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“American Exceptionalism” This phrase offers the perfect time for each of us to resolve never again to use the phrase but also never to use the word “American” to refer to one country of the Americas—North, Central, and South—and one country of North America. “American Exceptionalism” is a false phrase created in the cauldron of the arrogance of power.

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Obama Tells World: US Is 'Exceptional' But (Don't Worry) Not 'Imperial'

http://www.commondreams.org/headline/2013/09/24-3

In speech three times longer than scheduled, US president doubles down on "American exceptionalism" in address to UN General Assembly

- Jon Queally, staff writer
In a display of what critics were quick to interpret as the rhetorical equivalent of U.S. military imperialism and its hubris in foreign policy matters, President Obama defended the idea of "American exceptionalism" and its outsized role in international affairs during his address at the UN General Assembly in New York on Tuesday.

Dismissing the notion of "an American empire" as mere "propaganda" by some, Obama defended the dominance of U.S. military power as a necessary good in the world. He argued that despite more than a decade of war, which included the illegal invasion and subsequent occupation and destruction of Iraq, the U.S. should continue to use its military strength to defend its interests around the globe.

In his speech, Obama said:

The danger for the world is not an America that is too eager to immerse itself in the affairs of other countries, or to take on every problem in the region as its own. The danger for the world is, that the United States after a decade of war, rightly concerned about issues aback home, aware of the hostility that our engagement in the region has engendered throughout the Muslim world, may disengage creating a vacuum of leadership that no other nation is ready to fill.

I believe such disengagement would be a mistake. I believe America must remain engaged
for our own security, but I also believe the world is better for it. Some may disagree. But I believe America is exceptional. In part because we have shown a willingness through the sacrifice of blood and treasure to stand up not only for our own narrow self interest, but for the interest of all.

Obama's comments were a clear reference to a broadly conciliatory yet strongly worded op-ed by Russian President Vladimir Putin that appeared in the *New York Times* recently and which criticized the U.S. approach to international relations. Amid the ongoing efforts to find a negotiated settlement in Syria, Putin called the habit of U.S. leaders—and specifically Obama—of invoking the idea of "exceptionalism" as insulting and dangerous to the world community. Following Obama's U.N. address on Tuesday morning, commentors on Twitter were blasting Obama for his repeated promotion of the idea of "American exceptionalism" and the pointing out the pitfalls of continued U.S. arrogance. Some, citing the fact that Obama—who like other world leaders addressing the assembly was given 15 minutes to speak—delivered a 43-minute speech, said the length of the president's speech itself provided ample proof of how the U.S. thinks it should stand above all other nations.

As Yousef Munayyer, executive director of the Palestine Center in Washington, tweeted:

And independent journalist Jeremy Scahill applied his dry wit to the speech by paraphrasing the message underlying Obama's defense of U.S. military imperialism:

He then added:

And a sampling of those fed up with the conceit of U.S. claims to superiority:

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Lewis Lapham: Memento Mori: The Death of American Exceptionalism... and of Me


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American exceptionalism — A survey

The leaders of imperial powers have traditionally told themselves and their citizens that their country was exceptional and that their subjugation of a particular foreign land should be seen as a "civilizing mission", a "liberation", "God's will", and of course bringing "freedom and democracy" to the benighted and downtrodden. It is difficult to kill large numbers of people without a claim to virtue. I wonder if this sense of exceptionalism has been embedded anywhere more deeply than in the United States, where it is drilled into every cell and ganglion of American consciousness from kindergarten on.

If we measure the degree of indoctrination (I'll resist the temptation to use the word "brainwashing") of a population as the gap between what the people believe their government has done in the world and what the actual (very sordid) facts are, the American people are clearly the most indoctrinated people on the planet. The role of the American media is of course indispensable to this process — Try naming a single American daily newspaper or TV network that was unequivocally against the US attacks on Libya, Iraq, Afghanistan, Yugoslavia, Panama, Grenada, and Vietnam. Or even against any two of them. How about one? Which of the mainstream media expressed real skepticism of The War on Terror in its early years?

