



## Horrible Histories: the Great Powers

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### The Great Powers

#### No. 1 - The United States of America

##### 1780-1880

**Action:** Genocide against native Americans, land seized, inhabitants driven out and/or exterminated. Half of Mexican territory - present day California, Nevada, Utah, Arizona, Texas, New Mexico and parts of Colorado, Wyoming and Kansas - plundered and conquered.

**Excuse:** 'Expanding Anglo Saxon democracy'.

**Outcome:** Millions murdered or displaced. Culture, way of life, identity destroyed. Massive US political and economic expansion. Growing preoccupation, at home, with interests abroad.

##### 1898

**Action:** Declared war on Spain.

**Excuse:** Supporting independence struggles in Cuba and the Philippines.

**Outcome:** Philippines subjugated by US force and, with Puerto Rico and Guam, turned into a US colony. 600,000 Philipinos murdered. Queen of Hawaii overthrown and islands transformed into US navy base. Cuba granted 'independence' in return for a guarantee of US military presence and a US right of intervention.

##### 1898-1934

**Action:** Invaded or attacked Guatemala (twice), Panama (six times), Cuba (four times), Nicaragua (five times), Honduras (eight times), Dominican Republic (four times), Haiti (twice), Mexico (three times), Columbia (four times).

**Excuses:** Take your pick.

**Outcome:** Familiar pattern of massacres and expulsions, including fifty thousand Haitians machine gunned to death by US pilots. US marines remained as occupying forces or replaced by friendly dictators, dependent upon US power and armed to suppress their own people. Mass influx of US business interests supported by military intervention when internal 'instability' threatened.

God ... has made us adept in government that we may administer government among savage and senile peoples

Senator Albert Beveridge, 1900

## 1917

**Action:** Declared war on Germany.

**Excuse:** 'Making the world safe for democracy'. Russia did it to free Serbia, France to free the 'oppressed' people of Alsace-Lorraine, Germany to protect Poland and Britain for 'plucky little Belgium'.

**Outcome:** Continent divided into spheres of influence with Germany excluded. US succeeded in 'maintaining our present pre eminent trade status' (Ambassador W H Page, 1917).

## 1940

**Action:** In October, US State Department and the Council on Foreign Relations convened a group of prominent officials, executives and bankers to discuss US strategy. Concluded that America must prepare for war as a means by which to create 'an integrated policy to achieve military and economic supremacy for the United States'.

## 1941

**Action:** Declared war on Germany and Japan.

**Excuse:** Defending the 'four freedoms'.

**Outcome:** Imperialist powers carved up the world into spheres of influence. US replaced Britain as leader of the Western alliance. Demonstrated its pre eminent status and the meaning of the new order by dropping nuclear bombs on a demoralised and defeated Japan, murdering 200,000.

## 1950-1953

**Action:** Military intervention in Korea.

**Excuse:** Restoring order.

**Outcome:** Two and a half million died, millions more displaced, country reduced to rubble, remains divided.

## 1954

**Action:** Invaded Guatemala (again).

**Excuse:** No one remembers.

**Outcome:** Democratically elected government overthrown, followed by succession of friendly dictatorships.

## 1965

**Action:** Invaded Dominican Republic (again), to suppress popular uprising organised in support of Juan Bosch, former elected President.

**Excuse:** 'Self defence', ie protecting the lives of Americans stationed there.

**Outcome:** Rising suppressed, 3,000 Dominicans murdered in the streets, new dictatorship installed.

## 1964-1973

**Action:** Attacked Vietnam in support of South Vietnamese Government.

Intervention extended to neighbouring neutral countries, Laos and Cambodia.

**Excuse:** Protecting democracy from Communist 'terrorism'. Also, looking after

minority Catholic community.

**Outcome:** Greatest bombardment in history, more fire power than all protagonists in all other wars combined. Two million dead, mostly civilians. Policy failed. Almost total opposition of the Vietnamese people undermined unity back home.

### 1982-1983

**Action:** Military intervention in Lebanon, in support of Israeli backed Falange militia, which had just massacred 800 Palestinian civilians.

**Outcome:** Israeli presence in South Lebanon made permanent, widespread repression. 241 US marines murdered by truck bomb.

### 1983

**Action:** Invaded Grenada, a British dependency.

**Excuse:** Grenada threatening 'US security'.

**Outcome:** Death, destruction and a new US friendly government imposed.

One hundred nations in the UN have not agreed with us on just about everything that's come before them, where we're involved, and it didn't upset my breakfast at all.

