

Cold War Then. Cold War Now.

By [William Blum](#)

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The anti-Russian/anti-Soviet bias in the American media appears to have no limit. You would think that they would have enough self-awareness and enough journalistic integrity -- just enough -- to be concerned about their image. But it keeps on coming, piled higher and deeper.

One of the latest cases in point is a review of a new biography of Mikhail Gorbachev in the *New York Times Book Review* (September 10). The review says that Gorbachev "was no hero to his own people" because he was "the destroyer of their empire". This is how the *New York Times* avoids having to say anything positive about life in the Soviet Union or about socialism. They would have readers believe that it was the loss of the likes of Czechoslovakia or Hungary et al. that upset the Russian people, not the loss, under Gorbachev's *perestroika*, of a decent standard of living for all, a loss affecting people's rent, employment, vacations, medical care, education, and many other aspects of the Soviet welfare state.

Accompanying this review is a quote from a 1996 *Times* review of Gorbachev's own memoir, which said:

"It mystifies Westerners that Mikhail Gorbachev is loathed and ridiculed in his own country. This is the man who pulled the world several steps back from the nuclear brink and lifted a crushing fear from his countrymen, who ended bloody foreign adventures [and] liberated Eastern Europe. ... Yet his repudiation at home could hardly be more complete. His political comeback attempt in June attracted less than 1 percent of the vote."

Thus is Gorbachev's unpopularity with his own people further relegated to the category of "mystery", and not due to the profound social changes.

It should be noted that in 1999, *USA Today* reported:

"When the Berlin Wall crumbled [1989], East Germans imagined a life of freedom where consumer goods were abundant and hardships would fade. Ten years later, a remarkable 51% say they were happier with communism."

Earlier polls would likely have shown even more than 51% expressing such a sentiment, for in the ten years many of those who remembered life in East Germany with some fondness had passed away; although even 10 years later, in 2009, the *Washington Post* could report:

"Westerners [West Berliners] say they are fed up with the tendency of their

eastern counterparts to wax nostalgic about communist times.”

It was in the post-unification period that a new Russian and eastern Europe proverb was born:

“Everything the Communists said about Communism was a lie, but everything they said about capitalism turned out to be the truth.”

The current *New York Times* review twice refers to Vladimir Putin as “authoritarian”, as does, routinely, much of the Western media. None of the many such references I have come across in recent years has given an example of such authoritarian policies, although such examples of course exist, as they do under a man named Trump and a woman named May and every other government in the world. But clearly if a strong case could be made of Putin being authoritarian, the Western media would routinely document such in their attacks upon the Russian president. Why do they not?

The review further refers to Putin to as “the cold-eye former K.G.B. lieutenant colonel”. One has to wonder if the *New York Times* has ever referred to President George H.W. Bush as “the cold-eye former CIA Director”.

Just as in the first Cold War, one of the basic problems is that Americans have great difficulty in believing that Russians mean well. Apropos this, I’d like to recall the following written about George Kennan, one of the most prominent American diplomats ever:

Crossing Poland with the first US diplomatic mission to the Soviet Union in the winter of 1933, a young American diplomat named George Kennan was somewhat astonished to hear the Soviet escort, Foreign Minister Maxim Litvinov, reminisce about growing up in a village nearby, about the books he had read and his dreams as a small boy of being a librarian.

“We suddenly realized, or at least I did, that these people we were dealing with were human beings like ourselves,” Kennan wrote, “that they had been born somewhere, that they had their childhood ambitions as we had. It seemed for a brief moment we could break through and embrace these people.”

It hasn’t happened yet.

Kennan’s sudden realization brings George Orwell to mind:

“We have now sunk to a depth at which the restatement of the obvious is the first duty of intelligent men.”

The plague of nationalism

The world has enough countries. Too goddamn many if you ask me. Is there room for any more delegations at the United Nations? Any more parking spots in New York? Have the people of Catalonia, who are seeking independence from Spain in an October 1 vote, considered that their new nation will have to open *hundreds* of new embassies and consulates around the world, furnish them all, fill them all with paid employees, houses and

apartments and furniture for many of them, several new cars for each diplomatic post. ... How many billions of dollars in taxes will be taken from the Catalan people to pay for all this?

And what about the military? Any self-respecting country needs an army and a navy. Will the new Catalonia be able to afford even halfway decent armed forces? The new country will of course have to join NATO with its obligatory minimum defense capability. There goes a billion or two more.

