking greater ‘diversity of world oil production’ with greater diversity having ‘obvious benefits to all market participants’.³⁶ This decrease on a reliance on Middle Eastern sources of oil will lead to an *increased* reliance on new states and regions, specifically, Atlantic basin sources that encompass the ‘Western Hemisphere, the Caspian, and Africa’. The report makes clear that the US must act both for reasons of national *and* transnational interest with diversification helping to ‘lessen the impact of a supply disruption on the US and world economies’. Moreover, US strategy ‘in each of these high-priority regions’ should focus on institutionalising capitalist social relations and opening up these regions to the penetration of foreign capital so as to improve ‘the investment climate’.³⁷ The report thus recommends that the US state should continue to act for both reasons of national and transnational interest through institutionalising and underwriting capitalism in these new oil-rich regions via a strategy of increased market incorporation and strategic presence.

Interestingly, given the well-documented relationship between natural resources and conflict, the US has increasingly sought to ‘stabilise’ states with often fragile social bases so as to ensure the smooth incorporation of these regions within the global economy. This in turn is leading to US interests being defined against social change in the global South that might potentially impact upon energy supplies to world markets. This potentiality was recognised within the report, *Strategic Energy Policy: Challenges for the 21st Century*, produced by the US Council on Foreign Relations. The report begins by highlighting the highly integrated nature of the global political economy: ‘[a]s the 21st century opens, the energy sector is in critical condition. A crisis could erupt at any time from any number of factors, from an accident on the Alaskan pipeline to a revolution in a major oil-producing country. It would inevitably affect every country in today’s globalized world.’ Within the report, US national interests are married to the prevention of major social or political changes in the global South and any alteration of prevailing relationships affecting

³⁴ Author unknown, *Remarks by US Secretary of Energy Spencer Abraham*: (http://www.usembassy.it/file2001_03/alia/a1031906.htm).

³⁵ National Energy Policy Development Group, *National Energy Policy*, 21 May 2001, p. 130.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 132.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 133.

'US national security and foreign policy in dramatic ways'. The report continues that the US should take the lead in policing the global energy regime: the US should act to promote 'market forces wherever and whenever possible, while acting to ensure order in case of market failures or severe shortfalls or accidents'. Market failures include 'interference in trade flows by private or state-owned entities and actions by adversaries'. Interestingly, the report concludes by making it very clear that the US should use its military force to ensure that crucial energy supplies continue to flow to world markets and that the American state should seek to assume a similar strategic primacy in these new oil-rich regions than it currently does in the Middle East. The report argues that if the US 'does not respond strategically to the current energy situation, the US risks perpetuating the unacceptable leverage of adversaries and leaving the country's economy vulnerable to disruptions and volatile energy prices'. This new form of energy security through diversification has intensified in the post-9/11 era with the US dramatically increasing its military assistance to oil-rich states as part of the so-called global 'war on terror'. As we shall now see, the US is becoming increasingly bound up with consolidating authoritarian state structures in the Third World so as to ensure stable supplies of energy to the global political economy. As outlined above, the three areas subject to these US oil interventions are the Western Hemisphere, the Caspian, and Africa and I now examine the forms of transnational conflict in each of these regions.

Global capitalism and energy diversification

Amongst the Atlantic basin suppliers, Latin America supplies more oil to the US than all of the Middle Eastern states combined, with Mexico, Venezuela and Colombia the largest suppliers. As the Cheney report makes clear however, the Andean region of South America, notably Venezuela and Colombia have become increasingly central to US concerns. In summarising these commitments, the former Commander in Chief of the US Southern Command (USSOUTHCOM), General James T. Hill, affirmed the link between US strategy and the preservation of transnationally orientated oil-rich economies. Hill argued that US's 'Southern Command's security cooperation activities' served to expand US 'influence, assure friends, and dissuade potential adversaries' whilst promoting a market stability 'through training, equipping, and developing allied security force capabilities'. Importantly, Hill argued that 'Southern Command will play a crucial role in developing the kinds of security forces that help provide the ability to govern throughout the region, and particularly in Colombia'.³⁸ In 'stabilising' Colombia, the US has been sending billions of dollars of US military aid to the Colombian military since 2000. Although this money is said to be for a war on drugs it is in fact for a classic counter-insurgency war against the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) which is Latin America's oldest armed insurgency movement.³⁹ Marc

³⁸ James T. Hill, *Posture Statement*, US Southern Command, House Armed Services Committee, 12 March 2003: (<http://www.house.gov/hasc/openingstatementsandpressreleases/108thcongress/03-03-12hill.html>).

