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Review

The Rubicon: the point of no return

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Crossing the Rubicon

The Decline of the American Empire at the End of the Age of Oil

By Michael C. Ruppert

New Society, 674 pages, \$22.95

December 4, 2004—By marching his forces across that most infamous of rivers, the Rubicon, and into Rome, Julius Caesar not only trampled on its constitution, but sowed the seeds for fascism centuries later. Now, with *Crossing the Rubicon*, Michael Ruppert, founder of FromTheWilderness.com, implores us to make an about-face on our own march toward the system of governance on which even Mussolini bestowed the alias, “corporatism.”

Like five other recent books (and crucial web site drydipstick.com), *Crossing the Rubicon* outlines how the world’s supply of oil will trickle to a stop over the next 20 years. Its inevitability, though, hadn’t been written in stone during the ‘90s, when oilfields around the Caspian Sea valued at \$6 trillion were discovered. Then, when the Taliban conquered Kabul, the order they instilled provided fertile ground for a company like Unocal to build a pipeline through Afghanistan.

However, when dry holes were reported in the Caspian oilfields, the US decided it needed to nail down the availability of known reserves in Saudi Arabia and Iraq. Then, besides throwing their support behind al Qaeda, the Taliban banned poppies, threatening US markets, which, Ruppert maintains, are propped up by drug money. Afghanistan thus became ripe for an invasion planned before 9/11.

In the early going, Ruppert’s use of vague phrases like “was connected to,” “somehow involved,” and “implicated in,” subvert his attempts to establish his authority. Oddly enough, it’s the chapter on that stalwart of conspiracy theorists, erratic naval intelligence officer Mike Vreeland, whose warnings about 9/11 went unheeded, where the author wins one’s confidence. His refusal to discount Vreeland as just a con man and instead pan his shtick for intelligence gold turns out to be typical of how the author not only out-savvies, but outworks, any journalist this side of Seymour Hersh.

When he was a police officer, Ruppert learned that physical evidence—seldom as cut and dried as in television’s crime scene kingdom—tended to bore juries. Leaving questions like whether Flight 77 or a missile struck the Pentagon for others, he and his From The Wilderness researchers not only conduct interviews, but pore over official documents, newspaper accounts, and TV reportage.

While, many of us have heard about the Project for a New American Century’s lust for a new Pearl Harbor to open the floodgates for military intervention, we know little about Dick Cheney’s US National Energy Policy Development Group. Extrapolating from the few documents the conservative watchdog Judicial Watch was able to secure under the Freedom of Information Act, Ruppert maintains that in April 2001 the NEPDG signed off on plans to cross the Rubicon—that is, secure what oil remains by facilitating attacks on the US.

Next Cheney was placed in charge of all response to a terror attack, including control of FEMA. A month later most of the decision-making power to scramble NORAD fighter jets was taken out of the hands of commanders and remanded to the secretary of defense. Then when the depth of the Caspian Basin's inadequacy became known, engendering fears of a market crash, plans for the attack were put in action before they were finalized, thus accounting for mistakes in execution and cover-up.

While Ruppert provides no smoking gun, you watch with lurid fascination as the pieces fall into place with such precision that the tumbler in your brain clicks, the lock opens, and the scenario is admitted. Ruppert's coup is discovering, as many now know, that it's the war games, stupid.

On September 11, NORAD, the FAA, the Canadian Air Force, and the National Reconnaissance Office were conducting as many as five war-game drills. Not only were fighters diverted from the northeast US, but the insertion of blips simulating emergencies onto radar screens bewitched air traffic controllers lost in the fog of war games. Ruppert discounts the likelihood of a stand-down order to fighter pilots, because, as he reminds us, they're constitutionally incapable of remaining in a holding pattern while their country is attacked.

As for the hijackers, Ruppert theorizes that, other than the "muscle," they were CIA assets too valuable to lose. Lest you think that the remote control he suggests guided the planes is the realm of fantasy, refer to the unmanned X-43A jet with which, as of this writing, NASA is attempting to set a speed record.

By exploring the links between Wall Street and the CIA and emphasizing the influence of overlords like the Trilateral Commission and the Council on Foreign Relations, Ruppert encourages us to look beyond the current administration. For this alone we owe him a debt of gratitude: Four more years of hating the dynamic duo could have almost as debilitating an effect on us as their policies. Besides, as Ruppert says, ". . . you will change nothing until you change the way money works."

Thus does momentum build for a criminal inquiry that survivors of 9/11, family members, and a World Trade Center-site triage physician seek from Eliot Spitzer. Meanwhile, 911truth.org has revealed that a firefighter witnessed the discovery of black (yellow actually) boxes at the WTC site. Then, on November 1, Alexander Cockburn and Jeffrey St. Clair published a blockbuster article on Counterpunch.org: "How Bush Was Offered Bin Laden and Blew It" (by the Taliban, on multiple occasions). Most recently, Kevin Ryan of the National Institute of Standards and Technology has questioned the belief that fuel fires caused the World Trade Tower beams to buckle.

Crossing the Rubicon is one of those rare books capable of ruining a reviewer's credibility by seducing the superlatives out of him. It is, however, open to another interpretation. Sure, Cheney accords Halliburton hallowed-ground status. But to many, the American way of life, which Cheney declares is "not negotiable," is an end that more than justifies the means, however untidy.

Russ Wellen has also written for *The New York Press* and CounterPunch. Visit him at Running Commentary.