

America's other Glorious War

By [William Blum](#)

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The Pentagon pushes hard for a large increase in troops for Afghanistan. Barack Obama has been calling for the same since well before the November election. Listen to the drumbeats telling us that the security of the United States and the Free World necessitates increased action in this place called Afghanistan. As urgent as Iraq 2003, it is. Why? What is there about this backward, reactionary, woman-hating, failed state that warrants hundreds of deaths of American and NATO soldiers? That justifies tens of thousands of Afghan deaths since the first US bombing attacks in October 2001?

In early December, reports the Washington Post, "standing at Kandahar Air Field in Afghanistan, Defense Secretary Robert M. Gates said the United States is making a 'sustained commitment' to that country, one that will last 'some protracted period of time'." The story goes on to discuss \$300 million in construction projects at this one base to house additional American forces, erecting guard stations and towers and perimeter fencing around the barracks area, putting in vehicle inspection areas, administration offices, cold-storage warehouse, a new power plant, electrical and water distribution systems, communications lines, housing for 1,500 personnel who sustain the systems, maintenance shops, warehouses[1] ... America's wealth bleeds out endlessly.

Back in April Maj. Gen. David Rodriguez, commander of the US Army's 82nd Airborne Division, when asked how long it would take to create "lasting stability" in Afghanistan, replied: "In some way, shape or form ... I think it's a generation." [2] "Stability", it should be noted, is a code word used regularly by the United States since at least the 1950s to mean that the regime in power is willing and able to behave the way Washington would like it to behave. It is remarkable, and scary, to read the US military writing about how it goes around the world bringing "stability" to (often ungrateful) people. This past October the Army published a manual called "Stability Operations". [3] It discusses numerous American interventions all over the world since the 1890s, one example after another of bringing "stability" to benighted peoples. One can picture the young American service members reading it, or having it fed to them in lectures, full of pride to be a member of such an altruistic fighting force.

For those members of the US military in Afghanistan the most enlightening lesson they could receive is that their government's plans for that land of sadness have little or nothing to do with the welfare of the Afghan people. In the late 1970s through much of the 1980s, the country had a government that was relatively progressive, with full rights for women; even a Pentagon report of the time testified to the actuality of women's rights in the country. [4] And what happened to that government? The United States was instrumental in overthrowing it. It was replaced by the Taliban.

Since the dissolution of the Soviet Union, US oil companies have been vying with Russia,

Iran and other energy interests for the massive, untapped oil and natural gas reserves in the former Soviet republics of Central Asia. The building and protection of oil and gas pipelines in Afghanistan, to continue farther to Pakistan, India, and elsewhere, has been a key objective of US policy since before the 2001 American invasion and occupation of the country, although the subsequent turmoil there has presented serious obstacles to such plans. A planned Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India pipeline has strong support from Washington because, amongst other reasons, the US is eager to block a competing pipeline that would bring gas to Pakistan and India from Iran.[5] But security for such projects remains daunting, and that's where the US and NATO forces come in to play.

In the late 1990s, the American oil company, Unocal, met with Taliban officials in Texas to discuss the pipelines.[6] Zalmay Khalilzad, later chosen to be the US ambassador to Afghanistan, worked for Unocal[7]; Hamid Karzai, later chosen by Washington to be the Afghan president, also reportedly worked for Unocal, although the company denies this. Unocal's talks with the Taliban, conducted with the full knowledge of the Clinton administration, and undeterred by the extreme repression of Taliban society, continued as late as 2000 or 2001.

As for NATO, it has no reason to be fighting in Afghanistan. Indeed, NATO has no legitimate reason for existence at all. Their biggest fear is that "failure" in Afghanistan would make this thought more present in the world's mind. If NATO hadn't begun to intervene outside of Europe it would have highlighted its uselessness and lack of mission. "Out of area or out of business" it was said.

In June, the Canadian Center for Policy Alternatives published a report saying Taliban and insurgent activity against the US-NATO presence in Kandahar province puts the feasibility of the pipeline project in doubt. The report says southern regions in Afghanistan, including Kandahar, would have to be cleared of insurgent activity and land mines in two years to meet construction and investment schedules.

"Nobody is going to start putting pipe in the ground unless they are satisfied that there is some reasonable insurance that the workers for the pipeline are going to be safe," said Howard Brown, the Canadian representative for the Asian Development Bank, the major funding agency for the pipeline.[8]

If Americans were asked what they think their country is doing in Afghanistan, their answers would likely be one variation or another of "fighting terrorism", with some kind of connection to 9-11. But what does that mean? Of the tens of thousands of Afghans killed by American/NATO bombs over the course of seven years, how many can it be said had any kind of linkage to any kind of anti-American terrorist act, other than in Afghanistan itself during this period? Not one, as far as we know. The so-called "terrorist training camps" in Afghanistan were set up largely by the Taliban to provide fighters for their civil conflict with the Northern Alliance (minimally less religious fanatics and misogynists than the Taliban, but represented in the present Afghan government). As everyone knows, none of the alleged 9-11 hijackers was an Afghan; 15 of the 19 were from Saudi Arabia; and most of the planning for the attacks appears to have been carried out in Germany and the United States. So, of course, bomb Afghanistan. And keep bombing Afghanistan. And bomb Pakistan. Especially wedding parties (at least six so far). Israel and Palestine, again, forever.