Plus what it will have to pay the European Union, which will simply be replacing Madrid in imposing many legal restrictions upon the Catalan people.

And for what noble purpose are they rising up? Freedom, democracy, civil liberties, human rights? No. It's all for money. Madrid is taking in more in taxes from Catalonia than it returns in services, something which can be said about many city-state relationships in the United States. (Presumably there are also some individual Catalans who have their odd personal reasons.)



Source: Socialist Project

Catalan nationalists insist that “self-determination” is an inalienable right and cannot be curbed by the Spanish Constitution. Well, then, why stop with an “autonomous community” as Catalonia is designated? Why don’t provinces everywhere have the right to declare their independence? How about cities? Or neighborhoods? Why not my block? I could be the president.

And there are many other restive independence movements in the world, like the Kurds in Iraq and Turkey; in Scotland, Belgium and Italy; and California. Lord help us. Many countries are very reluctant to even recognize a new state for fear that it might encourage their own people to break away.

If love is blind, nationalism has lost all five senses.

"If nature were a bank, they would have already rescued it." – Eduardo Galeano

U.S. Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin told a New York investor conference that Hurricane Irma would ultimately boost the economy by sparking rebuilding.

"There clearly is going to be an impact on GDP in the short run, we will make it up in the long run. As we rebuild, that will help GDP. It won't have a bad impact on the economy."

Hmmm ... very interesting ... Can we therefore assume that if the damage had been twice as bad it would have boosted the economy even more?

Meanwhile, in the non-Trump, non-fantasy world, there is a thing called climate change; i.e. the quality of our lives, the survival of the planet. What keeps corporations from modifying their behavior so as to be kinder to our environment? It is of course the good old "bottom line" again. What can we do to convince the corporations to consistently behave like good citizens? Nothing that hasn't already been tried and failed. Except one thing. ... unmentionable in polite company. ... unmentionable in a capitalist society. ... Nationalization. There, I said it. Now I'll be getting letters addressed to "The Old Stalinist".

But nationalization is not a panacea either, at least for the environment. There's the greatest single source of man-made environmental damage in the world – The United States military. And it's already been nationalized. But doing away with private corporations will reduce the drive toward imperialism sufficiently that before long the need for a military will fade away and we can live like Costa Rica. If you think that that would put the United States in danger of attack, please tell me who would attack, and why.

The argument I like to use when speaking to those who don't accept the idea that extreme weather phenomena are man-made is this:

Well, we can proceed in one of two ways:

1. We can do our best to limit the greenhouse effect by curtailing greenhouse gas emissions (carbon dioxide, methane, and nitrous oxide) into the atmosphere, and if it turns out that these emissions were not in fact the cause of all the extreme weather phenomena, then we've wasted a lot of time, effort and money (although other benefits to the ecosystem would still accrue).
2. We can do nothing at all to curtail the emission of greenhouse gases into the atmosphere, and if it turns out that these emissions were in fact the leading cause of all the extreme weather phenomena (not simply extreme, but getting downright freaky), then we've lost the earth and life as we know it.

So, are you a gambler?

The new Vietnam documentary

At the beginning of Ken Burns' new documentary on the American war in Vietnam the narrator says the war "was begun in good faith by decent people out of fateful misunderstandings, American overconfidence and Cold War misunderstandings."

The early American involvement in Vietnam can be marked by two things in particular:

(1) helping the French imperialists in their fight against the forces led by Ho Chi Minh of North Vietnam and

(2) the cancellation of the elections that would have united North and South Vietnam as one nation because the US and its South Vietnam allies knew that Ho Chi Minh would win. It was that simple.

Nothing of good faith or decency in that scenario. No misunderstandings. Ho Chi Minh was a great admirer of America and its Declaration of Independence. His own actual declaration of 1945 begins with the familiar "All men are created equal. They are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights, among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness." But Ho Chi Minh was what was called a "communist". It was that simple. (See the Vietnam chapter in my book *Killing Hope* for the details.)

Daniel Ellsberg's conclusion about the US in Vietnam:

"It wasn't that we were on the wrong side; we were the wrong side."

Ms. Hillary

She has a new book out and lots of interviews, all giving her the opportunity to complain about the many forces that joined together to deny her her rightful place as queen. I might feel a bit, just a bit, of sympathy for the woman if not for her greatest crime.



