

US Interventionism : The Enduring Mystique of the Marshall Plan

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Amidst all the stirring political upheavals in North Africa and the Middle East the name “Marshall Plan” keeps being repeated by political figures and media around the world as the key to rebuilding the economies of those societies to complement the political advances, which hopefully will be somewhat progressive. But *caveat emptor*. Let the buyer beware.

During my years of writing and speaking about the harm and injustice inflicted upon the world by unending United States interventions, I’ve often been met with resentment from those who accuse me of chronicling only the negative side of US foreign policy and ignoring the many positive sides. When I ask the person to give me some examples of what s/he thinks show the virtuous face of America’s dealings with the world in modern times, one of the things mentioned — almost without exception — is The Marshall Plan. This is usually described along the lines of: “After World War II, the United States unselfishly built up Europe economically, including our wartime enemies, and allowed them to compete with us.” Even those today who are very cynical about US foreign policy, who are quick to question the White House’s motives in Afghanistan, Iraq and elsewhere, have little problem in accepting this picture of an altruistic America of the period 1948-1952. But let’s have a look at the Marshall Plan outside the official and popular versions.

After World War II, the United States, triumphant abroad and undamaged at home, saw a door wide open for world supremacy. Only the thing called “communism” stood in the way, politically, militarily, and ideologically. The entire US foreign policy establishment was mobilized to confront this “enemy”, and the Marshall Plan was an integral part of this campaign. How could it be otherwise? Anti-communism had been the principal pillar of US foreign policy from the Russian Revolution up to World War II, pausing for the war until the closing months of the Pacific campaign, when Washington put challenging communism ahead of fighting the Japanese. This return to anti-communism included the dropping of the atom bomb on Japan as a warning to the Soviets. [1](#)

After the war, anti-communism continued as the leitmotif of American foreign policy as naturally as if World War II and the alliance with the Soviet Union had not happened. Along with the CIA, the Rockefeller and Ford Foundations, the Council on Foreign Relations, certain corporations, and a few other private institutions, the Marshall Plan was one more arrow in the quiver of those striving to remake Europe to suit Washington’s desires:

1. Spreading the capitalist gospel — to counter strong postwar tendencies towards socialism.
2. Opening markets to provide new customers for US corporations — a major reason for helping to rebuild the European economies; e.g., a billion dollars of

tobacco at today's prices, spurred by US tobacco interests.

3. Pushing for the creation of the Common Market and NATO as integral parts of the West European bulwark against the alleged Soviet threat.
4. Suppressing the left all over Western Europe, most notably sabotaging the Communist Parties in France and Italy in their bids for legal, non-violent, electoral victory. Marshall Plan funds were secretly siphoned off to finance this endeavor, and the promise of aid to a country, or the threat of its cutoff, was used as a bullying club; indeed, France and Italy would certainly have been exempted from receiving aid if they had not gone along with the plots to exclude the communists from any kind of influential role.

The CIA also skimmed large amounts of Marshall Plan funds to covertly maintain cultural institutions, journalists, and publishers, at home and abroad, for the heated and omnipresent propaganda of the Cold War; the selling of the Marshall Plan to the American public and elsewhere was entwined with fighting "the red menace". Moreover, in its covert operations, CIA personnel at times used the Marshall Plan as cover, and one of the Plan's chief architects, Richard Bissell, then moved to the CIA, stopping off briefly at the Ford Foundation, a long time conduit for CIA covert funds. One big happy family.

The Marshall Plan imposed all kinds of restrictions on the recipient countries, all manner of economic and fiscal criteria which had to be met, designed for a wide open return to free enterprise. The US had the right to control not only how Marshall Plan dollars were spent, but also to approve the expenditure of an equivalent amount of the local currency, giving Washington substantial power over the internal plans and programs of the European states; welfare programs for the needy survivors of the war were looked upon with disfavor by the United States; even rationing smelled too much like socialism and had to go or be scaled down; nationalization of industry was even more vehemently opposed by Washington. The great bulk of Marshall Plan funds returned to the United States, or never left, to purchase American goods, making American corporations among the chief beneficiaries.

