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William Blum

Libya: Unending American hostility

- Archives - Archives Générales 2006 - 2022 - 2011 - NÂ° 27. Septembre 2011 - English -

Date de mise en ligne : Tuesday 6 September 2011

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If I could publicly ask our beloved president one question, it would be this: "Mr. President, in your short time in office you've waged war against six countries — Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Somalia, Yemen and Libya. This makes me wonder something. With all due respect: What is wrong with you?"

The American media has done its best to dismiss or ignore Libyan charges that NATO/US missiles have been killing civilians (the people they're supposedly protecting), at least up until the recent bombing "error" that was too blatant to be covered up. But who in the mainstream media has questioned the NATO/US charges that Libya was targeting and "massacring" Libyan civilians a few months ago, which, we've been told, is the reason for the Western powers attacks? Don't look to *Al Jazeera* for such questioning. The government of Qatar, which owns the station, has a deep-seated animosity toward Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi and was itself a leading purveyor of the Libyan "massacre" stories, as well as playing a military role in the war against Tripoli. *Al Jazeera's* reporting on the subject has been so disgraceful I've stopped looking at the station.

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William Blum, Paris, May 18th, 2011 .

Alain Juppé, Foreign Minister of France, which has been the leading force behind the attacks on Libya, spoke at the Brookings Institution in Washington on June 7. After his talk he was asked a question from the audience by local activist Ken Meyercord:

"An American observer of events in Libya has commented: 'The evidence was not persuasive that a large-scale massacre or genocide was either likely or imminent.' That comment was made by Richard Haass, President of our Council on Foreign Relations. If Mr. Haass is right, and he's a fairly knowledgeable fellow, then what NATO has done in Libya is attack a country that wasn't threatening anyone; in other words, aggression. Are you at all concerned that as NATO deals more and more death and destruction on the people of Libya that the International Criminal Court may decide that you and your friends in the Naked Aggression Treaty Organization should be prosecuted rather than Mr. Gaddafi?"

Monsieur Juppé then stated, without attribution, somebody's estimate that 15,000 Libyan civilians had been killed by pro-Gaddafi forces. To which Mr. Meyercord replied: "So where are the 15,000 bodies?" M. Juppé failed to respond to this, although in the tumult caused by the first question, it was not certain that he had heard the second one. (For a counter-view of the Libyan "massacre" stories.)

It should be noted that, as of June 30, NATO had flown 13,184 air missions (sorties) over Libya, 4,963 of which are described as strike sorties. You can find the latest figures on the [Allied Command Operations website](#).

If any foreign power fired missiles at the United States would Barack Obama regard that as an act of war? If the US firing hundreds of missiles at Libya is not an act of war, as Obama insists (to avoid having to declare war as required by US law), then the deaths resulting from the missile attacks are murder. That's it. It's either war or murder. To the extent there's a difference between the two.

It should be further noted that since Gaddafi came to power in 1969 there has virtually never been a sustained period when the United States has been prepared to treat him and the many positive changes he's instituted in Libya and Africa with any respect. For a history of this hostility, including the continual lies and scare campaigns, see my Libya chapter in *Killing Hope*.

America and its perpetual quest for love

Why can't we "get some of the people in these downtrodden countries to like us instead of hating us."

— *President Dwight D. Eisenhower, in a March, 1953 National Security Council Meeting* [1]

The United States is still wondering, and is no closer to an understanding than Good Ol' Ike was almost 60 years ago. American leaders still believe what Frances Fitzgerald observed in her study of American history textbooks: "According to these books, the United States had been a kind of Salvation Army to the rest of the world: throughout history, it had done little but dispense benefits to poor, ignorant, and diseased countries. ... the United States always acted in a disinterested fashion, always from the highest of motives; it gave, never took." [2]

In 2007 I wrote in this report about the US military in Iraq:

I almost feel sorry for them. They're "can-do" Americans, accustomed to getting their way, accustomed to thinking of themselves as the best, and they're frustrated as hell, unable to figure out "why they hate us", why we can't win them over, why we can't at least wipe them out. Don't they want freedom and democracy? ... They're can-do Americans, using good ol' American know-how and Madison Avenue savvy, sales campaigns, public relations, advertising, selling the US brand, just like they do it back home; employing psychologists and anthropologists ... and nothing helps. And how can it if the product you're selling is toxic, inherently, from birth, if you're totally ruining your customers' lives, with no regard for any kind of law or morality, health or environment. They're can-do Americans, accustomed to playing by the rules — theirs; and they're frustrated as hell.

Here now the Google Cavalry rides up on its silver horse. Through its think tank, Google Ideas (or "think/do tank"), the company paid for 80 former Muslim extremists, neo-Nazis, U.S. gang members and other former radicals to gather in Dublin June 26-28 ("Summit Against Violent Extremism", or SAVE) to explore how technology can play a role in "de-radicalization" efforts around the globe. Now is that not Can-do ambitious?

The "formers," as they have been dubbed by Google, will be surrounded by 120 thinkers, activists, philanthropists and business leaders. The goal is to dissect the question of what draws some people, particularly young people, to extremist movements and why some of them leave.

