



Photo: U.S. Air Force

“The Peace of America” was spread throughout Vietnam in many violent forms, including this napalm bombing of an isolated farm and its inhabitants.

POX AMERICANA

WHEN THE COLD WAR came to an end at the close of the 20th century, it was widely suggested that a golden era of world peace could be expected to follow. But as a former citizen of the United States, familiar with the history of its international conduct, I was fairly certain that the postulated “peace dividend” would never materialize.

On the contrary, it seemed inevitable that the dark forces that have long shaped U.S. foreign policy would seize the opportunity presented by the collapse of the Soviet Union to extend their influence and seek to establish a world hegemony, a *Pax Americana* as it is often called — misleadingly so, as it has little or nothing to do with *pax* (peace).

For anyone with a bit of knowledge and eyes to see, that was not terribly hard to figure out: The fundamentally aggressive nature of U.S. foreign policy is well documented. And as though to dispel any doubt, the ardent hegemonists have openly declared their intent in a variety of forums and documents, including a blueprint for world domination entitled *Defence Planning Guidance* which includes the following:

Our first objective is to prevent the re-emergence of a new rival, either on the territory of the former Soviet Union or elsewhere, that poses a threat on the order of that posed formerly by the Soviet Union. This is a dominant consideration underlying the new regional defense strategy and requires that we endeavor to prevent any hostile power from dominating a region whose resources would,

under consolidated control, be sufficient to generate global power. These regions include Western Europe, East Asia, the territory of the former Soviet Union, and Southwest Asia.

There are three additional aspects to this objective: First, the U.S. must show the leadership necessary to establish and protect a new order that holds the promise of convincing potential competitors that they need not aspire to a greater role or pursue a more aggressive posture to protect their legitimate interests. Second, in the non-defense areas, we must account sufficiently for the interests of the advanced industrial nations to discourage them from challenging our leadership or seeking to overturn the established political and economic order. Finally, we must maintain the mechanisms for deterring potential competitors from even aspiring to a larger regional or global role. . . .

In the Middle East and Southwest Asia, our overall objective is to remain the predominant outside power in the region and preserve U.S. and Western access to the region's oil.¹

Developments since that blueprint was drafted some fifteen years ago, during the administration of President George Bush I, have demonstrated that it was not an exercise in idle speculation. Its basic thrust has also been reinforced by subsequent documents of a similar nature, for example, the *National Security Strategy of the United States of America* issued in 2002 by the administration of George Bush II.

The forces that control the United States are deadly serious about dominating the planet, and the results of their zealous efforts have been typically disastrous, with no end in sight. Having laid waste to Afghanistan and Iraq with wars of aggression— and having supplied Israel with the means to do the same to Lebanon, for the second time in recent decades—the administration of President George Bush II has designated Iran as its next major target. It is currently orchestrating a standard propaganda campaign to demonize Iran in preparation of yet another military onslaught.



The first aerial bombing of a civilian population is widely believed to have occurred in 1937, when planes from Nazi Germany attacked the Basque town of Guernica during the Spanish Civil War. But the “honour” of being first apparently goes to the U.S. pilots who in 1927 bombed the Nicaraguan town of Chinandega, shown here in the aftermath.

There are others on the list and, if the U.S. should ever run out of suitable enemies, its rulers will doubtless invent some or provoke them into being— as they have been doing ever since the Mexican War was instigated in the name of God and “manifest destiny”. Today, 160 years later, U.S. aggression is still being divinely inspired: The evangelistic/messianic delusions of President Bush II are no secret; and his former Secretary of State and so-called moderate, Colin Powell, has proclaimed his faith that, “The United States has been anointed by God to establish order on earth.” (Among the many services performed by General Powell for god and country was to help cover up atrocities committed by U.S. troops against citizens of Vietnam.²)

Historical amnesia

For me, as for so many others, the image of the United States was indelibly etched in consciousness by the Vietnam War— “the greatest act of criminal aggression during the second half of the 20th century”, as Prof. Richard DuBoff and many others have noted.³

In some respects, the protracted assault on Vietnam and neighbouring countries was even more inexcusable than the crimes of Nazi Germany, the generally accepted standard of ruthless inhumanity. The rise of the Nazi regime was a fairly inevitable consequence of the punitive Versailles Treaty and the deep economic depression that followed— so much so that British economist J.M. Keynes predicted it with remarkable accuracy.⁷ Further, the Nazi wars of aggression were launched against ancient, nearby enemies at roughly comparable stages of economic and technological development.

