

The Rock That Changed the World

by Glenn Mesaros

Uranium: War, Energy, and the Rock that Shaped the World

by Tom Zoellner

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Shortly after President Harry S. Truman dropped two atomic bombs on Japan in August, 1945, he invited Manhattan Project scientist Robert Oppenheimer to the Oval Office.

"When will the Russians be able to build the bomb?" Truman asked.

"I don't know," said Oppenheimer.

"I know," insisted Truman.

"When?" asked Oppenheimer.

"Never." claimed Harry S Truman.

Oppenheimer then remarked that some of his scientists felt they had blood on their hands as a result of the atomic bombs. An infuriated Truman pulled out his handkerchief and handed it to Oppenheimer.

"Here," Truman said, "Would you like to wipe the blood off your hands?"

After Oppenheimer left, Truman instructed an aide, "I don't want to see that son of a bitch in here ever again." The Russians exploded their first atomic bomb on August 29, 1949, four years before the newly created CIA forecast.

* * *

Uranium traces the modern history of this heavy metal in the 20th Century as the critical component of nuclear energy. Author Tom Zoellner especially goes into the U.S. development of African sources of uranium in the Manhattan Project, and then develops the postwar story of the international race to create nuclear bombs and peaceful nuclear energy. In his conclusion, Zoellner documents the current "renaissance" of nuclear energy development in third world countries as the only energy source that can satisfy growing demand of electricity.

Zoellner is a layman who is very familiar with the science of nuclear energy, but less so with the geopolitics surrounding it. His anecdotal approach to the subject is interesting and useful.

However, Zoellner relates the fascinating story above, without realizing the stunning and insulting arrogance of Truman against America's leading scientists; Truman dropped their bomb on Japan as a geopolitical attack on Russia.

That little person, Harry S Truman, believed the fairy tale when his "experts" told him that uranium was so scarce that the Russians could never get enough of it to build an atomic bomb.

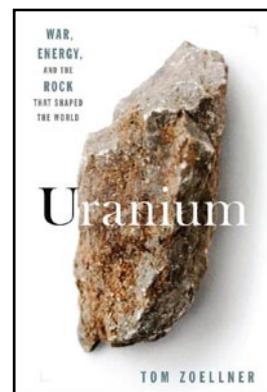
Contrary to the little Truman, President Franklin Delano Roosevelt had thrived on conflicting advice, and played different factions of the Federal government against each other to determine what was really going on. At the beginning of his Presidency in 1933, Roosevelt developed a system of "chits," which are like today's "e-mails." He filled out little slips of paper asking questions such as "Please find out about Finland's financial position," or, "Did the Silver Purchase Act of 1890 raise prices?" and he directed them to the various departments, accumulating the responses in his a great repository of knowledge (*The Roosevelt Omnibus*, 1934).

Deep in the Geopolitical Wells

Zoellner situates the "nuclear age" within the constructs of H.G. Wells, who when he learned about the potential of atomic energy from British scientists, wrote a science fiction novel about it in 1914. Titled *The World Set Free*, Wells's book perpetrated the classic British Empire geopolitics of "the Free Nations Vs. Central Powers," before World War I had even started. Wells's novel has both sides using "atomic bombs" to destroy Europe. A heroic King Egbert rallies a council of nations to safeguard the rare atomic element, calling it "Carolinum," and saves civilization from further destruction.

Apparently, Zoellner is not aware that the British Empire deployed a stable of such geopolitical "authors," whose job entailed "shaping" public opinion along desired geopolitical ends.

What were the geopolitical ends of the British Empire? The "free nations"



must safeguard dangerous technologies from "unstable" powers.

Although Zoellner does not quite realize the shaped charges of these geopolitics, he remarks later in the book that the George W. Bush war on Iraq stemmed from deliberately contrived false intelligence that Saddam Hussein had procured the dangerous uranium material from Niger: President Bush told us on January 28, 2003 that the "British government has learned that Saddam Hussein recently sought significant quantities of uranium from Africa."

Why did those "unreliable" French allies oppose the Bush War? Because, the author says, they have controlled the Niger uranium shipments for over 40 years, and knew that such a deal with Iraq was impossible. The CIA sent a now-famous agent named Wilson to Niger to confirm this.

The Uranium Club

The author also tells us the important story of Rio Tinto Zinc in forming a Uranium Club, or cartel, in 1972, when various uranium suppliers, sans the United States, met in Paris. They included Canada (33.5 percent), South Africa (23.75 percent), Australia (17 percent), France (21.75 percent), and Rio Tinto Zinc (4 percent). The astute observer will note that all these club members, except France, were members of the British Commonwealth.

