

# THIRD WORLD TRAVELER



## **A Brief History of U.S. Interventions: 1945 to the Present**

**by William Blum**

*Z magazine* , June 1999



The engine of American foreign policy has been fueled not by a devotion to any kind of morality, but rather by the necessity to serve other imperatives, which can be summarized as follows:

- \* making the world safe for American corporations;
- \* enhancing the financial statements of defense contractors at home who have contributed generously to members of congress;
- \* preventing the rise of any society that might serve as a successful example of an alternative to the capitalist model;
- \* extending political and economic hegemony over as wide an area as possible, as befits a "great power."

**This in the name of fighting a supposed moral crusade against what cold warriors convinced themselves, and the American people, was the existence of an evil International Communist Conspiracy, which in fact never existed, evil or not.**

**The United States carried out extremely serious interventions into more than 70 nations in this period.**

**China, 1945-49:**

**Intervened in a civil war, taking the side of Chiang Kai-shek against the Communists, even though the latter had been a much closer ally of the United States in the world war. The U.S. used defeated Japanese soldiers to fight for its side. The Communists forced Chiang to flee to Taiwan in 1949.**

**Italy, 1947-48:**

**Using every trick in the book, the U.S. interfered in the elections to prevent the Communist Party from coming to power legally and fairly. This perversion of democracy was done in the name of "saving democracy" in Italy. The Communists lost. For the next few decades, the CIA, along with American corporations, continued to intervene in Italian elections, pouring in hundreds of millions of dollars and much psychological warfare to block the specter that was haunting Europe.**

**Greece, 1947-49:**

**Intervened in a civil war, taking the side of the neo-fascists against the Greek left which had fought the Nazis courageously. The neo-fascists won and instituted a highly brutal regime, for which the CIA created a new internal security agency, KYP. Before long, KYP was carrying out all the endearing practices of secret police everywhere, including systematic torture.**

**Philippines, 1945-53:**

**U.S. military fought against leftist forces (Huks) even while the Huks were still fighting against the Japanese invaders. After the war, the U. S. continued its fight against the Huks, defeating them, and then installing a series of puppets as president, culminating in the dictatorship of Ferdinand Marcos.**

**South Korea, 1945-53:**

**After World War II, the United States suppressed the popular progressive forces in favor of the conservatives who had collaborated with the Japanese. This led to a long era of corrupt, reactionary, and brutal governments.**

**Albania, 1949-53:**

**The U.S. and Britain tried unsuccessfully to overthrow the communist government and install a new one that would have been pro-Western and composed largely of monarchists and collaborators with Italian fascists and Nazis.**

**Germany, 1950s:**

**The CIA orchestrated a wide-ranging campaign of sabotage, terrorism, dirty tricks, and psychological warfare against East Germany. This was one of the factors which led to the building of the Berlin Wall in 1961.**

**Iran, 1953:**

**Prime Minister Mossadegh was overthrown in a joint U.S./British operation. Mossadegh had been elected to his position by a large majority of parliament, but he had made the fateful mistake of spearheading the movement to nationalize a British-owned oil company, the sole oil company operating in Iran. The coup restored the Shah to absolute power and began a period of 25 years of repression and torture, with the oil industry being restored to foreign ownership, as follows: Britain and the U.S., each 40 percent, other nations 20 percent.**

**Guatemala, 1953-1990s:**

**A CIA-organized coup overthrew the democratically-elected and progressive government of Jacobo Arbenz, initiating 40 years of death-squads, torture, disappearances, mass executions, and unimaginable cruelty, totaling well over 100,000 victims -indisputably one of the most inhuman chapters of the 20th century. Arbenz had nationalized the U.S. firm, United Fruit Company, which had extremely close ties to the American power elite. As justification for the coup, Washington declared that Guatemala had been on the verge of a Soviet takeover, when in fact the Russians had so little interest in the country that it didn't even maintain diplomatic relations. The real problem in the eyes of Washington, in addition to United Fruit, was the danger of Guatemala's social democracy spreading to other countries in Latin America.**

