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The Anti-Empire Report

Things which don't go away. Things the American government and media don't let go of. And neither do I.

by William Blum
September 1st, 2010

Iraq

"They're leaving as heroes. I want them to walk home with pride in their hearts," declared Col. John Norris, the head of a US Army brigade in Iraq. ¹

It's enough to bring tears to the eyes of an American, enough to make him choke up.

Enough to make him forget.

But no American should be allowed to forget that the nation of Iraq, the society of Iraq, have been destroyed, ruined, a failed state. The Americans, beginning 1991, bombed for 12 years, with one excuse or another; then invaded, then occupied, overthrew the government, killed wantonly, tortured ... the people of that unhappy land have lost everything — their homes, their schools, their electricity, their clean water, their environment, their neighborhoods, their mosques, their archaeology, their jobs, their careers, their professionals, their state-run

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enterprises, their physical health, their mental health, their health care, their welfare state, their women's rights, their religious tolerance, their safety, their security, their children, their parents, their past, their present, their future, their lives ... More than half the population either dead, wounded, traumatized, in prison, internally displaced, or in foreign exile ... The air, soil, water, blood and genes drenched with depleted uranium ... the most awful birth defects ... unexploded cluster bombs lie in wait for children to pick them up ... an army of young Islamic men went to Iraq to fight the American invaders; they left the country more militant, hardened by war, to spread across the Middle East, Europe and Central Asia ... a river of blood runs alongside the Euphrates and Tigris ... through a country that may never be put back together again.

"It is a common refrain among war-weary Iraqis that things were better before the U.S.-led invasion in 2003," reported the *Washington Post* on May 5, 2007.

No matter ... drum roll, please ... Stand tall American GI hero! And don't even *think* of ever apologizing. Iraq is forced by the United States to continue paying reparations for its own invasion of Kuwait in 1990. How much will the American heroes pay the people of Iraq?

"Unhappy the land that has no heroes ...
No. Unhappy the land that *needs* heroes."
– Bertolt Brecht, *Life of Galileo*

"What we need to discover in the social realm is the moral equivalent of war; something heroic that will speak to men as universally as war does, and yet will be as compatible with their spiritual selves as war has proved to be incompatible."
– William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*

Perhaps the groundwork for that heroism already exists ... February 15, 2003, a month before the US invasion of Iraq, probably the largest protest in human history, between six and ten million protesters took to the streets of some 800 cities in nearly sixty countries across the globe.

Iraq. Love it or leave it.

PanAm 103

The British government recently warned Libya against celebrating the one-year anniversary of Scotland's release of Abdel Baset al-Megrahi, the Libyan who's the only person ever convicted of the 1988 blowing up of PanAm flight 103 over Scotland, which took the lives of 270 largely Americans and British. Britain's Foreign Office has declared: "On this anniversary we understand the continuing anguish that al-Megrahi's release has caused his victims both in the U.K. and the U.S. He was convicted for the worst act of terrorism in British history. Any celebration of al-Megrahi's release would be tasteless, offensive and deeply insensitive to the victims' families."

John Brennan, President Obama's counter-terrorism adviser, stated that the United States has "expressed our strong conviction" to Scottish officials that Megrahi should not remain free. Brennan criticized what he termed the "unfortunate and inappropriate and wrong decision" to

allow Megrahi's return to Libya on compassionate grounds on Aug. 20, 2009 because he had cancer and was not expected to live more than about three months. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton issued a statement saying that the United States "continues to categorically disagree" with Scotland's decision to release Megrahi a year ago. "As we have expressed repeatedly to Scottish authorities, we maintain that Megrahi should serve out the entirety of his sentence in prison in Scotland." ² The US Senate has called for an investigation and family members of the crash victims have demanded that Megrahi's medical records be released. The Libyan's failure to die as promised has upset many people.

But how many of our wonderful leaders are upset that Abdel Baset al-Megrahi spent eight years in prison despite the fact that there was, and is, no evidence that he had anything to do with the bombing of flight 103? The Scottish court that convicted him knew he was innocent. To understand that just read their 2001 "Opinion of the Court", or read my analysis of it at killinghope.org/bblum6/panam.htm.

