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Issue 235

ColdType

WRITING WORTH READING ■ PHOTOS WORTH SEEING

June 2022



CLIMATE BREAKDOWN AND STATE-CORPORATE MADNESS

THERE'S NO WAY TO FOOL PHYSICS

DAVID CROMWELL & DAVID EDWARDS - PAGES 14-17

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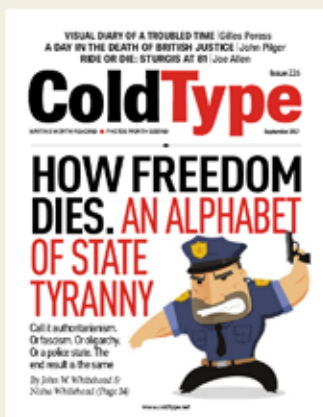
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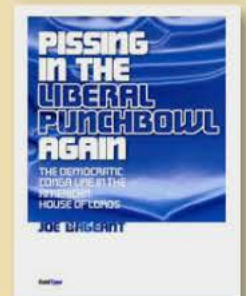
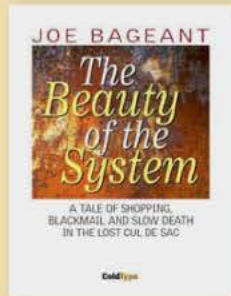
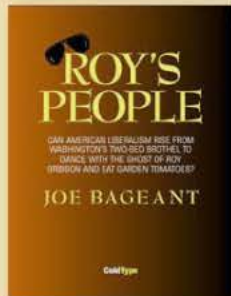
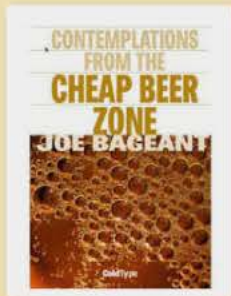
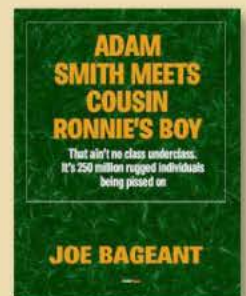
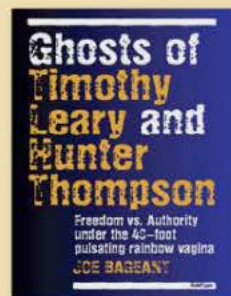
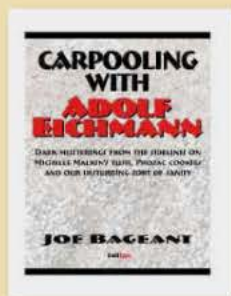
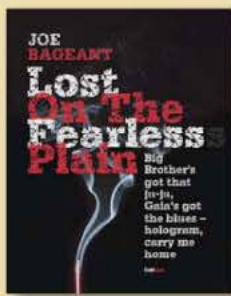
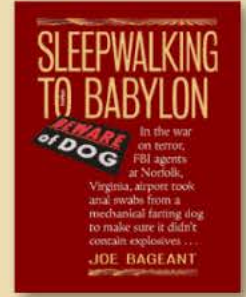
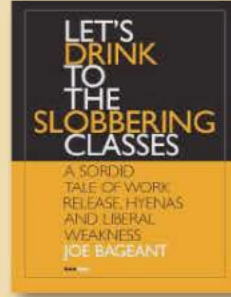
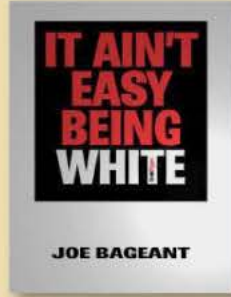
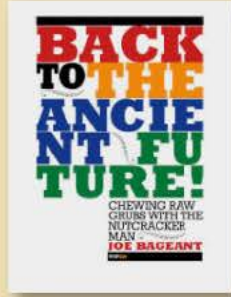
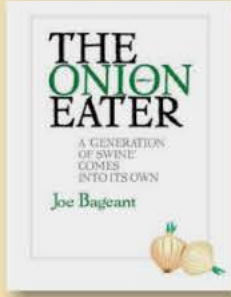
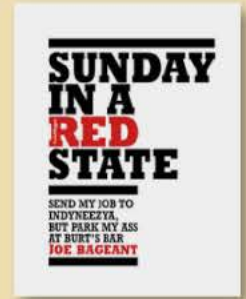
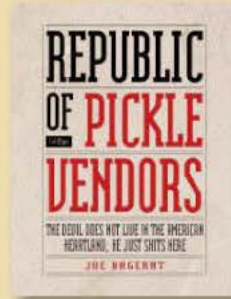
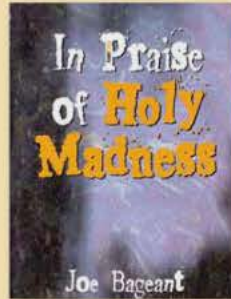
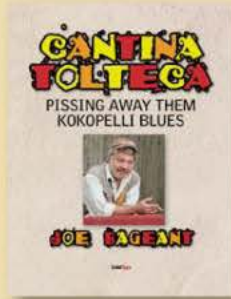
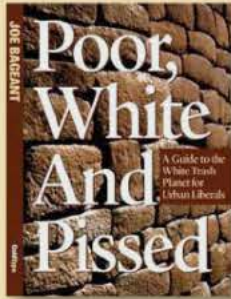
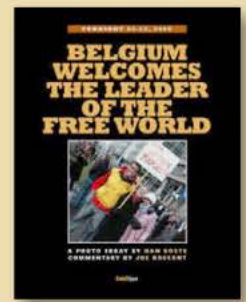
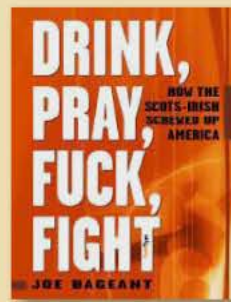
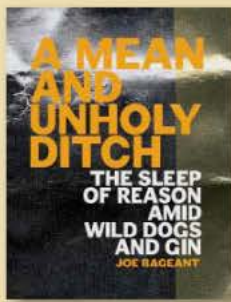
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NEWS | VIEWS | OPINIONS

INSIGHTS

SAM PIZZIGATI

Safeboxes in the sky: The height of folly

You can never be too rich or too thin, an article in the high-fashion magazine *Harper's Bazaar* quipped way back in 1963. But can a skyscraper for the rich ever be too thin?

New Yorkers these days have good reason to ask that question as they look up and contemplate the latest addition to Manhattan's skyline, the 84-floor "Steinway Tower" at 111 West 57th Street, right in the middle of New York's Billionaires' Row.

Just how thin does this new 111 West 57th happen to go? The Steinway Tower rises 1,428 feet up off the street. The width: 57 feet. The resulting 24:1 ratio makes this edifice "the most slender skyscraper in the world," beating out the 15:1 ratio of Manhattan's 432 Park Avenue and the 20:1 of the previous skinniest skyscraper, Hong Kong's Highcliff Tower.

The architects for 111 West 57th



Jim Henderson/Wikipedia

SLENDER: The 84-floor Steinway Tower, seen in December 2019 from Columbus Circle rises high above New York City's 'Billionaires' Row'.

INSIGHTS

have had to exercise considerable ingenuity to keep their handiwork upright at such a narrow width. They clad the surface, notes Financial Times architecture critic Edwin Heathcote, with spiralled terracotta moulding designed to create a turbulence that will “deflect the direct power of the wind.” They’ve also incorporated into their needle’s design a “mass damper,” an 800-ton “vertical slab of steel” to limit the tower’s swaying.

All this ingenuity will no doubt be well rewarded. The developers figure to have plenty of cash to pay off their contractors. They’re hawking their 46 tower condos at price points that range from \$7.75 million for two-bedrooms that each occupy entire single floors to \$66 million for the Steinway Tower’s penthouse summit, an eight-bedroom extravaganza that stretches out over three full floors.

