

"The human being says that the beast in him has been aroused, when what he actually means is that the human being in him has been aroused."

- James Thurber, *Lanterns and Lances* (1961)

From the early days of the American Republic, US governments have shown themselves to be very adept at creating their own virtual reality about having always respected 'human rights'. American scholar Noam Chomsky in *Understanding Power*, published in 2002, made the point that "the treatment of the Palestinians by Israel has been bad, but in comparison to the treatment of the native population here by our forefathers, it's been a paradise," adding that "throughout American history this genocide has been accepted as perfectly legitimate." [Chomsky noted that in his history of Columbus, leading Harvard historian Samuel Eliot Morison, after referring to him as a great man, "then had this little line saying, of course Columbus did set off a program of 'complete genocide' which, in Morison's view, "was only a minor flaw as he was really a terrific seaman."] Chomsky went on to recall a personal story "to indicate just how far out of history" all of this really was. While taking a walk with some friends and family in a National Park, they had come across a tombstone which had just been put in along the path. It said: 'Here lies an Indian woman, a Wampanoag, whose family and tribe gave of themselves and their land that this great nation might be born and grow.'

Chomsky's comment: "Okay, 'gave of themselves and their land' – in fact, were murdered, scattered, dispersed, and we stole their land, that's what we are sitting on. There can't be anything more illegitimate: the whole history of this country is illegitimate."

I remembered, if only vaguely, Chomsky's observations [and looked it up once more for confirmation] on reading a piece on October 8 on the ConsortiumNews website titled *Surprise – The Very Dark Side of US History* written jointly by retired Professor Peter Dale Scott and investigative journalist Robert Parry, with Parry, as editor-founder of the website providing this intro:

Many Americans view their country and its soldiers as the 'good guys' spreading 'democracy' and 'liberty' around the world. When the United States inflicts unnecessary death and destruction, it's viewed as a mistake or an aberration. In the following article Peter Dale Scott and Robert Parry examine the long history of these acts of brutality, a record that suggests they are neither a 'mistake' nor an 'aberration' but rather conscious counterinsurgency doctrine on the 'dark side'. [emphasis added]

[So General David Petraeus's much-ballyhooed 'out-of-the-box-thinking' which he presented as his all-new 'counterinsurgency strategy' – the one that finally gave George W. Bush the comforting virtual reality of victory in Iraq – was actually very, very old hat, after all.]

America's global depredations in the guise of fighting communism after World War II and, now, its War-on-Terror against fundamentalist Islamists is of course contemporary history and is accepted by all except those who believe that the US is God's gift to mankind.

Scott and Parry note quite early in their piece that "the historical record shows that terror tactics have long been a dark side of US military doctrine" and explain that the American people were largely oblivious to this hidden tradition because most of the literature advocating state-sponsored terror was carefully confined to national security circles and rarely spilled out into the public debate, which was instead dominated by feel-good messages about well-intentioned US interventions abroad.

"Some historians trace the formal acceptance of those brutal tenets to the 1860s when the US Army was facing challenge from a rebellious South and resistance from Native Americans in the West. Out of those crises emerged the modern military concept of 'total war' – which considers attacks on civilians and their economic infrastructure an integral part of a victorious strategy."

By the end of the 19th Century, the Native American warriors had been vanquished, but the US Army's winning strategies lived on.

When America claimed the Philippines as a prize in the Spanish-American War, Filipino insurgents resisted. In 1900, the US commander, Gen. J. Franklin Bell, consciously modeled his brutal counterinsurgency campaign after the Indian wars. Bell believed that by punishing the wealthier Filipinos through destruction of their homes they would be coerced into helping convince their countrymen to submit.

Historian Stuart Creighton Miller chose to call his book on the brutal American conquest of The Philippines *Benevolent Assimilation* to remind readers of the utter hypocrisy that accompanied US imperialist ventures. The words come directly from US President William McKinley's proclamation of December 21, 1898 which concluded thus:

"Finally, it should be the earnest and paramount aim of the military administration to win the confidence, respect, and affection of the inhabitants of the Philippines by assuring them in every possible way that full measure of individual rights and liberties which is the heritage of a free people, and by proving to them that the mission of the United States is one of benevolent assimilation, substituting the mild sway of justice and right for arbitrary rule."

"The entire population outside of the major cities in Batangas was herded into concentration camps, wrote Miller. "Bell's main target was the wealthier and better-educated classes. . . Adding insult to injury, Bell made these people carry the petrol used to burn their own country homes."

Historian Miller's conclusion: "American innocence has been historically nurtured and protected by a conveniently selective collective memory. Amnesia over the horrors of the war of conquest in the Philippines set in early, during the summer of 1902." [President Roosevelt best reflected imperialist amnesia when he declared on July 4, 1902, that not only was the war over, but that it had been the most glorious war in the nation's history, although a month earlier, in his Memorial Day address he had acknowledged with regret 'a few acts of cruelty . . . committed in retaliation' for 'the hundreds committed by Filipinos against American soldiers.']

In the 1950s, say Scott and Parry, the Huk rebellion against US dominance made the

Philippines again the laboratory, with Bell's earlier lessons clearly remembered; psy-war [for psychological war] was a new spin to the old game of breaking the will of a target population.

Psy-war also relies on terror tactics of a demonstrative nature. A US Army pamphlet advocated "exemplary criminal violence – the murder and mutilation of captives and the display of their bodies." [Michael McClintock's Instruments of Statecraft.] The US formalized its hard-learned counterinsurgency lessons into a top-secret program called Project X, and by the mid-1970s Project X material was being exported to the armies of friendly countries the world over.

What's clear, say the authors, is that the US, for generations, has sustained two parallel but opposed states of mind about military atrocities and human rights: one of US benevolence, the other of 'ends-justify-means' brutality embraced by counterinsurgency specialists who conduct their actions in remote locations with little notice in the national press.

Sometimes the two competing visions – of a 'just' America and a 'ruthless' one – clash in the open, as they did in Vietnam. Or the dark side of US security policy gets spotlighted by unauthorized leaks of photos of detainee-abuse or by revelations of water boarding and other torture authorized by the Bush White House.

Only then does the public get a glimpse of the grim reality, the bloody and brutal tactics that have been deemed 'necessary' for more than two centuries in the defense of purported US 'national interests'.

~ www.island.lk ~ by Selvam Canagaratna