

# CounterPunch

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Alexander Cockburn and Jeffrey St. Clair

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## If It's War, Here's Why

Now that Henry Kissinger and Christopher Hitchens are both, at matching levels of pomposity and self-satisfaction, agreed on the desirability of sending in the bombers and finishing off Saddam, we suppose the Bush regime will conclude that the necessary national consensus for war has been achieved, despite the bleats of the military. All that remains to be done is to deploy Christiane Amanpour.

Was it Hitchens or Kissinger who wrote the following? "An opponent might argue that the inspections offer a better chance on containing the deadly weaponry, and also of observing the rights of sovereign states. Invasion might cause much death and destruction, and exert a destabilizing effect on the region in general. It might also trigger the use of the very weapons whose removal was its ostensible justification."

Hard to decide, isn't it? But you're right, Kissinger is simply incapable of expressing any disquiet on the imminence of death and destruction, whereas Hitchens raises the subject, if only to discount it as a matter of any great consequence.

The on-again, off-again noises from the White House about the desirability of "a regime change" in Iraq have become like white sound, always in the background, then intermittently rising to oppressive levels. What's it really all about?

We can dismiss the proclaimed reasons, starting with the "weapons of mass destruction". We buy the verdict of Scott Ritter here. Ritter, you'll recall, was formerly one of the most hawkish of the U.N. weapons inspectors in Iraq. He has stated repeatedly that Iraq is "qualitatively disarmed" and as of December 1998 was in no position to develop biological, chemical, or nuclear weapons.

Even the rabid pro-war panel on the first day of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee's hearings on Iraq was unable to produce any reason why Saddam would be

crazy enough to try and offer the pretext the US has been yearning for. Beyond this, the United States has systematically sabotaged arms control in Iraq and worldwide.

It was Clinton who pulled out the arms inspectors in 1998. It was Bush who killed off the proposed enforcement and verification mechanism for the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention, originally passed in 1972. The enforcement mechanism could have been used as a lever to prize open Iraq for arms inspections. In March 2002, the United States removed Jose Bustani, head of the Organization to Prevent Chemical Weapons, from office. George Monbiot of the Guardian has written that it was because Bustani's efforts to include Iraq in the Chemical Weapons Convention, thereby opening it to weapons inspections.

Other rationales for attacking Iraq have come and gone. A few months ago, former CIA director James Woolsey, but tressed by the writer Laurie Milroye, were pressing Iraq's implication in 9/11. Few now raise that excuse, though it does remind us that the nation that was host to most of the 9/11 perpetrators is Saudi Arabia.

This offers us the necessary pointer. Remember, where the Middle East is concerned, everything revolves around oil. The conspiracy mongers mumbling about the UNOCAL natural gas pipeline scheduled to run through Afghanistan and about the Kazakh oilfields are looking at the wrong page in the Atlas.

It's not "all about oil" in Afghanistan. When it comes to Iraq and Saudi Arabia it is.

Figure it. In the wake of 9/11 it becomes clear that Saudis, starting with Osama bin Laden, were at the heart of the attack, with some members of the ruling family probably involved or at least tacitly approving. Furthermore, America's local supervisors, the Saud clan, face increasing discontent. The Bush administration is led and advised

by people trained by origin and business proclivity to see everything in terms of the availability and price of oil, an optical vantage point far more powerful than the influence of the pro-Israel zealots or even the cowboy desire to whack Saddam because George Bush Sr held off, having decided that leaving Saddam in place was the best way forward.

Now, Saudi Arabia is the world's "swing producer", meaning it controls the world price by either restricting or expanding supply. Would it not be rational in the wake of 9/11 to seek urgently another "swing producer" option, and to see such an option in the form of Iraq? Iraq nationalized its own huge reserves back in 1972, taking control over sale and pricing. Either upon his own initiative, or conned by the United States, Saddam Hussein invaded Kuwait in 1990, thus setting Iraq on the path to utter ruin, and permitting the US, via sanctions, to control once more Iraq's oil exports, drastically restricting its supply.

So the US game plan could be to continue with the present "strategy of tension", or to gradually ratchet up the level of military harassment, without all the trumpet blares that accompanied the formal onslaught of 1991. More bombing raids, more attacks from the Kurdish protected areas, more thundering about weapons of mass destruction. Saddam can be counted on to

play his own weak hand badly. Last week, for example, he chose to divulge his apparent agreement for new weapons inspectors to a British Labor MP, George Galloway, who reported as much in a newspaper column. Result: the concession, if such it was, made about as much noise as a crumpet falling on a carpet.

It probably would not take much in the way of armed intervention for Saddam to be overthrown in an internal revolt. Then the US could substitute a suitably brutal successor and then have Iraq available as the swing producer, and Iran as the next target of opportunity.

