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The Anti-Empire Report #148

By William Blum

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“Why, sometimes I’ve believed as many as six impossible things before breakfast.” – Alice in Wonderland

Since Yalta, we have a long list of times we’ve tried to engage positively with Russia. We have a relatively short list of successes in that regard. – *General James Mattis, the new Secretary of Defense*

If anyone knows where to find this long list please send me a copy.

This delusion is repeated periodically by American military officials. A year ago, following the release of Russia’s new national security document, naming as threats both the United States and the expansion of the NATO alliance, a Pentagon spokesman declared: “They have no reason to consider us a threat. We are not looking for conflict with Russia.”

Meanwhile, in early January, the United States embarked upon its biggest military buildup in Europe since the end of the Cold War – 3,500 American soldiers landed, unloading three shiploads, with 2,500 tanks, trucks and other combat vehicles. The troops were to be deployed in Poland, Romania, Bulgaria, Germany, Hungary and across the Baltics. Lt. Gen. Frederick

Hodges, commander of US forces in Europe, said, “Three years after the last American tanks left the continent, we need to get them back.”

The measures, General Hodges declared, were a “response to Russia’s invasion of Ukraine and the illegal annexation of Crimea. This does not mean that there necessarily has to be a war, none of this is inevitable, but Moscow is preparing for the possibility.” (See previous paragraph.)

This January 2017 buildup, we are told, is in response to a Russian action in Crimea of January 2014. The alert reader will have noticed that critics of Russia in recent years, virtually without exception, condemn Moscow’s Crimean action and typically nothing else. Could that be because they have nothing else to condemn about Russia’s foreign policy? At the same time they invariably fail to point out what preceded the Russian action – the overthrow, with Washington’s indispensable help, of the democratically-elected, Moscow-friendly Ukrainian government, replacing it with an anti-Russian, neo-fascist (literally) regime, complete with Nazi salutes and swastika-like symbols.

Ukraine and Georgia, both of which border Russia, are all that’s left to complete the US/NATO encirclement. And when the US overthrew the government of Ukraine, why shouldn’t Russia have been alarmed as the circle was about to close yet tighter? Even so, the Russian military appeared in Ukraine only in Crimea, where the Russians already had a military base with the approval of the Ukrainian government. No one could have blocked Moscow from taking over all of Ukraine if they wanted to.

Yet, the United States is right. Russia is a threat. A threat to American world dominance. And Americans can’t shake their upbringing. Here’s veteran National Public Radio newscaster Cokie Roberts bemoaning Trump’s stated desire to develop friendly relations with Russia: “This country has had a consistent policy for 70 years towards the Soviet Union and Russia, and Trump is trying to undo that.” Heavens! Nuclear war would be better than that!

Fake news, fake issue

The entire emphasis has been on whether a particular news item is factually correct or incorrect. However, that is not the main problem with mainstream media. A news item can be factually correct and still be very biased and misleading because of what’s been left out, such as the relevant information about the Russian “invasion” of Crimea mentioned above. But when it comes to *real fake news* it’s difficult to top the CIA’s record in Latin America as revealed by Philip Agee, the leading whistleblower of all time.

Agee spent 12 years (1957-69) as a CIA case officer, most of it in Latin America. His first book, *Inside the Company: CIA Diary*, published in 1974 revealed how it was a common Agency tactic to write editorials and phoney news stories to be knowingly published by Latin American media with no indication of the CIA authorship or CIA payment to the particular media. The propaganda value of such a “news” item might be multiplied by being picked up by other CIA stations in Latin America who would disseminate it through a CIA-owned news agency or a

CIA-owned radio station. Some of these stories made their way back to the United States to be read or heard by unknowing North Americans.

The Great Wall of Mr. T

So much cheaper. So much easier. So much more humane. So much more popular. ... Just stop overthrowing or destabilizing governments south of the border.

