

The Crime of Making Americans Aware of their Own History

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Global Research, October 04, 2011

[The Anti-Empire Report](#) 4 October 2011

Region: [USA](#)

Theme: [History](#)

Is history getting too close for comfort for the fragile little American heart and mind? Their schools and their favorite media have done an excellent job of keeping them ignorant of what their favorite country has done to the rest of the world, but lately some discomfiting points of view have managed to find their way into this well-defended American consciousness.

First, Congressman Ron Paul during a presidential debate last month expressed the belief that those who carried out the September 11 attack were retaliating for the many abuses perpetrated against Arab countries by the United States over the years. The audience booed him, loudly.

Then, popular-song icon Tony Bennett, in a radio interview, said the United States caused the 9/11 attacks because of its actions in the Persian Gulf, adding that President George W. Bush had told him in 2005 that the Iraq war was a mistake. Bennett of course came under some nasty fire. *FOX News* (September 24), carefully choosing its comments charmingly as usual, used words like “insane”, “twisted mind”, and “absurdities”. Bennett felt obliged to post a statement on Facebook saying that his experience in World War II had taught him that “war is the lowest form of human behavior.” He said there’s no excuse for terrorism, and he added, “I’m sorry if my statements suggested anything other than an expression of love for my country.” (*NBC* September 21)

Then came the Islamic cleric, Anwar al-Awlaki, an American citizen, who for some time had been blaming US foreign policy in the Middle East as the cause of anti-American hatred and terrorist acts. So we killed him. Ron Paul and Tony Bennett can count themselves lucky.

What, then, is the basis of all this? What has the United States actually been doing in the Middle East in the recent past?

- the shooting down of two Libyan planes in 1981
- the bombing of Lebanon in 1983 and 1984
- the bombing of Libya in 1986
- the bombing and sinking of an Iranian ship in 1987
- the shooting down of an Iranian passenger plane in 1988
- the shooting down of two more Libyan planes in 1989

- the massive bombing of the Iraqi people in 1991
- the continuing bombings and draconian sanctions against Iraq for the next 12 years
- the bombing of Afghanistan and Sudan in 1998
- the habitual support of Israel despite the routine devastation and torture it inflicts upon the Palestinian people
- the habitual condemnation of Palestinian resistance to this
- the abduction of “suspected terrorists” from Muslim countries, such as Malaysia, Pakistan, Lebanon and Albania, who were then taken to places like Egypt and Saudi Arabia, where they were tortured
- the large military and hi-tech presence in Islam’s holiest land, Saudi Arabia, and elsewhere in the Persian Gulf region
- the support of numerous undemocratic, authoritarian Middle East governments from the Shah of Iran to Mubarak of Egypt to the Saudi royal family
- the invasion, bombing and occupation of Afghanistan, 2001 to the present, and Iraq, 2003 to the present
- the bombings and continuous firing of missiles to assassinate individuals in Somalia, Yemen, Pakistan, and Libya during the period of 2006-2011

It can’t be repeated or emphasized enough. The biggest lie of the “war on terrorism”, although weakening, is that the targets of America’s attacks have an irrational hatred of the United States and its way of life, based on religious and cultural misunderstandings and envy. The large body of evidence to the contrary includes a 2004 report from the Defense Science Board, “a Federal advisory committee established to provide independent advice to the Secretary of Defense.” The report states:

“Muslims do not hate our freedom, but rather they hate our policies. The overwhelming majority voice their objections to what they see as one-sided support in favor of Israel and against Palestinian rights, and the long-standing, even increasing, support for what Muslims collectively see as tyrannies, most notably Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Pakistan and the Gulf states. Thus, when American public diplomacy talks about bringing democracy to Islamic societies, this is seen as no more than self-serving hypocrisy.”

The report concludes: “No public relations campaign can save America from flawed policies.” (*Christian Science Monitor*, November 29, 2004)

The Pentagon released the study after the *New York Times* ran a story about it on November 24, 2004. The *Times* reported that although the board’s report does not constitute official

government policy, it captures “the essential themes of a debate that is now roiling not just the Defense Department but the entire United States government.”

“Homeland security is a rightwing concept fostered following 9/11 as the answer to the effects of 50 years of bad foreign policies in the middle east. The amount of homeland security we actually need is inversely related to how good our foreign policy is.” – Sam Smith, editor of *The Progressive Review*

The lies that will not die

In his September 22 address at the United Nations, Iranian president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad mentioned the Nazi Holocaust just twice:

“Some European countries still use the Holocaust, after six decades, as the excuse to pay fines or ransom to the Zionists.”

“They threaten anyone who questions the Holocaust and the September 11 event with sanctions and military action.”

