

**NOAM  
CHOMSKY**

**AND ANDRE VLTCHEK**

**ON WESTERN  
TERRORISM**

**PLUTO PRESS**





# On Western Terrorism

From Hiroshima to Drone Warfare

NEW EDITION

Noam Chomsky and Andre Vltchek



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# Contents

<i>Preface to the Second Edition</i>	vi
<i>Introduction</i>	x
1. The Murderous Legacy of Colonialism	1
2. Concealing the Crimes of the West	23
3. Propaganda and the Media	31
4. The Soviet Bloc	58
5. India and China	79
6. Latin America	91
7. The Middle East and the Arab Spring	111
8. Hope in the Most Devastated Places on Earth	134
9. The Decline of U.S. Power	149
<i>Timeline</i>	174
<i>Index</i>	180

# 1

## The Murderous Legacy of Colonialism

ANDRE VLTCHEK

Between 50 and 55 million people have died around the world as a result of Western colonialism and neo-colonialism since the end of World War II. This relatively short period has arguably seen the greatest number of massacres in human history. Most of them were performed in the name of lofty slogans such as freedom and democracy. A handful of European nations and those governed mainly by citizens of European descent have been advancing Western interests—the interests of the people who “matter”—against those of the great majority of humanity. The slaughter of millions has been accepted and seen as inevitable and even justifiable. And the great majority of the Western public appears to be frighteningly badly informed.

Along with the 55 million or so people killed as the direct result of wars initiated by the West, pro-Western military coups and other conflicts, hundreds of millions have died indirectly, in absolute misery, and silently. Such global arrangements are rarely challenged in the West, and even in the conquered world it is often accepted without any opposition. Has the world gone mad?



NOAM CHOMSKY

Unfortunately there is fierce competition over which is the greatest crime the West has committed. When Columbus landed in the Western hemisphere, there were probably 80–100 million people with advanced civilizations: commerce, cities, etc. Not long afterward about 95 percent of this population had disappeared. In what is now the territory of the United States, there were maybe ten million or so Native Americans, but by 1900, according to the census, there were 200,000 in the country. But all of this is denied. In the leading intellectual, left-liberal journals in the Anglo-American world, it's simply denied . . . casually and with no comment.

According to the medical journal *The Lancet*, six million children die every year from lack of elementary medical procedures, which could be provided at virtually no cost. The number is all too familiar. Malnutrition and easily treatable diseases kill 8000 children in Southern Africa alone every day: Rwanda level, but every day. And easily ended.

And we are moving toward what may in fact be the ultimate genocide—the destruction of the environment. And this is barely being addressed; in fact, the United States is going backwards on it. In the U.S. there is now euphoria about the possibility that we may have a hundred years of energy independence as a result of sophisticated techniques of extraction of fossil fuels, that this will preserve American hegemony for another century, that we will become the Saudi Arabia of the world, and so on. President Obama spoke about it enthusiastically in his 2012 State of the Union address. You can read about it in excited articles in the national press, business press and so on. There is some comment on local environmental effects, such as that it destroys the water supplies, wipes out the ecology, etc. But virtually nothing about

the question of what the world is going to look like in a hundred years if we proceed with this. That is not discussed. Now these are very fundamental problems. They are kind of intrinsic in the market-oriented societies, where you do not consider what we call externalities. Things that don't enter into any particular transaction, those that affect others: that is not considered.

ANDRE VLTCHek

I am witnessing the disappearance of several countries in Oceania (the South Pacific). I was based in Samoa for several years and travelled extensively across the region. Several countries, like Tuvalu and Kiribati, but also the Marshall Islands, are already thinking about massive evacuation of their citizens. There are several islands and atolls that are already becoming uninhabitable in Oceania, but also in Maldives and elsewhere. Kiribati may be the first one to disappear as a country. The mass



2 Ebeye Island, Marshall Islands, showing pollution from the nearby U.S. military base at Kwajalein. (Copyright Andre Vltchek)

media says that those countries are sinking. They are actually not sinking at all, but there are tidal waves that go over the atolls and destroy all the vegetation, contaminating water supplies, if there are any. This makes these islands uninhabitable or too dependent on the imports of everything, from water to food.

Surprisingly, when I worked in Tuvalu, there was no foreign press present. There was only one Japanese film crew shooting something irrelevant, some soap opera, on the Funafuti Atoll. It made me think: this was one of the worst affected countries, one that could soon disappear from the face of the earth as sea levels rise, and there was no press coverage whatsoever!

