



Horrible Histories: the Great Powers

Kim Bryan

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

May 1999

The Great Powers

No 2 - The British Labour Party ... in it's own words

"so far as the underlying spirit of Imperialism is a frank acceptance of national duty exercised beyond the nation's frontier ... it cannot be condemned ... the compulsion to expand and to assume world responsibility is worthy at its origin."

James Ramsay MacDonald, Leader, Independent Labour Party, 1901

"what is the use of an Empire if it does not breed and maintain in the truest and fullest sense of the word an Imperial race?"

Sidney Webb, Founder, New Statesman Magazine, Fabian Society, 1901

"With the boom of enemy guns within earshot, the lads who have gone forth to fight their country's battles must not be disheartened by any discordant notes at home."

James Keir Hardie, First Chairman of the Parliamentary Labour Party, 1914

"We do not approve armed rebellion at all ... Nor do we complain against the Government for having opposed and suppressed armed rebellion by armed force."

Socialist Review, Labour Party magazine, editorial on the Easter Rising, 1916

"it is impracticable to leave ... non adult races ... to settle their own destinies."

Labour 'Memorandum on War Aims', 1917

"Nobody contends that the black races can govern themselves. They can only make it known that the particular government under which they have been living is bad in some or all respects, and indicate the specific evils from which they desire liberation."

Sidney Webb, 1918

"By no moral right may the ownership and control of the natural and material resources of a territory be regarded as the absolute monopoly of the people who happen to be settled there."

Philip Snowden, later Labour Chancellor, 1921

"Every far sighted view of our imperial interests, and of the hope of removing them altogether from party controversy, goes to show how important it is that a Labour Government, and no other, should have the handling of the great external problems which are crowding upon us."

Leader, The Times, 1930

"Let the Arabs be encouraged to move out as the Jews move in. Let them be compensated handsomely for their land and let their settlement elsewhere be carefully organised and generously financed ..."

Labour Party conference resolution, 1944

"British socialists are not so concerned with ideals like independence and self government, but with the idea of social justice. When British socialists look at the eastern Europe of today they ask themselves whether independence is itself a worthwhile aim."

Rita Hinden, Secretary, Fabian Colonial Bureau, 1946

"By hook or by crook the development of primary production of all sorts in the colonial territories and dependent areas in the Commonwealth and throughout the world is a life and death matter for the economy of this country."

John Strachey, Labour Minister for Food, 1947

"No doubt we could have held India for two or three years longer. But we could have done so only at the cost of a great expenditure of men and money."

Clement Attlee, Labour Prime Minister, 1947

"Tribal, dynastic and religious antagonisms take more fanatical forms in the Oriental than in the Western world ... the liberal era has never dawned on these countries."

Michael Foot, on the Arabs, 1947

"For years you have been in debt to us, and you have paid up: our political control of you ensured that. Now the wheel of fortune has turned full circle: we are indebted to you. It is true that you are poor and we are rich, and that you need our funds for your economic development. But I am afraid we are not going to pay up."

Hugh Dalton, Labour Chancellor, on the post war relationship with India, 1948

"I had a horrid vision of pullulating, poverty-stricken, diseased nigger communities, for whom one can do nothing in the short run, and who the more one tries to help them, are querulous and ungrateful."

Hugh Dalton, after turning down the job of Colonial Secretary, 1950

"The government claims that the dependent territories were exploited in the past but are not being exploited now ... in fact, the Socialist Government seems to be the first government which has discovered how to exploit the colonies."

Oliver Lyttleton, just before becoming Conservative Colonial Secretary, 1951

"from the beginning we have given the Government our fullest support in any steps that are required to suppress Mau Mau."

James Griffiths, former Labour Colonial Secretary, 1953

"our policy ... operated with considerable success, having provided information leading to the discovery of numerous arms caches and to the arrest of a large number of terrorists."

George Brown, Labour Foreign Secretary, on allegations of torture by Britain, North Yemen, 1964

"I wholly understand the deep concern you must feel at the need to do anything possible to reduce the losses of young Americans in and over Viet Nam ... our reservations about this operation will not affect our continuing support for your policy over Viet Nam."

Harold Wilson, Labour Prime Minister, 1965

"When I compare the horrors of the Viet Nam war with the election manifesto of the Labour Government, I find myself confronted with the most shameful betrayal ... Hitler, at least, seldom professed humanity, but these men who now pollute the chairs of office professed, before election the most noble and lofty ideals of human brotherhood ... I can no longer remain a member of this so called 'Labour' Party, and I am resigning after 51 years."