That was it.

By the term “questions the Holocaust” the Iranian president has made clear repeatedly over the years what he’s referring to. He has commented about the peculiarity and injustice of a tragedy which took place in Europe resulting in a state for the Jews in the Middle East instead of in Europe. Why are the Palestinians paying a price for a German crime? he asks. And he has questioned the figure of six million Jews killed by Nazi Germany, as have many historians and others of all political stripes who think the total was probably less. This has nothing to do with the Holocaust not taking place.

But, as usual, the Western media pretends that it doesn’t understand.

The *New York Post* (September 22) referred to the Iranian president as “the world’s foremost Holocaust denier, the would-be genocidist Ahmadinejad”.

Agence France Presse (September 22) stated: “The Iranian leader repeated comments casting doubt on the origins of the Holocaust.”

The *Washington Post* wrote of “Ahmadinejad’s speech suggesting larger conspiracies were behind the Holocaust and the Sept. 11 attacks caused delegates to walk out.” (September 23)

And Amy Goodman on *Democracy Now!* (September 23) included this amongst the radio program’s news headlines: “For the third straight year, Ahmadinejad sent delegates to the exits after questioning the Nazi Holocaust.”

Without further explanation of that incendiary term — and none was given — what can “questioning the Nazi Holocaust” mean or imply to most listeners other than that Ahmadinejad was questioning whether the Holocaust had actually taken place?

Once again I must point out that I have yet to read of Ahmadinejad ever saying simply, clearly, unambiguously, and unequivocally that he thinks that what we know as the

Holocaust never happened. For the record, in a speech at Columbia University on September 24, 2007, in reply to a question about the Holocaust, the Iranian president declared: "I'm not saying that it didn't happen at all. This is not the judgment that I'm passing here."

Indeed, I do not know if *any* of the so-called "Holocaust-deniers" actually, ever, umm, y'know ... *deny the Holocaust*. They question certain aspects of the Holocaust history that's been handed down to us, but they don't explicitly say that what we know as the Holocaust never took place. (Yes, I'm sure you can find at least one nut-case somewhere.)

Another enduring lie about Ahmadinejad is that he has called for violence against Israel: His 2005 remark re "wiping Israel off the map", besides being a very questionable translation, has been seriously misinterpreted, as evidenced by the fact that the following year he declared: "The Zionist regime will be wiped out soon, the same way the Soviet Union was, and humanity will achieve freedom." (*Associated Press*, December 12, 2006) Obviously, the man was not calling for any kind of violent attack upon Israel, for the dissolution of the Soviet Union took place peacefully.

Carl Oglesby

The president of Students for a Democratic Society (SDS), 1965-66, died September 13, age 76. I remember him best for a speech of his I heard during the March on Washington, November 27, 1965, a speech passionately received by the tens of thousands crowding the National Mall:

The original commitment in Vietnam was made by President Truman, a mainstream liberal. It was seconded by President Eisenhower, a moderate liberal. It was intensified by the late President Kennedy, a flaming liberal. Think of the men who now engineer that war — those who study the maps, give the commands, push the buttons, and tally the dead: Bundy, McNamara, Rusk, Lodge, Goldberg, the President [Johnson] himself. They are not moral monsters. They are all honorable men. They are all liberals.

He insisted that America's founding fathers would have been on his side. "Our dead revolutionaries would soon wonder why their country was fighting against what appeared to be a revolution." He challenged those who called him anti-American: "I say, don't blame me for that! Blame those who mouthed my liberal values and broke my American heart."

We are dealing now with a colossus that does not want to be changed. It will not change itself. It will not cooperate with those who want to change it. Those allies of ours in the government — are they really our allies? If they are, then they don't need advice, they need constituencies; they don't need study groups, they need a movement. And if they are not [our allies], then all the more reason for building that movement with the most relentless conviction.

It saddens me to think that virtually nothing has changed for the better in US foreign policy since Carl Oglesby spoke on the Mall that day. America's wars are ongoing, perpetual, eternal. And the current war monger in the White House is regarded by many as a liberal, for whatever that's worth.

"We took space back quickly, expensively, with total panic and close to maximum brutality,"

war correspondent Michael Herr recalled about the US military in Vietnam. "Our machine was devastating. And versatile. It could do everything but stop."