The person in charge of this project is Jared Cohen, who spent four years on the State Department's Policy Planning staff, and is soon to be an adjunct fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations (CFR), focusing on counter-radicalization, innovation, technology, and statecraft. [3]

So ... it's "violent extremism" that's the big mystery, the target for all these intellectuals to figure out. ... Why does violent extremism attract so many young people all over the world? Or, of more importance probably to the State Department and CFR types: Why do violent extremists single out the United States as their target of choice?

Readers of this report do not need to be enlightened as to the latter question. There is simply an abundance of terrible things US foreign policy has done in every corner of the world. As to what attracts young people to violent extremism, consider this: What makes a million young Americans willing to travel to places like Afghanistan and Iraq to risk their life and limbs to kill other young people, who have never done them any harm, and to commit unspeakable atrocities and tortures?

Is this not extreme behavior? Can these young Americans not be called "extremists" or "radicals"? Are they not

violent? Do the Google experts understand their behavior? If not, how will they ever understand the foreign Muslim extremists? Are the experts prepared to examine the underlying phenomenon — the deep-seated belief in "American exceptionalism" drilled into every cell and nerve ganglion of American consciousness from pre-kindergarten on? Do the esteemed experts then have to wonder about those who believe in "Muslim exceptionalism"?

This just in! American leaders do have feelings!

Afghanistan President Hamid Karzai's criticism of US and NATO forces in his country grows more angry and confrontational with each passing week. Recently, US Ambassador Karl Eikenberry was moved to reply to him: "When Americans, who are serving in your country at great cost — in terms of lives and treasure — hear themselves compared with occupiers, told that they are only here to advance their own interest, and likened to the brutal enemies of the Afghan people ... they are filled with confusion and grow weary of our effort here. ... We begin to lose our inspiration to carry on."

That certainly may apply to many of the soldiers in the field. But oh, if only American military and political leaders could really be so offended and insulted by what's said about them and their many wars.

Eikenberry — who has served in Afghanistan a total of five years as a senior US Army general and then as ambassador — warned that if Afghan leaders reach the point where they "believe that we are doing more harm than good," then Americans may "reach a point that we feel our soldiers and civilians are being asked to sacrifice without a just cause," and "the American people will ask for our forces to come home."

Well, if Eikenberry is really interested, a June 8 BBC World News America/Harris Poll found that 52% of Americans believe that the United States should move to get its troops out of Afghanistan "now", with only 35% believing that the troops should stay; while a Pew Research Center poll of mid-June showed 56% of Americans favor an "immediate" pullout.

"America has never sought to occupy any nation in the world," the ambassador continued. "We are a good people." [[4](#)]

How nice. Reminds me of US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, after the 1999 78-day bombing of the helpless people of the former Yugoslavia, a war crime largely instigated by herself, when she declared: "The United States is good. We try to do our best everywhere." [[5](#)]

Do these grownups really believe what comes out of their mouths? Does Mr. Eikenberry actually think that "America has never sought to occupy any nation in the world"? Sixty-six years after World War II ended, the United States still has major bases in Germany and Japan; 58 years after the end of the Korean War, tens of thousands of American armed forces continue to be stationed in South Korea; for over a century, the United States has occupied Guantanamo Bay in Cuba against the fervent wishes of the Cuban people. And what other term shall we use to describe the American presence in Iraq for more than eight years? And Afghanistan for almost ten?

George W. Bush had no doubt: The Iraqis are "not happy they're occupied," he said. "I wouldn't be happy if I were occupied either." [[6](#)]

However, the current Republican leader in the House, John Boehner appears to be a true believer. "The United States has never proposed establishing a permanent base in Iraq or anywhere else," he affirmed a few years ago. [[7](#)]

If 18th century Americans could resent occupation by the British, when many of the Americans were British themselves, then how much easier to understand the resentment of Iraqis and Afghans toward foreign occupiers.

An excerpt from William Blum's memoir of the 1960s-1970s: West-Bloc Dissident

What our natural enemies didn't do to us, we naturally did to ourselves, as did many of the other underground newspapers and movement groups in the '60s: disagreements developed, factions formed, and, eventually, a split that rent the organization hopelessly in two — the left's traditional circular firing squad.

Putting it in the broadest terms, there were two species of activists in these large dysfunctional families who kept bumping heads, here, there, and everywhere. We can call them the "politicos" and the "yippies" (subspecies: hippies, anarchists).

The politicos placed their faith in organization and in the intellect — a mass movement, "vanguard" political parties, hierarchies and leaders, heavy on meetings, ideology, and tracts, at times doctrinaire sounding, using words and ideas to convince the great middle class, if not the great unwashed. There were theories to justify these tactics, theories based on class analysis, presented with historical annotation to certify their viability; theories that Norman Mailer disparagingly referred to as "the sound-as-brickwork-logic-of-the-next-step in some hard new Left program."

The yippies looked upon all this with unconcealed impatience, scorn, and unbelief. Said a yippie to a politico back then: your protest is so narrow, your rhetoric so boring, your ideological power plays so old fashioned ...