³⁹ Further discussed in my forthcoming book *Transnational Conflict and US Primacy* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009).

Grossman, US Undersecretary of State for Political Affairs, explained the reasons why the US continues to support the Colombian military, despite its record of gross human rights violations. Grossman argued that the Colombian insurgents:

represent a danger to the \$4.3 bn in direct US investment in Colombia. They regularly attack U.S. interests, including the railway used by the Drummond Coal Mining facility and Occidental Petroleum's stake in the Caño Limón oil pipeline. Terrorist attacks on the Caño Limón pipeline also pose a threat to US energy security. Colombia supplied 3% of U.S. oil imports in 2001, and possesses substantial potential oil and natural gas reserves.⁴⁰

As Grossman indicates, Colombia has discovered vast oil reserves within its territory.⁴¹ More importantly, however, the insurgency in Colombia threatens regional stability, and in particular Colombia's neighbour Venezuela which is one of the US's *largest* suppliers of oil. General Peter Pace, Hill's predecessor at US SOUTHCOM, outlined the wider strategic considerations of US access to South American oil, and linked US intervention in Colombia with fears of regional instability generated by the FARC. He started by explaining how important South American oil is to the US, arguing that there is a 'common misperception' that the US 'is completely dependent on the Middle East' for oil, when in fact Venezuela provides '15%–19% of our imported oil in any given month'. Pace then went on to note that the 'internal conflict in Colombia poses a direct threat to regional stability' and US oil interests, with 'Venezuela, Ecuador, and Panama' the 'most vulnerable to destabilization due to Colombian insurgent activity along their borders'.⁴²

Aside from Colombia, the popular left-wing leader of Venezuela, Hugo Chavez, has been a thorn in America's side since his election in 1998 as he has rejected the neoliberal vision which seeks to further incorporate Latin America into an asymmetric global political economy. In response, the US backed a coup attempt against Chavez in 2002. Immediately afterwards State Department spokesperson Phillip Reeker stated that the US wished 'to express our solidarity with the Venezuelan people and look forward to working with all democratic forces in Venezuela'. He went on to explain that the coup had been caused by Chavez's 'undemocratic actions' that 'provoked' the 'crisis in Venezuela'.⁴³ Contrary to this assertion however, Chavez had won elections in 1998 and 2000 by the largest majority in four decades of Venezuelan history, and had passed a new democratic constitution by popular referendum in 1999.⁴⁴ In backing the coup the US government's National Endowment for Democracy had channelled 'hundreds of thousands

⁴⁰ Marc Grossman, *Testimony of Ambassador Marc Grossman before the House Appropriations Committee's Subcommittee on Foreign Operations*, 10 April 2002: (<http://www.ciponline.org/colombia/02041001.htm>).

⁴¹ Donald E. Schulz, *The United States and Latin America: Shaping an Elusive Future* (Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, 2000), p. 3.

⁴² Peter Pace, *Advance Questions for Lieutenant General Peter Pace. Defense Reforms*. United States Senate Committee on Armed Services. 2000: (http://www.senate.gov/~armed_services/statemnt/2000/000906pp.pdf).

⁴³ Phillip Reeker, *State Department on Change of Government in Venezuela*, 12 April 2002: (<http://usinfo.state.gov/regional/ar/venezuela/02041250.htm>).

⁴⁴ On Chavez and his popular democratic mandate see *NarcoNews*, 20 February 2002; on US media responses to the coup, see Fairness and Accuracy In Reporting, *US Papers Hail Venezuelan Coup as Pro-Democracy Move*, 18 April 2002: (<http://www.fair.org/press-releases/venezuela-editorials.html>); for a good overall context to the background of the coup, see Conn Hallinan, 'US Shadow Over Venezuela', *Foreign Policy in Focus*, 17 April 2002: (http://www.fpfip.org/commentary/2002/0204venezuela2_body.html).

