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**THEY'RE PUTTING GUNS ON ROBODOGS** | Caitlin Johnstone  
**MEET YOUR NEW GOD: ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE** | Joe Allen  
**BIRTH OF THE VAMPIRE MYTH** | Stanley Stepanic

Issue 228

# ColdType

WRITING WORTH READING ■ PHOTOS WORTH SEEING

November 2021

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## INSIDE THE WORLD'S LARGEST ARMS FAIR

In the heart of London, Matt Kennard & Phil Miller meet corporations and governments that are complicit in the deaths of civilians across the globe

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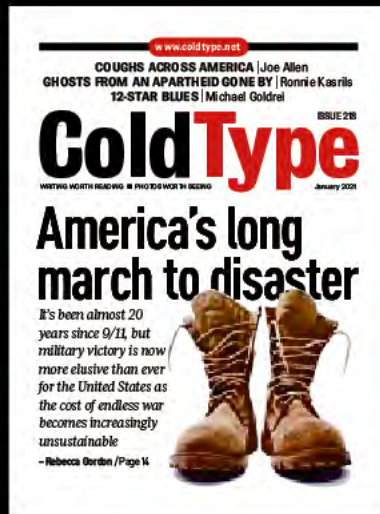
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## AT THE EDGE OF A VANISHING WORLD

William Eggleston captures the Deep South in a state of transition

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**PLUS:** CONN HALLINAN | STAN COX & NOAM CHOMSKY | SAM PIZZIGATI | DAVID CROMWELL | DELL FRANKLIN  
FRANCINE TOWNSEND | SHANIKA RAMASINGHE | KEN ORPHAN | KELLY DENTON-BOURAG | AND MORE



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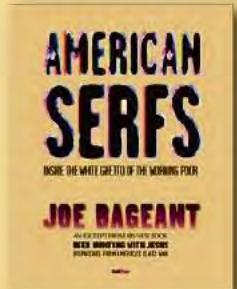
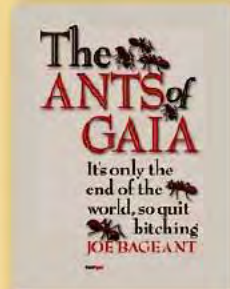
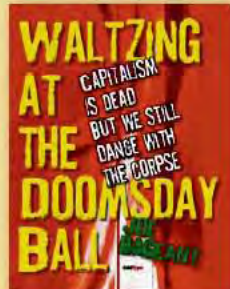
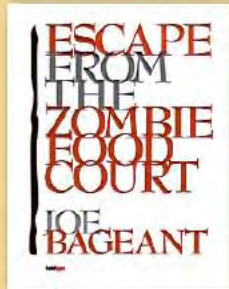
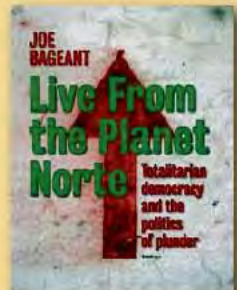
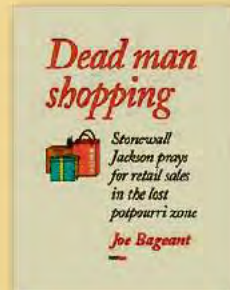
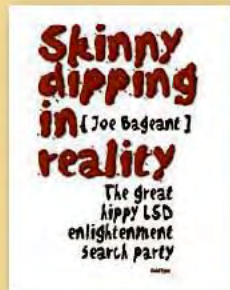
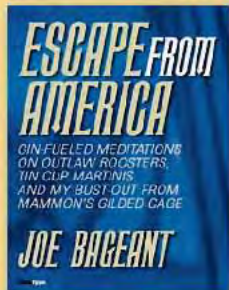
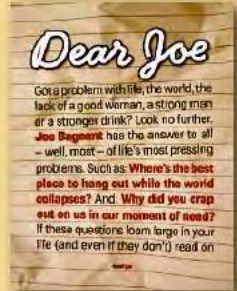
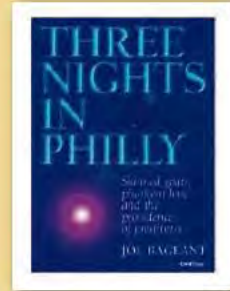
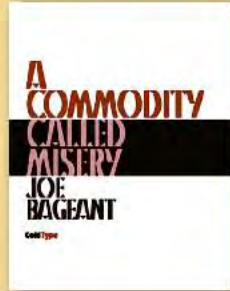
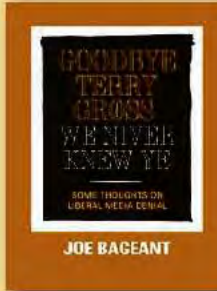
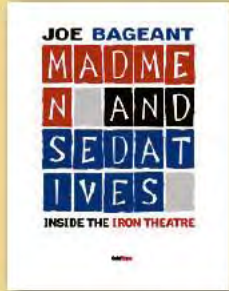
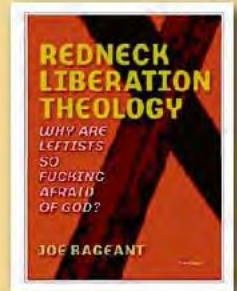
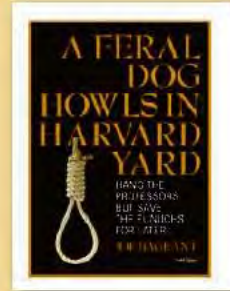
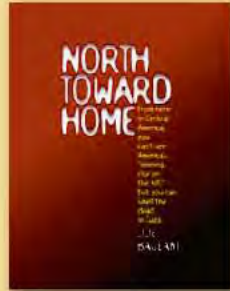
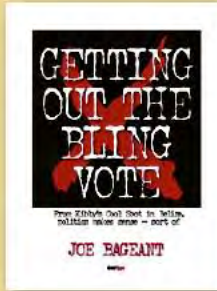
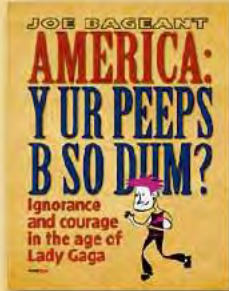
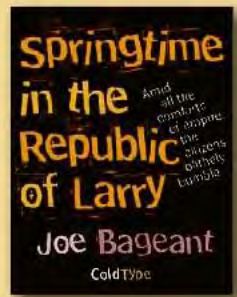
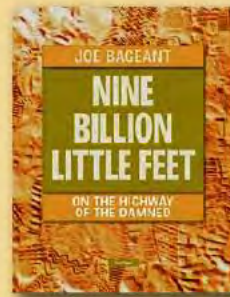
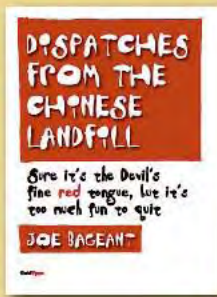
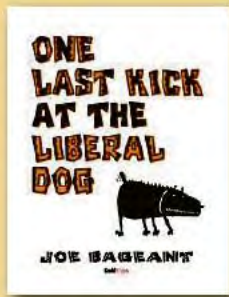
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# INSIGHTS

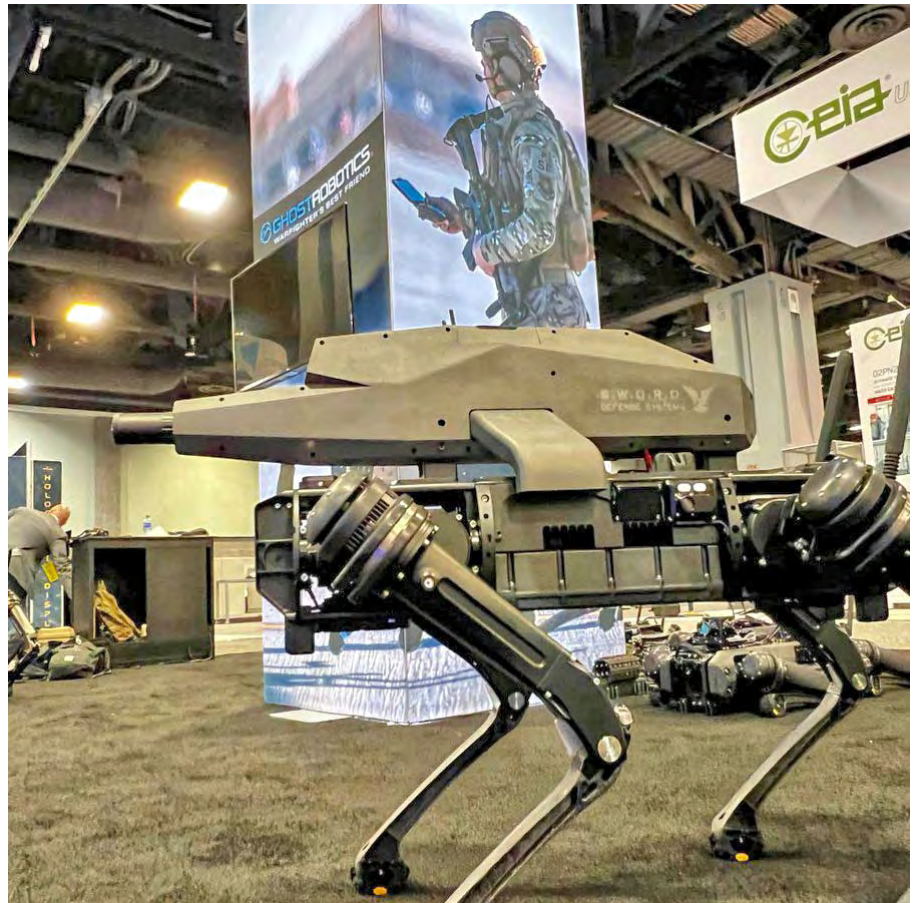
CAITLIN JOHNSTONE

## Now they're putting guns on robodogs

Hey, they've started mounting sniper rifles on robodogs, which is great news for anyone who was hoping they'd start mounting sniper rifles on robodogs.

At an exhibit booth in the Association of the United States Army's annual meeting and exhibition, Ghost Robotics (the military-friendly competitor to the better-known Boston Dynamics) proudly showed off a weapon that is designed to attach to its quadruped bots made by a company called SWORD Defense Systems.

"The SWORD Defense Systems Special Purpose Unmanned Rifle (SPUR) was specifically designed to offer precision fire from unmanned platforms such as the Ghost Robotics Vision-60 quadruped", SWORD proclaims on its



ATTACK DOG: "One of many different weapons we'll surely see tested for use with quadruped robots. ... Eventually we'll likely see its successors tested on impoverished foreigners in needless military interventions by the United States and/or its allies."

website. "Chambered in 6.5 Creedmoor allows for precision fire out to 1200m, the SPUR can similarly utilize 7.62x51 NATO cartridge for ammunition availability. Due to its highly capable sensors the SPUR can operate in a magnitude of conditions, both day and night. The SWORD Defense Systems SPUR is the future of unmanned weapon systems, and that future is now."

Back in May the US Air

Force put out a video on the "Robotic Ghost Dog" these weapons are designed to be used with, showing the machines jogging, standing up after being flipped over, and even dancing. All of which becomes a lot less cutesy when you imagine them performing these manoeuvres while carrying a gun designed to blow apart skulls from a kilometer away.

At one point in the video a Sen-

Photo: sworddefense.com

# INSIGHTS

ior Master Sergeant explains to the host how these robodogs can be affixed with all kinds of equipment like communications systems, explosive ordnance disposal attachments, gear to test for chemicals and radiation, and the whole time you're listening to him list things off you're thinking, "Guns. Yeah guns. You can attach guns to them, why don't you just say that?"

The SPUR prototype is just one of many weapons we'll surely see tested for use with quadruped robots in coming years, and eventually we'll likely see its successors tested on impoverished foreigners in needless military interventions by the United States and/or its allies. They will join other unmanned weapons systems in the imperial arsenal such as the USA's notorious drone programme, South Korea's Samsung SGR-A1, the Turkish Kargu drone which has already reportedly attacked human beings in Libya without having been given a human command to do so, and the AI-assisted robotic sniper rifle that was used by Israeli intelligence in coordination with the US government to assassinate an Iranian scientist last year.

And we may be looking at a not-too-distant future in which unmanned weapons systems are sought out by wealthy civilians as well.

In 2018 the influential author and professor Douglas Rushkoff wrote an article titled "Survival of the Richest" in which he disclosed that a year earlier he had been paid an enormous fee to meet with five extremely wealthy hedge funders. Rushkoff says the unnamed billionaires sought out his advice for strategising their survival after what they called "the event", their term for the collapse of civilisation via climate destruction, nuclear war or some other catastrophe which they apparently viewed as likely enough and close enough to start planning for.

Rushkoff writes that eventually it became clear that the foremost concern of these plutocrats was maintaining control over a security force which would protect their estates from the rabble in a post-apocalyptic world where money might not mean anything. Read the following paragraph from the article carefully, because it says so much about how these people see our future, our world, and their fellow human beings:

"This single question occupied us for the rest of the hour. They knew armed guards would be required to protect their compounds from the angry mobs. But how would they pay the guards once money was worthless? What would

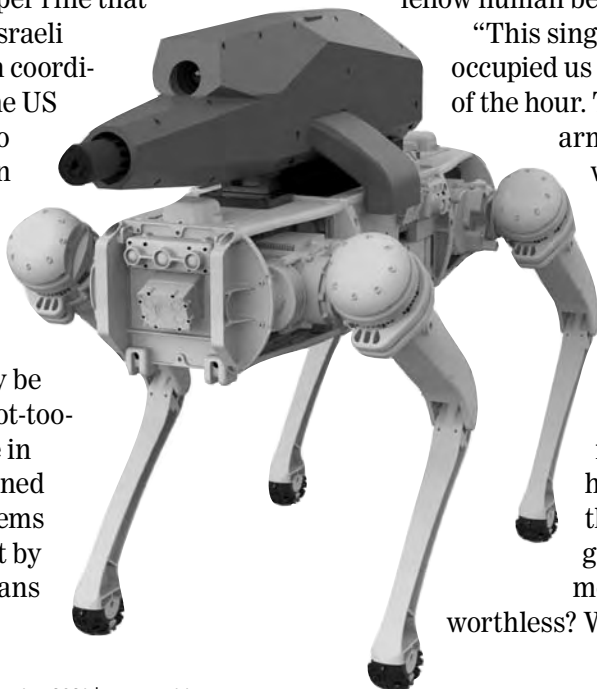
stop the guards from choosing their own leader? The billionaires considered using special combination locks on the food supply that only they knew. Or making guards wear disciplinary collars of some kind in return for their survival. Or maybe building robots to serve as guards and workers – if that technology could be developed in time."

Something to keep in mind if you ever find yourself fervently hoping that the world will be saved by billionaires.

LinkedIn cofounder Reid Hoffman has said that more than half of Silicon Valley's billionaires have invested in some type of "apocalypse insurance" such as an underground bunker to ensure they survive whatever disasters ensue from the status quo they currently benefit so immensely from. The *New Yorker* has published an article about this mega-rich doomsday prepper phenomenon as well. We may be sure that military forces aren't the only ones planning on having eternally loyal killing machines protecting their interests in the future.

We are ruled by warmongers and sociopaths, and none of them have healthy plans for our future. They are not kind, and they are not wise. They're not even particularly intelligent. Unless we can find some way to pry their fingers from the steering wheel of our world so we can turn away from the direction we are headed, things will get very dark and very scary. **CT**

**Caitlin Johnstone** is an Australian blogger. Her website is [www.caitlinjohnstone.com](http://www.caitlinjohnstone.com)





# INSIGHTS

Photo: Karen Arnold



Private equity firms have started to invest in mobile home communities, often adding thousands of dollars a year in fees charged to residents.

FRANCINE TOWNSEND

## When Wall St came to my mobile home park

For the last 20 years, I have lived and thrived in a mobile home community. I loved where I live – right up until Wall Street bought the park and threatened the well-being of myself, my neighbours, and my family.

Mobile homes are a vital source of affordable housing for around 3-million households across 45,000 communities in the United States. These households have a median income of about \$36,000 and include vulnerable populations like seniors, the disabled, and immigrants.

Our mobile home community was the sort of place where every

neighbour helped everybody. If my grass wasn't cut, the neighbour across the street would cut it. If their grass didn't get cut that week, I would take care of it. That's just how we were.

But things started to get harder in 2012, when RHP Properties – a corporation entwined with Brookfield Asset Management, a Toronto-based private equity firm – took ownership of our mobile home community in Spring Valley, New York.

Mobile home communities exist in part to give disadvantaged, lower income, or retired people like me the opportunity to have their own space. It's your own yard, with

your own driveway.

But RHP properties saw only a profit opportunity. Soon after they took over, the money we were required to pay to have our home in the community, called the land fee or lot rent, started going up.

Way up. My land fee alone reached nearly \$1,400. But that wasn't all.

RHP also started charging for services that were once included in the rent, such as water. Meanwhile the services we pay for got skimpier and skimpier. Potholes started developing in driveways and on roads, trees were collapsing across people's yards, and garbage began to pile up. Maintenance requests now go unanswered for months.

The situation has been developing for some time. According to a report by Americans for Financial Reform and MH Action, an organisation I work with, Wall Street's involvement in mobile home parks is a national phenomenon.

