

NOAM CHOMSKY

PIRATES AND EMPERORS OLD AND NEW

International Terrorism in the Real World



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Pirates and Emperors, Old and New

International Terrorism in the Real World

Noam Chomsky



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Preface to the 2015 edition

As I write, the press reports that “in Iraq, Iran’s once-elusive spymaster, Maj. Gen. Qassim Suleiman—the commander of the Quds force who has spent a career in the shadows orchestrating terrorist attacks—including some that killed American soldiers in Iraq—has emerged as a public figure.”¹ The

comment is so routine as to merit no attention. But for just that reason, it is interesting and instructive. Uncontroversially, the United States invaded Iraq, an unprovoked act of aggression, leaving the country in ruins. Exactly how can an attack that kills soldiers of an invading army be a “terrorist attack?” There is one way: if the aggressor has unique privileges that give it the right to invade and destroy at will, so that any resistance to its justified actions is terrorism. In brief, if the aggressor “molests the world with a great navy,” and is therefore an emperor, not a thief or a pirate, as in St. Augustine’s tale of pirates and emperors.

As the chapters that follow discuss, “St. Augustine’s tale illuminates the meaning of the concept of international terrorism in contemporary Western usage, and reaches to the heart of the frenzy over selected incidents of terrorism currently being orchestrated, with supreme cynicism, as a cover for Western violence.”

At times, the sense of imperial entitlement is quite impressive. There has, for example, been debate over whether to provide military aid to Syrian rebels. A front-page lead story in the *New York Times* reported a CIA study that contributes to the debate by reviewing past cases of intervention to support rebels, which “found that it rarely works.”² The article quotes President Obama as saying that he had asked the CIA to carry out such inquiries in order to find cases of “financing and supplying arms to an insurgency in a country that actually worked out well. And they couldn’t come up with much.” So he has some reluctance about continuing such efforts.

The first paragraph of the article lists the three prime examples: Cuba, Angola, and Nicaragua. Each case is a murderous and prolonged terrorist war conducted by Washington.

President Kennedy launched a campaign to bring “the terrors of the earth” to Cuba, his close confidant historian Arthur Schlesinger writes in his biography of Robert Kennedy, who was assigned the task as his highest priority. The terrorist atrocities were extreme, and as is well known, played a part in what Schlesinger called “the most dangerous moment in history,” the Cuban missile crisis. The terrorist attacks were resumed when the crisis abated, and continued for many years.

In Angola, the Reagan Administration—the last holdouts in backing apartheid South Africa—supported the vicious and brutal UNITA army, and continued to do so even its leader, Jonas Savimbi, had been roundly defeated in a carefully monitored free election and even after South Africa had

withdrawn support from this “monster whose lust for power had brought appalling misery to his people,” in the words of Murrack Goulding, British ambassador to Angola, who was seconded by the CIA station chief in nearby Kinshasa, who warned that “it wasn’t a good idea” to support the monster “because of the extent of Savimbi’s crimes. He was terribly brutal.”³

Reagan’s terrorist war against Nicaragua, also murderous and destructive, was even condemned by the International Court of Justice, which ordered the U.S. to terminate its “unlawful use of force” and pay substantial reparations. The orders were of course dismissed, the war was escalated, and the U.S. even vetoed a Security Council resolution calling on states to observe international law—no one mentioned, but the intent was clear.

But the three huge terrorist campaigns, which brought untold misery and destruction to the victims had only limited success, so they are not a good model for policy. The sole lesson from this inquiry. The clear, prominent and candid message is that the U.S. is the world’s leading terrorist state, but that is good and proper: the emperor “molests the world” by right.

The emperor, after all, cannot be too severely chastised for molesting his own domains—the world. Or for defending them. And one can appreciate his pain when some of what he possesses is stolen from him. A case of great significance took place in October 1949, when China declared independence. “The loss of China” was not only a major historical event but also had a devastating impact in domestic American society. The great question of the day, and long after, was “Who was responsible for the loss of China?” That was the major theme of the McCarthyite wave of repression. It also launched the U.S. into the Vietnam war out of concern for the possible “loss of Indochina” as well, perhaps setting off a chain of losses that would even reach the “superdomino,” as Japan was called by Asia historian John Dower in his analysis of US policy in the region. Kennedy was deeply concerned that he might be blamed for “the loss of Indochina,” if he failed to escalate the attack against South Vietnam, later all of Indochina.

Plainly, one can only lose what one possesses. Imperial mentality is so deeply rooted that these locutions aroused little notice for a long period, and still are used.

What the emperor owns, he must also defend. President Lyndon Johnson articulated the principle with considerable passion in a speech to American soldiers in Asia in 1966. He explained to them that “We are going to have to stand and say, ‘Might doesn’t make right.’ 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.” So we must “defend freedom” by destroying Vietnam, to defend ourselves from their onslaught against us.⁴

The reasoning is hardly different when President Obama launches drone strikes to murder people suspected of perhaps planning to harm us some day.

The principle is also lucidly expressed in scholarship. In his inquiry into the historical roots of George W. Bush’s “preemptive war” against Iraq (nothing was “preempted,” but put that aside), the

noted Cold War historian John Lewis Gaddis traces “Bush’s framework for fighting terrorism [to] the lofty, idealistic tradition” established by his hero John Quincy Adams, the grand strategist who was the intellectual author of Manifest Destiny. Adams adopted the principle that has always defined U.S. strategic thinking, Gaddis explains: “Expansion, we have assumed, is the path to security.” Accordingly, when Bush warned “that Americans must ‘be ready for preemptive action when necessary to defend our liberty and to defend our lives,’ he was echoing an old tradition rather than establishing a new one,” reiterating principles that presidents from Adams on “would all have understood . . . very well.”⁵

Security, of course, is a legitimate goal. It follows that expansion should be limitless, since the outer reaches of what we own are always under potential threat, perhaps the threat of robbery of our possessions by the people who live there, the most vile form of aggression against us.

