

War Criminals at Large

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It is a common misconception that democracies do not start wars of aggression or carry out terrorist attacks. The historical facts for the period from 1945 to today show a completely different reality: time and again, democratic states in Europe and North America have participated in wars of aggression and terrorist attacks in the past 70 years.

There are so many cases that I am not able to list all of them here. As examples, I have selected three events from different decades:

- the illegal attack by the European democracies Britain and France on Egypt in 1956;
- the terrorist attack by the democracy France on *Rainbow Warrior*, a ship operated by the environmental organization Greenpeace in 1985;
- and the illegal attack by US President Donald Trump on Syria on April 7, 2017.

Because mass media, neither in the European nor the American democracies, openly address and criticize these crimes and because so far the responsible politicians have not been convicted by a court, a stubborn misconception persists in the populations of these aggressor states that democracies never start wars and also never use terror as a political instrument.

But the three examples mentioned show clearly:

Democracies, members of the NATO military alliance and with a veto power in the UN Security Council to protect themselves from condemnation, have repeatedly attacked other countries.

This is illegal. For the UN Charter of 1945, Article 2 (4), clearly states:

All Members shall refrain in their international relations from the threat or use of force..[..]

The Charter only allows the use of force if an attacked state defends itself or if the United Nations Security Council has approved the military strike. In all other cases, the UN prohibits war. Terrorist attacks are always prohibited.

The attack on Egypt in 1956

Egypt is a strategically important country because of the 160 kilometer long Suez Canal, opened in 1869. It plays a central role in supplying Europe with crude oil. The canal

connects the Mediterranean with the Red Sea and saves ships from the Persian Gulf to Europe the detour around Africa. Today, the canal is plied daily by tankers bringing oil and liquefied natural gas to the European market.



For **Gamal Abdel Nasser**, who ruled Egypt as president in the 1950s, the Suez Canal was a hated symbol of European colonialism, because the long and narrow water-way through the Egyptian desert had been built by the French and thereafter became the private *Suez Canal Company*, jointly owned by France and the colonial power Great Britain.

Nasser pursued a nationalist policy of neutrality in the Cold War and cultivated cooperation with India and Yugoslavia, whose non-alignment he admired. In order to prevent Egypt from falling into the sphere of influence of the communist Soviet Union, the Americans and British, together with the World Bank, in 1955 promised Egypt a loan for the construction of a massive dam on the Nile near Aswan. The dam would allow Nasser to regulate the water masses of the Nile during the annual floods, for agricultural purposes and production of renewable hydropower for the industrialization of Egypt.

But in July 1956, US **President Dwight Eisenhower** changed his mind. After consulting with London and the World Bank, he said that Egypt was not creditworthy because Nasser recognized the People's Republic of China and publicly had stated that he wanted to destroy Israel. Nasser became enraged and decided that the oil transit fees from the Suez Canal now needed to finance the construction of the planned Aswan High Dam. Therefore, on July 26, 1956 he nationalized the *Suez Canal Company*, to the horror of France and Britain.

British **Prime Minister Anthony Eden** was shocked, and feared that the Soviets would extend their sphere of influence. In April 1956, shortly before the nationalization of the Suez Canal, Eden had warned the Soviet leader **Nikita Khrushchev** with clear words:

"As far as oil is concerned, I have to bluntly tell you – we would fight for it ... we could not live without oil and ... we do not intend to be strangled."

After nationalization, US **Secretary of State John Foster Dulles** also insisted to the British and French foreign ministers that "a way had to be found to make Nasser disgorge" the canal (1).

Britain decided to use military resources to fight for the canal and access to Middle East oil. "The truth is that we are caught in a terrible dilemma," noted British **Prime Minister Harold Macmillan** in his diary:

"If we take strong action against Egypt, and as a result the canal is closed, the pipelines to the Levant are cut, the Persian Gulf revolts and oil production is stopped, then the U.K. and Western Europe have 'had it'."

But "if we suffer a diplomatic defeat; if Nasser gets away with it" – and the Middle East countries, in a ferment, 'nationalize oil' ... we have equally 'had it'. What then are we to do? It seems clear to me that we should take the only chance we have – to take strong action, and hope that thereby our friends in the Middle East will stand, our enemies fall, and the oil be saved – but it is a tremendous decision"(2).

As part of a conspiracy – by definition, a secret agreement between two or more people to reach a common goal – high-ranking representatives of Britain, France and Israel met in a villa in Sèvres, near Paris between October 22-24, 1956 to plan the top-secret *Operation Musketeer*.



