

# The United States of Genocide: Putting the US on Trial for Genocide Against the Peoples of Korea, Laos, Viet Nam, Cambodia, Iraq, and Elsewhere

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The United States of America was built on a foundation of genocide against the Indigenous peoples of North America. In fact, all successful settler colonial societies are founded in genocide. The process is one of dispossession – the erasure of one group identity and the imposition of another on the people and/or on the land. But genocide is not merely the foundation of the US nation state, it is also the foundation of the US empire. The US habit of genocide has not died, but has transformed. The US has become a serial perpetrator of genocide with the blood of many millions of innocents spilled in pursuit of imperial hegemony.

There is a fight going on for the very meaning of the term “genocide”. Western powers assert their right to accuse enemies of committing genocide using the broadest possible definitions whilst also touting a twisted undefined sense of “genocide” which can never, ever be applied to their own actions. Aotearoa (New Zealand) Prime Minister John Key, apparently taking his cue from the US, is currently [pushing for reform](#) of the UN Security Council such that the veto power would be unavailable. The UNSC is a political body and “genocide” will simply become a political term cited by powerful states to rationalise aggression against the weak. Key [notoriously said](#) that his country was “missing in action” because it did not invade Iraq in 2003, reminding Kiwis that “blood is thicker than water”. If his desired reforms existed now, the US would probably have a UN Security Council resolution authorising the use of force against Syria on the grounds of “genocide”.

All of those who oppose Western aggression justified as humanitarian intervention under the “responsibility to protect” must stop burying their heads in the sand over this matter. This is a very real fight for the future of humanity. We can either learn and propagate the understanding that US imperial interventions are, by nature, genocidal. Or we can just pretend the word has no meaning; indulge our childish moral impulses and the lazy fatuousness of our scholars and pundits and let Western mass-murderers use this Orwellian buzzword (for that is what “genocide” currently is) to commit heinous acts of horrific violence which ensure the continued domination of the world’s masses by a tiny imperialist elite.

(An aside: apparently people like a pragmatic focus to accompany a call to action. So, am I making the most obvious appeal – that US officials be tried for committing genocide? No I am not. They can be tried for war crimes if people really think that “holding people accountable” is more important than preventing suffering and protecting the vulnerable. But it has been a terrible mistake to construct genocide as being an aggravated crime against

humanity, as if it were simply a vicious felony writ large. This has played completely into the hands of those propagandists for whom every new enemy of the West is the new Hitler. The means by which genocides are perpetrated are the crimes of individuals – war crimes, for example – but genocide itself is the crime of a state or para-state regime. That is the proper target of inquisition and censure. Though the attempt was tragically abortive, the Kuala Lumpur War Crimes Tribunal recently began hearing charges of genocide against Israel. We need this sort of process to hear charges of genocide against the US. I fully support such efforts, but my real call to action is a call for thought, for clarity, and for self-discipline. People are drawn to using woolly thinking over genocide, wishing to use it as the ultimate condemnation of mass violence without reference to any actual meaning of the term. We must not tolerate it in ourselves or others. We are a hair's breadth away from the point where "genocide prevention" will be used by major Western powers to justify genocidal mass violence.)

### US "Wars" are Actually Genocides

Every major military action by the US since World War II has first and foremost been an act of genocide. I do not state this as a moral condemnation. If I were seeking to condemn I would try to convey the enormous scale of suffering, death, loss and misery caused by US mass violence. My purpose instead is to correct a terrible misconception of US actions – their nature, their meaning and their strategic utility. This understanding which I am trying to convey is a very dangerous notion with an inescapable moral dimension because the US has always maintained that the suffering, death and destruction it causes are incidental to military purposes – they are instances of "collateral damage". But, with all due respect to the fact that US personnel may face real dangers, these are not real wars. These are genocides and it is the military aspect that is incidental. In fact, it is straining credulity to continue believing in a string of military defeats being sustained by the most powerful military in the history of the world at the hands of impoverished Third World combatants. The US hasn't really been defeated in any real sense. They committed genocide in Indochina, increasing the level of killing as much as possible right through to the clearly foreseen inevitable conclusion which was a cessation of direct mass violence, not a defeat. The US signed a peace agreement which they completely ignored. The Vietnamese did not occupy US territory and force the US to disarm and pay crippling reparations.

There is no question that the US has committed actions which fit the description of genocide. Genocide does not mean the successful extermination of a defined group (there is no such thing as "attempted genocide"). It was never conceived that way, but rather as any systematic attack on "a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such." Those who deny US genocides usually only deny that there is any intent to commit genocide. The UN definition of genocide (recognised by 142 states) is:

... any of the following acts committed with [intent to destroy, in whole or in part](#), a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such:

- (a) Killing members of the group;
- (b) Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group;
- (c) Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part;
- (d) Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group;

(e) Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group.

