

Reality is an Orphan: The 'Dream'world Challenge for Americans

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It's no wonder that most Americans are clueless about why "their" country is feared and hated the world over. It remains unthinkable to this day, for example, that any respectable "mainstream" U.S. media outlet would tell the truth about why the United States atom-bombed the civilian populations of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. As [Gar Alperovitz](#) and other [historians](#) have shown, Washington knew that Japan was defeated and ready to surrender at the end of World War II. The ghastly civilian killing atomic attacks were meant to send a signal to Soviet Russia about the post-WWII world: "We run the world. What we say goes."

However, as far as most Americans who even care to remember Hiroshima and Nagasaki know, the Japanese cities were nuked to save American lives certain to be lost in a U.S. invasion required to force Japan's surrender. This false rationalization was reproduced in the "[The War](#)," the widely viewed 2007 PBS miniseries on World War II from celebrated liberal documentarians Ken Burns and Lynn Novick.

An early challenge to Uncle Sam's purported right to manage postwar world affairs from the banks of the Potomac came in 1950. Korean forces, joined by Chinese troops, pushed back against the United States' invasion of North Korea. Washington responded with a merciless bombing campaign that flattened all of North Korea's cities and towns. U.S. Air Force Gen. Curtis LeMay boasted that "we burned down every town in North Korea" and proudly guessed that Uncle Sam's gruesome air campaign, replete with napalm and chemical weapons, murdered 20 percent of North Korea's population. This and more was recounted without a hint of shame—with pride, in fact—in the leading public U.S. military journals of the time. As Noam Chomsky, the world's leading intellectual, [explained](#) five years ago, the U.S. was not content just to demolish the country's urban zones:

Since everything in North Korea had been destroyed, the air force was then sent to destroy North Korea's dams, huge dams that controlled the nation's water supply—a war crime for which people had been hanged in Nuremberg. And these official journals ... talk[ed] excitedly about how wonderful it was to see the water pouring down, digging out the valleys and the 'Asians' scurrying around trying to survive. The journals exulted in what this meant to those Asians—horrors beyond our imagination. It meant the destruction of their rice crop, which in turn meant starvation. How magnificent!

The United States' monstrous massive crimes against North Korea during the early 1950s went down George Orwell's "[memory hole](#)" even as they took place. To the American public they never occurred—and therefore hold no relevance to current U.S.-North Korean tensions and negotiations as far as most good Americans know.

Things are different in North Korea, where every schoolchild learns about the epic, mass-murderous wrongdoings of the U.S. "imperialist aggressor" from the early 1950s.

"Just imagine ourselves in their position," Chomsky writes. "Imagine what it meant ... for your country to be totally levelled—everything destroyed by a huge superpower, which furthermore was

gloating about what it was doing. Imagine the imprint that would leave behind.”

That ugly history rarely makes its way into the “mainstream” U.S. understanding of why North Korea behaves in “bizarre” and “paranoid” ways toward the U.S.

Outside the “radical” margins where people read left critics and chroniclers of “U.S. foreign policy” (a mild euphemism for American imperialism), Americans still can’t grapple with the monumental and arch-imperialist crime that was “the U.S. crucifixion of Southeast Asia” ([Chomsky’s term](#) at the time) between 1962 and 1975.

Contrary to the conventional U.S. wisdom, there was no “Vietnam War.” What really occurred was a U.S. War on Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia—a giant and prolonged, multi-pronged and imperial assault that murdered 5 million southeast Asians along with 58,000 U.S. soldiers. Just one U.S. torture program alone—the CIA’s [Operation Phoenix](#)—killed more than two-thirds as many Vietnamese as the total U.S. body count. Unbeknownst to most Americans, the widely publicized My Lai atrocity was just one of countless mass [racist killings of Vietnamese villagers](#) carried out by U.S. troops during the crucifixion. Vietnam struggles with an epidemic of [birth defects](#) created by U.S. chemical warfare to this day.

America’s savage saturation bombing of Cambodia (meant to cut off supply lines to Vietnamese independence fighters) created the devastation out of which [arose](#) the mass-extminating Khmer Rouge regime, which Washington later backed against Vietnam.

