

By William Blum

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I'm sure most Americans are mighty proud of the fact that Julian Assange is so frightened of falling into the custody of the United States that he had to seek sanctuary in the embassy of Ecuador, a tiny and poor Third World country, without any way of knowing how it would turn out. He might be forced to be there for years. "That'll teach him to mess with the most powerful country in the world! All you other terrorists and anti-Americans out there — Take Note! When you fuck around with God's country you pay a price!"

How true. You do pay a price. Ask the people of Cuba, Vietnam, Chile, Yugoslavia, Iraq, Iran, Haiti, etc., etc., etc. And ask the people of Guantánamo, Diego Garcia, Bagram, and a dozen other torture centers to which God's country offers free transportation.

You think with the whole world watching, the United States would not be so obvious as to torture Assange if they got hold of him? Ask Bradley Manning. At a bare minimum, prolonged solitary confinement is torture. Before too long the world may ban it. Not that that would keep God's country and other police states from using it.

You think with the whole world watching, the United States would not be so obvious as to target Assange with a drone? They've done it with American citizens. Assange is a mere Aussie.

And Ecuador and its president, Rafael Correa, will pay a price. You think with the whole world watching, the United States would not intervene in Ecuador? In Latin America, it comes very naturally for Washington. During the Cold War it was said that the United States could cause the downfall of a government south of the border ... with a frown. The dissolution of the Soviet Union didn't bring any change in that because it was never the Soviet Union per se that the United States was fighting. It was the threat of a good example of an alternative to the capitalist model.

For example, on January 21, 2000 in Ecuador, where almost two-thirds live in poverty, a very large number of indigenous peasants rose up in desperation and marched to the capital city of Quito, where they were joined by labor unions and some junior military officers (most members of the army being of indigenous stock). This coalition presented a list of economic demands, seized the Congress and Supreme Court buildings, and forced the president to resign. He was replaced by a junta from the ranks of the new coalition. The Clinton administration was alarmed. Besides North American knee-reflex hostility to anything that look or smells like a leftist revolution, Washington had big plans for a large military base in Manta (later closed by Correa). And Colombia — already plagued by leftist movements — was next door.

The US quickly stepped in to educate the Ecuadorean coalition leaders as to the facts of Western Hemispheric imperial life. The American embassy in Quito ... Peter Romero, Assistant Secretary of State for Latin America and Western Hemispheric Affairs ... Sandy Berger, National Security Adviser to President Clinton ... Undersecretary of State Thomas Pickering ... all made phone calls to Ecuadorian officials to threaten a cutoff in aid and other support, warning that "Ecuador will find itself isolated", informing them that the United States would never recognize any new government the coalition might set up, there would be no peace in Ecuador unless the military backed the vice president as the new leader, and the vice president must continue to pursue neoliberal "reforms", the kind of IMF structural adjustment policies which had played a major role in inciting the uprising in the first place.

Within hours the heads of the Ecuadorian army, navy and air force declared their support for the vice president. The leaders of the uprising fled into hiding. And that was the end of the Ecuadorian revolution of the year 2000. [1](#)

Rafael Correa was first elected in 2006 with a 58% majority, and reelected in 2009 with a 55% majority; his current term runs until August 2013. The American mainstream media has been increasingly critical of him. The following letter sent in January to the *Washington Post* by the Ecuadoran ambassador to the United States is an attempt to clarify one of the issues.

Letter to the Editor:

We were offended by the Jan. 12 editorial "Ecuador's bully," which focused on a lawsuit brought by our president, Rafael Correa, after a newspaper claimed that he was guilty of ordering troops to fire on innocent citizens during a failed coup in 2010. The president asked

the publishers to release their evidence or a retraction. When they refused, he sued, as any citizen should do when recklessly wronged.

No journalist has gone to prison or paid a significant fine in the five years of the Correa presidency. Media criticism — fair and unfair, sometimes with malice — of the government appears every day. The case involving the newspaper is on appeal. When the judicial process ends, the president has said, he will waive some or all of the penalties provided he gets a retraction. That is a common solution to libel and slander cases in the United States, I believe.

Your writer uses obnoxious phrases such as "banana republic," but here is the reality of today's Ecuador: a highly popular, stable and progressive democracy for the first time in decades.

Nathalie Cely, Washington

1. *Washington Post*, January 23, 2000, p.1; ["The coup in Ecuador: a grim warning"](#) , *World Socialist Web Site*
, February 2, 2000;
Z Magazine
(Massachusetts), February 2001, pp.36-7