

American Exceptionalism: The Naked Truth

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Article by the late William Blum. His important legacy

We can all agree I think that US foreign policy must be changed and that to achieve that the mind – not to mention the heart and soul – of the American public must be changed. But what do you think is the main barrier to achieving such a change in the American mind?

Each of you I'm sure has met many people who support American foreign policy, with whom you've argued and argued. You point out one horror after another, from Vietnam to Iraq to Libya; from bombings and invasions to torture. And nothing helps. Nothing moves these people.

Now why is that? Do these people have no social conscience? Are they just stupid? I think a better answer is that they have certain preconceptions. Consciously or unconsciously, they have certain basic beliefs about the United States and its foreign policy, and if you don't deal with these basic beliefs you may as well be talking to a stone wall.

The most basic of these basic beliefs, I think, is a deeply-held conviction that no matter what the US does abroad, no matter how bad it may look, no matter what horror may result, the government of the United States means well. American leaders may make mistakes, they may blunder, they may lie, they may even on many occasions cause more harm than good, but they do mean well. Their intentions are always honorable, even noble. Of that the great majority of Americans are certain.

Frances Fitzgerald, in her famous study of American school textbooks, summarized the message of these books:

"The United States has 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 U.S. always acted in a disinterested fashion, always from the highest of motives; it gave, never took."

And Americans genuinely wonder why the rest of the world can't see how benevolent and self-sacrificing America has been. Even many people who take part in the anti-war movement have a hard time shaking off some of this mindset; they march to spur America — the America they love and worship and trust — they march to spur this noble America back onto its path of goodness.

Many of the citizens fall for US government propaganda justifying its military actions as often and as naively as Charlie Brown falling for Lucy's football. The American people are very much like the children of a Mafia boss who do not know what their father does for a

living, and don't want to know, but then they wonder why someone just threw a firebomb through the living room window.

This basic belief in America's good intentions is often linked to "American exceptionalism". Let's look at just how exceptional America has been. Since the end of World War 2, the United States has:

- Attempted to overthrow more than 50 foreign governments, most of which were democratically-elected.
- Dropped bombs on the people of more than 30 countries.
- Attempted to assassinate more than 50 foreign leaders.
- Attempted to suppress a populist or nationalist movement in 20 countries.
- Grossly interfered in democratic elections in at least 30 countries.
- Led the world in torture; not only the torture performed directly by Americans upon foreigners, but providing torture equipment, torture manuals, lists of people to be tortured, and in-person guidance by American teachers, especially in Latin America.

This is indeed exceptional. No other country in all of history comes anywhere close to such a record. But it certainly makes it very difficult to believe that America means well.

US military presence overseas



So the next time you're up against a stone wall ... ask the person what the United States would have to do in its foreign policy to lose his or her support. What for this person would finally be TOO MUCH. Chances are the US has already done it. Keep in mind that our precious homeland, above all, seeks to dominate the world. For economic reasons, nationalistic reasons, ideological, Christian, and for other reasons, world hegemony has long been America's bottom line. And let's not forget the powerful Executive Branch officials whose salaries, promotions, agency budgets and future well-paying private sector jobs depend upon perpetual war. These leaders are not especially concerned about the consequences for the world of their wars. They're not necessarily bad people; but they're

amoral, like a sociopath is.

Take the Middle East and South Asia. The people in those areas have suffered horribly because of Islamic fundamentalism. What they desperately need are secular governments, which have respect for different religions. And such governments were actually instituted in the recent past. But what has been the fate of those governments?

Well, in the late 1970s through much of the 1980s, Afghanistan had a secular government that was relatively progressive, with full rights for women, which is hard to believe, isn't it? But even a Pentagon report of the time testified to the actuality of women's rights in Afghanistan. And what happened to that government? The United States overthrew it, allowing the Taliban to come to power. So keep that in mind the next time you hear an American official say that we have to remain in Afghanistan for the sake of the women.

After Afghanistan came Iraq, another secular society, under Saddam Hussein. And the United States overthrew that government as well, and now the country has its share of crazed and bloody jihadists and fundamentalists; and women who are not covered up properly are sometimes running a serious risk.

Next came Libya; again, a secular country, under Moammar Gaddafi, who, like Saddam Hussein, had a tyrant side to him but could in important ways be benevolent and do some marvelous things. Gaddafi, for example, founded the African Union and gave the Libyan people the highest standard of living in Africa. So, of course, the United States overthrew that government as well. In 2011, with the help of NATO we bombed the people of Libya almost every day for more than six months.



Can anyone say that in all these interventions, or in any of them, the United States of America meant well?

When we attack Iran, will we mean well? Will we have the welfare of the Iranian people at heart? I suggest you keep such thoughts in mind the next time you're having a discussion or argument with a flag-waving American.

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William Blum is the author of [Killing Hope: U.S. Military and CIA Interventions Since World War II](#), [Rogue State: a guide to the World's Only Super Power](#) . His latest book is: [America's Deadliest Export: Democracy](#). He can be reached at: BBlum6@aol.com

Sources

For documentation on government overthrows, bombs dropped, attempts to assassinate foreign leaders, movement suppression — see [Killing Hope: U.S. Military and CIA Interventions Since World War II](#).

For documentation on covert interference in democratic elections — see chapter 18 of William Blum, ["Rogue State: A Guide to the World's Only Superpower"](#)

For documentation on torture – see chapter 5 of William Blum, [“Rogue State: A Guide to the World’s Only Superpower”](#)

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