The owners-to-be of these Steinway Tower condos will all have fantastic, 360-degree views of the world’s most iconic cityscape. What they won’t have: places that anyone expects them to actually live in. The billionaires buying into 111 West 57th are essentially purchasing high-status safeboxes in the sky that only figure to be occupied a small part of the year.

No one can really call the condos in the Steinway Tower “housing,” explains London School of Economics sociologist David Madden, an ex-New Yorker. These units, he adds, aren’t serving “any social purpose.” Each one amounts to a “land-bound yacht.”

So cogitate a bit about the situ-

ation we have here: The cleverest architectural minds and the most accomplished builders of our time have constructed a modern eighth wonder of the world that will largely sit empty for the bulk of every year. And let’s also keep in mind that the new Steinway Tower hardly stands alone. Manhattan now boasts a number of similar safebox-in-the-sky skyscrapers, all built within the past dozen years. These towers may not run quite as slender as 111 West 57th, but they serve the same function. Their “residences” all regularly sit lifeless.

What sort of society, maybe we should be asking, would choose to waste its resources and talents building ever more elaborate residences without residents? Wait, we have even more to ruminate on here. All this waste is coming at a time when record numbers of Americans can’t find decent housing they can afford. Just under half of all Americans, the Pew Research Center disclosed this past January, consider the availability of affordable housing in their local community a major problem. Only 14 percent of Americans consider housing availability no problem at all.

But the problems inherent in luxurious super tall and skinny skyscrapers, average New Yorkers are learning, can go well beyond waste. This past February, huge chunks of ice fell off the upper reaches of the Steinway Tower and injured three people below. One of the three, Deneice O’Connor, was driving her Honda at the time. The ice, the New York Daily News reported, “smashed through the car’s sunroof and windshield.”

A stunned O’Connor pulled over

to the curb as long panes of ice kept falling around her. She found shelter under an awning.

“I truly believe I cheated death,” she told the Daily News.

Super-tall luxury towers, observes the architecture and design magazine Dezeen, also pose a particularly striking threat to our beleaguered environment. The floor-to-ceiling glass walls on 111 West 57th and other luxury skyscrapers give views to die for. But they also require high levels of air conditioning that make them “notoriously energy inefficient.”

In China, the global center of the luxury needle tower boom, the inefficiencies of mostly empty super tall towers have generated an official backlash. Authorities last October announced a total ban on skyscrapers over 500 meters and strict restrictions on towers over 250 meters, about 820 feet.

China currently hosts 99 skyscrapers that stretch over 300 meters high, the global benchmark for defining a super tall structure.

China’s restrictions on super tall towers have already begun encouraging some fresh new approaches to building up. The Italian design firm Carlo Ratti Associati, for instance, is incorporating the principles of “vertical forestry” into its plans for a new 218-meter skyscraper in Shenzhen, China’s third most populous city.

The Ratti Associates tower will have “facades covered in plants,” in a design that will create a vertical hydroponic farm expected to generate 270 tons of food per year, “enough to feed roughly 40,000 people” through “a self-sustained

INSIGHTS

food supply chain” that manages everything from cultivation to consumption “all within one building.”

A tall, skinny building, the new tower plans in China suggest, doesn't have to be a “svelte monstrosity to immoral excess” – one New Yorker's tag for 111 West 57th – or aspire to “the exclusion of the 99.99 percent.” Tall buildings can have some redeeming social value.

On the other hand, the Steinway Tower suggests, grand concentra-

tions of private wealth cannot. **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*. Readers can access his earlier book, *Greed and Good: Understanding and Overcoming the Inequality that Limits Our Lives*, at www.Inequality.org.

Pioneer Oil isn't the only one: 59 percent of oil and gas executives recently told the Dallas Fed that “investor pressure to maintain capital discipline” – ie, to keep profits soaring – is the primary reason publicly traded oil companies are throttling supply despite high prices.

If you think these CEOs are worried about the toll high gas prices are having on families trying to get their kids to school or drive to work, think again. As Diamondback's CEO told investors this month: “I think what matters most...is that we're returning cash to shareholders.”

As long as we depend on oil and gas to fuel our cars, heat our homes, and power our electric grid, we will remain vulnerable to the bottomless greed of fossil fuel executives, their shareholders, and a volatile global market.

Unless we fight back, Big Oil profiteers will continue adding to their profits – and to those of the authoritarian petrostates they've long been in bed with.

The good news is, there are many policy tools at our disposal to rein them in.

House Democrats are advancing legislation that would grant the Federal Trade Commission expanded authority to crack down on profiteering energy companies charging excessive or exploitative prices for fuel.

Congress is also considering a Big Oil Windfall Profits Tax, which would make it

LINDSAY OWENS & HEBAH KASSEM

Stop profiteering at the gas pump

Amid the ongoing atrocities in Ukraine, rising gas prices, and the existential threat of climate change, policymakers in Washington have a long list of crises to address. But there's one step that could help mitigate all of them: reducing our dependence on oil – and the giant oil and gas companies who profit from it.

For decades, we've allowed big oil and gas companies to enrich themselves at the expense of our families, communities, and environment.

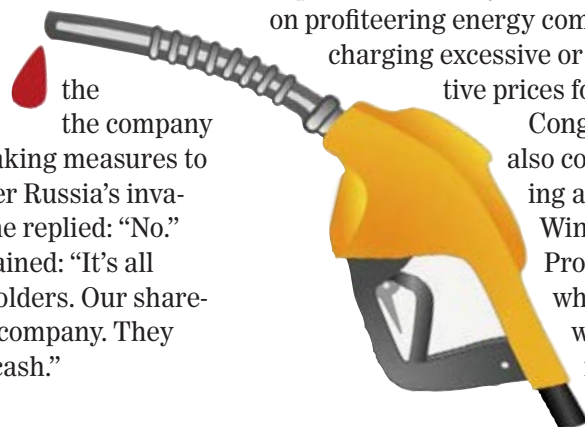
Now these companies are seizing a moment of geopolitical unrest to pad their pockets even more. Oil companies are celebrating some of their biggest profits in years. In the first three months of 2022 alone,

ExxonMobil raked in a record \$5.5 billion, ConocoPhillips \$5.8 billion, and Chevron \$6 billion.

On quarterly earnings calls with their shareholders, big oil CEOs can't stop bragging about how the crisis in the Ukraine is a great excuse to keep prices high and bring in historic profits – while consumers literally pay the price.

Just listen to the CEO of Texas-based Pioneer Oil. When a reporter asked the CEO whether the company would consider taking measures to reduce prices after Russia's invasion of Ukraine, he replied: “No.”

Why? He explained: “It's all about the shareholders. Our shareholders own this company. They want a return of cash.”



INSIGHTS

a lot less lucrative for big oil companies to exploit moments of crisis. The revenue raised from the tax on price gouging would go back to families to give them direct relief while we do everything we can to quickly transition away from our reliance on fossil fuels.

However, our work cannot stop there. Russia's invasion of Ukraine has laid bare the inherent risks of fossil fuel dependency not only for consumers' wallets, but for our national security and the future of our planet. Fortunately, one long-overdue solution sits before the US Senate: a suite of investments in secure sources of homegrown, affordable, clean energy.

A bold reconciliation bill could

make it \$10,000 cheaper for families to electrify their home to sidestep the rising cost of heating from gas. The bill could also lower electricity costs by doubling the expansion of wind and solar power to create more competition with gas.

Congress has a narrow window of opportunity to stop profiteering at the pump and secure a more stable, sustainable future for all. It's time to act – before it's too late. **CT**

Lindsay Owens is the Executive Director of Groundwork Collaborative. Hebah Kassem is Acting Director of the Living Economy Program at the Sierra Club. This op-ed was distributed by www.OtherWords.org.

ruler of the giant Carnegie Steel Company (which became US Steel Corporation). Carnegie violently broke up strikes, such as the 1892 Homestead strike, before he left the company to be a major philanthropist building libraries and universities.