But the threat of “them” is at home as well, another concern with deep roots in American history. The colonists had to defend themselves against the “merciless Indian savages” denounced by Thomas Jefferson in the Declaration of Independence. Another major threat was the slave population. As Jefferson lamented, it would be very dangerous to set them free. Each of them has “ten thousand recollections” of their hideous treatment in the barbaric slave labor camps that were a primary source of the industrial revolution that created the modern developed societies, and they might react if free, leading a war that would end only with “extermination of the one or the other race.”⁶

Possible threats never end. Security therefore demands that we be armed to the teeth, carrying guns into churches, restaurants, any place where *they* may be lurking, planning to harm us.

And the imperium too must be defended if we are to have any hope of security. It is only natural then that the U.S. should have one thousand military bases around the world, a military budget that comes close to matching the rest of the world combined, with by far the most advanced technology and cutting-edge research to attain “full-spectrum dominance” over the world and outer space.

The prerogatives of the emperor, and his just needs.

Preface to the First Edition (1986)

St. Augustine tells the story of a pirate captured by Alexander the Great, who asked him “how he dare molest the sea.” “How dare you molest the whole world?” the pirate replied: “Because I do it with a little ship only, I am called a thief; you, doing it with a great navy, are called an Emperor.”

The pirate’s answer was “elegant and excellent,” St. Augustine relates. It captures with some accuracy the current relations between the United States and various minor actors on the stage of international terrorism: Libya, factions of the PLO, and others. More generally, St. Augustine’s tale illuminates the meaning of the concept of international terrorism in contemporary Western usage, and reaches to the heart of the frenzy over selected incidents of terrorism currently being orchestrated, with supreme cynicism, as a cover for Western violence.

The term “terrorism” came into use at the end of the eighteenth century, primarily to refer to violent acts of governments designed to ensure popular submission. That concept plainly is of little benefit to the practitioners of state terrorism, who, holding power, are in a position to control the system of thought and expression. The original sense has therefore been abandoned, and the term “terrorism” has come to be applied mainly to “retail terrorism” by individuals or groups.¹ Whereas the term was once applied to emperors who molest their own subjects and the world, now it is restricted to thieves who molest the powerful—though not entirely restricted: the term still applies to enemy emperors, a category that shifts with the needs of power and ideology.

Extricating ourselves from such practices, we use the term “terrorism” to refer to the threat or use of violence to intimidate or coerce (generally for political, religious, or other such ends), whether it is the terrorism of the emperor or of the thief.

The pirate’s maxim explains the recently evolved concept of “international terrorism” only in part. It is necessary to add a second feature: an act of terrorism enters the canon only if it is committed by “their side,” not ours. That was the guiding doctrine of the public relations campaign about “international terrorism” launched by the Reagan Administration as it came to office. It relied on scholarship claiming to have established that the plague is a “Soviet-inspired” instrument, “aimed at the destabilization of Western democratic society,” as shown by the alleged fact that terrorism is not “directed against the Soviet Union or any of its satellites or client states,” but rather occurs “almost exclusively in democratic or relatively democratic countries.”²

The thesis is true, in fact true by definition, given the way the term “terrorism” is employed by the emperor and his loyal coterie. Since only acts committed by “their side” count as terrorism, it follows that the thesis is necessarily correct, whatever the facts. In the real world, the story is quite different.

The major victims of international terrorism³ in the past several decades have been Cubans, Central Americans, and inhabitants of Lebanon, but none of this counts, by definition. When Israel bombs Palestinian refugee camps killing many civilians—often without even a pretense of “reprisal”—or sends its troops into Lebanese villages in “counterterror” operations where they murder and destroy, or hijacks ships and dispatches hundreds of hostages to prison camps under horrifying conditions, this is not “terrorism”; in fact, the rare voices of protest are thunderously condemned by loyal party liners for their “anti-Semitism” and “double standard,” demonstrated by their failure to join the chorus of praise for “a country that cares for human life” (*Washington Post*), whose “high moral purpose” (*Time*) is the object of never-ending awe and acclaim, a country which, according to its admirers, “is held to a higher law, as interpreted for it by journalists” (Walter Goodman).⁴

Similarly, it is not terrorism when paramilitary forces operating from U.S. bases and trained by the CIA bombard Cuban hotels, sink fishing boats and attack Russian ships in Cuban harbors, poison crops and livestock, attempt to assassinate Castro, and so on, in missions that were running almost weekly at their peak.⁵ These and many similar actions on the part of the emperor and his clients are not the subject of conferences and learned tomes, or of anguished commentary and diatribes in the media and journals of opinion.

Standards for the emperor and his court are unique in two closely related respects. First, their terrorist acts are excluded from the canon; second, while terrorist attacks against them are regarded with extreme seriousness, even requiring violence in “self-defense against future attack” as we will see, comparable or more serious terrorist attacks against others do not merit retaliation or preemptive action, and if undertaken would elicit fury and a fearsome response. The significance of such terrorist attacks is so slight that they need barely be reported, surely not remembered. Suppose, for example, that a seaborne Libyan force were to attack three American ships in the Israeli port of Haifa, sinking one of them and damaging the others, using East German-made missiles. There is no need to speculate on the reaction. Turning to the real world, on June 5, 1986, “a seaborne South African force attacked three Russian ships in the southern Angolan harbour of Namibe, sinking one of them,” using “Israeli-made Scorpion [Gabriel] missiles.”⁶

If the Soviet Union had responded to this terrorist attack against commercial shipping as the U.S. would have done under similar circumstances—perhaps by a firebombing that would have destroyed Johannesburg, to judge by the action-response scale of U.S. and Israeli “retaliation”—the U.S. might well have considered a nuclear strike as legitimate “retaliation” against the Communist devil. In the real world, the USSR did not respond, and the events were considered so insignificant that they were barely mentioned in the U.S. press.⁷

Suppose that Cuba were to have invaded Venezuela in late 1976 in self-defense against terrorist attack, with the intent of establishing a “New Order” there organized by elements under its control, killing 200 Americans manning an air defense system, heavily shelling the U.S. Embassy and finally

occupying it for several days during its conquest of Caracas in violation of a cease-fire agreement.⁸ Turning again to the real world, in 1982 Israel attacked Lebanon under the pretext of protecting the Galilee against terrorist attack (fabricated for the U.S. audience, as tacitly conceded internally), with the intent of establishing a “New Order” there organized by elements under its control, killing 200 Russians who were manning an air defense system, heavily shelling the Russian Embassy and finally occupying it for two days during its conquest of West Beirut in violation of a cease-fire agreement. The facts were casually reported in the U.S., with the context and crucial background ignored or denied. There was, fortunately, no Soviet response, or we would not be here today to discuss the matter.