**Middle East, 1956-58:**

**The Eisenhower Doctrine stated that the United States "is prepared to use armed forces to assist" any Middle East country "requesting assistance against armed aggression from any country controlled by international communism." The English translation of this was that no one would be allowed to dominate, or have excessive influence over, the middle east and its oil fields except the United States, and that anyone who tried would be, by definition, "Communist." In keeping with this policy, the United States twice attempted to overthrow the Syrian government, staged several shows-of-force in the Mediterranean to intimidate movements opposed to U.S.-supported governments in Jordan and Lebanon, landed 14,000 troops in Lebanon, and conspired to overthrow or assassinate Nasser of Egypt and his troublesome middle-east nationalism.**

### **Indonesia, 1957-58:**

**Sukarno, like Nasser, was the kind of Third World leader the United States could not abide. He took neutralism in the cold war seriously, making trips to the Soviet Union and China (though to the White House as well). He nationalized many private holdings of the Dutch, the former colonial power. He refused to crack down on the Indonesian Communist Party, which was walking the legal, peaceful road and making impressive gains electorally. Such policies could easily give other Third World leaders "wrong ideas." The CIA began throwing money into the elections, plotted Sukarno's assassination, tried to blackmail him with a phony sex film, and joined forces with dissident military officers to wage a full-scale war against the government. Sukarno survived it all.**

### **British Guiana/Guyana, 1953-64:**

**For 11 years, two of the oldest democracies in the world, Great Britain and the United States, went to great lengths to prevent a democratically elected leader from occupying his office. Cheddi Jagan was another Third World leader who tried to remain neutral and independent. He was elected three times. Although a leftist-more so than Sukarno or Arbenz-his policies in office were not revolutionary. But he was still a marked man, for he represented Washington's greatest fear: building a society that might be a successful example of an alternative to the capitalist model. Using a wide variety of tactics-from general strikes and disinformation to terrorism and British legalisms, the U. S. and Britain finally forced Jagan out in 1964. John F. Kennedy had given a direct order for his ouster, as, presumably, had Eisenhower.**

**One of the better-off countries in the region under Jagan, Guyana, by the 1980s, was one of the poorest. Its principal export became people.**

### **Vietnam, 1950-73:**

**The slippery slope began with siding with ~ French, the former colonizers and collaborators with the Japanese, against Ho Chi Minh and his followers who had worked closely with the Allied war effort and admired all things American. Ho Chi Minh was, after all, some kind of Communist. He had written numerous letters to President Truman and the State Department asking for America's help in winning Vietnamese independence from the French and finding a peaceful solution for his country. All his entreaties were ignored. Ho Chi Minh modeled the new Vietnamese declaration of independence on the American, beginning it with "All men are created equal. They are endowed by their Creator with ..." But this would count for nothing in Washington. Ho Chi Minh was some kind of Communist.**

**Twenty-three years and more than a million dead, later, the United States withdrew its military forces from Vietnam. Most people say that the U.S. lost the war. But by destroying Vietnam to its core, and poisoning the earth and the gene pool for generations, Washington had achieved its main purpose: preventing what might have been the rise of a good development option for Asia. Ho Chi Minh was, after all, some kind of communist.**

### **Cambodia, 1955-73:**

**Prince Sihanouk was yet another leader who did not fancy being an American client. After many years of hostility towards his regime, including assassination plots and the infamous Nixon/Kissinger secret "carpet bombings" of 1969-70, Washington finally overthrew Sihanouk in a coup in 1970. This was all that was needed to impel Pol Pot and his Khmer Rouge forces to enter the fray. Five years later, they took power. But five years of American bombing had caused Cambodia's traditional economy to vanish. The old Cambodia had been destroyed forever.**

**Incredibly, the Khmer Rouge were to inflict even greater misery on this unhappy land. To add to the irony, the United States supported Pol Pot, militarily and diplomatically, after their subsequent defeat by the Vietnamese.**