The US has committed these acts many times and in many different countries. Some people object that this is some watered down version of genocide that risks diluting the significance of this “ultimate crime”. However, bear in mind that the victims of US armed violence are not usually combatants and are not engaged in some sort of contested combat that gives them some ability to defend themselves or to kill or be killed. They are helpless as they die of incineration, asphyxiation, dismemberment, cancer, starvation, disease. People of all ages die in terror unable to protect themselves from the machinery of death. Make no mistake, that is what it is: a large complex co-ordinated machinery of mass killing. There is nothing watered down about the horrors of the genocides committed by the US, and their victims number many millions. The violence is mostly impersonal, implacable, arbitrary and industrial.

There are at least three specific times at which US mass violence has taken lives in the millions through direct killing: the Korean War, the Vietnam War, and the wars and sanctions against Iraq in combination with the occupation of Iraq. I refer to them as the Korea Genocide (which was against both South and North Koreans), the Indochina Genocide (against Laotians, Cambodians, and Vietnamese), and the Iraq Genocide (which took place over at least a 20 year period).

There are many ways to show that the US committed genocides in these cases. On one level the case is straightforward. For example, if the US commits acts of “strategic bombing” which systematically kills civilians by the hundreds of thousands, *and* it turns out that not only is there no rational proportionate military reason, *but* that US military and intelligence analysis is clear that these are in fact militarily counter-productive acts of gratuitous mass-murder, *then* by any reasonable definition these must be acts of genocide. The logic is simple and inescapable. I have written lengthy pieces showing in detail that these were large scale systematic and intentional genocides which you can read.<sup>1</sup>

For a long time I have tried to think of ways to condense this in a readable form. The problem in many respects lies with the necessity of overcoming misapprehensions. Genocide is an emotive topic; people are very reluctant to read that those who rule in their name (with whom they sometimes actively identify) are in the moral vicinity of the Nazi leaders of Germany. Permeating every level of the discourse is the constant position (whether as the unspoken assumption or as the active assertion) that the US has never acted with genocidal intent. Intentionality is a topic in its own right, but to be brief I will point out that intent does not require that “genocide” be its own motive. If I kill someone because I want their watch, I can’t turn around and say it isn’t murder because I didn’t intend to kill them because I was really just intending to take their watch. It may seem a ridiculous example, but the discourse of genocide is so twisted that it is the norm even amongst genocide scholars. Primed by our political leaders and various media, we keep looking for the people, the bloodthirsty psychopathic monsters, who kill people just for the fun of it and grab their watch afterwards as an afterthought. Unsurprisingly, most Westerners find those people among the leaders of those countries who oppose Western political power. Now our leaders are trying to persuade us that that includes Syria’s Bashar al-Assad (though many are becoming skeptical of this “Hitler-of-the-month” propaganda).

The best way of demonstrating US intentionality is to demonstrate the consistency of their approach in different times and places. However, this is a necessarily exhaustive approach,

so I have decided to take a different tack here. I wish to sketch a fragment of autobiography here – an outline of the process by which I came to my current understanding of the topic. I didn't seek these conclusions out, but had it made clear to me, by rather comfortably embedded scholars, that they think that I am being provocative out of ambition. It is a testament to the self-satisfaction of such people that they somehow think that being provocative is some advantage. Academia thrives on the journal-filling peer-reviewed "controversies" of rival schools and scholars, but they aren't really keen on anything that might actually be of any interest to anyone else. The fact is that I didn't seek this out and it certainly has not endeared me to anyone that I can think of. On the other hand, I have had people act as if I had smeared my own faeces all over myself for using the g-word with respect to Iraq, and I have had many metaphorical doors slammed in my face. As I hope the following will indicate, at least partially, I cannot but characterise US genocides as such and I cannot but view the subject of absolute urgent fundamental importance.

### Coming to Understand

The Vietnam War loomed large in my childhood. I was five when it ended. I watched the critical documentary series [Vietnam: The 10,000 Day War](#) when I was ten or eleven years old. During the 1980s Vietnam War movie craze I was sucked into that powerful quagmire of pathos and adrenaline – not to mention the evocative music. But even then, as a teen, I could not abide the apologism and the way in which American lives and American suffering were privileged. The US personnel were portrayed as the victims, even in films which showed US atrocities. I knew far too much about things such as the nature of the atrocities carried out by the Contras to find that sort of propaganda palatable. For one thing, I had read William Blum's *The CIA: A Forgotten History*. This book (now titled [Killing Hope](#)) doesn't leave the reader much room for illusions about the US role in international politics. Perhaps if I had been a little older I might have been "educated" enough to be blind to the obvious, but I wasn't. While most people managed to avoid facing the facts, I knew from this book and others like it that although the atrocities of the Soviet Bloc were substantial, they were dwarfed by those of the US and its closest clients. If Cuba, for example, has been repressive, then what words remain to describe the US installed regimes in the Dominican Republic, Haiti, El Salvador, or Chile?