And the United States certainly has a moral obligation to do this. So many of the immigrants are escaping a situation in their homeland made hopeless by American intervention and policy. The particularly severe increase in Honduran migration to the US in recent years is a direct result of the June 28, 2009 military coup that overthrew the democratically-elected president, Manuel Zelaya, after he did things like raising the minimum wage, giving subsidies to small farmers, and instituting free education. The coup – like so many others in Latin America – was led by a graduate of Washington’s infamous School of the Americas.

As per the standard Western Hemisphere script, the Honduran coup was followed by the abusive policies of the new regime, loyally supported by the United States. The State Department was virtually alone in the Western Hemisphere in not unequivocally condemning the Honduran coup. Indeed, the Obama administration refused to even call it a coup, which, under American law, would tie Washington’s hands as to the amount of support it could give the coup government. This denial of reality continued to exist even though a US embassy cable released by Wikileaks in 2010 declared: “There is no doubt that the military, Supreme Court and National Congress conspired on June 28 [2009] in what constituted an illegal and unconstitutional coup against the Executive Branch”. Washington’s support of the far-right Honduran government has continued ever since.

In addition to Honduras, Washington overthrew progressive governments which were sincerely committed to fighting poverty in Guatemala and Nicaragua; while in El Salvador the US played a major role in suppressing a movement striving to install such a government. And in Mexico, over the years the US has been providing training, arms, and surveillance technology to Mexico’s police and armed forces to better their ability to suppress their own people’s aspirations, as in Chiapas in 1994, and this has added to the influx of the oppressed to the United States, irony notwithstanding.

Moreover, Washington’s North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), has brought a flood of cheap, subsidized US agricultural products into Mexico, ravaging campesino communities and driving many Mexican farmers off the land when they couldn’t compete with the giant from the north. The subsequent Central American Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA) brought the same joys to the people of that area.

These “free trade” agreements – as they do all over the world – also resulted in government enterprises being privatized, the regulation of corporations being reduced, and cuts to the social budget. Add to this the displacement of communities by foreign mining projects and the drastic

US-led militarization of the War on Drugs with accompanying violence and you have the perfect storm of suffering followed by the attempt to escape from suffering.

It's not that all these people prefer to live in the United States. They'd much rather remain with their families and friends, be able to speak their native language at all times, and avoid the hardships imposed on them by American police and other right-wingers.

Mr. T., if one can read him correctly – not always an easy task – insists that he's opposed to the hallmark of American foreign policy: regime change. If he would keep his Yankee hands off political and social change in Mexico and Central America and donate as compensation a good part of the billions to be spent on his Great Wall to those societies, there could be a remarkable reduction in the never-ending line of desperate people clawing their way northward.

Murders: Putin and Clintons

Amongst the many repeated denunciations of Russian president Vladimir Putin is that he can't be trusted because he spent many years in the Soviet secret intelligence service, the KGB.

Well, consider that before he became the US president George HW Bush was the head of the CIA.

Putin, we are also told, has his enemies murdered.

But consider the case of Seth Rich, the 27-year-old Democratic National Committee staffer who was shot dead on a Washington, DC street last July.

On August 9, in an interview on the Dutch television program Nieuwsuur, Julian Assange seemed to suggest rather clearly that Seth Rich was the source for the Wikileaks-exposed DNC emails and was murdered for it.

Julian Assange: "Our whistleblowers go to significant efforts to get us material and often face very significant risks. A 27-year-old that works for the DNC, was shot in the back, murdered just a few weeks ago for unknown reasons, as he was walking down the street in Washington, D.C."

Reporter: "That was just a robbery, I believe. Wasn't it?"

Julian Assange: "No. There's no finding. So ... I'm suggesting that our sources take risks." (See also *Washington Post*, January 19, 2017)

But ... but ... that was Russian hacking, wasn't it? Not a leak, right?

If you've been paying attention over the years, you know that many other murders have been attributed to the Clintons, beginning in Arkansas. But Bill and Hillary I'm sure are not guilty of all of them. (Google "murders connected clintons.")

