

Keeping Track of the Empire's Crimes

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Theme: [US NATO War Agenda](#)

If you catch the CIA with its hand in the cookie jar and the Agency admits the obvious — what your eyes can plainly see — that its hand is indeed in the cookie jar, it means one of two things: a) the CIA's hand is in several other cookie jars at the same time which you don't know about and they hope that by confessing to the one instance they can keep the others covered up; or b) its hand is not really in the cookie jar — it's an illusion to throw you off the right scent — but they want you to believe it.

There have been numerous news stories in recent months about secret CIA programs, hidden from Congress, inspired by former vice-president Dick Cheney, in operation since the September 11 terrorist attacks, involving assassination of al Qaeda operatives or other non-believers-in-the-Empire abroad without the knowledge of their governments. The Agency admits to some sort of program having existed, but insists that it was canceled; and if it was an assassination program it was canceled before anyone was actually assassinated. Another report has the US military, not the CIA, putting the plan — or was it a different plan? — into operation, carrying out several assassinations including one in Kenya that proved to be a severe embarrassment and helped lead to the quashing of the program.¹

All of this can be confusing to those following the news. And rather irrelevant. We already know that the United States has been assassinating non-believers, or suspected non-believers, with regularity, and impunity, in recent years, using unmanned planes (drones) firing missiles, in Yemen, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Somalia, if not elsewhere. (Even more victims have been produced from amongst those who happened to be in the same house, car, wedding party, or funeral as the non-believer.) These murders apparently don't qualify as "assassinations", for somehow killing "terrorists" from 2000 feet is morally and legally superior to doing so from two feet away.

But whatever the real story is behind the current rash of speculation, we should not fall into the media's practice of at times intimating that multiple or routine CIA assassination attempts would be something shocking or at least very unusual.

I've compiled a list of CIA assassination attempts, successful and unsuccessful, against prominent foreign political figures, from 1949 through 2003, which, depending on how you count it, can run into the hundreds (targeting Fidel Castro alone totals 634 according to Cuban intelligence)²; the list can be updated by adding the allegedly al Qaeda leaders among the drone attack victims of recent years. Assassination and torture are the two things governments are most loath to admit to, and try their best to cover up. It's thus rare to find a government document or recorded statement mentioning a particular plan to assassinate someone. There is, however, an abundance of compelling circumstantial evidence to work with. [The list can be found here.](#)

For those of you who collect lists about splendid US foreign policy post-World War II, here are a few more that, lacking anything better to do, I've put together: [Attempts to overthrow more than 50 foreign governments, most of which had been democratically-elected.](#)

After his June 4 Cairo speech, President Obama was much praised for mentioning the 1953 CIA overthrow of Iranian prime minister Mohammed Mossadegh. But in his talk in Ghana on July 11 he failed to mention the CIA coup that ousted Ghanaian president Kwame Nkrumah in 1966³, referring to him only as a "giant" among African leaders. The Mossadegh coup is one of the most well-known CIA covert actions. Obama could not easily get away without mentioning it in a talk in the Middle East looking to mend fences. But the Nkrumah ouster is one of the least known; indeed, not a single print or broadcast news report in the American mainstream media saw fit to mention it at the time of the president's talk. Like it never happened.

And the next time you hear that Africa can't produce good leaders, people who are committed to the welfare of the masses of their people, think of Nkrumah and his fate. And think of Patrice Lumumba, overthrown in the Congo 1960-61 with the help of the United States; Agostinho Neto of Angola, against whom Washington waged war in the 1970s, making it impossible for him to institute progressive changes; Samora Machel of Mozambique against whom the CIA supported a counter-revolution in the 1970s-80s period; and Nelson Mandela of South Africa (now married to Machel's widow), who spent 28 years in prison thanks to the CIA.⁴

- Gross interference in democratic elections in at least 30 countries⁵
- [Waging war/military action, either directly or in conjunction with a proxy army, in some 30 countries](#)
- [Dropping bombs on the people of more than 30 countries](#)
- Attempts to suppress dozens of populist/nationalist movements in every corner of the world⁶

The Myths of Afghanistan, past and present

On the Fourth of July, Senator Patrick Leahy declared he was optimistic that, unlike the Soviet forces that were driven from Afghanistan 20 years ago, US forces could succeed there. The Democrat from Vermont stated:

"The Russians were sent running as they should have been. We helped send them running. But they were there to conquer the country. We've made it very clear, and everybody I talk to within Afghanistan feels the same way: they know we're there to help and we're going to leave. We've made it very clear we are going to leave. And it's going to be turned back to them. The ones that made the mistakes in the past are those that tried to conquer them."⁷

Leahy is a long-time liberal on foreign-policy issues, a champion of withholding US counter-narcotics assistance to foreign military units guilty of serious human-rights violations, and an outspoken critic of robbing terrorist suspects of their human and legal rights. Yet he is willing to send countless young Americans to a living hell, or horrible death, or maimed

survival.