So it does all make sense, and even if a full invasion ultimately does not occur, there's no downside risk in constantly raising and lowering the level of white sound. Oil rules!

## FIRST HILLIARD NOW McKINNEY

By the time you read this it's possible that Cynthia McKinney, the Georgia congresswoman will have gone down, in face of a Democratic primary challenge, just as another member of the Black Congressional Caucus did. We refer to Earl Hilliard, the first black elected to Congress in Alabama since Reconstruction. For daring to call for some sense of balance in US policy in the Middle East, some attention to what Palestinians are saying, Hilliard was overwhelmed by a primary opponent, middle-of-the road lawyer Artur Davis whom Hilliard had trounced in earlier contests, but to whom American-Jewish organizations suddenly shovelled a ton of money. Davis lashed Hilliard for being anti-Israel.

McKinney has courageously dared to prod Congress into considering the inconvenient aspects of 9/11, as they pertain to culpable oversight by the Administration, implication of the Royal Family (Bush division) with Arab billionaires and so forth. Among other brave stances McKinney has called for a measure of even-handedness in US policy in the Middle East. So she's been targeted by the Israel lobby, whose aim is to demonstrate to all politicians that criticism of Israel will bring inevitable retribution at the polls.

This summer McKinney, who won past elections by huge majorities, has faced the same treatment as Hilliard, with heavy backing for retired judge Denise Majette from American-Jewish groups, plus appeals for Republicans to cross over and vote for

Majette in Georgia's open primaries. Hilliard was simply swamped by Davis's out of state support from Jewish groups. Seeing what happened to him, McKinney looked for support from some Arab-American groups, thus drawing predictable accusation she's Terror's pin-up girl. In the Washington Post for August 13 Tom Edsall placed all initial emphasis on McKinney's Muslim backers, before noting that Majette "is heavily funded by Jews living outside Georgia."

Only a few paragraphs further on did Edsall bring himself to reveal in a roundabout way that Majette had raised almost twice as much as McKinney: "Majette recently pulled ahead of McKinney in the battle for dollars. McKinney has raised \$618,166 in the election cycle, while Majette has raised \$1.12 million. No one has accused Majette of being backed by Terror, though some of her money is coming from groups supportive of Sharon, one of the prime terrorists in the Middle East today. The slimy Edsall never went to Majette's backers to elicit garish statements of their political sympathies, the way he did from Muslim backers of McKinney.

Remember Cynthia Tucker? She's the black editorial in-house pundit at the Atlantic Atlanta Journal-Constitution. We've seen her on panel shows on CNN, churning out the verbal equivalent of over-boiled spinach. Lately Tucker has been stirred to unexpected vehemence. Against whom? Why, McKinney of course. Tucker showed that when it comes to the crunch, she is snuggled down in the Man's pocket. Her paper has been unrelenting in its attempts to discredit McKinney. "[She] has shown herself to be a fringe lunatic, well outside the congressional mainstream," Cynthia Tucker wrote in one typical commentary.

Outrageously, Tucker asserts McKinney is "incapable of aiding any cause" and has the final pious effrontery to declare that "The plight of the Palestinians and their desire for an independent homeland is a serious cause deserving of thoughtful, mainstream advocates. Hilliard wasn't one and neither is McKinney."

We await Ms Tucker's thoughtful proposals for a Palestinian homeland, or perhaps even a "serious" consideration of their plight.

Hilliard recently remarked in an interview in The Black Commentator, "There is class warfare in the Black community. In Birmingham and Tuscaloosa, in the areas of Birmingham where what we call the New Blacks live, those that work for corporate

### Editors

ALEXANDER COCKBURN  
JEFFREY ST. CLAIR

### Business

BECKY GRANT (Manager)  
ANNA AMEZCUA

### Design

DEBORAH THOMAS

### Counselor

BEN SONNENBERG

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**PO Box 228**

**Petrolia, CA 95558**

**1-800-840-3683 (phone)**

**counterpunch@counterpunch.org**

**www.counterpunch.org**

Alabama, those that live in subdivisions that are predominantly Black, Davis won just like he did in the white areas.”

The Black Commentator asks Hilliard, “You refer to a ‘natural progression’ in Black politics that has been interrupted?”

Hilliard replies: “That’s because it was natural - Blacks building on what the previous generation had added to the foundation. So when you look at the natural progression from Martin Luther King, you would think that you would get to [Kweisi] Mfume, but we’ve been sidestepped. We’ve had a Clarence Thomas. We have a Colin Powell. We have Cynthia Tucker. We have all these other people whose ideals and views don’t sit on the foundation. It’s not building for the masses, or building for the race. It’s building for self.