America's frightening shortage of weapons

President Trump signed an executive order Friday to launch what he called "a 'great rebuilding of the Armed Forces' that is expected to include new ships, planes, weapons and the modernization of the U.S. nuclear arsenal."

This is something regularly advocated by American military and civilian leaders.

I ask them all the same question: Can you name a foreign war that the United States has ever lost due to an insufficient number of ships, planes, tanks, bombs, guns, or ammunition, or nuclear arsenal? Or because what they had was outdated, against an enemy with more modern weapons?

That tired old subject

Senator Jeff Sessions, Donald Trump's pick for Attorney General, declared two years ago: "Ultimately, freedom of speech is about ascertaining the truth. And if you don't believe there's a truth, you don't believe in truth, if you're an utter secularist, then how do we operate this government? How can we form a democracy of the kind I think you and I believe in ... I do believe that we are a nation that, without God, there is no truth, and it's all about power, ideology, advancement, agenda, not doing the public service."

So ... if one is an atheist or agnostic one is not inclined toward public service. This of course is easily disproved by all the atheists and agnostics who work for different levels of government and numerous non-profit organizations involved in all manner of social, poverty, peace and environmental projects.

Who is the more virtuous – the believer who goes to church and does good deeds because he hopes to be rewarded by God or at least not be punished by God, or the non-believer who lives a very moral life because it disturbs him to act cruelly and it is in keeping with the kind of world he wants to help create and live in? Remember, the God-awful (no pun intended) war in Iraq was started by a man who goes through all the motions of a very religious person.

Christopher Hitchens, in 2007, in response to conservative columnist Michael Gerson's article, "What Atheists Can't Answer", wrote: "How insulting is the latent suggestion of his position: the appalling insinuation that I would not know right from wrong if I was not supernaturally guided by a celestial dictatorship ... simply assumes, whether or not religion is metaphysically 'true', that at least it stands for morality. ... Here is my challenge. Let Gerson name one ethical statement made or one ethical action performed by a believer that could not have been uttered or done by a nonbeliever."

Gerson, it should be noted, was the chief speechwriter for the aforementioned very religious person, George W. Bush, for five years, including when Bush invaded Iraq.

Phil Ochs

I was turning the pages of the *Washington Post's* Sunday (January 29) feature section, Outlook, not finding much of particular interest, when to my great surprise I was suddenly hit with a long story about Phil Ochs. Who's Phil Ochs? many of you may ask, for the folksinger died in 1976 at the age of 35.

The *Post's* motivation in devoting so much space to a symbol of the American anti-war left appears to be one more example of the paper's serious displeasure with Donald Trump. The article is entitled "Phil Ochs is the obscure '60s folk singer we need today".

My favorite song of his, among many others, is "I ain't marching anymore":

Oh I marched to the battle of New Orleans
At the end of the early British war
The young land started growing
The young blood started flowing
But I ain't marchin' anymore

For I've killed my share of Indians
In a thousand different fights
I was there at the Little Big Horn
I heard many men lying, I saw many more dying
But I ain't marchin' anymore

(chorus)
It's always the old to lead us to the war
It's always the young to fall
Now look at all we've won with the saber and the gun
Tell me is it worth it all?

For I stole California from the Mexican land
Fought in the bloody Civil War
Yes I even killed my brothers
And so many others
But I ain't marchin' anymore

For I marched to the battles of the German trench
In a war that was bound to end all wars
Oh I must have killed a million men

And now they want me back again
But I ain't marchin' anymore

(chorus)

For I flew the final mission in the Japanese sky
Set off the mighty mushroom roar
When I saw the cities burning I knew that I was learning That I ain't marchin' anymore

Now the labor leader's screamin'
when they close the missile plants,
United Fruit screams at the Cuban shore,
Call it "Peace" or call it "Treason,"
Call it "Love" or call it "Reason,"
But I ain't marchin' any more,
No, I ain't marchin' any more