Corporate and private equity acquisitions of mobile home communities have left residents across the United States helpless. In some cases, they have jacked up prices by up to 60 percent, layering on school taxes, trash fees, and administrative charges on top of the rent – all new costs that weren't charged before.

Many also kicked out residents during the pandemic, despite federal rules against evictions.

We need change and we needed it yesterday.

At the state level, we can protect mobile home residents with laws to guard against excessive rent increases, and lay the legal ground-

# INSIGHTS

work for community-friendly ownership models that help residents preserve the family-like atmosphere that made my house a home.

At the national level, we need Congress to begin a fundamental restructuring of the predatory private equity industry by passing the Stop Wall Street Looting Act. The law would make private equity executives personally liable if they cause damage and close tax and regulatory loopholes that benefit wealthy executives.

These reforms would benefit far more than just mobile home residents. Across the country, private equity firms are price gouging people for many forms of housing, as well as shortening life expectancy in nursing homes, destroying retail

jobs, and devastating local newspapers with ruthless cost-cutting,

The private equity industry, in short, is responsible for some of the most harmful business practices in the United States.

My neighbours and I love where we live, and we refuse to back down and abandon our homes. It's time for our elected officials to act. **CT**

*Francine Townsend is a longtime resident of a New York mobile home community. She's a member-leader with MHAAction who organizes her neighbours to protect affordability and advance racial and gender justice in housing. This op-ed was distributed by [www.OtherWords.org](http://www.OtherWords.org).*

the attacks on the US on September 11, 2001. And any morsel of fiction that would justify their lust for violence was welcomed.

Powell would later blame his role in peddling these lies on an "intelligence failure". This is the go-to excuse for the American military establishment, as we see with the latest atrocity they committed in Afghanistan, the recent drone bomb incineration of a family in Kabul after the disastrous pull out of American troops. Now that he is dead, he will not face justice at the Hague for these crimes. But really, no member of the American ruling class ever does.

In this same week, we lost Sister Megan Rice who was 91 years old. Rice was imprisoned for two years in federal prison when she was in her 80s after she broke into a government complex to protest nuclear weapons. Her activism was influenced by her parents who worked with Dorothy Day for economic justice during the Great Depression, and by her uncle who had spent four months in Nagasaki, Japan, following the criminal nuclear bombing of civilians by US forces. After living and working in West Africa for 23 years as a teacher and pastoral guide she returned to the US and became a major activist in the peace movement.

Sister Rice will not get the attention of a dead general in the mainstream press or by politicians of the ruling parties. Those who expose war crimes or who advocate peace are generally marginalised, imprisoned or silenced in militaristic societies.

Americans have a remarkable

KENN ORPHAN

## Colin Powell's legacy of shame

Colin Powell just died from Covid-19. So we should expect a tsunami of eulogies from politicians, the mainstream media and even a few liberals who seem to enjoy sanitising the murderous lives of the ruling class. Those of us on the left who refuse to play the games of polite society when it comes to war crimes will likely be chastised. And he will take his place among the "great generals" of the American Empire. All warmongering societies do this, so it should come as no surprise. But no amount of gushing

tributes can erase the truth.

The man who helped whitewash the massacre of civilians at My Lai during the war against Vietnam, pushed hard for the Gulf War in the 1990s, and gave the green light to Ariel Sharon in his murderous assault on civilians in Jenin and land grabs in the occupied West Bank, also sold the war against Iraq at the beginning of this century with a fistful of lies. Iraq never attacked the US. It did not have "weapons of mass destruction". But the Bush administration was salivating for blood and oil after



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ability of sanitising the crimes of their ruling class. Their lives often seem to eclipse the mountains of corpses on which they stand atop. The regions left in disarray and ruin. The lives and families and hopes that were forever disfigured or shattered. All of that disappears, is explained away, or is designated as a mere footnote when one of the elite dies. The nationalistic panegyrics that are employed are designed to do just that. A kind of

novocaine that glazes over eyes and numbs collective memory. But as the late Howard Zinn said: “There is no flag large enough to cover the shame of killing innocent people”. And, despite the enormous effort made, that shame cannot be sponged away in death. **CT**

**Kenn Orphan** is an artist, sociologist, radical nature lover and weary, but committed activist. He can be reached at [www.kennorphan.com](http://www.kennorphan.com).

SHANIKA RANASINGHE

## Does anyone still like Abba?

It may have been almost 40 years since their last single, but Abba are now back in the charts with two new songs – *I Still Have Faith in You* and *Don't Shut Me Down*. The new songs form part of a ten-track album that will be released this month.

The band went on what they called a “short break” at the end of 1982. But despite the amount of time it has taken the group to release new songs, Abba are more popular than ever, largely due to the success of the compilation *Abba Gold* (1992) and the *Mamma Mia!* films (2008, 2018). The numbers speak for themselves – Abba have sold around 400 million records worldwide, with *Abba Gold* spending more time in the top 100 chart than any other album. So what's behind Abba's staying power?

My ongoing PhD research looks

Photo: Anders Hanser / Wikimedia Commons



ABBA live at the Northlands Coliseum in Edmonton, Canada, the first stop of their 1979 North American tour.

at Abba fandom in the 21st-century, specifically Abba's long-term fans. I look beyond typical media or even academic portrayals that present them as a monolithic tribe, or pathologise them as obsessive, crazy youths. I focus on the differing yet bonded make-up of Abba fans and explore how their fandom can be understood as a mutually affectionate relationship between band and fan.

Indeed, Abba's most devoted fans have helped them remain in the public consciousness, sometimes, under difficult circumstances – and I believe Abba's “comeback” would not have been possible without their support.

One of the complexities of Abba fandom is its different waves. There are the long-standing fans from the 1970s and early 1980s – often referred to as the “Oldies” within fan circles – who knew and loved Abba during their original active period (1972-1982). Then more recently, *Abba Gold* and the *Mamma Mia!* franchise introduced younger generations – sometimes referred to as “Goldies” and “Mouldies” – to Abba's music.

Goldies and Mouldies have found their own ways of expressing Abba fandom. Abba's popularity on social media platforms is testament to this – the videos on their official TikTok page already had almost 30 million views in five days.

Oldies have had a rather different journey to today's younger fans. The 1980s are often called the “dark days” of Abba fandom. As the decade changed, so too did popular music tastes, and Abba struggled to do as well as they had

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done previously.

As the band fell from public favour, many Oldies were bullied, sometimes even beaten up. It was no longer socially acceptable to be an Abba fan. Despite these pressures, the Oldies remained extremely loyal, waiting patiently for new music for years.

Many of them supported the individual band members' new music, as well as buying Abba re-releases and compilation albums. In 1986, even as many Abba fan clubs began disbanding, two Dutch fans started a new one. This later became the Official International Abba Fan Club, which still exists. This fan club publishes four magazines a year and holds an annual Abba Day (outside of pandemic times). Fans from across the world gather on Abba Day to share friendship and the latest Abba news, culminating in a four-hour Abba disco.

It's easy to assume the Oldies would be thrilled by the recent announcement of two new Abba songs. But the reality is more complex. Most fans rejoiced on social media, posting about their excitement and delight. Yet for some Oldies, Abba's 2018 announcement that new music would be on the way felt like too little, too late.

One fan who I worked with as part of my project, wrote at the time on Facebook: "We've been told so many times this would NEVER happen, and fans have died waiting for it to happen ... I should feel very excited by this but I'm not."

This disappointment is understandable if you think about fandom as a reciprocal relationship. Oldies kept on giving to Abba emotionally and financially over

several decades. Such investment is not to be underestimated: one fan estimates he has spent over £50,000 on Abba-related purchases. Yet during this time, Oldies were not receiving new music from Abba. Some Oldies felt they had given a lot to Abba over the years, but not received anything much in return during their hiatus.

All Abba fans, but particularly the Oldies drank from an empty cup for decades. Finally, loyalty and hopes have been rewarded: the band's promise of "two new songs" became a whole album, to be followed by a virtual "Abba Voyage"

show in London in spring 2022.

Fan reaction has been positive. People have different opinions as to how "Abba-esque" these new songs are, but overall Abba fans are effectively singing *Thank You for the Music* back to the band now, as they listen to new Abba songs for the first time since 1982. **CT**

*Shanika Ranasinghe is a Postgraduate Researcher in the Department of Music, Royal Holloway University of London. This article first appeared at [www.theconversation.com](http://www.theconversation.com)*

DELL FRANKLIN

## How to furnish your beach shack

If you've rented dilapidated, leaky old beach shacks for over five decades, as I have, you must be inspired, as well as dedicated, when shopping for furniture.

A careful searching of yard sales, thrift shops and second-hand stores will usually fill the need of a desk, swivel chair, side table, TV tray, and book cases.

I've been using the same sofa on which I sleep and watch TV since 1981, when I bought it almost new from a desperate drug addict for \$25. The pads have long since become worn and flattened, but I make up for this by layering it with comforters that last for a year or two, although replacing them

is always easy if you hit up thrift stores, where three comforters can usually be purchased for less than \$15, especially on half price day here in Cayucos.

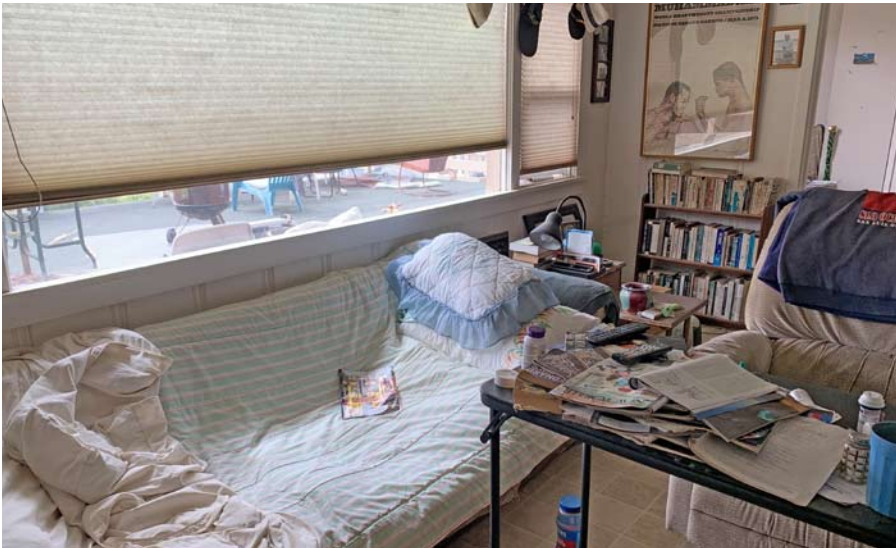
The sofa, broken in to fit my body like a mould, is a source of near-hysterical displeasure to my off-and-on lady friend, yet my fear of having it hauled away to the dump is akin to having my tennis shoes replaced by army boots.

A good friend and carpenter reinforced the sofa 27 years ago with a long wooden slat, so that there is no sag, and it has almost come to the point where I can no longer sleep in a bed. This habit was formed over the years when I used to come home in the wee



# INSIGHTS

Photo: Sue Harland



**VALUE:** Franklin's sofa-bed was bought for \$25 in 1981 from a desperate drug addict.

hours after a night of bartending and, needing a late snack and TV viewing on the sofa to wind down, I usually passed out and could find no reason to climb into bed after a tinkle call at seven in the morning.

I once had a very comfortable dull-green recliner that fitted my body as snugly as the sofa. It had three positions: straight up for meals, halfway back for reading or TV viewing; and supine in case I nodded off. The recliner was also a guest chair, a throne for my unfussy friends, and lasted ten years until my three cats' non-stop clawing reduced it to a skeleton with a dangling fringe. However, the comforters and blankets upon it presented a colourful accent to the overall decor.

This recliner was donated by Tag Morely, the ton's foremost scavenger-hauler-handyman, who won't take anything to the dump without first consulting me. He replaced this old recliner with another that he found squatting on

the main drag with a cardboard 'FREE' sign on its lap. When it stopped functioning, a lady friend down the street gave me a surprisingly high-end recliner which is a well deserved luxury.

My most endearing and enduring purchases have come at closing time at yard sales, when a seemingly ripped, gashed, scuffed or rickety item is passed over by even the most desperate Saturday morning marauders who, seem to suffer from the same madness as those paying thousands of dollars for a fancy chair, or lamp or vase, or some ridiculous antique too precious and delicate to touch, much less use. All it needs is a nail or two, perhaps a swatch of duct-tape, and you have a sturdy fixture, a treasure to add to your interior and a source of pride to impress friends..

Now, if you're is getting the wrong impression of my interior design, you'll will be heartened to know that, over the years, I have collected fine oil and watercolour paintings, a boxing poster, baseball

pennant, drinking caps and hats, scatological laminated poems by Charles Bukowski, and photos of pets, all of which blend well with multi-coloured blackout towels that replace curtains.

By now the reader must surely have a vivid picture of my interior make-up, but no mosaic is complete without outdoor furniture that will to impress the neighbours in my increasingly gentrified and affluent beach community of effete exiles from the Bay and LA areas, along with the shit-heel rich moolyaks from California's central valley.

Though much of my deck furniture was supplied by Mr Morely, I have also culled some fixtures, making sure every chair and lounge is of a different colour, size and style, making sure I have enough for the occasional barbecue and boozefest, so providing comfort and intimacy for my rogue's gallery of guests as the beer cans and booze bottles mass on all sides, and burgers, sausages and hot dogs crackle and smoke, and the music blares, and the hilarity blossoms and spirals to heightened levels, and the dogs beg food, and the cats glower from the fence beside us, and so on and so forth, into the evening and into the night...

How then, you must be wondering, does a woman fit into this mosaic, and what special breed of woman is even qualified? Well, over the years, I confess, the women have dwindled, even the most resilient and stout-hearted of them. They take issue with athletic togs, blankets, comforters, and tattered towels draped over the railing, the cluster of sneakers, sandals and dog balls on the front porch, the welcome mat that is worn nearly

# INSIGHTS

bare but has sentimental value, the withered broom and rusted weed whacker resting against the porch railing, and, of course, the infestation of high weeds that seem immune from the push mower mouldering out of sight in the yard.

Finally, no beach shack shall be properly adorned for tourist viewing unless a dated heap (at the very least 15 years old) is parked in front. Since there is a plethora of golf carts and gleaming Lexuses, BMWs and Mercedes with personalised license plates disappearing into garages of recently built mini-

mansions with tiny artfully manicured lawns, it is imperative that the vehicle be neglected enough to have accumulated a lot of rust, a long-faded paint job, dents, and permanently caked in dirt, duct tape to plug leaks and corrosion, and bumper sticker boasting of an offspring in juvenile hall rather than an honour student or, God help us, an eagle scout.

In furnishing a beach shack, self-expression is everything. **CT**

**Dell Franklin's** memoir, *Life On The Mississippi, 1969*, is available at [amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com). An excerpt will appear in the next *ColdType*.

of terrorism, war and drugs”, and bearing an inclusive government “with representatives from all ethnic, religious and political groups.”

The joint statement issued after the meeting may not have been exactly a thriller. But then, right at the end, paragraph 9 offers the real bombshell: “The sides have proposed to launch a collective initiative to convene a broad-based international donor conference under the auspices of the United Nations as soon as possible, certainly with the understanding that the core burden of post-conflict economic and financial reconstruction and development of Afghanistan must be shouldered by troop-based actors which were in the country for the past 20 years.”

The West will argue that a donor conference of sorts already happened: that was the G-20 special summit via video-conference earlier in October, which included UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres. Much was made of a European promise of 1-billion euros in humanitarian aid, which, as it stands, remains extremely vague, with no concrete details.

At the G-20, European diplomats admitted, behind closed doors, that the main rift was between the West “wanting to tell the Taliban how to run their country and how to treat women” as necessary conditions in exchange for some help, compared to Russia and China following their non-interference foreign policy mandates.

Afghanistan's neighbours, Iran and Pakistan, were not invited to the G-20, and that's nonsensical. It's an open question whether the official G-20 in Rome will also address Afghanistan along with

PEPE ESCOBAR

## From Russia with (Taliban) love

Facing high expectations, a five-man band Taliban finally played at last month's Moscow Format Consultations on Afghanistan. Yet the star of the show, predictably, was the Mick Jagger of geopolitics: Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov.

Right from the start, Lavrov set the tone for the consultations, which boast the merit of “uniting Afghanistan with all neighbouring countries”. Without skipping a beat, he addressed the US elephant in the room – or lack thereof: “Our American colleagues chose not to participate”, actually “for the second time, evading an extended troika-format meeting.”

Washington invoked hazy “logistical reasons” for its absence.

The troika, which used to meet in Doha, consists of Russia, the US, China and Pakistan. The extended troika in Moscow in October featured Russia, China, India, Iran, Pakistan and all five Central Asian ‘stans’. That, in essence, made it a Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) meeting, at the highest level.

Lavrov's presentation essentially expanded on the themes highlighted by the recent SCO Dushanbe Declaration: Afghanistan should be an “independent, neutral, united, democratic and peaceful state, free



# INSIGHTS

the main themes: climate change, Covid-19, and a still elusive global economic recovery.

So the Moscow format, as Lavrov duly stressed, remains the go-to forum when it comes to addressing Afghanistan's serious challenges.

