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Some thoughts that OCCUPY my mind

The Anti-Empire Report

William Blum
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When the Vietnam War became history, and the protest signs and the bullhorns were put away, so too was the serious side of most protestors' alienation and hostility toward the government. They returned, with minimal resistance, to the restless pursuit of success, and the belief that the choice facing the world was either "capitalist democracy" or "communist dictatorship". The war had been an aberration, was the implicit verdict, a blemish on an otherwise humane American record. The fear felt by the powers-that-be that society's fabric was unraveling and that the Republic was hanging by a thread turned out to be little more than media hype; it had been great copy.

I mention this to explain why I've been reluctant to jump with both feet on the Occupy bandwagon. I first thought that if nothing else the approaching winter would do them in; if not, it would be the demands of their lives — they have to make some money at some point, attend classes somewhere, lovers and friends and family they have to cater to somewhere; lately I've been thinking it's the police that will do them in, writing finis to their marvelous movement adventure — if you hold the system up to a mirror the system can go crazy.

But now I don't know. Those young people, and the old ones as well, keep surprising me, with their dedication and energy, their camaraderie and courage, their optimism and innovation, their non-violence and their keen awareness of the danger of being co-opted their focusing on the

economic institutions more than on the politicians or political parties. There is also their splendid signs and slogans, walking from New York to Washington, and not falling apart following the despicable police destruction of the Occupy Wall Street encampment. They've given a million young people other ideas about how to spend the rest of their lives, and commandeered a remarkable amount of media space. The Washington Post on several occasions has devoted full page or near-full page sympathetic coverage. Occupy is being taken increasingly seriously by virtually all media.

Yet, the 1960s and 70s were also a marvelous movement adventure — for me as much as for anyone — but nothing actually changed in US foreign policy as a result of our endless protests, many of which were also innovative. American imperialism has continued to add to its brutal record right up to this very moment. We can't even claim Vietnam as a victory. Most people believe that the US lost the war. But by destroying Vietnam to its core, by poisoning the earth, the water, the air, and the gene pool for generations, Washington in fact achieved its primary purpose: preventing the rise of what might have been a good development option for Asia, an alternative to the capitalist model.

It has greatly helped Occupy's growth and survival that they have seldom mentioned foreign policy. That's much more sensitive ground than corporate abuse. Foreign policy gets into flag-waving, "our brave boys" risking their lives, American exceptionalism, nationalism, patriotism, loyalty, treason, terrorism, "anti-American", "conspiracy theorist" ... all those emotional icons that mainstream America uses to separate a Good American from one who ain't really one of us.

Foreign policy cannot be ignored permanently of course, if for no other reason than that the nation's wealth that's wasted on war could be used to pay for anything Occupy calls for ... or anything anyone calls for.

The education which Occupy has caused to be thrust upon the citizenry — about corporate abuse and criminality, political corruption, inequality, poverty, etc., virtually all unprosecuted — would be highly significant if America were a democracy. But as it is, more and more people can learn more and more about these matters, and get more and more angry, but have nowhere to turn to, to effectuate meaningful change. Money must be removed from the political process. Completely. It is my favorite Latin expression: sine qua non — "without which, nothing".

USrael and Iran

There's no letup, is there? The preparation of the American mind, the world mind, for the next gala performance of D&D — Death and Destruction. The Bunker Buster bombs are now 30,000 pounds each one, six times as heavy as the previous delightful model..

But the Masters of War still want to be loved; they need for you to believe them when they say they have no choice, that Iran is the latest threat to life as we know it, no time to waste.

The preparation of minds was just as fervent before the invasion of Iraq in March 2003. And when it turned out that Iraq did not have any kind of arsenal of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) ... well, our power elite found other justifications for the invasion, and didn't look back. Some berated Iraq: "Why didn't they tell us that? Did they want us to bomb them?"

In actuality, before the US invasion high Iraqi officials had stated clearly on repeated occasions that they had no such weapons. In August 2002, Iraqi Deputy Prime Minister Tariq Aziz told American newscaster Dan Rather on CBS: "We do not possess any nuclear or biological or chemical weapons."¹

In December, Aziz stated to Ted Koppel on ABC: "The fact is that we don't have weapons of mass destruction. We don't have chemical, biological, or nuclear weaponry."²

Hussein himself told Rather in February 2003: "These missiles have been destroyed. There are no missiles that are contrary to the prescription of the United Nations [as to range] in Iraq. They are no longer there."³

Moreover, Gen. Hussein Kamel, former head of Iraq's secret weapons program, and a son-in-law of Saddam Hussein, told the UN in 1995 that Iraq had destroyed its banned missiles and chemical and biological weapons soon after the Persian Gulf War of 1991.⁴

There are yet other examples of Iraqi officials telling the world that the WMD were non-existent.

