

The Universe Unraveling: The Fate of Those Who Do Not Love the Empire

By [William Blum](#)

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The Southeast Asian country of Laos in the late 1950s and early 60s was a complex and confusing patchwork of civil conflicts, changes of government and switching loyalties. The CIA and the State Department alone could take credit for engineering coups at least once in each of the years 1958, 1959 and 1960. No study of Laos of this period appears to have had notable success in untangling the muddle of who exactly replaced whom, and when, and how, and why. After returning from Laos in 1961, American writer Norman Cousins stated that "if you want to get a sense of the universe unraveling, come to Laos. Complexity such as this has to be respected." 1

Syria 2012 has produced its own tangled complexity. In the past 18 months it appears that at one time or another virtually every nation in the Middle East and North Africa as well as members of NATO and the European Union has been reported as aiding those seeking to overthrow the regime of Bashar al-Assad, while Russia, China, and several other countries are reported as aiding Assad. The Syrian leader, for his part, has consistently referred to those in combat against him as "terrorists", citing the repeated use of car bombs and suicide bombers. The West has treated this accusation with scorn, or has simply ignored it. But the evidence that Assad has had good reason for his stance has been accumulating for some time now, particularly of late. Here is a small sample from recent months:

- "It is the sort of image that has become a staple of the Syrian revolution, a video of masked men calling themselves the Free Syrian Army and brandishing AK-47s — with one unsettling difference. In the background hang two flags of Al Qaeda, white Arabic writing on a black field ... The video, posted on YouTube, is one more bit of evidence that Al Qaeda and other Islamic extremists are doing their best to hijack the Syrian revolution." (New York Times, July 24, 2012)
- A leading German newspaper reported that the German intelligence service, BND, had concluded that 95% of the Syrian rebels come from abroad and are likely to be members of al Qaeda. (Die Welt, September 30, 2012)

• "A network of French Islamists behind a grenade attack on a kosher market outside Paris last month also planned to join jihadists fighting in Syria ... Two suspects were responsible for recruiting and dispatching people 'to carry out jihad in some countries - notably Syria'," a state prosecutor said. (Associated Press, October 11, 2012)

• "Fighters from a shadowy militant group [Jabhat al-Nusra] with suspected links to al-Qaida joined Syrian rebels in seizing a government missile defense base in northern Syria on Friday, according to activists and amateur video. ... The videos show dozens of fighters inside the base near a radar tower, along with rows of large missiles, some on

the backs of trucks.” (Associated Press, October 12, 2012)

- “In a videotape posted this week on militant forums, the Egyptian-born jihadist Ayman al-Zawahiri ... urged support for Syria’s uprisings.” (Associated Press, October 28, 2012)

According to your favorite news source or commentator, President Assad is either a brutal murderer of his own people, amongst whom he has had very little support; or he’s a hero who’s long had the backing of the majority of the Syrian population and who is standing up to Western imperialists and their terrorist comrades-in-arms, whom the US is providing military aid, intelligence, and propaganda services.

Washington and its freedom fighters de jour would like to establish Libya II. And we all know how well Libya I has turned out.

Of backward nations and modern nations

Page one of the October 24 Washington Post contained a prominent photo of a man chained to a concrete wall at a shrine in Afghanistan. The accompanying story told us that the man was mentally ill and that “legend has it that those with mental disorders will be healed after spending 40 days in one of the shrine’s 16 tiny concrete cells”, living “on a subsistence diet of bread, water and black pepper.” Every year hundreds of Afghans bring mentally ill relatives to the shrine for this “cure”.

Immediately to the right of this story, constituting the paper’s lead story of the day, we learn that the United States is planning to continue its policy of assassinating individuals, via drone attacks, for the foreseeable future. This is Washington’s “cure” for the mental illness of not believing that America is the savior of mankind, bringing democracy, freedom and happiness to all. (The article adds that the number of “militants and civilians” killed in the drone campaign over the past 10 years will soon exceed 3,000 by some estimates, surpassing the number of people killed on September 11.)

