The Washington Connection and Third World Fascism

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The Political Economy of Human Rights
Volume I

Noam Chomsky
and Edward S. Herman

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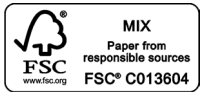

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1

Introduction: Summary of Major Findings and Conclusions

1.1 Freedom, Aggression and Human Rights

The common view that internal freedom makes for humane and moral international behavior is supported neither by historical evidence nor by reason.[1] The United States itself has a long history of imposing oppressive and terrorist regimes in regions of the world within the reach of its power, such as the Caribbean and Central American sugar and banana republics (Trujillo in the Dominican Republic and the Somozas in Nicaragua were long-lived progeny of U.S. intervention and selection). Since World War II, with the great extension of U.S. power, it has borne a heavy responsibility for the spread of a plague of neofascism, state terrorism, torture and repression throughout large parts of the underdeveloped world. The United States has globalized the "banana republic." This has occurred despite some modest ideological strain because these developments serve the needs of powerful and dominant interests, state and private, within the United States itself.

The Vietnam War experience is often cited to prove the importance of freedom and dissent in constraining state violence.

This assessment seriously misreads the facts of the case. Peace movement activism, growing from and contributing to the popular movements for equality, freedom and social change within the United States, did succeed in raising the domestic costs of the U.S. assault, thus helping to limit in some degree its scope and severity and contributing to the eventual decision that the game was not worth the candle. It did so, of course, mainly by employing modalities that were outside the framework of existing institutions: demonstrations, nonviolent resistance, grass roots organizing, and wide-ranging educational efforts needed to counter the deep commitment of existing institutions to the protection and furthering of the interests of state and private power. The established "free" institutions supported the war, for the most part enthusiastically and uncritically, occasionally with minor and qualified reservations. The principled opposition, based on grounds other than cost-ineffectiveness, functioned outside the major institutional structures. It is, of course, an important fact that a movement was allowed to organize with relatively modest state harassment and violence, and that this movement could make some impact on the course of events. Such developments and the costs of overcoming these and other forms of resistance that impede the actions of national elites are also problems in totalitarian societies, though the toll imposed on protestors in Iran, Argentina, and the Soviet Union is often far more severe. The value of being allowed to protest relatively unmolested is certainly real, but it should not lead to a disregard of the fact that established institutions, with overwhelmingly dominant power, tend to line up in goose-step fashion in support of any state foreign venture, no matter how immoral (until the cost becomes too high).

The peace movement frightened Western elites. The response of the U.S. (indeed Free World) leadership to the politicization of large parts of the population during the 1960s

provides a revealing indication of their concept of "democracy" and of the role of the public in the "democratic process." In 1975, the Trilateral Commission, representing the more liberal elements of ruling groups in the industrial democracies, published a study entitled *The Crisis of Democracy* which interprets public participation in decision-making as a *threat* to democracy, one that must be contained if elite domination is to persist unhindered by popular demands. The population must be reduced to apathy and conformism if "democracy," as interpreted by this liberal contingent, is to be kept workable and allowed to survive.[2]

The most crucial fact relating freedom to the Vietnam War experience is that, despite its free institutions, for over two decades (1949-1975) the United States attempted to subjugate Vietnam by force and subversion, in the process violating the UN Charter, the Geneva Accords of 1954, the Nuremberg Code, the Hague Convention, the Geneva Protocol of 1925, and finally the Paris agreements of 1973.[3] For almost a decade the peasants of Indochina served as experimental animals for an evolving military technology—cluster bombs, rockets designed to enter caves where people hid to escape saturation bombing, a fiendish array of antipersonnel weapons; new versions of the long-outlawed "dum-dum" bullet were among the more modest weapons employed.[4] The population was driven into urban slums by bombing, artillery, and ground attacks that often degenerated into mass murder, in an expanding effort to destroy the social structures in which resistance was rooted. Defenseless peasant societies in Laos and Cambodia were savagely bombed in "secret"—the "secrecy" resulting from the refusal of the mass media to make public facts for which they had ample evidence. Freedom was consistent not only with this expanding savagery, but also with interventions explicitly designed to preserve non-freedom from the threat of freedom (e.g., the invasion of the Dominican Republic in 1965)[5] and to displace democratic with totalitarian regimes (e.g., the open subversion of

Guatemala in 1954; the slightly more *sub rosa* subversion of democracy in Brazil in 1964 and Chile in 1973).[6] Free institutions were able to accept, indeed quietly approve of huge massacres in the name of "freedom," as in Indonesia in 1965-1966—interpreted by U.S. liberals as evidence for the far-sightedness of U.S. intervention in Vietnam. Massive atrocities committed by U.S. client regimes against their own populations or against foreign populations they hope to subdue (e.g., the Indonesian massacres in East Timor) have also proven compatible with freedom and are regularly disguised or ignored by the Free Press.