of dollars in grants to US and Venezuelan groups opposed to Mr Chavez, including the labour group whose protests sparked off the coup', whilst the US Navy was alleged to have co-ordinated and aided the coup plotters.⁴⁵ Thomas Dawson, the IMF External Relations Director, stated that the IMF stood ready to assist the new junta 'in whatever manner they find suitable'.⁴⁶ A Bush Administration spokesman stated quite bluntly that although Chavez was 'democratically elected', one had to bear in mind that 'legitimacy is something that is conferred not just by a majority of the voters'.⁴⁷ Chavez still remains firmly on the US radar with General Hill arguing that 'radical populism' (defined as the process whereby 'leaders in the region are tapping into deep-seated frustrations of the failure of democratic reforms to deliver expected goods and services') remains a 'primary' threat to 'to U.S. interests'.⁴⁸ Moreover, the US continues to attempt to undermine the democratic process in Venezuela.⁴⁹

Unhindered access to South American oil and the preservation of transnationally orientated political economies has become an even more pressing concern for US planners after the September 11th attacks and the continuing failure of the US-led occupation in Iraq. The former US Ambassador to Colombia, Anne Patterson, explained that 'after September 11, the issue of oil security has become a priority for the United States', especially as the 'traditional oil sources for the United States' in the Middle East have become even 'less secure'. By sourcing US energy needs from Colombia, which 'after Mexico and Venezuela' is 'the most important oil country in the region', the US would have 'a small margin to work with' in the face of a crisis and could 'avoid [oil] price speculation'.⁵⁰ In relation to Colombia this was illustrated clearly with the Bush administration's \$98 million for a specially trained Colombian military CI brigade as part Bush's South American military aid plan, the Andean Regional Initiative. Unlike the more generic Colombian CI brigades, this brigade is devoted solely to protecting the US multinational Occidental Petroleum's 500-mile long Cano Limon oil pipeline in Colombia.⁵¹ US Secretary of State Colin Powell explained that the money was used to 'train and equip two brigades of the Colombian armed forces to protect the pipeline' to prevent rebel attacks which are 'depriving us of a source of petroleum'.⁵² Patterson went on to explain that although this money was not provided under the pretext of a war on drugs 'it is something that we must do' because it is 'important for the future of the country, for our oil sources and for the confidence of our investors'.⁵³ Bush reaffirmed this commitment when he argued that 'Colombia was the source of about two percent of US oil imports' in 2001 (the

⁴⁵ *The Guardian*, 29 April 2002.

⁴⁶ Thomas C. Dawson, *Transcript of a Press Briefing*, International Monetary Fund, Friday, 12 April 2002: (<http://www.imf.org-external-nc-tr-2002-tr020412.htm>).

⁴⁷ *The Observer*, 21 April 2002.

⁴⁸ US House of Representatives, *Testimony Of General James T. Hill Before the House Armed Services Committee*, 24 March 2004: (<http://armedservices.house.gov/openingstatementsandpressreleases/108thcongress/04-03-24hill.html>).

⁴⁹ Richard Gott, 'Democracy Under Threat', *The Guardian*, 6 December 2005: (<http://www.guardian.co.uk/comment/story/0,,1658890,00.html>).

⁵⁰ *El Tiempo*, 10 February 2002: (http://www.amazonwatch.org/newsroom/medioclips02/col/020210_col_et.html).

⁵¹ *Christian Science Monitor*, 5 March, 2002.

⁵² House Appropriations Committee. *Secretary of State Colin Powell before the Foreign Operations Subcommittee*, 13 February 2002.

⁵³ *El Tiempo*, 10 February 2002.

year that the pipeline protection brigade was rolled out) which therefore created a 'mutual interest in protecting this economic asset'.⁵⁴

