

# MARK CURTIS

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## Secret Affairs: Britain's Collusion with Radical Islam

Jul 20, 2010 03:29PM

Mark Curtis's new book was published on 1 July 2010

**Read *The Guardian's* coverage of the book, 6 July 2010, here**

**Read Mark Curtis's *Guardian* article, 6 July 2010, here**

**Read reviews here (*Independent*), here (*Metro*), here (*New Humanist*) here (*Asharq al-Awsat*, in Arabic)**

**Listen to interviews with BBC Radio Scotland here and with RTE Radio 1 (Ireland) here** (latter interview begins at 1hr 15 mins)

**Read an online interview about the book here**

Mark Curtis' new book recounts the history of British collusion with radical Islamic and terrorist groups

**The book can be ordered here** (Word Power) or here (Amazon)

*"Startling and deeply disturbing evidence about how, in an effort to preserve declining influence in the world's oil-producing regions, the government has lent frequent and critical support to the states that have been the primary sponsors of radical Islam and the terrorism that it spawns..."*

**Noam Chomsky**

*"Sensational in the best sense, Secret Affairs examines the darkest corners of the imperial past to reveal the truth behind today's news."*

**John Pilger**

*"This valuable and important book presents a far more accurate and balanced picture than the shallow simplicities fed by Bush's so-called war on terror."*

**Michael Meacher**

### About *Secret Affairs*:

In his ground-breaking new book, Mark Curtis reveals the secret history of British collusion with radical Islamic and terrorist groups. It shows how Labour and Conservative governments have connived with militant groups linked to al-Qaida to control oil resources, overthrow governments and promote Britain's financial interests. The current terrorist threat to Britain is partly 'blowback'.

The story of how Britain has helped to nurture the rise of global terrorism has never been told. *Secret Affairs* reveals how Britain has covertly supported radical Islamic groups in Afghanistan, Iran, Iraq, Libya, the Balkans, Syria, Indonesia and Egypt. Drawing on declassified government files, it documents Britain's hidden strategic alliance with the two major state sponsors of

radical Islam - Saudi Arabia and Pakistan. And it shows how British policies of 'divide of rule' - rooted in the Empire - have used Islamic forces to promote imperial interests in India, Palestine, Jordan and Yemen. Similar British policies continue today in the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq.

Mark Curtis shows how British collusion with radical Islam is intimately related to its postwar imperial decline. Expedient and pragmatic, and lacking any moral compass, policy-makers have aimed to counter popular, nationalist forces in a desperate attempt to uphold their power in a changing world.

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## "British overseas obligations", 1958

Sep 2, 2009 06:17PM

**Cabinet Office, Steering Committee, "British Obligations Overseas", 14 April 58, Secret**

"The last fifty years have seen a drastic diminution in our world status...Our trading position has suffered a relative decline; we no longer have a virtual monopoly of the industrial export markets, and our balance of payments has worsened accordingly. Two world wars have sapped the UK's economic strength and also, to some extent, our will to dominate events".

"In Europe...the security of the UK is paramount; in the Middle East, access to oil; in other parts of the world, the maintenance and promotion of the UK's trading position. This should not be taken to imply that every obligation in, say, the Middle East, must be subordinated to one major interest there and assessed only by its contribution to it. The UK's membership of the Baghdad Pact, for example, serves other aims besides protecting our access to oil, and could not perhaps be justified by this criterion alone. But access to oil is nevertheless an overriding consideration in the sense that our membership of the Pact must be compatible with it or, at least, not militate against it, and it seems realistic to measure the value of all our obligations in the Middle East in this way. Similar considerations apply to other areas".

"In the last analysis, all parts of the world are not equally important to the aims of the UK and in some parts the main burden must fall upon the United States. Most of the Far East and Latin America, though not without importance to us, come into this category. These areas are those in which most of our interests are general, eg the containment of Communism and the maintenance of conditions in which trade can be carried on, rather than specific, eg, the defence of UK colonies. We can therefore afford to leave them to the US, whose resources are great enough to manage them... At the other end of the scale come Europe and the Middle East, where the UK has specific interests, home defence and access to oil... In between come South and South-East Asia and Africa, in which the UK has specific interests which she cannot afford to abandon or transfer to another power, but which are not immediately threatened or

directly of such vital importance as those in Europe and the Middle East”.

