

America, 4% of the World Population: A “World View” from the Other 96%

Book Review: "Exposing Lies of Empire" by Andre Vltchek

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Exposing Lies of Empire by Andre Vltchek is an 800-page tour of the world between 2012 and 2015 without a Western tour guide. It ought to make you spitting-mad furious, then grateful for the enlightenment, and then ready to get to work.

The 4% of us humans who have grown up in the United States are taught that our government means well and does good. As we begin to grasp that this isn't always so, we're duly admonished that all governments do evil — as if we were being simplistic and self-centered to blame Washington for too much.

But take this tour of the world with out nationless friend Andre. We see U.S. medical troops operating on Haitian civilians in the most unsafe conditions, while proper facilities nearby sit unused; these troops are practicing for battlefield surgeries. We see millions slaughtered in the Democratic Republic of the Congo at U.S. instigation and with U.S. support. We see U.S. militarism inflicting immeasurable suffering in Somalia. We witness the U.S. training and arming in Turkey of troops from around the Middle East to be sent into Syria to attempt to overthrow another government.

We follow the horrors that U.S.-driven militarism, capitalism, and racism have brought to Indonesia, as well as Colombia, the Philippines, and locations around the globe. We investigate the ongoing state of disaster in Iraq and Libya, even the everlasting crisis created by the long-forgotten U.S. war on Panama, and for that matter the ongoing injustice of the century-old German genocide in today's Namibia. We meet the people of occupied Okinawa, and the people of the rest of Asia who view theirs as an evil island hosting threatening U.S. troops. We examine the crushing of popular movements in Egypt, the corruption of four “anchor nations” in four U.S.-created regions of Africa, and the imposition of violent coups in Central America and Ukraine.

Some of us occasionally hear about polls such as Gallup's at the end of 2013 which found that most nations surveyed believed the United States to be the greatest threat to peace on earth. But many Americans must believe such results are mistakes, and must not find any cause for concern when Gallup chooses never again to ask that question.

Do other nations do evil as well, including nations not put up to it by the United States? Of course, but the blaming of other governments for their human rights abuses is both odd for Americans and beside the point. It's odd because the United States imprisons more people than any other country. Its police kill more people. It tortures. It executes. And it funds, arms, trains, and legally supports numerous dictators who engage in every outrage yet

conceived. It's beside the point because the greatest evil underway is U.S. imperialism, as imposed by the U.S. military, State Department, banks, corporations, bribes, spies, propaganda, movies, and television shows. It kills directly and indirectly, it impoverishes, disempowers, humiliates, and impedes inconceivable potential for progress.

We can stand with the resisters and victims of injustice in any nation. But that shouldn't stop us from appreciating the handful of nations that resist U.S. domination. And it certainly can't justify accepting as enemies those nations that are resisting the greatest evil on earth. Nor should it excuse inaction.

We live in a society of selfish inaction, of self-indulgence, of self-centeredness, of criminally negligent cruelty toward the majority of people on earth. Many Americans don't think so, of course, don't mean so, don't wish it so. Wars are imagined as philanthropy for their victims. But their victims don't see it that way. Only a small number of collaborators adapt that perspective.

When I give speeches in person or through media in the U.S., I'm not asked "How can we support resisters in South Korea?" or for that matter North Korea, nearly so often as I'm asked "How did you become an activist?" as if it were a bizarre decision, or "How do you keep optimistic?" as if I have time for giving a fuck whether I ought to be optimistic or not, as if there weren't a crisis calling for all hands on deck.

What has been done to our minds?

"If in thousands of brainless Hollywood films," Vltchek writes, "millions of people continuously vanish, victims of mutants, robots, terrorists, giant insects or microorganisms invading the earth, then the public becomes hardened, and 'well prepared for the worst.' Compared to those horrors of pseudo-reality, the real agony of millions of men, women, and children in places like Iraq, Libya, or Afghanistan appear to be quite insignificant."

". . . No other system has spilled more blood; no other system plundered more resources and enslaved more people, than the one we are told to describe in lofty and benign terms like 'Western parliamentary democracy.'"

It's a system that has built in acceptance of whatever it produces. "'Politics is boring' is one of the main messages we are encouraged to spread around. Because people are not expected to mingle in 'what is not their business'. Ruling the world is reserved for corporations and a few gangsters with excellent PR. The voters are there only to give legitimacy to the entire charade."

At one point, Vltchek remarks that at best Westerners demand higher wages for themselves. Are we to understand the labor movement and liberalism to be selfish? Wouldn't a better distribution of wealth mean a better distribution of power and consequently perhaps a less evil foreign policy? Is the politics of Bernie Sanders who wants the wealthy taxed but hardly acknowledges the existence of the Pentagon just incomplete, or is it viciously self-indulgent? And when Americans do notice wars and make noise about how many schools or roads they could have had in their town instead of a particular war, is that enlightened or blinkered?

Well, the main thing the United States does as a society, its largest public project, is the mass killing of foreigners, the preparation for more of it, and the manufacture and sale of weapons with which they can kill each other.