Bertrand Russell, Philosopher, 1965

"The British Government has repeatedly said that majority rule could not come about immediately but should be reached through merit and achievement."

Wilson, reassuring Ian Smith that white Rhodesian 'settlers' would not be suppressed like the natives, 1966

"In particular, I must remind you that the only four occasions on which my Government ... has exercised its veto in the Security Council ... has been in favour of South Africa."

British Ambassador, 1977

"It would not have been possible for a political party to be more committed to a national home for the Jews in Palestine than was Labour."

Harold Wilson, 1981

"our first concern in the Labour Party as in the country as a whole must be for their safety and success."

Michael Foot, Labour Leader, on the Falklands 'Task Force', 1982

"There is unanimity in this House on the question of opposing the aggression of the Junta. There is also unanimity on the right of self-defence against aggression."

Tony Benn, 1982

"Ordinary decent coppers using ordinary decent police methods apprehended those responsible for the Birmingham outrage."

Kevin McNamara, Labour Spokesman on Northern Ireland, 1983

"Our forces are engaged in pursuing legitimate objectives and should enjoy full support across the political spectrum."

Neil Kinnock, Labour Leader, on the massacre called 'Desert Storm', 1991

"Britain has been a major force in world affairs for several centuries ... no British patriot should be willing to give up that status."

Tony Blair, Labour Leader, 1997

"I have no doubt at all that we will win ... This is a battle over the values of Civilisation."

Tony Blair, Labour Prime Minister, while bombing Yugoslavia and Iraq, 1999

UNFAIR?? SELECTIVE??

Since 1945, Britain has engaged in military aggression against poorer countries no fewer than NINETY SIX times. Where it has not been the perpetrator, the Labour Party has supported all but one of them. The exception was Suez, 1956, when it supported imperialist America instead. There is no grass roots movement, struggle or protest, whether abroad or at home, against any imperialist war, atrocity or policy, which has been supported by the leadership of the Labour Party. As they regard the poor and the inferior elsewhere, so is their record here.

Special acknowledgement: Clough, Robert, *Labour: A Party Fit for Imperialism*, Larkin, London, 1992, ISBN 0 905400151

"utter boorish self-centred indifference to every living human struggle ... is the heart and soul of the imperialist psychology in the labour aristocracy ... looking on with contemptuous indifference to the curious incomprehensible inferior races."

R Palme Dutt, Labour Monthly, March 1927

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The Great Powers

No. 3 - The Highway of Death

What was the Highway of Death?

The coastal and inland roads between Mutlaa, Kuwait and Basra, Iraq during the Gulf massacres of January/February 1991.

What happened there?

US planes waited for vehicles to leave Kuwait City then destroyed those at the front and back of the convoy. Then, for hours, they 'strafed' the helpless people and vehicles. Some vehicles were destroyed so comprehensively, they disappeared. Human beings were incinerated.

When did it happen?

On the last day of the war, twenty four hours after Iraq began withdrawing from Kuwait.

Why doesn't anyone know about it?

Everyone knows about it ... except you!

How did they do it?

Incendiary and chemical weapons, banned under the 1977 Geneva Protocols. Depleted Uranium tipped shells, napalm, sarin, 'whatever ... happened to be closest to the deck' (Providence journal).

Who died?

Iraqi soldiers, withdrawing from Kuwait. Palestinian, Kuwaiti, Egyptian and Jordanian civilians fleeing the city. Men, women, children, animals. Arabs.

How many?

No one knows. Tens of thousands.

Why did they do it?

Officially, 'they might regroup and attack our troops'. In reality, preparing for the next phase of the war, to destroy what they could before the victims got home.

How many 'coalition' casualties? None.**Where's the evidence?**

Eye witnesses, photographs, video, news despatches, official and military sources.

What about the human evidence?

The bodies were buried in mass, unmarked graves, dug with bulldozers. No one attempted to identify them.

How many survived?

On the inland road, 450. On the coastal road, none.

Who was punished?

Iraq.

Who paid compensation?

Iraq.

Who says it's a war crime?

Everyone except the criminals and their apologists. Violations: UN Charter, Hague and Geneva Conventions, Nuremberg Charter, US Field Manual 1956.

So what? Saddam did worse.

Depending on who you believe, between 400 and 1000 people were killed during Iraq's invasion of Kuwait. About one tenth of those killed a year earlier when America invaded Panama.

Aren't soldiers fair game?

Not ours. Or America's. Their right of self defence is universal. If anyone uses chemical agents on American soldiers, the US reserves the right to kill civilians with nuclear weapons.

In the life of a nation there comes a moment when we are called upon to define who we are and what we believe.'

George Bush, January 1991

February 2001

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