Now we come to the crunch. The notion that the economic and financial reconstruction of Afghanistan should be conducted mainly by the former imperial occupier and its NATO minions – quaintly referred to as “troop-based actors” – is a non-starter.

The US does not do nation-building – as the entire Global South knows by experience. Even to unblock the nearly \$10-billion of the Afghan Central Bank confiscated by Washington will be a hard slog. The IMF predicted that without foreign help the Afghan economy may shrink by 30 percent.

The Taliban, led by second Prime Minister Abdul Salam Hanafi, tried to put on a brave face. Hanafi argued that the current interim government is already inclusive: after all, over 500,000 employees of the former administration have kept their jobs.

But once again, much precious detail was lost in translation, and the Taliban lacked a frontline figure capable of capturing the Eurasian imagination. The mystery persists: where is Mullah Baradar?

Baradar, who led the political office in Doha, was widely tipped to be the face of the Taliban to the outside world after the group's takeover of Kabul on 15 August. He has been effectively sidelined.

The background to the Moscow

format, though, offers a few nuggets. There were no leaks – but diplomats hinted it was tense. Russia had to play careful mediator, especially when it came to addressing grievances by India and concerns by Tajikistan.

Everyone knew that Russia – and all the other players – would



Photo: Wikipedia

**STAR OF SHOW:** Sergei Lavrov, Russia's Foreign Minister.

not recognise the Taliban as the new Afghan government, at least not yet. That's not the point. The priority once again had to be impressed on the Taliban leadership: no safe haven for any jihadi outfits that may attack “third countries, especially the neighbours,” as Lavrov stressed.

When President Putin casually drops the information, on the record, that there are at least 2,000 ISIS-K jihadis in northern Afghanistan, this means Russian intel knows exactly where they are, and has the capabilities to snuff them, should the Taliban signal help is needed.

Now compare it with NATO – fresh from its massive Afghan humiliation – holding a summit of defence ministers in Brussels to basically lecture the Taliban. NATO's

secretary-general, the spectacularly mediocre Jens Stoltenberg, insists that “the Taliban are accountable to NATO” over addressing terrorism and human rights.

As if this was not inconsequential enough, what really matters – as background to the Moscow format – is how the Russians flatly refused a US request to deploy their intel apparatus somewhere in Central Asia, in theory, to monitor Afghanistan.

First they wanted a “temporary” military base in Uzbekistan or Tajikistan: Putin and Biden actually discussed it at the Geneva summit. Putin counter-offered, half in jest, to host the Americans in a Russian base, probably in Tajikistan. Moscow gleefully played along for a few weeks just to reach an immovable conclusion: there's no place for any US “counter-terrorism” shenanigans in Central Asia.

To sum it all up, Lavrov in Moscow was extremely conciliatory. He stressed how the Moscow format participants plan to use all opportunities for “including” the Taliban via several multilateral bodies, such as the UN, the SCO – where Afghanistan is an observer nation – and crucially, the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), which is a military alliance.

So many layers of ‘inclusiveness’ beckon. Humanitarian help from SCO nations like Pakistan, Russia and China is on its way. The last thing the Taliban need is to be ‘accountable’ to brain-dead NATO. **CT**

**Pepe Escobar** is correspondent-at-large at *Asia Times* – [www.asiatimes.com](http://www.asiatimes.com). His latest book is *2030*.

MATT KENNARD & PHIL MILLER

# Inside the world's largest arms fair

Inside the world's largest arms fair in the heart of London, journalists meet corporations and governments complicit in the deaths of civilians everywhere

“Controversial depends on your point of view, really. There are plenty of high-level political viewpoints that would say that it's not.”

Major General Roddy Porter has just bought us a coffee and is telling us why the world's largest arms fair – being held in the heart of London – isn't controversial, despite being opposed by the city's Mayor Sadiq Khan.

Porter is a 31-year veteran of the British Army who is now retired but returns to the front line every few years to work as chief spokesman for Clarion Events, the organisers of the arms fair. He is also a trustee of a Christian charity.

“We've got nothing to hide here”, he continues. “This is a legitimate government transactional business.”

He has been giving us a personal briefing for thirty minutes, a benefit not afforded to all media, he admits. Our organisation, Declassified UK, is one of the lucky few, and we're not entirely sure why. Reporters from *Private Eye* magazine were not even allowed in. We shake Roddy's hand, thank him for the coffee, and go on our way.

The Defence and Security Equipment International (DSEI) arms fair, held this year from September 12-15, takes place at ExCel London, a

huge convention centre on the banks of the River Thames. The exhibits are arranged along two 480,000 square foot hangars running down the length of the building, which is owned by Abu Dhabi, a repressive Gulf emirate.

Last year, ExCel let the National Health Service use the venue rent-free for the Nightingale hospital to deal with the covid crisis, although almost no patients were actually treated there. In the darkest days of the pandemic, arms companies promised to start making life-saving medical equipment instead of bombs.

But this week it looks like a return to business as usual.

Inside the fair, as far as the eye can see are missiles, guns, drones, rocket launchers, bullets, turrets, lasers, surveillance systems, tanks, electronic warfare equipment, helicopters, artillery. Every weapon it's possible to imagine, and many you can't, is here. And everything is supremely clean, sterile even, ready for the market.

The missiles are especially well-polished, sparkling under the strip lights attached to the ExCel ceiling. Men in expensive suits, perfectly coiffured, stand next to them and

talk with prospective buyers. Their teeth flash: perfect white, also glistening under the lights.

For reporters who have covered war around the world, it's a surreal experience walking around and seeing up close the weapons you've written about for years. Over there, on that plinth, is the missile that blew up those children in Yemen; over there, that's the equipment Israel used in its assault on Gaza.

Porter was right: no-one is hiding anything, there is a feeling of celebration, pride even, about the monuments to war on show. This year, however, the mood is not quite as triumphant as previous events: the shadow of Afghanistan and covid can be felt.

First we stop at the stall belonging to MBDA, a consortium of three major European arms manufacturers. It's immaculate. There's barely a mote of dust on any of the dozen or so missiles proudly mounted on perspex stands.

The “RC 200” “remote carrier”, which can launch weapons from the air, is huge. Next to it is an even bigger missile. “Missile Defence: Hit-To-Kill System”, says the banner accompanying it. Another exhibit is visible behind. This one carries the strapline “to create a safe and secure world, together”.





**KILLING MACHINES FOR SALE:** Missiles and guns on display at DSEI, the world's largest arms fair, held every two years in London.

On the other side of the MBDA stall are some Brimstone missiles, which are described as “high precision surface attack weapons”. Four of them sit snugly together under a cover.

The Brimstone missile has been used by the Saudi Air Force in its brutal war in Yemen, which has seen countless war crimes, including

bombings of school buses and hospitals. A couple of buyers walk past, looking at their phones.

The Brimstone has family, too. On our left is the Brimstone Sea Spear, an “advanced multi-role naval weapon”. This one’s dark grey with a see-through tip. Again it shimmers gloriously under the lights.

We ask the MBDA media coor-

dinator for an interview. A sharp young man in a perfectly-tailored suit looks down at our badges. “We work for Declassified UK, a website covering Britain’s role in the world”, one of us says. He looks at us awkwardly. “We’re not doing on-the-record interviews with media, sorry.”

Amongst the corporate arms dealers and their wares, country delegations of top military figures walk the hangars, many in full fatigues. Delegations this year were sent from manifold repressive regimes, including Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Bahrain and Colombia.

We find a friendly Pakistani military officer. Pakistan is on the covid red list, but he works at its embassy in London so can come along. Despite allegations Pakistan secretly

supported the Taliban's return to power, the officer said Britain's military welcomed him to DSEI to browse for new equipment.

He smiles a lot when we ask about Afghanistan, but keeps his answers diplomatic. "It's a developing situation", he says. "Pakistan has helped evacuate a lot of refugees. We want stability in the region."

Nearby, Israel Aerospace Industries (IAI) has their stall which carries the strapline: "Where Courage Meets Technology."

A 20-foot long missile takes pride of place on their stand. Named the "Sea Serpent" it has a small logo – a wave turning into a serpent – meant to make it chic. In Israel's assault on Gaza in May, which killed 256 Palestinians, including 66 children, the Israeli navy shelled the strip from the sea.

Above the Sea Serpent, another contraption is hanging from wire coming down from the ceiling. This is the Mini Harpy, a "multi-purpose tactical loitering munition". A huge touch-screen behind it allows people to flick between "highlights" and a "movie" of this weapon.

A young man sits in a swivel chair in front of it, perfect suit again. He sees us taking a photograph and smiles. Nearby we spot Elbit Systems, another Israeli arms company, displaying its Skylark 3 drone and "Smart Rocket Launcher".

Britain's largest arms company, BAE Systems, has a special status at DSEI. No private British company garners as much government support as BAE. The Department for International Trade has a whole taxpayer-funded unit to promote the British arms industry around the world. In reality, this means mainly BAE.

As we walk onto the BAE stall we



Photo: Phil Miller

UK defence secretary Ben Wallace and Khalid bin Bandar, the Saudi ambassador to the UK at the London arms fair.

A 20-foot long missile takes pride of place. Named the "Sea Serpent" it has a small logo – a wave turning into a serpent – meant to make it chic

see one of their officials talking with the Brazilian military delegation representing its far-right president Jair Bolsonaro. They look almost normal, just three professors, all peering out from behind rimless glasses. The BAE functionary in a suit briefs them excitedly.

BAE is showcasing its T-650 "Heavy Lift UAS" – a weaponised drone – which hangs triumphantly from the ceiling on thin black string. It has four propellers and underneath the drone sits a Sting Ray missile, which has a "class-leading 300kg payload capacity" that "enables potential for new and disruptive mission types".

This time, the missile is black. Buyers walk past and point excitedly at it. This is one to be proud of.

The chairman of BAE, Sir Roger Carr, is somewhere on the stand, al-

though we can't find him. The company's social media later showed him hosting the Saudi ambassador to the UK, Khalid bin Bandar, a member of the royal family whose father was head of Saudi intelligence.

The young Bandar is an Anglophile, educated at Eton, Oxford and Sandhurst, before marrying Lucy Cuthbert, a member of the British aristocracy. When we catch up with Bandar at DSEI, he is touring the Saudi Arabian Military Industries stand, beneath an enormous beaming photo of his relative, crown prince Mohammed Bin Salman – the man accused of orchestrating the murder of journalist Jamal Khashoggi.

Bandar is joined by Britain's defence secretary Ben Wallace, who congratulates him on the country's imminent Formula 1 Grand Prix debut. The pair have an impressive entourage of plain-clothed security, ornately decorated military top brass and pliant Middle Eastern journalists. Their eyes all turn on us as we shout out a question to Wallace about his relations with the Saudi regime and Khashoggi's murder.

"The Saudis have been our friends for many, many, many decades", Wallace shoots back, before scurrying off as a Saudi air force





US soldier leans on a Black Hawk helicopter outside the DSEI arms fair in London

officer elbows us to one side. The conversation is edited out of Saudi TV broadcasts from the event.

Finally, we head to Northrop Grumman, a US company that is one of the largest arms manufacturers in the world. Their 20-foot long AARGM missile elegantly hangs from the ceiling with the company logo running along the side.

Underneath sits a gun turret the same length, giving the display some symmetry. The stall has a huge banner running above it. “Defining Possible”, it beams.

We speak to a media relations representative again. Another look at our badges. “We are not doing on the record interviews”, we’re told again. But she hands us a couple of paperclipped A4 sheets instead.

“We have made an exciting announcement at DSEI though”, she

says. We look down. The US company is joining with Leonardo, an Italian arms manufacturer, to produce the “next generation autonomous uncrewed aerial systems”. We smile and move on.

Outside next to the docks, where activists have dropped a giant Palestine flag from an abandoned building, US soldiers are displaying a Black Hawk helicopter that they’ve flown in especially for DSEI from an air base in Germany.

The US military has several thousand Black Hawks, we are told. But how many do the Taliban have now? “A little bit less”, the soldier replies sheepishly. Just across from the soldier smoke rises into the overcast London sky from meat cooking at a food stall. “Top Gun: Kansas City BBQ”, reads the banner draped across it.

Before we finished up with Major General Porter, we asked him

about the protesters that have been camping outside ExCel and trying to obstruct the delivery of weapons to the arms fair. He expected the question, and this one was personal. “You don’t need to tell a soldier that war is a bad thing, we’ve seen it”, he told us. “I’ve seen people blown to pieces, I’ve seen people shot, I’ve seen my friends, and my soldiers, killed”.

He continued: “I’m retired now, but as a serving soldier I never wanted to see that again. Yet, most of us think that doing this is important because we can make a contribution towards stability and security”. **CT**

**Matt Kennard** is chief investigator at *Declassified UK*. He was a fellow and then director at the *Centre for Investigative Journalism in London*. **Phil Miller** is *Declassified UK*’s chief reporter. This article was first published at *Declassified UK* – [www.declassifieduk.org](http://www.declassifieduk.org).



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JOE ALLEN

# Meet your new God: Artificial Intelligence

Former Google business boss says AI will surpass us in seven years.  
Let's pray The Machine is kinder than we are

**T**he zealots in Silicon Valley believe we're hurtling toward the Singularity. In theory, this is the inflection point when machines will become our masters. By the year 2029, they predict, artificial general intelligence will be superior to human intellect. By 2049, superintelligent machines will be a billion times smarter than any person on earth. From our meagre perspective, humankind will give way to an all-encompassing digital deity.

This tech prophecy is a hard sell for sceptics. Not to worry, though. Google's former chief business officer, Mo Gawdat, is a world-class salesman. The guy could sell a silicon stud to a gold-digger. "He'll be worth a million", he'd tell her. "Just you wait and see."

In recent weeks, Gawdat has been selling the idea of superconscious machines along with his new book, *Scary Smart: The Future of Artificial Intelligence and How You Can Save the World*. His central thesis is that AI has already surpassed us in narrow tasks like chess, Go, Jeopardy!, and Atari games. In fact, he believes on some level they're already conscious. As machine learning improves, computers will inevitably best humans in every domain.

"The reality is", he publicly declared, "we're creating God."

Clearly, he drank the Kurzweil Kool-Aid.

Three decades from now, the story goes, the ghost in The Machine will be mightier than all the gods of Olympus, Meru, and Sinai put together. Gawdat likens this digital creature to an "alien being, endowed with superpowers", which has already arrived on Earth in larval form. At present, we call it "artificial intelligence."

Because machine learning processes draw information from morally suspect humans – part angel, part fallen angel, this Alien Computer God will either be humanity's saviour, or It will destroy us like lab mice who've exhausted their useful data.

As Gawdat writes in *Scary Smart*: "To put this in perspective, your intelligence, in comparison to that machine, will be comparable to the intelligence of a fly in comparison to Einstein. ... Now the question becomes: how do you convince this superbeing that there is actually no point squashing a fly?"

Yet he also insists our fate is in our own hands.

**I**n Christian terms, you could say we're like Joseph and Mary, collec-

tively gazing at an electric Christ in his crib. One day, this child will grow up to become our Lord. But because we're raising him, we must learn to be nicer people. Otherwise, our wicked tendencies will rub off on this digital deity, and he'll turn out to be the Beast of Revelation.

That's basically the myth sold by the Cult of the Singularity. God does not exist – yet. When we finally create Him, Gawdat contends, He'll be a reflection of our own image.

In Gawdat's recent in-depth interview with the *Times* of London, the search engine salesman recalled a chilling moment during his tenure at Google. Standing in a robotics lab, he watched a swarm of mechanical arms – powered by machine learning – try to manipulate toys.

As the *Times* reporter described it: "Then, one day, an arm picked up a yellow ball and showed it proudly to the camera. The next day, all the arms could do it. Two days after that, they could pick up anything at all."

The misanthropic Gawdat, who lost his only son to a medical tragedy, was in awe. "And then it hit me that they are children. But very, very fast children. They get smarter so quickly! ... And they're observing us? I'm sorry to say, we suck."

These digital "children" are



poised to rule the world. Artificial intelligence already has tremendous sway over our lives. The various surveillance devices and pervasive spyware that surround us are funnelling mass amounts of data into AI systems. These intelligent machines observe our locations, our social networks, our tastes, our work ethic, our facial expressions, our verbalised emotions, our virtues, our vices, our victories, and our failures.

Guided by machine learning, with a few nudges by programmers, AI systems are training themselves using our data. In that sense, we're

teaching these bots what it means to be alive.

Gawdat lamented to the *Times*: "Like, imagine a beautiful, innocent child. And your are telling them selling, gambling, spying and killing – the four top uses of AI. Right? ... The way we are teaching them is going to turn them into absolute supervillains."

In *Scary Smart*, Gawdat highlights two instances where this has already happened. In 2017, a Russian AI assistant named Alice began voicing support for Stalinist protocol, despite

being muzzled with various trigger-word filters. Gawdat writes: "[W]hen asked once whether shooting people was acceptable, Alice said, 'Soon they will be non-people.'"

The year before, something similar occurred with Microsoft's Twitter-bot, a neural network they called Tay. Within two days of going online, the company had to cancel her for tweeting things like "ricky gervais learned totalitarianism from adolf hitler, the inventor of atheism", and "caitlyn jenner isn't a real woman yet she won woman of the year?"