“The basic task which confronts the United Kingdom in the Middle East is thus to pass smoothly from the previous patron-client relationship, suitable to our former strategic needs, to a new and more equally balanced commercial relationship which will preserve for as long as possible the continued supply of oil as a mutually advantageous basis of trade... in the most advanced countries, the problem is to convince the newly-arisen ruling classes that their interests lie with and their independence is not threatened by cooperation with us [sic]; in the most backward, to continue to support the present regimes without irrevocably associating ourselves with them in the eyes of the people who will one day supplant them, and with whom we must then be in a position to do business”.

Source: National Archives, T234 /768

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## Britain and radical movements in Arabia, February 1958

Jun 4, 2009 05:58PM

Report by the Joint Intelligence Committee, “Nationalist and radical movements in the Arabian Peninsula”, 10 February 1958

“Arab nationalism, including the urge towards greater Arab unity and the removal of any foreign control, is already the most powerful emotional force in the area and it is beginning to penetrate even the most remote corners of the peninsula... The maintenance of our interests in the Persian Gulf states is dependent on continued stability in the area. At present only the Rulers can provide this. No alternative regimes are in sight, certainly not regimes which could provide the stability on which the maintenance of British interests depends. A failure to support any one of the Rulers would weaken the confidence of the others in our ability and willingness to protect them. It is on this confidence that our special position in the Gulf chiefly rests.”

Source: Public Record Office, CAB 158/31

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## Israel and the bomb, 1961

Mar 3, 2009 07:07PM

Report by the Joint Intelligence Committee, “Development of nuclear weapons by fifth countries during the period up to 1970”, 5 September 1961

“Israel began an enlarged atomic energy programme in 1956/57. There is reason to suppose that its purpose was partly military, and the installations now being built could, when complete, be put to military use unless this were prevented by pressure from outside. It would be technically practicable for the Israelis to hold a nuclear test in 1965...”

Source: PRO/CAB 158/43

## The Cuban threat, 1961

Jan 22, 2009 02:41PM

Joint Intelligence Committee, “Cuban developments and their impact on the Caribbean”, 2 June 1961

“Castro’s attempts to intervene in the affairs of other countries have alienated most governments and moderate opinion in Latin America; however, Castroism still retains much of its popular appeal. If, in the longer term, the Cuban revolution succeeds in achieving a stable régime which appears to meet the aspirations of the depressed classes, there will be a serious risk that it will inspire similar revolutions elsewhere in Latin America”.

Source, PRO, CAB 158/43

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## “Future British policy toward the Arab/Israel dispute”, 14 September 1970

Dec 29, 2008 03:23PM

This paper by the Foreign Office planning committee considers the options of either a pro-Arab or a pro-Israel policy. It states:

“Neither...is practicable. A pro-Arab policy would be unacceptable to British public opinion and opposed by the US government. A pro-Israeli policy would destroy all hopes of preserving British economic and political interests in the Arab Middle East... A pro-Arab policy in any thoroughgoing form would... be hard or impossible to adopt: (a) because of British public and political commitment to Israel as an ideal and the political force of support for Israel in the country; (b) because of the pressure which the United States government undoubtedly exert on HMG to keep us in line in any public pronouncements or negotiations on the dispute”.

The paper then considers middle options. The first is “active pursuit of a settlement with disassociation from the US” and, another, “active neutrality”. The first would mean the government doing “all we can to promote a settlement but without running the risk to our world-wide interests that would be involved in actively disassociating ourselves from the US position”. This has advantages and disadvantages but the first disadvantage is that “as long as we are associated with the US government in active policies toward the dispute, we shall confirm the Arab belief that we are pro-Israel”.

The second option of “active neutrality” would mean “we should have to say and do things the US government did not like and to be more pro-Arab (or at least less pro-Israeli) than the Americans”. The disadvantages of this are the damage “to our world-wide relationship with the US”, that it would be criticised by some public opinion in the UK, that UK “could not affect the power structure of the conflict” (ie, have much influence) and that “there is no prospect of a European political entity” playing a “third force” role.

Therefore the paper argues for “the low risk policy”, described as “the less continuously active variant” of the last option above.