In the real world, we assume as a matter of course that the Soviet Union and other official enemies, most of them defenseless, will calmly endure provocations and violence that would elicit a furious reaction, verbal and military, if the emperor and his court were the victims.

The stunning hypocrisy illustrated by these and innumerable other cases, some discussed below, is not restricted to the matter of international terrorism. To mention a different case, consider the World War II agreements that allocated control over parts of Europe and Asia to the several Allied powers and called for withdrawal at specified times. There was great outrage over (in fact, outrageous) Soviet actions in Eastern Europe modeled closely on what the U.S. had done in the areas assigned to Western control under wartime agreements (Italy, Greece, South Korea, etc.); and over the belated Soviet withdrawal from northern Iran, while the U.S. violated its wartime agreements to withdraw from Portugal, Iceland, Greenland, and elsewhere, on the grounds that “military considerations” make such withdrawal “inadvisable,” the Joint Chiefs of Staff argued with State Department concurrence. There was—and to this day is—no outrage over the fact that West German espionage operations, directed against the USSR, were placed under the control of Reinhard Gehlen, who had conducted similar operations for the Nazis in Eastern Europe, or that the CIA was sending agents and supplies to aid armies encouraged by Hitler fighting in Eastern Europe and the Ukraine as late as the early 1950s as part of the “roll-back strategy” made official in NSC-68 (April 1950).⁹ Soviet support for armies encouraged by Hitler fighting in the Rockies in 1952 might have elicited a different reaction.¹⁰

Examples are legion. One of the most notorious is the example regularly offered as the ultimate proof that Communists cannot be relied upon to live up to agreements: the 1973 Paris Peace treaty concerning Vietnam and its aftermath. The truth is that the U.S. announced at once that it would reject every term of the scrap of paper it had been compelled to sign, and proceeded to do so, while the media, in a display of servility that goes beyond the norm, accepted the U.S. version of the treaty (violating every essential element of it) as the actual text, so that U.S. violations were “in accord” with the treaty while the Communist reaction to these violations proved their innate treachery. This example is now regularly offered as justification for the U.S. rejection of a negotiated political settlement in Central America, demonstrating the usefulness of a well-run propaganda system.¹¹

As noted, “international terrorism” (in the specific Western sense) was placed in the central focus of attention by the Reagan Administration as it came into office in 1981.¹² The reasons were not difficult to discern, though they were—and remain—inexpressible within the doctrinal system.

The Administration was committed to three related policies, all achieved with considerable success: 1) transfer of resources from the poor to the rich; 2) a large-scale increase in the state sector of the economy in the traditional way, through the Pentagon system, a device to compel the public to finance high technology industry by means of the state-guaranteed market for the production of high technology waste and thus to contribute to the program of public subsidy, private profit, called “free enterprise”; and 3) a substantial increase in U.S. intervention, subversion and international terrorism (in the literal sense). Such policies cannot be presented to the public in the terms in which they are intended. They can be implemented only if the general population is properly frightened by monsters against whom we must defend ourselves.

The standard device is an appeal to the threat of what the President called “the monolithic and ruthless conspiracy” bent on world conquest—President Kennedy, as he launched a rather similar program¹³—Reagan’s “Evil Empire.” But confrontation with the Empire itself would be a dangerous affair. It is far safer to do battle with defenseless enemies designated as the Evil Empire’s proxies, a choice that conforms well to the third plank in the Reagan agenda, pursued for quite independent reasons: to ensure “stability” and “order” in Washington’s global domains. The “terrorism” of properly chosen pirates, or of such enemies as Nicaragua or Salvadoran peasants who dare to defend themselves against international terrorist attack, is an easier target, and with an efficiently functioning propaganda system, it can be exploited to induce a proper sense of fear and mobilization among the domestic population.

It is in this context that “international terrorism” replaced human rights as “the Soul of our foreign policy” in the 1980s, human rights having achieved this status as part of the campaign to reverse the notable improvement in the moral and intellectual climate during the 1960s—termed the “Vietnam syndrome”—and to overcome the dread “crisis of democracy” that erupted in the same context as large elements of the general population became organized for political action, threatening the system of elite decision, public ratification, called “democracy” in Western parlance.¹⁴

In what follows, I will be concerned with international terrorism in the real world, focusing attention primarily on the Mediterranean region. “Mideast/Mediterranean terrorism” was selected as the top story of 1985 by editors and broadcasters—primarily American—polled by the Associated Press; the poll was taken before the terrorist attacks at the Rome and Vienna airports in December, which probably would have eliminated remaining doubts.¹⁵ In the early months of 1986, concern over Mideast/Mediterranean terrorism reached a fever pitch, culminating in the U.S. bombing of Libya in April. The official story is that this courageous action aimed at the leading practitioner of international terrorism achieved its goal. Qaddafi and other major criminals are now cowering in the

bunkers, tamed by the brave defender of human rights and dignity. But despite this grand victory over the forces of darkness, the issue of terrorism emanating from the Islamic world and the proper response for the democracies that defend civilized values remains a leading topic of concern and debate, as illustrated by numerous books, conferences, articles and editorials, television commentary and so on. Insofar as any large or elite public can be reached, the discussion strictly observes the principles just enunciated: attention is restricted to the terrorism of the thief, not the emperor and his clients; to their crimes, not ours. I will, however, not observe these decencies.