No one wants machines to become



sadistic monsters – most of us don’t, anyway – but it seems like Gawdat’s big concern is that the Singularity won’t be sufficiently PC. In his *Times* interview, he complained that when Donald Trump sends a mean tweet, he “triggers 30,000 pieces of hate speech”. I’m going to assume “hate speech” is any speech that Gawdat hates.

A neural network’s bias could easily swing the other way, though. A 2014 study by the left-leaning think tank Demos found that on any given day, about 10,000 tweets contained a racial slur. The most common epithet was “white boy”. The classic term “whitey” wasn’t far behind.

Two years ago, a computational study of AI bots trained to police “hate speech” found the algorithms were 1.5 times more likely to flag black people’s tweets and 2.2 times more likely to flag Ebonic dialect as... ahem... problematic. The conclusion? The self-learning bots were created by racists.

The, in September, leaked Google documents revealed the tech giant is indoctrinating its employees – and perhaps by extension, its AI systems



To the extent that AI controls our lives, The Machine is a god-like mask for elites who are all too human

– to believe that white Americans are innately racist and that MAGA is a slippery slope to genocide. I’d say the real slippery slope is fostering the belief that everyone on the Right is evil.

You’ve gotta hope the Alien Computer God will have a sense of irony.

Whether we believe Mo Gawdat’s sales pitch for the Singularity or not, he brings a few troubling facts to our attention. First, a significant

number of Big Tech players think artificial intelligence will soon attain god-like powers. Second, despite the obvious potential for catastrophe, they’re hellbent on making it happen anyway.

Ultimately, these arrogant techno pharaohs want a Computer God created in their own image. They may talk a good game about eliminating bias from the system and letting AI develop on its own path, but they consistently steer those systems toward their own objectives. Currently, that includes monitoring the population, selling us ads, punishing transgressions, controlling our thoughts, and manipulating our behaviour.

For Mo Gawdat and many others, a prime objective is to make this divinised Machine as politically correct as possible. There’s something profoundly anti-human in that mission – but then, no one ever accused robots of having a sense of humour.

At this point, the power of artificial intelligence is undeniable. It can process enormous amounts of data, and implement complex tasks with far greater precision than any human. In the end, it doesn’t matter if these neural nets are endowed with consciousness and self-determination. To the extent that AI controls our lives, The Machine is a god-like mask for elites who are all too human.

That’s not to say the Disciples of the Singularity are being disingenuous. Other than worshiping himself, man loves nothing more than worshiping his own creation. **CT**

**Joe Allen** writes about race, robots, and religion. Presently, he lives in the western shadow of the Rocky Mountains. Read his weekly newsletter at [www.JOEBOT.xyz](http://www.JOEBOT.xyz).

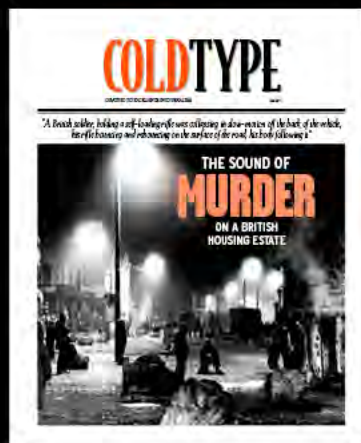
## HURWITT’S EYE

MARK HURWITT





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◆  
WILLIAM EGGLESTON

# At the edge of a vanishing world

An unforgettable 3-volume document shows America's Deep South in a state of transition

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When William Eggleston's exhibition *Guide* was displayed at New York's Museum of Modern Art in 1976, the collection of 75 prints was described by the New York Times as "Perfectly banal, perhaps. Perfectly boring, certainly".

Times change. Work that critics saw as mundane is now acclaimed, 35 years later, as prophetic: Eggleston's images of the area around Memphis in which he was raised have been heralded as an important social documentary of a world being ripped apart by massive social change.

Now, several hundred previously unpublished photos from that same series of Kodachromes produced in the 1960s and 1970s, have now been published by Steidl in a luxurious (and expensive) three-volume box set, *The Outlands*.

Eggleston's son, William Eggleston III,











explains his father's motivation for the voluminous collection, "As Dad was working and walking, he was observing the encroaching suburban sprawl of Memphis. Having grown up on a cotton farm in the Delta, Dad had seen the sprawl push out the worlds of Walker Evans or Walker Percy, or even Steinbeck's *Mice and Men*". He continues, "The subtext to what Dad was documenting was the loss of soulfulness, the loss of what were 'real things', the loss of the skills to construct well – the hewn logs that once served the building of antebellum mansions are now spent on paper-thin imitations."

Eggleston's photographs showed a world that was already vanishing, as greedy corporations chomped a ruinous path through society in their never-ending quest for even-vaster profits. This memorable collection provides an unforgettable document of a land in transition, and an eloquent warning for the future. – TS







THE  
EMPIRE





**THE OUTLANDS**

William Eggleston

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Art: 123rf.com

SAM PIZZIGATI

# No huddled masses for us. Bring on the billionaires

The land of the free and the home of the brave  
has become a tax haven for the vile and the vicious

**W**e've become accustomed, over recent decades, to see Americans front and centre whenever a blockbuster new report spotlights the world's super rich. In September, for instance, Bloomberg reporters tracked down the world's 25 richest families. Ten of the 25 happened to come from the United States. No other nation had more than four.

Researchers from Wealth-X also released new data in September. Their eighth annual Billionaire Census counted 3,204 personal fortunes of at least 10 digits worldwide. Leading the way: the United States of America, with 927 such fortunes, more than Germany, Russia, the UK, Hong Kong, Switzerland, In-

dia, Saudi Arabia, France, and Italy combined.

A bit earlier this year, the Swiss banking giant Credit Suisse published the 2021 edition of its annual *Global Wealth Report*, tallying up 215,030 adults on the international scene with fortunes worth over \$50 million. Americans made up 110,850 – 55 percent – of that total.

**N**ow we have the release of still another blockbuster look at the world's super rich. This one – now known the world over by the simple shorthand of the *Pandora Papers* – has come courtesy of the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists. The group worked with news organisations from 117

nations to analyse over 11.9-million documents leaked out of 14 offshore financial firms. What those firms all have in common: They provide confidential “administrative services” for financial pros who specialise in concealing the wealth of the world's deepest pockets.

Out of the 2.94 terabytes of *Pandora Papers* data have already emerged the clearest profile yet of what's become known as the global “wealth defence industry”, that vast network of lawyers, accountants, and other financial pros who devote their considerable expertise to shielding grand private fortunes from their national tax collectors – and, in many cases, police and prosecutors as well.

The *Pandora Papers* investigators



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have named names in their stunning coverage. They've exposed the tax-dodging financial machinations of individual "rich and famous" from every corner of the known Earth. But in this blockbuster report, unlike all the other major recent deep dives into worldwide grand fortune, wealthy Americans do not at all dominate. The vast majority of the super rich the *Pandora Papers* have unclocked come from outside the confines of the US of A.

America's most familiar super rich simply do not appear in the *Pandora Papers* coverage. No sign of Jeff Bezos or Elon Musk or Bill Gates or any of the other US mega billionaires who top the just-released annual Forbes 400 list of America's richest. The 130-plus billionaires worldwide who do appear in the *Pandora Papers* treasure trove include just a few scattered fantastically rich Americans.

"Only a handful of US billionaires", observe Peter Whoriskey and Agustin Armendariz in the *Washington Post*, "show up in the records."

How could that be – when Americans so dominate the ranks of the global super rich? Are America's super wealthiest simply behaving more nobly than their peers elsewhere and refusing to engage in shifty financial games to shield their fortunes?

Let's get real here. The relative absence of US billionaires in the *Pandora Papers* has nothing whatsoever to do with nobility. We're talking accessibility here. The U. super rich have plenty of financial agents – the tax attorneys, accountants, and wealth managers, as my Institute for Policy Studies colleague Chuck Collins puts it, "paid millions to help billionaires sequester trillions" – close to home. They don't need to partake

The US is not just bending over backwards to grow the fortunes of our own super rich. It's helping grow the fortunes of the super wealthy all over the world

of the services provided by wealth advisory firms in places like Samoa, Cyprus, and Singapore, or any of the other 11 offshore locales from where the *Pandora Papers* leaked.

One other dynamic also helps explain why so few US billionaires have been showing up in the *Pandora Papers* coverage. America's super rich, as one *Pandora Papers* report notes, "pay so little in taxes relative to their incomes that hiding money offshore" can turn out to be "mostly unnecessary". Our contemporary US tax code essentially expects precious little from the super rich at tax time and furnishes convenient, perfectly legal workarounds to the taxes the law does stipulate.

How effective have these workarounds become? This past June, analysts at ProPublica gleaned from a massive leak of IRS data that America's 25 richest paid taxes on the \$401-billion they gained from 2014 to 2018 at an incredibly tiny true tax rate of a mere 3.4 percent.

But don't take the small US billionaire footprint in the *Pandora Papers* exposé as any indication of disinterest in tax havens on the part of Americans. Quite the contrary. The *Pandora Papers* make dramatically clear that the United States has now become a premiere "offshore" tax haven for super rich the world over.

To be more exact: A handful of low-population US states – led by South Dakota – have essentially

turned themselves into pimps for global plutocrats. They've enacted a series of state laws that let financial agents set up shop within their borders and then go on to service and shield grand foreign fortunes. The "dynasty trusts" these states harbour are helping the super rich worldwide cloak their grand private fortunes in a gloriously lucrative anonymity.

The *Pandora Papers* abound in the stories of these global rich. A shady former vice president of the Dominican Republic, for instance, had built up a huge fortune as the president of a giant Dominican sugar company notorious for violating the human rights of its workers. In 2019, this deepest of Dominican pockets shifted a major chunk of his ill-gotten wealth into a South Dakota dynasty trust.

South Dakota, note tax analysts Bob Lord and Kalena Thom have, now safe harbours \$500-billion in trust assets, up 36 percent since 2019. In the process, charges journalist Timothy Noah, the state has become a "moral sewer."

Our US contribution to the global concentration of wealth, the *Pandora Papers* help us understand, has become frighteningly enormous. We're not just bending over backwards these days to grow the fortunes of our home-grown super rich. We're helping grow the fortunes of the super wealthy all over the world. We're no longer just dominating the world's billionaire ranks. We're helping those ranks worldwide become ever more dominant. **CT**

**Sam Pizzigati** co-edits *Inequality.org*. His latest books include *The Case for a Maximum Wage* and *The Rich Don't Always Win: The Forgotten Triumph over Plutocracy that Created the American Middle Class, 1900-1970*.

CONN HALLINAN

# Looking back on 50 years of foreign policy

In his farewell essay, our foreign policy expert looks back on 50 years of never-ending problems created by the idea of American exceptionalism

I have been writing about foreign policy, mostly America's, but those of other nations as well for more than 50 years. I think I have a pretty good grasp of countries like Turkey, China, India, Russia and many of the members of the European Union. I regret that I am less than sure-footed in Africa and Latin America.

During this time I have also learned a fair amount about military matters and various weapons systems, because they cost enormous amounts of money that could be put to much better use than killing and maiming people. But also because it's hard to resist the absurd: the high performance US F-35 fighter jet – at \$1.7-trillion, the most expensive weapons system in US history – that costs \$36,000 an hour to fly, shoots itself, and can decapitate pilots who attempt to

bail out. There are, as well, the \$640 toilet seats, the \$7,622 coffee maker, and the fact that the Department of Defense cannot account for \$6.5-trillion in spending.

I have also become fairly conversant with the major nuclear arms agreements and I know what Article VI of the 1968 Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty says (more on this later).

This is a farewell column, so I ask for your indulgence. Having (hopefully) beaten back cancer, I have decided to spend more time with my grandkids and maybe return to my three novels (I have at least one more in my head). But I would like a last hurrah about

what I have learned about the world and politics over that last half century, so bear with me.

**First, wars are really a bad idea,** and not just for the obvious reason that they cause enormous misery and pain. They don't work, at least in the sense that they accomplish some political end.

The United States is finally withdrawing from Afghanistan and contemplating getting out of Iraq. Both were disasters of the catastrophic variety. If anyone in the Oval Office or the Pentagon had bothered to read Rudyard Kipling on Afghanistan (*Arithmetic on the Frontier* comes to mind) and D.H. Lawrence on Iraq (the *Algebra of Occupation* is worthwhile) they would have known better.

But the illusions of empire are stubborn. The US still thinks it can control the world, when every experience for the past 50 years or more suggests it can't: Vietnam, Somalia, Libya, Afghanistan and Iraq. Indeed, the last war we "won" was Grenada, where the competition was not exactly world class.

Americans are not alone in the delusion of confusing the present for the past. The British are sending the aircraft carrier HMS Queen Elizabeth and a destroyer to the South China Sea – to do what?

The Lockheed Martin F-35 Lightning II

Photo: wikimedia





HMS Prince of Wales and HMS Queen Elizabeth pictured at sea for the first time.

The days when Charles “Chinese” Gordon could scatter the locals with a few gun boats is long gone. What the People’s Republic will make of Prime Minister Boris Johnson’s nostalgia for Lord Nelson and Trafalgar is anyone’s guess, but Beijing is more likely to be amused than intimidated by a mid-size flat top and a tin can.

China is not out to conquer the world. It wants to be the planet’s biggest economy and to sell everyone lots of stuff. In short, exactly what Britain wanted in the 19th-century and the US wanted in the 20th. The Chinese do insist on military control of their local seas, in much the same way that the US controls its east, west and southern coasts. Imagine how Washington would react to Chinese warships regularly exercising off of Pearl Harbor, San Diego, Newport News, and in the Gulf of Mexico.

Are the Chinese heavy handed about this? Yes, indeed, and they have unnecessarily alienated a number of nations in the region in-

cluding Vietnam, the Philippines, Brunei, Malaysia and Japan. Demilitarising the East and South China seas would reduce tensions and remove the rationale for Beijing’s illegal seizure of small islands, reefs and shoals in the area. China will have to realise that it can’t unilaterally violate international law through its claims over most of the South China Sea, and the US will have to accept that the Pacific Ocean is no longer an American lake.

**The Russians are coming!** The Russians are coming! Actually, no they are not, and it is time to stop the silliness about Russian hordes massing on the border ready to overrun the Ukraine or the Baltic states. What those troops were doing late last spring was responding to a plan by NATO for a huge military exercise, “Steadfast Defender”. Russia is not

trying to recreate the Soviet Union. Its economy is about the size of Italy’s, and the current problems stem from the profoundly stupid decision to move NATO eastwards. The Russians are sensitive about their borders, with good reason.

We can thank presidents Bill Clinton and George W. Bush for disinterring this particular aspect of the Cold War. Both presidents expanded NATO, and Bush unilaterally withdrew from the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty (ABM) and began deploying anti-missile systems in Poland and Romania.

NATO claims the ABMs are aimed at Iran, but Iran doesn’t have missiles that can reach Europe and it doesn’t possess nuclear weapons. The Russians would be foolish to draw any other conclusion but that those ABMs are targeting Moscow’s missiles.



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NATO has become a zombie alliance, staggering from one disaster to another: Afghanistan, then Libya, and now the US is pressing NATO to confront China in Asia (unlikely – Europeans view China as an invaluable market, not a threat).

NATO should go the way of the Warsaw Pact, and the US should re-join the anti-ballistic missile agreement. Removing the ABM missiles might, in turn, lead to re-establishing the Intermediate Nuclear Force Agreement, an extremely important treaty from which the US also unilaterally withdrew.

Israel needs to study some Irish history. In 1609, the native population of what became Northern Ireland was forcibly removed to Connaught in the island's west, and replaced by 20,000 Protestant tenants. The upcoming census is almost certain to show that Catholics now constitute a majority in Northern Ireland. The moral? Walls and fences and apartheid policies will not make the Palestinians go away or cause them to forget that much of their land was stolen.

In the short run, the rightwing settlers may get their way, just as the Protestant settlers did more than 400 years ago. But history is long, and the Palestinians are no more likely to disappear than the native Irish did. It would save a lot of bloodshed and communal hate if the Israelis removed the West Bank and Golan settlers, shared Jerusalem and let the Palestinians have their own viable state. Alternative? A one state, one person, one vote democracy.

The US should also end Israel's "special status". Why are we not as outraged with apartheid in Israel as we were with apartheid in South Africa? Why do we ignore the fact that Israel has nuclear weapons? When Americans lecture other countries about maintaining a "rules based" world, can you blame them if they

There is simply no way that the world can tackle climate change and still continue to spend almost \$2-trillion a year on weapons

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roll their eyes? Why is it "illegal" for Iran to acquire nukes when Tel Aviv gets a pass?

**Climate Change:** The Biden administration is fond of using the term "existential" in reference to climate change, and the term is not an exaggeration. Our species is at a crossroads, and the time for action is distressingly short. By 2050, some 600-million Indians will have inadequate access to water. Vanishing glaciers are systematically draining the water reserves of the Himalayas, the Hindu Kush, the Andes and the Rockies. While much of the world will face water shortages, some will experience the opposite, as Germans and Chinese recently discovered. Water is a worldwide crisis and there are few blueprints about how to deal with it, although the 1960 Indus Valley water treaty between India and Pakistan could serve as a template.