Zoellner writes, "The presence of the Rio Tinto company among this breadline of sovereign nations was a reminder of ... the matchless reach of Rio Tinto, which tended to behave as though it was a wholly owned subsidiary of the British throne ... [and shareholder] Queen Elizabeth II herself, via a secret account

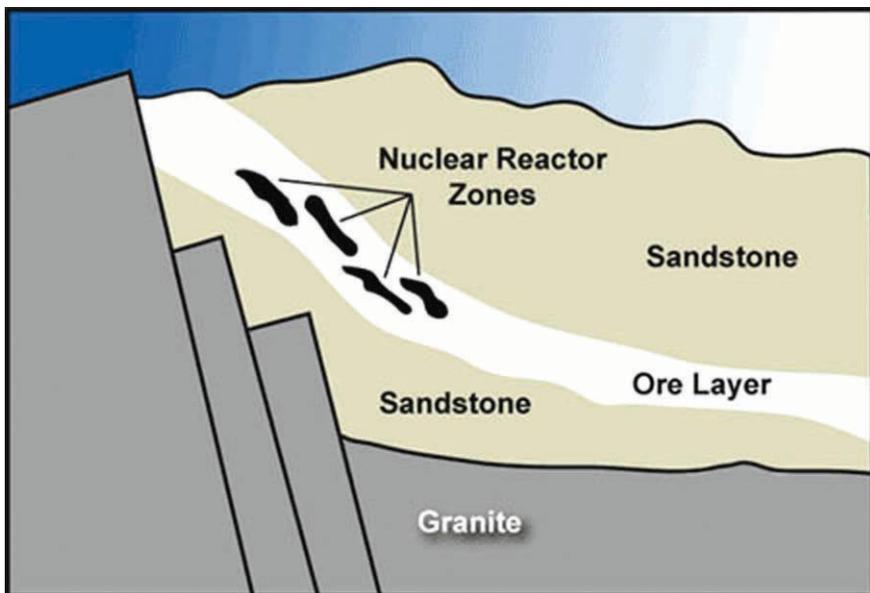


Diagram of one of the natural nuclear reactors found in Oklo, Gabon.

at the Bank of England.”

This sheds some needed light on the role of Her Majesty in international skullduggery. Rio Tinto chairman Sir Val Duncan built up a network of railways, ports, and mills to extract minerals from Britain’s former colonial possessions. Its web of affiliate companies was a closely guarded secret, its ownership records kept inside a four-inch thick book known within the company as “the Bible.”

Sir Duncan’s employees included Anthony Eden, who became Defense Secretary, and Lord Peter Carrington, who became Secretary of State for Energy during the Wilson administration. When political chaos engulfed Wilson in 1974, Sir Val Duncan remarked at a dinner party: “When anarchy comes, we are going to provide a lot of essential generators to keep electricity going. Then the army will play its proper role.”

As Zoellner elucidates, a result of this uranium cartel arrangement, its members established a floor price of \$5.40 a pound, which translated into \$8 for actual end-use buyers, such as Westinghouse, which were nearly bankrupted by the arrangement, and sued the Uranium Club members for price fixing. However, uranium prices then climbed to as high as \$23 a pound, and the group disbanded, its work accomplished.

Zoellner’s story is a small but useful example of how the British Empire

controls raw materials through interlocking directorates in Rio Tinto, Anglo-American, De Beers, and various other entities.

Nuclear Renaissance, Yes!

The book end with a chapter on the current Nuclear Renaissance, where various nations are ramping up nuclear energy after a 25-year hiatus engineered by the carefully generated anti-nuclear hysteria of the 1970s. Zoellner interviewed the Minister of Electricity in Yemen, a desert country appended to Saudi Arabia, which has no oil. The minister told him that there is not a single city in the developing world that is not trying for a huge increase in nuclear power. “There is no doubt, my friend, that the nuclear industry is now living in a renaissance.”

Zoellner notes that World Nuclear Association, located in London, claims that the world will build as many as 8,000 reactors in the 21st Century, up from the current total of 440. There are many new technologies now available, he says, including Thorium and Pebble Bed Reactors, which cannot be used for destructive purposes.

Zoellner even quotes Nancy Pelosi as now willing to include nuclear power in any energy mix. He also names James Lovelock, the famous British Gaia scientist, who is a founder of the Environmentalists for Nuclear Energy, and who says that opposition to nuclear energy

is based on irrational fear fed by Hollywood style fiction, the Green Lobbies, and the media.

Zoellner concludes by relating Manhattan Project scientist George Cowan’s discussion of the startling discovery of a natural nuclear reactor in the French colony uranium mines of Gabon, Africa. French chemists had noticed back in 1972 that the fissionable U-235 component of this uranium was less than the 0.7202 percent (the rest being the isotope U-238), which had been constant in all known uranium rocks. Sandwiched between sandstone and granite, and sloping at enough angle to allow water to drain through it, this rock formation at Oklo, Gabon, had formed a natural nuclear reaction 2 billion years ago, which had reduced the fissionable U-235 content to 0.7171 percent, a significant difference.

Cowan thus states, “In the design of fission reactors, man was not an innovator, but an unwitting imitator of nature.”

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