Introduction (2002)

The impact of the terrorist atrocities of September 11, 2001 was so overwhelming that the identification just given is redundant: “9/11” suffices. It is widely agreed that the world has entered into a new age in which everything will be different: “the age of terror.” Undoubtedly 9/11 will hold a prominent place in the annals of terrorism, though we should think carefully about just why this is the case. Anyone familiar with past and current history knows that the reason is not, regrettably, the scale of the crimes; rather, the choice of innocent victims. What the consequences will be depends substantially on how the rich and powerful interpret this dramatic demonstration that they are no longer immune from atrocities of the kind they routinely inflict on others, and how they choose to react.

In this connection, it is useful to consider several facts: 1) The “age of terror” was not unanticipated; 2) The “war on terror” declared on September 11 is no innovation, and the way it was conducted in the very recent past can hardly fail to be instructive today.

As for 1), though no one could have predicted the specific atrocities of 9/11, it had been understood for some time that with contemporary technology, the industrial world was likely to lose its virtual monopoly of violence. Well before 9/11, it was recognized that “a well-planned operation to smuggle [weapons of mass destruction] into the United States would have at least a 90 percent probability of success.”¹ Among the contemplated threats are “small nukes,” “dirty bombs,” and a variety of biological weapons. Execution might not require unusual technical proficiency or organization. Furthermore, the source of terror might be hard to identify, hence to confront. Nine months after 9/11 and the anthrax scare that many analysts found even more terrifying,² the FBI reported that it still had only suspicions about the origins and planning of the 9/11 attacks—basically, those assumed at once, prior to what must be the most extraordinary international investigations in history, which yielded very little, they acknowledge; and the FBI reported no progress on identifying the perpetrators of the anthrax terror, though the source had been localized to Federal laboratories within the United States, and huge resources had been devoted to the investigation.

Turning to point 2), it is important to remember that the “war on terror” was not declared by George W. Bush on 9/11, but rather re-declared. It had been declared 20 years earlier by the Reagan–Bush (No. 1) Administration, with similar rhetoric and much the same personnel in leading positions. They pledged to excise the “cancers” that are bringing “a return to barbarism in the modern age.” They identified two main centers of the “evil scourge of terrorism”: Central America and the Middle East/Mediterranean region. Their campaigns to eradicate the plague in these two regions ranked high

among the foreign policy issues of the decade. In the case of Central America, these campaigns quickly led to popular mobilization that was unprecedented in character. It had deep roots in mainstream American society, and broke new ground in the actions that were undertaken; during the U.S. wars in Indochina, as in earlier Western rampages in much of the world, few even thought of going to live in a village to help the victims and, by their presence, to provide some minimal protection from the foreign invaders and their local clients. There was also a large literature on the Reagan Administration's "war on terror." It found its place within the popular movements that sought to counter state-supported international terrorism, though it remained virtually unmentionable in the mainstream under the convention that only crimes of others are to command attention and elicit passionate denunciation. Much of what follows is drawn from writings of the 1980s on this topic,³ which has considerable relevance for what lies ahead, I believe.

Washington's Central American base for countering the plague was Honduras. The official in charge during the most violent years was Ambassador John Negroponte, who was appointed by George H. W. Bush (No. 2) in 2001 to lead the diplomatic component of the redeclared "war on terror" at the United Nations. Reagan's special envoy to the Middle East through the period of the worst atrocities there was Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld, who directs the military component of the new phase of the campaign. Other leading planners in Washington also bring to the new "war on terror" the experience they gained from the first phase.

In both regions, the Reagan Administration carried out massive terrorist atrocities, vastly exceeding anything they claimed to be combating. In the Middle East, by a large margin the worst atrocities trace back to the U.S. and its local clients, who left a trail of bloodshed and devastation, particularly in the shattered societies of Lebanon and in the territories under Israeli military occupation. Central America suffered even worse disasters at the hands of the terrorist commanders in Washington and their minions. One of the targets was a state, Nicaragua, which was therefore able to follow the course required by law and solemn treaties when a country is attacked: to appeal to international authorities. The World Court ruled in favor of Nicaragua, determining that the U.S. was guilty of "unlawful use of force" and violation of treaties, ordering Washington to terminate its international terrorist crimes and pay substantial reparations. The U.S. dismissed the Court ruling with contempt, on the official grounds that other nations do not agree with us so we must decide for ourselves what lies within our "domestic jurisdiction"; in this case, a terrorist war against Nicaragua. With bipartisan support, the Administration immediately escalated the crimes. Nicaragua appealed to the Security Council, where the U.S. vetoed a resolution supporting the Court decision and calling on all states to observe international law, also voting alone (with one or two client-states) against similar General Assembly resolutions. The U.S. escalated the attack further while undermining efforts of the Central American presidents to achieve a negotiated settlement. When the population finally succumbed, the national press, while acknowledging the terrorist methods employed, did not try to

conceal its ecstasy, informing the world that Americans are “United in joy” at this “Victory for U.S. Fair Play” (*New York Times*).

Elsewhere in Central America the population had no army to protect it. The atrocities carried out by the forces armed and trained by the U.S. and the states that joined its international terrorist network were therefore considerably more extreme than in Nicaragua, where they were horrifying enough. Conducted with unspeakable barbarism and brutality, the U.S. wars left some 200,000 corpses and millions of refugees and orphans in the shattered countries. One prime target of the “war on terror” was the Catholic Church, which had committed a grievous sin. Abandoning the traditional role of service to wealth and power, major segments of the Church adopted “the preferential option for the poor.” Priests, nuns, and layworkers sought to organize people who lived in misery to take some control of their lives, thereby becoming “Communists” who must be exterminated. It was more than symbolic that the atrocious decade began with the assassination of a conservative Archbishop who had become “a voice for the voiceless,” and ended with the brutal murder of six leading Jesuit intellectuals, in both cases by Washington’s favored clients. The events elicited little interest among those responsible. Few even know the names of the assassinated intellectuals, in dramatic contrast to dissidents in enemy states; one can imagine the reaction if they had not merely been jailed and exiled but had their brains blown out by elite forces trained and armed by the Kremlin, capping a record of horrendous atrocities.