And if there were still any uncertainty remaining, last year Hans Blix, former chief United Nations weapons inspector, who led a doomed hunt for WMD in Iraq, told a British inquiry into the 2003 invasion that those who were "100 percent certain there were weapons of mass destruction" in Iraq turned out to have "less than zero percent knowledge" of where the purported hidden caches might be. He testified that he had warned British Prime Minister Tony Blair in a February 2003 meeting — as well as US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice in separate talks — that Hussein might have no weapons of mass destruction.⁵

Those of who you don't already have serious doubts about the American mainstream media's knowledge and understanding of US foreign policy, should consider this: Despite the two revelations on Dan Rather's CBS programs, and the other revelations noted above, in January 2008 we find CBS reporter Scott Pelley interviewing FBI agent George Piro, who had interviewed Saddam Hussein before he was executed:

PELLEY: And what did he tell you about how his weapons of mass destruction had been destroyed?

PIRO: He told me that most of the WMD had been destroyed by the U.N. inspectors in the '90s, and those that hadn't been destroyed by the inspectors were unilaterally destroyed by Iraq.

PELLEY: He had ordered them destroyed?

PIRO: Yes.

PELLEY: So why keep the secret? Why put your nation at risk? Why put your own life at risk to maintain this charade?⁶

The United States and Israel are preparing to attack Iran because of their alleged development of nuclear weapons, which Iran has denied on many occasions. Of the Iraqis who warned the United States that it was mistaken about the WMD — Saddam Hussein was executed, Tariq Aziz is awaiting execution. Which Iranian officials is USrael going to hang after their country is laid to waste?

Would it have mattered if the Bush administration had fully believed Iraq when it said it had no WMD? Probably not. There is ample evidence that Bush knew this to be the case, or at a minimum should have seriously suspected it; the same applies to Tony Blair. Saddam Hussein did not sufficiently appreciate just how psychopathic his two adversaries were. Bush was determined to vanquish Iraq, for the sake of Israel, for control of oil, and for expanding the empire with new bases, though in the end most of this didn't work out as the empire expected; for some odd reason, it seems that the Iraqi people resented being bombed, invaded, occupied, demolished, and tortured.

But if Iran is in fact building nuclear weapons, we have to ask: Is there some international law that says that the US, the UK, Russia, China, Israel, France, Pakistan, and India are entitled to nuclear weapons, but Iran is not? If the United States had known that the Japanese had deliverable atomic bombs, would Hiroshima and Nagasaki have been destroyed? Israeli military historian, Martin van Creveld, has written: "The world has witnessed how the United States attacked Iraq for, as it turned out, no reason at all. Had the Iranians not tried to build nuclear weapons, they would be crazy."⁷

It can not be repeated too often: The secret to understanding US foreign policy is that there is no secret. Principally, one must come to the realization that the United States strives to dominate the world. Once one understands that, much of the apparent confusion, contradiction, and ambiguity surrounding Washington's policies fades away. Examine a map: Iran sits directly between two of the United States' great obsessions — Iraq and Afghanistan ... directly between two of the world's greatest oil regions — the Persian Gulf and Caspian Sea areas ... it's part of the encirclement of the two leading potential threats to American world domination — Russia and China ... Tehran will never be a client state or obedient poodle to Washington. How could any good, self-respecting Washington imperialist resist such a target? Bombs Away!

American exceptionalism — A survey

The leaders of imperial powers have traditionally told themselves and their citizens that their country was exceptional and that their subjugation of a particular foreign land should be seen as a "civilizing mission", a "liberation", "God's will", and of course bringing "freedom and democracy" to the benighted and downtrodden. It is difficult to kill large numbers of people without a claim to virtue. I wonder if this sense of exceptionalism has been embedded anywhere more deeply than in the United States, where it is drilled into every cell and ganglion of American consciousness from kindergarten on. If we measure the degree of indoctrination (I'll resist the temptation to use the word "brainwashing") of a population as the gap between what the people believe their government has done in the world and what the actual (very sordid) facts are, the American people are clearly the most indoctrinated people on the planet. The role of the American media is of course indispensable to this process — Try naming a single American daily newspaper or TV network that was unequivocally against the US attacks on Libya, Iraq,

Afghanistan, Yugoslavia, Panama, Grenada, and Vietnam. Or even against any two of them. How about one? Which of the mainstream media expressed real skepticism of The War on Terror in its early years?