How could one characterise a state that backed and created death squad regimes that massacred entire villages, that tortured children to death in front of parents? How does one describe a militarised country whose meticulously planned and executed bombing raids systematically visited untold death and suffering on innocents as an intended purpose. Any informed person who had an objective proportionate viewpoint could only conclude, as Martin Luther King Jr. had already [concluded](#), that the US government and the wider US corporate state were "the greatest purveyor of violence in the world today." Fred Branfman, who saw the results of US bombing first-hand in Laos, has more [recently concluded](#) that the executive branch of the US government is "the world's most evil and lawless institution."

On moral terms I could not have been more condemnatory of the US government. I considered the US government and military-corporate-intelligence complex to be the worst thing in the world since the demise of the Third Reich. I believed this on the basis that they had demonstrably brought about more suffering, death and destruction than anyone else. If someone had tried to claim that it was for "freedom," I would have laughed bitterly, thinking of the brutally crushed democracies and popular movements that were victims of the US. But if someone had said to me that the US had committed genocide in Korea and Indochina I would have most likely dismissed the claim as emotive overstatement. I didn't actually know

what the word genocide meant precisely, but I would still have seen its use as being a form of exaggeration. Implicitly, I took the word “genocide” to be a form of subjective moral condemnation, as if it were an inchoate scream rather than a word that might have a consistent meaning. (You can’t exaggerate by calling something “arson,” for example. It is either a lie or it is the truth. Genocide is the same). However, “genocide,” as a word, has been subjected to the ideological processes (described so well by Orwell in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*) which destroy the meaning of words. Here is how I put it in an academic [piece](#):

Certain words are so highly politicised in their usage that, in Orwellian fashion, they are stripped of all meaning and become merely signals designed to provoke in impassioned unreasoning involuntary response. In this fashion ‘democracy’ means ‘double-plus good’ and the Party members<sup>2</sup> respond with cheers and tears of joy. Equally, ‘terrorism’ means ‘double-plus bad’ provoking among Party members, ‘[a] hideous ecstasy of fear and vindictiveness, a desire to kill, to torture, to smash faces in with a sledge-hammer....’<sup>3</sup> Genocide plays a starring role in an entire discourse shaped in such a way as to not only excuse but to facilitate the perpetration of war crimes and crimes against humanity. Stripped of any actual meaning but given the significance of being the ‘ultimate crime’ it becomes a tool by which powerful Western states are able to threaten or carry out attacks against weaker states – attacks which are in themselves criminal and which in some instances are actually genocidal. The emotive misuse of the term genocide has become a powerful political tool. As Jeremy Scahill reveals after accusations of genocide by Arabs against black Africans, “even at antiwar rallies, scores of protesters held signs reading, ‘Out of Iraq, into Darfur.’” Scahill adds that, ‘[a] quick survey of Sudan’s vast natural resources dispels any notion that U.S./corporate desires to move into Sudan derive from purely humanitarian motives.’<sup>4</sup>

What brought me around to using the term genocide was realising that there was no other word to describe what the US did in South Viet Nam. I had been aware that the vast majority of victims of the US military were civilians. It was commonplace to say that 90% of casualties were civilian. (Tellingly Western commentators, including those in the peace movement, would vouch that the figure of 90% civilian casualties was proof of how cruel and deadly “modern war” had become – as if US practices were some sort of universal standard and as if the fact that other belligerents did not produce such high rates of civilian death was not of any interest whatsoever.)

So, US violence mostly caused civilian deaths and the vast majority of those civilians were, in fact, subjects of the US installed puppet [sic] regime in Saigon. They were killing their own supposed allies. I have read all of the rationalisations for why the US thought it was a good idea to kill the civilians of their own client state, and they are all completely insane. I don’t even believe that killing the civilian populations of *enemy* countries is militarily effective, and in that belief I am supported by the strategic analyses of the US itself going back to 1944. Killing the civilian population of an allied state makes *no military sense whatsoever*. Often killing civilians was rationalised in terms of counterinsurgency (usually crudely reversing Maoist doctrine about the relationship between the guerrilla and the rural population) despite the fact that it was recognised from very early on that the civilian deaths were recruiting and strengthening the enemy.