Millions of lives could be spared by ending this project, and tens of millions saved by redirecting even a bit of the money into useful areas. Permitting others to proceed on their own could work further miracles. We can't continue to survive U.S. militarism economically, governmentally, morally, environmentally, or in terms of the growing risk of widespread and nuclear war. We are, most of us, well off compared with much of the world, even as the concentration of wealth in the hands of our billionaires disgusts us. And a lot of our wealth is stripped out of the natural and human resources of the other 96%. How dare we talk about solidarity and justice while confining our morality and our politics within arbitrary political and militarized borders!

Europe comes in for criticism as severe as that Vltchek bestows on the United States. And he faults U.S. Europhiles for misplacing their affections: "That famed 'social system' is built on the enslavement of colonized peoples; it is built on the unimaginable horrors visited on those hundreds of millions of men, women, and children who were slaughtered mercilessly by colonial European powers. . . . To admire it is like admiring some brutish thuggish oligarch who has amassed huge wealth by extortion and open plunder, built a gigantic palace and provided his family or his village with free medical care, education, some theaters, libraries, and parks. . . . How many Asian and African families have to starve, in order to have some early-retired, still strong, German man or woman farting deep holes into his or her sofa, immobilized in front of the television set?"

Now it is possible to admire Europe's healthcare system over the U.S. sickcare system, as the former provides more for less by cutting out the corrupt for-profit insurance companies. But the larger point remains: much of the world lacks good healthcare and could easily have it for what the West spends on inventing new ways to murder.

One element of Western culture that comes in for particular blame is Christianity: "Were Christianity to be a political party or a movement, it would be condemned, banned and declared to be the most brutal creation of humanity." Does that mean that someone who actively resists imperialism does harm in being Christian? Not in a simple way, I think. But it does mean that they are supporting a religion that has managed over the centuries to align itself with racism and militarism with incredible consistency, as Vltchek documents.

On this global voyage we encounter Western writers who claim to have nothing to write about, and artists who paint abstract frivolity for lack of any political inspiration. Vltchek points us in several directions for where inspiration ought to be found and whom we ought to be joining with and supporting. He finds resistance alive and well in Cuba, Venezuela, Bolivia, Ecuador, Uruguay, China, Russia, Eritrea, Vietnam, Zimbabwe, and Iran — as well as in the BRICS alignment of nations (Brazil, Russia, China, South Africa, and less-so: India; Vltchek hopes that Indonesia and Turkey can be kept out of BRICS). He finds a burst of possibility in the development of Russia's RT, Venezuela's TeleSur, and Iran's Press TV. He doesn't discuss how well these new media outlets cover their own nations, but that's not the point. They cover U.S. politics without bowing down before it.

"Entire modern and ecological neighborhoods are growing up all over China; entire cities are being built, with enormous parks and public exercise grounds, with childcare centers and all the modern sanitation facilities, as well as wide sidewalks and incredibly cheap and super modern public transportation. In Latin America, former slums are being converted into cultural centers." This and nothing else makes China, like Venezuela, a "threat" to U.S. "national security."

Does that begin to sound insane?

Vltchek translates a statement from U.S. ambassador to the U.N. Samantha Power, as an example of how insane U.S. propaganda is:

“Bashar al-Assad, we helped to create ISIS in order to overthrow you Now we hold you responsible for not managing to destroy our offspring Therefore we are going to bomb your country, kill thousands of your people, and possibly overthrow you in the process.”

Vltchek quite reasonably traces the creation of violent Islam to British support for Wahhabis and U.S. support for what would become Al Qaeda in the 1980s, followed up by U.S.-led wars and the arming and training of fighters to attack Syria. Of course, U.S. wars against U.S. creations are nothing new (Saddam Hussein and Muammar Gaddafi being recent examples from a long list of pet dictators fallen from grace).

One complaint with Vltchek (other than the need for a native-English editor for the book's preface) is his lack of explicit advocacy for the powerful tools of nonviolence that Erica Chenoweth's study found more likely to succeed than violence. Vltchek throws in a few vague romanticized references to “force” as what's needed: “Fascism will be fought. Humanity will be defended! By reason or by force. . . .” And: “Let us do it by reason and by force!” And: “The West is increasingly acting as a Nazi entity, and one does not do ‘peaceful protests’ in front of the Reichstag, when flames are consuming the world, when millions are being murdered!” Actually 1933 would have been an excellent time for nonviolent noncompliance with Nazism, which would have displayed its then-little-known powers even more powerfully than did the women in Rosenstrasse 10 years later.

Vltchek also urges us to be less “fussy” about picking our allies in resistance to U.S. empire. I think that's good advice when not combined with the previous references to “force,” as the combination would seem to support the idiocy of running off and joining ISIS. That's not a way to resist the war machine, which created the conditions for ISIS, armed and trained fighters knowing something like ISIS was likely to emerge, and attacked knowing what its attacks would do for ISIS recruitment. The war machine is hell-bent on World War III, thriving on a culture in absolute love with World War II.

As decent Israelis should support boycotts, divestment, and sanctions against their horrible government, decent Americans should support the same against theirs, and join the nonviolent and creative global resistance from within the brain of the beast.

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