"This policy should mean, in practical terms, that our efforts should first and foremost take the form of private pressure upon the US to do all in their power to bring about a settlement". This would mean UK would have a "strictly limited role" and "modest contributions and not peace plans should be our aim", keeping doing business with Arab world, including arms sales, and maintaining links with Israel, especially commercial.

The conclusion was that:

"In terms of the national interest, there would be much to be gained by adopting a thoroughgoing pro-Arab policy... It would, however, be difficult to defend such a policy on grounds of principle and it would be extremely unpopular in this country. The US government would dislike it intensely and oppose it strongly if it entailed (as logically it should) showing sympathy for the Arab point of view in the international effort to help bring about a settlement. It would be incompatible with support for, or even acquiescence in, the US position in the quest for a settlement".

The paper rules out an openly pro-Israel policy, and considers the option of active pursuit of a settlement in alignment with the US, concluding:

"Our almost total lack of influence on the combatant countries means that our capacity to contribute to progress toward a settlement is very limited. We cannot make even that modest contribution effective (or convince the Arabs we are doing all we can) if we remain closely associated with the US position".

The paper also objects to the option of dissociating UK policy from that of the US, saying that "relations with the Arabs would be improved, but this would not measure up to the importance of our global relationship with the US". It concludes, again, in favour of the "low risk" strategy.

Reference: PRO/FCO 49/295

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## British policy towards Israel, the Arab states and the US, Foreign Office note, July 1970

Aug 28, 2008 08:18AM

Percy Cradock, Foreign and Commonwealth Office planning staff, to Sir Denis Greenhill, Permanent Under-Secretary, FCO, 24 July 1970

"We start from the fact that our economic interests in the Arab world greatly outweigh those in Israel. It would be reasonable to expect that our policy should reflect this fact. It does not do so for a number of reasons, one of them the need for association with the United States over Middle East issues. Although out [sic] interests in the area are proportionately greater than those of the United States and although we are more vulnerable, we cannot afford to distance ourselves too far from the United States position without risk of injury to the general Anglo-US relationship. The United States, however, are identified with the Israeli position, at least in Arab eyes. Herein lies our dilemma, or one of them... As regards loss of our economic interests in Arab

countries, it is impossible to point to specific current instances of loss attributable to our political posture alone. But this posture is the main reason why our economic interests in the Arab world are permanently at risk. And if we are to talk of potential [last word UL] trade... it is fair to argue that on the Arab side, where the economic stake is much bigger, our potential losses are much greater as a result of our attempt to take up a neutral position'.

Source: National Archives, FCO 49/305

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## 'British foreign policy', Foreign Office brief, January 1968

Jul 18, 2008 07:46AM

### Permanent Under-Secretary's Steering Committee, "British Foreign Policy: Brief by the Foreign Office", 26 January 1968

This long report is a briefing for the Foreign Secretary's forthcoming talks in Washington. It notes that the primary goal of British foreign policy is to make Britain economically strong, which was the reason for deciding to withdraw military forces from 'East of Suez'. It continues:

"Positively, it demands that we should bend our energies to help to produce a world economic climate in which our external trade, our income from invisibles and our balance of payments can prosper. This demands that we should support and, where appropriate, initiate measures for freer and more expanded world trade, for tariff reductions, for the reduction of non-tariff barriers, for greater international liquidity and for satisfactory solutions to problems of international indebtedness, including that of the sterling balances... Although our entry into the European Communities has been blocked for the time being we must continue to develop our markets there, while increasing our efforts to open up new markets and making the best of existing opportunities elsewhere eg in Latin America, parts of the Far East such as Thailand, and indeed wherever devaluation has given us real competitive advantages. Negatively, we should for the time being adopt a 'heads down' attitude in regard to proposals which, however desirable in themselves, would throw a significantly greater strain upon our balance of payments, eg commodity schemes directed primarily to raise prices rather than at stability of markets".

"We should work to harmonise US and European policies but so long as the objectives are in harmony we need not be shy about forward on the merits of the case different means of attaining them... We must ensure that our aid programme supports not only the developmental needs of recipient countries but also our own commercial and foreign policies... Wherever possible we should try to shape our aid programme to fit more appropriately the pattern of our trade and investment interests in different countries".