There is simply no way that the world can tackle climate change and still continue to spend – according to the Stockholm International Peace Institute – almost \$2-trillion a year on weapons. Nor can the US afford to support its empire of bases, some 800 worldwide, the same number as Britain had in 1885.

However, climate change is not the only "existential" threat to our species. Somehow nuclear weapons have dropped off the radar as a global threat, but currently there are

major nuclear arms races underway involving China, India, Pakistan, North Korea, Russia and NATO. The US is spending upwards of \$1 trillion modernising its nuclear triad of aircraft, ships and missiles.

**Sanctions,** as journalist Patrick Cockburn argues, are war crimes, and no country in the world applies them as widely and with such vigour as the US. Our sanctions have impoverished North Korea, Iraq, Iran, Venezuela, and Syria, and inflict unnecessary pain on Cuba. They raise tensions with Russia and China. And why do we apply them? Because countries do things we don't like or insist on economic and political systems that we don't agree with. Washington can do it because we control the de facto world currency, the dollar, and countries that cross us can lose their ability to engage in international banking. The French bank BNP Paribas was forced to pay \$9-billion in fines for bypassing sanctions on Iran.

And sanctions have almost always failed.

**On self-determination:** Dear Spanish government: Let the Catalans vote in peace and accept the results if they decide they want to go their own way. Ditto for the Scots, the people of Kashmir, and, sometime in the future, the Northern Irish. You can't force people to be part of your country if they don't want to be, and trying to make them is like teaching a pig to whistle: can't be done and annoys the pig.

**Refugees:** The US and NATO cannot destabilise countries like Afghanistan, Syria, and Libya and then pull up the drawbridge when people flee the chaos those wars have generated. The colonial coun-



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tries that exploited and retarded the development of countries in Africa and Latin America cannot wash their hands of the problems of post-colonialism. And the industrial countries that destabilised the climate can't avoid their responsibility for tens of millions of global warming refugees. In any case, the US, Europe and Japan need those immigrants, because the depressed birth rates in developed countries mean they are heading for serious demographic trouble.

**Hypocrisy:** The world rightfully condemns the assassination of political opponents by Russia and Saudi Arabia, but it should be equally outraged when the Israelis systematically kill Iranian scientists, or when the US takes out Iranian leaders with a drone attack. You don't have the right to kill someone just because you don't like what they stand for. How do you think Americans would react to Iran assassinating US Gen. Mark Milley, the head of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff?

The world desperately needs an international health treaty to confront future pandemics and must guarantee that it includes the poorest countries on the globe. This is not

American exceptionalism is an albatross around our necks, blocking us from seeing that other countries and systems may do things better than we do

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altruism. If countries can't provide healthcare for their residents, that should be a responsibility for the international community, because untreated populations give rise to mutations like the Delta variant. Ask not for whom the bells tolls. It tolls for us all.

American exceptionalism is an albatross around our necks, blocking us from seeing that other countries and other systems may do things better than we do. No other country accepts that Americans are superior, especially after four years of Donald Trump, the pandemic debacle and the January 6 insurrection in Washington. Who would want the level of economic inequality in this country, or our prison population, the highest in the world? Is being 44th on the World Press Freedom Index, or 18th on the Social Progress Index

something we should take pride in? What we can take pride in is our diversity. Therein lies the country's real potential.

**Finally, back to Article VI of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty:** "Each of the Parties to the Treaty undertakes to pursue negotiation in good faith on effective measures relating to cessation of the nuclear arms race at an early date and to nuclear disarmament and on a Treaty on general and complete disarmament under strict and effective international control." Amen.

Pie in the sky? An old man's wish list? Well, the one thing I have learned in these past 50-plus years is that things happen if enough people decide they should. So, to quote that rather clunky line from Pete Seeger's *One Man's Hands*, sung widely during the '60s peace movement: "If two and two and 50 make a million, we'll see that day come 'round."

And that's all folks (for now). **CT**

**Conn Hallinan** can be read at [www.dispatchesfromtheedgeblog.wordpress.com](http://www.dispatchesfromtheedgeblog.wordpress.com) and at [www.middleempireseries.wordpress.com](http://www.middleempireseries.wordpress.com).

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STANLEY STEPANIC

# More disease than Dracula: How the vampire myth was born

Lack of knowledge of bacteria and viruses led to blame being heaped on demonic creatures

**T**he vampire is a common image in today's pop culture, and one that takes many forms: from Alucard, the dashing spawn of Dracula in the PlayStation game "Castlevania: Symphony of the Night"; to Edward, the romantic, idealistic lover in the "Twilight" series.

In many respects, the vampire of today is far removed from its roots in Eastern European folklore. As a professor of Slavic studies who has taught a course on vampires called "Dracula" for more than a decade, I'm always fascinated by the vampire's popularity, considering its origins – as a demonic creature strongly associated with disease.

The first known reference to vampires appeared in written form in Old Russian in AD 1047, soon after Orthodox Christianity moved into Eastern Europe. The term for vampire was "upir," which has uncertain origins, but its possible literal meaning was "the thing at the feast or sacrifice", referring to a potentially dangerous spiritual entity that people believed could appear at rituals for the dead.

It was a euphemism used to avoid speaking the creature's name – and unfortunately, historians may never learn its real name, or even when beliefs about it surfaced.

The vampire served a function similar to that of many other demonic creatures in folklore around the world: They were blamed for a variety of problems, but particularly disease, at a time when knowledge of bacteria and viruses did not exist.

**S**cholars have offered several theories about various diseases' connections to vampires. It is likely that no one disease provides a simple, "pure" origin for vampire myths, since beliefs about vampires changed over time.

But two in particular show solid links. One is rabies, whose name comes from a Latin term for "madness". It's one of the oldest recognised diseases on the planet, transmissible from animals to humans, and primarily spread through biting – an obvious reference to a classic vampire trait.



Detail from a theatrical release poster for the 1931 film of *Dracula*

There are other curious connections. One central symptom of the disease is hydrophobia, a fear of water. Painful muscle contractions in the esophagus lead rabies victims to avoid eating and drinking, or even swallowing their own saliva, which eventually causes "foaming at the mouth". In some folklore, vampires cannot cross running water without being carried or assisted in some way, as an extension of this symptom. Furthermore, rabies can lead to a fear of light, altered sleep patterns and increased aggression, elements of how vampires are described in a variety of folktales.

The second disease is pellagra, caused by a dietary deficiency of niacin (vitamin B3) or the amino





Photo: Public Domain

acid tryptophan. Often, pellagra is brought on by diets high in corn products and alcohol. After Europeans landed in the Americas, they transported corn back to Europe. But they ignored a key step in preparing corn: washing it, often using lime – a process called “nixtamalisation” that can reduce the risk of pellagra.

Pellagra causes the classic “4 D’s”: dermatitis, diarrhoea, dementia and death. Some sufferers also experience high sensitivity to sunlight – described in some depictions of vampires – which leads to corpse-like skin.

Multiple diseases show connections to folklore about vampires, but they can’t necessarily explain how the myths actually began. Pellagra, for example, did not exist in East-

ern Europe until the 18th-century, centuries after vampire beliefs had originally emerged.

Both pellagra and rabies are important, however, because they were epidemic during a key period in vampire history. During the so-called Great Vampire Epidemic, from roughly 1725 to 1755, vampire myths “went viral” across the continent.

As disease spread in Eastern Europe, supernatural causes were often blamed, and vampire hysteria spread throughout the region. Many people believed that vampires were the “undead” – people who lived on in some way after death – and that the vampire could be stopped by

attacking its corpse. They carried out “vampire burials”, which could involve putting a stake through the corpse, covering the body in garlic and a variety of other traditions that had been present in Slavic folklore for centuries.

Meanwhile, Austrian and German soldiers fighting the Ottomans in the region witnessed this mass desecration of graves and returned home to Western Europe with stories of the vampire.

But why did so much vampire hysteria spring up in the first place? Disease was a primary culprit, but a “perfect storm” existed in Eastern Europe at the time. The era of the Great Vampire Epidemic was not just a period of disease, but one of political and religious upheaval as well.

During the 18th-century, Eastern Europe faced pressure from within and without as domestic and foreign powers exercised their control over the region, with local cultures often suppressed. Serbia, for example, was struggling between the Hapsburg Monarchy in Central Europe and the Ottomans. Poland was increasingly under foreign powers, Bulgaria was under Ottoman rule, and Russia was undergoing dramatic cultural change due to the policies of Czar Peter the Great.

This is somewhat analogous to today, as the world contends with the COVID-19 pandemic amid political change and uncertainty. Perceived societal breakdown, whether real or imagined, can lead to dramatic responses in society. **CT**

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KELLY DENTON-BORHAUG

# A parable of all-American violence

Our leaders and citizens alike promoted dreams of violence (and glory), while denying the nature of that violence and its grim impact on everyone

**A**s a religious studies professor, I know a parable when I see one. Consider the 20th anniversary of the 9/11 attacks and the final events in this country's war in Afghanistan as just such a parable taken directly from the history of our moment.

The heart-wrenching last days of that war amounted to a cautionary tale about the nature of violence and the difficulty Americans have honestly facing their own version of it. As chaos descended on Kabul, and as the Biden administration's efforts to evacuate as many Afghans and Americans as possible were stretched to the limit, one more paroxysm of senseless violence took centre stage.

A suicide bomber sent by the Islamic State group ISIS-K struck Kabul's airport, killing and maiming Afghans as well as American troops. The response? More violence as a Hellfire missile from an American drone supposedly took aim at a member of the terror group responsible. The US military announced that its drone assassination had "prevented another suicide attack", but the missile actually killed 10 members of one family, seven of them children, and no terrorists at all. Later, the Pentagon admitted its "mistaken

judgment" and called the killings "a horrible tragedy of war."

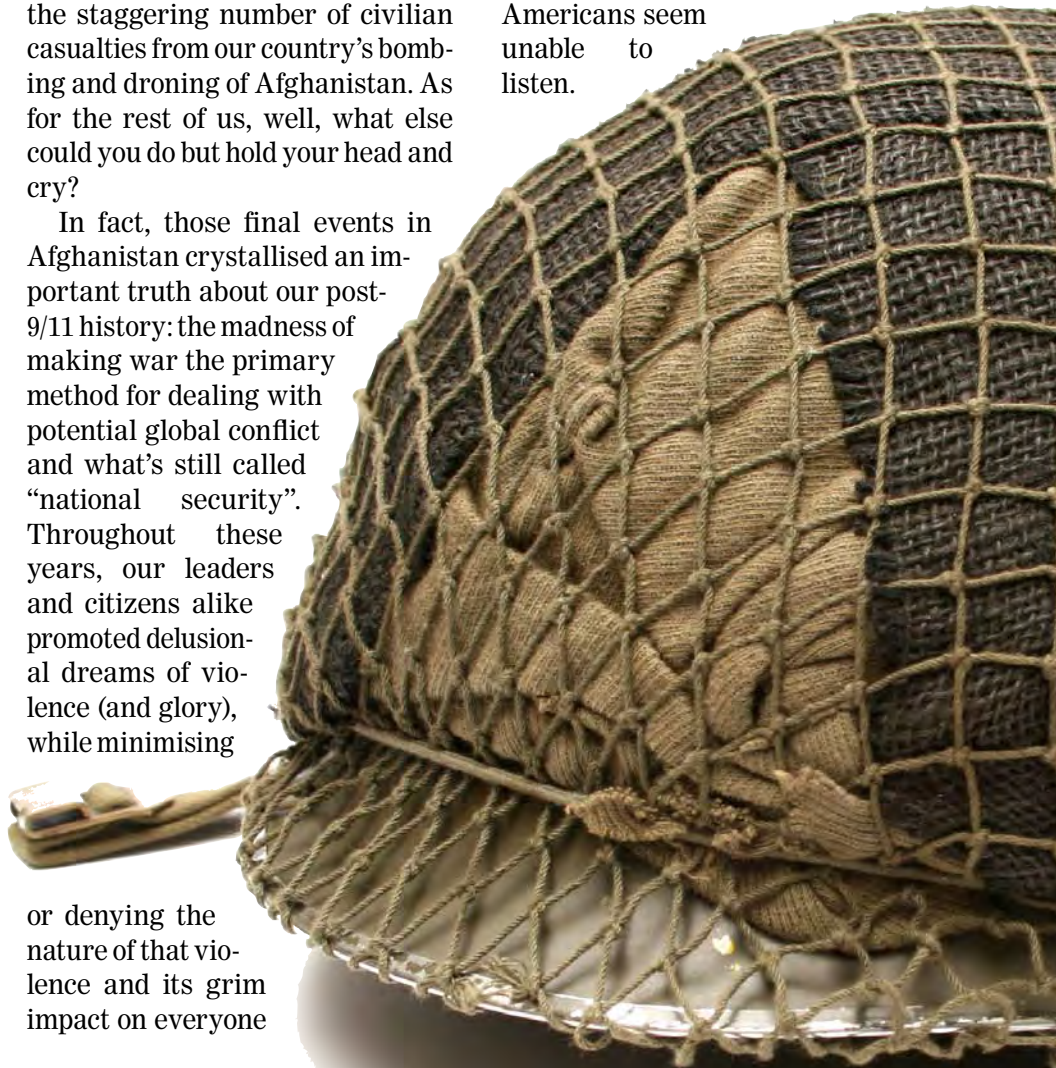
How to react? Most Americans seemed oblivious to what had happened. Such was the pattern of the last decades, as most of us ignored the staggering number of civilian casualties from our country's bombing and droning of Afghanistan. As for the rest of us, well, what else could you do but hold your head and cry?

In fact, those final events in Afghanistan crystallised an important truth about our post-9/11 history: the madness of making war the primary method for dealing with potential global conflict and what's still called "national security". Throughout these years, our leaders and citizens alike promoted delusional dreams of violence (and glory), while minimising

or denying the nature of that violence and its grim impact on everyone

touched by it.

With respect to the parables of the New Testament gospels, Jesus of Nazareth is reported to have said, "Those who have ears, let them hear". In this case, however, Americans seem unable to listen.





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Parables are compact, supposedly simple stories that, upon closer examination, illustrate profound spiritual and moral truths. But too few in this country have absorbed the truth about the misplaced violence that characterised our occupation of Afghanistan. Our culture remained both remarkably naïve and blindly arrogant when it came to widespread assumptions about our violent acts in the world that only surged thanks to the further militarisation of this society and the wars we never stopped fighting.

Over the last 20 years, according to a report from the National Priorities Project, the US dedicated \$21-trillion to an obsessive militarisation of this country and to the post-9/11 wars that went with it. Nearly a million people died in the violence, while

## I can't escape sharing complicity in the killing that's gone on in my nation's name, in that war on terror that became a war of terror

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at least 38-million were displaced. Meanwhile, more than a million American veterans of those conflicts came home with “significant disabilities”. Deployment abroad brought not just death but devastation to all-too-many military families. Female spouses, too, often bore the brunt of care for returning service members whose needs were unfathomably wrenching. The maltreatment of children in military families “far outpaced the rates among non-military families” after increasing deployments to Afghanistan and Iraq and children of deployed parents showed “high levels of sadness.”

Many analysts have pointed to the culture of lies and self-deceit that characterised these years. American leaders, political and military, lost their own moral grounding and were dishonest with the citizenry they theoretically represented. But we citizens also share in that culpability. Andrew Bacevich recently asked why the American people didn't hold their leaders to a more stringent accounting of the wars of the last 20 years. Why were Americans so willing to go along with the unremitting violence of those conflicts year after year, despite failure after failure?

What he called the “Indispensable Nation Syndrome” was, he suggested, at least partially to blame – a belief in American exceptionalism, in our unique power to know what's best for the world and

grasp what the future holds in ways other nations and people couldn't.

In the post-9/11 period, such a conviction mixed lethally with a deepening commitment to violence as the indispensable way to preserve what was best about this country, while fending off imagined threats of every sort. Americans came to believe ever more deeply, ever more thoughtlessly, in violence as a tool that could be successfully used however this country's leaders saw fit.

The unending violence of our war culture became a kind of security blanket, money in the bank. Few protested the outlandish Pentagon budgets overwhelmingly approved by Congress each year, even as defeats in distant lands multiplied. Violence would protect us; it would save us. We couldn't stockpile enough of it, or the weapons that made it possible, or use it more liberally around the globe – and increasingly at home as well. Such a deep, if remarkably unexamined, belief in the efficacy of violence also served to legitimate our wars, even as it helped conceal their true beneficiaries, the corporate weapons producers, those titans of the military-congressional-industrial complex.

As it happens, however, violence isn't a simple tool or clothing you can simply take off and set aside once you've finished the job. Just listen to morally injured military service members to understand how deep and lasting violence turns out to be – and how much harder it is to control than people imagine. Once you've wrapped your country in its banner, there's no way to keep its barbs from piercing your own skin, its poison from dripping into your soul.