### **The Congo/Zaire, 1960-65:**

**In June 1960, Patrice Lumumba became the Congo's first prime minister after independence from Belgium. But Belgium retained its vast mineral wealth in Katanga province, prominent Eisenhower administration officials had financial ties to the same wealth, and Lumumba, at Independence Day ceremonies before a host of foreign dignitaries, called for the nation's economic as well as its political liberation, and recounted a list of injustices against the natives by the white owners of the country. The man was obviously a "Communist." The poor man was obviously doomed.**

**Eleven days later, Katanga province seceded, in September, Lumumba was dismissed by the president at the instigation of the United States, and in January 1961 he was assassinated at the express request of Dwight Eisenhower. There followed several years of civil conflict and chaos and the rise to power of Mobutu Sese Seko, a man not a stranger to the CIA. Mobutu went on to rule the country for more than 30 years, with a level of corruption and cruelty that shocked even his CIA handlers. The Zairian people lived in abject poverty despite the plentiful natural wealth, while Mobutu became a multibillionaire.**

### **Brazil, 1961-64:**

**President Joao Goulart was guilty of the usual crimes: He took an independent stand in foreign policy, resuming relations with socialist countries and opposing sanctions against Cuba; his administration passed a law limiting the amount of profits multinationals could transmit outside the country; a subsidiary of ITT was nationalized; he promoted economic and social reforms. And Attorney-General Robert Kennedy was uneasy about Goulart allowing "communists" to hold positions in government agencies. Yet the man was no radical. He was a millionaire land-owner and a Catholic who wore a medal of the Virgin around his neck. That, however, was not enough to save him. In 1964, he was overthrown in a military coup which had deep, covert American involvement. The official Washington line was...yes, it's unfortunate that democracy has been overthrown in Brazil...but, still, the country has been saved from communism.**

**For the next 15 years, all the features of military dictatorship that Latin America has come to know were instituted: Congress was shut down, political opposition was reduced to virtual extinction, habeas corpus for "political crimes" was suspended, criticism of the president was forbidden by law, labor unions were taken over by government interveners, mounting protests were met by police and military firing into crowds, peasants' homes were burned down, priests were brutalized...disappearances, death squads, a remarkable degree and depravity of torture...the government had a name for its program: the "moral rehabilitation" of Brazil.**

**Washington was very pleased. Brazil broke relations with Cuba and became one of the United States' most reliable allies in Latin America.**

**Dominican Republic, 1963-66:**

**In February 1963, Juan Bosch took office as the first democratically elected president of the Dominican Republic since 1924. Here at last was John F. Kennedy's liberal anti-Communist, to counter the charge that the U.S. supported only military dictatorships. Bosch's government was to be the long sought "showcase of democracy" that would put the lie to Fidel Castro. He was given the grand treatment in Washington shortly before he took office.**

**Bosch was true to his beliefs. He called for land reform, low-rent housing, modest nationalization of business, and foreign investment provided it was not excessively exploitative of the country and other policies making up the program of any liberal Third World leader serious about social change. He was likewise serious about civil liberties: Communists, or those labeled as such, were not to be persecuted unless they actually violated the law.**

**A number of American officials and congresspeople expressed their discomfort with Bosch's plans, as well as his stance of independence from the United States. Land reform and nationalization are always touchy issues in Washington, the stuff that "creeping socialism" is made of. In several quarters of the U.S. press Bosch was red-baited.**

**In September, the military boots marched. Bosch was out. The United States, which could discourage a military coup in Latin America with a frown, did nothing.**

**Nineteen months later, a revolt broke out which promised to put the exiled Bosch back into power. The United States sent 23,000 troops to help crush it.**

**Cuba, 1959 to present:**

**Fidel Castro came to power at the beginning of 1959. A U.S. National Security Council meeting of March 10, 1959 included on its agenda the feasibility of bringing "another government to power in Cuba." There followed 40 years of terrorist attacks, bombings, full-scale military invasion, sanctions, embargoes, isolation, assassinations...Cuba had**

carried out The Unforgivable Revolution, a very serious threat of setting a "good example" in Latin America.

The saddest part of this is that the world will never know what kind of society Cuba could have produced if left alone, if not constantly under the gun and the threat of invasion, if allowed to relax its control at home. The idealism, the vision, the talent were all there. But we'll never know. And that of course was the idea.

