The New York Times indicts Trump for questioning the CIA's moral superiority

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The media firestorm over Donald Trump's hinting in a recent Fox News interview at the crimes carried out by the US government and its military and intelligence "killers" found fresh expression Tuesday in a *New York Times* editorial titled "Blaming America First."

Responding to Fox commentator Bill O'Reilly's indictment of Russian President Vladimir Putin as a "killer," Trump, with the cynicism of an old gangster who knows how America works, stated, "We got a lot of killers. What, you think our country's so innocent?"

Trump's one undoubtedly true statement provoked media outrage, especially in the flagship of CIA-directed journalism, the *New York Times*. Its editorial indicts Trump for the crime of "moral equivalency"—that is, implying that the actions of the United States in pursuit of its interests can be compared to the crimes of its adversaries. This accusation was a staple of Cold War propaganda, used to justify US imperialism's crimes and intimidate those who exposed them on the grounds of America's supposed moral superiority to the Soviet Union.

The editorial denounces Putin's "brutality," including "bombing civilians in Syria," while rejecting any comparison of his actions with some "terrible mistakes" made by Washington. The editorial mentions the invasion of Iraq (but not the death of over a million Iraqis) and "torturing terrorism suspects" (but not the establishment of secret torture centers all over the world). Whatever harm done by US military operations, it adds, has been the result of "unintended consequences."

The *Times* insists that "no American president has done what Mr. Putin has done in silencing nearly all independent media, crushing dissent, snuffing out Russia's once-incipient democracy, invading Ukraine, interfering in the American election—apparently on Mr. Trump's behalf—and trying to destabilize Europe."

It continues: "At least in recent decades, American presidents who took military action have been driven by the desire to promote freedom and democracy, sometimes with extraordinary results, as when Germany and Japan evolved after World War II from vanquished enemies into trusted, prosperous allies."

US imperialism killed millions in Korea, Vietnam, Iraq and elsewhere to "promote freedom and democracy?" Who does the *Times* think it's kidding?

There is no doubt that Putin has blood on his hands. But when it comes to mass murder, the overthrow of governments and subversion of elections, he is not in the same league as US imperialism. This is not a matter of personality, but of Russia's limited resources and the far smaller scope of its geopolitical reach.

Moreover, Putin is the direct and inevitable product of the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the restoration of capitalism in Russia, which was celebrated by Washington as the greatest triumph of its global crusade for "democracy." He heads the kind of regime that is required to defend the interests of the criminal oligarchs who enriched themselves through the theft of state property against the masses of impoverished Russian workers. To the extent that this regime enjoys a popular base and is able to suppress opposition from below, it is largely thanks to the concern and fear generated by the aggressive anti-Russian foreign policy of the United States.

The *Times*' attitude toward Putin has nothing to do with crimes he may or may not have committed. Rather, it follows a well-worn Washington playbook: demonization of a country's head of state always precedes a war of aggression. The same modus operandi was employed against Manuel Noriega in Panama, Serbia's Slobodan Milosevic, Saddam Hussein in Iraq, Libya's Muammar Gaddafi and Bashar al-Assad in Syria.

To advance its brief against "moral equivalency," the *Times* editorial board has to engage in a form of self-induced amnesia. One has only to do a cursory search of the *Times*' own archives, using terms such as "CIA," "assassination," "torture," "death squads," etc., to turn up thousands of news reports of crimes carried out by US imperialism, from the fomenting of bloody coups, to the assassination of foreign heads of state, to the training of torturers and the organization of death squads. To cite only a few examples:

Vietnam assassination program

"Dark Side Up," July 1, 1973

The *Times* presented a profile of new CIA director William Colby "who supervised the Phoenix program, designed to 'neutralize' the Vietcong, which its critics have charged was a program of systematic assassination, murder and torture—an accusation that Colby has vigorously denied, under oath. According to figures Colby provided to a House subcommittee in 1971, however, the Phoenix program killed 20,587 persons between 1968 and May, 1971."

Training torturers

"Testifying to Torture," June 5, 1988

The *Times* interviewed "an interrogator in a Honduran Army death squad, which he said had tortured and then murdered approximately 120 Hondurans and other Latin Americans. He had been trained in Texas by the Central Intelligence Agency, he told me. As a sergeant in the Honduran Army, he said, he had kidnapped and interrogated people, including an American priest, who were then murdered. 'Horrible things' had been done to people in dark basements and hidden graveyards."

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Operation Phoenix—Vietnam

"Body Count Was Their Most Important Product," October 21, 1990

"So out into the countryside went teams of accountants and case officers, Vietnamese assassins and their American counterparts, with bags and bags of money, the whole effort tethered to a computer in the United States Embassy in Saigon. And from the embassy came reports again and again that the program was working. Body count became our most important product. The bodies turned out to be just about anyone who got in the way..."

Assassinations in Guatemala

"The CIA: A Pattern of Deceit," April 1, 1995

"There is a pathology of secrecy and deceit at the Central Intelligence Agency that seems to defeat all remedial efforts, starting with the Congressional inquiries 20 years ago into intelligence abuses. The latest sign of the agency's chilling indifference to democratic principles is the still unfolding story of two killings [Michael DeVine, an American living in Guatemala, and Efrain Bamaca Velasquez, a rebel leader married to an American] in Guatemala and the CIA's role in impeding the investigations and subverting a suspension of aid to Guatemala."