The program could be seen as more a joint business operation between governments than an American "handout"; often it was a business arrangement between American and European ruling classes, many of the latter fresh from their service to the Third Reich, some of the former as well; or it was an arrangement between Congressmen and their favorite corporations to export certain commodities, including a lot of military goods. Thus did the Marshall Plan help lay the foundation for the military industrial complex as a permanent feature of American life.

It is very difficult to find, or put together, a clear, credible description of how the Marshall Plan played a pivotal or indispensable role in the recovery in each of the 16 recipient nations. The opposing view, at least as clear, is that the Europeans — highly educated, skilled and experienced — could have recovered from the war on their own without an extensive master plan and aid program from abroad, and indeed had already made significant strides in this direction before the Plan's funds began flowing. Marshall Plan funds were not directed primarily toward the urgently needed feeding of individuals or rebuilding their homes, schools, or factories, but at strengthening the economic superstructure, particularly the iron, steel and power industries. The period was in fact marked by deflationary policies, unemployment and recession. The one unambiguous outcome was the full restoration of the propertied class. [2](#)

The rising up of the people ... and the conservative mind

James Baker served as the Chief of Staff in President Ronald Reagan's first administration and in the final year of the administration of President George H.W. Bush. He was also Secretary of the Treasury under Reagan and Secretary of State under Bush. Thus, by establishment standards and values, inside marble-columned institutions, Baker is a man to be taken seriously when it comes to affairs of state. Here he is on February 3, during an interview by our favorite TV station, our very own shining beacon of truth, Fox News:

"We want to see the people in the Middle East have a chance at democracy and free markets ... I'm sorry, democracy and human rights." [3](#)

Baker has a record of speaking his mind, whether Freudian-slip-like or not. When he was Secretary of State, on an occasion when the Middle East was being discussed at a government meeting, and Jewish-American influence was mentioned, Baker was reported to have said "Fuck the Jews! They don't vote for us anyway." [4](#)

They couldn't resist, could they?

News flash: "Judge Mustafa Abdel Jallil, the Libyan justice minister who resigned last week in protest over the use of force against unarmed civilians, said he has proof that Libyan leader Moammar Gadhafi ordered the bombing of Pan Am flight 103 over Lockerbie, Scotland on Dec. 21, 1988. He would not disclose details of the alleged evidence." [5](#)

Hmmm, let me guess now why he wouldn't disclose details of the alleged evidence ... hmmm ... Ah, I know — because it doesn't exist! How could Gadhafi's many enemies in Libya resist kicking him like this when he's down? Or perhaps the honorable judge is simply protecting himself from a future international criminal tribunal for his years of service to the Libyan state? If you read any more of such nonsense — and you will — reach for some of the antidote I've been providing for more than 20 years. [6](#)

The empire's deep dark secret

"In my opinion, any future defense secretary who advises the president to again send a big American land army into Asia or into the Middle East or Africa should have his head examined," declared US Secretary of Defense Robert Gates on February 25.

Remarkable. Every one of the many wars the United States has engaged in since the end of World War II has been presented to the American people, explicitly or implicitly, as a war of necessity, not a war of choice; a war urgently needed to protect American citizens, American allies, vital American "interests", freedom, or democracy. Here is President Obama speaking of Afghanistan: "But we must never forget this is not a war of choice. This is a war of necessity." [7](#)

This being the case, how can a future administration say it will not go to war if any of these noble causes is seriously threatened? The answer is that these noble causes are irrelevant. The United States goes to war where and when it wants, and if a noble cause is not self-evident, the government, with indispensable help from the American media, will manufacture it. Secretary Gates is now admitting that there is choice involved. Well, Bob, thanks for telling us. You were Bush's Secretary of Defense as well, and before that 26 years

in the CIA and the National Security Council. You sure know how to keep a secret.