**Indonesia, 1965:**

A complex series of events, involving a supposed coup attempt, a counter-coup, and perhaps a counter-counter-coup, with American fingerprints apparent at various points, resulted in the ouster from power of Sukarno and his replacement by a military coup led by General Suharto. The massacre that began immediately-of Communists, Communist sympathizers, suspected Communists, suspected Communist sympathizers, and none of the above-was called by the New York Times "one of the most savage mass slayings of modern political history." The estimates of the number killed in the course of a few years begin at half a million and go above a million.

It was later learned that the U.S. embassy had compiled lists of "Communist" operatives, from top echelons down to village cadres, as many as 5,000 names, and turned them over to the army, which then hunted those persons down and killed them. The Americans would then check off the names of those who had been killed or captured. "It really was a big help to the army. They probably killed a lot of people, and I probably have a lot of blood on my hands," said one U.S. diplomat. "But that's not all bad. There's a time when you have to strike hard at a decisive moment. "

**Chile, 1964-73:**

Salvador Allende was the worst possible scenario for a Washington imperialist. He could imagine only one thing worse than a Marxist in power-an elected Marxist in power, who honored the constitution, and became increasingly popular. This shook the very foundation stones on which the anti-Communist tower was built: the doctrine, painstakingly cultivated for decades, that "communists" can take power only through force and deception, that they can retain that power only through terrorizing and brainwashing the population.

After sabotaging Allende's electoral endeavor in 1964, and failing to do so in 1970, despite their best efforts, the CIA and the rest of the American foreign policy machine left no stone unturned in their attempt to destabilize the Allende government over the next three years, paying particular attention to building up military hostility. Finally, in September 1973, the military overthrew the government, Allende dying in the process.

They closed the country to the outside world for a week, while the tanks rolled and the soldiers broke down doors; the stadiums rang with the sounds of execution and the bodies piled up along the streets and floated in the river; the torture centers opened for business; the subversive books were thrown into bonfires; soldiers slit the trouser legs of women,

shouting that "In Chile women wear dresses!"; the poor returned to their natural state; and the men of the world in Washington and in the halls of international finance opened up their check-books. In the end, more than 3,000 had been executed, thousands more tortured or disappeared.

**Greece, 1964-74:**

The military coup took place in April 1967, just two days before the campaign for national elections was to begin, elections which appeared certain to bring the veteran liberal leader George Papandreou back as prime minister. Papandreou had been elected in February 1964 with the only outright majority in the history of modern Greek elections. The successful machinations to unseat him had begun immediately, a joint effort of the Royal Court, the Greek military, and the American military and CIA stationed in Greece. The 1967 coup was followed immediately by the traditional martial law, censorship, arrests, beatings, torture, and killings, the victims totaling some 8,000 in the first month. This was accompanied by the equally traditional declaration that this was all being done to save the nation from a "Communist takeover." Corrupting and subversive influences in Greek life were to be removed. Among these were miniskirts, long hair, and foreign newspapers; church attendance for the young would be compulsory.

It was torture, however, which most indelibly marked the seven-year Greek nightmare. James Becket, an American attorney sent to Greece by Amnesty International, wrote in December 1969 that "a conservative estimate would place at not less than two thousand" the number of people tortured, usually in the most gruesome of ways, often with equipment supplied by the United States.

Becket reported the following: Hundreds of prisoners have listened to the little speech given by Inspector Basil Lambrou, who sits behind his desk which displays the red, white, and blue clasped-hand symbol of American aid. He tries to show the prisoner the absolute futility of resistance: "You make yourself ridiculous by thinking you can do anything. The world is divided in two. There are the communists on that side and on this side the free world. The Russians and the Americans, no one else. What are we? Americans. Behind me there is the government, behind the government is NATO, behind NATO is the U.S. You can't fight us, we are Americans."

George Papandreou was not any kind of radical. He was a liberal anti-Communist type. But his son Andreas, the heir-apparent, while only a little to the left of his father had not disguised his wish to take Greece out of the Cold War, and had questioned remaining in NATO, or at least as a satellite of the United States.