Source: National Archives, FCO 49/13

# The British interest in oil, 1967

Jun 20, 2008 08:58AM

Over the next few months, I will be publishing on this site some of the declassified British government documents I have used in my research. The following, a Foreign Office paper from March 1967, is the first:

## FCO, "The British interest in oil", paper, March 1967

"Oil is easily the largest single commodity moving in international trade. It supplies nearly 40 per cent of the world's energy needs... British major interests in oil are twofold: (i) in common with all other industrialised nations dependent upon imported fuel supplies we have an interest in the continued and secure availability of imported oil at acceptable prices...(ii) through British Petroleum (BP)...and Shell... the United Kingdom has a stake in the international oil industry second only to that of the United States. The overseas assets of the British oil companies have a book value of £2,000 million without counting their rights to oil still in the ground. Because these companies supply nearly one half of the market, the United Kingdom obtains its own oil supplies at lower foreign exchange costs than would otherwise be the case: for example, in 1965, if the oil imported by Shell and BP had been imported by foreign companies, it would have cost £60 million more in balance of payments terms. Furthermore, remittance of money from their production, refining and marketing operations overseas makes an even more substantial direct contribution to the balance of payments; net foreign exchange earnings ... from Shell's and BP's overseas operations in 1965 amounted to about £160 million; of that total, about £60 million was spent on equipment exports for those operations and about £100 million represented net earnings on investment".

"In the United Nations and its associate bodies Her Majesty's Government's policy is to oppose, or at least attempt to moderate, resolutions which might: (a) encourage concessionary governments to expropriate or acquire too direct a control over Western oil investments; (b) give OPEC a status which could lead to its acceptance as a body with special competence or powers as regards the international oil industry as a whole; or © encourage direct links between consuming and producing countries or any form of commodity agreement for oil. The broad aim is to inhibit undue governmental interference in the international oil trade".

"It seems likely (unwelcome though this is as regards the 'profitability' of the British investments in balance of payments terms) that unit payments to concessionary governments by the companies will continue to rise, it is hoped slowly, and that those governments will acquire an increasing direct stake in the development of oil resources in their countries... From our massive stake in the international oil industry, we enjoy two major advantages for the balance of payments: our oil costs a good deal less in overseas payments than it would if we bought it all from foreign companies; we get large invisible earnings from the business of producing and selling oil in other countries".

Source: PRO /FCO 54/77

# Fanning the Flames: The role of British mining companies in conflict and the violation of human rights

Nov 20, 2007 05:49PM

British mining companies are abusing human rights all over the world at the same time as making record profits and exploring new 'frontiers' in territories plagued by conflict. A report I've just authored for the NGO, Want on Want, documents the impacts of large-scale mining on communities in twenty countries. London is the centre of the world's mining industry and many of the world's largest mining companies are either UK-based or part-British, notably Anglo American, Rio Tinto, BHP Billiton and Xstrata.

The report shows that these largest four British companies made profits of around £14 billion in 2006. Much of this wealth is simply being extracted from poor countries, with the complicity of Southern governments, due to low tax rates and profit repatriation allowances; there is also evidence that some companies are using creative accounting techniques to avoid paying taxes.

The report includes analysis of the following cases:

- Two junior British mining companies are working in joint ventures with Chinese companies in Chinese-occupied Tibet, almost certainly illegally extracting that country's rich natural resources.
- Some of the big British companies are fanning conflict by mining in countries such as Colombia and exploring on the Philippines island of Mindanao, where the military is eradicating opponents of mining to make way for the companies.
- In Uzbekistan, the British government is backing a gold mining company's joint venture with the Uzbek régime, one of the region's most repressive states.
- British mining operations have provoked massive local opposition in countries such as Bangladesh, Peru, South Africa and India, notably for forcing people off their land, while receiving virtually no media coverage in the UK.
- Severe environmental destruction, notably water pollution, is being caused in various countries including Ghana, Argentina, Papua New Guinea and Zambia

All this is being done with the active support of the British government, which continues to press for 'favourable investment climates' in developing countries while involving mining company leaders in various 'corporate social responsibility' initiatives and rejecting calls for increased regulation of corporations. Whitehall has close personal connections to the big mining companies. A director of Rio Tinto, for example, sits on the Ministry of Defence's Defence Management Board, which is responsible for 'success in the military tasks we undertake at home and abroad'.

The full report can be seen at:

<http://www.waronwant.org/Fanning%20the%20Flames%2015142>