NOAM CHOMSKY

George Orwell had a term for it: “unpeople.” The world is divided into people like us, and unpeople—everyone else who do not matter. Orwell was talking about a future totalitarian society, but it applies quite well to us. There is a fine young British diplomatic historian, Mark Curtis, who uses the term unpeople in his study of the post-World War II depredations of the British Empire. We are not concerned with what happens to them.

There are parallels with the treatment of indigenous populations of the so-called Anglosphere, the offshoots of England: the United States, Canada, Australia. These are unusual imperial societies in that they didn’t just rule the natives, they eliminated them. They took over their land and settlements and virtually exterminated them in most cases. We don’t think about them. We don’t ask what happened to them in the past. We deny it in fact.

ANDRE VLTCHEK

Historically this was the case in almost all European colonies, in all parts of the world controlled by European colonial empires.

The first concentration camps were built not by Nazi Germany, but by the British Empire—in Kenya and South Africa. And of course the Holocaust that was performed by Germans on European Jews and Roma was not the first German holocaust; they were involved in terrible massacres in the southern cone of South America and in fact all over the world. Germany had already exterminated the majority of the Herero tribe in Namibia. This is all hardly discussed in Germany and in the rest of Europe. There was no reason for the onslaught, and no logic. The only explanation was absolute spite Germans had for local populations.

But listen to those laments of so many Europeans after World War II—about how that rational and philosophical and essentially peaceful Germany suddenly ran amok, just because it was economically humiliated after World War I! How nobody would expect such an outburst of violence from such nice people. Well, one would not, if one did not consider the Herero people, or Samoans, or Mapuche Indians as human beings, and if one could forget about German colonial history in the rest of Africa.

NOAM CHOMSKY

Even in the case of the Holocaust, the Roma were treated pretty much the way the Jews were. But that's not really mentioned either. Nor is Roma persecution today generally acknowledged. For example, in 2010 the French government decided to expel Roma residents in France to misery and terror in Romania. Can you imagine the French expelling Jewish survivors of the Holocaust to some place where they were still being tortured and terrorised? The country would blow up in fury. This passed without comment!

ANDRE VLTČEK

Walls were built to separate the Roma in the modern Czech Republic. They were actually building ghettos in the middle of the cities relatively recently, less than a couple of decades ago. This was a very chilling reminder of the 1930s and 40s, when the Czechs collaborated with the Nazis and helped to round-up Roma people. Of course, by the 1990s the Czechs had become staunch allies of the West, and therefore they were an untouchable nation in the eyes of Western mass media. The treatment of Roma in the Czech Republic is much more brutal than anything committed by Mugabe against Zimbabwean white farmers.

But coming back to European colonialism, it feels like colonialism didn't disappear with the end of World War II, or in the 1950s or 60s. The more I travel through the so-called marginal parts of the world, the more it appears that colonialism has solidified itself through much better propaganda and better knowledge of how to deal with the local population. It is actually very scary because in the past there was always an enemy, some tangible villain. It was easy to define the enemy in a colonial army or in the face of some colonial administration. Colonialism continues but it appears that it is much more difficult for local people to point the finger and say exactly what is happening and who their enemies are.

NOAM CHOMSKY

Some of the worst atrocities in the world have been committed over the last few years in the Eastern Congo. Three to five million people may have been killed. And who do you point the finger at? They have been killed by militias, but behind the militias are multinational corporations and governments, and they are not visible.

## THE MURDEROUS LEGACY OF COLONIALISM

ANDRE VLTCHER

Right now I am finishing a long documentary film called *Rwanda Gambit*. It has taken me more than three years to complete it. The numbers we are talking about now are even higher than those you mentioned: six to ten million people killed in DR Congo, which is approximately as many as those killed at the beginning of the twentieth century by the Belgian King Leopold II. And you are right: although it is mostly Rwanda, Uganda, and their proxies who are murdering millions of innocent people, behind this are always Western geopolitical and economic interests.