Items of interest from a journal I've kept for 40 years, part II

- In its more than 50 years of revolution Cuba has never reciprocated the US aggression against it; no military or terrorist assaults have emanated from Havana in spite of the many hundreds of CIA aerial bombings, ground attacks, acts of sabotage, and assassination attempts. Oh, did I mention all the chemical and biological warfare? Oddly, the State Department's list of "State sponsors of terrorism" includes Cuba, but not the United States. The little nation of Cuba has defied all rational odds against its socialist survival.
- The wit and wisdom of Mr. Barack Obama: "To ensure prosperity here at home and peace abroad, we all share the belief we have to maintain the strongest military on the planet." (December 1, 2008, *Agence France Presse*) How true. All Americans share that belief, as they rejoice in the strongest military on the planet and a veritable overflowing of prosperity at home and peace abroad.
- Steven Bradbury, Department of Justice lawyer under George W. Bush, testifying before the Senate Judiciary Committee, which was discussing the legal status of prisoners at Guantanamo Bay: "The president is always right." (*Washington Post*, July 12, 2006)
- "There are 3 billion people in the world and we have only 200 million of them. We are outnumbered 15 to 1. If might did make right they would sweep over the United States and take what we have. We have what they want." - *President Lyndon Johnson, 1966*
- As the George W. Bush administration was entering office in 2000, Donald Rumsfeld exuberantly expressed grandiose ambitions for Middle East domination, telling the National Security Council: "Imagine what the region would look like without Saddam and with a regime that's aligned with US interests. It would change everything in the region and beyond." A few weeks later, Bush speechwriter David Frum declared to the *New York Times Magazine*: "An American-led overthrow of Saddam Hussein, and the replacement of the radical Baathist dictatorship with a new government more closely aligned with the United States, would put America more wholly in charge of the region than any power since the Ottomans, or maybe even the Romans."
- Shortly after Salvador Allende became president of Chile in 1970, Nixon's National Security Advisor, Henry Kissinger, recorded a conversation in which Secretary of State William Rogers agreed that "we ought, as you say, to cold-bloodedly decide what to do and then do it," but warned it should be done "discreetly so that it doesn't backfire." Rogers predicted that "after all we have said about elections, if the first time a Communist wins the U.S. tries to prevent the constitutional process from coming into play we will look very bad."
- "The revulsion against war ... will be an almost insuperable obstacle for us to overcome. For that reason, I am convinced that we must begin now to set the machinery in motion for a permanent wartime economy." Charles E. Wilson, 1944. During World War II he held leading positions overseeing the huge US military production effort; after the war he resumed his position as CEO of General Electric, one of the leading defense corporations.
- Remember Ben Tre? That was the Vietnamese village the Americans destroyed in 1968, saying "It became necessary to destroy the town in order to save it." Since then the Americans have been saving towns all over the globe, in

Cambodia, Laos, Panama, Nicaragua, Sudan, Iraq, Yugoslavia and more. Then on Sept 11, 2001, someone, no doubt overcome with gratitude, decided to save some Americans. – *Bev Currie, Canada*

- United Nations Resolution 1244, adopted in 1999, reaffirmed the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the former Federal Republic of Yugoslavia to which Serbia was the recognized successor state, and established that Kosovo was to remain part of Serbia. Today, Kosovo is independent, because the United States wants it that way, because Serbia is still being punished for its refusal in the 1990s to act like a proper European state displaying subservience to the United States, the European Union, NATO, and capitalism. Independent Kosovo is perhaps the most genuinely gangster-state in the world. It's led by Prime Minister Hashim Thaci, whom a Council of Europe investigation recently accused of being the boss of a criminal operation to kidnap people and steal their kidneys.(sic) (*Associated Press*, December 14 and 15, 2010) He and Washington, naturally, are on the best of terms.
- “Look,” said Russian president Vladimir Putin about NATO in 2001, “this is a military organization. It's moving towards our border. Why?” He subsequently described NATO as “the stinking corpse of the cold war.” (*Associated Press*, June 16, 2001; *Press Trust of India*, December 21, 2007)
- Senator John McCain, re: fighting in Georgia, 2008: “I'm interested in good relations between the United States and Russia. But in the 21st century, nations don't invade other nations.” (*Washington Post*, August 14, 2008) One really has to wonder at times about the sanity of neo-conservatives, or at least their IQ.
- Re: “collateral damage” produced by US bombing in many countries: Killing innocent bystanders when targeting someone else has long been considered murder in Western law.
- “It is forbidden to kill; therefore all murderers are punished unless they kill in large numbers and to the sound of trumpets.” – *Voltaire*
- “The central aim of the war in Afghanistan — planned well before the attacks of September 11, 2001 — was to take advantage of the power vacuum in Central Asia created by the Soviet Union's dissolution to assert US domination over a region containing the second largest proven reserves of petroleum and natural gas in the world.” – *Bill Van Auken, World Socialist Web Site*
- “To me, I confess, [countries] are pieces on a chessboard upon which is being played out a game for dominion of the world.” Lord Curzon, British viceroy of India, speaking about Afghanistan, 1898
- Ricardo Alarcon, President of the Cuban National Assembly, stated in 2008: Cuba allows CNN, AP and Chicago Tribune to maintain offices in Cuba, but the US refuses to allow Cuban journalists to work in the United States.
- Washington's “Plan Colombia”, launched in 2000, was the militarization of the war on drugs.
- Michael Moore, March 24, 2008: “I see that Frontline on PBS this week has a documentary called ‘Bush's War’. That's what I've been calling it for a long time. It's not the ‘Iraq War’. Iraq did nothing. Iraq didn't plan 9/11. It didn't have weapons of mass destruction. It DID have movie theaters and bars and women wearing what they wanted and a significant Christian population and one of the few Arab capitals with an open synagogue. But that's all gone now. Show a movie and you'll be shot in the head. Over a hundred women have been randomly executed for not wearing a scarf.”
- Michael Collon: “Let's replace the word ‘democratic’ by ‘with us’ and the word

