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Western Aggression: The Highest Form of Terrorism

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Aggression is arguably the highest form of terrorism as it invariably includes the frightening of the target populations and their leaders as well as killing and destruction on a large scale.. The U.S. invaders of Iraq in 2003 proudly announced a "shock and awe" purpose in their opening assault, clearly designed to instill fear; that is, to terrorize the victim population along with the target security forces. And millions of Iraqis suffered in this massive enterprise. Benjamin Netanyahu himself defined terrorism as "the deliberate and systematic murder, maiming and menacing of the innocent to inspire fear for political ends." This would seem to make both the Iraq war (2003 onward) and the serial Israeli wars on Gaza (2008-2009; 2012; 2014) cases of serious terrorism.

How do the responsible U.S. and Israeli leaders escape this designation? One trick is the disclaiming of any "deliberateness" in the killing of civilians. It is "collateral damage" in the pursuit of proper targets (Iraqi soldiers, Hamas, etc.). .This is a factual lie, as there is overwhelming evidence that in both the Iraq and Gaza wars the killing of civilians was on a large scale and often not comprehensible in terms of genuine military objectives. (I give many illustrations in "'They kill reporters, don't they?" Yes–as Part of a System of Information Control That Will Allow the Mass Killing of Civilians," *Z Magazine*, December 2004. That this goes back a long way is well documented in Nick Turse's *Kill Anything That Moves: The Real American War in Vietnam* [Metropolitan, 2014]).

But even if the killings were only collateral damage, the regular failure to avoid killing civilians, including a built-in carelessness and/or reliance on undependable sources of information, is both a war crime and terrorism. Recall that the Geneva Conventions state that combatants « shall at all times distinguish between the civilian population and combatants and between civilian objects and military objectives and, accordingly, shall direct their operations only against military objectives » (Part IV, Chap. 1, Article 48). Also, if civilian casualties are extremely likely in bombing attacks against purported military targets, even if the specific civilians killed were not intended victims, their deaths—some deaths—were predictable, hence in an important sense deliberate. Michael Mandel, while dismantling the claim of non-deliberateness in the usual collateral damage killing of civilians, points out that even in Texas a man who shoots someone dead while aiming at somebody else is guilty of murder (*How America Gets Away With Murder* [Pluto, 2004, 46-56]).

A second line of defense of U.S. and Israeli killing of civilians, only occasionally made explicit, is that the civilians killed are helping out the enemy armed forces–they are the sea in which the terrorist fish swim—so this makes them legitimate targets. This opens up vast possibilities for ruthless attacks and the mass killing of civilians, notorious in the Vietnam

war, but also applicable in Iraq, Afghanistan and Gaza. Civilian killings are sometimes admitted to be an objective by official sources, but not often, and the subject is not focused on by the mainstream media. This rationale may placate the home population but it does not satisfy international law or widely held moral rules.,

The same is true of the retaliation defense. The United States and Israel are always allegedly retaliating for prior aggressive acts of their targets. Deadly actions by the target military or their supporters, even if they clearly follow some deadly action by the United States or Israel, are never deemed retaliatory and thus justifiable. It has long been a claimed feature of the Israeli ethnic cleansing project that Israel only retaliates, the Palestinians provoke and virtually compel an Israeli response. In fact, the Israelis have long taken advantage of this bias in Western reporting at strategic moments by attacking just enough to induce a Palestinian response, that justifies a larger scale "retaliatory" action by Israel.

Of course all of these tricks work only because an array of Western institutions, including but not confined to the media, follow the demands of Western (and mainly U.S.) interests. For example, although the Nuremberg judgment against the Nazis features aggression as "the supreme international crime differing only from other war crimes in that it contains within itself the accumulated evil of the whole," because the United States is virtually in the full-time business of committing aggression (attacking across borders without Security Council approval), the UN and "international community" (i.e., Western and even many non-Western leaders, not publics) do nothing when the United States engages in aggression. The brazen 2003 invasion of Iraq called forth no UN condemnation or sanctions against the U.S.aggression, and the UN quickly began to cooperate with the invader-occupiers. The word aggression is rarely applied to that massive and hugely destructive attack either in the media or learned discourse, but it is applied with regularity to the Russian occupation of Crimea which entailed no casualties and could be regarded as a defensive response to the U.S.-sponsored February 2014 *coup d'etat* in Ukraine. The U.S. invasion of Iraq was surely not defensive, and was rationalized at the time on the basis of what were eventually acknowleged to be plain lies. (For an exception to the establishment's villainization of Russia in the Ukraine conflict, see John Mearsheimer, "The Ukraine Crisis is the West's Fault," *Foreign Affairs*, Sept.-Oct. 2014)