That was the other striking thing about US activities in Indochina – they were systematically killing civilians without apparent purpose, but they were also undermining their own political and military efforts. This happened at all levels. As I was reading and coming to grips with

this aspect of history, it seemed that exactly the same thing was playing out in Iraq. In 2003, as invasion loomed, I had initially expected that the US would conduct a fast vicious campaign particularly aimed at inflicting maximum damage to economic infrastructure. They would then leave, crowing about their surgical use of force and minuscule US fatalities. The US would continue to enhance the perceived legitimacy of its acts of aggression and would be able to use economic blackmail to exert neocolonial control. However, I was woefully naïve for believing that. In contrast, Paul Wolfowitz was [absolutely clear](#) on this point – you cannot use normal neocolonial power on Iraq: “[W]e just had no choice in Iraq. The country swims on a sea of oil.” Instead, the US invaded, occupied and then acted repeatedly and systematically in ways which would very predictably cause armed resistance, just as they had in Indochina. But without that resistance they could not have justified a major military presence and the proconsular rule of the occupation imposed on Iraq.

In 2006 I was able to devote quite a lot of time to the subject of genocide in Indochina as it was the topic of my Honours [research](#) paper. My initial understanding of genocide was pretty thin and one-dimensional, but it was sound in the given context. The most important aspect for me was that genocide matched *means* with *ends*. War is always a matter of uncertain outcome. To wage war is to wager (the words are cognates). Indeed that is why we use such terms as “wage” and “adventure” for military action. Carl von Clausewitz wrote that a belligerent will never be able to attain their intended war aims because the war they pursue will itself change matters and impose its own realities. In that sense, war is a gamble which will always be lost. Genocide is *not* a gamble.

Genocide was an attack on the peoples of Indochina which avoided the uncertainties of waging military war. The maximal aim of the genocide was the eventual neocolonial domination of Indochina. It worked. In Viet Nam the war and subsequent US economic sanctions were devastating. By 1990 the per capita GDP was only \$114.<sup>5</sup> Under *doi moi* liberalisation, Viet Nam has achieved much greater formal economic activity (GDP), but only by submitting to the Washington Consensus, which means no price supports for staples such as rice, which in turn means that the real income of the poorest urban dwellers has dropped.<sup>6</sup> Genocide doesn’t need an end goal such as submitting to neoliberal WTO regulations and IMF conditions. Chomsky called Vietnamese poverty “a vivid refutation of the claim that the US lost.”<sup>7</sup> Similar stories could be related with regard to Laos and Cambodia. Whether these nation states are considered enemies or vanquished vassals or friends is of no relevance, the weakness of their populations is a gain in relative power for the US empire, and empires intrinsically function on relative gains.

This is what I wrote in 2006:

...[A] clever strategist, where possible, matches means and ends, thus making results more predictable. In a situation where there is a stated end and a given means are employed and continue to be employed despite continued demonstrable “failure” and are then employed elsewhere under the same rationale with the same results – in such a situation it is possibly worth considering that the “means” are themselves the end. In the case of the Second Indochina War, I will argue the means were widespread general destruction, employed on as many of the people and as much of the societal fabric or infrastructure as was physically and politically feasible. If those were the means, I will suggest, they were also the end. The results are predictable. The dead stay dead.

When Raphaël Lemkin first coined the word “genocide,” he [wrote](#) “genocide is a new technique of occupation aimed at winning the peace even though the war itself is lost.” He also wrote: “Genocide is the antithesis of the ... doctrine [which] holds that war is directed against sovereigns and armies, not against subjects and civilians. In its modern application in civilized society, the doctrine means that war is conducted against states and armed forces and not against populations. ... [T]he Germans prepared, waged, and continued a war not merely against states and their armies but against peoples. For the German occupying authorities war thus appears to offer the most appropriate occasion for carrying out their policy of genocide.”

(At this point I would like to urge people to read what Lemkin actually wrote when trying to describe genocide. It is not a time consuming task. You can find the chapter [here](#).)