Items of interest from a journal I've kept for 40 years, part V

- A Bush administration regulation on Sept. 30, 2004 said Americans cannot buy or smoke Cuban cigars even in countries where the cigars are legal, such as Canada, Mexico, Europe, indeed most of the world. The same goes for Havana Club rum and other Cuban products.
- April 26th, 2007 posting from the courageous but anonymous Iraqi woman who has, since August 2003, published the indispensable blog Baghdad Burning. Her family, she reported, was finally giving up and going into exile. In her final dispatch, she wrote: "There are moments when the injustice of having to leave your country simply because an imbecile got it into his head to invade it, is overwhelming. It is unfair that in order to survive and live normally, we have to leave our home and what remains of family and friends. ... And to what?"
- "God appointed America to save the world in any way that suits America. God appointed Israel to be the nexus of America's Middle Eastern policy and anyone who wants to mess with that idea is a) anti-Semitic, b) anti-American, c) with the enemy, and d) a terrorist." — *John LeCarre (London Times, January 15, 2003)*
- Army Gen. David Petraeus, the top U.S. commander in Iraq admonished his troops regarding the results of an Army survey that found that many U.S. military personnel there are willing to tolerate some torture of suspects and unwilling to report abuse by comrades. "This fight depends on securing the population, which must understand that we — not our enemies — occupy the moral high ground," he wrote in an open letter dated May 10 and posted on a military Web site. (*Washington Post*, May 11, 2007)
- "To most of its citizens, America is exceptional, and it's only natural that it should take exception to certain international standards." — *Michael Ignatieff, former Canadian politician and Washington Post columnist*
- It is easy to understand an observation by one of Israel's leading military historians, Martin van Creveld. After the U.S. invaded Iraq, knowing it to be defenseless, he noted, "Had the Iranians not tried to build nuclear weapons, they would be crazy." — *Noam Chomsky*
- "It is easier for an American member of Congress to criticize an American president than to criticize an Israeli Prime Minister; it is easier for them to criticize an unjust and unwarranted US war than one launched by Israel." — *Jeffrey Blankfort*
- Ken Livingston, Mayor of London, re: his visit to Cuba in 2006: "What really stood out for me was hearing first hand from people working in the medical services just how appalling the US blockade is. When you meet people who are treating eye disorders and blindness on a huge scale and they describe how difficult it is

to get the equipment they need except through indirect routes because of the blockade you get a feel for the scale of the injustice that is being imposed on Cuba.” Livingston might have added that the “indirect routes”, even if available, are much more expensive.

- In 1965 when UN Secretary-General U Thant tried to open back-channel ties to the North Vietnamese, US Secretary of State Dean Rusk called him off by shouting: “Who do you think you are, a country?” (*Washington Post BookWorld*, January 7, 2007)
- George W. Bush: “Years from now when America looks out on a democratic Middle East, growing in freedom and prosperity, Americans will speak of the battles like Fallujah with the same awe and reverence that we now give to Guadalcanal and Iwo Jima” in World War II. (*Associated Press*, November 11, 2006)
- The National Endowment for Democracy was US Government initiated, and although ostensibly “independent,” has been continually funded by the US Congress, and its Board has included top level actors in the US Government’s foreign policy apparatus, including former Secretaries of State Henry Kissinger and Madeleine Albright, former National Security Council Chair Zbigniew Brzezinski, and former World Bank President Paul Wolfowitz.
- *CBS News*, September 9, 2006: Senator Jay Rockefeller says the world would be better off today if the United States had never invaded Iraq. Does Rockefeller stand by his view, even if it means that Saddam Hussein could still be in power if the United States didn’t invade? “Yes. Yes.” says Rockefeller. “He wasn’t going to attack us.”
- William Appleman Williams, in his 2007 book “*Empire as a way of life*”: Analyzing US history from its revolutionary origins to the dawn of the Reagan era, Williams shows how America has always been addicted to empire in its foreign and domestic ideology. Detailing the imperial actions and beliefs of revered figures such as Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Jefferson, Abraham Lincoln and Franklin Delano Roosevelt, this book is the most in-depth historical study of the American obsession with empire, and is essential to understanding the origins of our current foreign and domestic undertakings.
- Compare Washington’s reaction in recent years to popular uprisings alleging electoral fraud in the Ukraine and Georgia to its reaction to the same in Mexico in 2006 when the rightwing Felipe Calderon was declared the winner in a very questionable manner.
- Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez, in his talk at the United Nations, September 20, 2006, sharply criticized US president George W. Bush’s foreign policies and Bush himself. Britain’s Foreign Secretary Margaret Beckett suggested that the Chávez comments were beyond the pale of diplomatic protocol at the UN. “Even the Democrats wouldn’t say that”. However, the *Guardian* reported that

“Delegates and leaders from around the world streamed back into the chamber to hear Mr Chávez, and when he stepped down the vigorous applause lasted so long that it had to be curtailed by the chair.”

- Only the imperialist powers have the ability to enforce sanctions and are therefore always exempt from them.

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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

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