Let's listen to Jerry Rubin, certainly the yippies' most articulate spokesperson:

The long-haired beast, smoking pot, evading the draft, and stopping traffic during demonstrations is a hell of a more a threat to the system than the so-called "politicos" with their leaflets of support for the Vietcong and the coming working class revolution. Politics is how you live your life, not whom you vote for or whom you support.

The most important political conflict in the United States for Rubin was not of classes, but "the generational conflict". "The respectable middle-class debates LBJ while we try to pull down his pants."

Is [American society] interested in reform, or is it just interested in eliminating nuisance? What's needed is a new generation of nuisances. A new generation of people who are freaky, crazy, irrational, sexy, angry, irreligious, childish, and mad ... people who burn draft cards, people who burn dollar bills, people who burn MA and doctoral degrees, people who say: "To hell with your goals", people who proudly carry Vietcong flags, people who re-define reality, who re-define the norm, people who see property as theft, people who say "fuck" on television, people who break with the status-role-title-consumer game, people who have nothing material to lose but their bodies ... What the socialists like the SWP and the Communist Party, with their conversions of Marxism into a natural science, fail to understand is that language does not radicalize people — what changes people is the emotional involvement of action.

Hardly anyone, of course, fit precisely and solely into either of these classifications, including Jerry Rubin. Much of the yippie "party line" was to be taken metaphorically, unless one's alienation had reached the level of an alien, while most politicos were independent of any political party.

Ray Mungo, one of the founders of Liberation News Service, later wrote of LNS:

It is impossible for me to describe our "ideology," for we simply didn't have one; we never subscribed to a code of conduct or a clearly conceptualized Ideal Society ... And it was the introduction of formal ideology into the group which eventually destroyed it, or more properly split it into bitterly warring camps.

When Mungo speaks of "formal ideology", he's referring to the "politicos" who joined LNS after its inception. These people, whom he refers to as "the Vulgar Marxists", as opposed to his own "anarchist" camp ...

believed fervently in "the revolution", and were working toward it — a revolution based on Marx and Lenin and Cuba and SDS and "the struggle"; and people were supported only on the basis of what they were worth to the revolution; and most of the things in life which were purely enjoyable were bourgeois comforts irrelevant to the news service, although not absolutely barred. ... Their method of running the news service was the Meeting and the Vote, ours was Magic. We lived on Magic, and still do, and I have to say it beats anything systematic."

Mungo would have one believe that ideology is a "thing" introduced from the "outside", like tuberculosis, that is best to avoid. I would argue, however, that "ideology" is nothing less than a system of ideas in one's head, whether consciously organized or not, that attempts to answer the questions: Why is the world the way it is? Why is society the way it is? Why are people the way they are? And what can be done to change any of this? To say you have no ideology comes dangerously close to saying that you have no opinions on — and perhaps no interest in — such questions. Ray Mungo, I believe, was overreacting to people whom he saw as too *systematic* and who didn't appreciate his "Magic".

Just as I knew instinctively that I wasn't a Quaker or a pacifist, I knew I wasn't a yuppie, hippie or anarchist, which didn't mean that I couldn't enjoy and even take part in some of their antics. Jerry Rubin was mistaken in my case, as in many others — language, spoken and print, had played a major role in my radicalization; equally indispensable had been the sad state of the world, but it was language which had illuminated and brought home to me the sad state of the world and proffered explanations for why it was the way it was.

During the American Revolution, Thomas Paine's *Common Sense*, which sold hundreds of thousands of copies in the first few months of 1776, used language suffused with both reason and emotion to argue powerfully the case for independence, to strike convincingly at one of the greatest obstacles to separation: American veneration of royalty; and to point out that beyond the politics and legalities of the conflict, the colonies were sources of profit the crown would never voluntarily relinquish. This message clarified the revolution for thousands of confused rebels who had been debating points of law with London. Imagine if Paine had been a yuppie instead of a politico — his primary message might have been to pull down the king's pants.

It was the movement's politicians who stayed the course, continuing to be activists well past the '60s, while Rubin's long-haired beast and Mungo's Magic people — lacking the convictions of their courage — could more likely be found in the '70s sitting cross-legged at the feet of the newest-flavor guru, probing interpersonal relations instead of international relations, or seeking fulfillment through vegetarianism, "the land", or Rolfing. By the '80s they had evolved into yuppies.

Post-scriptum :

This article was published July 1st, 2011

<http://killinghope.org/bblum6/aer95.html>

William Blum is the author of:

Killing Hope: US Military and CIA Interventions Since World War 2

Rogue State: A Guide to the World's Only Superpower

West-Bloc Dissident: A Cold War Memoir

Freeing the World to Death: Essays on the American Empire

Portions of the books can be read, and signed copies purchased, at www.killinghope.org

[1] *New York Times*, August 10, 2003.

[2] Frances Fitzgerald, *America Revised* (1980), pp.129, 139.

[3] Foreign Policy, "State Department Innovator Goes to Google", September 7 2010; *Washington Post*, June 24, 2011.

[4] *Washington Post*, June 19, 2011.

[5] *Washington Post*, October 23, 1999.

[6] *Washington Post*, April 14, 2004.

[7] *United Press International*, July 26, 2007.