And for what? Every point he made in his statement is simply wrong.

The Russians were not in Afghanistan to conquer it. The Soviet Union had existed next door to the country for more than 60 years without any kind of invasion. It was only when the United States intervened in Afghanistan to replace a government friendly to Moscow with one militantly anti-communist that the Russians invaded to do battle with the US-supported Islamic jihadists; precisely what the United States would have done to prevent a communist government in Canada or Mexico.

It's also rather difficult for the United States to claim that it's in Afghanistan to help the people there when it's killed tens of thousands of them simply for resisting the American invasion and occupation or for being in the wrong place at the wrong time; not a single one of the victims has been identified as having had any kind of connection to the terrorist attack in the US of September 11, 2001, the event usually cited by Washington as justification for the military intervention. Moreover, Afghanistan is now permeated with depleted uranium, cluster bombs-cum-landmines, white phosphorous, a witch's brew of other charming chemicals, and a population, after 30 years of almost non-stop warfare, of physically and mentally mutilated human beings, exceedingly susceptible to the promise of paradise, or at least relief, sold by the Taliban.

As to the US leaving ... utterly meaningless propaganda until it happens. Ask the people of South Korea — 56 years of American occupation and still counting; ask the people of Japan — 64 years. And Iraq? Would you want to wager your life's savings on which decade it will be that the last American soldier and military contractor leaves?

It's not even precise to say that the Russians were sent running. That was essentially Russian president Mikhail Gorbachev's decision, and it was more of a political decision than a military one. Gorbachev's fondest ambition was to turn the Soviet Union into a West-European style social democracy, and he fervently wished for the approval of those European leaders, virtually all of whom were cold-war anti-communists and opposed the Soviet intervention into Afghanistan.

There has been as much of the same "causes" for wars that did not happen as for wars that did.

Henry Allingham died in Britain on July 18 at age 113, believed to have been the world's oldest man. A veteran of World War I, he spent his final years reminding the British people about their service members killed during the war, which came to about a million: "I want everyone to know," he said during an interview in November. "They died for us."[8](#)

The whole million? Each one died for Britain? In the most useless imperialist war of the 20th century? No, let me correct that — the most useless imperialist war of *any* century. The British Empire, the French Empire, the Russian Empire, and the wannabe American Empire joined in battle against the Austro-Hungarian Empire and the Ottoman Empire as youthful bodies and spirits sank endlessly into the wretched mud of Belgium and Germany, the pools of blood of Russia and France. The wondrous nobility of it all is enough to make you swallow hard, fight back the tears, light a few candles, and throw up. Imagine, by the middle of this century Vietnam veterans in their 90s and 100s will be speaking of how each of their 58,000 war buddies died for America. By 2075 we'll be hearing the same stirring message from

ancient vets of Iraq and Afghanistan. How many will remember that there was a large protest movement against their glorious, holy crusades, particularly Vietnam and Iraq?

Supreme nonsense

Senate hearings to question a nominee for the Supreme Court are a supreme bore. The *sine qua non* for President Obama choosing Sonia Sotomayor appears to be that she's a woman with a Hispanic background. A LATINA! How often that word was used by her supporters. She would be the first LATINA on the Supreme Court! Dios mio!

Who gives a damn? All anyone should care about are her social and political opinions. Justice Clarence Thomas is a black man. A BLACK MAN! And he's as conservative as they come.

Supreme Court nominees, of all political stripes, typically feel obliged to pretend that their social and political leanings don't enter into their judicial opinions. But everyone knows this is rubbish. During her Senate hearing, Sotomayor declared: "It's not the heart that compels conclusions in cases. It's the law."