In the post-World War II years, the CEOs of General Motors and Ford had immense power but still had to contend with a strong United Auto Workers union and later with jolting consumer advocacy leading to federal safety and emissions regulation.

Today's corporate dictators are like no others, beyond with unparalleled wealth towering over that held by Rockefeller and Carnegie (adjusted for inflation).

Consider the sheer unchallenged power of Mark Zuckerberg, CEO of Facebook (Meta), Tim Cook, CEO of Apple, the wannabe CEO of a going-private Twitter, Elon Musk, (unless the sinking Tesla stock ends the debt-deep acquisition price), and Sergey Brin and Larry Page still in control of Google. Despite recent stirrings, there are no companywide unions at these companies and the prospect for such is still in the distant future.

These CEOs snap their fingers and their patsy Boards of Directors sign off on huge optimally priced stock options and other goodies. These CEOs don't have to worry about their shareholders because like Zuckerberg, with a large portion of the shares, they have rigged their even larger control of voting shares giving them an unassailable shareholder majority.

They are hauled before Congress-

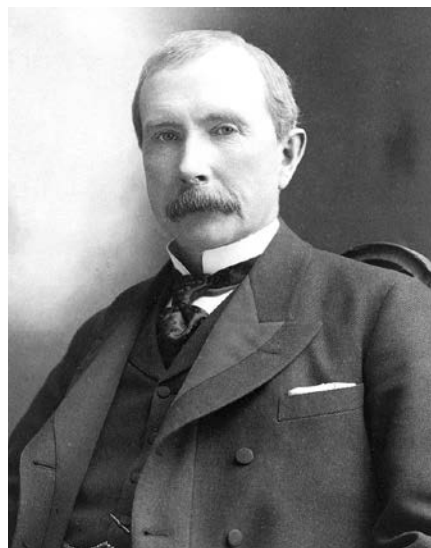
RALPH NADER

The new corporate dictators

Ever since the heads of East India Trading Company (1600) and Hudson Bay Company (1670), were incorporated by English Royal charters, there have been corporate dictators. Their range and actions, have varied widely however. Today's new corporate dictators shatter past restraints.

John D. Rockefeller ruled the Standard Oil Company monopoly until the trust busters from Washington broke up its giant price-fixing and predatory practices into several companies.

Andrew Carnegie was the



John D. Rockefeller

Wikimedia

INSIGHTS

sional Committees, appearing humble and afterwards they must be breaking open the champagne. Because after the public posturing by the lawmakers, no effective regulation is ever enacted. Anti-trust action year after year doesn't materialize, other than some weak consent decrees against Facebook which for a decade it violated while paying laughable civil fines.

No corporate monopolist comes close these days to being prosecuted for jail time. Under both the Democratic and Republican Parties, the Department of Justice cuts sweetheart 'deferred prosecution agreements' (See: Corporate Crime Reporter: <https://www.corporatecrimereporter.com/>) with the corporate entity and lets off the bosses. Boeing, after its two criminal 737 MAX crashes, is the latest example (See: Flying Blind: The 737 MAX Tragedy and the Fall of Boeing by Peter Robison, November 30, 2021).

The dictatorship over consumers is most unprecedented. Whereas the old dictatorial bosses – pre-unions – had control over worker's lives at the workplace, today's corporate dictators can ply their power 24/7. They can get into the minds of people to addict them and have their personal lives invaded and their personal information offered for sale all over the globe. The old bosses used child labor until the early 20th century, but then kids were largely off limits.

Today's dollar dictators have fused children's hands with their iPhones and incarcerated them in their vast gluttonous, nasty, violent Internet world to which they become addicted. For six to ten hours a day, their screen time has become



Mark Zuckerberg

Wikipedia



Elon Musk

Wikipedia

their lifetime – families begone!

Not only do these bosses' avaricious clutches have no "quit time," the little ones are now being lured into the Metaverse Gulag equipped with three-dimensional goggles to distance themselves further from daily reality.

Although circumvented. Millions of parents are at their wit's end, trying to recover their children from their screens and their video games at all hours and their digital fantasy worlds. Although there have been dozens of expose'

books, documentaries and newly formed citizen groups focusing on these corporate child molesters, the hijacking of little America by these Internet Barons continues unabated.

Suing these commercial dictators for whom enough is never enough has gone nowhere. Judges don't recognize offered causes of action. Moreover, under a special exception (Section 230 of the Communications Decency Act) from federal communications law, media like Twitter and Facebook are largely immune from suits no matter how violent, defamatory and false the anonymous hate messages traversing their corporate portals.

The contrast between the old and new corporate dictators is that the latter use, for free, your personal data for a fantastically profitable sale. The profit margins flowing from turning free "products" into big time cash are so high as to stun old-time economists who are used to margins under 10%, not over 50%.

Perhaps a bottom line in the differences between the old and new corporate dictators is twofold. Year after year, there is no number two really challenging their tight controls, no Avis to take on Hertz, as the old phrase went.

Second, the workers in these old industries felt and knew the oppressors or dictators ruling them. They were deep in this corporate reality. They could organize themselves because they knew their co-workers and this proximity gave birth to the union movements that led to fair labor standards and other regulations protecting workers (still much to be done here).

INSIGHTS

How do the users organize to overcome transaction costs (as with Facebook, Google and Twitter) when they never see each other? It's a one-way gold mine ether out there. When several years ago, Facebook users formed a group for enhanced bargaining, Facebook sued for trademark infringement and blocked that nascent effort.

As long as Silicon Valley behe-

moths continue to rule Washington DC and State Capitals, get ready for more refinements of commercial tyranny. **CT**

Ralph Nader is an American political activist, author, lecturer, and attorney noted for his involvement in consumer protection, environmentalism, and government reform causes

Insecurity: The Challenge and Call to Action", whose participants included the heads of international financial institutions such as the World Bank's Malpass. Yellen also noted, "Early estimates suggest that at least 10-million more people could be pushed into poverty in Sub-Saharan Africa due to higher food prices alone". The World Food Program (WFP) plans to feed a record 140-million people this year", and it reports that "at least 44-million people in 38 countries are teetering on the edge of famine", an increase from 27 million in 2019.

In countries facing other problems, such as climate change, food price increases have been catastrophic. For example, in Lebanon, "the cost of a basic food basket – the minimum food needs per family per month – [rose]... by 351 percent" in 2021 compared to 2020, according to the WFP.

In the Global North, famine is not a threat, but the populations of these countries face a sharp squeeze on their living standards as the global food crisis also raises the prices people in wealthy countries have to pay and budget for. In the United States, for example, the combination of high inflation and economic slowdown led to a 3.4 percent reduction in real average weekly earnings in the last year, as per data provided by the US Bureau of Labor Statistics.

Faced with this rapidly rising threat of the deepening food crisis, the G7 foreign ministers met from May 12 to May 14 to finally focus their attention on this pressing matter. They issued a statement on May 13 expressing "deep concern" about the growing food insecurity, while pointing out the next day

JOHN ROSS

Russia sanctions will mean food disaster

There is really no true solution to the problem of global food security without bringing back the agriculture production of Ukraine and the food and fertiliser production of Russia and Belarus into world markets despite the war". These blunt words by UN Secretary-General António Guterres accurately describe the present global food crisis.

As the US and the G7 (comprising Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the United Kingdom, and the United States) insist that cutting off food exports from Ukraine poses the biggest threat to world food security, rather than admitting the far more powerful negative effect of Western sanctions against Russia, their propaganda does immense damage to the world's understanding and capability of avoiding a looming global food disaster.

Looking at the world food sup-

ply situation, many experts see an imminent threat of "human catastrophe", as World Bank President David Malpass put it. Andrew Bailey, the governor of the Bank of England, characterised his outlook on global food supply problems as "apocalyptic" when discussing increasing food prices. This rise has led to the unfolding of two issues simultaneously: creating the threat of hunger and famine in parts of the Global South, and hitting living standards in every country across the globe.