Nothing changes. Including what I have to say on the matter. To prove my point, I'm

repeating part of what I wrote in this report in July 2006 ...

There are times when I think this tired old world has gone on a few years too long. What's happening in the Middle East is so depressing. Most discussions of the everlasting Israel-Palestine conflict are variations on the child's eternal defense for misbehavior — "He started it!" Within two minutes of discussing/arguing the latest manifestation of the conflict the participants are back to 1967, then 1948, then biblical times. Instead of getting entangled in who started the current mess, I'd prefer to express what I see as two essential underlying facts of life which remain from one conflict to the next:

1) Israel's existence is not at stake and hasn't been so for decades, if it ever was, regardless of the many de rigueur militant statements by Middle East leaders over the years. If Israel would learn to deal with its neighbors in a non-expansionist, non-military, humane, and respectful manner, engage in full prisoner exchanges, and sincerely strive for a viable two-state (if not one-state) solution, even those who are opposed to the idea of a state based on a particular religion could accept the state of Israel, and the question of its right to exist would scarcely arise in people's minds. But as it is, Israel still uses the issue as a justification for its behavior, as Jews all over the world use the Holocaust and conflating anti-Zionism with anti-Semitism.

2) In a conflict between a thousand-pound gorilla and a mouse, it's the gorilla who has to make concessions in order for the two sides to progress to the next level. What can the Palestinians offer in the way of concession? Israel would reply to that question: "No violent attacks of any kind." But that would leave the status quo ante bellum — a life of unmitigated misery for the occupied, captive Palestinian people, confined to the world's largest open air concentration camp.

It is a wanton act of collective punishment that is depriving the Palestinians of food, electricity, water, money, access to the outside world ... and sleep. Israel has been sending jets flying over Gaza at night triggering sonic booms, traumatizing children. "I want nobody to sleep at night in Gaza," declared Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert[9], words suitable for Israel's tombstone.

Israel has created its worst enemies — they helped create Hamas as a counterweight to Fatah in Palestine, and their occupation of Lebanon created Hezbollah. The current terrible bombings can be expected to keep the process going. Since its very beginning, Israel has been almost continually engaged in fighting wars and taking other people's lands. Did not any better way ever occur to the idealistic Zionist pioneers? The question that may never go away: Who really is Barack Obama?

In his autobiography, "Dreams From My Fathers", Barack Obama writes of taking a job at some point after graduating from Columbia University in 1983. He describes his employer as "a consulting house to multinational corporations" in New York City, and his functions as a "research assistant" and "financial writer".

The odd part of Obama's story is that he doesn't mention the name of his employer. However, a New York Times story of 2007 identifies the company as Business International Corporation.[10] Equally odd is that the Times did not remind its readers that the newspaper itself had disclosed in 1977 that Business International had provided cover for four CIA employees in various countries between 1955 and 1960.[11]

The British journal, *Lobster Magazine* — which, despite its incongruous name, is a venerable international publication on intelligence matters — has reported that Business International

was active in the 1980s promoting the candidacy of Washington-favored candidates in Australia and Fiji.[12] In 1987, the CIA overthrew the Fiji government after but one month in office because of its policy of maintaining the island as a nuclear-free zone, meaning that American nuclear-powered or nuclear-weapons-carrying ships could not make port calls.[13] After the Fiji coup, the candidate supported by Business International, who was much more amenable to Washington's nuclear desires, was reinstated to power — R.S.K. Mara was Prime Minister or President of Fiji from 1970 to 2000, except for the one-month break in 1987.

In his book, not only doesn't Obama mention his employer's name; he fails to say when he worked there, or why he left the job. There may well be no significance to these omissions, but inasmuch as Business International has a long association with the world of intelligence, covert actions, and attempts to penetrate the radical left — including Students for a Democratic Society (SDS)[14] — it's valid to wonder if the inscrutable Mr. Obama is concealing something about his own association with this world. On socialist Cuba's 50th anniversary, January 1, 2009: Notes on the beginning of its unforgivable revolution.

The existence of a revolutionary socialist government with growing ties to the Soviet Union only 90 miles away, insisted the United States government, was a situation which no self-respecting superpower should tolerate, and in 1961 it undertook an invasion of Cuba.

But less than 50 miles from the Soviet Union sat Pakistan, a close ally of the United States, a member since 1955 of the South-East Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO), the US-created anti-communist alliance. On the very border of the Soviet Union was Iran, an even closer ally of the United States, with its relentless electronic listening posts, aerial surveillance, and infiltration into Russian territory by American agents. And alongside Iran, also bordering the Soviet Union, was Turkey, a member of the Russians' mortal enemy, NATO, since 1951.