Whatever the attitudes of the U.S. leadership toward freedom at home—and as noted, this is highly ambiguous—systematic policies towards Third World countries, described in detail below, make it evident that the alleged commitment to democracy and human rights is mere rhetoric, directly contrary to actual policy. The operative principle has been and remains *economic* freedom—meaning freedom for U.S. business to invest, sell, and repatriate profits and its two basic requisites, a favorable investment climate and a specific form of stability.[7] Since these primary values are disturbed by unruly students, democratic processes, peasant organizations, a free press, and free labor unions, "economic freedom" has often required political servitude. Respect for the rights of the individual, also alleged to be one of the cardinal values of the West, has had little place in the operating procedures applied to the Third World. Since a favorable investment climate and stability quite often require repression, the United States has supplied the tools and training for interrogation and torture and is thoroughly implicated in the vast expansion of torture during the past decade.[8] When Dan Mitrione came to Uruguay in a police advisory function, the police were torturing with an obsolete electric needle:

> Mitrione arranged for the police to get newer electric needles of varying thickness. Some needles were so thin they could be

> slipped between the teeth. Benitez [a Uruguayan police official] understood that this equipment came to Montevideo inside the U.S. embassy's diplomatic pouch.[9]

Within the United States itself, the intelligence services were "running torture camps," as were their Brazilian associates, who "set up a camp modeled after that of the *boinas verdes,* the Green Berets."[10] And there is evidence that U.S. advisors took an active part in torture, not contenting themselves with supplying training and material means.[11] During the Vietnam War, the United States employed on a massive scale improved napalm, phosphorus and fragmentation bombs, and a wide range of other "antipersonnel" weapons that had a devastating effect on civilians. The steady development of weaponry and methods of "interrogation" that inflict enormous pain on the human body and spirit, and the expansion of use of this technology in U.S.-sponsored counterinsurgency warfare and "stabilization" throughout the U.S. sphere of influence, is further evidence that the "sacredness of the individual" is hardly a primary value in the West, at least in its application beyond an elite in-group.[12]

The rationale given for the U.S. buildup of Third World police and military establishments and regular "tilt" toward repressive regimes, is the demands of "security". This is a wonderfully elastic concept with a virtuous ring that can validate open-ended arms expenditures as well as support for neo-fascism. When it is said that we must oppose Goulart in Brazil or the NLF in South Vietnam for reasons of security, this obviously does not mean that they threaten our survival; it means that their success would be disadvantageous to U.S. interests, and not primarily military interests. It is possible that "security" for a great power and its client government corresponds to heightened insecurity for large numbers within the dominated "secure" state.[13] This seems to be very much the case for the majorities in Brazil, Chile, and Paraguay, for example.

As Jan Black points out:

> The delimitation of what must be secured expands to accommodate what a nation, class, institution, or other social entity has, or thinks it should have. It follows, then, that it is often the nations, groups, or individuals whose wealth and power would appear to make them the most secure who are, in fact, most paranoid....[14]

—a comment that applies with striking accuracy to the United States after World War II. In the specific case of the United States, she notes that the concept of security is "all-encompassing, involving economic and political hegemony as well as strictly military considerations...."[15] This flows from the fact of inordinate power and is the propaganda counterpart of the imperial leader's assumption of the natural right to intervene to keep its subordinates in line. It has the great public relations advantage, also, of built-in self-justification. Who could object to the pitiful giant's efforts to protect its own security?

1.2 The Semantics of "Terror"

Among the many symbols used to frighten and manipulate the populace of the democratic states, few have been more important than "terror" and "terrorism". These terms have generally been confined to the use of violence by individuals and marginal groups. Official violence, which is far more extensive in both scale and destructiveness, is placed in a different category altogether. This usage has nothing to do with justice, causal sequence, or numbers abused. Whatever the actual sequence of cause and effect, official violence is described as responsive or provoked ("retaliation," "protective reaction," etc.), not as the active and initiating source of abuse. Similarly, the massive long-term violence inherent in the oppressive social structures that U.S. power has supported or imposed is typically disregarded. The numbers tormented and killed by official violence—wholesale as opposed to retail terror—during

recent decades have exceeded those of unofficial terrorists by a factor running into the thousands. But this is not "terror," although one terminological exception may be noted: while Argentinian "security forces" only retaliate and engage in "police action," violence carried out by unfriendly states (Cuba, Cambodia) may be designated "terroristic". The question of proper usage is settled not merely by the official or unofficial status of the perpetrators of violence but also by their political affiliations.

These terminological devices serve important functions. They help to justify the far more extensive violence of (friendly) state authorities by interpreting them as "reactive," and they implicitly sanction the suppression of information on the methods and scale of official violence by removing it from the category of "terrorism". Thus in Latin America, "left-wing terrorism is quiescent after a decade and a half of turmoil," the *New York Times* explains in a summary article on the state of terrorism;[16] it does not discuss any other kind of violence in Latin America—CIA, Argentinian and Brazilian death squads, DINA, etc. Their actions are excluded by definition, and nothing is said about the nature and causes of the "turmoil". Thus the language is well-designed for apologetics for wholesale terror.