As is the case with South America, Central Asia is an oil-rich region and US national interests and its security assistance have been explicitly linked to stabilising particular kinds of political economies in the region with US military aid supporting highly abusive militaries. The US-led war against Afghanistan led to an intensification of US military presence throughout the region, and a number of Central Asian states are now in receipt of US military aid which is justified as part of the global 'war on terror'.⁵⁵ However, US military presence was by no means limited to the Afghan campaign as Elizabeth Jones, the US assistant Secretary of State made clear in 2001 when she argued that '[w]hen the Afghan conflict is over we will not leave Central Asia. We have long-term plans and interests in this region . . .'.⁵⁶ General Anthony Zinni, the head of the US's Unified Central Command (responsible for implementing US security assistance programmes throughout Central Asia) gave an indication of what these long-term plans were and underlined the continuing dual logic of US intervention in Central Asia when he stated that US CENTCOM and its military aid and training programmes contribute in crucial ways to maintaining 'stability in this volatile region' which 'is key to the free flow of oil and other commerce essential to the world economy'. He continued that 'attention to the legitimate defense needs of our friends, and by maintaining appropriate military presence and access, we can promote regional security while protecting our own vital interests'.⁵⁷ A recent US State Department reports echoes Zinni's concerns. It lists US national interests in relation to each Central Asian state with a unifying theme being the necessity to incorporate the region's energy resources within the US-led international order and to deepen market economies. In relation to Georgia, for example, the US Department of State argues that US interests centre on the promotion of market forces and the linkage of Georgia with the global economy: 'Georgia is an important geopolitical linchpin in the Caucasus region: as the western portal to the Great Silk Road and the newest conduit of Caspian oil to world markets, Georgia is a strategic gateway of energy and trade routes linking East and West'.⁵⁸ Given Georgia's centrality to US policy it is unsurprising that it is the leading recipient of US aid in the region with a \$64 m US-funded 'train and equip' strategic programme for Georgia's security forces closely resembling the CI programme being rolled out in Colombia. Approximately 150 US Special Forces instructors are training Georgian security personnel in counter-insurgency warfare. A Georgian Defence Ministry spokesman stated that the US CI trainers would work to develop a rapid reaction force which will guard 'strategic sites, particularly oil pipelines'. Similarly, Uzbekistan, one the US's 'foremost partners in the fight against terrorism',⁵⁹ received over \$90 m in US military aid in late 2001. US military assistance continued and in

⁵⁴ George Bush, *President's Budget Message on Andean Counterdrug Initiative*, Washington, DC: US Department of State, 4 February 2002: (<http://usinfo.state.gov/regional/ar/colombia/andean04.htm>).

⁵⁵ Lutz Kleveman, *The New Great Game: Blood and Oil in Central Asia* (London: Grove Press, 2004).

⁵⁶ Jones quote from Saul B. Cohen, 'The Eurasian Convergence Zone: Gateway or Shatterbelt?', *Eurasian Geography and Economics*, 46:1 (2005), p. 9.

⁵⁷ US CENTCOM, *Statement of General Anthony C. Zinni*, undated, (<http://www.centcom.mil/>).

⁵⁸ US Department of State, *New Independent States*, undated, (<http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/3971.pdf>).

⁵⁹ United States Government, 'Uzbekistan Military Assistance' and 'Uzbekistan Exchanges and Law Enforcement Assistance', undated, 2002.

2003, the US provided \$25 m for military assistance and \$18 m for border security assistance that included new training programmes for Uzbek Special Forces in counter-insurgency warfare. General Zinni explained that Uzbekistan possesses ‘a potential wealth of natural resources, and Caspian region energy (oil and gas) . . . is poised for extensive development in the next several years’. However, because of the ‘enormous energy riches at stake the potential for instability exists as countries settle questions of ownership and acceptable export routes’. Our relationships with the CAS are evolving and will continue to grow in the future’.⁶⁰

This trend is also occurring in parts of Africa. One of the key African states is the West African state of Nigeria which is the largest exporter of oil in Africa, and is the fifth largest supplier of oil to world markets.⁶¹ To encourage the further integration of Africa within the global political economy the US has been promoting free trade agreements and in 2000 signed the African Growth and Opportunity Act designed to open Africa up for global capital, especially investment by Western oil transnationals. As Ed Royce, the Chairman of the US House of Representatives Subcommittee on Africa argued, ‘African oil should be treated as a priority for U.S. national security post 9–11’ with African oil providing ‘a revenue stream that should supply capital to grow African economies . . . [t]here is no good reason why African oil producing countries should not take advantage of the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA) to diversify their economies’.⁶² Bush reiterated this commitment in 2004 when he signed the AGOA Acceleration Act of 2004 that extended AGOA to 2015. Bush argued that no ‘region has more to gain from free markets than Africa’ with AGOA giving ‘American businesses greater confidence to invest in Africa, and encouraged African nations to reform their economies and governments to take advantage of the opportunities that AGOA provides’.⁶³ Alongside these processes of further market incorporation has been a corresponding rise in US military aid and training, with US Foreign Military Financing to Africa alone increasing by 800 per cent between 2000–2006.⁶⁴ In 2004, General Charles Wald, deputy commander of EUCOM (the military command responsible for Europe and Western Africa) completed a tour of several West African states, including Nigeria. In outlining US interests in Africa, Wald argued that the US has a ‘huge interest in Africa from a security standpoint, from a strategic standpoint and from the standpoint of protecting our security interests and investment interests’.⁶⁵ Interestingly, when discussing joint military operations between the US and Nigeria and whether military cooperation would extend to the protection of Nigerian oil