Even before rapid price rises surrounding the Ukraine war, more than 800-million people were suffering from chronic food insecurity – around 10 percent of the world's population. US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen cited this fact while speaking to the participants of an April 2022 event, "Tackling Food

INSIGHTS

that “the world is now facing a worsening state of food insecurity and malnutrition... at a time when 43-million people were already one step away from famine.”

But the G7 falsely claimed that the reason for this food crisis was primarily due to “Russia blocking the exit routes for Ukraine’s grain”. According to Canada’s foreign minister, Mélanie Joly: “We need to make sure that these cereals are sent to the world. If not, millions of people will be facing famine.”

This G7 statement deliberately misrepresented the present global food crisis. Instead of attempting to solve this crisis, the US and the rest of the G7 used this opportunity to further their propaganda on the Ukraine war.

Certainly, Ukraine’s export restrictions make the global food problem worse. But it is not the main cause of the deteriorating situation. A much more powerful cause is Western sanctions imposed on Russia’s exports.

The first reason for this is that Russia is a far bigger exporter of essential food items and other products in comparison to Ukraine. Russia is the world’s largest wheat exporter, accounting for almost three times as much of world exports as Ukraine, 18 percent compared to 7 percent.

Second, and even more important, is the situation with fertilisers. Russia is the world’s largest fertiliser exporter, and Belarus, which is also facing Western sanctions, is also a major supplier – together they account for more than 20 percent of the global supply. Fertiliser prices were already rising before

the Ukraine war due to high fuel prices – fertiliser production relies heavily on natural gas – but sanctions by the West, which prevent Russia from exporting fertilisers, have made the situation worse.

David Laborde, a senior research fellow at the International Food Policy Research Institute, pointed out that “the biggest threat the food system is facing is the disruption of the fertiliser trade”. This is because, he said: “Wheat will impact a few countries. The fertiliser issue can impact every farmer everywhere in the world, and cause declines in the production.

The threat to global fertilizer



Wikimedia

António Guterres

supply illustrates how energy products are an essential input into virtually all economic sectors. As Russia is one of the world’s largest exporters not only of food but also of energy, sanctions against the country have a knock-on inflationary effect across the entire world economy.

This world food supply situation worsened further after the G7 meeting when on May 14, India, the world’s second-largest wheat producer, announced that it was halt-

ing wheat exports due to crop losses caused by an intense heatwave. Already in April Indonesia had announced that it was ending palm oil exports – Indonesia accounts for 60 percent of the world supply.

India’s halt of wheat exports will be a further severe blow to countries in the Global South, where its exports are mostly focused. In 2021-2022, India exported 7-million metric tons of wheat, primarily to Asian Global South countries such as Sri Lanka, Indonesia, Yemen, Nepal, Malaysia, the Philippines, and Bangladesh. But India had earlier set a target of expanding wheat exports to 10-million tons in 2022-2023, including supplying 3-million tons of wheat to Egypt for the first time.

The unfolding situation makes clear that António Guterres’ words were indeed accurate – the world food crisis cannot be solved without both Ukraine’s exports and Russia’s exports of food and fertilizer. Without the latter, humanity does indeed face a “catastrophe” – billions of people will have to lower their living standards, and hundreds of millions of people in the Global South will face great hardship like hunger or worse. Almost every Global South country rightly refused to support the unilateral US sanctions against Russia. This refusal needs to be extended to the whole world to prevent further devastation. **CT**

John Ross is a senior fellow at Chongyang Institute for Financial Studies, Renmin University of China. He was previously director of economic policy for the mayor of London. This article was produced by Globetrotter.

INSIGHTS

BINOY KAMPMARK

The economy of tolerable massacres

Societies generate their own economies of tolerable cruelties and injustices. Poverty, for instance, will be allowed, as long a sufficient number of individuals are profiting. To an extent, crime and violence can be allowed to thrive. In the United States, the economy of tolerable massacres, executed by military grade weapons, is considerable and seemingly resilient. Its participants partake in administering it, playing their roles under the sacred banner of constitutional freedom and psychobabble.

Just as prison reform tends to keep pace with the expansion of the bloated system, the gun argument in the US keeps pace with each massacre. With each round of killings, a script is activated: initial horror, hot tears of indignation of never again, and then, the stalemate on reform till the next round of killings can be duly accommodated.

“It isn’t enough to reiterate the plain truth that the assault weapons used in mass shootings must be banned and confiscated”, observes Benjamin Kunkel. “Instead, every fresh atrocity must be recruited into everyone’s preferred single-factor sociological narrative.”

In Uvalde, Texas, a teenage gunman made his way into an elementary school and delivered an unforgettable May 24 lesson. When he had finished at Robb Elementary

School, 19 children and 2 adults had perished.

But even this effort, in the premier league ranking of school killings, failed to top the mass shooting at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Connecticut in December 2012. On that occasion, 26 lost their lives.

The horror and indignant tears were duly cued. President of the United States, Joe Biden: “Why are we willing to live with this carnage? Why do we keep letting this happen?” he rhetorically intoned at a press conference. “For every parent, for every citizen in this country, we have to make it clear to every elected official in this country: it’s time to act”. This would involve the passing of “common sense gun laws”, and combating the gun lobby.

The next day, Vice President Kamala Harris reiterated the formula. “We must work together to create an America where everyone feels safe in their community, where children feel safe in their schools.”

The politicians are duly accompanied by the talking heads, such as Ron Avi Astor, described by NPR as “a mass shooting expert”. We are told that this UCLA professor is puzzled as to why negligible changes to gun laws have taken place since Sandy Hook. In coping

with such puzzlement, he suggests an old academic trick: reframe the problem to lessen its gravity.

With some gusto, Astor proceeds to say that schools in the US have been doing fabulously well in coping with violence – as long as you take the long view. “If you look over the last 20 years, really since Columbine, there’s been a massive, massive, massive ... decrease in victimisation and violence in schools.” Diving into the silver lining, he finds “reductions” in violence in the order of 50 to 70 percent.

It never takes long for the economy of tolerable massacres to generate the next round of scrappy arguments, with the corpses barely cold. The common one is that of shooting frequency. Was this a good year relative to the last? This year, the United States has suffered 27.

Since 2018, *Education Week*, showing how school deaths should very much feature in planning curricula, has taken a grim interest in the whole matter. Reading its compiled figures – “heartbreaking, but important work”, the journal claims – is much like dipping into stock market returns with the requisite amount of sensitivity. In 2021, there were 34 school shootings, a real bumper year. In 2020, it was poor on that front: a modest 10. Both 2019 and 2018 saw higher returns: 24 each.

If you wish to be entertained by the ghoulish nature of it all, *Education Week* also gives us some infotainment with a graphic on “Where the Shootings Happened.” Dots feature on a map of the country. “The size of the dots correlates to the number of people killed or injured. Click on each dot for more

INSIGHTS

information.” Where would we be but for such valuable services?

To give credence to the seemingly immutable nature of this economy on shootings, platoons of commentators, equipped with various skills, argue about responses, most showing that common sense, in this field, is a noble dream.

The conservative *National Review* takes the view that “tougher background checks” would hardly have worked for the Uvalde shooter. There was no paper trail flagging him as a threat, nothing to suggest that he should have been prevented as a “legal adult from purchasing a firearm.” The implicit suggestion here: only nutters kill.

The business of guns is the business of a particular American sensibility. With the school shooting still fresh, various members of the GOP and Donald Trump affirmed their interest in appearing at a Memorial Day weekend event hosted by the National Rifle Association. The NRA expressed its “deepest sympathies” for the families and victims of “this horrific and evil crime”, but preferred to describe the killings as the responsibility “of a lone, deranged criminal”. Leave gun regulation alone; focus on school security instead.

With that brief formality discharged, the NRA expressed its delight at its Annual Meetings and Exhibits event due to take place at the George R. Brown Convention Center, Houston. “The Exhibit Hall is open all three days and will showcase over 14 acres of the latest guns and gear from the most popular companies in the Industry.”