As far as most Americans who care to think about the “[Vietnam War](#)” know from “mainstream” U.S. media, however, the war’s real tragedy is about what it did to Americans, not Southeast Asians. With no small help from Burns and Novick’s instantly celebrated documentary on, well, “The Vietnam War” last year, we are still stuck in the ethical oblivion of then U.S. President Jimmy Carter’s morally idiotic 1977 [statement](#) that no U.S. reparations or apologies were due to Vietnam since “the destruction was mutual” in the “Vietnam War.” As if fearsome fleets of Vietnamese bombers had wreaked havoc on major U.S. cities and pulverized and poisoned U.S. fields and farms during the 1960s and 1970s. As if legions of Vietnamese killers had descended from attack helicopters to murder U.S. citizens in their homes while Vietnamese gunships destroyed U.S. schools and hospitals. Did the Vietnamese mine U.S. harbors? Did naked American children run down streets in flight from Vietnamese napalm attacks?

The colossal crimes committed run contrary to Cold War claims that Washington was fighting the spread of Soviet-directed communism. The U.S. wanted to prevent Vietnam from becoming a good example of Third World social revolution and national independence. The truth is remembered in Vietnam, where national museums exhibit artifacts from Uncle Sam’s noble effort to “bomb Vietnam back to the Stone Age” and tell stories of Vietnamese soldiers’ heroic resistance to the “imperialist aggressors.”

One American who made the moral decision to put himself in “our” supposed “enemy’s” position was Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. The people of Indochina, King mused in 1967, “must find Americans to be strange liberators” as we “destroy their families, villages, land” and send them “wander[ing] into the hospitals, with at least twenty casualties from American firepower for one ‘Vietcong’-inflicted injury. So far we have killed a million of them—mostly children.” Further:

They languish under our bombs and consider us—not their fellow Vietnamese—the real enemy. They move sadly and apathetically as we herd them off the land of their fathers and into concentration camps where minimal social needs are rarely met. They know

they must move or be destroyed by our bombs. ... They watch as we poison their water, as we kill a million acres of their land. They must weep as the bulldozers roar through their areas preparing to destroy the precious trees. ... They wander into the towns and see thousands of children, homeless, without clothes, running in packs on the streets like animals. They see the children degraded by our soldiers as they beg for food. They see the children selling their sisters to our soldiers, soliciting for their mothers.

Observing that the U.S. had become the world's "leading purveyor of violence," King asked Americans to develop the maturity to "learn and grow and profit from the wisdom of the [Vietnamese] brothers who are called the opposition."

All good Americans were naturally horrified by the 9/11/2001 jetliner attacks—the first serious foreign attack on the U.S. since the War of 1812. Where was their humanitarian revulsion as U.S.-led economic sanctions killed 500,000 innocent Iraqi children (what Bill Clinton's secretary of state, Madeleine Albright, went on [CBS](#) to call "a price worth paying") during the first half of the 1990s? "Mainstream" U.S. media had little to say about this terrible toll.

How many good Americans who understandably wept as they watched the World Trade Center towers collapse had ever heard about the grisly slaughter the U.S. armed forces arch-criminally inflicted on surrendered Iraqi troops retreating from Kuwait in February 1991? Journalist Joyce Chediak [testified](#) that:

U.S. planes trapped the long convoys by disabling vehicles in the front, and at the rear, and then pounded the resulting traffic jams for hours. ... On the sixty miles of coastal highway, Iraqi military units sit in gruesome repose, scorched skeletons of vehicles and men alike, black and awful under the sun ... for 60 miles every vehicle was strafed or bombed, every windshield is shattered, every tank is burned, every truck is riddled with shell fragments. No survivors are known or likely. ... U.S. forces continued to drop bombs on the convoys until all humans were killed. So many jets swarmed over the inland road that it created an aerial traffic jam, and combat air controllers feared midair collisions. ... [I]t was simply a one-sided massacre. ...

Luftwaffe chief Hermann Göring would have been impressed.

Imagine the imprint this senseless war crime must have left behind on Iraqis.

Thanks to its poor fit with American exceptionalist doctrine—according to which Uncle Sam always tries to do the morally right thing, even if it sometimes goes too far in overzealous pursuits of its consistently good intentions—this gruesome imperial crime was only a minor story in U.S. "mainstream" media. The same was true three years earlier when the American battleship USS Vincennes shot down Iran [Air Flight 655, killing 290 civilians](#) on a clearly marked commercial jet in Iranian air space over the Persian Gulf. (Two years later, the Vincennes' commander and his chief air-war artillery officer were given medals for "exceptionally meritorious conduct" during this heroic slaughter of harmless innocents.)