The basic facts are understood. The School of the Americas announces with pride that “liberation theology . . . was defeated with the assistance of the U.S. Army,” thanks in no small measure to the training it provided to military officers of the client-states.

The “Victory for U.S. Fair Play” left more than a trail of mutilated corpses and ruined lives, in the midst of ecological disaster. After the U.S. took over again in 1990, Nicaragua declined to the rank of poorest country of the hemisphere after Haiti—which, by coincidence, has been the leading target of U.S. intervention and violence for a century, and now shares with Cuba the distinction of enduring a crushing U.S. embargo. Elsewhere in the region,

neoliberal economic policies, such as ending price subsidies and increasing sales taxes, have worsened the situation for the poor, the UN believes. Annual social spending in the four drought-hit Central American countries is \$100 a head, one sixth of the Latin American average [which is disgraceful enough]. Statistics compiled for the UN’s Food and Agricultural Organization’s annual meeting in Rome this week [June 11, 2002] show that the number of people with chronic hunger in Central America has risen by almost a third in the last decade, from 5 million to 6.4 million of the 28 million population.⁴

UN agencies are seeking remedies, “but without effective land reform these measures can have only limited impact.” The popular organizations that might have led the way to land reform and other measures to benefit the poor majority were effectively destroyed by Washington’s “war on terror.” Formal democracy was instituted, but it impresses mostly ideologues. Polls throughout the hemisphere reveal that faith in democracy has steadily declined, in part because of the destruction of the social base for effective democracy, and in part, very likely, because the institution of formal

democracy was accompanied by neoliberal policies that reduce the space for democratic participation.

Reviewing the program of “bringing democracy to Latin America,” Thomas Carothers, who served in the “democracy enhancement” projects of the Reagan Administration, concludes that the policies were “sincere” but a “failure,” of a peculiarly systematic kind. Where Washington’s influence was least—in the southern cone—successes were greatest, despite the efforts of the Reagan Administration to impede them; where Washington’s influence was greatest, successes were least. The reason, Carothers concludes, is that Washington sought to maintain “the basic order of . . . quite undemocratic societies” and to avoid “populist-based change . . . inevitably [seeking] only limited, top-down forms of democratic change that did not risk upsetting the traditional structures of power with which the United States has long been allied.” He dismisses the “liberal critique” of this approach because of its “perennial weak spot”: it offers no alternative. The option of allowing the population a meaningful voice in running their own affairs is not on the agenda.⁵

In the reigning culture of terrorism, the crimes of the “war on terror” and their aftermath arouse little articulate concern, apart from tactical considerations. The facts were amply reported by human rights organizations, church groups, and others, sometimes even the press, but were mostly dismissed with shameful apologetics. They are to teach us nothing about the “war on terror.” Most of the story was excised from history, even hailed as “an inspiration for the triumph of democracy in our time” (*New Republic*). With the threat of meaningful democracy and desperately needed reform drowned in blood, the region drifted back to the obscurity of earlier years, when the vast majority suffered bitterly but in silence, while foreign investors and “the traditional structures of power with which the United States has long been allied” enriched themselves.

The reaction throughout makes good sense on the prevailing assumption that the victims are “mere things” whose lives have “no value,” to borrow Hegel’s elegant term for the lower orders. If they try to “raise their heads,” they must be crushed by international terrorism, which will be honored as a noble cause. If they endure in silence, their misery can be ignored. History teaches few lessons with such crystal clarity.

Though Central America faded from view in the 1990s, terror elsewhere remained prominent on the policy agenda, and having defeated liberation theology, the U.S. military was directed to new tasks. In the Western hemisphere, Haiti and Colombia became the focus of concern. In Haiti, the U.S. had provided ample support for state violence through the 1980s (as before), but new problems arose in 1990, when to everyone’s surprise, Haiti’s first democratic election was won overwhelmingly by a populist priest, thanks to large-scale popular mobilization in the slums and rural areas that had been ignored. The democratic government was quickly overthrown by a military coup. The junta at once resorted to atrocious terror to destroy the popular organizations, with tacit support from Bush (No. 1) and Clinton. The elected president was finally restored, but on condition that he keep to the harsh neoliberal policies of the U.S.-backed candidate who had won 14 percent of the vote in the 1990

election. Haiti declined into further misery, while Washington again was hailed for its inspiring dedication to freedom, justice, and democracy.

Considerably more significant for U.S. policy is Colombia, where the terrible crimes of earlier years mounted sharply in the 1990s, and Colombia became the leading recipient of U.S. arms and training in the hemisphere, in conformity to a consistent pattern. By the decade's end political murders were running at about ten a day (since perhaps doubled according to Colombian human rights organizations), and the number of displaced people had risen to two million, with some 300,000 more each year, regularly increasing. The State Department and Rand Corporation concur with human rights organizations that some 75–80 percent of the atrocities are attributable to the military and paramilitaries. The latter are so closely linked to the military that Human Rights Watch refers to them as the army's "sixth division," alongside the five official divisions. The proportion of atrocities attributed to the six divisions has remained fairly constant through the decade, but with a shift from the military to the paramilitaries as terror has been privatized, a familiar device, employed in recent years by Serbia, Indonesia, and other terror states that seek "plausible deniability" for their crimes. The U.S. is employing a similar tactic, privatizing the training and direction of atrocities, as well as implementation, as in the chemical warfare operations ("fumigation") that have had a devastating impact on much of the peasant society under derisory drug war pretexts.⁶ Increasingly, these operations are being transferred to private companies (MPRI, Dyncorps), which are funded by Washington and employ U.S. military officers, a useful device to escape the limited congressional scrutiny for direct involvement in state terror.