Then comes the thorny matter of definitions, a sure way to kill off any sensible action. From boffin

to reactionary, no one can quite accept what a “school shooting” is. Non-profit outfits such as the New York-based Everytown for Gun Safety include any discharge of a firearm at school as part of the definition. “In 2022,” the organisation claims, “there were at least 77 incidents of gunfire on school grounds, resulting in 14 deaths and 45 injuries nationally.”

Everytown for Gun Safety is keen to paint a picture of annual murderous rampage: 3,500 children and teens being shot and killed; 15,000 shot and injured. Some 3 million children in the US are exposed to shootings each year.

The tone underlying such a message is much at odds with the rest easy approach taken by Astor – what Australians would call the “she’ll be right, mate” caste of mind.

It is certainly Panglossian in nature, aligning with the views of cognitive psychologist Steven

Pinker, optimist extraordinaire on the human condition. Taken holistically, he keeps insisting, we live in far better, less violent times than our forebears. Such massacres as those at Sandy Hook should not be taken to mean that schools have become less safe. For Pinker, the 2013 joint survey by the Departments of Justice and Education on such statistics as rates of victimisation since 1992 to non-fatal victimisations was sufficient rebuke against the pessimists and moaners.

The Uvalde massacre will, in time, be absorbed by this economy of tolerable violence. The anger will dissipate; collective amnesia, if not simple indifference, will exert its dulling sleep. The dead, except for the personally affected, will go the way of others, buried in the confetti and scrapings of statistics. **CT**

Dr. Binoy Kampmark lectures at Australia’s RMIT University.

HURWITT’S EYE

MARK HURWITT



DAVID CROMWELL & DAVID EDWARDS

There's no way to fool physics

Climate breakdowns and state-corporate madness

In the terrifying opening to his 2020 novel, *The Ministry for the Future*, Kim Stanley Robinson depicts an intense heatwave in India. In an 'ordinary town' in the northern state of Uttar Pradesh, people are struggling to cope with unbearable heat and humidity. It is the combination of the two, measured by the so-called 'wet-bulb temperature', that is potentially fatal. When it approaches the core body temperature of 36C, sweat cannot evaporate and humans can no longer cool themselves down. Dehydration rises to dangerous levels. Vital organs become seriously stressed, especially the heart. Unless the body temperature is reduced, death follows in a matter of hours.

In the novel's opening scenes, there are shouts of:

"Go to the lake! Get in the water!"

One man shakes his head:

"That water is in the sun. It's as hot as a bath. It's worse than the air."

Nevertheless, people jump in the lake, hoping it will help. But a catastrophe is unfolding.

"People were dying faster than ever. There was no coolness to be had. All the children were dead, all the old people were dead. People murmured what should have been screams of grief; those who could still move shoved bodies out of the

lake, or out toward the middle where they floated like logs, or sank."

It is a nightmare vision of what may lie ahead for humanity in the very near future.

In May month, an intense heatwave did indeed hit northern India with temperatures reaching a record high of 49.2C in parts of Delhi. This was the fifth heatwave in the Indian capital since March.

April was India's hottest in 122 years and Pakistan's for 61 years. Jacobabad hit nearly 50C with night-time temperatures often staying above 30C. Exhausted and dehydrated birds fell from the sky, an apocalyptic portent if ever there was one. A UK Met Office study has concluded that global warming makes record-breaking heatwaves in northwest India and Pakistan 100 times more likely.

Meanwhile, the highest daily level of carbon dioxide in the Earth's atmosphere was recorded. On 11 May, the Scripps Institute of Oceanography at the University of California, San Diego, measured 421.37 parts per million of carbon dioxide. The previous record of 418.95 ppm was set in May 2021.

"It is very concerning, extremely worrisome", Peter Tans, senior

climate scientist at the National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration, told the *Financial Times*. "This last decade, the rate of increase [of carbon emissions] has never been higher, and we are still on the same path. We're going in the wrong direction at maximum speed."

Scientists are warning that the 1.5C global heating limit set by governments is about to be breached. The probability of one of the next five years surpassing the limit is now 50 per cent. This is up from 20 per cent in 2020 and zero per cent in 2015.

A new report last month from the UN World Meteorological Organization revealed that 2021 was a record year for breaking critical global indicators of the climate crisis. These include rising sea levels and the amount of heat-trapping emissions in the atmosphere.

António Guterres, the secretary general of the UN, said, "Today's State of the Climate report is a dismal litany of humanity's failure to tackle climate disruption. Fossil fuels are a dead end – environmentally and economically."

On top of all that, climate scientists recently reported that global warming could cause the most cataclysmic extinction of marine life in the past 250 million years.



If the news media were not owned and run for the benefit of state-corporate elites, all this would be huge headline news – day after day, month after month. There would be vigorous debate across all the main media outlets, building pressure on governments to implement the urgent radical changes required to avert the worst consequences of the climate crisis.

But, instead, the general population is being held captive, caught in a tight death grip by powerful forces masquerading as our benefactors and protectors. As Jonathan Cook observed:

“Corporate media is the glue holding our corrupt world together. They promote the Ukraine arms bonanza, helping the corporate war industries profit from mass death. Then they normalise profiteering from the re-

Corporate Europe Observatory has warned that “Fossil fuel giants are shaping the EU’s response to the energy crisis”

sulting fuel crisis as ‘bumper’ profits for the corporate energy sector.”

Is it any wonder we are in an era of climate breakdown when Business-As-Usual – characterised by short-term corporate greed, compliant mass media and careerist government politicians – is such a dominant factor in human ‘civilisation’?

For example, Corporate Europe Observatory, a non-profit research

and campaign group which monitors and exposes corporate lobbying on EU policy making, recently warned that, “Fossil fuel giants are shaping the EU’s response to the energy crisis.”

Six big energy companies were named: Shell, BP, Total, ENI, E.ON and Vattenfall. Pascoe Sabido of Corporate Europe Observatory said, “The European Commission has been in bed with these corporations for decades. If we want to end our reliance on gas, Russian or otherwise, then we need to end the relationship between the fossil fuel industry and decision-makers, cutting fossil fuel interests out of our political system. In short, we need fossil free politics.”

There is little chance of that under the Tories. Business Secretary Kwasi Kwarteng has just drafted in the former UK boss of BP to sup-

posedly oversee the UK's transition to "a low-carbon economy". Would a former CEO of Big Tobacco be rewarded by leading a reform of the NHS? Would a former slave owner be put in charge of the abolition of slavery?

In the never-ending corporate quest for profit, even as the planet's life support systems are failing, oil and gas corporations are planning scores of vast projects that threaten to shatter the 1.5C climate goal. If governments allow the projects to proceed, these 'carbon bombs' will 'trigger catastrophic climate breakdown.'

As mentioned above, the head of the UN has called for an end to new fossil fuel projects, warning that climate change poses 'an existential threat to us all – to the whole world.' Speaking at a recent press conference, António Guterres said, "Main emitters must drastically cut emissions, starting now. This means accelerating the end of our fossil fuel addiction and speeding up the deployment of clean renewable energy."

The UN chief's urgent comments align with the aims of campaign groups, such as Extinction Rebellion and Just Stop Oil, so often labelled by mainstream media as 'eco-zealots', 'eco maniacs', 'eco yobs' or a 'mob of environmentalists'. Indeed, on Twitter, Guterres effectively gave climate campaigners his support, "Climate activists are sometimes depicted as dangerous radicals. But the truly dangerous radicals are the countries that are increasing the production of fossil fuels. Investing in new fossil fuels infrastructure is moral and economic madness."

In the UK, the madness extends to all three of the main political parties – Labour, Liberal Democrats and Conservative – calling for cli-

Starmer, leader of the UK opposition party, "appear[ed] visibly flustered and fle[d] the scene without addressing the topic of the injunction

mate protesters to be 'cracked down on' and for their rational demands to be rejected.