Imagine the U.S. response if, say, a Chinese navy ship had shot down an American Airlines flight in U.S. airspace over San Francisco Bay.

The U.S. shutdown of Flight 655 is well remembered in Iran. Not so in the United States of Imperial Amnesia, where official doctrine holds that, in Albright's words, "The United States is good. We try to do our best everywhere."

" 'Tis too much proved," William Shakespeare wrote in "Hamlet," "that with devotion's visage and pious action we do sugar o'er the devil himself."

The tenacious hold of pious U.S.-exceptionalist dogma leads to soul-numbing two-facedness. In May 2009, a U.S. airstrike killed more than 10 dozen civilians in [Bola Boluk](#), a village in western Afghanistan's Farah province. Ninety-three of the dead villagers torn apart by U.S. explosives were children. Just 22 were males 18 years or older. As The New York Times somewhat surprisingly reported: "In a phone call played on a loudspeaker on Wednesday to ... the Afghan Parliament, the governor of Farah Province, Rohul Amin, said that as many as 130 civilians had been killed, according to a legislator, Mohammad Naim Farahi. ... The governor said that the villagers have brought two tractor trailers full of pieces of human bodies to his office to prove the casualties that had occurred. ... Everyone was crying ... watching that shocking scene. Mr. Farahi said he had talked to someone he knew personally who had counted 113 bodies being buried, including ... many women and children."

The initial response of the Obama Pentagon to this horrific incident—one among many mass U.S. aerial civilian killings in Afghanistan and Pakistan beginning in the fall of 2001—was to blame the deaths on "Taliban grenades." Obama's secretary of state, Hillary Clinton, expressed "regret," but the administration refused to issue an apology or to acknowledge U.S. responsibility.

By telling contrast, Barack Obama had just offered a full apology and fired a White House official for scaring New Yorkers with an ill-advised Air Force One photo-shoot flyover of Manhattan that reminded people there of 9/11.

The disparity was remarkable: Frightening New Yorkers led to a full presidential apology and the discharge of a White House staffer. Killing more than 100 Afghan civilians required no apology. No one had to be fired. And the Pentagon was permitted to advance preposterous claims about how the civilians perished—stories U.S. corporate media took seriously.

"Why, oh why, do they hate us?" So runs the plaintive American cry, as if Washington hasn't directly and indirectly (through blood-soaked proxies like the [Indonesia dictator Suharto](#) and the death-squad regimes of Central America during the 1970s and 1980s) killed untold millions and overthrown dozens of governments the world over since 1945. As if the U.S. doesn't account for nearly [40 percent](#) of the world's military spending to maintain at least [800 military bases](#) spread across more than 80 "sovereign" nations.

Maybe it has to do with a U.S. media that wrings its hands for months over the deaths of four U.S. soldiers trapped on an imperial mission in Niger but can't muster so much as a tear for the thousands of innocents regularly killed (victims of what Chomsky has called "the most extreme terrorist campaign of modern times") by U.S. drone attacks across the Middle East, Southwest Asia and North Africa. Imagine what it is like to live in constant dread of annihilation launched from invisible and unmanned aerial killing machines. The tens of thousands of Yemenis killed and maimed by U.S.-backed and U.S.-equipped Saudi Arabian air raids get no sympathy from most American media. Nor do the more than 1 million Iraqis who died prematurely thanks to Washington's arch-criminal 2003 invasion of Iraq, which was sold on thoroughly and openly false pretexts and provided essential context for the rise of the Islamic State.

Maybe it's also about the "good friends" that "we" (our "foreign policy" imperial masters) keep around the world in the names of "freedom" and "democracy."