⁶⁰ Anthony C. Zinni, *Statement of General Anthony C. Zinni*, undated: (<http://www.house.gov/hasc/testimony/106thcongress/99-03-11zinni.htm>).

⁶¹ Statement of George L. Person, JR. Subcommittee on Near Eastern and South Asian Affairs, US Senate. *US Foreign Policy, Petroleum and the Middle East*, 20 October 2005: (<http://foreign.senate.gov/testimony/2005/PersonTestimony051020.pdf>).

⁶² Ed Royce quote from *African Oil: A Priority for US National Security and African Development*, African Oil Policy Initiative Group, undated: (<http://www.israeleconomy.org/strategic/africawhitepaper.pdf>).

⁶³ George W Bush, *Remarks by the President at Signing of the Agoa Acceleration Act of 2004*, 13 July 2004: (<http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2004/07/20040713-3.html>).

⁶⁴ William D. Hartung and Frida Berrigan, *Militarization of U.S. Africa Policy, 2000 to 2005*, March 2005: (<http://www.worldpolicy.org/projects/arms/reports/AfricaMarch2005.html>).

⁶⁵ Donna Miles ‘US Must Confront Terrorism in Africa’ *American Forces Information Services*, 16 June 2004: (http://www.defenselink.mil/news/Jun2004/n06162004_200406163.html).

infrastructure in the conflict ridden Niger Delta zone, Wald stated that 'Wherever there's evil, we want to get there and fight it'.⁶⁶

Whose blood for our oil?

We see then that there is a very clear marriage between the promotion of capitalism in the global South, primarily through the entrenchment of market-orientated reforms, and the stabilisation and insulation of transnationally-orientated states through US military aid and training. The American state continues to act both for reasons of national and transnational interest, with US intervention serving to 'plug' political economies into global capitalism as both productive and relatively stable circuits. Of course, the form of stability that this entails does not necessarily equate into a majoritarian stability, and similarly to the Cold War period, continues to have egregious effects upon human rights, state development and social justice. Aside from the oil riches of the various states now in receipt of US military aid and training, another common factor is the fact that each recipient military is credibly charged with gross human rights violations with US military aid and training in counter-insurgency warfare intimately bound up with human rights abuses. For example, as we saw above, the Colombian military is now in receipt of billions of dollars of US military aid. However, the Colombian military is closely aligned with paramilitary forces who continue to carry out a dirty war against Colombian civil society. For example, in 2000, over 8,000 political assassinations were committed in Colombia, with 80 per cent of these murders committed by paramilitary groups allied to the Colombian military.⁶⁷ This trend shows no sign of abating and in one of the most extensive recent reports on human rights in Colombia the UN notes that its 'office . . . [has] continued to receive complaints about human rights violations implying the direct responsibility . . . of the security forces . . . Many of the violations, due to their serious, massive or systematic nature, constitute crimes against humanity and are susceptible to trial by the International Criminal Court'.⁶⁸ The principal recipient region for the US's \$98 m 'pipeline protection money' has been Arauca in north-eastern Colombia. According to Colombia's far-right President Alvaro Uribe, Arauca is a 'laboratory of war' and provides the security model envisaged for the rest of the nation. A 2004 UN High Commissioners report continued to document the high level collusion between the Colombian military and paramilitary forces,⁶⁹ with many of the most serious violations in Arauca taking place within a few minutes' walk from the bases where US military training is occurring. For example, in August 2004, Colombia's Attorney General's office noted that soldiers based outside the city of Saravena, Arauca, executed three union leaders whilst senior officials on the base

⁶⁶ Ian Mason, 'A Growing Source For Oil Is Also A Target: West Africa, a Big Exporter to the US, Demonstrates the "Paradox of Plenty"', *San Francisco Chronicle*, 19 September 2004.