Overloaded with a sense of America's moral superiority, each year the State Department judges the world, issuing reports evaluating the behavior of all other nations, often accompanied by sanctions of one kind or another. There are different reports rating how each lesser nation has performed in the previous year in the areas of religious freedom, human rights, the war on drugs, trafficking in persons, and counterterrorism, as well as maintaining a list of international "terrorist" groups. The criteria used in these reports are mainly political, wherever applicable; Cuba, for example, is always listed as a supporter of terrorism whereas anti-Castro exile groups in Florida, which have committed literally hundreds of terrorist acts, are not listed as terrorist groups.

- "The causes of the malady are not entirely clear but its recurrence is one of the uniformities of history: power tends to confuse itself with virtue and a great nation is peculiarly susceptible to the idea that its power is a sign of God's favor, conferring upon it a special responsibility for other nations — to make them richer and happier and wiser, to remake them, that is, in its own shining image." — **Former US Senator William Fulbright**, *The Arrogance of Power* (1966)

- "We Americans are the peculiar, chosen people — the Israel of our time; we bear the ark of the liberties of the world. ... God has predestined, mankind expects, great things from our race; and great things we feel in our souls." — Herman Melville, *White-Jacket* (1850)
"God appointed America to save the world in any way that suits America. God appointed Israel to be the nexus of America's Middle Eastern policy and anyone who wants to mess with that idea is a) anti-Semitic, b) anti-American, c) with the enemy, and d) a terrorist." — John le Carré, *London Times*, January 15, 2003

"Neoconservatism ... traded upon the historic American myths of innocence, exceptionalism, triumphalism and Manifest Destiny. It offered a vision of what the United States should do with its unrivaled global power. In its most rhetorically-seductive messianic versions, it conflated the expansion of American power with the dream of universal democracy. In all of this, it proclaimed that the maximal use of American power was good for both America and the world." — Columbia University Professor Gary Dorrien, *The Christian Century* magazine, January 22, 2007

"To most of its citizens, America is exceptional, and it's only natural that it should take exception to certain international standards." — Michael Ignatieff, *Washington Post* columnist, *Legal Affairs*, May-June, 2002

- Lieutenant Colonel Ralph Peters, US Army War College, 1997: "Our country is a force for good without precedent".

Thomas Barnett, US Naval War College: "The US military is a force for global good that ... has no equal." — *The Guardian* (London), December 27, 2005

- John Bolton, future US ambassador to the United Nations, writing in 2000: Because of its unique status, the United States could not be "legally bound" or constrained in any way by its international treaty obligations. The U.S. needed to "be unashamed, unapologetic, uncompromising American constitutional hegemonists," so that their "senior decision makers" could be free to use force unilaterally.

Condoleezza Rice, future US Secretary of State, writing in 2000, was equally contemptuous of international law. She claimed that in the pursuit of its national security the United States no longer needed to be guided by "notions of international law and norms" or "institutions like the United Nations" because it was "on the right side of history." — *Z Magazine*, July/August 2004

"The president [George W. Bush] said he didn't want other countries dictating terms or conditions for the war on terrorism. 'At some point, we may be the only ones left. That's okay with me. We are America'." — *Washington Post*, January 31, 2002

"Reinhold Niebuhr got it right a half-century ago: What persists — and promises no end of grief — is our conviction that Providence has summoned America to tutor all of humankind on its pilgrimage to perfection." — Andrew Bacevich, professor of international relations, Boston University

In commenting on Woodrow Wilson's moral lecturing of his European colleagues at the Versailles peace table following the First World War, Winston Churchill remarked that he found it hard to believe that the European emigrants, who brought to America the virtues of the lands from which they sprang, had left behind all their vices. — *The World Crisis, Vol. V, The Aftermath*, 1929

"Behold a republic, gradually but surely becoming the supreme moral factor to the world's
progress and the accepted arbiter of the world's disputes." — William Jennings Bryan, US Secretary of State under Woodrow Wilson, *In His Image* (1922)

- *Newsweek* editor Michael Hirsch: "U.S. allies must accept that some U.S. unilateralism is inevitable, even desirable. This mainly involves accepting the reality of America's supreme might — and truthfully, appreciating how historically lucky they are to be protected by such a relatively benign power." — *Foreign Affairs*, November, 2002

- Colin Powell speaking before the Republican National Convention, August 13, 1996: The United States is "a country that exists by the grace of a divine providence."