Ronald Reagan

### 1986

**Action:** Bombed Tripoli, Libya, in an attempt to assassinate Colonel Gaddafi.

**Excuse:** Libya 'responsible' for a bomb attack on US soldiers.

**Outcome:** Murdered 100 civilians, including Gaddafi's baby daughter. While America decided that the new demon, Iran, was in fact responsible for the bomb attack, Libya contained by sanctions regime and threat of further punishment.

### 1987

**Action:** Intervened in Gulf War, between Iran and Iraq, on side of Iraq, whilst, in secret, supplying both sides.

**Excuse:** Protecting the oil reserves of Kuwait, then Iraq's ally.

**Outcome:** Destroyed an oil platform, boats and an Iranian passenger airliner.

### 1989

**Action:** Invaded Panama (again).

**Excuse:** Arrest a drug dealer, ie its former puppet, General Noriega.

**Outcome:** Thousands killed, all but seventy six of them civilians. Numbers unknown, dead buried in mass graves. US controlled President installed, US military bases secured. Show trial of former Head of State, while drug trafficking and money laundering increased.

### 1991

**Action:** Massive attack on Iraq, the latest 'threat' in the region.

**Excuse:** 'Liberating' Kuwait.

**Outcome:** Most intensive bombing campaign in history, featuring illegal chemical and

radioactive weapons and previously untried weapons of mass destruction. Reduced Iraq to a condition of sub Third World status. Wholesale extermination of fleeing conscript army and civilians. Numbers unknown, up to half a million, tens of thousands buried in mass unmarked graves. Millions of refugees. Iraq's industrial base destroyed, water system polluted, environment poisoned. Widespread epidemics and starvation. Condition described by UN official as 'apocalyptic'.

We are a select people, with a righteous mission in this earth

Leader, Boston Globe, 1991

## 1991-?

**Action:** Post-war containment of Iraq by combination of air attacks, weapons inspections, incursions by Turkish troops, no fly zones and sanctions.

**Excuse:** Punishing 'Saddam', caging 'Saddam', disarming 'Saddam', protecting his neighbours, looking after Kurds, Marsh Arabs, 'his own people', protecting the 'international community'.

**Outcome:** Up to five thousand people dying every week of hunger, disease and cancers. As Iraq maintained in a condition of weakness, its neighbours enjoy the benefits of increased militarisation through expanded US and allied presence. Opposition to US policy, within Arab states, contained by fresh agreements with friendly dictators. Arms sales flourishing - five times what they were in 1989 - following the battle testing of America's hardware. 'Containment' successful. Suffering of Iraq fails to constitute a crisis.

## 1994

**Action:** 'Intervened in civil war, Bosnia-Herzegovina, province of Yugoslavia.

**Excuse:** Policing a 'peace settlement', looking after Muslim majority.

**Outcome:** American sponsored partition of the territory, installing foreigners in key positions, supported by US and allied presence. Transitional 'UN' administration, with the power to dismiss regional governments, now extended indefinitely.

## 1998

**Action:** Attacked Afghanistan and Sudan.

**Excuse:** Defending democracy from 'terrorism'.

**Outcome:** Civilians and soldiers murdered and maimed but point of principle proved. In impoverished Sudan, widespread shortages of medicines.

## 1999

**Action:** Attacked Yugoslavia, when President Milosevic, who had accepted a US sponsored ultimatum, refused to allow NATO forces to occupy Kosovo.

**Excuse:** Preventing an escalation of the crisis in Kosovo.

**Outcome:** So far, familiar pattern of escalation and expanding war aims, justified by other people's barbarism. Next??? Radioactive poisoning? Environmental disaster? Millions more refugees? Long term containment of Yugoslavia? Kosovo an 'independent' US base? Increasing militarisation of Eastern Europe? Expansion of NATO membership and interests?

## **APOLOGIES:**

There are, of course, scores of conflicts which the US or an ally finances or controls through 'counter insurgency', ie arming and training death squads or through the proxy armies or states which are used to replace governments it doesn't like, maintain people in poverty or incite the wars which justify intervention. Apart from these, however, the United States, SINCE 1945, has intervened directly and violently in the affairs of foreign countries more than TWO HUNDRED times. Apologies are offered, here, to the loved ones of those people whose fate was simply too small or too common to be included in this history. Great crimes they may have been if they'd been committed by a Saddam or a Milosevic, but here, like so much of the world's invisible history, they have, sadly, to be made to disappear. This is, regrettably, a matter only of lack of space.

## **SPECIAL ACKNOWLEDGEMENT:**

Joel Andreas, *Addicted to War: Why the US Can't Kick Militarism*, (1993), New Society Publishers, Philadelphia, ISBN USA 0-86571-243-3 (softback), ISBN USA 0-86571-2425 (hardback).

The struggle of people against power is the struggle of memory against forgetting.  
Milan Kundera

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