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## American Foreign Policy – Have our war lovers learned anything?

### The Anti-Empire Report #113

<http://williamblum.org/aer/read/113>

By William Blum –

February 7th, 2013

Over the past four decades, of all the reasons people over a certain age have given for their becoming radicalized against US foreign policy, the Vietnam War has easily been the one most often cited. And I myself am the best example of this that you could find. I sometimes think that if the war lovers who run the United States had known of this in advance they might have had serious second thoughts about starting that great historical folly and war crime.

At other times, however, I have the thought that our dear war lovers have had 40 years to take this lesson to heart, and during this time what did they do? They did Salvador and Nicaragua, and Angola and Grenada. They did Panama and Yugoslavia, and Afghanistan and Iraq. And in 2012 American President Barack Obama saw fit to declare that the Vietnam War was “one of the most extraordinary stories of bravery and integrity in the annals of military history”. <sup>1</sup>

So, have they learned nothing? When it comes to following international law, is the United States like a failed state? The Somalia of international law? Well, if they were perfectly frank, the war lovers would insist that the purpose of all these interventions, and many others like them,

was to keep the atheists out of power – the non-believers in America’s god-given right to rule the world – or to at least make life as difficult as possible for them. And thus the interventions were successful; nothing to apologize for; even the Vietnam War achieved its purpose of preventing that country from becoming a good development option for Asia, a socialist alternative to the capitalist model; precisely the same reason for Washington’s endless hostility toward Cuba in Latin America; and Cuba has indeed inspired numerous atheists and their alternatives for a better world.

If they were even more honest, the war lovers might quote George Kennan, the legendary State Department strategist, who wrote prophetically during the Cold War: “Were the Soviet Union to sink tomorrow under the waters of the ocean, the American military-industrial establishment would have to go on, substantially unchanged, until some other adversary could be invented. Anything else would be an unacceptable shock to the American economy.” 2

But after all these years, after decades of American militarism – though not a day passes without some government official or media acolyte expressing his admiration and gratitude for “our brave boys” – cracks in the American edifice can be seen. Some of the war lovers, and their TV groupies would have us believe that they have actually learned something. One of the first was Secretary of Defense Robert Gates in February 2011: “In my opinion, any future defense secretary who advises the president to again send a big American land army into Asia or into the Middle East or Africa should have his head examined.”

And here’s former Secretary of State George Shultz speaking before the prestigious Council of Foreign Relations last month (January 29): “Iraq and Afghanistan cannot be the template for how we go about” dealing with threats of terrorism.

A few days earlier the very establishment and conservative *Economist* magazine declared: “The best-intentioned foreign intervention is bound to bog its armies down in endless wars fighting invisible enemies to help ungrateful locals.”

However, none of these people are in power. And does history offer any example of a highly militaristic power – without extreme coercion – seeing the error of its ways? One of my readers, who prefers to remain anonymous, wrote to me recently:

It is my opinion that the German and Japanese people only relinquished their imperial culture and mindset when they were bombed back to the stone age at the end of WWII. Something similar is the only cure for the same pathology that now is embedded into the very social fabric of the USA. The USA is a full-blown pathological society now. There is no other cure. No amount of articles on the Internet pointing out the hypocrisies or war crimes will do it.

So, while the United States is busy building bases and anti-missile sites in Europe, Asia and Africa, deploying space-based and other hi-tech weapons systems, trying to surround Russia, China, Iran and any other atheist that threatens American world hegemony, and firing drone missiles all over the Middle East I’m busy playing games on the Internet. What can I say? In theory at least, there is another force besides the terrible bombing mentioned above that can stop

the American empire, and that is the American people. I'll continue trying to educate them. Too bad I won't live long enough to see the glorious transformation.

## **Afghanistan: Manufacturing the American Legacy**

“A decade ago, playing music could get you maimed in Afghanistan. Today, a youth ensemble is traveling to the Kennedy Center and Carnegie Hall. And it even includes girls.”

Thus reads the sub-heading of a *Washington Post* story of February 3 about an orchestra of 48 Afghan young people who attended music school in a country where the Taliban have tried to silence both women and music. “The Afghan Youth Orchestra is more than a development project,” the article informs us. For “the school’s many international donors, it serves as a powerful symbol of successful reconstruction in Afghanistan. And by performing in Washington and New York, the seats of U.S. political and financial power, the orchestra hopes to showcase what a decade of investment has achieved.”

“The U.S. State Department, the World Bank, the Carnegie Corporation and Afghanistan’s Ministry of Education have invested heavily in the tour. The U.S. Embassy in Kabul awarded nearly \$350,000 footing most of the estimated \$500,000 cost. For international donors, the tour symbolizes progress in a country crippled by war.”

The State Department’s director of communications and public diplomacy for Afghanistan and Pakistan declares: “We wanted Americans to understand the difference their tax dollars have made in building a better future for young people, which translates into reduced threats from extremists in the region.”

“There’s a lot of weariness in the U.S. and cynicism about Afghanistan,” said William Harvey, an American violinist who teaches at the school, where 35 of 141 students are girls. “What are we doing there? What can be achieved? These concerts answer those questions in the strongest way possible: Cooperation between Afghanistan and the international community has made it safe for young girls and boys to learn music.”