⁶⁷ Human Rights Watch, *Colombia*, undated: (<http://www.hrw.org/americas/colombia.php>).

⁶⁸ United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, *The Human Rights Situation in Colombia*, 17 February 2004, p. 21.

⁶⁹ United Nations, Informe del Alto Comisionado de las Naciones Unidas para los Derechos Humanos sobre la situación de los derechos humanos en Colombia, E/CN.4/2004/13, 17 de febrero de 2004, Anexo II, paragraphs 2 and 3. Accessed at Center for International Policy, Blueprint for a New Colombia Policy, March 2005: (<http://www.ciponline.org/colombia/0503blueprint.pdf>).

are alleged to have participated in a cover-up. US Special Forces CI trainers are housed on the same base.⁷⁰ According to the UN the latest tactic of the Colombian military involves dressing murdered civilians in guerrilla clothing so as to justify their deaths.⁷¹ Crucially however, paramilitarism has long formed an integral part of the overall US-backed CI strategy. Moreover, this reliance on paramilitary forces was not confined to the Cold War era. For example, in 1991 both the US Department of Defence and the CIA reorganised Colombian military intelligence networks which saw the further covert incorporation of paramilitary networks within the Colombian military itself. The secret reorganisation focused solely on combating what was called 'escalating terrorism by armed subversion' through the creation of what Human Rights Watch characterised as a 'secret network that relied on paramilitaries not only for intelligence, but to carry out murder'.⁷²

Similarly to the Colombian military, both Georgian and Uzbek security forces have horrendous human rights records. For example, Uzbek security forces regularly commit horrific human rights abuses, with the US Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor concluding that throughout the period of US military assistance the Uzbek state's 'human rights record remained very poor, and it continued to commit numerous serious abuses. Torture is endemic, prison conditions are extremely harsh, and independent journalists, opposition politicians and human rights activists are subject to harassment'.⁷³ Similarly, the US State Department in its 2004 annual report on human rights in Nigeria argued that there were 'politically motivated killings by the Government or its agents' with 'police, army, and security forces committed extrajudicial killings' and using 'excessive force' to disperse protestors during the year' as well as using 'lethal force against suspected criminals and suspected vandals near oil pipelines in the Niger Delta Region'. In a worrying signal for even any semblance of accountability, the report continues that '[m]ulti-national oil companies and domestic oil producing companies often hired private security forces and subsidized living expenses for police and soldiers from area units assigned to protect oil facilities in the volatile Niger Delta region'.⁷⁴ We see then that the new policy of diversification of oil and the stabilisation of political economies conducive for global capitalism carries high human costs, especially in those specific zones where oil extraction takes place. US sponsored CI warfare now forms the central strategic modality of US military engagement with the use of paramilitary

⁷⁰ Center for International Policy, *Blueprint for a New Colombia Policy*, March 2005: (<http://www.ciponline.org/colombia/0503blueprint.pdf>).

⁷¹ Maria Cristina Caballero, 'In Colombia: Military Crimes Point To A Growing Problem', *The Providence Journal*, 25 June 2006.

⁷² Human Rights Watch/Americas Human Rights Watch Arms Project, *Colombia's Killer Networks: The Military-Paramilitary Partnership and the United States* (London: Human Rights Watch, 1996), p. 28–9. In the same report Human Rights Watch have provided the original documents of the order in both Spanish and English. See pp. 105–50.

⁷³ US Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor, *Supporting Human Rights and Democracy: The US Record 2003–2004* (2004): (<http://www.usembassy.uz/home/index.aspx?&=&mid=387&lid=1>); The US has been asked to leave the Karshi-Khanabad airfield in Uzbekistan by the regime of President Islam Karimov. The US criticised him after world media attention was focused on Karimov following the shooting of hundreds of civilians during an anti-government demonstration. See: (<http://www.iht.com/articles/2005/07/31/news/uzbek.php>) for more on this. For more on Georgia see (http://hrw.org/english/docs/2004/02/24/georgi7650.htm#P58_5798).