In 1999, as atrocities mounted, Colombia became the leading recipient of U.S. military aid worldwide (apart from the perennials, Israel–Egypt), replacing Turkey. A strategically placed ally, Turkey had received substantial U.S. military aid and training from the 1940s, but there was a sharp increase in the mid-1980s as Turkey launched a counterinsurgency campaign targeting its miserably repressed Kurdish population. State terror operations escalated in the 1990s, becoming some of the worst crimes of that gory decade. The operations, conducted with rampant torture and unspeakable barbarism, drove millions of people from the devastated countryside while killing tens of thousands. The remaining population is confined to a virtual dungeon, deprived of even the most elementary rights.⁷ As state terror escalated, so did U.S. support for the crimes. Clinton provided Turkey with 80 percent of its arms; in 1997 alone arms flow exceeded the entire Cold War period combined up to the onset of the counterinsurgency campaign.⁸

It is instructive that in the deluge of commentary on the second phase of the "war on terror," the very recent and highly relevant history merits no attention. There is also no detectable concern over the fact that the second phase is led by the only state to have been condemned for international terrorism by the highest international authorities, and that the coalition of the just brings together a remarkable array of terrorist states: Russia, China, and others, eagerly joining so as to obtain

authorization for their terrorist atrocities from the global leader who pledges to drive evil from the world. No eyebrows are raised when the defense of Kabul against terror passes from the hands of one terrorist state (Britain) to another, Turkey, which qualified for the post by its “positive experiences” combating terror, according to the State Department and the press. Turkey has become a “pivotal ally in Washington’s new war against terrorism,” a Brookings Institution study explains. It has “struggled with terrorist violence” in recent years and “is thus uniquely positioned to help shape the new global effort to eliminate this threat.”⁹

As the few examples cited illustrate—there are many more—Washington’s role in state-directed international terrorism persisted without notable change in the interim between the two phases of the “war on terror,” along with the reaction to it.

Just as had been true throughout the first phase of the “war on terror,” ample information about more recent exploits of state-supported international terrorism has been available from the major human rights organizations and other highly reliable sources, which are eagerly sought when they have a story to tell that is ideologically serviceable. Here, that is most definitely not the case. The facts are therefore ignored, or if that is impossible, dismissed as a minor flaw or inadvertent deviation from our path of righteousness. The performance was particularly impressive in the 1990s, when it was necessary to suppress the role of the U.S. and its allies in Turkey, Colombia, East Timor, the Middle East, and elsewhere, while praising Washington for entering a “noble phase” in its foreign policy with a “saintly glow” as the leaders of the “idealistic New World bent on ending inhumanity,” for the first time in history, dedicated themselves to “principles and values” in their zeal to uphold human rights and freedom. That the torrent could flow without embarrassment is remarkable enough that it was unimpeded by the crucial participation of the same saintly figures in some of the worst crimes of the decade would have silenced even a Jonathan Swift.¹⁰

The successes of the first phase of the “war on terror” in Central America were mirrored in the second major area of concern, the Middle East/Mediterranean region. In Lebanon, Palestinian refugees were crushed by U.S.-backed terror operations, and Lebanese society suffered further trauma. Some 20,000 were killed during the 1982 Israeli invasion, many more in atrocities of the Israeli Army (IDF) and its mercenaries in occupied Lebanon in the years that followed, continuing through the 1990s with periodic Israeli invasions that drove hundreds of thousands from their homes, killing hundreds. The Lebanese government reports 25,000 killed after the 1982 invasion. There was rarely a credible pretext of self-defense, as Israeli authorities conceded (apart from propaganda directed to the U.S.). U.S. support was consistent and decisive throughout.

In the Israeli-occupied territories, terror and repression increased through the 1980s. Israel barred development in the occupied territories, taking over valuable lands and much of the resources, while organizing settlement projects in such a way as to leave the indigenous population isolated and helpless. The plans and programs relied crucially on U.S. military, economic, diplomatic, and

ideological support.

In the early days of the 35-year military occupation, Moshe Dayan—one of the Israeli leaders most sympathetic to the plight of the Palestinians—advised his cabinet colleagues that Israel should tell Palestinians that they will “Live like dogs, and whoever wishes, may leave.”¹¹ Like many such exercises, the hallmark of the occupation has been humiliation and degradation of the “Araboushim” (the counterpart of “niggers,” “kikes”), who must be taught not to “raise their heads,” in the standard idiom. Twenty years ago, reviewing one of the earlier outbreaks of settler/IDF violence, political scientist Yoram Peri ruefully observed that three-quarters of a million young Israelis have learned from military service “that the task of the army is not only to defend the state in the battlefield against a foreign army, but to demolish the rights of innocent people just because they are Araboushim living in territories that God promised to us.” The “two-legged beasts” (Prime Minister Menahem Begin) will then be able only “to scurry around like drugged roaches in a bottle” (Chief of Staff Rafael Eitan). Eitan’s superior Ariel Sharon, fresh from his invasion of Lebanon and the Sabra–Shatila massacre, advised that the way to deal with demonstrators is to “cut off their testicles.” The mainstream Hebrew press reported “detailed accounts of terrorist acts [by the IDF and settlers] in the conquered territories,” which were presented to Prime Minister Begin by prominent political figures, including leading hawks. These included regular exercises of humiliation, such as forcing Araboushim to urinate and excrete on one another and crawl on the ground while they call out “Long Live the State of Israel” or lick the earth; or on Holocaust day, to write numbers on their own hands “in memory of Jews in the extermination camps.” Such acts have scandalized much of the Israeli public since, again when they were repeated during Sharon’s April 2002 invasion.

The respected human rights activist and legal specialist Raja Shehadeh wrote 20 years ago that for Palestinians under occupation there are few choices: “Living like this, you must constantly resist the twin temptations of either acquiescing in the jailer’s plan in numb despair, or becoming crazed by consuming hatred for your jailer and yourself, the prisoner.” The only alternative is to be one of the “samidin,” those who silently endure, controlling their fury.

One of Israel’s most eminent writers, Boaz Evron, described the technique of the occupation succinctly: “to keep them on a short leash,” to make sure that they recognize “that the whip is held over their heads.” That makes more sense than slaughter, because then civilized folk can “accept it all peacefully,” asking “What is so terrible? Is anyone being killed?”