Israeli soldiers waving at a French Air Force aircraft (CC BY-SA 3.0)

The British delegation was led by **Foreign Minister Selwyn Lloyd**, the French by **Prime Minister Guy Mollet** and the Israelis by **Prime Minister Ben Gurion**. The conspirators decided that Israel should attack Egypt and advance militarily through the sparsely populated Sinai Peninsula to the Suez Canal. France and Britain would then give Nasser an unacceptable ultimatum, creating an excuse to militarily occupy the Suez Canal. The goal of the action was to gain control of the Suez Canal and, Israel hoped, overthrow Nasser.

Of course, the planned war was illegal, because it contradicted the prohibition of violence in the UN Charter, but the conspirators did not care about international law. On October 29, 1956, the Israeli army attacked Egypt right on schedule and occupied the Sinai Peninsula. Thereby Israel made itself guilty of the crime of aggression.

The US quickly realized that this was an illegal war of aggression, and on October 30th summoned the Security Council to a special session. US **Ambassador Henry Lodge** called for the “the immediate cessation of the military action of Israel in Egypt”. The Egyptian ambassador, **Omar Loutfi**, condemned the Israeli attack on his country with very sharp words. “Israeli troops have invaded Egyptian territory in various places,” this is an “extremely dangerous act of aggression” (3).

Israeli **Ambassador Abba Eban** did not deny that the Israeli army had attacked Egypt, but stressed that it was an act of self-defense. The French UN ambassador, as agreed, stood on the Israeli side. "Egyptian imperialism" is trying to control the area from the Atlantic to the Persian Gulf and aims at "the destruction of Israel". Contrary to all legal obligations, Egypt also had seized a "water-way which is essential to the life of the nations." (4)

Then, as agreed, France and Britain presented their unacceptable ultimatum, demanding that Egyptian and Israeli forces retreat to a distance of ten miles from the water-way and allow British and French troops to control strategic positions on the Suez Canal. Waiting only twelve hours for an answer, British **Ambassador Sir Pierson Dixon** warned that "British and French forces will intervene in whatever strength may be necessary to secure compliance" (4).

Of course, this ultimatum was unacceptable to Egypt. It served the European democracies France and Britain as an excuse to attack Egypt. This was of course illegal, because they did not have a mandate from the Security Council. The conspiracy that existed before the attack between the three countries remained a secret at that time and was exposed by historians only years later.



Damaged tank and vehicles, Sinai War, 1956. (Source: Public Domain)

"We have done everything in our power to lower tension in the Middle East", British Ambassador Dixon protested, "and if tension has increased, it is because unhappily neither Israel nor its Arab neighbours have seen fit to listen to our advice and to that of our friends". (5)

Ambassador Dixon concluded his mendacious speech by saying,

"I trust that the great majority of the members of the Council will agree that the action which the French Government and Her Majesty's Government have taken is in the general interest and in the interest of security and peace." (5).

The United States introduced a resolution in the UN Security Council condemning Israel's

attack on Egypt and calling for the immediate withdrawal of Israeli forces from Egypt. But the veto powers France and Great Britain voted against the resolution on October 30, 1956, which therefore failed. The UN Security Council was completely deadlocked.

The next day, October 31, the British and French began bombing Egyptian airfields. This was an illegal war of aggression that violated the UN Charter. President Nasser, surprised and infuriated by the attacks, decided to interrupt the flow of oil to Europe.

The same day British and French bombs fell on Egypt, Egyptian commandos sank dozens of ships filled with stones and cement in the approximately 300 meter wide Suez Canal. This blocked the canal for shipping. Because Syrian engineers at the same time sabotaged the oil pipelines through Syria on Nasser's instructions, the flow of oil from the Middle East came to a standstill in November 1956, which worried Western Europe greatly.

The empty oil tankers leaving Europe for the Suez Canal cruised around cautiously in the Mediterranean, while the loaded tankers in the Red Sea waited idly. Nobody knew when Nasser would lift the blockade of the canal. And there was a heated internal struggle within NATO.

American President Eisenhower was furious with the joint British, French, and Israeli colonial adventure, for failing to have prearranged their conspiracy with Washington. He refused to help Europe by delivering oil across the Atlantic. And the Soviet Union too, under the leadership of Nikita Khrushchev, gave an ultimatum to the French and British to stop their war of aggression.

This sealed the defeat of the Europeans. On November 6, France and Great Britain ceased fire, and before Christmas all British and French soldiers had returned home. The Europeans were humiliated and lost their former dominant position in the region.