“They are black in skin tone but, philosophically, they are not. So, whites understand them better than we do... You have a Condoleezza Rice: I made it because I’m smart, and because of myself. I didn’t need affirmative action, I don’t believe in it. If I can make it, everybody else can make it.”

And if of course they can make it by ringing statements of support for Israel-right-or-wrong, thus eliciting huge contributions from Jewish groups, well and good.

Imagine the uproar among the pundits, the Tuckers of this world, if somehow Arab-American money rather than Jewish-American money had been decisive in his defeat!

## THE WAR COMES HOME

The war is already coming home, the ways wars always do, in the form of drugs and psychosis. Witness the murders of four Fort Bragg soldiers wives in the space of six weeks. Fort Bragg is the home of the Special Forces Command. Three of the four soldiers had recently returned from Afghanistan, where they served with Special Forces units.

“He was like my own child”, said Wilma Watson, describing her son-in-law Master Sergeant Wright. “Until he came back from Afghanistan, I didn’t worry about violence.” Wright killed her daughter. “He was getting these attacks of rage.” One line of defense, discussed in an interesting piece published in Newsday by UPI reporters, Mark Benjamin and Dan Olmsted, is that at least two of the soldiers had been taking Lariam, aka mefloquine. As the reporters wrote: “Lariam has been blamed for psychotic episodes and suicidal behavior for more than a decade. The official product information sheet, written by manufacturer Hoffmann-

La Roche and approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration, states Lariam has been associated with aggression, paranoia and suicidal thoughts.”

It is the Army’s drug of choice to prevent malaria.

There’s nothing to equal the military as the incubator of violence. The four murdered women in Fort Bragg have paid an installment, and the payments in terms of rage, drunkenness, drug addiction and antisocial behavior will be exacted month after month for years to come, amid the resolute determination of the press NOT to connect the dots.

## THE CASE OF THE MISSING TERRORIST

### By JACOB LEVICH

In a mystery that raises further questions about official accounts of the September 11 attacks, a man named as a key player in the Al Qaeda 9/11 conspiracy seems to have vanished from the face of the earth.

Atif Ahmed, 30, was scooped up by Scotland Yard detectives nine months ago after the FBI, working with the New York

documents has failed to turn up any mention of Ahmed, apart from Moussaoui’s pleadings and a single ABC News story dating from November of last year.

Where Ahmed is concerned, press coverage and official acknowledgement are conspicuous by their absence. Although the US government has been secretive in its proceedings against the hundreds of persons preventively detained in the post-9/11 dragnet, arrests of alleged Al Qaeda conspirators, like Moussaoui or Jose Padilla, have been well publicized and widely reported.

Similarly, the press has closely followed the stories of other alleged Moussaoui henchmen, like his ex-roommates Hussein al-Attas and Ramzi Binalshibh. If there is a black-out, it appears to apply only to Ahmed.

Calls to the FBI’s national and New York press offices failed to yield any information about Ahmed’s status. “Never heard of the guy”, FBI spokesman Joe Valiquette said.

Thus the only publicly available information about Atif Ahmed is contained in an ABC News item dated November 14, 2001, which remains accessible on the network’s Web site. Headlined “British Police Nab Terror Suspect,” the story reveals that Ahmed was picked up at his London dwelling and

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City police, linked him to accused “20th hijacker” Zacarias Moussaoui. At the time of Ahmed’s arrest, law enforcement sources told ABC News they had found telephone records and other evidence suggesting that Ahmed, a British national, was a co-conspirator with Moussaoui.

In his own trial on capital conspiracy charges, Moussaoui, an admitted Al Qaeda member, has identified Ahmed as a “very important part” of the 9/11 terror plot. Moussaoui has also claimed that Ahmed was a double agent working for British intelligence. That charge, if true, would have alarming implications about the extent of 9/11 foreknowledge among Western intelligence agencies.

Yet, since the day of his arrest, Atif Ahmed has been all but erased from the public record in what feels eerily like a deliberate news blackout. A review of online newspaper archives, Internet search engines, unsealed court papers, and relevant government

detained at the request of US law enforcement officials, who claimed to have uncovered telephone evidence suggesting that Ahmed “was working with” Moussaoui. Further unspecified evidence was said to have been found during a search of Ahmed’s apartment.

As of the story’s filing, Ahmed was being held without charge under the British Counterterrorism Act. “Sources say the FBI wants Scotland Yard to keep Ahmed in custody until it can be learned just how deeply he may be connected with Moussaoui,” the story said.

The rest is silence. Despite the seriousness of the allegations against Atif Ahmed, there has been no press follow-up, and it is impossible to discover whether he has been charged or released, or indeed whether he is living or dead.

Moussaoui has moved for a court order compelling the prosecution to produce any and all information relating to Ahmed, but