Iranian, Guatemalan coups

"The CIA's Foreign Policy," May 31, 1997

"This week the Central Intelligence Agency revealed that it had destroyed almost all its files related to its secret mission in 1953 to overthrow the Government of Iran. Documents about other major covert operations may also have been destroyed long ago.

"Nonetheless, some secret files survived, and this week the CIA released documents showing how it had orchestrated the 1954 overthrow of Guatemala's democratically elected President, Jacobo Arbenz Guzman. The agency also made plans, which it says were never carried out, to assassinate 58 Government officials, including Mr. Arbenz."

Chilean coup

"All the President Had to Do Was Ask; The CIA Took Aim at Allende," September 13, 1998

The *Times* cited documents on the run-up to the 1973 coup in Chile, which led to the death, disappearance and torture of tens of thousands of workers, leftists and students. The documents showed "how much the United States was committed to thwarting Mr. Allende even before he took office, and they illustrate a fact that was not well understood during the cold war: The CIA very rarely acted as a rogue elephant. When it plotted coups and shipped guns to murderous colonels, it did so on orders from the President."

"Exposing America's Role in Chile," October 6, 1999

"Because of two 1975 Senate reports, Justice Department investigations and CIA reviews, the world is aware that Washington ran covert operations in Chile. These operations tried to prevent the inauguration of Salvador Allende, a Socialist, as president in 1970. They then sought to undermine his administration and encouraged—at the very least—the coup that toppled him. The CIA then maintained close ties to Mr. Pinochet's repressive security forces."

"New Evidence Surfaces in '73 Killing of American in Chile," March 12, 2004

"More than 30 years after an American writer and filmmaker was kidnapped by Chilean security forces and killed here… evidence has been unearthed pointing to the involvement of high-ranking military and intelligence officials in the death of Charles Horman, who disappeared shortly after the American-instigated military coup that toppled President Salvador Allende on Sept. 11, 1973… In 1976, for instance, three State Department officials wrote a cable to the assistant secretary of state for inter-American affairs accepting a degree of responsibility for Mr. Horman's execution. 'US intelligence may have played an unfortunate part in Horman's death,' the report acknowledges. 'At best, it was limited to providing or confirming information that helped motivate his murder by the government of Chile.'"

The CIA and the Nazis

"CIA Knew Where Eichmann Was Hiding, Documents Show," June 7, 2006

"The Central Intelligence Agency took no action after learning the pseudonym and whereabouts of the fugitive Holocaust administrator Adolf Eichmann in 1958, according to CIA documents released Tuesday that shed new light on the spy agency's use of former Nazis as informants after World War II… The Eichmann papers are among 27,000 newly declassified pages released by the CIA to the National Archives under Congressional pressure to make public files about former officials of Hitler's regime later used as American agents.

"In Cold War, US Spy Agencies Used 1,000 Nazis," October 26, 2014

"In the decades after World War II, the CIA and other United States agencies employed at least a thousand Nazis as Cold War spies and informants and, as recently as the 1990s, concealed the government's ties to some still living in America, newly disclosed records and interviews show... The agency hired one former SS officer as a spy in the 1950s, for instance, even after concluding he was probably guilty of "minor war crimes."

Assassinating Patrice Lumumba

Obituary of former CIA agent Lawrence Devlin, December 11, 2008

The *Times* cited Devlin's meeting in 1960 with the CIA's "top poison expert, who passed on orders he said had been approved by President Dwight D. Eisenhower to kill Lumumba [the Congolese independence leader], who the United States feared might ally the mineral-rich Congo with the Soviet Union."

All of the above is well known history, not a matter of opinion. For the *Times* to pretend otherwise is preposterous.

These crimes and so many more, from the savage repression and wholesale killings following CIA coups in Iran in 1953 and Indonesia in 1965, to the bringing to power of fascist-military regimes throughout South America, to the death squad massacres of hundreds of thousands in Guatemala and El Salvador and the dirty CIA "contra" war in Nicaragua, are now justified by the *Times* as part of a selfless "moral" struggle.

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The *Times*, like the rest of the media, has been so corrupted over the past 30 years that it no longer even attempts to expose the crimes carried out by the CIA. An agency that was long viewed as a global criminal conspiracy, dubbed Murder Inc., is now hailed as a foundation of liberty and a counter-weight to the right-wing policies of Donald Trump.

Today, under the guiding hand of state-connected figures such as the newspaper's editorial page editor, James Bennet, whose father was head of the US Agency for International Development, a long-time CIA front, and whose brother is US senator from Colorado, the *Times* functions as a direct mouthpiece for Washington's massive military and intelligence apparatus.

The paper is outraged over Trump's remarks on Fox because they cut across the propaganda campaign to demonize Putin and Russia. This campaign is, in turn, driven not by Washington's supposed crusade "to promote freedom and democracy," but by the calculations of that faction of the ruling establishment that sees Russia as the foremost obstacle to US imperialism's drive to assert global hegemony.

Trump's overtures to Russia have complicated that strategy. For the present, the president seemingly prefers to delay a settling of accounts with Russia, advancing instead a policy of belligerent militarism directed at Iran and China. Trump calculates in the manner of an experienced Mafia don that it makes more sense to drive a wedge between China and Iran on the one side, and Russia on the other. The *Times* and those sections of the CIA for which it speaks oppose that strategy. It is the bitter internecine struggle within the ruling establishment over the prioritizing of targets and the best path to world war that underlies the *Times*' relentless propaganda barrage against Trump's nods in Russia's direction and its outrage over suggestions of "moral equivalency" between old KGB hand Putin and America's own CIA killers.

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