- "The US media always has an underlying acceptance of the mythology of American exceptionalism, that the US, in everything it does, is the last best hope of humanity." — Rahul Mahajan, author of: *The New Crusade: America's War on Terrorism*, and *Full Spectrum Dominance*

- "The fundamental problem is that the Americans do not respect anybody except themselves," said Col. Mir Jan, a spokesman for the Afghan Defense Ministry. "They say, 'We are the God of the world,' and they don't consult us." — *Washington Post*, August 3, 2002

- "If we have to use force, it is because we are America! We are the indispensable nation. We stand tall. We see further into the future." — Madeleine Albright, U.S. Secretary of State, 1998

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**Reader Supported News | 26 September 13**

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**FOCUS: Tom Engelhardt | The American Exceptionalism Sweepstakes**

*Tom Engelhardt, TomDispatch*

Engelhardt writes: "Let's be Americans, which means being exceptional, which also means being honest in ways inconceivable to the rest of humanity. So here's the truth of it: the American exceptionalism sweepstakes really do matter. Here. A lot."

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**Christian Patriotism: Love for the 'Other'**

by Christian Piatt

I'm really sensitive to what I call "Christian exceptionalism." There are those within Christianity that honestly believe America is God's second Zion, the new Israel, and that we Americans are God's new chosen people. This, in turn, helps justify everything from flags in worship spaces to the Ten Commandments in the public square, and even pre-emptive acts of aggression against perceived threats around the world.

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**Obama’s Rogue State:** The US calls on other nations to abide by the treaties it violates. By George [Monbiot](http://www.monbiot.com/2013/09/09/obamas-rogue-state/), published in the *Guardian* 9th September 2013

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September 9, 2013

The US calls on other nations to abide by the treaties it violates.

By George Monbiot, published in the Guardian 9th September 2013

You could almost pity these people. For 67 years successive US governments have resisted calls to reform the UN Security Council. They’ve defended a system which grants five nations a veto over world affairs, reducing all others to impotent spectators. They have abused the powers and trust with which they have been vested. They have collaborated with the other four permanent members (the UK, Russia, China and France) in a colonial carve-up, through which these nations can pursue their own corrupt interests at the expense of peace and global justice(1).

Eighty-three times the US has exercised its veto(2). On 42 of these occasions it has done so to prevent Israel’s treatment of the Palestinians from being censured(3). On the last occasion, 130 nations supported the resolution, but Obama spiked it(4). Though veto powers have been used less often since the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991, the US has exercised them 14 times since then (in 13 cases to shield Israel), while Russia has used them 9 times(5). Increasingly the permanent members have used the threat of a veto to prevent a resolution from being discussed. They have bullied the rest of the world into silence.

Through this tyrannical dispensation – created at a time when other nations were either broken or voiceless – the great warmongers of the past 60 years remain responsible for global peace. The biggest weapons traders are tasked with global disarmament. Those who trample international law control the administration of justice(6).

But now, as the veto powers of two permanent members (Russia and China) obstruct its attempt to pour petrol onto another Middle Eastern fire, the United States suddenly decides that the system is illegitimate. “If”, Mr Obama says, “we end up using the UN Security Council not as a means of enforcing international norms and international law, but rather as a barrier ... then I think people, rightly, are going to be pretty skeptical about the system”(7). Well, yes.

Never has Obama, or his predecessors, attempted a serious reform of this system. Never have they sought to replace a corrupt global oligarchy with a democratic body. Never do they lament this injustice – until they object to the outcome. The same goes for every aspect of global governance.
Barack Obama warned last week that Syria’s use of poisoned gas “threatens to unravel the international norm against chemical weapons embraced by 189 nations”(8). Unravelling the international norm is the the US president’s job.