Evron’s acid critique is right on the mark. Its accuracy has repeatedly been demonstrated, very pointedly in April 2002, when the latest of Sharon’s war crimes was neatly converted by the pro-Israel lobby to a demonstration that outside the U.S., the world is ruled by ineradicable anti-Semitism. The proof is that early fears of a huge slaughter proved unfounded, and all that happened was the destruction of the Jenin refugee camp, the old city of Nablus, and the cultural center and other civilian institutions in Ramallah, along with obscene humiliation of the normal variety, brutal collective

punishment of hundreds of thousands of innocent people, and other trivialities of the kind that educated Americans and many Israelis can “accept peacefully.” Surely no one but some hysterical anti-Iraqi racist would object if Saddam Hussein’s forces were to carry out similar actions in Israel or the U.S.

Individual cases often reveal prevailing attitudes towards terror more graphically than the general picture. There is no more vivid and lasting symbol of “the evil scourge of terrorism” than the brutal murder of a crippled American in a wheelchair, Leon Klinghoffer, during the hijacking of the *Achille Lauro* in October 1985. The atrocity is in no way mitigated by the claim of the terrorists that the hijacking was in retaliation for the U.S.-backed Israeli bombing of Tunis a week earlier, which had killed 75 Tunisians and Palestinians with no credible pretext. Reactions were quite different when British reporters found “the flattened remains of a wheelchair” in the Jenin refugee camp after Sharon’s onslaught. “It had been utterly crushed, ironed flat as if in a cartoon,” they reported: “In the middle of the debris lay a broken white flag.” A crippled Palestinian, Kemal Zughayer, “was shot dead as he tried to wheel himself up the road. The Israeli tanks must have driven over the body, because when [a friend] found it, one leg and both arms were missing, and the face, he said, had been ripped in two.”¹² This apparently did not even merit report in the U.S., and if it were reported, it would be denied along with a flood of accusations of anti-Semitism that would probably lead to apology and retraction. If acknowledged, the crime would be dismissed as an inadvertent error in the course of justified retaliation, quite unlike the *Achille Lauro* atrocity. Kemal Zughayer will not enter the annals of terrorism along with Leon Klinghoffer.

It is all too easy to multiply such examples. U.S. allies must be distinguished from the Araboushins they grind under their boots, just as more generally over the centuries, human beings are not to be confused with “mere things.”

Former Chief of Israeli intelligence Shlomo Gazit, a senior official of the military administration in its early years, described the occupation in 1985 as a “success story.” The population was causing no problems. They were *samidin* who do not raise their heads. The primary goal had been achieved: “to prevent the inhabitants of the territories from participating in shaping the political future of the territory” or to “be seen as a partner for dealings with Israel.” That entailed “the absolute prohibition of any political organization, for it was clearly understood by everyone that if political activism and organization were permitted, its leaders would become potential participants in political affairs.” The same considerations require “the destruction of all initiative and every effort on the part of the inhabitants of the territories to serve as a pipeline for negotiations, to be a channel to the Palestinian Arab leadership outside of the territories.” The guiding principle had been enunciated in 1972 by the distinguished Israeli diplomat Chaim Herzog, later President: “I do not deny the Palestinians a place or stand or opinion on every matter . . . But certainly I am not prepared to consider them as partners in any respect in a land that has been consecrated in the hands of our nation for thousands of years. For

the Jews of this land there cannot be any partner.”¹³

For the sponsors, problems arise only if the drugged roaches become so “crazed by consuming hatred” that they do raise their heads and even turn on their jailers. In that case punishment is severe, reaching extreme levels of brutality, always with impunity as long as the paymaster agrees. Until December 1987, when the first *Intifada* broke out, Palestinians within the territories were remarkably subdued. When they finally raised their heads within the occupied territories, the IDF, Border Patrol (who resemble paramilitaries), and settlers exploded in a paroxysm of terror and brutality.¹⁴

Reporting in the U.S. was scanty. The press and commentary also generally remained loyal, while Washington valiantly pretended “not to see” offers by the PLO and others for a political settlement. Finally, as it was becoming an object of international ridicule, Washington agreed to talk to the PLO, with the childish pretense, accepted without a qualm by the intellectual community and the media, that the PLO had succumbed and had now meekly agreed to accept the forthright U.S. stand. In the first meeting (reported in Israel and Egypt, but not in the U.S., within the mainstream), Washington demanded that the PLO call off the “riots” within the territories under military occupation, “which we view as terrorist acts against Israel,” aiming to “undermine [its] security and stability.” The “terrorism” is not that of the occupying army; their violence is legitimate, given U.S. government priorities, just as it was in Lebanon. It is those who dare to raise their heads who are culpable. Prime Minister Rabin informed Peace Now leaders that the purpose of the “low-level” U.S.–PLO negotiations was to provide Israel with ample time to crush the *Intifada* by “harsh military and economic pressure,” and assured them that the Palestinians “will be broken.”

As is commonly the case, violence worked. When they were “broken” and returned to the state of *samidin*, concerns in the U.S. abated, as in other cases, demonstrating again the accuracy of Evron’s analysis, cited earlier.

So matters proceeded through the 1990s, now within the framework of the “Oslo peace process.” In the Gaza Strip, a few thousand Jewish settlers live in luxury, with swimming pools, fishponds, and highly successful agriculture thanks to their appropriation of much of the region’s meager water resources. A million Palestinians barely survive in misery, imprisoned behind a wall and barred access to the sea or to Egypt, often compelled to walk or swim around IDF barriers that serve little if any security function but do impose harsh and degrading punishment. Often they face live fire if they seek to travel within the dungeon. Gaza has become “the penal colony” of Israel, its “devils island, Alcatraz,” the prominent columnist Nahum Barnea writes.