These partners in global virtue include:

- Thirty-six nations receiving [U.S. military assistance](#) despite being identified as “dictatorships” in 2016 by the right-wing U.S. organization Freedom House.
- The Saudi regime, the leading source and funder of extremist Sunni jihadism and the most reactionary government on earth, currently using U.S. military hardware and ordnance to bomb Yemen into an epic humanitarian crisis.
- The openly racist occupation and apartheid state of Israel, which has sickened the morally sentient world this spring by systemically sniper-killing dozens of young, [unarmed Palestinians](#) who have had the audacity to protest their sadistic U.S.-backed siege in the miserable open-air prison that is Gaza.
- Honduras, home to a violently repressive right-wing government installed through a U.S.-backed [military coup](#) in June 2009.
- The Philippines, headed by a thuggish brute who boasts of killing thousands of drug users and dealers with death squads.
- [Rwanda](#), a semi-totalitarian state enlisted in the U.S.-backed multinational rape of the Congo, where 5 million people have been killed by imperially sponsored starvation, disease and civil war since 2008.
- Ukraine, where a right-wing government that includes and relies on paramilitary neo-Nazis was installed in a [U.S.-assisted coup](#) four years ago.

You don't have to be a leftist to have the elementary moral decency to do the Chomsky exercise of imagining yourself in other nations' shoes—on the wrong side of the Pax Americana and its dutiful, consent-manufacturing “mainstream” media. Four years ago, the University of Chicago's “realist” U.S. foreign policy expert John Mearsheimer had the all-too-uncommon decency (at least among U.S. “foreign affairs” specialists) to reflect on the Ukraine crisis and the New Cold War as seen from Russian eyes.

“The taproot of the crisis,” Mearsheimer [wrote](#) in the nation's top establishment journal, *Foreign Affairs*, “is [U.S.-led] NATO expansion and Washington's commitment to move Ukraine out of Moscow's orbit and integrated into the West,” something Vladimir Putin quite naturally saw as “a direct threat to Russia's core interests.” And “who can blame him?” Mearsheimer asked, adding that grasping the reasons for Putin's hostility ought to have been easy since the “United States does not tolerate distant great powers deploying military forces anywhere in the Western hemisphere, much less on its borders.”

“We need not ask,” Chomsky reflects, “how the United States would have reacted had the countries of Latin America joined the Warsaw Pact, with plans for Mexico and Canada to join as well. The merest hints of the first tentative steps in that direction would have been ‘terminated with extreme prejudice,’ to adopt CIA lingo.”

You never heard about Mearsheimer's take, much less Chomsky's, even (or especially) in liberal media outposts like MSNBC and CNN, where progressives learn to love the CIA and the FBI.

The dominant U.S. media now is warning us about the great and resurgent danger of Iran developing a single nuclear weapon. U.S. talking heads and pundits also are leading the charge for the “complete denuclearization of the Korean peninsula [of North Korea].”

It is unthinkable that anyone in the reigning American exceptionalist U.S. media-politics-and-culture complex would raise the question of the denuclearization of the United States. It's no small matter. The world's only superpower, the only nation to ever attack civilians with nuclear weapons, is embarking on a super-expensive top-to-bottom overhaul of a U.S. nuclear arsenal that already houses 5,500 weapons with enough menacing power between them to blow the world up five times over. This [\\$1.7 trillion](#) rebuild includes the creation of provocative new first-strike weapons systems likely to escalate the risks of nuclear exchanges with Russia and/or China. Everyday Americans could have opportunities to more than just imagine what the innocents of Nagasaki experienced in August 1945.

But don't blame Donald Trump. Our current reality was initiated under Obama, leader of a party that is positioning itself as the real and anti-Russian and CIA-backed party of empire in the 2018 and 2020 U.S. elections.

This extraordinarily costly retooling heightens prospects for human self-extermination in a world in dire need of public investment to end poverty (half the world's population "lives" on less than [\\$2.50 a day](#)), to replace fossil fuels with clean energy (we are marching to the fatal mark of 500 carbon parts per atmospheric million by 2050—if not sooner), and to clean up the titanic environmental mess we've made of our planet.

The perverted national priorities reflected in such appalling, Darth Vader-esque "public investment"—a giant windfall for the high-tech U.S. weapons-industrial complex—are symptoms of the moral collapse that Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. warned the United States about in the famous anti-war speech he gave one year to the day before his assassination (or execution). "A nation that continues year after year to spend more money on military defense than on programs of social uplift," King said, "is approaching spiritual death."

That spiritual death is well underway. Material and physical death for the species is not far off on America's eco- and nuclear-exterminating path, led in no small part by a dominant U.S. media that obsesses over everything Trump and Russia while the underlying bipartisan institutions of imperial U.S. oligarchy lead humanity over the cliff. Americans might want to learn how to take Chomsky's challenge—imagine ourselves in others' situation—before it's too late to imagine anything at all.

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