Overloaded with a sense of America's moral superiority, each year the State Department judges the world, issuing reports evaluating the behavior of all other nations, often accompanied by sanctions of one kind or another. There are different reports rating how each lesser nation has performed in the previous year in the areas of religious freedom, human rights, the war on drugs, trafficking in persons, and counterterrorism, as well as maintaining a list of international "terrorist" groups. The criteria used in these reports are mainly political, wherever applicable; Cuba, for example, is always listed as a supporter of terrorism whereas anti-Castro exile groups in Florida, which have committed literally hundreds of terrorist acts, are not listed as terrorist groups.

"The causes of the malady are not entirely clear but its recurrence is one of the uniformities of history: power tends to confuse itself with virtue and a great nation is peculiarly susceptible to the idea that its power is a sign of God's favor, conferring upon it a special responsibility for other nations — to make them richer and happier and wiser, to remake them, that is, in its own shining image." — Former US Senator William Fulbright, *The Arrogance of Power* (1966)

"We Americans are the peculiar, chosen people — the Israel of our time; we bear the ark of the liberties of the world. ... God has predestined, mankind expects, great things from our race; and great things we feel in our souls." — Herman Melville, *White-Jacket* (1850)

"God appointed America to save the world in any way that suits America. God appointed Israel to be the nexus of America's Middle Eastern policy and anyone who wants to mess with that idea is a) anti-Semitic, b) anti-American, c) with the enemy, and d) a terrorist." — John le Carré, *London Times*, January 15, 2003

"Neoconservatism ... traded upon the historic American myths of innocence, exceptionalism, triumphalism and Manifest Destiny. It offered a vision of what the United States should do with its unrivaled global power. In its most rhetorically-seductive messianic versions, it conflated the expansion of American power with the dream of universal democracy. In all of this, it proclaimed that the maximal use of American power was good for both America and the world." — Columbia University Professor Gary Dorrien, *The Christian Century* magazine, January 22, 2007

"To most of its citizens, America is exceptional, and it's only natural that it should take exception to certain international standards." — Michael Ignatieff, *Washington Post* columnist, *Legal Affairs*, May-June, 2002

Lieutenant Colonel Ralph Peters, US Army War College, 1997: "Our country is a force for good without precedent".

Thomas Barnett, US Naval War College: "The US military is a force for global good that ... has no equal." — *The Guardian* (London), December 27, 2005

John Bolton, future US ambassador to the United Nations, writing in 2000: Because of its unique status, the United States could not be "legally bound" or constrained in any way by its international treaty obligations. The U.S. needed to "be unashamed, unapologetic,

uncompromising American constitutional hegemonists," so that their "senior decision makers" could be free to use force unilaterally.

Condoleezza Rice, future US Secretary of State, writing in 2000, was equally contemptuous of international law. She claimed that in the pursuit of its national security the United States no longer needed to be guided by "notions of international law and norms" or "institutions like the United Nations" because it was "on the right side of history." — Z Magazine, July/August 2004

"The president [George W. Bush] said he didn't want other countries dictating terms or conditions for the war on terrorism. 'At some point, we may be the only ones left. That's okay with me. We are America'." — Washington Post, January 31, 2002

"Reinhold Niebuhr got it right a half-century ago: What persists — and promises no end of grief — is our conviction that Providence has summoned America to tutor all of humankind on its pilgrimage to perfection." — Andrew Bacevich, professor of international relations, Boston University

In commenting on Woodrow Wilson's moral lecturing of his European colleagues at the Versailles peace table following the First World War, Winston Churchill remarked that he found it hard to believe that the European emigrants, who brought to America the virtues of the lands from which they sprang, had left behind all their vices. — The World Crisis, Vol. V, The Aftermath, 1929

"Behold a republic, gradually but surely becoming the supreme moral factor to the world's progress and the accepted arbiter of the world's disputes." — William Jennings Bryan, US Secretary of State under Woodrow Wilson, In His Image (1922)

Newsweek editor Michael Hirsch: "U.S. allies must accept that some U.S. unilateralism is inevitable, even desirable. This mainly involves accepting the reality of America's supreme might — and truthfully, appreciating how historically lucky they are to be protected by such a relatively benign power." — Foreign Affairs, November, 2002

Colin Powell speaking before the Republican National Convention, August 13, 1996: The United States is "a country that exists by the grace of a divine providence."

"The US media always has an underlying acceptance of the mythology of American exceptionalism, that the US, in everything it does, is the last best hope of humanity." — Rahul Mahajan, author of: The New Crusade: America's War on Terrorism, and Full Spectrum Dominance

"The fundamental problem is that the Americans do not respect anybody except themselves," said Col. Mir Jan, a spokesman for the Afghan Defense Ministry. "They say, 'We are the God of the world,' and they don't consult us." — Washington Post, August 3, 2002

"If we have to use force, it is because we are America! We are the indispensable nation. We stand tall. We see further into the future." — Madeleine Albright, U.S. Secretary of State, 1998
People who like this sort of thing will find this the sort of thing they like.