

Interview - William Blum

Written by E-International Relations

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William Blum is a popular writer and a strident critic of U.S. foreign policy. He is author of several books, including *Rogue State: A Guide to the World's Only Superpower*, *Killing Hope: U.S. Military and CIA Interventions Since World War II* and *America's Deadliest Export: Democracy – The Truth About US Foreign Policy and Everything Else*.

Blum worked at the United States Department of State in the mid-1960s. He was initially a dedicated anti-communist with dreams of becoming a Foreign Service officer, but, after he became disillusioned by the Vietnam War, he left the State Department in 1967. He went on to become one of the founders and editors of the radical underground newspaper *The Washington Free Press*. In 1969, he wrote and published an exposé of the CIA in which was revealed the names and addresses of more than 200 employees of the Agency. Subsequently Blum worked as a journalist in Chile, where he reported on the Allende government's "socialist experiment" and its violent overthrow in a CIA-designed coup. He was one of the recipients of Project Censored's awards, in 1999, for writing an article on how the United States gave Iraq the material to develop a chemical and biological warfare capability in the 1980s. In early 2006, Blum became the subject of widespread media attention when — in the form of a tape — Osama bin Laden issued a public statement in which he quoted Blum and recommended that all Americans read *Rogue State*.

Blum's writing devotes substantial attention to CIA interventions and assassination plots. Blum has described his life's mission as: "If not ending, at least slowing down the American Empire. At least injuring the beast. It's causing so much suffering around the world." He currently circulates a monthly newsletter by email called "The Anti-Empire Report".

In this interview, Blum offers his thoughts on past CIA interventions, the Obama Administration and explains how he became a 'crazed, fanatical socialist'.

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You were in Chile at the time of the coup which displaced Allende and put Pinochet in charge forty years ago. Recent declassified information shows that Kissinger pressed Nixon to overthrow the democratically elected Allende government because his "'model' effect can be insidious." Do you think that the U.S. would have acted the way it did had Kissinger not been involved?

Yes, it's been US policy — independent of who was president or Secretary of State — to attempt to suppress leftwing revolutions anywhere which might offer a viable alternative to the capitalist model. That's the reason for 54 years of intense hostility toward Cuba. I've documented in my books the frequent repetition of this policy, all the way to Venezuela.

It's been sixty years since the Iranian coup which ousted Iran's democratically elected Prime Minister, Mohammad Mossadeq, and the CIA has recently released documents which for the first time formally acknowledge its key role in the 1953 coup. What do you think has been the long-term legacy of this intervention in terms of its effect upon the Iranian people and on the mentality of the CIA?

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The Iranian people had 26 years of torture under the Shah and the CIA was encouraged to believe that it could overthrow any government it wished. The 1979 Islamic revolution did not bring much relief. Contrary to popular belief, the US supported the Islamists to some extent because the alternative was a possible leftist government, and there's nothing scarier to the American Empire than a leftist government.

Broadly speaking, a significant reason that the CIA's reputation among scholars is generally negative is because of its willingness to undertake covert operations and overlook international law. It could be argued, though, that this negative view is undeserved as the CIA's main historical and theoretical function has always been the analysis of intelligence rather than undertaking covert operations – and its analysis function has always been undertaken with a great degree of competence. When discussing CIA incompetence in regard to covert affairs, some specifically point out that the Directorate of Plans/Directorate of Operations/NCS was/is responsible for the majority of the CIA's historical wrongdoings as an organization and its positive contributions should be highlighted more regularly. Do you agree or disagree with these sentiments?

I have no interest or desire to engage in such intellectual games. They're meaningless. All the interventions, overthrows, assassinations, torture, military attacks, etc., etc., for 66 years..... It was the CIA, the US government, the US Empire, US foreign policy — all one big package; no purpose of any significance is served by trying to pinpoint which office in Washington did this and which office did that, at least not as a means to understanding US foreign policy.

Rogue State was infamously quoted by Osama bin Laden. In response, you said that you were glad for the endorsement, though you later changed this position somewhat. Is there anyone (or any cause) that you would not be glad to be endorsed by? If so why?

I don't recall changing my position. I believe that OBL shared my view about the terrible harm brought to the Mideast by US policies and that this was the reason for anti-American terrorism. It all depends on the reason for the endorsement.

When Obama took office, there was much hope that it would signal an era of change, particularly in the realms of foreign policy. However, the Obama Administration has been described as being worse than the Bush Administration for clandestine military activity, surveillance and general secrecy. Overall, would you say that this is the case?

Yes. And he has set back the cause of the American Left for years.

Your new book: “America's Deadliest Export: Democracy – The Truth About US Foreign Policy and Everything Else” is about how the American people been conditioned to believe that America's motives in ‘exporting’ democracy are honourable, even noble. What are some of the methods used to achieve this conditioning?

From childhood on — from comic books, TV, school, the church ... everything that goes into a society conditioning the nationalism of its members. It works the same all over the world but even more so in the US, the founder of advertising and public relations.

How has the way you understand the world changed over time, and what (or who) prompted the most significant shifts in your thinking?

The Vietnam War changed me from a loyal American hoping to become a Foreign Service Officer to a crazed, fanatical socialist. See my book “West-Bloc Dissident”

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A lot of the readers of e-International Relations are students. What advice would give to those considering careers in the CIA and intelligence community?

Read my books and the books of Philip Agee.

What key pieces of advice would you give to our student readers who share your ambition to if not end, at least slow down the American Empire?

Educate yourself and as many others as you can. Only the American people can stop the empire.

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*This interview was conducted by **AI McKay**. AI is the Blogs Editor of e-IR.*