

Some Things You Need to Know before the World Ends

By [William Blum](#)

Region: [USA](#)

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Bird flu and capitalism

Preparing for and combating the threatened bird flu pandemic would be tough enough under the best of circumstances. But the circumstances the United States has to deal with include the reality that the country, more than any other on earth, is privately owned. It's corporations that we have to rely on to make virtually all the vaccines and drugs needed. The corporations, however, need financial incentives, perhaps the government paying for most or all of the research, and then turning the patent over to the corporations, as has often been the case; the corporations are concerned with being stuck with the cost of overproduction if it turns out that there's no pandemic; they're concerned about lawsuits from the inevitable cases of individuals who suffer ill effects from the vaccines or drugs; they get rather upset about a generic version being made available anywhere in the world; and they're highly concerned about obtaining a suitable profit margin, perhaps leading them to hold back on the supply to cause the price to rise. On top of all that, the corporate medical system has dumped millions of uninsured people into society's lap. How will these people fare during a pandemic?

What is needed is a mobilization reminiscent of World War Two. At that time the government commandeered the auto manufacturers to make tanks and jeeps instead of private cars. When a pressing need for an atom bomb was seen, Washington did not ask for bids from the private sector; it created the Manhattan Project to do it itself, with no concern for liability protection or profit margins. Women and blacks were given skilled factory jobs they had been traditionally denied. Hollywood was enlisted to make propaganda films. Indeed, much of the nation's activities, including farming, manufacturing, mining, communications, labor, education, and cultural undertakings were in some fashion brought under new and significant government control, with the war effort coming before private profit.

Those who swear by free enterprise argue that this "socialism" was instituted only because of the exigencies of the war. That's true, but it misses a vital point. The point is that it had been immediately recognized by the government that the wasteful and inefficient capitalist system, always in need of the proper financial care and feeding, was no way to win a war.

I would add that it's also no way to run a society of human beings with human needs. Most Americans agree with this but are not consciously aware that they hold such a belief. For this reason I've written an essay entitled: "The United States invades, bombs, and kills for it, but do Americans really believe in free enterprise?" {1}

The Wonderful World of Anti-Communism

Anti-communism is alive and well in the Washington, DC area. There's going to be a new statue, very near the Capitol: The Victims of Communism Memorial, which "will honor an estimated 100 million people killed or tortured under communist rule", a monument established by an Act of Congress.

Also coming soon: A Cold War Museum in nearby Virginia, to be located on a former Nike Missile Base and affiliated with the Smithsonian Institution. The state of Virginia has allocated a \$125,000 matching grant for the museum. Francis Gary Powers, Jr., son of the man whose U-2 spy plane was forced to crash land in the Soviet Union in 1960, is the motivating force behind the museum and the associated online magazine "Cold War Times". The journal is hardly a corrective to the many anti-communist myths Americans were spoon fed, from their church sermons to their comic books, which have hardened into historical concrete.

It may be difficult for young people today to believe, but the lies fed to the American people and the world about the Cold War, the Soviet Union, and communism (or "communism") were much more routine and flagrant than the lies of the past few years concerning Iraq and terrorism, the most flagrant and basic lie being the existence of something called the International Communist Conspiracy, seeking to take over the world and subvert everything decent and holy. (In actuality, what there was was people all over the Third World fighting for economic and political changes that didn't coincide with the needs of the American power elite, and so the US moved to crush those governments and those movements, even though the Soviet Union or China was playing hardly any role at all in the great majority of those scenarios.)

I don't know how those behind the memorial arrived at their figure of 100 million victims. I would guess that they'd be hard pressed to explain it themselves. On their own website one finds this: "In less than 100 years, Communism has claimed more than 100 million lives." So here they're saying it's more than 100 million even without including those tortured.

We've all heard the figures many times ... 10 million ... 20 million ... 40 million ... 60 million ... died under Stalin. But what does the number mean, whichever number you choose? Of course many people died under Stalin, many people died under Roosevelt, and many people are still dying under Bush. Dying appears to be a natural phenomenon in every country. The question is how did those people die under Stalin? Did they die from the famines that plagued the USSR in the 1920s and 30s? Did the Bolsheviks deliberately create those famines? How? Why? More people certainly died in India in the 20th century from famines than in the Soviet Union, but no one accuses India of the mass murder of its own citizens. Were millions actually murdered in cold blood in the Soviet Union? If so, how? The logistics of murdering tens of millions of people is daunting.

The ideological hijacking of history is never a pretty sight. Who, it must be asked, will build the Victims of Anti-Communism Memorial and Museum? To document and remember the abominable death, destruction, torture, and violation of human rights under the banner of fighting "communism", that we know under various names: Vietnam, Laos, Chile, Korea, Guatemala, El Salvador, Cambodia, Indonesia, Iran, Brazil, Greece, Argentina, Nicaragua, Haiti, Afghanistan, Iraq, and others.

Thought crimes

Ahmed Omar Abu Ali is a 24-year-old American citizen from Virginia who went to study at a university in Saudi Arabia. He was arrested by the Saudis, interrogated, and confessed to being part of an al Qaeda plot to assassinate George W. Bush while the president was

visiting the country. Abu Ali is now being held in the United States by federal authorities. His defense attorneys and his family have contended that any statements he made in Saudi custody were obtained through torture and should thus not be allowed into evidence. Two doctors who examined Abu Ali found evidence that he was tortured in Saudi Arabia, including scars on his back consistent with having been whipped, defense lawyers have said in court papers. The prosecution has argued that he was not tortured, and the judge presiding over the trial, which began October 31, has agreed to allow Abu Ali's confession into evidence.