Undoubtedly there are many people in Afghanistan, high and low, who know that their ancient cure is nonsense, but the chainings have continued for centuries. Just as certain, there are American officials who know the same about their own cure. Here’s a senior American official: “We can’t possibly kill everyone who wants to harm us. ... We’re not going to wind up in 10 years in a world of everybody holding hands and saying, ‘We love America’.” Yet , we are told, “Among senior Obama administration officials, there is a broad consensus that such operations are likely to be extended at least another decade. Given the way al-Qaeda continues to metastasize, some officials said no clear end is in sight.”

We can also be confident that there have been people chained to the wall in Afghanistan who were not particularly mentally ill to begin with but became so because of the cure. And just as certain, there have been numerous people in several countries who were not anti-American until a drone devastated their village, family or neighbors.

The Post article also reported that Adm. Mike Mullen, former chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, returned from Pakistan a while ago and recounted a heated confrontation with his counterpart, Gen. Ashfaq Parvez Kayani. “Mullen told White House and counterterrorism officials that the Pakistani military chief had demanded an answer to a seemingly reasonable question: After hundreds of drone strikes, how could the United States possibly still be working its way through a ‘top 20’ list?”

American officials defended the arrangement even while acknowledging an erosion in the caliber of operatives placed in the drones' cross hairs. "Is the person currently Number 4 as good as the Number 4 seven years ago? Probably not," said a former senior U.S. counterterrorism official. "But it doesn't mean he's not dangerous." The Post added this comment: "Internal doubts about the effectiveness of the drone campaign are almost nonexistent."

The next day we could read in the Post: "There is ample evidence in Pakistan that the more than 300 [drone] strikes launched under Obama have helped turn the vast majority of the population vehemently against the United States."

Wake up and smell the bullshit. Then go vote.

After the second presidential debate in early October, Luke Rudkowski of the media group We Are Change asked Florida Rep. Debbie Wasserman Schultz, the chair of the Democratic National Committee, about President Obama's widely reported "kill list" of Americans and foreigners who can be assassinated without charge or trial.

Luke Rudkowski: "If President Romney becomes president, he's going to inherit President Barack Obama's secret 'kill list'? This is going to be debated. How do you think Romney will handle this 'kill list,' and are you comfortable with him having a 'kill list'?"

Debbie Wasserman Schultz: "I have no idea what you're talking about."

Luke Rudkowski: "Obama has a secret 'kill list' which he has used to assassinate different people all over the world."

Debbie Wasserman Schultz: "I'm happy to answer any serious questions you have."

Luke Rudkowski: "Why is that not serious?"

Debbie Wasserman Schultz: "Because I have no idea what you're talking about."

Luke Rudkowski: "Of course you don't."

The existence of the U.S. 'kill list' has been publicly known for nearly two years and was the subject of a 6,000-word exposé in the New York Times in May.

At the same event, Sierra Adamson of We Are Change asked former White House Press Secretary and current Obama campaign adviser Robert Gibbs about the U.S. killing of Abdulrahman Awlaki, the teenage son of Anwar al-Awlaki in Yemen.

Sierra Adamson: "Do you think that the killing of Anwar al-Awlaki's 16-year-old son, who was an American citizen, is justifiable?"

Robert Gibbs: "I'm not going to get into Anwar al-Awlaki's son. I know that Anwar al-Awlaki renounced his citizenship."

Sierra Adamson: "His son was still an American citizen."

Robert Gibbs: "Did great harm to people in this country and was a regional al-Qaeda commander hoping to inflict harm and destruction on people that share his religion and

others in this country. And..."

Sierra Adamson: "That's an American citizen that's being targeted without due process of law, without trial. And he's underage. He's a minor."

Robert Gibbs: "I would suggest that you should have a far more responsible father. If they're truly concerned about the well-being of their children, I don't think becoming an al-Qaeda jihadist terrorist is the best way to go about doing your business." 2

To demonstrate that the bullshit is bipartisan, we now present Mr. Mitt Romney, speaking during the presidential foreign policy debate: "Syria is Iran's only ally in the Arab world. It's their route to the sea. It's the route for them to arm Hezbollah in Lebanon, which threatens, of course, our ally, Israel."