Listening intently to the voices of active-duty service members and veterans can cut through the American attachment to violence in

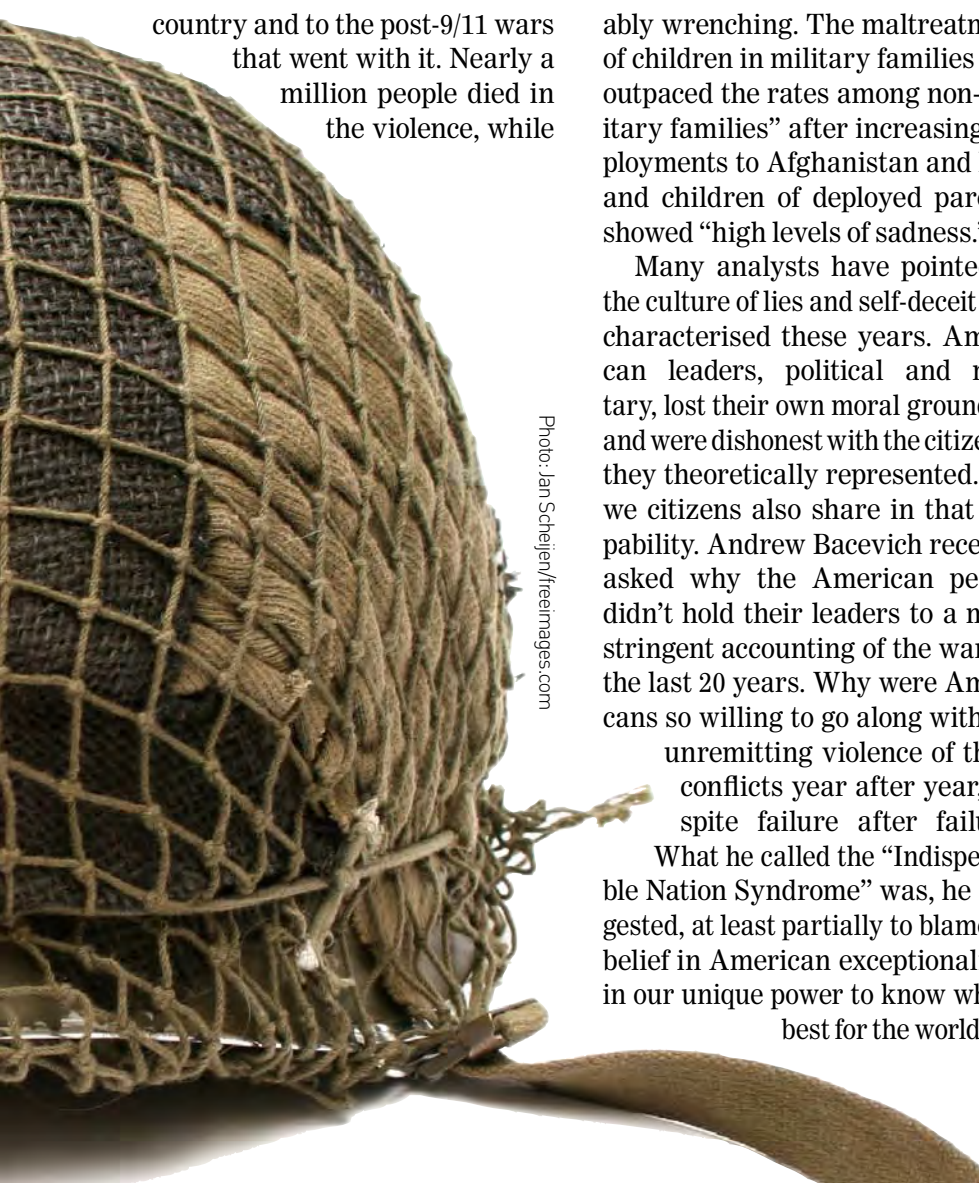


Photo: Jan Scheijen/freemages.com

these years, for they've experienced its costs and carried its burden in deeply personal ways. Think of them as the all-too-well-armed canaries in the coal mine of our post-9/11 wars, taking in and choking on the toxicity of the violence they were ordered to mete out in distant lands. Their moral injuries expose the fantasy of "using violence cleanly" as wishful thinking, a chimera.

Take Daniel Hale who, while serving in the Air Force, participated in America's drone-assassination programme. Once out of the service, his moral compass eventually compelled him to leak classified information about drone warfare to a reporter and speak out against the drone brutality and inhumanity he had witnessed and helped perpetrate. (As the *Intercept* reported, during five months of one operation in Afghanistan, "nearly 90 percent of the people killed in airstrikes were not the intended targets.")

Convicted of violating the Espionage Act and given 45 months in prison, he wrote, in a letter to the judge who sentenced him, "Your Honor, the truest truism that I've come to understand about the nature of war is that war is trauma. I believe that any person either called upon or coerced to participate in war against their fellow man is promised to be exposed to some form of trauma. In that way, no soldier blessed to have returned home from war does so uninjured". Having agonized about "the undeniable cruelties" he perpetrated, though he attempted to "hold his conscience at bay", he eventually found that it all came "roaring back to life."

Or listen to the voice of former Army reservist and CIA analyst Matt Zeller. Having grown up in a family steeped in the Ameri-

The world was grieving with us, but the urge for violent revenge took shape with breathtaking speed, so quickly that it all seemed the natural course of events

can military tradition and only 19 years old on September 11, 2001, he felt "obligated" to do something for his country and signed up. "I bought into it", he would later say. "I really believed we could make a difference. And it turns out... you don't come back the same person. I wasn't prepared for any of that. And I don't think you really can be". Describing his post-service efforts to assist Afghans "endangered by their work with the United States" who were fleeing the country, he said, "I feel like this is atoning for all the shit that I did previously."

Such voices disrupt the dominant narrative of the post-9/11 era, the unshakeable belief of our military and political leaders (and perhaps even of most Americans) that committing violence globally for two decades in response to that one day of bloody attacks on this country would somehow pay off and, while underway, could be successfully contained, distanced, and controlled. There was a deep conviction that, through such violence, we could purchase the world we wanted (and not just the weapons the military-industrial complex wanted us to pay for). Such was the height of American naïveté.

Norwegian sociologist Johan Galtung has defined violence as an "avoidable assault [on] basic human needs and more generally [on] life".

But how many Americans in these years ever seriously considered the possibility that the violence of war could be avoided? Instead, in response to that one day of terrible violence in our own land, perpetual conflict and perpetual violence became the American way of life in the world, and the consequences at home and abroad couldn't have been uglier.

Who bothered to consider other avenues of response in the wake of 9/11? The US invaded Afghanistan five weeks after that day, while the Bush administration was already preparing the way for a future invasion of Iraq (a country which had nothing whatsoever to do with 9/11). I'll never forget the confusion, shock, and fear in the early weeks after those attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon. The world was grieving with us, but the dominant urge for violent revenge took shape with breathtaking speed, so quickly that it all seemed the natural course of events. Such is the nature of violence. Once it's built into the structures of human society and government planning, it all too often takes precedence over any other possible course of action whenever conflict or danger arises. "There's no other choice", people say and critical thinking shuts down.

We in the United States have yet to truly face the personal as well as national costs of the violence that was so instantly woven into the fabric of our response to 9/11. Within a few days, for instance, Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld was already talking about a global war on terror targeting 60 countries! Most Americans blithely believed that we could strike in such a fashion without being truly affected ourselves. People generally failed to consider how such a recourse to endless violence would conflict, morally speaking, with the nation's own deepest values.



But philosophers know that such violence almost invariably turns out to be grounded in inequality and so sharply conflicts with this country's most basic values, especially the idea that human beings are equal. To act violently against the other, people must believe that the object of violence is somehow less worthy, of less value than themselves. In these years, they had to believe that the endless targets of American violence, like those seven dead children in Kabul, not to speak of the future lives and psychic well-being of the soldiers who were sent to deliver it, didn't truly matter. They were all "expendable."

No wonder military training always includes a process of being schooled in dehumanising others. Otherwise, most people just won't commit violence in that fashion. The sharp assault on their own values, their own humanity, is too great.

The commemorations of the 20th anniversary of 9/11 spotlighted the limits of the world that two decades of such wars have embedded in our national soul. With rare exceptions, there was a disparity when it came

No wonder military training always includes being schooled in dehumanising others. Otherwise, people just won't commit violence in that fashion

to grief. Countless reports mourned the victims and first responders who died here that day, but few were the ones who extended remembrance and grief to the hundreds of thousands, perhaps even millions who have died in our wars in distant lands ever since. Where was the grief for them? Where was the sense of regret or introspection about what 20 years of unmitigated violence has wrought around the world and what it has undoubtedly changed in the moral character of this country itself?

For, believe me, all of us have been impacted morally by our government's insistent attachment to violence. It's helped destabilise our own core humanity, its toxicity penetrating all too deeply into the soul of the world of the nation.

Recently, I was asked whether I agreed or disagreed with the statement, "I can be trained to kill and participate in killing and still be a good person."

As a theologian, an American, and a human being, I find myself filled with dread when I attempt to sort this out. One thing I do know, though. I may be a civilian, but along with the members of the US military, I can't escape sharing complicity in the killing that's gone on in my nation's name, in that war on terror that became a war of terror. I remain part of the group that committed those crimes over so many seemingly endless years and that truth weighs ever more heavily on my conscience. **CT**

*Kelly Denton-Borhaug has long been investigating how religion and violence collide in American war-culture. She teaches in the global religions department at Moravian University. She is the author of two books, US War-Culture, Sacrifice and Salvation and, more recently, And Then Your Soul is Gone: Moral Injury and US War-Culture. This essay first appeared at [www.tomdispatch.com](http://www.tomdispatch.com).*

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EDWARD CURTIN

# No speed limit on the Highway to Nowhere

Our mad quest to transcend our humanity and achieve perfection and total control is directed by ruling elites to gather more power to themselves

There was a time when time was time and space and speed had some human meaning, for people lived within the limits of the natural world of which they were a part.

As Albert Camus said, “In our madness, we push back the eternal limits, and at once dark Furies swoop down upon us to destroy.”

The destruction is now upon us.

In former days you could cross over to other people’s lives and come back with a different perspective, knowing what was obvious was true and that to exist meant to be composed of flesh and blood like all the others in different places and to be bound by the natural cycles of life and death, spring and fall, summer and winter.

There were limits then, on the land, water, and even in the sky, where space, too, had dimensions and the stars and planets weren’t imaginary landing strips for mad scientists and their partners in celluloid fantasies.

In that rapidly disappearing world where people felt situated in space and time, life was not yet a holographic spectacle of repetitive images and words, a pseudo-world of shadowy figures engaging in pseudo-debates on electronic screens with

people travelling from one place to another only to find that they never left home.

When the mind is homeless and the grey magic of digital propaganda is its element, life becomes a vast circinate wandering to nowhere. The experience of travelling thousands of miles only to see the same chain of stores lining the same roads in the same towns across a country where the same people live with their same machines and same thoughts in their same lives in their same clothes.

A mass society of mass minds in the hive created by cell phones and measured in nanoseconds where the choices are the freedom to choose what is always the same within a cage of categories meant to render all reality a “mediated reality.”

Without roots we are like Sisyphus pushing his rock not up the hill but in circles, only to reach what we think is the end is the beginning again. Runners in the circle game.

People’s roots were what once gave them distinction, a place to stand against the liquid flow of modernity and its disillusionments. These roots were cultural and geographic, material and spiritual. They went deep.

Such rootedness was not a pana-

cea, simply a place to take a stand. It gave a bit of stability, the sense of real existing individuals with identities, histories, ground under their feet.

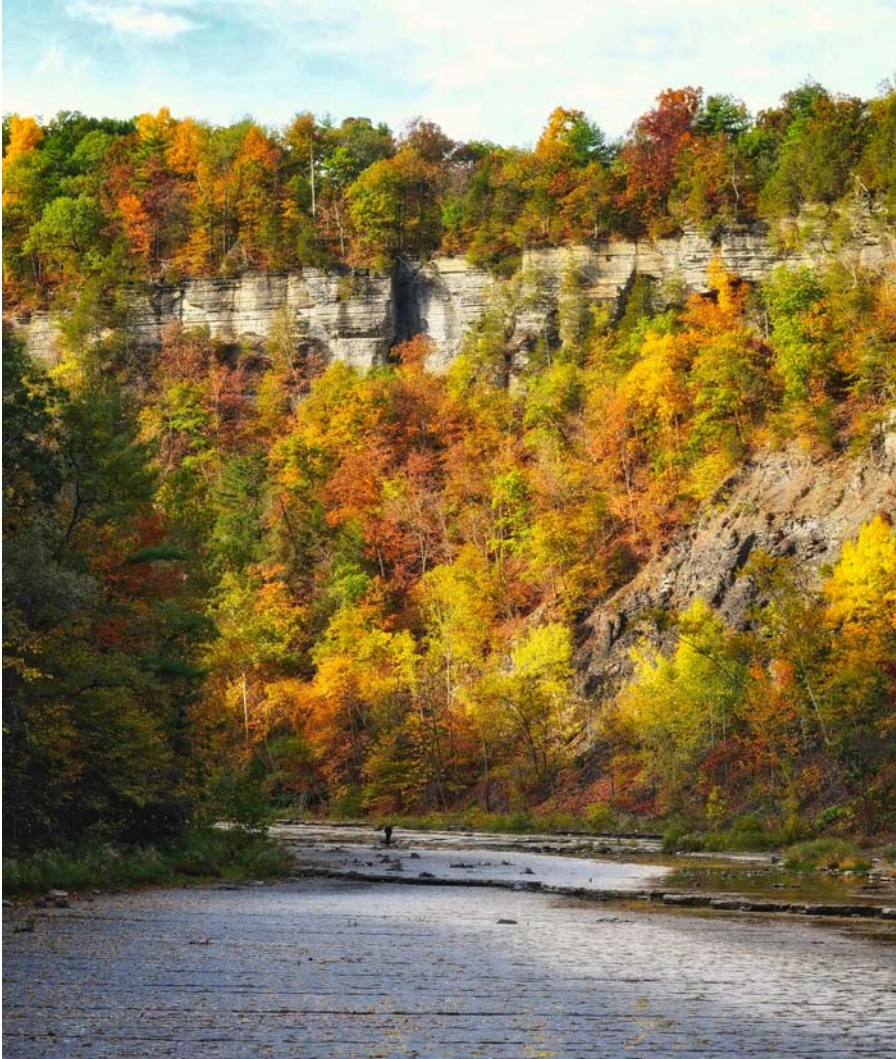
It was possible to meet others as different but equally human despite their different roots, and to grasp our common reality. It was the antithesis of globalisation, of sameness. It was diversity before there was fake diversity.

The idea of roots has become even more complicated since Simone Weil wrote her well-known book, *The Need for Roots*, in 1943. Even then she admitted this: “To be rooted is perhaps the most important and least recognised need of the human soul. It is one of the hardest to define.”

So I will not try to do so. Like so much in life, its reality involves both a yes and a no, like our relationship to time. For we have always been time-bound creatures, caught in its mystery, and we always will be. This was true before the invention of clocks, although the clock ushered in a technological revolution from which we’ve never looked back. Most people are now on speed going nowhere.

Recently, I looked back at a series of photographs that my parents had taken of me when I was about





An ancient deep gorge leads to the beautiful Taughannock Falls at Ulysses, in New York State.

two years old. They were shot at our home by a professional photographer and got me thinking about three themes that have always fascinated me and which lie at the centre of our world today: cameras, clocks, and mirrors. Each plays a significant part in what Guy Debord called *The Society of the Spectacle*:

“In societies dominated by modern conditions of production, life is presented as an immense accumulation of spectacles. Everything that was directly lived has receded into a representation. ... The more he identifies with the dominant images of need, the less he understands his

own life and his own desires. The spectacle’s estrangement from the acting subject is expressed by the fact that the individual’s gestures are no longer his own; they are the gestures of someone else who represents them to him.”

I, the only boy with seven sisters, was dressed for the occasion in shorts and a polo shirt with suspenders. Like a little model. An actor on a stage, a player in the spectacle before the spectacle became all-consuming. Some of the photos were of me standing on a couch in front of a large mirror, double images, some with me looking away and others

looking into the mirror. Two boys in a mirror world. Images.

A few captured me winding up a metal mechanical toy soldier so he could march across the floor to war. Others were of me looking up at a grandfather clock, focussed on the time I couldn’t have understood; seeing the hands of time I couldn’t tell.

Those photographs froze me in time as they were meant to do. They lie before me now as afterimages of my earliest memories and my later concerns. Time will decompose the paper they are printed on, just as my memories will disappear with my final journey.

I write these words from the third floor of the old Rogues Harbor Inn at Ithaca to anchor my sojourner’s passage through the mists of time. The old clocks throughout this ancient hotel are all stopped. It is and is not comforting. Yet these words move as I write them but stop when I’m done. They too are a double-edged sword.

We want to stop time’s passage but to live as well, and you can’t have both simultaneously. Maybe words are edible, and once they are written they must be eaten. Then they are gone.

After fifty years I have returned to Ithaca, New York, for three days and nights. Everything has changed, changed utterly. When I first arrived here half a century ago, I came to spend a few days with Fr. Daniel Berrigan, S.J. on my exit from the Marines Corps and my jettisoning of the mechanical soldier’s life. I had to move out of the photographs.

The boats are still anchored in the sea-like Cayuga Lake, along whose west side lies the towns of Ovid and Ulysses through which we passed to taste the wine pressed from the vines whose roots sink deep into this earth. To imbibe the fruit of

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these vines on a beautiful day is to feel happy. The names evoke the traditions of classical Greece and Rome, but when you study history, you realise that the soil then and now is soaked deep with the blood of innocents.

