Camp Bondsteel and America's plans to control Caspian oil

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Camp Bondsteel, the biggest "from scratch" foreign US military base since the Vietnam War is near completion in the Yugoslav province of Kosovo. It is located close to vital oil pipelines and energy corridors presently under construction, such as the US sponsored Trans-Balkan oil pipeline. As a result defence contractors—in particular Halliburton Oil subsidiary Brown & Root Services—are making a fortune.

In June 1999, in the immediate aftermath of the bombing of Yugoslavia, US forces seized 1,000 acres of farmland in southeast Kosovo at Uresevic, near the Macedonian border, and began the construction of a camp.

Camp Bondsteel is known as the "grand dame" in a network of US bases running both sides of the border between Kosovo and Macedonia. In less than three years it has been transformed from an encampment of tents to a self sufficient, high tech base-camp housing nearly 7,000 troops—three quarters of all the US troops stationed in Kosovo.

There are 25 kilometres of roads and over 300 buildings at Camp Bondsteel, surrounded by 14 kilometres of earth and concrete barriers, 84 kilometres of concertina wire and 11 watch towers. It is so big that it has downtown, midtown and uptown districts, retail outlets, 24-hour sports halls, a chapel, library and the best-equipped hospital anywhere in Europe. At present there are 55 Black Hawk and Apache helicopters based at Bondsteel and although it has no aircraft landing strip the location was chosen for its capacity to expand. There are suggestions that it could replace the US airforce base at Aviano in Italy.

According to Colonel Robert L. McClure, writing in the engineers professional *Bulletin*, "Engineer planning for operations in Kosovo began months before the first bomb was dropped. At the outset, planners wanted to use the lessons learned in Bosnia and convinced decision makers to reach base-camp 'end state' as quickly as possible."

Initially US military engineers took control of 320 kilometres of roads and 75 bridges in the surrounding area for military use and laid out a base camp template involving soldiers living quarters, helicopter flight paths, ammunition holding areas and so on.

McClure explains how the Engineer Brigade were instructed "to merge construction assets and integrate them with the contractor, Brown & Root Services Corporation, to build not one but two base camps [the other is Camp Monteith] for a total of 7,000 troops."

According to McClure, "At the height of the effort, about 1,000 former US military personnel, hired by Brown & Root, along with more than 7,000 Albanian local nationals, joined the 1,700 military engineers. From early July and into October [1999], construction at both camps continued 24 hours a day, seven days a week."

Brown & Root Services provides all the support services to Camp Bondsteel. This includes 600,000 gallons of water per-day, enough electricity to supply a city of 25,000 and a supply centre with 14,000 product lines. It washes 1,200 bags of laundry, supplies 18,000 meals per day and operates 95 percent of the rail and airfield facilities. It also provides the camps firefighting service. Brown & Root are now the largest employers in Kosovo, with more than 5,000 local Kosovan Albanians and another 15,000 on its books.

Staff at Camp Bondsteel rarely venture outside the compound and their activities are secretive. Whilst other KFOR patrols are small and mobile with soldiers wearing soft caps and instructed to integrate with the local population, US military personnel leave Bondsteel in either helicopters or as part of infrequent but large heavily armed convoys.

In unnamed interviews US troops complain that hostility to their presence is growing as local inhabitants compare the investment in Camp Bondsteel with the continuing decline in their own living standards.

Those visiting Camp Bondsteel describe it as a journey through 100 years in time. The area surrounding the camp is extremely poor with an unemployment rate of 80 percent. Then Bondsteel appears on the horizon with its mass of communication satellites, antennae and menacing attack helicopters circling above. Brown & Root pay Kosova workers between $1 and $3 per hour. The local manager said wages were so low because, "We can't inflate the wages because we don't want to over inflate the local economy."

The escalating US presence at Bondsteel was accompanied by increased activity by the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA). Since its appearance most Serbs, Roma and Albanians opposed to the KLA have been murdered or driven out. Those remaining dare not leave their houses to buy food at the local stores and the need for military escorts stretch from children's swimming pools to tractors taken away for repair. According to observers the KLA continue to act with virtual impunity in the US sector despite the high tech military intelligence facilities at Bondsteel.

When US troops arrive at Camp Bondsteel, they are more likely to be met by a Brown & Root employee directing them to their accommodation and equipment areas. According to G. Cahlink in *Government Executive Magazine* (February 2002), "Army peace keepers joke that they're missing a patch on their camouflage fatigues. 'We need one that says *Sponsored by Brown & Root*,' says a staff sergeant, who, like more than nearly 10,000 soldiers in the region, has come to rely on Brown and Root Services, a Houston based contractor, for everything from breakfast to spare parts for armoured Humvees."

The contract to service Camp Bondsteel is the latest in a string of military contracts awarded to Brown & Root Services. Its fortunes have grown as US militarism has escalated. The company is part of the Halliburton Corporation, the largest supplier of products and services to the oil industry.

In 1992 Dick Cheney, as Secretary of Defence in the senior Bush administration, awarded the company a contract providing support for the US army's global operations. Cheney left politics and joined Halliburton as CEO between 1995 and 2000. He is now US vice president in the junior Bush administration. In 1992 Brown & Root built and maintained US army bases in Somalia earning $62 million. In 1994 Brown & Root built bases and support systems for 18,000 troops in Haiti doubling its earnings to $133 million. The company received a five-year support contract in 1999 worth $180 million per-year to build military facilities in Hungary,

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Croatia and Bosnia. It was Camp Bondsteel, however, that was dubbed "the mother of all contracts" by the Washington based Contract Services Association of America. There, "We do everything that does not require us to carry a gun," said Brown & Roots director David Capouya.