The US was maintaining the “war.” It helped to recruit its enemies, to arm them, finance them, and to supply them. Just as I was researching this, [Endless War?](#) by David Keen was published about the War on Terror which claimed that it was a self-perpetuating endless “war system”. It focused on clearly “counterproductive” actions undertaken by the US, belying its stated aims:

When it comes to war in other words, winning is not everything; it may be the taking part that counts. Indeed, as Orwell saw in his novel *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, certain kinds of regimes may thrive off energies and perpetual war. The irrationality of counterproductive tactics, in short, may be more apparent than real, and even an endless war may not be endless in the sense of lacking aims or functions.<sup>8</sup>

Keen never mentioned Indochina. The precedents he cited of were civil wars in Africa. However it was as if the idea of a war system was, in a sense, on the tip of people’s tongues towards the end of the US involvement in Indochina, as if they knew deep-down that the US was not trying to win the war. It seems almost the implicit subtext of Magnum photographer Philip Jones Griffiths’ book, [Vietnam Inc.](#), which by its title alone suggests an enterprise quite differently conceived than war. Even the orthodox political discourse (with talk of quagmires and a “stab in the back” story of brave soldiers hamstrung by politicians) hints at a war system. What the US did in Indochina was an absolute textbook example of what Keen was describing.

From this way of understanding the past, I was also viewing events in Iraq with the same apprehension. What was occurring on a daily basis was very clearly indicating a parallel process. Captured weapons were dumped unsecured in the countryside. Efforts to secure borders (to at least impede the flow of weapons, resistance fighters and money) were systematically undermined. Just as in Viet Nam, diverted cash sloshed through networks of corruption and was available to resistance groups. People were driven into the arms of the resistance by the random brutality of US personnel, the murderous use of indiscriminate ordnance, and the systematic degradation of the civilian economic sphere. On top of this, the US fomented a civil war.

It is a pity that Keen did not know of the Indochina precedent because what we know of it goes much deeper and reaches much higher than the what we know of the “War on Terror” (which Keen takes to include Iraq and Afghanistan interventions). Keen discusses various tactics and policies which are counterproductive. But it is not just the counterproductive

things which sustain US enemies, it is the ways in which US leaders ensure that they cannot ever achieve a victory. This is what I wrote:

Numerous people, including Jeffrey Record<sup>9</sup> and Harry Summers<sup>10</sup> have in effect suggested that the US lacked any winning strategy. In fact, what they had were three no-win strategies – strategies which did not, even in theory, have an end point at which a military victory would be obtained. These were the fire-power/attrition, the graduated response and the enclave strategies. The only strategy by which the US could have attained its stated objective was the pacification strategy, but this too was no threat because the pacification strategy was only weakly implemented while being misapplied, subverted, sabotaged and contravened – not least by the more vigorous application of the fire-power/attrition and graduated response strategies.

You can read all about that [stuff](#) in detail if you want, otherwise you'll just have to take my word for it. The US systematically ensured that it could never achieve "victory" in Indochina. Perhaps the most blatant example was the brutal genocide unleashed on Cambodia from 1970 until 1975. Not the "genocide" or "autogenocide" of the Khmer Rouge, but the genocide before that, without which there would never have been a Khmer Rouge takeover. Here's a long excerpt from my Honours piece:

When the the US generated a war in Cambodia they had already had a great deal of experience in Viet Nam and Laos, and what occurred in Cambodia is, in many ways, a naked exposure of the logic behind the genocidal war system, less obfuscated because, ironically, Cambodia was a "sideshow" where it was not the details but the whole war which was kept obscure from the public.

Within a year of Lon Nol's coup, as mentioned, the economy of Cambodia was virtually destroyed, not only by bombing, but also by US aid. Aid was channelled to the import of commodities and surplus US agricultural goods. It also underwrote the Cambodian government and armed forces: "By the end of 1970, the government was spending five times its revenue and earning nothing abroad."<sup>11</sup> Most of the population became reliant on US aid to eat, and rice supplies were kept at the minimum level needed to prevent food riots. By 1975, malnutrition was widespread and many children starved to death.<sup>12</sup>

Less than two months after the coup that brought Lon Nol to power, the US invaded Cambodia, along with ARVN forces. They did not bother to forewarn Lon Nol who found out after Richard Nixon had announced the invasion publicly.<sup>13</sup> This invasion along US and RVN bombing and the civil war made refugees of around half of the Cambodian population.<sup>14</sup> Lon Nol was outraged by the invasion and when later briefed by Alexander Haig (then military assistant to Kissinger) about US intentions he wept with frustration. According to Shawcross, "He wished that the Americans had blocked the communists' escape route before attacking, instead of spreading them across Cambodia. ... The Cambodian leader told Haig that there was no way his small force could stop them. ... [Haig] informed Lon Nol that President Nixon intended to limit the involvement of American forces.... They would be withdrawn at the end of June. The the President hoped to introduce a program of restricted military and economic aid. As the implications of Haig's words for the future of Cambodia became clear to Lon Nol, he began to weep. Cambodia, he said, could never defend itself."<sup>15</sup>