In contrast, the United States was the world’s leading nation and enjoying a lengthy period of prosperity when it launched its assault on Vietnam. The targeted country was located on the other side of the earth, had never lifted a finger against its tormentor, was economically and technologically underdeveloped, and had barely begun to recover from a century of debilitating occupation and exploitation by a succession of foreign powers— the efforts of the most recent, France, having been financed and otherwise supported by

“I have said from the beginning that the United States are the aggressors. . . We have no particle of right to be here.... It looks as if the government sent a small force on purpose to bring on a war [with Mexico], so as to have a pretext for taking California and as much of the country as it chooses.... My heart is not in this business.”⁴

— *Col. Ethan Allen Hitchcock, U.S. Army, 1845*

“I was a racketeer for capitalism. I helped purify Nicaragua for the international banking house of Brown Brothers.... I helped make Haiti and Cuba a decent place for the National City Bank boys to collect revenue in. I helped in the rape of half a dozen Central American republics for the benefit of Wall Street.”⁵

— *General Smedley Butler, U.S. Marines, 1935*

“We should keep the Panama Canal, because we stole it fair and square.”⁶

— *Senator S. A. Hayakawa (California), 1977*

the United States. For resisting direct domination by the U.S.A., the peoples of Vietnam and of neighbouring Cambodia and Laos have been forced to pay a terrible price that will continue to be exacted long into the future.⁸

All that now seems to be largely forgotten, thanks to a relentless campaign of historical falsification and an endless chain of new catastrophes to suppress the memory of those less recently inflicted. This is of crucial significance: If people can be made to forget a crime as vast as the Vietnam War, they can be made to forget just about anything.

Such historical amnesia is virtually a precondition for the continuation of business as usual by the United States, which justifies its international crimes on the basis of lofty ideals and noble intent. While it is neither possible nor essential to win universal support, it is difficult to maintain an empire if resistance to domination and sympathy for the victims cannot be kept to manageable levels.

The administration of Pres. Bush II is beginning to experience that difficulty as a result of its disastrous policies in the Middle East; and, though far too late, the linkage between the Vietnam War and the most recent war against Iraq is being noted with increasing frequency. For the moment, at least, the world has been reminded of the destructive tendencies of U.S. foreign policy.

But if the past is any guide, that heightened awareness is likely to dissipate as soon as the worst is over, especially if the U.S. war machine takes a brief pause to lick its wounds. The period of restraint following the Vietnam War, during which the most aggressive elements of U.S. society were briefly subdued, lasted no more than five years.

As it turned out, that interlude was merely a prelude to the Reagan Era, with its murder of hope (yet again) in Central America, further escalation of the nuclear arms race, and much more. An important item on the Reaganite agenda was to imprint a falsified history of the Vietnam War, a process that had begun while it was still raging. Several of the basic themes are included in the following excerpts from a speech by “The Great Communicator”, as President Reagan is fondly remembered:

When France gave up Indochina as a colony, the leading nations of the world met in Geneva with regard to helping those colonies become independent nations. And since North and South Vietnam had been, previous to colonization, two separate countries, provisions were made that these two countries could, by a vote of all their people together, decide whether they wanted to be one country or not.

And there wasn't anything surreptitious about it, that when Ho Chi Minh refused to participate in such an election. . . and when [people] began leaving by the thousands and thousands from North Vietnam to live in South Vietnam, Ho Chi Minh closed the border and again violated that part of the agreement.

And openly, our country sent military advisers there to help a country which had been a colony have such things as a national security force, an army, you might say, or a military to defend itself.⁹

The truth is quite the opposite, as documented by the wartime U.S. government's official history, known as *The Pentagon Papers*. But it is the Reaganite version or something like it that now prevails in the United States and elsewhere.