In April, Labour leader Sir Keir Starmer demonstrated yet again that he is a faithful ally of established power. Referring to Just Stop Oil protesters' blockade of 11 fuel depots in southern England, Starmer tweeted, "The government must stop standing idly by and immediately impose injunctions to put an end to this disruption."

He was later confronted publicly by Lauren MacDonald, a 21-year-old Scottish climate activist. According to one newspaper report, Starmer, "appear[ed] visibly flustered and fle[d] the scene without addressing the topic of the injunction."

Fatima Ibrahim from campaign group Green New Deal Rising said, "We feel betrayed by Keir Starmer and the Labour Party for calling for more police powers to prevent young people worried about their future from peacefully protesting.

"At a time when the country is desperate for a different vision of the future, the Labour Party could be calling for a massive shift towards renewables to bring down energy bills and deliver new jobs. Instead, they've relegated themselves to government cheerleaders."

Starmer had shown once again how paper-thin are the differences between Her Majesty's 'Opposition'

and Her Majesty's Government.

Veteran climate scientist James Hansen, who warned the US Congress of the dangers of global warming as early as 1988, injected some reality missing from 'mainstream' reporting, "There is no indication that incumbent governments are even considering the fundamental actions that are needed to slow and reverse climate change."

As we wrote at the time, last year's UN Climate Summit in Glasgow was a greenwashing festival, full of empty rhetoric. Last month, the UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change said it was "now or never" to save humanity.

Climate scientist Simon Lewis observed of the most recent IPCC report, "the full 3,000-page report contains an astonishingly frank assessment of the organised efforts used to thwart climate action, noting: 'opposition to climate action by carbon-connected industries is broad-based, highly organized, and matched with extensive lobbying.'"

Earth scientist Bill McGuire warned that, "it is now practically impossible to have any chance of staying this side of the 1.5C guard-rail. The truth is that we can no longer sidestep dangerous, all-pervasive, climate breakdown."

He added, "The demise of civilisation is well and truly in sight."

These are remarkable and frightening statements from a senior scientist; in other words, the kind of sober, conservative, even ultra-cautious figure that the public has traditionally regarded as unwilling to speak out for fear of being seen to be too 'political'.

McGuire also commented, "I have concluded that there will be no real pressure on governments to seriously tackle the #ClimateEmergency until we are all terrified. We

are simply not sh*t scared enough – yet.”

In similar vein, Nasa climate scientist Peter Kalmus urged large-scale citizen action to pressure governments around the world. In April, he wrote that: “Climate scientists are desperate: we’re crying, begging and getting arrested.”

He warned: “Earth breakdown is much worse than most people realize. The science indicates that as fossil fuels continue to heat our planet, everything we love is at risk.”

Kalmus continued, “Nothing has worked. It’s now the eleventh hour and I feel terrified for my kids, and terrified for humanity. I feel deep grief over the loss of forests and corals and diminishing biodiversity. But I’ll keep fighting as hard as I can for this Earth, no matter how bad it gets, because it can always get worse. And it will continue to get worse until we end the fossil fuel industry and the exponential quest for ever more profit at the expense of everything else. There is no way to fool physics.”

All this has motivated Kalmus to become involved in climate activism,” I’ve joined the ranks of those who selflessly risk their freedom and put their bodies on the line for the Earth, despite ridicule from the ignorant and punishment from a colonizing legal system designed to protect the planet-killing interests of the rich. It’s time we all join them. The feeling of solidarity is a wonderful balm.”

Noam Chomsky has also urged widespread participation in climate actions, “What we face is the greatest imposition of suffering and injustice in the history of civilization...I support the actions of the Just Stop Oil coalition. It’s imperative for us all to do so.”

He added, “Brave humans from all walks of life have chosen to not

It will take massive, public activism – perhaps on a scale never seen before in human history – to shift course away from climate catastrophe

give up. We are fighting back because it’s the fight for all life. It’s now or never. It’s time for action. We need you to join us. We need everyone, everywhere. Now. Just stop oil.”

It will take truly massive, sustained public activism – perhaps on a scale never seen before in human history – to shift course away from climate catastrophe. Meanwhile, governments and corporations will claim their destructive policies, actions and threats are intended to ensure ‘security’ of energy supplies, or ‘security’ of the general population in ‘defending’ the West against Official Enemies.

In a recent interview, aptly titled “To Tackle Climate, Our Morality Must Catch Up With Our Intelligence”, Chomsky identified such elite statements as propaganda, “Whatever is driving policy, it is not security – at least, security of the population. That is at best a marginal concern. That holds for existential threats as well. We have to look elsewhere.”

Chomsky suggested that to understand why this happens, one could start with ‘the best-established principle of international relations theory’. This dates back to the 18th-century and economist Adam Smith’s observation that, “the ‘Masters of Mankind’ – in his day the merchants and manufacturers of England – are the ‘principal archi-

teets of [state] policy.’ They use their power to ensure that their own interests ‘are most peculiarly attended to’ no matter how ‘grievous’ the effects on others, including the people of England, but most brutally the victims of the ‘savage injustice of the Europeans.’ His [Smith’s] particular target was British savagery in India, then in its early stages, already horrifying enough.”

But in an era of climate breakdown and mass extinction of species, including perhaps our own, surely this principle no longer applies? Chomsky disagrees, “Nothing much changes when the crises become existential. Short-term interests prevail. The logic is clear in competitive systems, like unregulated markets. Those who do not play the game are soon out of it. Competition among the ‘principal architects of policy’ in the state system has somewhat similar properties, but we should bear in mind that security of the population is far from a guiding principle, as the record shows all too clearly.”

The historical record also shows that improvements in society are rarely, if ever, bestowed as gifts from above. Power typically only ever makes concessions when it is forced to do so by pressure from below.

Time is running out too rapidly to fundamentally reform society and create a real democracy that people deserve. The immediate priority is to exert insurmountable pressure on existing power structures, not least our own governments, to change course away from climate catastrophe. If we cannot do that, there will be no human civilisation to reform or restructure. **CT**

David Cromwell and David Edwards are co-editors of *Medialens*, the UK media watchdog. This article first appeared at www.medialens.org.

GEORGE MONBIOT

Contagious collapse

The global food system is in much more trouble than we think

For the past few years, scientists have been frantically sounding an alarm that governments refuse to hear: the global food system is beginning to look like the global financial system in the run-up to 2008.

While financial collapse would have been devastating to human welfare, food system collapse doesn't bear thinking about. Yet the evidence that something is going badly wrong has been escalating rapidly. The current surge in food prices looks like the latest sign of systemic instability.

Many people assume that the food crisis was caused by a combination of the pandemic and the invasion of Ukraine. While these are important factors, they aggravate an underlying problem. For years, it looked as if hunger was heading for extinction. The number of undernourished people fell from 811 million in 2005 to 607 million in 2014. But in 2015, the trend began to turn. Hunger has been rising ever since: to 650 million in 2019, and back to 811 million in 2020. This year is likely to be much worse.

Now brace yourself for the really bad news: this has happened at a time of great abundance. Global food production has been rising steadily for more than half a century, comfortably beating population growth.

Last year, the global wheat harvest was bigger than ever. Astoundingly, the number of undernourished people began to rise just as world food prices began to fall. In 2014, when fewer people were hungry than at any time since, the global food price index stood at 115 points. In 2015, it fell to 93, and remained below 100 until 2021.

Only in the past two years has it surged. The rise in food prices is now a major driver of inflation, which reached 9 percent in the UK in April. Food is becoming unaffordable even to many people in rich nations. The impact in poorer countries is much worse.

So what has been going on? Well, global food, like global finance, is a complex system, that develops spontaneously from billions of interactions. Complex systems have counterintuitive properties. They are resilient under certain conditions, as their self-organising properties stabilise them. But as stress escalates, these same properties start transmitting shocks through the network. Beyond a certain point, a small disturbance can tip the entire system over its critical threshold, whereupon it collapses, suddenly and unstopably.