As has been detailed, US actions, particularly in bombing, were directly

responsible for creating the communist enemy which overthrew Lon Nol. The bombing between 1969 and 1973 took up to 150,000 lives.<sup>16</sup> If averaged out, over 33 tons of ordnance were used to kill each Khmer Rouge insurgent.<sup>17</sup> Despite the fact that Vietnamese pilots bombed any Cambodian they could, which aided only the Khmer Rouge, Lon Nol acceded to a US demand that he request an increase in VNAF bombing in 1971.<sup>18</sup>

By May 1972, the Lon Nol regime had control of perhaps 10 per cent of the country and continued to lose territory which was thereafter fragmented into ever smaller enclaves.<sup>19</sup> The result was by that stage foregone, and yet the war dragged on for three years with the greater part of the 1 million casualties occurring after that point.

In 1970, when Henry Kissinger briefed Jonathan “Fred” Ladd, who was slated to conduct the war in Cambodia, he told him: “Don’t even think of victory; just keep it alive.”<sup>20</sup>

When the US Congress finally blocked aid to Cambodia and South Viet Nam, it was with the belated realisation that such aid would not give any hope of victory or improve a bargaining position. Senator Mike Mansfield spoke out, “Ultimately Cambodia cannot survive.... Additional aid means more killing, more fighting. This has got to stop sometime.”<sup>21</sup>

It was pretty clear that the US was maintaining the situation of armed conflict in order to commit genocide. This was a comprehensive act of genocide which did not merely involve the systematic killing of the target populations, it also involved every other “technique of genocide” described by Lemkin. There was systematic economic, social, cultural, political, and religious destruction. There was the systematic and deliberate ecocidal poisoning of the land and people with defoliants. There was very raw brutality. People were slaughtered by bombs, but there was also murder, rape and torture on a scale beyond imagining. In one book co-written by Nick Turse he finds that when he sets out to find the site of a massacre in Vietnam it becomes like trying to find a needle in a haystack of massacre sites.<sup>22</sup> In his next book *Kill Anything that Moves* Turse tries to show that haystack for what it is. The results would be hard to believe if they were not so well documented. I cannot reduce its contents here, I can only recommend that people acquire and read the book. It is a litany of slaughter that seems almost endless and through it all the command structure and the political structure provide the framework for the personnel to commit atrocities.

This is not just about the choice of tactics – it is also about “grand tactics”, strategy, doctrine, and indoctrination. Psychiatrist and author Robert Jay Lifton famously discussed “atrocious producing situations” as a driving factor behind US war crimes, and I believe we can now conclude these situations were deliberately created, not just because we have other evidence that atrocities were tacitly encouraged, but because the US went to great lengths to replicate these “atrocious producing situations” in Iraq.

### Why Genocide and Not War?

By the end of my honours thesis I was convinced that both the second Indochina War and the “Iraq War” were “genocidal war systems”. Since then I have learnt a great deal more, and my thinking has developed a great deal more. I won’t bore you with the detail, but I came to realise the “war system” appellation was largely redundant. Genocides are “war

systems” by nature. Almost every perpetrator of genocide explains their violence as fighting war.

Genocide was a key means by which the US secured global hegemony in the post-WWII era. I learnt that Korea was also a case of US genocide. US actions there were as shocking, as deadly and as militarily nonsensical as they were in Indochina. Hundreds of thousands were massacred and hundreds of thousands incinerated. 25% of the entire population of North Korea was killed and we should not forget that many hundreds of thousands of the ostensibly allied South Koreans died at US hands or those of US commanded troops. The whole war became widely recognised as a pointless killing machine (described as “the meatgrinder”) while the US needlessly sabotaged and prolonged armistice negotiations.

I can’t explain in this space why Korea, Vietnam, and Iraq posed such great threats to US imperial hegemony, but they did, and the US successfully dealt with those dangers by committing genocide. These are successful uses of genocide to establish, deepen, and maintain imperialist hegemony, but we have wilfully blinded ourselves to their nature. Critics of US interventions have evidently been scared to entertain the notion that there was some successfully applied rationale to US behaviour. They have joined with the lovers of war, the nationalists, the racists and the fanatics in declaring over and over and over again the wrong-headedness and failures of US military endeavours. The victims of US genocide quite understandably prefer to see themselves as the plucky Davids that beat the Pentagon Goliath. These are all lies.

US forces storm into one house after another, claiming to be trying to kill flies with sledgehammers. Given that they have entirely demolished several houses and severely damaged many others; and given that they have been caught red-handed releasing flies into targeted houses; and given that they forcibly try to make people buy very expensive fly “insurance”; maybe it is time we consider that neither they, nor their sledgehammers, are concerned in any way with flies (except as a pretext).

