

Hurt Feelings Over Afghan Complaints

American officials are expressing hurt feelings over complaints from Afghan leaders about the deaths of civilians resulting from the U.S.-led war in Afghanistan. Some Afghans have gone so far as to accuse NATO of “occupying” their country these past 10 years, an observation that historian William Blum assesses in this guest essay.

By William Blum

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Afghanistan President Hamid Karzai’s criticism of U.S. and NATO forces in his country grows more angry and confrontational with each passing week. Recently, U.S. Ambassador Karl Eikenberry was moved to reply to him:

“When Americans, who are serving in your country at great cost, in terms of lives and treasure, hear themselves compared with occupiers, told that they are only here to advance their own interest, and likened to the brutal enemies of the Afghan people ... they are filled with confusion and grow weary of our effort here. ... We begin to lose our inspiration to carry on.”

That certainly may apply to many of the soldiers in the field. But oh, if only American military and political leaders could really be so offended and insulted by what’s said about them and their many wars.

Eikenberry, who has served in Afghanistan a total of five years as a senior U.S. Army general and then as ambassador, warned that if Afghan leaders reach the point where they “believe that we are doing more harm than good,” then Americans may “reach a point that we feel our soldiers and civilians are being asked to sacrifice without a just cause,” and “the American people will ask for our forces to come home.”

Well, if Eikenberry is really interested, a June 8 BBC World News America/Harris Poll found that 52 percent of Americans believe that the United States should move to get its troops out of Afghanistan “now”, with only 35 percent believing that the troops should stay; while a Pew Research Center poll of mid-June showed 56 percent of Americans favor an “immediate” pullout.

“America has never sought to occupy any nation in the world,” the ambassador continued. “We are a good people.” [*Washington Post*, June 19, 2011]

How nice. Reminds me of U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, after the 1999 78-day bombing of the helpless people of the former Yugoslavia, a war crime largely instigated by herself, when she declared: “The United States is good. We try to do our best everywhere.” [*Washington Post*, October 23, 1999]

Do these grownups really believe what comes out of their mouths? Does Mr.

Eikenberry actually think that “America has never sought to occupy any nation in the world”?

Sixty-six years after World War II ended, the United States still has major bases in Germany and Japan; 58 years after the end of the Korean War, tens of thousands of American armed forces continue to be stationed in South Korea; for over a century, the United States has occupied Guantanamo Bay in Cuba against the fervent wishes of the Cuban people.

And what other term shall we use to describe the American presence in Iraq for more than eight years? And Afghanistan for almost ten?

George W. Bush had no doubt: The Iraqis are “not happy they’re occupied,” he said. “I wouldn’t be happy if I were occupied either.” [*Washington Post*, April 14, 2004]

However, the current Republican leader in the House, John Boehner appears to be a true believer. “The United States has never proposed establishing a permanent base in Iraq or anywhere else,” he affirmed a few years ago. [*United Press International*, July 26, 2007]

If 18th century Americans could resent occupation by the British, when many of the Americans were British themselves, then how much easier to understand the resentment of Iraqis and Afghans toward foreign occupiers.

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. This article was originally published in Blum’s Anti-Empire Report.

Targeting Cuba’s Health-Care System

The U.S. government’s half-century campaign to discredit and destroy Cuba’s experiment with socialism has had many ruthless aspects, but perhaps none more so than efforts to disparage and damage the Caribbean island’s widely admired health-care system, as William Blum describes in this guest essay.

By William Blum

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In January, the government of the United States of America saw fit to seize \$4.207 million in funds allocated to Cuba by the United Nations Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria for the first quarter of 2011, Cuba has charged.

The UN Fund is a \$22 billion a year program that works to combat the three deadly pandemics in 150 countries. [*Prensa Latina* (Cuba), March 12, 2011]

“This mean-spirited policy,” the Cuban government said, “aims to undermine the quality of service provided to the Cuban population and to obstruct the provision of medical assistance in over 100 countries by 40,000 Cuban health workers.”

Most of the funds are used to import expensive AIDS medication to Cuba, where antiretroviral treatment is provided free of charge to some 5,000 HIV patients. [*The Militant* (US, Socialist Workers Party), April 4, 2011]

The United States sees the Cuban health system and Havana’s sharing of such as a means of Cuba winning friends and allies in the Third World, particularly Latin America; a situation sharply in conflict with long-standing US policy to isolate Cuba.