**East Timor, 1975 to present:**

In December 1975, Indonesia invaded East Timor, which lies at the eastern end of the Indonesian archipelago, and which had proclaimed its independence after Portugal had relinquished control of it. The invasion was launched the day after U. S. President Gerald Ford and Secretary of State Henry Kissinger had left Indonesia after giving Suharto

permission to use American arms, which, under U.S. law, could not be used for aggression. Indonesia was Washington's most valuable tool in Southeast Asia.

Amnesty International estimated that by 1989, Indonesian troops, with the aim of forcibly annexing East Timor, had killed 200,000 people out of a population of between 600,000 and 700,000. The United States consistently supported Indonesia's claim to East Timor (unlike the UN and the EU), and downplayed the slaughter to a remarkable degree, at the same time supplying Indonesia with all the military hardware and training it needed to carry out the job.

**Nicaragua, 1978-89:**

When the Sandinistas overthrew the Somoza dictatorship in 1978, it was clear to Washington that they might well be that long-dreaded beast-"another Cuba." Under President Carter, attempts to sabotage the revolution took diplomatic and economic forms. Under Reagan, violence was the method of choice. For eight terribly long years, the people of Nicaragua were under attack by Washington's proxy army, the Contras, formed from Somoza's vicious National Guard and other supporters of the dictator. It was all-out war, aiming to destroy the progressive social and economic programs of the government, burning down schools and medical clinics, raping, torturing, mining harbors, bombing and strafing. These were Ronald Reagan's "freedom fighters." There would be no revolution in Nicaragua.

**Grenada, 1979-84:**

What would drive the most powerful nation in the world to invade a country of 110,000? Maurice Bishop and his followers had taken power in a 1979 coup, and though their actual policies were not as revolutionary as Castro's, Washington was again driven by its fear of "another Cuba," particularly when public appearances by the Grenadian leaders in other countries of the region met with great enthusiasm.

U. S. destabilization tactics against the Bishop government began soon after the coup and continued until 1983, featuring numerous acts of disinformation and dirty tricks. The American invasion in October 1983 met minimal resistance, although the U.S. suffered 135 killed or wounded; there were also some 400 Grenadian casualties, and 84 Cubans, mainly construction workers.

At the end of 1984, a questionable election was held which was won by a man supported by the Reagan administration. One year later, the human rights organization, Council on Hemispheric Affairs, reported that Grenada's new U.S.-trained police force and counter-insurgency forces had acquired a reputation for brutality, arbitrary arrest, and abuse of authority, and were eroding civil rights.

In April 1989, the government issued a list of more than 80 books which were prohibited from being imported. Four months later, the prime minister suspended parliament to

**forestall a threatened no-confidence vote resulting from what his critics called "an increasingly authoritarian style."**

#### **Libya, 1981-89:**

**Libya refused to be a proper Middle East client state of Washington. Its leader, Muammar el-Qaddafi, was uppity. He would have to be punished. U.S. planes shot down two Libyan planes in what Libya regarded as its air space. The U. S . also dropped bombs on the country, killing at least 40 people, including Qaddafi's daughter. There were other attempts to assassinate the man, operations to overthrow him, a major disinformation campaign, economic sanctions, and blaming Libya for being behind the Pan Am 103 bombing without any good evidence.**

#### **Panama, 1989:**

**Washington's bombers strike again. December 1989, a large tenement barrio in Panama City wiped out, 15,000 people left homeless. Counting several days of ground fighting against Panamanian forces, 500-something dead was the official body count, what the U.S. and the new U.S.-installed Panamanian government admitted to; other sources, with no less evidence, insisted that thousands had died; 3,000-something wounded. Twenty-three Americans dead, 324 wounded.**

**Question from reporter: "Was it really worth it to send people to their death for this? To get Noriega?"**

**George Bush: "Every human life is precious, and yet I have to answer, yes, it has been worth it."**

**Manuel Noriega had been an American ally and informant for years until he outlived his usefulness. But getting him was not the only motive for the attack. Bush wanted to send a clear message to the people of Nicaragua, who had an election scheduled in two months, that this might be their fate if they reelected the Sandinistas. Bush also wanted to flex some military muscle to illustrate to Congress the need for a large combat-ready force even after the very recent dissolution of the "Soviet threat." The official explanation for the American ouster was Noriega's drug trafficking, which Washington had known about for years and had not been at all bothered by.**