Nasser triumphed because he had managed to turn his military defeat into a political victory over two major European powers. The ships sunk by Nasser blocked the Suez Canal until spring of 1957, after which all damage was repaired and the canal was back to normal traffic. The Israeli forces withdrew from the Sinai Peninsula. Over the next few years, Nasser built the Aswan Dam with the help of thousands of Soviet engineers and architects. The prestige project was inaugurated in 1971.

The terrorist attack on a Greenpeace ship in 1985

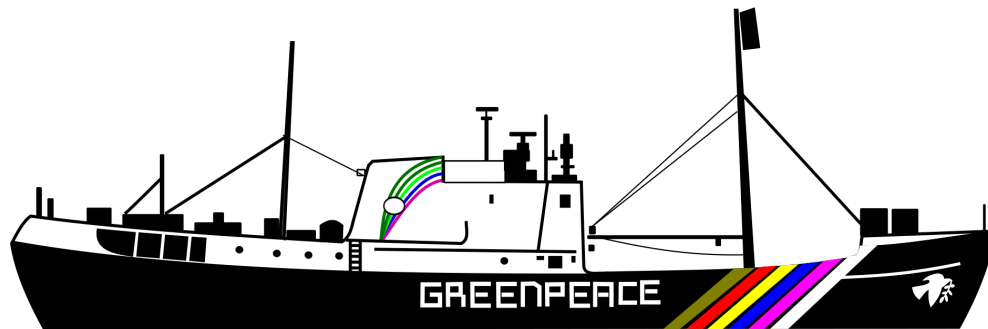
When a democratic country like France carries out a terrorist attack abroad, it does so in secret and tries to cover its tracks. In order to carry out covert operations, democracies in Europe and North America use their intelligence services and military special units, because they are poorly monitored by parliament and the media. Many such covert operations are never revealed or remain secret for years.

The American foreign intelligence service CIA is notorious worldwide because it in 1953, together with the British secret service MI6, overthrew the democratically elected government of **Prime Minister Mohammad Mossadegh** in Iran; and in 1973, also the democratically elected government of **President Salvador Allende** in Chile. Both operations were of course illegal.

The French foreign intelligence service is far less well-known than the CIA. Its name is *Direction Générale de la Sécurité Extérieure* (DGSE) and is headquartered in Paris. The tasks

of the DGSE consist of espionage and counterintelligence outside France. There are currently about 3,000 civilian employees and 1,500 military personnel working for this intelligence service. The DGSE is subordinate to the French Ministry of Defense.

France is a nuclear power and has repeatedly tested nuclear bombs in the South Pacific. This created protests from the environmentalists in the NGO Greenpeace. The most notorious of the French nuclear tests areas is the Mururoa Atoll. There, from 1966 to 1996, France detonated a total of 188 atomic bombs, of which 41 were in the atmosphere and 147 underground. It was only in 2000 that the French left Mururoa. The atoll is today a contaminated and restricted area, on which a lot of radioactive waste is stored.



Rainbow Warrior (CC BY-SA 2.0 fr)

To protest against these nuclear tests, Greenpeace sent the ship Rainbow Warrior to the South Pacific. This caused a worldwide sensation and annoyed the French socialist president François Mitterrand, because the presence of Greenpeace prevented the continuation of the nuclear tests on Mururoa. Therefore, French democracy resorted to terror and sank the ship with a bomb.

The Greenpeace ship lay at anchor in the port of Auckland, New Zealand, when it was sunk shortly before midnight on July 10, 1985 by two explosive charges. The DGSE gave the action the telling name "*Opération Satanique*", i.e. "The Satanic Operation". This was clearly a terrorist attack on Greenpeace, carried out by the democratic state of France.

"The truth is: France organized this attack ... Mitterrand gave the order," said French journalist **Edwy Plenel** from the newspaper Le Monde. Plenel's research helped uncover the previously secret operation and forced French **Defense Minister Charles Hernu** to resign (6).

In all, a dozen DGSE agents were involved in the operation. First, the yacht Ouvea brought the explosives to New Zealand. Two DGSE agents, **Dominique Prieur and Alain Marfart**, who arrived in New Zealand with false passports as the Swiss couple Turenge on their honeymoon, transported the explosives under cover of darkness in a van from the yacht through the harbor and brought it to a dinghy with a crew of three agents.

DGSE agent **Gerard Royal** steered the dinghy to the Greenpeace ship. 500 meters from the target, the DGSE combat dive team **Jean-Luc Kister** and **Jean Cammas** slipped into the water and fastened two limpet mines with timers under the waterline on the steel hull of the ship. After the two bombs exploded, the assassins immediately left the area with the dinghy.