There can be no question that for the sad country of Afghanistan all this is welcome news. There can also be little doubt that a beleaguered and defensive US foreign policy establishment will seek to squeeze out as much favorable publicity as possible from these events. On the issue of the severe oppression of women and girls in Afghanistan, defenders of the US occupation of that desperate land would have you believe that the United States is the last great hope of those poor females. However, you will not be reminded that in the 1980s the United States played an indispensable role in the overthrow of a secular and relatively progressive Afghan government, one which endeavored to grant women much more freedom than they’ll ever have under the current Karzai-US government, more probably than ever again. Here are some excerpts from a 1986 US Army manual on Afghanistan discussing the policies of this government concerning women:

- “provisions of complete freedom of choice of marriage partner, and fixation of the minimum age at marriage at 16 for women and 18 for men”

- “abolished forced marriages”
- “bring [women] out of seclusion, and initiate social programs”
- “extensive literacy programs, especially for women”
- “putting girls and boys in the same classroom”;
- “concerned with changing gender roles and giving women a more active role in politics”.

3

The US-led overthrow of this government paved the way for the coming to power of Islamic fundamentalist forces, which led directly to the awful Taliban. And why did the United States in its infinite wisdom choose to do such a thing? Because the Afghan government was allied with the Soviet Union and Washington wanted to draw the Russians into a hopeless military quagmire – “We now have the opportunity of giving to the Soviet Union its Vietnam War”, said Zbigniew Brzezinski, President Carter’s National Security Adviser. 4

The women of Afghanistan will never know how the campaign to raise them to the status of full human beings would have turned out, but this, some might argue, is but a small price to pay for a marvelous Cold War victory.

## **Guantánamo Bay**

People on the left never tire of calling for the closing of the US prison at Guantánamo Bay, Cuba. The fact that President Obama made the closing a promise of his 2008 campaign and repeated it again in the White House, while the prison still remains in operation, is seen as a serious betrayal. But each time I read about this I’m struck by the same thought: The horror of Guantánamo is not its being open, not its mere existence. Its horror lies in its being the site of more than 10 years of terrible abuse of human beings. If the prison is closed and all its inmates are moved to another prison, and the abuses continue, what would have been accomplished? How would the cause of human rights be benefitted? I think that activists should focus on the abuses, regardless of the location.

## **The War on Terror – They’re really getting serious about it now**

For disseminating classified materials that exposed war crimes, Julian Assange is now honored as an official terrorist as only America can honor. *We Shall Never Forget 9/11, Vol. II: The True Faces of Evil - Terror*, a graphic coloring novel for children, which comes with several pages of perforated, detachable “terrorist trading cards”. Published by Really Big Coloring Books Inc. in St. Louis, the cards include Assange, Timothy McVeigh, Jared Lee Loughner, Ted Kaczynski, Maj. Nidal Hasan, Bill Ayers, and others. 5

## **Superpower – the film**

Starring Noam Chomsky, Chalmers Johnson, Michel Chossudovsky, Karen Kwiatkowski (Pentagon “defector”), William Blum, Sergei Khrushchev (son of Nikita), Kathy Kelly, and many others: <https://vimeo.com/55141496> (enter password when prompted:

The eagerly awaited (I can name at least three people) new book by William Blum is here at last. “America’s Deadliest Export – Democracy: The Truth About US Foreign Policy and Everything Else” is made up of essays which are a combination of new and old; combined, updated, expanded; many first appeared in one form or another in the Anti-Empire Report, or on my website, at various times during the past ten years or so.

As mentioned in the book, activists like myself are sometimes scoffed at for saying the same old things to the same old people; just spinning our wheels, we’re told, “preaching to the choir” or “preaching to the converted”. But long experience as speaker, writer and activist in the area of foreign policy tells me it just ain’t so. From the questions and comments I regularly get from my audiences, via email and in person, I can plainly see that there are numerous significant information gaps and misconceptions in the choir’s thinking, often leaving them unable to see through the newest government lie or propaganda trick; they’re unknowing or forgetful of what happened in the past that illuminates the present; or knowing the facts but unable to apply them at the appropriate moment; vulnerable to being led astray by the next person who offers a specious argument that opposes what they currently believe, or think they believe; and, perhaps worst of all, many of them suffer pathetically from an over-abundance of conspiracy thinking, often carrying a justified suspicion or idea to a ridiculous level; virtually nothing is taken at face value.

The choir needs to be frequently reminded and enlightened to be better able to influence others, to be better activists.

To order a signed copy directly from me you can go to my website: <http://killinghope.org>.

I’ll be speaking about the new book at *Politics and Prose* bookstore, 5015 Connecticut Ave., NW, in Washington, DC, Saturday, March 2 at 1 pm.

## Notes

1. May 28, 2012, speaking at the Vietnam War Memorial in Washington ↵
2. [George Kennan, Wikipedia entry](#) ↵
3. US Department of the Army, *Afghanistan, A Country Study* (1986), pp.121, 128, 130, 223, 232 (Library of Congress Call Number DS351.5 .A34 1986) ↵
4. [Zbigniew Brzezinski, Wikipedia entry](#) ↵
5. [View the press release; see the cards](#) ↵