Where people might once have been terrified that to suggest any cogent purpose to US actions for fear of giving credit to warmongers, we need not be so worried now. It is very clear that the US does not exert imperialist hegemony for the sake of peace and stability or even for the sake of the enrichment of the US and its people. They never protected us from the nefarious existential evil threat of communism and they don’t protect us from the nefarious existential evil threat of Islam. A very narrow group of imperialists who share a cohesive long-term hegemonic programme have successfully concentrated power and wealth levels of disparity akin to those in slavery-based economies. They have also created a neofeudal framework of privatised regnal rights. No doubt many of these people have noble intentions, believing that only by such ruthless action can they exert enough control to save humanity from its self-destructive impulses. Many elitists will openly express such opinions and we can certainly understand having concern over the future of the planet. But such people are, in fact, completely insane and they should be taken out of circulation and treated exactly like any other dangerous megalomaniac who believes that they are the new Napoleon. It is not the masses that are threatening the planet. It is not the masses who bring about wars. And though communal violence seems almost the epitome of the mob in action, I know of no genocide that did not result from the actions of a narrow elite.

The reason that we must view US genocides as being genocides and not wars is that we cannot ever understand the logic of their actions in any other way. People shy away from the term genocide and people react violently to what they perceive as its misuse. That

indicates just how important it is. I mentioned Nick Turse's *Kill Anything that Moves* which is an entire book devoted primarily to the systematic killing of non-combatants. He never uses the term "genocide". In a work based on veteran testimony, Chris Hedges and Laila al-Arian explain that the very nature of the Iraq occupation is that of an atrocity producing situation and that US personnel have gone "from killing – the shooting of someone who [can] harm you – to murder. The war in Iraq is primarily about murder. There is very little killing."<sup>23</sup> They are talking about the systematic murder of civilians in small increments multiplied many times over, but they never use the term "genocide". This despite the fact that US actions in Indochina have widely been adjudged genocidal and despite the fact that it was very strongly argued that the US and UK controlled sanctions against Iraq were genocidal. Ask yourself this: if someone was documenting the same thing being perpetrated by Sudan, or by Zimbabwe do you think the word "genocide" would be left out of such works?

Above all we must end the continuing fatuous nonsense spouted by security geeks (including high ranking military and civilian personnel) who seem to believe every exaggerated claim about threats from the Cubans, the Iranians, the Soviets, Al Qaeda in the Falklands (AQIF) or whomever. The morons with their clichés about "fighting the last war" will never ever tire of telling us how the US just doesn't know how to do counterinsurgency. Really? The question must be, then how did they manage to remain so bad at counterinsurgency when they have spent more person hours on counterinsurgency and counter-guerilla warfare than all other states throughout the entirety of humanity added together? (I could list a few examples here starting with the "Indian" Wars, mentioning 200 years of interventions in the Western hemisphere, Cuba, Philippines, Pacific War, Korea and Indochina. Then there is also the institutional knowledge built and disseminated by "security co-operation". Moreover, the US trains many of the rest of the world's military leaders to conduct counterinsurgency at [Fort Benning](#).)

The point is that you can't understand what the US does through the lens of war. It is very satisfying, no doubt, for young liberal reporters to outsmart generals (who clearly have no idea how to fight wars because they are just stupid Republicans), but it is seriously delusional. There is an instant exculpation given when these genocides are misrepresented as wars. It is very, very important for perpetrators of aggression or genocide (or both) to conceal their intentionality. The UK government and Tony Blair, in particular, showed far more concern with convincing people that they themselves believed in their fictitious *casus belli*, than with convincing people that Iraq really did have pose a threat. All of the British media seemed to echo the mantra that you might not agree with Blair but, "no one can doubt his sincerity". So for moral reasons, in order to end the impunity of the worlds worst war criminals, as well as for intellectual reasons we must grasp the nettle and begin using the term genocide.

#### Textbook Cases

There are many problematic areas in the subject of genocide. Sometimes it is hard to tell when war ends and genocide begins. It can be hard to tell where state repression becomes persecution and when persecution becomes genocide. Were not the Nuremburg Laws an epitome of what we now call apartheid? Is apartheid a form of slow genocide? Is there structural genocide? Should something only be called genocide if there are mass fatalities?

These are all important considerations and questions, but none of them are relevant here. The genocides I have referenced are absolute textbook cases of genocide. It is impossible to

create a coherent and rational definition of the term “genocide” which does not include these genocides.