In 1997, the United States agreed to decommission the 31,000 tonnes of sarin, VX, mustard gas and other agents it possessed within 10 years. In 2007 it requested the maximum extension of the deadline permitted by the Chemical Weapons Convention: five years. Again it failed to keep its promise(9), and in 2012 it claimed they would be gone by 2021(10). Was the world’s richest nation unable to complete this task on time? Or just unwilling? Russia has now urged Syria to place its chemical weapons under international control(11). Perhaps it should press the US to do the same.

In 1998, the Clinton administration pushed a law through Congress that forbade international weapons inspectors from taking samples of chemicals in the US and that allowed the president to refuse unannounced inspections(12). In 2002, the Bush government forced the sacking of José Maurício Bustani, the director-general of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons(13,14). He had committed two unforgiveable crimes: seeking a rigorous inspection of US facilities and pressing Saddam Hussein to sign the Chemical Weapons Convention, to help prevent the war George Bush was itching to wage.

The US used millions of gallons of chemical weapons in Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia. It also used them during its destruction of Falluja in 2004, then lied about it(15,16). The Reagan government helped Saddam Hussein to wage war with Iran in the 1980s, while aware that he was using nerve and mustard gas(17). (The Bush administration then cited this deployment as an excuse to attack Iraq, 15 years later).

Smallpox has been eliminated from the human population, but two nations – the US and Russia – insist on keeping the pathogen in cold storage. They claim their purpose is to develop defences against possible biological weapons attack, but most experts in the field consider this to be nonsense(18). While raising concerns about each other’s possession of the disease, they have collaborated to bludgeon the other members of the World Health Organisation, which have pressed them to destroy their stocks(19).

In 2001, the New York Times reported that, without either Congressional oversight or a declaration under the Biological Weapons Convention “the Pentagon has built a germ factory that could make enough lethal microbes to wipe out entire cities.”(20, 21) It claimed the purpose was defensive, but, developed in contravention of international law, it didn’t look good. The Bush government also sought to destroy the Biological Weapons Convention as an
effective instrument, by scuttling negotiations over the verification protocol required to make it work(22).

Looming over all this is the great unmentionable: the cover the US provides for Israel’s weapons of mass destruction. It’s not just that Israel – which refuses to ratify the Chemical Weapons Convention – has used white phosphorus as a weapon in Gaza (when deployed against people, phosphorus meets the convention’s definition of “any chemical which through its chemical action on life processes can cause death, temporary incapacitation or permanent harm”(23)).

It’s also that, as the Washington Post points out, “Syria’s chemical weapons stockpile results from a never-acknowledged gentleman’s agreement in the Middle East that as long as Israel had nuclear weapons, Syria’s pursuit of chemical weapons would not attract much public acknowledgement or criticism.”(24) Israel has developed its nuclear arsenal in defiance of the non-proliferation treaty, and the US supports it in defiance of its own law, which forbids the disbursement of aid to a country with unauthorised weapons of mass destruction(25).

As for the norms of international law, let’s remind ourselves where the US stands. It remains outside the jurisdiction of the International Criminal Court, after declaring its citizens immune from prosecution. The crime of aggression it committed in Iraq – defined by the Nuremberg tribunal as “the supreme international crime”(26) – goes not just unpunished but also unmentioned by anyone in government. The same applies to most of the subsidiary war crimes US troops committed during the invasion and occupation. Guantanamo Bay raises a finger to any notions of justice between nations.

None of this is to exonerate Bashar al-Assad’s government – or its opponents – of a long series of hideous crimes, including the use of chemical weapons. Nor is it to suggest that there is an easy answer to the horrors in Syria.

But Obama’s failure to be honest about his nation’s record of destroying international norms and undermining international law, his myth-making about the role of the United States in world affairs and his one-sided interventions in the Middle East all render the crisis in Syria even harder to resolve. Until there is some candour about past crimes and current injustices, until there is an effort to address the inequalities over which the United States presides, everything the US attempts, even if it doesn’t involve guns and bombs, will stoke the cynicism and anger the president says he wants to quench.

During his first inauguration speech, Barack Obama promised to “to set aside childish
things”(27). We all knew what he meant. He hasn’t done it.

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