The United States in recent years has attempted to counter the Cuban international success by dispatching the U.S. Naval Ship “Comfort” to the region.

With 12 operating rooms and a 1,000-bed hospital, the converted oil tanker has performed hundreds of thousands of free surgeries in places such as Belize, Guatemala, Panama, El Salvador, Peru, Ecuador, Colombia, Nicaragua and Haiti.

However, the Comfort’s port calls likely will not substantially enhance America’s influence in the hemisphere.

“It’s hard for the U.S. to compete with Cuba and Venezuela in this way,” said Peter Hakim, president of the Inter-American Dialogue, a pro-U.S. policy-research group in Washington. “It makes us look like we’re trying to imitate them. Cuba’s doctors aren’t docked at port for a couple days, but are in the country for years.” [Bloomberg News, Sept. 19, 2007]

The recent disclosure by WikiLeaks of U.S. State Department documents included this little item: A cable was sent by Michael Parmly from the U.S. Interests Section in Havana in July 2006, during the run-up to the Non-Aligned Movement conference.

Parmly notes that he is actively looking for “human interest stories and other news that shatters the myth of Cuban medical prowess.”

Michael Moore refers to another WikiLeaks State Department cable: “On Jan. 31, 2008, a State Department official stationed in Havana took a made-up story and sent it back to his headquarters in Washington. Here’s what they came up with: [The official] stated that Cuban authorities have banned Michael Moore’s documentary, ‘Sicko,’ as being subversive.

“Although the film’s intent is to discredit the U.S. healthcare system by highlighting the excellence of the Cuban system, the official said the regime knows the film is a myth and does not want to risk a popular backlash by showing to Cubans facilities that are clearly not available to the vast majority of them.”

Moore points out an Associated Press story of June 16, 2007 (seven months prior to the cable) with the headline: “Cuban health minister says Moore’s ‘Sicko’ shows ‘human values’ of communist system.”

Moore adds that the people of Cuba were shown the film on national television on April 25,

2008. "The Cubans embraced the film so much it became one of those rare American movies that received a theatrical distribution in Cuba. I personally ensured that a 35mm print got to the Film Institute in Havana. Screenings of *Sicko* were set up in towns all across the country." [Huffington Post, Dec. 18, 2010]

The United States also bans the sale to Cuba of vital medical drugs and devices, such as the inhalant agent Sevoflurane which has become the pharmaceutical of excellence for applying general anesthesia to children; and the pharmaceutical Dexmetomidine, of particular usefulness in elderly patients who often must be subjected to extended surgical procedures.

Both of these are produced by the U.S. firm Abbot Laboratories.

Cuban children suffering from lymphoblastic leukemia cannot use Erwinia L-asparaginasa, a medicine commercially known as Elspar, since the U.S. pharmaceutical company Merck and Co. refuses to sell this product to Cuba. Washington has also prohibited the U.S.-based Pastors for Peace Caravan from donating three Ford ambulances to Cuba.

Cubans are moreover upset by the denial of visas requested to attend conferences in the field of Anesthesiology and Reanimation that take place in the United States. This creates further barriers for Cuba's anesthesiologists to update themselves on state of the art anesthesiology, the care of severely ill patients, and the advances achieved in the treatment of pain.

Some of the foregoing are but a small sample of American warfare against the Cuban medical system presented in a Cuban report to the United Nations General Assembly on Oct. 28, 2009.

Finally, we have the Cuban Medical Professional Parole (CMPP) immigration program, which encourages Cuban doctors who are serving their government overseas to defect and enter the U.S. immediately as refugees.

The *Wall Street Journal* reported in January of this year that through Dec. 16, 2010, CMPP visas had been issued by U.S. consulates in 65 countries to 1,574 Cuban doctors whose education had been paid for by the financially-struggling Cuban government. [*Wall Street Journal*, "[Cuban Doctors Come In From the Cold](#)" (video), Jan. 14, 2011]

This program, oddly enough, was initiated by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security. Another victory over terrorism? Or socialism? Or same thing?

Wait until the American conservatives hear that Cuba is the only country in Latin America offering abortion on demand, and free.

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