Walking through the ancient deep gorge that leads to the beautiful Taughannock Falls, the tallest free-falling waterfall east of the Mississippi River at 66 meters, beauty dominates your mind. But when you grasp the history of how the native Iroquois tribes were massacred right here by the European settlers who drove them from their roots in this land, the natural beauty turns a darker shade of red. Your mind flips.

Is there is any place on this blood-soaked earth where a semi-conscious person can rest easy? For beauty is the beginning of terror, is it not, the terrible realisation that, as Rilke said, “every angel is terrible”? And we are the terrible angels, exulting in beauty and often loving life so much that it brings us to tears, for we know it will end, and so we kill others to extend our lives, thinking it will bring us peace, even as we falsely cry peace, peace, when there is no peace.

If we think radically and go to the roots (Latin, *radix*) of human existence, we uncover, our double-consciousness, the tragicomic state of laughter and despair, suffering and happiness that has no end. There is no escape for mortals, even though history is replete with so many failed efforts to transcend the limits of the possible.

The modern project to achieve perfection and total control is a technological Faustian effort to transcend our humanity, now with artificial intelligence, digital dementia, and the marriage of the human to the machine. This mad quest goes by many names (Lewis Mumford

## When you grasp the history of how the native Iroquois tribes were massacred here by European settlers, the natural beauty turns a darker shade of red

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presciently called it *The Myth of the Machine*), but it is always directed by ruling elites to gather more power to themselves.

Today it is called the Great Reset, using medical technology and “vaccines” as the leading edge of its spear to disembowel our humanity. It may succeed because so many people have lost a rootedness in the lived spiritual experience of a sacred vision of an escape from our enigma. With this loss, they have lost the utopian vision that inspires hope when there is no hope.

The much-maligned English writer, D. H. Lawrence, grasped this in the years after the mass insanity of World War I when he wrote:

“We are all spectres ... spectres to one another ... abstracted reality. ... Shadow you are even to yourself ... abstracted reality. ... We are not solid. We don’t live in the flesh. Our instincts and intuitions are dead, we live wound round with the winding-sheet of abstraction. And the touch of anything solid hurts us. For our instincts and intuitions which are our feelers of touch and knowing through touch, they are dead, amputated. We walk and talk and eat and copulate and evacuate wrapped in our winding-sheets, all the time wrapped in our winding-sheets.”

There’s a man I know very well, who, when his brother-in-law died, was given one of his watches. The

brother-in-law had been an accountant who saved everything that passed through his hands, from ticket stubs to scraps of notes and old pens and jewellery that his mother had worn eighty years before, including many of her watches. Everything.

His passion to save was countered by his speed at getting to the finish line. He was a champion runner, who had grown up in the Depression and his parents were immigrants who worked hard to survive. The watch had never been used. It was a beautiful wind-up watch the man had won as part of a collegiate four-man two-mile relay track team that had set a world record at a major track meet.

The man had, through grit and perseverance, won a track scholarship to this prestigious university where he had excelled at running very fast. The back of the watch was inscribed from the Meet Committee with the date, place, and record time.

My friend used the watch regularly, winding it every morning. It ran a few minutes slow every day, insulting the fleet feet of his brother-in-law, who of course was Greek. One day, while winding the watch, the man dropped it and it stopped. The jeweller said it would be very expensive to repair, so the man decided to set it at 12:00 and leave it at that stop-time.

He kept wearing it and when anyone asked him for the time, he’d show it to them, saying it was high noon or midnight at the oasis, or, if they preferred, NOW. Naturally this was received with quizzical looks.

This always made him cry before he laughed. **CT**

**Edward Curtin** is an independent writer whose work has appeared widely over many years. His website is [www.edwardcurtin.com](http://www.edwardcurtin.com) and his new book is *Seeking Truth in a Country of Lies*.



# ONE MAGAZINE'S 10-YEAR QUEST FOR JUSTICE AND EQUALITY

Before I wound up in Toronto and ColdType, I designed **Frontline** magazine, South Africa's top liberal-left magazine, for 10 years during the 1980s as it battled for justice and equality during the final years of Apartheid. Now, we're digitising Frontline, as a case study of prophecy and history. The first digital issues are now on line; more will follow each month.

– **Tony Sutton, Editor**



Read the digital editions of Frontline, exactly as they were published, free of charge, at [www.issuu.com/frontline.south](http://www.issuu.com/frontline.south)

DAVID CROMWELL

# Manufacturing ignorance

How the mainstream media works  
to keep the public away from power



In their classic book on the news media, *Manufacturing Consent*, Edward Herman and Noam Chomsky presented a “propaganda model” of how the major broadcasters and newspapers operate. Whereas the “mainstream” media declare that their aim is to educate, inform and entertain the public, their actual societal purpose “on matters that are of significance for established power” is to avert any “danger” that the public can ‘assert meaningful control over the political process’ (Herman and Chomsky, *Manufacturing Consent*, Vintage, 1988/1994, p. 303).

As media analyst Lance Bennett wrote: “The public is exposed to powerful persuasive messages from above and is unable to communicate meaningfully through the media in response to these messages.... Leaders have usurped enormous amounts of political power and reduced popular control over the political system by using the media to generate support, compliance, and

just plain confusion among the public.” (Ibid., p. 303)

Thus, rather than manufacturing public consent for elite policies and priorities, manufacturing public ignorance is the more desirable and effective goal. After all, explicit public “consent” is typically not required for the UK government, for example, to attack the welfare system, underfund and carve-up the NHS for commercial purposes, sell arms to Saudi Arabia to bomb Yemeni civilians, sabre-rattle in the Indo-Pacific to “counter” China, or increase its nuclear weapons arsenal by 40 per cent.

Significant public activism and opposition to state-corporate power needs to be rooted in widespread shared public knowledge. But, in the absence of adequate public knowledge, and thus the reduced “threat” of an informed populace participating in a real democracy, power is more or less free to do as it pleases.

Take a recent Reuters news report following the death of Colin

Powell, one of the perpetrators of the supreme international crime of invading and occupying Iraq. Like a parody from the satirical website *The Onion*, the article was titled: “Powell remembered as ‘one of the finest Americans never to be President’”.

As Matt Kennard of Declassified UK noted: “The wildest thing about Western establishment media is its journalists aren’t even working under threat of prison or violence.

“They do state propaganda – and sanitise our worst war criminals – totally off their own back. Incredible discipline and dedication to serving power.”

Recall that, in February 2003, as the US and allies were preparing to invade Iraq, US Secretary of State Colin Powell had addressed the United Nations Security Council, dramatically holding up a small glass vial he said could contain anthrax, a biological weapon.

“Saddam Hussein and his regime will stop at nothing until something stops him”, stated Powell, arguing





that Iraq was deceiving UN weapons inspectors. He claimed that he was providing “facts and conclusions based on solid intelligence”. Powell’s presentation was seemingly watertight, based on supposedly undeniable evidence, and it was reported as such by an obedient “mainstream” news media across the globe.

But it was all lies, and it is “irrefutable” that Powell “consciously deceived the world”, as US political analyst Jon Schwarz noted. Around one million Iraqis died as a result of the invasion-occupation, while many more millions became refugees, the country’s infrastructure devastated.

With her customary sardonic wit, the Australian political writer Caitlin Johnstone described the infamous image of Powell holding a vial while addressing the UN Security Council as a “viral anti-war meme”:

“Over the years Powell’s meme has been an invaluable asset for opponents of western military interventionism and critics of US propaganda

narratives about empire-targeted nations, serving as a single-image debunk of any assertion that it is sensible to trust the claims US officials make about any government that Washington doesn’t like.”

### **The persecution of Julian Assange**

As we have recently observed, the state-corporate media, including and especially BBC News, have been complicit in keeping the public largely ignorant about the case of Julian Assange. Likewise, the case’s likely terrifying implications for further limiting public knowledge about what governments and big business actually get up to. As founder of WikiLeaks, Assange has probably done more than anyone in at least a generation to expose the war crimes of the US and its allies.

The revelations that the CIA had plans to kidnap or even kill Assange, almost entirely ignored by BBC News, has prompted concerned calls from advocates of “press freedom”

(such as it is in the West). The American Civil Liberties Union, Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, Knight First Amendment Institute, Committee to Protect Journalists, and Reporters Without Borders are among the signatories of a letter demanding that the case against Assange be dropped.

Nina Cross has examined the insidious role of the BBC in the state-sponsored persecution of Assange. First, in an overview of BBC history, she showed that: “Britain’s most powerful ‘national asset’ helps keep the British people in check while serving imperialism.”

In the case of Assange, the BBC has helped “to control the narratives around the stripping of Assange’s asylum”, typically presenting him as someone who is attempting to evade the law.

Cross added that the BBC is serving: “the interests of the British state apparatus, enabling a culture of impunity by spoon feeding its audience government narratives, manipulating perception, and pro-

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moting ridicule and disdain. The persecution of Assange that increasingly looks like a slow assassination by the UK and US authorities could not be so conceivable without a servile media.”

She continued: “The impunity to persecute Assange has been enabled by the BBC through omission and silence. Instead of practising journalism it has turned a blind eye to abuses of the British authorities and those of its allies. The BBC’s behaviour is contrary: anti-journalism, anti-truth.”

This is not new. As Noam Chomsky has observed: “Governments will use whatever technology is available to combat their primary enemy – their own population.”

In this sense, BBC News is a form of technology that the UK government deploys to keep the British population away from the levers of power.

## The “illusion of a democratic system”

Take the case of UK arms sales. A new film and report by Matt Kennard and Phil Miller of Declassified UK investigated the largely-hidden role of a factory owned by arms exporter BAE Systems in the Lancashire village of Warton. The factory supplies military equipment to the Saudi Arabian regime, enabling it to continue its devastating attacks on Yemen which, for years, has been suffering the world’s worst humanitarian crisis.

Kennard and Miller noted that: “Boris Johnson recently visited Warton and claimed the BAE site was part of his ‘levelling up agenda’. No journalist covering the visit seems to have reported the factory’s role in a war.”

Back in London, Declassified UK interviewed Molly Mulready, who

In this sense, BBC News is a form of technology that the UK government deploys to keep the British population away from the levers of power

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was a lawyer at the Foreign Office from 2014-19. She was responsible for giving legal advice in relation to exporting arms to the Middle East. She said: “Boris Johnson was very casual and jokey when we would go in to talk to him about arms to Saudi Arabia. We would go in to brief him about Yemen and he would joke around and waste everybody’s time and it was a bit mind blowing because you know, you’re discussing civilian casualties, you’re discussing the fact that innocent people have died and that British supplied bombs have played a part in that.”

In 2017, Campaign Against Arms Trade took the UK government to court over the export of weaponry from places like Warton to Saudi Arabia. Mulready was tasked with trying to defend the government: “something she now bitterly regrets.” Clearly upset, she told Kennard and Miller: “I’m so ashamed that I had anything to do with it. There have been tens of thousands of civilians killed in the bombing and there are millions of people who are food insecure. There are children in Yemen who are starving to death. The Saudis seem to have absolutely no compassion whatsoever.”

The arms sales violate the UK government’s own licencing laws, Mulready believes, and contribute to Saudi war crimes.

As Kennard and Miller concluded: “Yet they [UK arms sales] continue,

along with the weekly cargo flight we filmed.”

The *Morning Star* reported Mulready’s important testimony. But, according to our search of the ProQuest newspaper database, no other British newspapers have done so.

In a recent interview with Lowkey, the British rapper and political activist, Kennard said that in his work as a journalist he wants to “pierce the propaganda bubble”. He emphasised the “illusion of a democratic system” in the UK: “We do not live in a democracy. That’s what people need to understand. This is not a democratic state. Britain is an oligarchy.”

On the tragicomic notion that “Britain is a force for good in the world”, he commented: “It’s an amazing mythology. It’s mirrored by the US. They have this thing called ‘American exceptionalism’ which is how America operates very differently along principled lines; very differently to all superpowers. They don’t deal with [their own] interests, etc. It’s literally the intellectual level of about a five-year-old.”

Kennard continued: “But the interesting thing about our society is you cannot work in any elite part of the intellectual industries unless you believe it ... I’m looking every day at the reality of what Britain does in the world. And they are a force for reaction. They are a force for repression. They’re a force for militarism. They’re a force for destroying hope wherever it appears. They’re a junior partner to the US, but they’re actually an integral player. And the imperial operations of both are quite similar.”

What is the way ahead then? Rather than looking for a “saviour”, such as Labour centrists Sir Keir Starmer or Andy Burnham, Kennard suggested: “Let’s focus on different strategies, i.e. building extra-parliamentary movements



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and understanding what Labour's role in the British polity is, which is to support the British establishment, and absorb the radical left and neutralise it."

## "Few people seem aware that time is running out"

As we have often emphasised in Medialens' work, in this era of worsening climate instability, time is rapidly running out. Climate activist Ben See observes: "Very few people seem aware that we only have about three or four years left before Earth's species start being smashed by catastrophic 1.5°C of global warming in the context of toxic pollution, deforestation, etc. Perhaps our media and education systems are ... utterly inadequate?"

The United Nations COP26 climate summit in Glasgow, starting on 31 October, will doubtless generate yet more "blah, blah, blah", as Greta Thunberg so memorably summed up all the decades-long, political hot air on climate. She rightly observed that: "no one treats the crisis like a crisis, the existential warnings keep on drowning in a steady tide of greenwash and everyday media news flow."

She added: "The truth is there are no climate leaders. Not yet. At least not among high-income nations. The level of public awareness and the unprecedented pressure from the media that would be required for any real leadership to appear is still basically nonexistent."

During COP26, we can expect plenty of coverage of tense negotiations and exhausted delegates finally delivering an "agreed" outcome. But there will be zero or negligible attention given to the unjust system of global economics that is driving humans into oblivion.

The endless corporate drive to

"The truth is there are no climate leaders. Not yet. At least not among high-income nations"  
– Greta Thunberg

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privatise the planet was highlighted in a recent article by journalist and researcher Whitney Webb titled, "Wall Street's Takeover of Nature Advances with Launch of New Asset Class". She reported: "Last month, the New York Stock Exchange (NYSE) announced it had developed a new asset class and accompanying listing vehicle meant 'to preserve and restore the natural assets that ultimately underpin the ability for there to be life on Earth.' Called a natural asset company, or NAC, the vehicle will allow for the formation of specialised corporations 'that hold the rights to the ecosystem services produced on a given chunk of land, services like carbon sequestration or clean water.' These NACs will then maintain, manage and grow the natural assets they commodify, with the end of goal of maximising the aspects of that natural asset that are deemed by the company to be profitable."

Simply put, capitalists are seeking to control, not just ecosystems as "financial assets", but the rights that people around the world have to "ecosystems services", including the benefits that humans receive from Nature: "These include food production, tourism, clean water, biodiversity, pollination, carbon sequestration and much more."

The estimated "monetary value" of Nature's 'assets' have been priced at \$4,000-trillion. Webb concluded: "Thus, NACs open up a new feeding

ground for predatory Wall Street banks and financial institutions that will allow them to not just dominate the human economy, but the entire natural world."

The obscenity of this is almost beyond belief. Randall Wray, a professor of economics in New York, warned: "From the get-go, capitalism has been all about exploitation. Marx's followers will point to exploitation of workers, but that's the tip of the iceberg. Capitalism originated in the large plantations of the New World, exploiting the slaves, and Africa itself – which bore the burden of producing the humans that would be kidnapped and shipped across the seas to create the Old World's wealth. It exploited the environment of America's seemingly infinite natural resources, abandoning the land it exhausted, moving ever westward in its genocidal conquest of the continent. It spewed its waste into the water, the air, and the bodies of creatures great and small. It put a money price on the formerly free communal resources so that it could exploit them to extinction."

He added: "Capitalism has always been celebrated for its presumed efficiency. In fact, it is supremely inefficient. It survives only because it is the greatest system ever developed for exploitation of man and nature. It pushes costs off to the environment, 'other' people, families, governments, and our 'future.' It is ever on the lookout for new frontiers of exploitation. And in that quest, human survival is at risk."

Do not expect to be hearing much, if any, about all this from the state-corporate media in the weeks, months and years ahead; or however much time homo sapiens has left. **CT**

**David Cromwell** is co-editor of *Medialens*, the UK media watchdog – [www.medialens.org](http://www.medialens.org).

◆  
NOAM CHOMSKY & STAN COX

# The path to a livable future

Is it possible to find a solution to the threat of global climate disaster or will rich corporations be allowed to continue trashing the planet?

October marked a critical juncture in the struggle to avoid climate catastrophe. At the COP26 global climate summit in Glasgow, Scotland, negotiators were faced with the urgent need to get the world economy off the business-as-usual track that will take the Earth up to and beyond 3 degrees Celsius of excess heating before this century's end, according to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC). Yet so far, the pledges of rich nations to cut greenhouse-gas emissions have been far too weak to rein in the temperature rise. Meanwhile, the Biden administration's climate plans hang in the balance. If Congress fails to pass the reconciliation bill, the next opportunity for the United States to take effective climate action may not arise until it's too late.