⁷⁴ US Department of State, *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Nigeria 2004*, 28 February 2004: (<http://www.state.gov/drl/rls/hrrpt/2004/41620.htm>).

forces and private military contractors developing as part of the prevailing strategic architecture under the so-called 'war on terror'.⁷⁵

We see then that US planners are increasingly seeking to diversify energy supplies away from the Middle East to new oil-rich regions located principally in South America, Central Asia and West Africa with US military power being used to underwrite forms of political and economic order conducive for global capitalism as a whole. Similarly to the Cold War period, the American state seeks to make these regions safe for global capitalism through stabilising states with fragile social bases and containing (and rolling back) inimical social forces be they Islamist, nationalist, indigenous or explicitly anti-capitalist. So far, this form of intervention continues to be subject to the dual logic that I outlined earlier on in this article, insofar as US intervention both serves US national interests through underwriting US hegemony and securing crucial oil supplies, *and* transnational interests in terms of underwriting an open international market within which all other core states can participate. For example, Colombia has received more US military aid than all of the other states examined in this article combined, and whilst the US is Colombia's largest trading partner, European investors are a close second: in 2004 Colombia conducted just over 36 per cent of its annual trade with the US and almost 19 per cent with the EU. The next largest trading partner was Venezuela with just over 5 per cent.⁷⁶ China is today one of the largest investors in Latin America with the majority of that investment in natural resource extraction, including oil. Roger F. Noriega, Assistant Secretary for Western Hemisphere Affairs argued that whilst Chinese investment in Latin America 'includes a political dimension' its 'growing presence in the region reflects its growing engagement throughout the world' which 'does not necessarily constitute a threat to US interests'.⁷⁷ This point is underscored when we consider the fact that although the US enjoys strategic primacy within the global oil regime, the majority of this oil ends up in the Asia Pacific region (including China and Japan) which consumes 23,446,000 barrels a day whilst the US consumes 20,517,000.⁷⁸

Will this current benign global oil regime continue or will the US use this strategic primacy to act in a more protectionist way so as to safeguard US oil interests through, for example, seeking to close markets off to other core states? This is of course the 'six million dollar' question and there are definite tensions within the current oil regime, such as the fact that oil is a non-fungible resource, with all of the advanced industrialised economies becoming more reliant on oil coupled with the chronic instability in oil-rich regions and the ever-diminishing supplies. On the flip-side the EU, Japan (and increasingly China) could seek to lessen their reliance on US power and develop their own bilateral or multilateral trade relationships outside US control (for example, an increased lean towards Russian oil and gas by EU

⁷⁵ For more on private military contractors, see Peter Singer, *Corporate Warriors: The Rise of the Privatized Military Industry* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2003).

⁷⁶ European Commission, *EU-Colombia trade*, undated: (<http://trade-info.cec.eu.int/doclib/html/113367.htm>).

⁷⁷ Roger F. Noriega, *Statement Before the House Subcommittee on the Western Hemisphere*, Washington, DC, 6 April 2005: (<http://www.state.gov/p/wha/rls/rm/2005/q2/44375.htm>).

⁷⁸ British Petroleum, *British Petroleum Statistical Review of World Energy*, June 2006: (http://www.bp.com/liveassets/bp_internet/globalbp/globalbp_uk_english/publications/energy_reviews_2005/STAGING/local_assets/downloads/pdf/statistical_review_of_world_energy_full_report_2005.pdf), p. 12.

powers).⁷⁹ The scramble for energy by China could also have an impact upon the current global oil regime, especially if the Chinese seek to parlay their bilateral arrangements with oil-rich states into forms of political influence that US planners consider to be inimical to US interests. What can be said for certainty is that at the present moment any move towards a more protectionist regime is unlikely given that the fact that in many ways the US is in a bind. Should it revert to resource protectionism there is a very strong likelihood that other core powers will seek to balance against US power which would in turn impact upon US strategic, political and economic interests in profound ways and would undoubtedly hasten the struggle for energy autonomy. Moreover, in so doing the US would fracture the liberal international order from which the US derives enormous benefits.⁸⁰ Of course, this does not discount the very real potential for ideology to 'overdetermine' US policy, and there are a number of debates, arguments and disagreements amongst US foreign policy planners as to the precise strategies that the American state should pursue to maintain US hegemony as we move into the twenty-first century. We should not also discount the often chaotic nature of social, political and economic processes and the ways in which various policies can often have contradictory and highly contingent effects. All we can say in relation to these very contemporary developments is 'watch this space' and it is still too early to see whether the dual logics will continue to compliment each other as a key plank of US primacy or whether an increased US unilateralism will translate into an increased push for autonomy in relation to energy security by other core powers.⁸¹ What can we conclude from this account?