Perhaps the most murderous aggression and ultra-terrorism of the last 40 years, involving millions of civilian deaths, has been the Rwanda-Uganda invasion of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), beginning in 1996 and still ongoing. But the invasion's leaders, Paul Kagame and Yoweri Museveni, were (and still are) U.S. clients, hence they have been subject to no international tribunal nor threat from the Security Council or International Criminal Court, and there has been no media featuring of the vast crimes carried out in this area. You have to be a U.S. target to get that kind of attention, as with Iran, Syria and Russia.

These rules also apply to the major human rights groups. Both Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International have a rule that they will not focus on the origins of a conflict but will attend only to how the conflict is carried out. This is wonderfully convenient to a country that commits aggression on a regular basis, but it flies in the face of logic or the UN Charter's foundational idea that aggression is the supreme international crime that the world must prevent and punish Thus, neither HRW nor AI condemned the United States for invading Iraq or bombing Serbia, but confined their attention to the war crimes of both the aggressor and target, but mainly the target. HRW is especially notorious for its huge bias in

featuring the war crimes of U.S. targets, underplaying the criminality of the aggressor, and calling for international action against the victim (see Herman, Peterson and Szamuely, "Human Rights Watch in the Service of the War Party," *Electric Politics*, February 26, 2007.). During the period leading up to the U.S.-UK attack on Iraq, HRW head Kenneth Roth had an op-ed in the *Wall Street Journal* entitled "Indict Saddam" (March 22, 2002). Thus beyond failing to oppose the imminent war of aggression, this human rights group leader was providing a public relations cover for the "supreme international crime." His organization also failed to report on and condemn the "sanctions of mass destruction" against Iraq that had devastating health effects on Iraqi civilians, accounting for hundreds of thousands of deaths. For HRW these were "unworthy victims."

In the case of the Rwandan Patriotic Front's invasion and massacres of 1990-1994, HRW and its associates (notably Alison Des Forges) played an important role in focusing on and condemning the defensive responses of the Rwanda government to the military and subversive advances of the U.S.-supported invading army of Tutsi from Uganda, thereby making a positive contribution to the mass killings in Rwanda and later in the DRC. (See Herman and Peterson, *Enduring Lies: The Rwandan Genocide in the Propaganda System, 20 Years Later* [Real News Books, 2014], 66-70.)

Similarly the ad hoc international tribunals established in the last several decades have always been designed to exclude aggression and to focus on war crimes and "genocide." And they are directed at U.S. targets (Serbia, the Hutu of Rwanda) whol are actually the victims of aggression, who are then subjected to a quasi-judicial process that is fraudulent and a perversion of justice. (On the Yugoslavia tribunal, see John Laughland, *Travesty* [Pluto, 2007; on Rwanda, Sebastien Chartrand and John Philpot, *Justice Belied: The Unbalanced Scale of International Criminal Justice*.[Baraka Books, 2014]). The International Criminal Court (ICC) was also organized with "aggression" excluded from its remit, in deference to the demands of the Great Aggressor, who still refused to join because there remained the theoretical possibility that a U.S. citizen might be brought before the court! The ICC still made itself useful to the Great Aggressor by indicting Gadaffi in preparation for the U.S.-NATO war of aggression against Libya.

In short, terrorism thrives. That is, state terrorism, as in the serial U.S. wars—direct, joint and proxy– against Yugoslavia, Afghanistan, Iraq, Somalia, Libya and Syria—and the still more wide-ranging drone assassination attacks. In the devastating wars in the DRC by Kagame and Museveni. And in Israel's wars on Gaza and Lebanon and ordinary pacification efforts in Gaza and the West Bank. And in Saudi Arabia's war on Yemen and Turkey's proxy war in Syria and war against the Kurds.

All of these wars have evoked mainly retail terrorist responses to the invading, bombing, and occupying forces of the United States and its allies, responses that have been shocking and deadly, but on a much smaller scale than the state terrorism that has evoked them. But in the Western propaganda systems it is only the responsive terrorism that surprises and angers politicians, pundits and the public and is called "terrorism." There is no recognition of the true flow of initiating violence and response, no recognition of the fact that the "global war on terrorism" is really a "global war OF terrorism." The propaganda system is in fact a constituent of the permanent war system, hence a reliable supporter of wholesale terrorism.

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