As to the British government being so upset about Libya celebrating Megrahi's release — keeping in mind that it strongly appears that UK oil deals with Libya played more of a role in his release than his medical condition did — we should remember that in July 1988 an American Navy ship in the Persian Gulf, the Vincennes, shot down an Iranian passenger plane, taking the lives of 290 people; i.e., more than died from flight 103. And while the Iranian people mourned their lost loved ones, the United States celebrated by handing out medals and ribbons to the captain and crew of the Vincennes. ³ The shootdown had another consequence: It inspired Iran to take revenge, which it did in December of that year, financing the operation to blow up PanAm 103 (carried out by the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine — General Command).

Why do they hate us?

Passions are flying all over the place concerning the proposed building of an Islamic cultural center and mosque two blocks from 9/11 Ground Zero in New York. Even people who are not particularly anti-Muslim think it would be in bad taste, offensive. But implicit in all the hostility is the idea that what happened on that fateful day in 2001 was a religious act, fanatic Muslims *acting as Muslims* attacking infidels. However — even if one accepts the official government version of 19 Muslims hijacking four airliners — the question remains: Why did they choose the targets they chose? If they wanted to kill lots of American infidels why not fly the planes into the stands of packed football or baseball stadiums in the midwest or the south? Certainly a lot less protected than the Pentagon or the financial center of downtown Manhattan. Why did they choose symbols of US military might and imperialism? Because it was not a religious act, it was a political act. It was revenge for decades of American political and military abuse in the Middle East. ⁴ It works the same all over the world. In the period of the 1950s to the 1980s in Latin America, in response to continuous hateful policies of Washington, there were countless acts of terrorism against American diplomatic and military targets as well as the offices of US corporations; nothing to do with religion.

Somehow, American leaders have to learn that their country is not exempt from history, that their actions have consequences.

Afghanistan

In their need to defend the US occupation of Afghanistan, many Americans have cited the severe oppression of women in that desperate land and would have you believe that the United States is the last great hope of those poor ladies. However, 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 government, more perhaps 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". ⁵

The overthrow of this government paved the way for the coming to power of an Islamic fundamentalist regime, followed by the awful Taliban. And why did the United States in its infinite wisdom choose to do such a thing? Mainly 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. ⁶

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.

Cuba

Why does the mainstream media routinely refer to Cuba as a dictatorship? Why is it not uncommon even for people on the left to do the same? I think that many of the latter do so in the belief that to say otherwise runs the risk of not being taken seriously, largely a vestige of the Cold War when Communists all over the world were ridiculed for following Moscow's party line. But what does Cuba do or lack that makes it a dictatorship? No "free press"? Apart from the question of how free Western media is, if that's to be the standard, what would happen if Cuba announced that from now on anyone in the country could own any kind of media? How long would it be before CIA money — secret and unlimited CIA money financing all kinds of fronts in Cuba — would own or control most of the media worth owning or controlling?

Is it "free elections" that Cuba lacks? They regularly have elections at municipal, regional and national levels. Money plays virtually no role in these elections; neither does party politics, including the Communist Party, since candidates run as individuals. ⁷ Again, what is the standard by which Cuban elections are to be judged? Most Americans, if they gave it any thought, might find it difficult to even imagine what a free and democratic election, without great concentrations of corporate money, would look like, or how it would operate. Would Ralph Nader finally be able to get on all 50 state ballots, take part in national television debates, and be able to match the two monopoly parties in media advertising? If that were the case, I think he'd probably win;

and that's why it's not the case. Or perhaps what Cuba lacks is our marvelous "electoral college" system, where the presidential candidate with the most votes is not necessarily the winner. If we really think this system is a good example of democracy why don't we use it for local and state elections as well?

Is Cuba a dictatorship because it arrests dissidents? Thousands of anti-war and other protesters have been arrested in the United States in recent years, as in every period in American history. Many have been beaten by police and mistreated while incarcerated. And remember: The United States is to the Cuban government like al Qaeda is to Washington, only much more powerful and much closer. Since the Cuban revolution, the United States and anti-Castro Cuban exiles in the US have inflicted upon Cuba greater damage and greater loss of life than what happened in New York and Washington on September 11, 2001. (This is documented by Cuba in a 1999 suit against the United States detailing \$181.1 billion in compensation for victims: the death of 3,478 Cubans and the wounding or disabling of 2,099 others. The Cuban suit has been in the hands of the Counter-Terrorism Committee of the United Nations since 2001, a committee made up of all 15 members of the Security Council, which of course includes the United States, and which may account for the inaction on the matter.)