In late 2007, President Bush II followed the mendacious example of Reagan as he attempted to prolong his catastrophic assault on Iraq by conjuring up the spectre of Vietnam:

“While masquerading as a force for universal good”

From Harold Pinter’s speech in acceptance of the 2005 Nobel Prize in Literature

Everyone knows what happened in the Soviet Union and throughout Eastern Europe during the post-war period: the systematic brutality, the widespread atrocities, the ruthless suppression of independent thought. All this has been fully documented and verified.

But my contention here is that the US crimes in the same period have only been superficially recorded, let alone documented, let alone acknowledged, let alone recognised as crimes at all. I believe this must be addressed and that the truth has considerable bearing on where the world stands now....

Direct invasion of a sovereign state has never in fact been America’s favoured method. In the main, it has preferred what it has described as ‘low intensity conflict’. Low intensity conflict means that thousands of people die but slower than if you dropped a bomb on them in one fell swoop. It means that you infect the heart of the country, that you establish a malignant growth and watch the gangrene bloom. When the populace has been subdued, or beaten to death—the same thing—and your own friends, the military and the great corporations, sit comfortably in power, you go before the camera and say that democracy has prevailed. This was a commonplace in US foreign policy in the years to which I refer.

The tragedy of Nicaragua was a highly significant case. I choose to offer it here as a potent example of America’s view of its role in the world, both then and now.... The United States finally brought down the Sandinista government. It took some years and considerable resistance but relentless economic persecution and 30,000 dead finally undermined the spirit of the Nicaraguan people. They were exhausted and poverty-stricken once again. The casinos moved back into the country. Free health and free education were over. Big business returned with a vengeance. ‘Democracy’ had prevailed.

But this ‘policy’ was by no means restricted to Central America. It was conducted throughout the world. It was never-ending. And it is as if it never happened.

The United States supported and in many cases engendered every right-wing military dictatorship in the world after the end of the Second World War....

Hundreds of thousands of deaths took place throughout these countries. Did they take place? And are they in all cases attributable to US foreign policy? The answer is yes, they did take place and they are attributable to American foreign policy. But you wouldn’t know it.

It never happened. Nothing ever happened. Even while it was happening it wasn’t happening. It didn’t matter. It was of no interest. The crimes of the United States have been systematic, constant, vicious, remorseless, but very few people have actually talked about them. You have to hand it to America. It has exercised a quite clinical manipulation of power worldwide while masquerading as a force for universal good.

“Many argued that if we pulled out, there would be no consequences for the Vietnamese people,” said Bush, in a desperate effort to quell mounting pressure for withdrawal from Iraq. “The world would learn just how costly these misimpressions would be.... One unmistakable legacy of Vietnam is that the price of America’s withdrawal was paid by millions of innocent citizens whose agonies would add to our vocabulary new terms like ‘boat people’, ‘re-education camps’ and ‘killing fields’.”

The reality, of course, is that the United States is primarily responsible for all of the suffering that has resulted, and will long continue to result from the Vietnam War.¹⁰

It therefore seems essential to provide as many reminders as possible of the true history and broader implications of the Vietnam War. That history is important in its own right, for reasons discussed in *Remember Vietnam*.¹¹ But it also provides a useful frame of reference for the interpretation of subsequent events, such as the wars against Iraq and the so-called war on terror which was invented to serve the same purpose as the Cold War, i.e. to frighten the U.S. public into condoning aggression and repression.¹²

Of particular significance is the process by which the Vietnam War has been made to recede from public awareness or, to the extent that it is remembered at all, to be recalled in terms that obscure or trivialize the enormity of the crimes perpetrated. The same sort of oblivion almost certainly awaits the U.S. wars that currently occupy the attention of the world, and with those that are to follow, unless the cycle of induced amnesia can be broken.

That is the common purpose of three projects that are documented on the *Pox Americana* website:¹³

Remember Vietnam

A response to the widespread historical amnesia and falsification regarding the U.S. war of aggression against Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam.

Environmental Conference on Cambodia, Laos & Vietnam

The first international conference on the long-term effects of the Vietnam War, a quarter-century after its formal conclusion.

Levande Framtid/Living Future

A public education project concerning crimes against humanity perpetrated by the United States and its allies.