We now know enough about systems to predict whether they might be resilient or fragile. Scientists represent complex systems as a mesh of nodes and links. The nodes are like the knots in an old-fashioned net; the links are the strings that connect them. In the food system, the nodes include the corporations trading grain, seed and farm chemicals, the major exporters and importers and the ports through which food passes. The links are their commercial and institutional relationships.

If the nodes behave in a variety of ways, and their links to each other are weak, the system is likely to be resilient. If certain nodes become dominant, start to behave in similar ways and are strongly connected, the system is likely to be fragile.

In the approach to the 2008 crisis, the big banks developed similar strategies and similar ways of managing risk, as they pursued the same sources of profit. They became strongly linked to each other in ways that regulators scarcely understood. When Lehman Brothers failed, it threatened to pull everyone down.

So here's what sends cold fear through those who study the global food system. In recent years, just as in finance during the 2000s, key nodes in the food system have swollen, their links have become stronger,

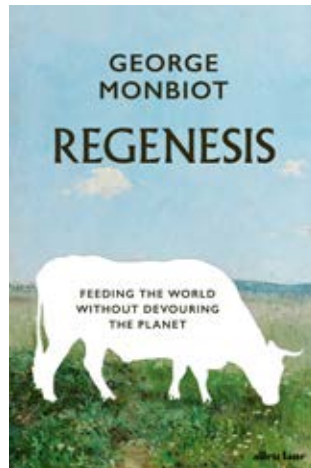
business strategies have converged and synchronised, and the features that might impede systemic collapse (“redundancy”, “modularity”, “circuit breakers” and “backup systems”) have been stripped away, exposing the system to “globally contagious” shocks.

On one estimate, just four corporations control 90 percent of the global grain trade. The same corporations have been buying into seed, chemicals, processing, packing, distribution and retail. In the course of 18 years, the number of trade connections between the exporters and importers of wheat and rice doubled.

Nations are now polarising into super-importers and super-exporters. Much of this trade passes through vulnerable chokepoints, such as the Turkish Straits (now obstructed by Russia’s invasion of Ukraine), the Suez and Panama canals, and the Straits of Hormuz, Bab-el-Mandeb and Malacca.

One of the fastest cultural shifts in human history is the convergence towards a “Global Standard Diet”. While our food has become locally more diverse, globally it has become less diverse. Just four crops – wheat, rice, maize and soy – account for almost 60 percent of the calories grown by farmers. Their production is now highly concentrated in a handful of nations, including Russia and Ukraine. The Global Standard Diet is grown by the Global Standard Farm, supplied by the same corporations with the same packages of seed, chemicals and machinery, and vulnerable to the same environmental shocks.

The food industry is becoming tightly coupled to the financial sector, increasing what scientists call the “network density” of the system, making it more susceptible to



George Monbiot’s book, *Regenesis: Feeding the World Without Devouring the Planet*, is published by Allen Lane.

cascading failure. Around the world, trade barriers have come down and roads and ports upgraded, streamlining the global network.

You might imagine that this smooth system would enhance food security. But it has allowed companies to shed the costs of warehousing and inventories, switching from stocks to flows. Mostly, this just-in-time strategy works. But if deliveries are interrupted or there’s a rapid surge in demand, shelves can suddenly empty.

A paper in *Nature Sustainability* reports that in the food system, “shock frequency has increased through time on land and sea at a global scale”. In researching my book *Regenesis*, I came to realise

Four corporations control 90 percent of the global grain trade. They have been buying into seed, chemicals, processing, packing, distribution and retail

that it’s this escalating series of contagious shocks, exacerbated by financial speculation, that has been driving global hunger. Shocks caused by speculative surges, supply chain disruptions, export bans, bottlenecks and other systemic issues scarcely affected rich nations before 2020, so we ignored them. But they caused havoc in poor nations with weak currencies, which stand at the end of the queue. Local prices can surge even as global prices remain low.

Now the global food system must survive not only its internal frailties, but also environmental and political disruptions that might interact with each other. To give a current example, in mid-April, the Indian government suggested that it could make up the shortfall in global food exports caused by Russia’s invasion of Ukraine. Just a month later, it banned exports of wheat, after crops shrivelled in a devastating heatwave.

We urgently need to diversify global food production, both geographically and in terms of crops and farming techniques. We need to break the grip of massive corporations and financial speculators. We need to create backup systems, producing food by entirely different means. We need to introduce spare capacity into a system threatened by its own efficiencies.

If so many can go hungry at a time of unprecedented bounty, the consequences of the major crop failure that environmental breakdown could cause defy imagination. The system has to change. **CT**

George Monbiot’s latest book is *Regenesis: Feeding the World Without Devouring the Planet*. This article first appeared in the *Guardian*. Read more of Monbiot’s work at www.monbiot.com.

CHRIS HEDGES

The execution of a journalist

Israel, which shoots hundreds of Palestinians a year, routinely includes reporters and photographers on its target list. The latest victim is Al Jazeera reporter Shireen Abu Akleh

Photographs by Ron Fassbender

Shireen Abu Akleh, the Al Jazeera reporter with more than two decades of experience covering armed conflicts, knew the protocol. She and other reporters remained in the open on May 11, clearly visible to Israeli snipers about 650 feet away in a building. Her flak jacket and helmet were emblazoned with the word “PRESS.”

Three shots were fired in her direction. The second bullet hit the Al Jazeera producer Ali al-Samoudi in the back. The third shot, al-Samoudi remembered, hit Abu Akleh in the face below the rim of her helmet.

There were a few seconds when the Israeli sniper saw profiled in his scope Abu Akleh, one of the most recognizable faces in the Middle East. The 5.56 mm bullet from the M-16, designed to spin end over end upon impact, would have obliterated most of Abu Akleh’s head. The accuracy of the M-16, especially the M16A4s equipped with the Advanced Combat Optical Gunsight (ACOG), a prismatic telescopic sight, is very high. In the fighting in Fallujah so many dead insurgents were found with head wounds that observers at

first thought they had been executed. The bullet that killed Abu Akleh was deftly placed between the very slim opening separating her helmet and the collar of her flak jacket.

I have been in combat, including in clashes between Israeli and Palestinian forces. Snipers are dreaded on a battlefield because each kill is calculated. The execution of Abu Akleh was not an accident. She was singled out for elimination. Whether this killing was ordered by commanding officers, or whether it was the whim of an Israeli sniper, I cannot answer. Israelis shoot so many Palestinians with impunity my guess is the sniper knew he or she could kill Abu Akleh and never face any consequences.

The shooting, Al Jazeera said in a statement, was “a blatant murder, violating international laws and norms.” Abu Akleh, the network added, was “assassinated in cold blood.”

Abu Akleh, who was 51 and a Palestinian-American, was a familiar and trusted presence on television screens throughout the region, revered for her courage and integ-



Flowers, candles and posters of Abu Akleh are

Tributes paid to

Tributes were paid in London to veteran Al Jazeera journalist Shireen Abu Akleh who was shot dead on 11th May 2022, by an Israeli sniper and whose funeral was attacked days later by Israeli police. A vigil was held outside the BBC’s London HQ and her name and image featured prominently at the annual rally commemorating the 74th



laid in tribute, near the BBC headquarters in London.

slain journalist Shireen at London events

anniversary of the 1948 Nakba (the 'catastrophe') which saw the mass displacement of Palestinian Arabs from their homes and land.

Abu Akleh, who had worked for Al Jazeera for 25 years, was reporting on an Israeli army raid in the Israeli-occupied West Bank, wearing an armoured jacket clearly marked "Press".

Another Al Jazeera journalist, pro-

ducer Ali al-Samudi, was also injured. Film footage shows people attempting to rescue her also coming under fire. Israeli claims she was "shot by Palestinians" or "caught in crossfire" were rapidly rebutted. Her employers say she was "assassinated in cold blood" amid calls for independent investigation.