Cuban dissidents typically have had very close, indeed intimate, political and financial connections to American government agents. Would the US government ignore a group of Americans receiving funds from al Qaeda and engaging in repeated meetings with known members of that organization? In recent years the United States has arrested a great many people in the US and abroad solely on the basis of alleged ties to al Qaeda, with a lot less evidence to go by than Cuba has had with its dissidents' ties to the United States. Virtually all of Cuba's "political prisoners" are such dissidents. While others may call Cuba's security policies dictatorship, I call it self-defense.⁸

The terrorist list

As casually and as routinely as calling Cuba a dictatorship, the mainstream media drops the line into news stories that "Hezbollah [or Hamas, or FARC, etc.] is considered a terrorist group by the United States", stated as matter-of-factly as saying that Hezbollah is located in Lebanon. Inclusion on the list limits an organization in various ways, such as its ability to raise funds and travel internationally. And inclusion is scarcely more than a political decision made by the US government. Who is put on or left off the State Department's terrorist list bears a strong relation to how supportive of US or Israeli policies the group is. The list, for example, never includes any of the anti-Castro Cuban groups or individuals in Florida although those people have carried out literally hundreds of terrorist acts over the past few decades, in Latin America, in the US, and in Europe. As you read this, the two men responsible for blowing up a Cuban airline in 1976, taking 73 lives, Orlando Bosch and Luis Posada, are walking around free in the Florida sunshine. Imagine that Osama bin Laden was walking freely around the Streets of an Afghan or Pakistan city taking part in political demonstrations as Posada does in Florida. Venezuela asked the United States to extradite Posada five years ago and is still waiting.

Bosch and Posada are but two of hundreds of Latin-American terrorists who've been given haven in the United States over the years.⁹ Various administrations, both Democrat and Republican,

have also provided close support of terrorists in Kosovo, Bosnia, Iran, Iraq, Chechnya, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and elsewhere, including those with known connections to al Qaeda. Yet, in the grand offices of the State Department sit learned men who list Cuba as a "state sponsor of terrorism", along with Syria, Sudan and Iran. ¹⁰ That's the complete list.

Meanwhile, the five Cubans sent to Miami to monitor the anti-Castro terrorists are in their 12th year in US prisons. The Cuban government made the very foolish error of turning over to the FBI the evidence of terrorist activities gathered by the five Cubans. Instead of arresting the terrorists, the FBI arrested the five Cubans (sic).

Steroids

"Hall of Shamer: Clemens Indicted" — page one headline in large type about fabled baseball pitcher Roger Clemens charged with lying to Congress about his use of steroids and other performance-enhancing drugs. ¹¹ Of all the things that athletes put into their bodies to improve their health, fitness and performance, why are steroids singled out? Doesn't taking vitamin and mineral supplements give an athlete an advantage over athletes who don't take them? Should these supplements be banned from sport competition? Vitamin and mineral supplements are not necessarily any more "natural" than steroids, which in fact are very important in our body chemistry; among the steroids are the male and female sex hormones. Moreover, why not punish those who follow a "healthy diet" because of the advantage this may give them?

Notes

1. *Washington Post*, August 19, 2010 [⇨]
2. *Associated Press*, August 21, 2010 [⇨]
3. *Newsweek*, July 13, 1992 [⇨]
4. See chapter one of Blum's book *Rogue State: A Guide to the World's Only Superpower* [⇨]
5. US Department of the Army, *Afghanistan, A Country Study* (1986), pp.121, 128, 130, 223, 232 [⇨]
6. See Brzezinski's [Wikipedia entry](#) [⇨]
7. See Anti-Empire Report of [September 25, 2006](#), 3rd item, for more information about the Cuban election process [⇨]
8. For a detailed discussion of Cuba's alleged political prisoners see article '[Cuba and the Number of "Political Prisoners"](#)', *Huffington Post*, August 24th 2010 [⇨]
9. *Rogue State*, Chapter 9 [⇨]
10. See State Department: www.state.gov/s/ct/c14151.htm [⇨]
11. *The Examiner* (Washington, DC), August 20, 2010 [⇨]