The aim of outsourcing military support and services to private contractors has been to free up more soldiers for combat duties. A US Department of Defence (DoD) review in 2001 insisted that the use of contractors would escalate: "Only those functions that must be done at DoD should be kept at DoD."

In sectors controlled by other Western powers, KFOR soldiers who are living in bombed out apartment blocks and old factories joke, "What are the two things that can be seen from space? One is the Great Wall of China, the other is Camp Bondsteel."

More seriously a senior British military officer told the *Washington Post*, "It is an obvious sign that the Americans are making a major commitment to the Balkan region and plan to stay." One analyst described the US as having taken advantage of favourable circumstances to create a base that would be large enough to accommodate future military plans.

Camp Bondsteel has become a key venue for important policy speeches by leading officials of the Bush administration.

On June 5, 2001 US Secretary of Defence Donald Rumsfeld explained to troops at Camp Bondsteel what role they played in the new administration's economic strategy. He declared, "How much should we spend on the armed services? ...My view is we don't spend on you, we invest in you. The men and women in the armed services are not a drain on our economic strength. Indeed you safeguard it. You're not a burden on our economy, you are the critical foundation for growth."

One month later, President George W. Bush made his first trip abroad to see US troops at the camp. He traveled directly from the Rome G8 summit, where tensions with European governments had come to the fore. In a speech described as a "retrenching" of the US in Europe, he insisted that US troops were in Kosovo to stay, had gone in together and would "leave together". In a break from normal procedure, in front of cheering troops, Bush signed into law a Congress-approved increase in military spending of $1.9 billion.

Since then Camp Bondsteel has continued to grow, as it spearheads the first phase in a realignment of US military bases in Europe and eastward. The Bondsteel template is now being applied in Afghanistan and the new bases in the former Soviet Republics.

According to leaked comments to the press, European politicians now believe that the US used the bombing of Yugoslavia specifically in order to establish Camp Bondsteel. Before the start of the NATO bombing of Yugoslavia in 1999, the *Washington Post* insisted, "With the Middle-East increasingly fragile, we will need bases and fly over rights in the Balkans to protect Caspian Sea oil."

The scale of US oil corporations investment in the exploitation of Caspian oil fields and the US government demand for the economy to be less dependent on imported oil, particularly from the Middle-East, demands a long term solution to the transportation of oil to European and US markets. The US Trade & Development Agency (TDA) has financed initial feasibility studies, with large grants, and more recently advanced technical studies for the New York based AMBO (Albania, Macedonia, Bulgaria Oil) Trans-Balkan pipeline.

Announcing a grant for an advanced technical study in 1999 for the AMBO oil pipeline through Bulgaria, Macedonia and Albania, TDA director J. Joseph Grandmaison declared, "The competition is fierce to tap energy resources in the Caspian region....Over the last year [1999], TDA has been actively promoting the development of multiple pipelines to connect these vast resources with Western markets. This grant represents a significant step forward for this policy and for US business interests in the Caspian region."

The $1.3 billion trans-Balkan AMBO pipeline is one of the most important of these multiple pipelines. It will pump oil from the tankers that bring it across the Black Sea to the Bulgarian oil terminus at Burgas, through Macedonia to the Albanian Adriatic port of Vlore. From there it will be pumped on to huge 300,000 ton tankers and sent on to Europe and the US, bypassing the Bosphorus Straits—the congested and only route out of the Black Sea where tankers are restricted to 150,000 tons.

The initial feasibility study for AMBO was conducted in 1995 by none other than Brown & Root, as was an updated feasibility study in 1999. In another twist, the former director of Oil & Gas Development for Europe and Africa for Brown & Root Energy Services, Ted Ferguson, was appointed as the new president of AMBO [1997] after the death of former president and founder of AMBO, Macedonian born Mr Vuko Tashkovikj.

According to a recent Reuters article, Ferguson declared that Exxon-Mobil and Chevron, two of the worlds largest oil corporations, are preparing to finance the AMBO project.

The building of AMBO risks antagonising Turkey, the US's main ally in the region. According to the Reagan Information Interchange, "While the United States is making an advantageous economic decision, it is overlooking its crucial strategic relationship with Turkey."

The US is also antagonising its European allies and Russia with Camp Bondsteel and other smaller military bases run alongside the proposed AMBO pipeline route. It has been built near the mouth of the Presevo valley and energy Corridor 8, which the European Union has sponsored since 1994 and regards as a strategic route east-west for global trade.

In April 1999, British General Michael Jackson, the commander in Macedonia during the NATO bombing of Serbia, explained to the Italian paper *Sole 24 Ore* "Today, the circumstances which we have created here have changed. Today, it is absolutely necessary to guarantee the stability of Macedonia and its entry into NATO. But we will certainly remain here a long time so that we can also guarantee the security of the energy corridors which traverse this country."

The newspaper added, "It is clear that Jackson is referring to the 8th corridor, the East-West axis which ought to be combined to the pipeline bringing energy resources from Central Asia to terminals in the Black Sea and in the Adriatic, connecting Europe with Central Asia. That explains why the great and medium sized powers, and first of all Russia, don't want to be excluded from the settling of scores that will take place over the next few months in the Balkans."

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