In 1962 during the "Cuban Missile Crisis", Washington, seemingly in a state of near-panic, informed the world that the Russians were installing "offensive" missiles in Cuba. The US promptly instituted a "quarantine" of the island — a powerful show of naval and marine forces in the Caribbean would stop and search all vessels heading towards Cuba; any found to contain military cargo would be forced to turn back.

The United States, however, had missiles and bomber bases already in place in Turkey and other missiles in Western Europe pointed toward the Soviet Union. Russian leader Nikita Khrushchev later wrote: "The Americans had surrounded our country with military bases and threatened us with nuclear weapons, and now they would learn just what it feels like to have enemy missiles pointing at you; we'd be doing nothing more than giving them a little of their own medicine. ... After all, the United States had no moral or legal quarrel with us. We hadn't given the Cubans anything more than the Americans were giving to their allies. We had the same rights and opportunities as the Americans. Our conduct in the international arena was governed by the same rules and limits as the Americans." [15] Lest anyone misunderstand, as Khrushchev apparently did, the rules under which Washington was operating, Time magazine was quick to explain. "On the part of the Communists," the magazine declared, "this equating [referring to Khrushchev's offer to mutually remove missiles and bombers from Cuba and Turkey] had obvious tactical motives.

On the part of neutralists and pacifists [who welcomed Khrushchev's offer] it betrayed intellectual and moral confusion." The confusion lay, it seems, in not seeing clearly who were the good guys and who were the bad guys, for "The purpose of the U.S. bases [in

Turkey] was not to blackmail Russia but to strengthen the defense system of NATO, which had been created as a safeguard against Russian aggression. As a member of NATO, Turkey welcomed the bases as a contribution to her own defense.” Cuba, which had been invaded only the year before, could have, it seems, no such concern. Time continued its sermon, which undoubtedly spoke for most Americans: “Beyond these differences between the two cases, there is an enormous moral difference between U.S. and Russian objectives ... To equate U.S. and Russian bases is in effect to equate U.S. and Russian purposes ... The U.S. bases, such as those in Turkey, have helped keep the peace since World War II, while the Russian bases in Cuba threatened to upset the peace. The Russian bases were intended to further conquest and domination, while U.S. bases were erected to preserve freedom. The difference should have been obvious to all.”[16] Equally obvious was the right of the United States to maintain a military base on Cuban soil — Guantanamo Naval Base by name, a vestige of colonialism staring down the throats of the Cuban people, which the US, to this day, refuses to vacate despite the vehement protest of the Castro government.

In the American lexicon, in addition to good and bad bases and missiles, there are good and bad revolutions. The American and French Revolutions were good. The Cuban Revolution is bad. It must be bad because so many people have left Cuba as a result of it.

But at least 100,000 people left the British colonies in America during and after the American Revolution. These Tories could not abide by the political and social changes, both actual and feared, particularly that change which attends all revolutions worthy of the name — Those looked down upon as inferiors no longer know their place. (Or as the US Secretary of State put it after the Russian Revolution: The Bolsheviks sought “to make the ignorant and incapable mass of humanity dominant in the earth.”[17])

The Tories fled to Nova Scotia and Britain carrying tales of the godless, dissolute, barbaric American revolutionaries. Those who remained and refused to take an oath of allegiance to the new state governments were denied virtually all civil liberties. Many were jailed, murdered, or forced into exile. After the American Civil War, thousands more fled to South America and other points, again disturbed by the social upheaval. How much more is such an exodus to be expected following the Cuban Revolution? — a true social revolution, giving rise to changes much more profound than anything in the American experience. How many more would have left the United States if 90 miles away lay the world’s wealthiest nation welcoming their residence and promising all manner of benefits and rewards?

NOTES

[1] Washington Post, December 25, 2008

[2] Reuters, April 29, 2008

[3] <http://usacac.army.mil/cac2/Repository/FM307/FM3-07.pdf>

[4] U.S. Department of the Army, “Afghanistan, A Country Study” (1986), pp.121, 128, 130, 134, 136, 223, 232-3

[5] Globe & Mail (Toronto), June 19, 2008

[6] BBC News, December 4, 1997, “Taleban [sic] in Texas for talks on gas pipeline”

[7] Washington Post, November 23, 2001

[8] United Press International, July 17, 2008

[9] Associated Press, July 3, 2006

[10] New York Times, October 30, 2007

[11] New York Times, December 27, 1977, p.40

[12] Lobster Magazine, Hull, UK, #14, November 1987

- [13] William Blum, "Rogue State: A Guide to the World's Only Superpower", pp.199-200
- [14] Carl Oglesby, "Ravens in the Storm: A Personal History of the 1960s Antiwar Movement" (2008), passim
- [15] "Khrushchev Remembers" (1971) pp.494, 496.
- [16] Time magazine, November 2, 1962
- [17] Cited by William Appleman Williams, "American Intervention in Russia: 1917-20", in David Horowitz, ed., "Containment and Revolution" (1967). Written in a letter to President Woodrow Wilson by Secretary of State Robert Lansing, uncle of John Foster and Allen Dulles.

William Blum is the author of: Killing Hope: US Military and CIA Interventions Since World War, 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. Previous Anti-Empire Reports can be read at this website.

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