These genocides were *more* demonstrably genocidal in nature than the Armenian Holocaust. We should always remember that for the Turkish government, and for most Turks, there was no such thing as a genocide of Armenians. In their own eyes they were fighting a war against Armenian insurgents. Sound familiar?

## Notes

1. [Beyond Stalemate](#), [Context of Iraq Genocide](#), [Genocide Scholarship](#), [Korean Genocide before the US Occupation: Part 1](#), [Korean Genocide before the US Occupation: Part 2](#), and [Korean Genocide before the US Occupation: Part 3](#), and [Korean Genocide before the US Occupation: Part 4](#). [[↵](#)]
2. In Orwell’s allegory the ‘Party’ represented the ‘educated’ sector of society – people such as the central character Winston Smith, who worked as a journalist. [[↵](#)]
3. George Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. London: Penguin, 1983. [[↵](#)]
4. Jeremy Scahill, *Blackwater: The Rise of the World’s Most Powerful Mercenary Army*, London: Serpent’s Tail, 2007, p 350. [[↵](#)]
5. Hy V. Luong, ‘Postwar Vietnamese Society: An Overview of Transformational Dynamic’ in Hy V. Luong (ed.), *Postwar Vietnam: Dynamics of a Transforming Society*. Oxford: Rowman and Littlefield, 2003, pp 12, 14. [[↵](#)]
6. Nicholas Minot; Francesco Goletti, ‘Export Liberalization and Household Welfare: The Case of Rice in Vietnam’ in *American Journal of Agricultural Economics*, Vol. 80, No. 4. (Nov., 1998), p 743. Minot and Goletti actually (to their own evident surprise) projected a slight overall drop in poverty, but they do so on the basis of changes in real income which do not take into account that rural persons are better able to acquire food without income expenditure. They also slightly underestimate the level of urbanisation – they use the 1990 figure of 20 per cent, when by the time of their writing the figure was over 23 per cent (Michael DiGregorio, A. Terry Rambo, Masayuki Yanagisawa, ‘Clean, Green, and Beautiful: Environment and Development under the Renovation Economy’ in Hy V. Luong (ed.), *Postwar Vietnam: Dynamics of a Transforming Society*. Oxford: Rowman and Littlefield, 2003, p 189.) and do not account for future urbanisation. Michel Chossudovsky suggests that the Vietnamese did, in the actual event, become considerably poorer (Michel Chossudovsky, *The Globalisation of Poverty and the New World Order*. Shanty Bay, Ontario: Global Outlook, 2003, p 168). [[↵](#)]
7. Marc Jason Gilbert, “Introduction”, in Marc Jason Gilbert (ed), *Why the North Won the Vietnam War*. New York: Palgrave, 2002, p 26. [[↵](#)]
8. David Keen, *Endless War? Hidden functions of the ‘War on Terror’*. London, Ann Arbor: Pluto Press, 2006, p 51.> [[↵](#)]
9. Record, “How America’s Military Performance...”, in Gilbert (ed.), *Why the North Won the Vietnam War*, p 117. [[↵](#)]
10. Harry G. Summers Jr., *On Strategy: A critical analysis of the Vietnam War*. New York: Presidio Press, 1995 (1982), p 103. [[↵](#)]
11. William Shawcross, *Sideshow: Kissinger, Nixon and the Destruction of Cambodia*. London: Fontana, 1980 (1979), p 220. [[↵](#)]
12. Shawcross, 317-9. [[↵](#)]
13. Shawcross, 149. [[↵](#)]
14. Sorpong Peou, *Intervention & Change in Cambodia: Towards Democracy?* Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2000, p 127. [[↵](#)]
15. Shawcross, 163. [[↵](#)]

16. Ben Kiernan, *The Pol Pot Regime: Race, Power, and Genocide in Cambodia under the Khmer Rouge*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1996, p 24. [[↵](#)]
17. Kiernan, 19. [[↵](#)]
18. Shawcross, 186. [[↵](#)]
19. Shawcross, 254-5. [[↵](#)]
20. Shawcross, 169. [[↵](#)]
21. Nigel Cawthorne, *Vietnam: A War Lost and Won*. London: Arcturus Publishing, 2003, p 213; Westmoreland, 'A Look Back'. [[↵](#)]
22. Deborah Nelson, *The War Behind Me: Vietnam Veterans Confront the Truth about U.S. War Crimes*, New York: Basic Books, 2008, p 127. [[↵](#)]
23. Chris Hedges and Laila Al-Arian, *Collateral Damage: America's War against Iraqi Civilians*, New York: Nation Books, 2008, p xiii. [[↵](#)]

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