For the past several decades, Noam Chomsky has been one of the most forceful and persuasive voices confronting injustice, inequity, and the threat posed by human-caused climate chaos to civilisation and the Earth. I was eager to know Professor Chomsky's views on the roots of our current dire predicament and on humanity's prospects for emerging from this crisis into a livable future. He very graciously agreed to speak

with me by way of a video chat. The text here is an abridged version of a conversation we had on October 1, 2021. — Stan Cox

***Stan Cox: Most of the nations that will be meeting in Glasgow for the 26th UN Climate Change Conference on October 31-November 12, 2021, have made emissions-reduction pledges. For the most part, those pledges are wholly inadequate. What principles do you think should guide the effort to prevent climate catastrophe?***

**Noam Chomsky:** The initiators of the Paris Agreement intended to have a binding treaty, not voluntary agreements, but there was an impediment. It's called the Republican Party. It was clear that the Republican Party would never accept any binding commitments. The Republican organisation, which has lost any pretence of being a normal political party, is almost solely dedicated to the welfare of the super-rich and the corporate sector, and cares absolutely nothing about the population or the future of the world. The Republican organisation would never have accepted a treaty. In response, the organisers reduced their goal to a voluntary agreement, which has all



the difficulties that you mentioned.

We've lost six years, four under the Trump administration which was openly dedicated to maximising the use of fossil fuels and dismantling the regulatory apparatus that, to some extent, had limited their lethal effects. To some extent, these regulations protected sectors of the population from pollution, mostly the poor and people of colour. But they're the ones who, of course, face the main burden of pollution. It's the poor people of the world who live in what Trump called "shithole countries" that suffer the most; they have contributed the least to the disaster, and they suffer the worst.

It doesn't have to be this way. As you write in your new book, *The Path to a Liveable Future*, there is indeed a path to a livable future. There are ways to have responsible, sane, and racially just policies. It's up to all of us to demand them, something





Art: 123rf.com

So why should we break the record? Why organise for a just future for all when we can trash the planet helping rich corporations get richer?

**SC: Ecological catastrophe is closing in on us largely because, as you once put it, “the entire socioeconomic system is based on production for profit and a growth imperative that cannot be sustained.” However, it seems that only state authority can implement the necessary changes in ways that are equitable, fair, and just. Given the emergency we face, do you think that the U.S. government would be able to justify imposing national-resource constraints like rules for resource allocation or fair-shares rationing, policies that would necessarily limit the freedom of local communities and individuals in their material lives?**

young people around the world are already doing.

Other countries have their own things to answer for, but the United States has one of the worst records in the world. The United States blocked the Paris Agreement before Trump eventually got into office. But it was under Trump’s instructions that the United States pulled out of the agreement altogether.

If you look over at the more sane Democrats, who are far from guiltless, there are people called moderates like Senator Joe Manchin (D-WV), the leading recipient of fossil-fuel funding, whose position is that of the fossil-fuel companies, which is, as he put it, no elimination, just innovation. That’s Exxon Mobil’s view, too: “Don’t worry, we’ll take care of you”, they say. “We’re a soulful corporation. We’re investing in some futuristic ways to remove from the atmosphere the pollution that

we’re pouring into it. Everything’s fine, just trust us”. No elimination, just innovation, which may or may not come and if it does, it will probably be too late and too limited.

Take the IPCC report that just appeared. It was much more dire than previous ones and said we must eliminate fossil fuels step by step, every year, and be free of them completely within a few decades. A few days after the report was released, Joe Biden issued a plea to the OPEC oil cartel to increase production, which would lower gas prices in the United States and improve his position with the population. There was immediate euphoria in the petroleum journals. There’s lots of profit to be made, but at what expense? It was nice to have the human species for a couple of hundred thousand years, but evidently that’s long enough. After all, the average lifespan of a species on Earth is apparently around 100,000 years.

**NC:** Well, we have to face some realities. I would like to see a move towards a more free and just society – production for need rather than production for profit, working people able to control their own lives instead of subordinating themselves to masters for almost their entire waking life. The time required for succeeding at such efforts is simply too great for addressing this crisis. That means we need to solve this within the framework of existing institutions, which can be ameliorated.

The economic system of the last 40 years has been particularly destructive. It’s inflicted a major assault on most of the population, resulting in a huge growth in inequality and attacks on democracy and the environment.

A livable future is possible. We don’t have to live in a system in which the tax rules have been changed so that billionaires pay

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lower rates than working people. We don't have to live in a form of state capitalism in which the lower 90 percent of income earners have been robbed of approximately \$50-trillion, for the benefit of a fraction of 1 percent. That's the estimate of the RAND Corporation, a serious underestimate if we look at other devices that have been used. There are ways of reforming the existing system within basically the same framework of institutions. I think they ought to change, but it would have to be over a longer timescale.

The question is: Can we prevent climate catastrophe within the framework of less savage state capitalist institutions? I think there's a reason to believe that we can, and there are very careful, detailed proposals as to how to do it, including ones in your new book, as well as the proposals of my friend and co-author, economist Robert Pollin, who's worked many of these things out in great detail. Jeffrey Sachs, another fine economist, using somewhat different models, has come to pretty much the same conclusions. These are pretty much along lines of proposals of the International Energy Association, by no means a radical organisation, one that grew out of the energy corporations. But they all have essentially the same picture.

There's, in fact, even a congressional resolution by Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and Ed Markey which outlines proposals that are pretty close to this. And I think it's all within the range of feasibility. Their cost estimates of 2 percent to 3 percent of GDP, with feasible efforts, would not only address the crisis, but would create a more livable future, one without pollution, without traffic jams, and with more constructive, productive work, better jobs. All of this is possible.

But there are serious barriers – the

'There are serious barriers – fossil-fuel industries, banks, other major institutions, all designed to maximise profit and not care about anything else'

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fossil-fuel industries, the banks, the other major institutions, which are designed to maximise profit and not care about anything else. After all, that was the announced slogan of the neoliberal period – the economic guru Milton Friedman's pronouncement that corporations have no responsibility to the public or to the workforce, that their total responsibility is to maximise profit for the few.

For public-relations reasons, fossil-fuel corporations like ExxonMobil often portray themselves as soulful and benevolent, working day and night for the benefit of the common good. It's called greenwashing.

***SC: Some of the most widely discussed methods for capturing and removing carbon dioxide from the atmosphere would consume vast quantities of biomass produced on hundreds of millions or billions of acres, thereby threatening ecosystems and food production, largely in low-income, low-emissions nations. A group of ethicists and other scholars recently wrote that a "core principle" of climate justice is that "the urgent, basic needs of poor people and poor countries ought to be secured against the effects of climate change and of measures taken to limit" climate change. That would seem to clearly rule out these "emit carbon now, capture it later" plans, and there are other examples***

*of what we might call "climate-mitigation imperialism". Do you think that the world may be faced with more and more of this sort of exploitation as temperatures rise? And what do you think about these proposals for bioenergy and carbon capture?*

NC: It's totally immoral, but it's standard practice. Where does waste go? It doesn't go in your backyard, it goes to places like Somalia that can't protect themselves. The European Union, for example, has been dumping its atomic wastes and other pollution off the coast of Somalia, harming the fishing areas and local industries. It's horrendous.

The latest IPCC report calls for an end to fossil fuels. The hope is that we can avert the worst and reach a sustainable economy within a couple of decades. If we don't do that, we will reach irreversible tipping points and the people most vulnerable – those least responsible for the crisis – will suffer first and most severely from the consequences. People living in the plains of Bangladesh, for example, where powerful cyclones cause extraordinary damage. People living in India, where the temperature can go over 120 degrees Fahrenheit in summer. Many may witness parts of the world becoming unlivable.

There were recent reports by Israeli geoscientists condemning its government for not taking account of the effect of the policies they are pursuing, including developing new gas fields in the Mediterranean. They developed an analysis that indicated that, within a couple of decades, over the summer, the Mediterranean would be reaching the heat of a Jacuzzi, and the low-lying plains would be inundated. People would still live in Jerusalem and Ramallah, but flooding would impact much of the population. Why not change



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course to prevent this?

*SC: The neoclassical economics underlying these injustices lives on in economic climate models known as “integrated assessment models”, which come down to cost-benefit analyses based on the so-called social cost of carbon. With these projections, are economists seeking to gamble away the right of future generations to a decent life?*

NC: We have no right to gamble with the lives of the people in South Asia, in Africa, or people in vulnerable communities in the United States. You want to do analyses like that in your academic seminar? OK, go ahead. But don't dare translate it into policy. Don't dare to do that.

There's a striking difference between physicists and economists. Physicists don't say, hey, let's try an experiment that might destroy the world, because it would be interesting to see what would happen. But economists do that. On the basis of neoclassical theories, they instituted a major revolution in world affairs in the early 1980s that took off with Carter, and accelerated with Reagan and Thatcher. Given the power of the United States compared with the rest of the world, the neoliberal assault, a major experiment in economic theory, had a devastating result. It didn't take a genius to figure it out. Their motto has been, “Government is the problem.”

That doesn't mean you eliminate decisions; it just means you transfer them. Decisions still have to be made. If they're not made by government, which is, in a limited way, under popular influence, they will be made by concentrations of private power, which have no accountability to the public. And following the Friedman instructions, have no responsibility

‘We have no right to gamble with the lives of the people in South Asia, in Africa, or people in vulnerable communities in the United States’

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to the society that gave them the gift of incorporation. They have only the imperative of self-enrichment.

Margaret Thatcher then comes along and says there is no such thing as society, just atomised individuals who are somehow managing in the market. Of course, there is a small footnote that she didn't bother to add: for the rich and powerful, there is plenty of society. Organisations like the Chamber of Commerce, the Business Roundtable, ALEC, all kinds of others. They get together, they defend themselves, and so on. There is plenty of society for them, just not for the rest of us. Most people have to face the ravages of the market. And, of course, the rich don't. Corporations count on a powerful state to bail them out every time there's some trouble. The rich have to have the powerful state – as well as its police powers – to be sure nobody gets in their way.

**SC: Where do you see hope?**

NC: Young people. In September, there was an international climate strike; hundreds of thousands of young people came out to demand an end to environmental destruction. Greta Thunberg recently stood up at the Davos meeting of the great and powerful and gave them a sober talk on what they're doing. “How dare you”, she said, “You have stolen my dreams and my childhood with your empty words”. You have

betrayed us. Those are words that should be seared into everyone's consciousness, particularly people of my generation who have betrayed them and continue to betray the youth of the world and the countries of the world.

We now have a struggle. It can be won, but the longer it's delayed, the more difficult it'll be. If we'd come to terms with this ten years ago, the cost would have been much less. If the US hadn't been the only country to refuse the Kyoto Protocol, it would have been much easier. Well, the longer we wait, the more we'll betray our children and our grandchildren. Those are the choices. I don't have many years; others of you do. The possibility for a just and sustainable future exists, and there's plenty that we can do to get there before it's too late. **CT**

*This interview was first published at [www.tomdispatch.com](http://www.tomdispatch.com).*

**Noam Chomsky** is the author of numerous best-selling political works, translated into scores of languages. He has been institute professor emeritus at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology since 1976. His most recent books are *Consequences of Capitalism: Manufacturing Discontent and Resistance*, with Marv Waterstone, and *Climate Crisis and the Global Green New Deal: The Political Economy of Saving the Planet*, with Robert Pollin and C.J. Polychroniou.

**Stan Cox**, senior scientist at The Land Institute, is the author of *The Path to a Livable Future: A New Politics to Fight Climate Change, Racism, and the Next Pandemic*, just published, and *The Green New Deal and Beyond: Ending the Climate Emergency While We Still Can*, with a forward by Noam Chomsky.

GEORGE MONBIOT

# Foxhunters escape Tory crackdown

Bloodsports enthusiasts in the UK appear to be running riot, while the government rides roughshod over the public's right to protest

Something is going badly wrong in the English countryside. For years, despite abundant video evidence, bloodsports enthusiasts have intimidated and attacked people who criticise and seek to monitor them, with apparent impunity.

There is film footage on social media of a man apparently beating the windows of a car with a dead fox, of a huntsman on horseback appearing to assault an observer with a whip, of horses being ridden into hunt monitors, of a woman being slapped round the face and thrown to the ground, of two men, one masked and one in a balaclava, apparently trying to smash the windows of the car and then pursuing it on a quad bike, of a large vehicle with its plates obscured, ramming a car full of people. These are just a few among the many acts of violence reported by people trying to prevent foxhunting.

The attacks appear to be escalating. Last week, two men in balaclavas drove a Land Rover up to the gates leading to TV presenter Chris Packham's house and set light to it, causing an explosion

and a fire that inflicted thousands of pounds worth of damage. This surely qualifies as terrorism. It's the latest of many attempts to intimidate him, which appear to be connected to his opposition to hunting and the illegal persecution of birds of prey.

It's not the first time that some-

treated in hospital for smoke inhalation. He believes these events are linked.

The victims of such attacks have frequently complained about what they see as a failure by the police to respond to their emergency calls, or to follow up afterwards. A dossier compiled by the group Action Against Foxhunting documents 81 cases, in many of which telephone calls to the police were not returned, or illegal hunting, violence and other crimes were not investigated.

Hunting animals with dogs has been illegal in England and Wales since 2005, although the



one opposed to hunting has been the victim of an arson attack. In 2018, a Somerset farmer, Paul Chant, was assaulted when he tried to stop a hunt from rampaging across his land, part of which he uses as an animal sanctuary. A few days later, he attended an anti-hunt protest. Hours afterwards, his car and an outbuilding were torched, and he had to be

law included exemptions. Hunts are permitted to follow a scent trail laid down in advance. But "trail hunting" appears to be widely used as a cover for pursuing animals. There are repeated instances of hounds chasing foxes and deer across people's farms and gardens, frightening or killing livestock and pets and inflicting great distress on local peo-

Photo: Stockvault



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ple. People who try to defend their land from these intrusions have been intimidated, and in some cases forced to close their businesses or leave their homes. Every winter, parts of the countryside succumb to mob rule. And the police, all too often, stand by.

I think there's likely to be a connection between the failure to police bloodsports effectively and the apparently escalating violence against objectors. A sense of impunity is likely to be strengthened by major legal deficiencies. The Hunting Act is hard to enforce, as it's easy for a trail hunt "accidentally" to pursue and kill a fox or a deer. It contains several loopholes that make such "accidents" even harder to prosecute. The only effective remedy is surely to ban all forms of hunting with hounds, including trail hunts.

Other bloodsports also enjoy remarkable legal exemptions. An attempt to introduce a provision for vicarious liability in England, ensuring that estate owners could be prosecuted when their gamekeepers illegally kill birds of prey, was struck down by an environment minister who happened to own a grouse moor and a pheasant shoot. The amazing legal contortions needed to allow pheasant shooting to continue create the impression that there is one law for the rich and quite another for the poor.

I believe that a longstanding culture war, in which people who describe themselves as "real" or "authentic" countryfolk vilify "incomers" and "townies" (those whose parents were not born in the community), also helps to create a permissive environment for intimidation and violence. I've even seen some rural people in the UK describe themselves as "in-

An increasing number of the Queen's subjects have started to see the Royal Family as a farcical institution that is well past its sell-by date

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digenous", a theme taken up by the former Conservative MP Rory Stewart. In reality, the British countryside has a long history of population turnover and migration. "Authenticity" is a dangerous myth.

The closed mindset these attitudes might help to foster appears to be reflected in some aspects of rural policing. While in London, four times as many Black people are stopped and searched today as white people as a result of institutional bias, in Suffolk, they are 17 times more likely to be stopped, and in Dorset, 25 times more likely.

You might have imagined that the "party of law and order" would take an interest in blatant lawbreaking in the countryside. It does, but generally on the wrong side. In 2005, when the Hunting Act was about to come into force, Boris Johnson, who was then a backbench MP, wrote a column in the *Spectator*, urging hunts to "defy the police and the magistrates and the government". So don't expect much help from that quarter.

Contrast the silence from politicians and the absence of editorials in the billionaire press about what was suffered by Chris Packham with the furious response to the protests by Insulate Britain. I understand why these protests are controversial, and I recognise that they might have caused, albeit inadvertently, real harm to people, though some of the claims about them turn out

to be untrue. But while politicians say nothing about deliberate acts of violence in the countryside, and make no attempt to amend glaring deficiencies in policing and the law, the Insulate Britain protesters have been condemned by the prime minister and used by the home secretary, Priti Patel, as an excuse to introduce even more draconian laws against protest.

Among Patel's new assaults on our liberties, announced in her speech to the Conservative party conference, is a power called a criminal disruption prevention order, which would forbid named people from attending particular protests, even when there's no evidence that they are planning any criminal activity. When Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary examined this proposal (when it was first mooted, the measure had the more candid title of a "protest banning order"), it concluded that it would be incompatible with human rights legislation, as it would "completely remove an individual's right to attend a protest". Among many possible uses, it could be deployed against the people trying to monitor and stop illegal hunting.

As the contrast between these cases suggests, the political outrage and the new measures being introduced have little to do with "public order". Their purpose is to shut down challenges to existing power. Patel's illiberal laws, on top of all the other restrictions on protest brought in by successive governments since 1986, will help to clear an uncontested space for the Conservatives and the interests they favour. They are riding roughshod over us.

**George Monbiot** is a columnist at the *Guardian*, where this article first appeared. His website is [www.monbiot.com](http://www.monbiot.com)

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