

An Enron War On Terrorism

By Jim Lobe and Lora Lumpe

If former Enron boss Kenneth Lay were put in charge of the U.S. war on terrorism, he would probably conduct it much the same way his fellow Texas oilman and beneficiary of Enron largesse, George W. Bush, has.

Like the bankrupt energy giant, the Bush administration has a predilection for secrecy and deregulation and a penchant for being indiscriminate when it comes to making potentially costly investments—mainly in the form of new military entanglements—in unstable partners around the globe.

In his State of the Union address, President Bush did not mention his old friends at Enron by name, but he alluded to the problems they caused when he called for stronger rules requiring companies to disclose risky business ventures and greater public oversight of their financial operations. Yet in his war on terrorism, the president is trying to circumvent or eliminate similar controls that could help prevent the U.S. from entering into the kinds of risky alliances and dangerous associations—support for Saddam Hussein in his war against Iran and arming and training the Afghan mujahideen in the 1980s are two of many—that have come back to haunt Washington.

Just as Enron ventured into businesses that its more timid competitors never dreamed about, so the Bush team has rushed chaotically into new and largely secret military and intelligence commitments with a growing number of undemocratic and unstable countries, such as Kyrgyzstan, Azerbaijan, and Uzbekistan, places that many Americans have never even heard of.

At the same time, the White House has sent some 650 U.S. troops on a training mission to the southern Philippines to help chase after guerrillas whose ties to al-Qaeda are anything but certain, while senior Pentagon officials talk openly about how much they want to help

Indonesia's abusive army root out Islamist terrorists on that giant archipelago's islands. Since September 11, the administration has hinted at military action against many other countries, including Iraq, Iran, Yemen, Sudan, Lebanon, Somalia, and even North Korea in the name of fighting global terror, seemingly heedless of the possible impact on regional security and human rights.

In fairness to President Bush, the U.S. military has been steadily expanding its military global reach, with the number of countries receiving some form of training increasing from less than 100 a decade ago to at least 150 last year. Before September 11, these programs were justified as part of the "war on drugs," or improving the peacekeeping capacities of poor nations. But now, under the banner of the "war on terrorism," the president is involving the U.S. in foreign military entanglements at an unprecedented level.

And, like Enron, President Bush has tried hard to circumvent or restrict congressional authority. The administration has sought to kill an annual report that provides information to Congress and the public about the Pentagon's foreign military training programs and the deployments of Special Forces abroad. It has also proposed sending U.S. military advisers into the field without seeking Congressional approval or advice. Finally, it wants complete discretion in lifting all human rights, democracy, and nonproliferation sanctions provided for in U.S. law that currently restrict the provision of military aid to unsavory regimes. An ominous example of the latter is the recent circumvention of congressional restrictions on training Indonesian troops through the creation of a new antiterrorism training program.

And just as Enron resisted disclosing bad news to its shareholders and employees, the administration has consistently downplayed or denied the

existence of serious problems with some of its new partners. While Hamid Karzai is presented as the face of the new Afghanistan, the Pentagon's special forces remain deeply engaged with thuggish warlords like Gen. Abdul Rashid Dostum and Gul Agha Shirzai, whose corruption and brutality helped deliver the country to the Taliban in the first place. Similarly, Russian abuses in Chechnya are now consistently downplayed, while Uzbekistan's ruthless dictator, Islam Karimov, is praised as a loyal ally in the antiterrorist crusade, even as he rigs a referendum extending his rule in the face of growing popular opposition.

In the end, Enron collapsed because its investments were far shakier and its accounting methods far shadier

than it had led its shareholders and employees to believe. In a booming economy and unregulated environment that it helped to create through lavish political patronage, Enron's empire grew uncontrollably. But when the economy went south and creditors began calling in debts, it imploded like a house of cards, destroying the fortunes of deceived shareholders and workers.

Now, the U.S. is winning in Afghanistan, and it's boom times for the war on terror. President Bush, undeterred by Congress and emboldened by his high ratings in the polls, is making new military investments in countries all over the world, while downplaying or keeping secret from the American people the problems

that these investments will pose down the line. What happens when these investments go bad? American citizens should know the price they will have to pay.

(Jim Lobe <jlobe@starpower.net> is the Washington correspondent for the international news service Inter Press Service. Lora Lumpe <llumpe@mindspring.com> is a senior associate at the International Peace Research Institute in Oslo and a frequent commentator on U.S. military and police training programs around the world. They both serve on the advisory board of Foreign Policy in Focus (online at www.fpif.org).)

Who's Who in the Bush Administration

<http://www.fpif.org/republicanrule/index.html>

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