#### **Iraq, 1990s:**

**Relentless bombing for more than 40 days and nights, against one of the most advanced nations in the Middle East, devastating its ancient and modern capital city; 177 million pounds of bombs falling on the people of Iraq, the most concentrated aerial onslaught in the history of the world; depleted uranium weapons incinerating people, causing cancer; blasting chemical and biological weapon storage and oil facilities; poisoning the atmosphere to a degree perhaps never matched anywhere; burying soldiers alive, deliberately; the infrastructure destroyed, with a terrible effect on health; sanctions**

continued to this day multiplying the health problems; perhaps a million children dead by now from all of these things, even more adults.

Iraq was the strongest military power among the Arab states. This may have been their crime. Noam Chomsky has written: "It's been a leading, driving doctrine of U.S. foreign policy since the 1940s that the vast and unparalleled energy resources of the Gulf region will be effectively dominated by the United States and its clients, and, crucially, that no independent, indigenous force will be permitted to have a substantial influence on the administration of oil production and price. "

#### **Afghanistan, 1979-92:**

Everyone knows of the unbelievable repression of women in Afghanistan, carried out by Islamic fundamentalists, even before the Taliban. But how many people know that during the late 1970s and most of the 1980s, Afghanistan had a government committed to bringing the incredibly backward nation into the 20th century, including giving women equal rights? What happened, however, is that the United States poured billions of dollars into waging a terrible war against this government, simply because it was supported by the Soviet Union. Prior to this, CIA operations had knowingly increased the probability of a Soviet intervention, which is what occurred. In the end, the United States won, and the women, and the rest of Afghanistan, lost. More than a million dead, three million disabled, five million refugees, in total about half the population.

#### **El Salvador, 1980-92:**

El Salvador's dissidents tried to work within the system. But with U.S. support, the government made that impossible, using repeated electoral fraud and murdering hundreds of protesters and strikers. In 1980, the dissidents took to the gun, and civil war.

Officially, the U.S. military presence in El Salvador was limited to an advisory capacity. In actuality, military and CIA personnel played a more active role on a continuous basis. About 20 Americans were killed or wounded in helicopter and plane crashes while flying reconnaissance or other missions over combat areas, and considerable evidence surfaced of a U.S. role in the ground fighting as well. The war came to an official end in 1992; 75,000 civilian deaths and the U.S. Treasury depleted by six billion dollars. Meaningful social change has been largely thwarted. A handful of the wealthy still own the country, the poor remain as ever, and dissidents still have to fear right-wing death squads.

#### **Haiti, 1987-94:**

The U.S. supported the Duvalier family dictatorship for 30 years, then opposed the reformist priest, Jean-Bertrand Aristide. Meanwhile, the CIA was working intimately with death squads, torturers, and drug traffickers. With this as background, the Clinton White House found itself in the awkward position of having to pretend-because of all their rhetoric about "democracy"-that they supported Aristide's return to power in Haiti after he had been ousted in a 1991 military coup. After delaying his return for more than two

years, Washington finally had its military restore Aristide to office, but only after obliging the priest to guarantee that he would not help the poor at the expense of the rich, and that he would stick closely to free-market economics. This meant that Haiti would continue to be the assembly plant of the Western Hemisphere, with its workers receiving literally starvation wages.

**Yugoslavia, 1999:**

The United States is bombing the country back to a pre-industrial era. It would like the world to believe that its intervention is motivated only by "humanitarian" impulses. Perhaps the above history of U.S. interventions can help one decide how much weight to place on this claim.

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William Blum is the author of **Killing Hope: US Military and CIA Interventions Since World War II**. Portions of the book can be read at: [http://members.aol.com/bblum6/American holocaust.htm](http://members.aol.com/bblum6/American%20holocaust.htm).

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