As in Central America, conditions deteriorated steadily through the 1990s.¹⁵ The Clinton–Barak proposals of summer 2000 at Camp David were lavishly praised as “magnanimous” and “generous,” and it is only fair to say that they did offer an improvement. At the time, Palestinians were confined to over 200 enclaves in the West Bank, most of them tiny. Clinton and Barak magnanimously offered to reduce the number to three cantons, effectively separated from one another and from the center of

Palestinian life, culture, and communications in East Jerusalem. The Palestinian entity would then become a “neocolonial dependency” that will be “permanent,” as Barak’s Foreign Minister described the goal of the Oslo process, reiterating the observation of Moshe Dayan 30 years before that the occupation is “permanent.” On the Gaza model, a wall was being constructed in summer 2002 to imprison the population, with internal barriers that will be passable, if at all, only after long periods of harassment and purposeful humiliation of people seeking to reach hospitals, visit relatives, go to school, find work, transfer produce, or otherwise survive within the dungeon. If such measures restore the monopoly of violence and terror previously enjoyed by Washington’s client regime, the policy in the West Bank too will be deemed a success.

In mid-2002, the UN World Food Program requested donor support for a program to feed half a million Palestinians suffering from hunger and malnutrition, as “growing numbers of families in the Israeli-occupied territories are being forced to skip meals or reduce their food intake,” the WFP warned, anticipating that the situation would deteriorate further as Israel prevents free movement of goods among the eight cantons it is establishing within the “penal colony.”¹⁶

Like its Gaza model, the West Bank wall is to be “semi-permeable.” The IDF, Jewish settlers, and foreign tourists can flow freely in either direction, but not the “mere things” whose lives have “no value” to the rulers.

As long as people whose lives have value are immune, the fate of their victims can be ignored. If they raise their heads, they must be taught lessons in obedience. Violence is typically the first choice which is why state-directed international terrorism is such a rampant plague. If that fails, other means must be considered. During the first *Intifada* even extreme supporters of Israeli terror began to call for partial withdrawal because of the costs to Israel. In the early days of the second *Intifada*, the killing of hundreds of Palestinians and large-scale collective punishment did not even impede new shipments of helicopters and other terror weapons, but as the *Intifada* spun out of control, reaching to Israel itself, new steps were necessary. President Bush even proclaimed his “vision” of an eventual Palestinian state, to much acclaim, as he approached (from below) the stand of South African racists 40 years earlier, who not only had a “vision” of Black-run states, but actually implemented it.

Just what and where the eventual state should be remained an open question. House Majority Leader Dick Armey observed that “there are many Arab nations” that have plenty of “soil and property and opportunity to create a Palestinian state,” so that Israel should “grab the entire West Bank” and “the Palestinians should leave.” His counterparts point out that there are plenty of Jews in New York and Los Angeles and the richest country in the world would have no problem absorbing a few million more, solving the problem. At the opposite extreme of the spectrum, Anthony Lewis lauded “the unsentimental old soldier” Yitzhak Rabin, a man of “sheer intellectual honesty” who was willing to sign the Oslo agreements. But the Israeli right wing, unlike Rabin, “opposes any solution that would give the Palestinians a viable state—tiny, disarmed, poor, dominated by Israel, but their

own.” That is “the heart of the matter,” and if Rabin’s noble vision fails, the peace process will die.¹⁷

Meanwhile state terror remains the approved means of control. In the first days of the *Intifada*, Israel used U.S. helicopters to attack civilian targets, killing and wounding dozens of people. Clinton responded with the biggest shipment of military helicopters in a decade, and shipments continued as Israel began using them for political assassinations and other terrorist acts. The U.S. consistently refused to allow international monitors, whose presence is likely to reduce violence. In December 2001, along with vetoing another Security Council resolution calling for dispatch of monitors, the Bush Administration took a further step to “enhance terror” (Arafat’s crime, according to the President) by undermining the international effort to terminate Israel’s “grave breaches” of the Fourth Geneva Convention. The general attitude is well expressed by the President in his major political pronouncement on the Arab–Israel conflict (June 24, 2002): the guiding principle is that only “leaders not compromised by terror” will be admitted to the U.S.-run diplomatic process. Ariel Sharon automatically meets the condition, a fact that appears to have aroused no comment, though some winced when the President declared him to be “a man of peace”—as his 50-year record of terrorist atrocities fully demonstrates. No U.S. leader can be so compromised, by definition. It is the Palestinian leaders only who must satisfy the master’s demand that their violence and repression be directed solely against other two-legged beasts, as in the past, when these practices won support and acclaim from the U.S.–Israel alliance through the Oslo years. If they depart from that mission or lose control, they must be eliminated and replaced by more reliable puppets, preferably by elections that will be termed “free” if the right person wins.

The basic principles concerning terror have been outlined with some candor by honest statesmen: Winston Churchill, for example. He informed Parliament before World War I that

we are not a young people with an innocent record and a scanty inheritance. We have engrossed to ourselves . . . an altogether disproportionate share of the wealth and traffic of the world. We have got all we want in territory, and our claim to be left in the unmolested enjoyment of vast and splendid possessions, mainly acquired by violence, largely maintained by force, often seems less reasonable to others than to us.

As the U.S. and Britain emerged victorious in 1945, Churchill drew the appropriate conclusions from his realistic observations:

the government of the world must be entrusted to satisfied nations, who wished nothing more for themselves than what they had. If the world-government were in the hands of hungry nations, there would always be danger. But none of us had any reason to seek for anything more. The peace would be kept by peoples who lived in their own way and were not ambitious. Our power placed us above the rest. We were like rich men dwelling at peace within their habitations.¹⁸

Others who have gained “vast and splendid possessions,” also not very politely, understand the Churchillian principles well. The Kennedy and Reagan Administrations are considered to be at opposite poles of the U.S. political spectrum, but in this regard they were alike. Both recognized the need to resort to terror to ensure subordination to the rich men who wish to enjoy their possessions undisturbed. After only a few months in office, Kennedy ordered that the “terrors of the earth” must be visited upon Cuba until Fidel Castro is eliminated. Large-scale terror continued through Kennedy’s

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