The first bomb detonated at 23:48 and made the ship sink. Greenpeace captain and environmental activist **Peter Willcox** was aboard, sleeping in his bed. The detonation woke him up, whereupon the Greenpeace crew left the ship. "The ship sank in 45 seconds. We had trouble getting out of the ship in time," Willcox later recalled.

Greenpeace photographer **Fernando Pereira** wanted to save his camera gear and the images he had taken, but was trapped in his cabin by the second bomb that detonated at 23:51. He drowned. "My father was killed," says his daughter **Marelle Pereira**, who was then eight years old. For captain Peter Willcox it was clearly an assassination attempt (7).

Of course, the police immediately noticed the explosion in Auckland harbour. The two agents ashore, disguised as the Swiss couple Turenge, were arrested by local police. The New Zealand police asked Swiss authorities if the passports were real. Swiss authorities declared that they were counterfeits. The two DGSE agents Dominique Prieur and Alain Marfart were sentenced to 10 years in prison for manslaughter.

For historians like me, the demolition of the ship Greenpeace Warrior is a controversial field of research. Should we call the participating DGSE agents terrorists? No doubt it was a terrorist attack. For many years it was unknown who was behind the bombing and none of the bombers involved wanted to speak. The clarification of terrorist attacks by historians always takes many years.

Today we know the truth. DGSE agent Jean-Luc Kister broke his silence in 2015, exactly 30 years after the attack. He told New Zealand television:

"We didn't intend to kill anybody....I would like to take this opportunity to express my deepest regrets and apologies to Ms. Marelle Pereira and her family for the accidental death of Fernando Pereira. ... I want to apologize also to Greenpeace members who were on board of the Rainbow Warrior. And I want to apologize to the people of New Zealand for the unfair, clandestine operation conducted in an allied, friendly and peaceful country. ... this was order given at the highest level of the government ... We were soldiers and had to obey orders. Now I am retired from the active service, and I want to obey to my consciousness. . It was wrong. It was a very wrong decision"(8).

Admiral Pierre Lacoste, director of the DGSE from 1982, had to resign after the scandal on September 12, 1985. But **President François Mitterrand** survived the Rainbow Warrior affair. He had been in office since 1981 and was a strong proponent of French nuclear testing. In 1995 he was succeeded by **President Jacques Chirac**. Mitterrand never admitted that he ordered the terrorist attack.

The question remains why the DGSE agents were ready to attack unarmed Greenpeace activists and sink their boat with two bombs. "We've been told that Greenpeace has been infiltrated by the KGB. That's the explanation given to us," recalls Jean-Luc Kister. This implicitly suggested that Moscow was fighting the French nuclear tests, which was not true.

Of course, France could have blown up the Greenpeace ship out in open seas. That would have been the safest option for the DGSE, because then hardly any traces would have been found. But then the whole Greenpeace crew would have died, and they did not want that. Therefore, the ship was blown up in harbour. With the first bomb, the DGSE wanted to force people off the ship, with the second bomb to sink the ship.

For me, as a historian, the sinking of the Greenpeace ship Rainbow Warrior by French intelligence is clearly a terrorist attack. Nevertheless, the agents involved do not want to be called terrorists and avoid the word. “Wasn’t this a terrorist act?” Jean-Luc Kister was asked. To which he replied:

“For us, it was a sabotage operation and no more”. Kister deeply regrets that an innocent civilian was killed. “My wife was shocked by the fact that somebody died in this operation, because before the operation, she didn’t know where I was. And a few years later, I get divorced, like many others.” (9).

The illegal attack on Syria 2017

When **Donald Trump** entered the White House as a new president in January 2017, critical observers wondered how long it would take for the democracy USA to bomb another country. Already on April 7, 2017, it was time. As Commander in Chief, Donald Trump attacked Syria:

Two American warships in the Mediterranean fired 59 Tomahawk cruise missiles made by the US armaments company Raytheon at the Syrian military air base al-Shayrat.

The American first strike weapons hit the targets defined by the White House at a speed of 800 kilometers (500 miles) per hour and flew over the Syrian territory at a low elevation of between 15-100 meters (50-330 feet) before striking and exploding.

Those who still cling to the mistaken belief that European or American democracies do not attack sovereign states, ignore contemporary history. Trump’s predecessor, **President Barack Obama**, had begun bombing Syria in September 2014. But both Obama’s and Trump’s attacks on Syria are illegal because the US does not have a mandate from the UN Security Council.

As previously stated and explicitly illustrated in many examples in my book *Illegal Wars (alas, not available in English. TN)*, the United Nations Charter only allows the use of force if an attacked state defends itself or the United Nations Security Council approves the military strike. Neither was the case here. Syria’s **President Bashar al-Assad** had not bombed the US, so there was no case of self-defense. And the UN Security Council had given neither President Obama nor President Trump a mandate to bomb Syria (10).