NOAM CHOMSKY

You don't see the multinational corporations that are using the militias to slaughter people so that they can get access to the coltan that Westerners are using in their cell phones and



3 Street scene in Goma, Democratic Republic of Congo.  
(Copyright Andre Vltchek)

other valuable minerals. That's indirect. And there are a lot of atrocities and crimes that you are describing which have that property... but some are quite direct... so take Vietnam, which is the worst crime since World War II. 2011 marked the 50th anniversary of John F. Kennedy's launching of the war. Usually, 50th anniversaries are well commemorated, certainly if they involve monstrosities. But in this case, not a word. In November 1961, Kennedy sent the U.S. Air Force to begin bombing South Vietnam. He authorized napalm, authorized chemical warfare to destroy crops and ground cover, initiated programs which ultimately drove millions of people into so-called "strategic hamlets," in effect concentration camps, or urban slums.

The effects of the chemical warfare are still being felt. If we go to Saigon hospitals—you may have seen them—you can still see those deformed fetuses; the children that were born with all kinds of hideous deformities and abnormalities as a result of all the chemical poisons that literally drenched South Vietnam. But now, several generations down the road, there is no concern.

This also went on in Laos and Cambodia. There is much talk about how terrible Pol Pot's regime in Cambodia was, but there is virtually nothing about what led up to it. In the early 1970s the United States Air Force bombed rural Cambodia to the level of the combined Allied air operations in the Pacific during World War II. They were following Henry Kissinger's instructions regarding a massive bombing campaign against Cambodia: "Anything that flies against anything that moves." I mean that's a call for genocide of the kind that you imply earlier. It will be hard to find anything like it in the archival record. Well, it was mentioned in one sentence in the *New York Times* and then it stopped. The scale of the bombing has never been reported except in scholarly journals, or on the margins. But

this is the killing of millions of people, destroying four countries that never recovered. People there know it but don't know what to do about it.

ANDRE VLTCHER

I lived in Hanoi in Vietnam for several years and I covered the consequences of the Plain of Jars carpet-bombing in Laos by the U.S. Air Force and its allies, which was called the Secret War, but I also wrote plenty about Cambodia. And the conclusions that I arrived at were absolutely shocking: like in the case of so many other places destabilized and ravished by the West, there has been a determined disinformation campaign conducted by Western mass-media outlets. Cambodia during the reign of Pol Pot has been depicted as one of the most dreadful examples of heinous crimes committed by Communism. The true story, the genocide committed against the people of Southeast Asia by the West, had been muted or totally omitted.

The U.S. campaign, using B52s, was to bomb the Laotian and Cambodian countryside to prevent Laos and Cambodia from joining Vietnam in its liberation struggle. Millions were mercilessly murdered. Even today cows are getting their heads blown off, because they chew stones and periodically also bite into the so-called "bombies" which are still all over the place. You can of course also imagine what is still happening to people, to women and children.

Five or six years ago, I worked closely with the Mines Advisory Group (MAG), a large British-based de-mining agency, and they were complaining that several companies who were producing and supplying deadly devices for the war (one of them is now a famous U.S.-based producer of domestic consumer goods) in Indochina are still refusing to share technical data on these



weapons, which makes MAG's work much more difficult, because they need to know how to disassemble the mechanism and they need to know how long these devices are going to stay active. This spite, this institutionalized lack of compassion, translates into absolute lack of cooperation that continues to kill hundreds, even thousands, of local people, mainly women and children.

In Cambodia, it all began with the U.S. implanting an illegitimate and corrupt government in the capital, Phnom Penh. When we talk about the atrocities of Khmer Rouge, of so-called Communism, I find it quite questionable, almost grotesque. Uneducated and cut-off from the rest of the world, most of Cambodia had no clue about Communist ideology after Pol Pot returned from France, where he managed to get radicalized at local cafés. What I was told on the ground in Cambodia was that, during the Khmer Rouge era, the atrocities were largely down to the people of the countryside settling scores with the urban elites of Phnom Penh.

Phnom Penh was actually fully collaborating with the U.S. during the bombing campaigns and the people in the countryside developed a profound hatred for the city dwellers, whom they saw as collaborators and often at the root of their suffering. It all had hardly anything to do with the Communist ideology. And there is no doubt that more people were murdered during the U.S. bombing campaigns of the Cambodian countryside than by Khmer Rouge actions.

Then, when it all was over and Vietnam liberated Cambodia and kicked out the Khmer Rouge from power, the U.S. ambassador to the UN was "demanding return of the legitimate government," meaning the Khmer Rouge. The U.S. was fighting