This language is also useful in its connotation of irrational evil, which can be exterminated with no questions asked. The criminally insane have no just grievance that we need trouble to comprehend. On the current scene, for example, the *New York Times* refers to the "cold-blooded and mysterious" Carlos; the South African government, on the other hand, whose single raid on the Namibian refugee camp of Kassinga on May 4, 1978[17] wiped out a far larger total (more than 600) than the combined victims of Carlos, the Baader-Meinhof gang, and the Italian Red Brigades, is not referred to in such invidious terms. Retail terror is "the crime of our times"[18] in the current picture of reality conveyed by the media; and friendly governments are portrayed as

the reassuring protectors of the public, striving courageously to cope with "terror".[19]

The limited concept of "terror" also serves as a lightning rod to distract attention from substantive issues, and helps to create a sensibility and frame of mind that allows greater freedom of action by the state. During the Vietnam War, students were the terrorists, and the government and mass media devoted great attention (and much outrage) to their frightful depredations (one person killed, many windows broken).[20] The device was used effectively to discredit the antiwar movement as violence-prone and destructive—the motive, of course, for the infiltration of the movement by government provocateurs[21]—and it helped to divert attention from the official violence that was far more extensive even on the home front, not to speak of Vietnam, the Dominican Republic, and elsewhere. The ploy was amazingly successful in light of the facts, now documented beyond serious question, even though it did not succeed in destroying the antiwar movement. The terrorism of the Vietnamese enemy was also used effectively in mobilizing public opinion, again a tremendous testimonial to the power of brainwashing under freedom, given the real facts of the matter (discussed in chapter 5 below).

1.3 The Shift in the Balance of Terror to the Free World

Over the past 25 years at least, not only has official terror been responsible for torture and killing on a vastly greater scale than its retail counterpart, but, furthermore, the balance of terror appears to have shifted to the West and its clients, with the United States setting the pace as sponsor and supplier. The old colonial world was shattered during World War II, and the resultant nationalist-radical upsurge threatened traditional Western hegemony and the economic interests of Western business. To contain this threat the United States has aligned itself with elite and mil-

itary elements in the Third World whose function has been to contain the tides of change. This role was played by Diem and Thieu in South Vietnam and is currently served by allies such as Mobutu in Zaire, Pinochet in Chile, and Suharto in Indonesia. Under frequent U.S. sponsorship the neo-fascist National Security State and other forms of authoritarian rule have become the dominant mode of government in the Third World. Heavily armed by the West (mainly the United States) and selected for amenability to foreign domination and zealous anti-Communism, counterrevolutionary regimes have been highly torture- and bloodshed-prone.

In the Soviet sphere of influence, torture appears to have been on the decline since the death of Stalin. In its 1974 *Report on Torture,* Amnesty International (AI) notes:

> Though prison conditions and the rights of the prisoners detained on political charges in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union may still be in many cases unsatisfactory, torture as a government-sanctioned, Stalinist practice has ceased. With a few exceptions (see below) no reports on the use of torture in Eastern Europe have been reaching the outside world in the past decade.[22]

In sharp contrast, torture, which "for the last two or three hundred years has been no more than a historical curiosity has suddenly developed a life of its own and become a social cancer."[23] Since it has declined in the Soviet sphere since the death of Stalin, it would appear that this cancerous growth is largely a Free World phenomenon. The frontispiece describes its distribution within the U.S. sphere of influence. It has shown phenomenal growth in Latin America, where, as AI points out:

> There is a marked difference between traditional brutality, stemming from historical conditions, and the systematic torture which has spread to many Latin American countries within the past decade.[24]

Amnesty International also notes that in some of the Latin American countries "the institutional violence and high incidence of

political assassinations has tended to overshadow the problem of torture."[25] The numbers involved in these official (wholesale) murders have been large: for example, AI estimates 15,000 death squad victims in the small country of Guatemala between 1970 and 1975, a thousand in Argentina in 1975 before the military coup and the unleashing of a true reign of terror.[26]

The AI Annual Report for 1975-1976 also notes that "more than 80%" of the urgent appeals and actions for victims of human torture have been coming from Latin America.[27] One reason for the urgency of these appeals is the nature of this expanding empire of violence, which bears comparison with some of the worst excrescences of European fascism. Hideous torture has become standard practice in the U.S. client fascist states. In the new Chile, to savor the results of the narrow escape of that country from Communist tyranny:

> Many people were tortured to death [after the military coup of 1973] by means of endless whipping as well as beating with fists, feet and rifle butts. Prisoners were beaten on all parts of the body, including the head and sexual organs. The bodies of prisoners were found in the Rio Mapocho, sometimes disfigured beyond recognition. Two well-known cases in Santiago are those of Litre Quiroga, the ex-director of prisons under the Allende government, and Victor Jara, Chile's most popular folksinger. Both were detained in the Estadio Chile and died as a result of the torture received there. According to a recurrent report, the body of Victor Jara was found outside the Estadio Chile, his hands broken and his body badly mutilated. Litre Quiroga had been kicked and beaten in front of other prisoners for approximately 40 hours before he was removed to a special interrogation room where he met his death under unknown circumstances.[28]

Such horrendous details could be repeated for many thousands of human beings in Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Uruguay, Paraguay, Guatemala, Nicaragua, Indonesia, U.S.-occupied South Vietnam up to 1975, Iran, and in quite a few other U.S. client states. They