Abu Ali confessed to the Saudis about conspiring to carry out other terrorist acts as well, but I'd like to focus here on the alleged assassination plot. Law enforcement sources cited by the Washington Post have said the plot against Bush, "never advanced beyond the talking stage".{3} If that is indeed the case, and even assuming there was no torture involved, then I'd raise the question of whether a "crime", worthy of punishment — and Abu Ali faces up to life in prison on the assassination charge alone — was committed. Or does it fall in the category of a "thought crime" made famous of course in Orwell's "1984"? Someone should perhaps tell the Justice Department that "1984" was meant to be a warning, not a how-to guide.

Who amongst us has not entertained fantasies of horrible and nasty things befalling our dear George W.? I've imagined myself as the perpetrator of actions taking care of the entire Bushgang all at once, including Cheney, Rumsfeld, Wolfowitz, Rice, Powell, Bolton and about a dozen other neo-con stars, all instantly falling victim to ... well, let's leave it at that on this FBI-patrolled Internet. But I've shared such pleasant thoughts with others in person. And they've shared theirs with me. And I'm sure that a million other Americans have had similar thoughts. Should we be indicted? How about His High Holiness Rev. Pat Robertson who publicly called for the assassination of Venezuelan president Hugo Chavez? He did it in all seriousness. Speaking to thousands of people. Without being tortured.

The elephant in Saddam Hussein's courtroom

The trial of Saddam Hussein has begun. He is charged with the deaths of more than 140 people who were executed after gunmen fired on his motorcade in the predominantly Shiite Muslim town of Dujail, north of Baghdad, in an attempt to assassinate him in 1982. This appears to be the only crime he's being tried for. Yet for a few years now we've been hearing about how Saddam used chemical weapons against "his own people" in the town of Halabja in March 1988. (Actually, the people were Kurds, who could be regarded as Saddam's "own people" only if the Seminoles were Andrew Jackson's own people). The Bush administration never tires of repeating that line to us. As recently as October 21, Karen Hughes, White House envoy for public diplomacy, told an audience in Indonesia that Saddam had "used weapons of mass destruction against his own people. He had murdered hundreds of thousands of his own people using poison gas." When challenged about the number, Hughes replied: "It's something that our U.S. government has said a number of times in the past. It's information that was used very widely after his attack on the Kurds. I believe it was close to 300,000. That's something I said every day in the course of the campaign. That's information that we talked about a great deal in America." The State Department later corrected Hughes, saying the number of victims in Halabja was about 5,000.{4} (This figure, too, may well have been inflated for political reasons; for at least the next six months following the Halabja attack one could find the casualty count being reported in major media as "hundreds", even by Iraq's Iranian foes; then, somehow, it ballooned to "5,000".){5}

Given the repeated administration emphasis of this event, you would think that it would

be the charge used in the court against Saddam, would you not? Well, I can think of two reasons why the US would be reluctant to bring that matter to court. One, the evidence for the crime has always been somewhat questionable; for example, at one time an arm of the Pentagon issued a report suggesting that it was actually Iran which had used the poison gas in Halabja.{6} And two, the United States, in addition to providing Saddam abundant financial and intelligence support, supplied him with lots of materials to help Iraq achieve its chemical and biological weapons capability; it would be kind of awkward if Saddam's defense raised this issue in the court. But the United States has carefully orchestrated the trial to exclude any unwanted testimony, including the well-known fact that not long after the 1982 carnage Saddam is being charged with, in December 1983, Donald Rumsfeld — perfectly well-informed about the Iraqi regime's methods and the use of chemical weapons against Iranian troops — arrived in Baghdad, sent by Ronald Reagan with the objective of strengthening the relationship between the two countries.{7}

Shameless self-promotion

Before beginning her recent government position, the cartoonly-awful Karen Hughes reportedly was getting \$50,000 (sic, sick) per speaking engagement. I ask for much less, much much less, but I'm getting too few offers. So if any reader has a contact with a university or other organization that is budgeted to pay honoraria to speakers, I'd like to ask you to inquire about a possible engagement for me. Muchas gracias.

I'd also like to announce that a greatly updated edition of my book *Rogue State: A Guide to the World's Only Superpower* has just been published. It first came out in 2000.

Lastly, some readers have informed me that in the last report quotation marks and apostrophes were replaced by garbage. I'm trying to find a solution to this problem and I'd appreciate being informed by anyone who finds this happening with this report; even better, let me know if you know the cause and/or cure of this.

NOTES

{1} <http://members.aol.com/superogue/system.htm>

{2} http://www.victimsofcommunism.org/history_communism.php

{3} Washington Post, September 9, 2005, p.4

{4} Washington Post, October 22, 2005, p.15

{5} New York Times, April 10, 1988, sec.4, p.3, re Iran; Washington Post, August 4 and September 4, 1988

{6} New York Times, January 31, 2003, p.29

{7} Barry Lando, "Saddam Hussein, a Biased Trial", *Le Monde* (Paris), October 17, 2005

William Blum is the author of:

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