‘terrorist’ by ‘against us’.”

- The American Century went the way of the Thousand Year Reich.
- Reagan invaded Grenada in October 1983 because he cut and ran from Beirut after the United States lost 241 Marines in the infamous truck bombing. The United States invaded Grenada two days later.
- Noam Chomsky: “The whole debate about the Iranian ‘interference’ in Iraq makes sense only on one assumption; namely, that ‘we own the world’. If we own the world, then the only question that can arise is that someone else is interfering in a country we have invaded and occupied. So if you look over the debate that took place and is still taking place about Iranian interference, no one points out this is insane. How can Iran be interfering in a country that we invaded and occupied? It’s only appropriate on the presupposition that we own the world. Once you have that established in your head, the discussion is perfectly sensible.”
- In late 1997, according to Dana Priest’s book, *The Mission*, the Bill Clinton White House wanted CENTCOM commander Gen. Anthony Zinni to order his pilots to provoke a military confrontation with Iraq in the no-fly zone by deliberately drawing fire from Iraqi planes.
- Reagan accepted a fateful trade-off when he agreed not to complain about Pakistan’s efforts to acquire a nuclear weapons capability in exchange for Pakistani cooperation in helping the Afghan rebels.
- “The presumption of ‘government incompetence’ is seldom a useful assumption in evaluating the behavior of governments. We only reach such a conclusion if we take their official rhetoric at face value. In terms of ‘achieving democracy’, the official rhetoric, Bush has been ‘incompetent’ in Iraq. But in terms of the real agenda — building permanent bases and controlling the oil — he has in fact been successful. I have found that this is always the pattern: some real agenda is always being achieved by the policies in force, despite the apparent bungling in terms of the official agenda.” – *Richard K. Moore*
- The 9/11 attacks reflected the anger and rage that US foreign policy had produced in the past and then provided the excuse for US officials to continue such policy in the future.

Notes

1. See William Blum’s [essay](#) on the use of the atomic bomb ↵
2. For discussion of various aspects of the Marshall Plan see, for example, Joyce & Gabriel Kolko, *The Limits of Power: The World and US Foreign Policy 1945-1954* (1972), chapters 13, 16, 17; Sallie Pisani, *The CIA and the Marshall Plan* (1991) passim; Frances Stonor Saunders, *The Cultural Cold War: The CIA and the world of arts and letters* (2000) passim ↵
3. [Crisis in Egypt – James A. Baker III on Middle East Political Change](#) ↵
4. *The Guardian* (London), December 12, 2000; *Haaretz* (Israel), November 14, 2008 ↵
5. *McClatchy Newspapers*, February 26, 2011 ↵
6. [The Bombing of PanAm Flight 103: Case Not Closed](#) ↵
7. Veterans of Foreign Wars convention, August 17, 2009

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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