“It has become embarrassing to be an American,” rued the American citizen **Paul Craig Roberts** self-critically in the spring of 2017. “Trump attacked Syria with US forces, thereby becoming a war criminal early in his regime,” were the clear words from Roberts.

Born in 1939, Roberts has personally experienced a great deal and served as the former head of policy at the Department of Treasury under Reagan.

Roberts knows that the UN Charter prohibits wars of aggression. He therefore criticizes **President Bill Clinton** for bombing Serbia in 1999 without a mandate from the UN; that **President George Bush Jr.** attacked Iraq in 2003, again without a mandate from the UN;

that President Barack Obama bombed Syria in 2014; and that now Trump, the new president, violates international law.

“Our country has had four war criminal presidents in succession,” said Roberts in a sobering conclusion (11).

Because Russia fights alongside the Syrian army against the terrorist militia IS in Syria, Trump’s attack carries the danger of a direct confrontation between the nuclear powers USA and Russia. The Shayrat base illegally attacked by Trump also housed buildings for Russian soldiers and Russian military equipment.

Shortly before the attack, Washington informed the Russian military to make sure the American Tomahawks did not kill any Russian soldiers. Since the Russian air defense systems S-300 and S-400 are stationed in Syria, the indirect confrontation between the nuclear powers still poses a fire hazard and has similarities to the Cuban missile crisis in 1962.

“It is depressing that further damage will be done to the already broken relations between Russia and the US,” warned Russian **Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov**. And President Putin’s spokesman **Dmitry Peskov** strongly condemned the “aggression against a sovereign state” and the violation of the UN Charter (12).

Dieter Deiseroth, a former judge at the Federal Administrative Court in Leipzig, Germany, also considers Trump’s attack on Syria to be very dangerous. The attack is illegal, Deiseroth points out, and “seriously violates the territorial integrity of the UN member state Syria.” According to the principle of self-defense enshrined in international law, Syria would now have the right to defend itself against the American attack together with its allies Russia and Iran.

“Syria had and still has the right to individual and collective self-defense against further US military actions of this kind, and could therefore also ask its allies – for example, Russia and Iran – for legal military support. It would then be about collective self-defense of these states against the US,” said Deiseroth.

This was “a highly explosive situation,” because a direct confrontation between the nuclear powers USA and Russia would have far-reaching consequences (13).

Two days before the attack on Syria, US **Ambassador Nikki Haley** announced the illegal military unilateral action with reference to an unsolved poison gas attack in Khan Sheikhun on April 4, 2017:

“When the United Nations consistently fails in its duty to act collectively, there are times in the life of states that we are compelled to take our own action,” she warned (14).

But none of the 193 UN member states, including the US democracy, has this right to start a war of aggression. Whoever is behind the dastardly use of poison gas: This crime does not justify a breach of international law by the United States, and must be solved. Too recent

are the war lies of President George Bush Jr., who justified his illegal war of aggression on Iraq in 2003 with reference to weapons of mass destruction.

Conclusion

It is time for citizens in the democracies of Europe and North America to openly discuss the global spiral of violence which we currently are in. Of course, not only democracies are driving this spiral of violence. But it seems important to me that we here talk openly about the Western share in this escalation.

The crimes of the NATO countries must be analyzed honestly, so that the necessary consequences can be drawn from them. The French and British illegal attack on Egypt in 1956, France's illegal terrorist attack on the Greenpeace ship in 1985 and the American illegal attack on Syria in 2017 clearly demonstrate that democracies are also driving this spiral of violence.

Too often one is reminded of the saying: "And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye?"

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Notes

- (1) Daniel Yergin. The Prize: The Epic Quest for Oil, Money & Power
- (2) Ibid
- (3) [UN Security Council](#), 30 October 1956
- (4) Ibid
- (5) Ibid
- (6) Edwy Plenel. Quoted in: French Secret Service Agents Who Led Fatal 1985 Bombing of Greenpeace Ship Breaks His Silence. [Democracy Now](#), September 8, 2015
- (7) Ibid
- (8) Ibid
- (9) Ibid
- (10) Compare: Daniele Ganser: Illegal Wars.
- (11) Paul Craig Roberts: A Government of Morons, April 15, 2017, <http://www.paulcraigroberts.org>
- (12) Tages-Anzeiger, April 7, 2017
- (13) Marcus Klöckner: interview with Dieter Deiseroth. NachDenkSeiten April 10, 2017
- (14) Die Welt April 7, 2017

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