Conclusion

This article has argued that the overly instrumentalist accounts of US intervention in oil rich regions fail to fully capture either the political logic of American statecraft, or more importantly the structural role that the American state has played in the making of global capitalism in the postwar period. US intervention in oil-rich regions seeks first and foremost to produce and stabilise transnationally responsive political economies with US strategic intervention seeking to insulate local states and ruling classes conducive for this transnationalisation process. In the post-Cold War era and especially after 9/11, the US has been pursuing an increasingly aggressive policy of energy diversification so as to ensure some degree of energy security for the global economy should the Middle East become even more insecure. The regions subject to these new interventions are South America, West Africa and Central Asia, and given the ongoing failure of the US project in Iraq it is logical to conclude that these regions will become more important to US energy security so as to give global energy supplies some 'elbow room'. I have argued that this new strategy is having a profound impact

⁷⁹ European Commission, EU/Russia Energy Partnership, 30 October 2000: (<http://europa.eu.int/scadplus/leg/en/lvb/l27055.htm>); see also Peter Gowan, 'US Hegemony Today', *Monthly Review*, 55:3 (July/August 2003), pp. 30–50.

⁸⁰ For a liberal critique of the Bush Administration, see G. John Ikenberry, 'America's Imperial Ambition', *Foreign Affairs* (September–October, 2002): (<http://sobek.colorado.edu/~brahm/courses/PSCI2223Fall2002/ImperialAmbition.pdf>).

⁸¹ This article is based on preliminary research for my new book *Transnational Conflict and US Primacy* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009).

in terms of consolidating often highly authoritarian regimes which in turn has an impact upon human rights, social justice and state development.⁸²

Of course, many of these regimes now in receipt of US military assistance were highly abusive prior to the onset of US aid, and US planners could simply state 'we have to work with what is there!'. This is of course correct and it is important that analysts of US intervention must always bear in mind the ways in which US policy must interact and work with local states which in themselves have their own histories, interests and agendas. However, the central question is whether US security assistance leads to fewer human rights abuses, greater accountability and the strengthening of genuine democracy, or whether US military aid serves to consolidate authoritarian regimes. That is, there is a very clear line between working with what you find and seeking to move towards ending human rights abuses and consolidating what you find so as to guarantee concrete economic and political interests. Sadly, as I have shown above, the US continues to put its economic and political interests above that of human rights and the development of genuinely democratic governments as part of its ongoing 'war on terror'. This is all being done within the logic whereby the ends justify the means. In the words of US Vice President Richard Cheney, the US is increasingly working on the 'dark side' whereby the US needs to 'have on the payroll some very unsavoury characters' so as to win the 'war on terrorism'.⁸³

On a broader note, a question which emerges from this article, and it is one that it is simply too early to answer just yet, is whether US intervention will continue to be subject to the dual logics that I have outlined in this article. The US state enjoys a degree of relative autonomy both because it must structurally ensure the necessary conditions for the long term functioning of global capitalism and because of its primacy within the world system. To date, US planners seem to be acutely conscious of the dual role that US intervention is playing. As we move further into the twenty-first century, it remains to be seen whether this will continue in the face of increased resource competition for energy sources amongst industrialised economies.⁸⁴

⁸² For more on Iraq, the role of counter-insurgency and state formation, see Eric Herring and Glen Rangwala, *Iraq In Fragments: The Occupation and its Legacy* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2006).

⁸³ Richard Cheney, *The Vice President appears on Meet the Press with Tim Russert*, 16 September 2001: (<http://www.whitehouse.gov/vicepresident/news-speeches/speeches/vp20010916.html>).

⁸⁴ There are ongoing debates as to whether the US economy is in decline in relation to other core powers. For a selection see Giovanni Arrighi, *The Long Twentieth Century: Money, Power, and the Origins of Our Times* (London: Verso, 1994); David Harvey, *The New Imperialism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003); Peter Gowan, 'Peter Gowan and the Capitalist World Empire', *Journal of World-Systems Research*, 10:2 (2004), pp. 471–539; Leo Panitch and Sam Gindin, *Global Capitalism and American Empire* (London: Merlin Press, 2003); Giovanni Arrighi, 'Hegemony Unravelling', *New Left Review*, 32 (March/April, 2005): (<http://www.newleftreview.net/Issue32.asp?Article=02>).