However, a look at a map reveals firstly that Iran does not share a border with Syria; there's something called Iraq in between; and secondly that Iran already has access to the sea on both its north and south; actually about 1100 miles of coastline. Romney has made this particular blunder repeatedly, and the Washington Post has pointed it out on several occasions. Post columnist Al Kamen recently wrote: "We tried so hard back in February to get Romney to stop saying that." 3

Of course, neither Obama nor the debate moderator pointed out Romney's errors.

The sanctity of life

"I'm as pro-life as a person gets," Congressman Paul Ryan, the Republican candidate for vice-president, told the conservative Weekly Standard in 2010. 4

How nice. Yet the man supports all of America's wars, each of which takes the lives of large numbers of people, both American and foreign; and he's opposed to national health insurance, which would save countless more lives. The good congressman is also an avid hunter and supporter of gun-owners' rights, so he apparently is not too pro-life concerning other creatures of God's Kingdom. Of course, what Ryan actually means by "life" is an embryo or fetus, perhaps even a zygote. Oh wait, that's not all of it - corporations are also people whose lives Ryan cherishes.

The fate of those who do not love the empire

On October 7 Hugo Chávez won his fourth term in office as president of Venezuela. The feeling of frustration that must have descended upon the Venezuelan and American power elite is likely reminiscent of Chile, March 1973, when the party of another socialist and American *bête noire*, Salvador Allende — despite the best intentions and dollars without end of the CIA — won about 44 percent of the vote in congressional elections, compared to some 36 percent in 1970. It was said to be the largest increase an incumbent party had ever received in Chile after being in power more than two years. The opposition parties had publicly expressed their optimism about capturing two-thirds of the congressional seats and thus being able to impeach Allende. Now they faced three more years under him, with the prospect of being unable, despite their most underhanded efforts, to prevent his popularity from increasing even further.

During the spring and summer the Agency's destabilization process escalated. There was a whole series of demonstrations and strikes, with a particularly long one by the truckers.

Time magazine reported: "While most of the country survived on short rations, the truckers seemed unusually well equipped for a lengthy holdout." A reporter asked a group of truckers who were camping and dining on "a lavish communal meal of steak, vegetables, wine and empanadas" where the money for it came from. "From the CIA," they answered laughingly.
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There was as well daily sabotage and violence, including assassination. In June, an abortive attack upon the Presidential Palace was carried out by the military and the ultra-right Patria y Libertad.

In September the military prevailed. "It is clear," said the later US Senate investigating committee, "the CIA received intelligence reports on the coup planning of the group which carried out the successful September 11 coup throughout the months of July, August, and September 1973." 6 The United States had also prepared the way for the military action through its economic intervention and support of the anti-Allende media.

Chávez has already been overthrown once in a coup that the United States choreographed, in 2002, but a combination of some loyal military officers and Chávez's followers in the streets combined for a remarkable reversal of the coup after but two days. The Venezuelan opposition will not again make the mistake of not finishing Chávez off when they have him in their custody.

Both Hugo Chávez and Salvador Allende had sinned by creating "nationalistic" regimes that served the wrong "national interest". The hatred felt by the power elite for such men is intense. The day after the legally and democratically elected Venezuelan leader was ousted, but before being restored to power, the New York Times (April 13, 2002) was moved to pen the following editorial:

"With yesterday's resignation [what the coup leaders called it] of President Hugo Chávez, Venezuelan democracy is no longer threatened by a would-be dictator. Mr. Chávez, a ruinous demagogue, stepped down after the military intervened and handed power to a respected business leader."

It should be noted that the "respected business leader", Pedro Carmona, quickly dissolved the National Assembly and the Supreme Court, and annulled the Venezuelan constitution.

And keep in mind that in the United States the New York Times is widely regarded as a "liberal" newspaper; most conservatives would say "very liberal", if not "socialist".

Notes

1. William Blum, Killing Hope: U.S. Military and CIA Interventions Since World War II, chapter 21 ↵
2. Democracy Now, October 25, 2012 ↵
3. Washington Post, October 24, 2012, column by Al Kamen ↵
4. New York Times, August 12, 2012 ↵
5. Time, September 24, 1973, p.46 ↵
6. Covert Action in Chile, 1963-1973, a Staff Report of The Select Committee to Study Governmental Operations with Respect to Intelligence Activities (US Senate) December 18, 1975, p.39 ↵

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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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Articles by: [William Blum](#)

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