The former Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, Charles Evans Hughes, would not agree with her. "At the constitutional level where we work," he said, "ninety percent of any decision is emotional. The rational part of us supplies the reasons for supporting our predilections."⁹

By Sotomayor's own account, which echos news reports, she was not asked about her position on abortion by either President Obama or his staff. But what if she is actually anti-abortion? What if she turns out to be the swing vote that overturns Roe vs. Wade?

What if she's a proud admirer of the American Empire and its perpetual wars? American dissidents, civilian and military, may depend on her vote for their freedom from imprisonment.

What does she think about the "War on Terror"? The civil liberties and freedom from torture of various Americans and foreigners may depend on her attitude. In his 2007 trial, Jose Padilla, an American citizen, was found guilty of aiding terrorists. "The jury did seem to be an oddly cohesive group," the Washington Post reported. "On the last day of trial before the Fourth of July holiday, jurors arranged to dress in outfits so that each row in the jury box was its own patriotic color — red, white or blue."¹⁰ No one dared to question this blatant display of patriotism in the courtroom; neither the defense attorney, nor the prosecutor, nor the judge. How can we continue to pretend that people's legal positions exist independently of their political sentiments?

In the 2000 Supreme Court decision stopping the presidential electoral count in Florida, giving the election to George W. Bush, did the politics of the five most conservative justices play a role in the 5 to 4 decision? Of course. Judges are essentially politicians in black robes. But should we care? Don't ask, don't tell. Sonia Sotomayor is a LATINA!

Given the large Democratic majority in the Senate, Sotomayor was in very little danger of being rejected. She could have openly and proudly expressed her social and political positions — whatever they may be — and the Democratic senators could have done the same. How refreshing, maybe even educational if a discussion ensued. Instead it was just another political appointment by a president determined to not offend anyone if he can help it, and another tiresome ritual hearing. The Republican senators were much less shy about

revealing how they actually felt about important issues.

It didn't have to be that way. As Rabbi Michael Lerner of Tikkun.org pointed out during the hearings: "Democratic Senators could use their time to ask questions and make statements that explain why a liberal or progressive worldview is precisely what is needed on the Supreme Court."

NATO and Eastern Europe resource

No one chronicles the rise of the supra-government called NATO like Rick Rozoff in his "Stop NATO" mailings. NATO has become an ever-expanding behemoth, making war and interfering in political controversies all over Europe and beyond. The United States is not the world's only superpower; NATO is another, as it surrounds Russia and the Caspian Sea oil reserves; although the distinction between the two superpowers is little more than a facade. This year marks the tenth anniversary of the NATO/US 78-day bombing of Yugoslavia. On April 23, 1999 missiles slammed into Radio Television Serbia (RTS) in downtown Belgrade, killing 16 employees. The station, NATO claimed, was a legitimate military target because it broadcast propaganda. (Certainly a novel form of censorship; not to mention the fact that NATO could simply have taken out the station's transmitter.) What apparently bothered the Western powers was that RTS was reporting the horrendous effects of NATO's bombing as well as passing footage of the destruction to Western media.

To mark the anniversary, Amnesty International recently issued a demand that NATO be held accountable for the 16 deaths. Amnesty asserts that the bombing was a deliberate attack on a civilian object (one of many during the 78 days) and as such constitutes a war crime, and called upon NATO to launch a war crimes probe into the attack to ensure full accountability and redress for victims and their families.

Readers might consider signing up for the "Stop NATO" mailing list. Just write to: rwrozoff [at] yahoo.com. Rozoff scours the East European press each day and comes up with numerous gems ignored by the mainstream media. But a warning: The amount of material you'll receive is often considerable. You'll have to learn to pick and choose. You can get an idea of this by reading previous reports at <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/stopnato/messages>.

Notes

1. *The Guardian* (London) July 13, 2009 [↵](#)
2. Fabian Escalante, "Executive Action: 634 Ways to Kill Fidel Castro" (Ocean Press, 2006) [↵](#)
3. William Blum, *Killing Hope*, chapter 32 [↵](#)
4. William Blum, *Rogue State*, chapter 23 [↵](#)
5. *Ibid.*, chapter 18 [↵](#)
6. *Rogue State*, chapter 17, intermixed with other types of US interventions [↵](#)

7. Vermont TV station WCAX, July 4, 2009, WCAX.com [↵](#)
8. *Washington Post*, July 19, 2009 [↵](#)
9. William O. Douglas, "The Court Years, 1939-1975" (1980), p.8 [↵](#)
10. *Washington Post*, August 17, 2007 [↵](#)

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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