“The study [known as *The Pentagon Papers*] has never been called into question; given the source, it is difficult to see how it could be. Instead, it has simply been ignored, as the falsehoods it documents— for example, that in Vietnam the U.S. was merely trying to assist an ally, a sovereign nation subjected to alien communist aggression— have once again become the conventional wisdom on the Vietnam War in the United States and many other parts of the world. Nothing more stunningly illustrates the power of propaganda than this demonstrated capacity to bury the truth of unimpeachable disclosures under a steady barrage of the very lies and myths that have been disclosed by official sources.”

— *The Pentagon Papers: An Introduction*¹⁴

Three faces of the United States' designated enemy in Vietnam, as they appeared in 2002 — nearly three decades after the military phase of the American War came to an end, and a long period of devastating economic aggression was about to begin. On the left is Nguyen Thi Giau, who as a young peasant woman was one of the liberation movement's most effective spies and, as a consequence, had a very high price on her head. On the right is Nguyen Hac Dam Thu, who as a young woman from a well-to-do family left university to join the movement and experienced both prison and torture. In the centre is Nguyen Thi Ngoc Toan, a physician whose service in the national army of liberation began with the French War, including the decisive battle at Dien Bien Phu in 1954.



(Photo: Al Burke)

A final note: There has been growing speculation of late that the U.S. empire is on the verge of decline or collapse, due in large part to the disastrous foreign policy of the current Bush administration and the general tendencies that it represents. There is much to support that view. But the imminent decline of U.S. hegemony has been prematurely announced before— during the 1980s, for example, just prior to the collapse of the Soviet Union and U.S. “victory” in the Cold War. Clearly, much depends on developments in other nations and/or with other potentially countervailing forces, such as “world opinion”.¹⁵

In any event, the United States is not likely to passively accept its dethronement when the time comes. It will be a miracle if the dark forces that dominate U.S. society do not wreak havoc by drawing on their vast arsenal in a desperate effort to retain their grasp on global power. They have already demonstrated, time and again, that there are virtually no limits on the amount of death and destruction they are prepared to inflict on other nations, and quite possibly their own, for that purpose.

But assuming that the world manages to survive that looming catastrophe, the basic problem is almost certain to remain as a new global disorder supplants the old. In that case, the lessons of the Vietnam War will be as relevant then as they are now.

— Al Burke
May 2008

NOTES

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2. Parry, Robert and Solomon, Norman. "Behind Colin Powell's Legend." Internet: www.consortiumnews.com, December 2000.
3. Richard Du Boff quoted in *History of the Living Future Project*: www.nnn.se/levande/living.pdf
4. Colonel Hitchcock quoted in *A People's History of the United States* by Howard Zinn. Harper & Row Publishers, 1980.
5. Butler, Smedley D. *War Is a Racket*. Round Table Press, 1935.
6. Senator Hayakawa quoted in "How Wall Street Created a Nation" by Russell Mokhiber and Robert Weissman. Internet: www.commondreams.org, 27 October 2001.
7. Keynes, John Maynard. *The Economic Consequences of the Peace*. Macmillan, 1919.
8. For a concise review of that grim history, see report entitled *Ethics • Law • Policy*: www.nnn.se/environ/ethics.htm
9. Reagan speech quoted in Gettleman, Marvin E. *et al.*, eds. *Vietnam and America*; Grove Weidenfeld, 1985. For more on the process of historical falsification, see "'Vietnam' and the New American Century": www.nnn.se/vietnam/franklin.pdf
10. Bush quoted by *BBC News*, 22 August 2007. For the truth of the matter, see *Ethics • Law • Policy*: www.nnn.se/environ/ethics.htm
11. *Remember Vietnam*. www.nnn.se/vietnam.htm
12. That development was predicted by former C.I.A. agent, Philip Agee, in a speech delivered shortly after the terrorist attacks in New York and Washington on 11 September 2001. See "Appendix E. Philip Agee on the CIA & Terrorism" in *The Word from the White House*: www.nnn.se/disinfo/vithus.pdf
13. *Pox Americana*: www.nnn.se/pox.htm
14. *The Pentagon Papers: An Introduction*: www.nnn.se/vietnam/pentpapers.pdf
15. For an analysis of world opinion's limited potential, see "Dilemmas and Delusions of Pacifism": www.nnn.se/pox/confront.pdf