Source: [The Duran](#)

There was a country called Libya. It had the highest standard of living in all of Africa; its people had not only free education and health care but all kinds of other benefits that other Africans could only dream about. It was also a secular state, a quality to be cherished in Africa and the Middle East. But Moammar Gaddafi of Libya was never a properly obedient client of Washington. Amongst other shortcomings, the man threatened to replace the US dollar with gold for payment of oil transactions, create a common African currency, and was a strong supporter of the Palestinians and foe of Israel.

In 2011, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton was the prime moving force behind the United States and NATO turning Libya into a failed state, where it remains today.

The attack against Libya was one that the *New York Times* said Clinton had "championed", convincing President Obama in "what was arguably her moment of greatest influence as Secretary of State." The people of Libya were bombed almost daily for more than six months. The main excuse given was that Gaddafi was about to invade Benghazi, the Libyan center of his opponents, and so the United States and NATO were thus saving the people of that city from a massacre. The American people and the American media of course swallowed this story, though no convincing evidence of the alleged impending massacre has ever been presented. The nearest thing to an official US government account of the matter – a Congressional Research Service report on events in Libya for the period – makes no mention at all of the threatened massacre.

The US/NATO heavy bombing sent Libya crashing in utter chaos, leading to the widespread

dispersal throughout North African and Middle East hotspots of the gigantic arsenal of weaponry that Gaddafi had accumulated. Libya is now a haven for terrorists, from al Qaeda to ISIS, whereas Gaddafi had been a leading foe of terrorists. He had declared Libya as a barrier to terrorists, as well as African refugees, going to Europe. The bombing has contributed greatly to the area's mammoth refugee crisis.

And when Hillary was shown a video about the horrific murder of Gaddafi by his opponents she loudly cackled (yes, that's the word):

"We came, we saw, he died!"

You can see it on Youtube.

There's also her support of placing regime change in Syria ahead of supporting the Syrian government in its struggle against ISIS and other terrorist groups. Even more disastrous was the 2003 US invasion of Iraq which she as a senator supported.

If all this is not sufficient to capture the utter charm of the woman, another foreign-policy adventure, one which her swooning followers totally ignore, the few that even know about it, is the coup ousting the moderately progressive Manuel Zelaya of Honduras in June, 2009. A tale told many times in Latin America: The downtrodden masses finally put into power a leader committed to reversing the status quo, determined to try to put an end to two centuries of oppression ... and before long the military overthrows the democratically-elected government, while the United States - if not the mastermind behind the coup - does nothing to prevent it or to punish the coup regime, as only the United States can punish; meanwhile Washington officials pretend to be very upset over this "affront to democracy".

District of Columbia

How many people around the world know that in Washington, DC (District of Columbia, where I live), the capital city of the United States -- the country that is always lecturing the world about this thing called "democracy" -- the citizens do not have the final say over making the laws that determine life in their city? Many Americans as well are not aware of this.

According to the US Constitution (Section 8) Congress has the final say, and in recent years has blocked the city from using local tax dollars to subsidize abortion for low-income women, blocked the implementation of legal marijuana use, blocked needle exchanges, blocked certain taxes, blocked a law that says employers cannot discriminate against workers based on their reproductive decisions, imposed private schools into the public-school system, and will soon probably block the District's new assisted-suicide law (already blocked in the House of Representatives). On top of all this, since DC is not a state, its citizens do not have any representatives in the Senate and their sole representative in the House has only the barest non-voting, token rights. DC residents did not even have the right to vote for the president until 1964.

In 2015 in Brussels, the Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization formally voted to accept the District of Columbia as a new member. UNPO is an international democratic organization whose members are indigenous peoples, minorities and unrecognized or occupied territories who have joined together to protect and promote their human and

cultural rights, to preserve their environments and to find nonviolent solutions to conflicts which affect them.

William Blum is an author, historian, and U.S. foreign policy critic. He is the author of [Killing Hope: U.S. Military and CIA Interventions Since World War II](#) and [Rogue State: A Guide to the World's Only Superpower](#), among others.

Notes

1. USA Today, October 11, 1999, p.1
2. Washington Post, May 12, 2009; see a similar story November 5, 2009
3. Walter Isaacson & Evan Thomas, *The Wise Men* (1986), p.158
4. Associated Press, September 21, 2017
5. New York Times, February 28, 2016
6. ["Libya: Transition and U.S. Policy"](#), updated March 4, 2016.
7. RT (Russia Today) television station, January 8, 2016
8. See Mark Weisbrot's ["Top Ten Ways You Can Tell Which Side The United States Government is On With Regard to the Military Coup in Honduras"](#)

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