During the London Nakba rally

supporters gathered outside Downing Street wearing mockups of blue press jackets, of the kind worn by Abu Akleh, bearing the names of some of the large number of journalists killed by Israeli forces. – **Ron Fassbender CT**

● [See more photographs from the commemorative events on the following pages](#)



Vigil outside the BBC on the day after Abu Akleh was killed.

rity and beloved for her careful and sensitive reporting on the intricacies of daily life under the occupation. Her reporting from the occupied territories routinely punctured Israeli narratives and exposed Israeli abuses and crimes, making her the *bête noire* of the Israeli government. She was a heroine for young Palestinian women, as Dalia Hatuqa, a Palestinian-American journalist and friend of Abu Akleh's, told the *New York Times*.

"I know of a lot of girls who grew up basically standing in front of a mirror and holding their hair brushes and pretending to be Shireen", Hatuqa told the paper. "That's how lasting and important her presence was."

"I chose journalism to be close to the people", Abu Akleh said in a clip shared by Al Jazeera after she

Israeli police in full riot gear disrupted the Abu Akleh's funeral procession, confiscating and ripping down Palestinian flags

was killed. "It might not be easy to change the reality, but at least I was able to bring their voice to the world."

In a 2017 interview with the Palestinian television channel An-Najah NBC, she was asked if she was worried about being shot.

"Of course, I get scared", she said. "In a specific moment you forget

that fear. We don't throw ourselves to death. We go and we try to find where we can stand and how to protect the team with me before I think about how I am going to go up on the screen and what I am going to say."

Her funeral attracted thousands of mourners, the largest in Jerusalem since the death in 2002 of the Palestinian leader Faisal Husseini. Israeli police in full riot gear disrupted the procession, confiscating and ripping down Palestinian flags. The police fired stun grenades and pushed, clubbed and beat mourners and pallbearers, causing them to lose their grip on the coffin. Thousands chanted: "We sacrifice our soul and blood for you, Shireen". It was another example of the daily humiliation meted out to Palestinians by their Israeli occupiers. It was also a moving tribute to a reporter who



Ron Fassbender

Several Arabic broadcasters covered the vigil, while the BBC apparently did not.

understood that the role of journalism is to give a voice to those the powerful seek to silence.

I covered the Israeli occupation for seven years, two years with the *Dallas Morning News* and five with the *New York Times*, where I was the paper's Middle East Bureau Chief. One of the chief objectives of the Israeli army was to prevent our reporting from the occupied territories. If we were able to get past Israeli checkpoints, not always possible, to document murderous assaults by Israeli soldiers on unarmed Palestinians then Israel's well-oiled propaganda machine was rolled out to obscure our reporting. Israeli officials swiftly issued counter narratives. The Israeli Prime Minister, Foreign Minister, Defence Minister and Israeli Defence Force (IDF) spokesperson, for example, imme-

diately blamed the killing of Abu Akleh on Palestinian gunmen until video footage examined by B'Tselem Israeli Information Center for Human Rights in the Occupied Territories exposed the falsehood.

When Israel is caught lying, as it was with the murder of Abu Akleh, it immediately promises an investigation. The narrative shifts from one of blaming the Palestinians to the outcome of an inquiry. Impartial investigations into the hundreds of killings by soldiers and Jewish settlers of Palestinians are rarely carried out. Perpetrators are almost never brought to trial or held accountable. The pattern of Israeli obfuscation is pathetically predictable. So is the collusion of much of the corporate media along with Re-

publican and Democratic politicians. US politicians decried the murder of Abu Akleh and dutifully repeated the old mantra, calling for a "thorough investigation" by the army that carried out the crime.

The dramatic footage captured in September 2000 at the Netzarim junction in the Gaza Strip by France 2 TV of a father trying to shield his 12-year-old son Muhammad al-Durrah from the Israeli gunfire that killed him resulted in a typical propaganda campaign by Israel. Israeli officials spent years lying about the killing of the boy, first blaming the Palestinians for the shooting, and later suggesting that the scene was faked, and Muhammad was still alive.

One thing is certain, the Israeli military knows which one of its snipers killed Abu Akleh, although



A speaker addresses the rally outside the BBC.

the name of the soldier will probably never be made public. Nor will, I expect, the sniper be reprimanded.

“With all due respect to us, let’s say that Israel’s credibility is not very high in such cases”, Israel’s Minister of Diaspora Affairs Nachman Shai said of an Israeli investigation into the killing. “We know this. It is based on the past.”

Israel has a long history of blocking investigations into the plethora of war crimes it commits in Gaza, the world’s largest open-air prison, and the West Bank. It refuses to cooperate with the International Criminal Court (ICC) into possible war crimes in the occupied territories. It does not cooperate with the UN Human Rights Council and prohibits the United Nations Special Rapporteur

Israel has a long history of blocking investigations into the plethora of war crimes it commits in Gaza

(UNSR) for Human Rights from entering the country. Israel revoked the work permit for Omar Shakir, the Director of Human Rights Watch (Israel and Palestine), in 2018 and expelled him. In May 2018, Israeli Ministry of Strategic Affairs and Public Diplomacy published a report calling on the European Union (EU) and European states to halt their direct and indirect financial support and funding to Palestinian and interna-

tional human rights organizations that “have ties to terror and promote boycotts against Israel.”

Israel relies on campaigns of terror, with random and indiscriminate killings, to beat back Palestinian resistance. Israeli strategists describe the tactic as “mowing the grass”, part of an endless war of attrition. Israeli terror keeps Palestinians perpetually off-balance, fearful, and living at a subsistence level. This state terrorism also contributes to Israel’s main goal, a slow-motion ethnic cleansing of Palestinian land.

The 2014 bombing and shelling of Gaza, which lasted 51 days, killed more than 2,250 Palestinians, including 551 children. Israel’s use of its military against an occupied population that does not have mechanised units, an air force, navy, missiles, heavy artillery, and com-



Activists outside Downing Street hold mock armour jackets bearing names of journalists killed by Israel.

mand and control, not to mention a US commitment to provide \$38-billion dollars in defence-aid to Israel over the next decade, is not justifiable under international law. Israel is not exercising the right to defend itself. It is carrying out mass murder. It is a war crime. The attacks are designed to degrade civilian infrastructure, destroying power plants, water and sewage treatment facilities, residential high-rises, government buildings, roads, bridges, public facilities, agricultural lands, schools and mosques.

Israel used state terror to crush the International Solidarity Movement that saw activists come to the occupied territories from around the world, often using their bodies to block Israel from demolishing Pal-

estinian homes, as well as filming and recording human rights abuses.

As the author and journalist Jonathan Cook writes:

“But Abu Akleh’s US passport was no more able to save her from Israeli retribution than that of Rachel Corrie, murdered in 2003 by an Israeli bulldozer driver as she tried to protect Palestinian homes in Gaza. Similarly, Tom Hurndall’s British passport did not stop him from being shot in the head as he tried to protect Palestinian children in Gaza from Israeli gunfire. Nor did filmmaker James Miller’s British passport prevent an Israeli soldier from executing him in 2003 in Gaza, as he documented Israel’s assault on the tiny, overcrowded enclave.

“All were seen as having taken a side by acting as witnesses and by refusing to remain quiet as Palestin-

ians suffered – and for that reason, they and those who thought like them had to be taught a lesson.

“It worked. Soon, the contingent of foreign volunteers – those who had come to Palestine to record Israel’s atrocities and serve, when necessary, as human shields to protect Palestinians from a trigger-happy Israeli army – were gone. Israel denounced the International Solidarity Movement for supporting terrorism, and given the clear threat to their lives, the pool of volunteers gradually dried up.”

Israel has a deep hostility to the press, especially Al Jazeera, which has large viewership throughout the Arab world. Al Jazeera reporters are routinely denied press credentials, harassed, and blocked from reporting. Israeli warplanes in May 2021 destroyed the al-Jalaa building



A banner reads "She was assassinated". Many believe Abu Akleh was deliberately targeted.

in Gaza that housed dozens of international news agencies, including the Gaza offices of Al Jazeera and the Associated Press.

At least 144 Palestinian journalists have been wounded by Israeli forces in the occupied territories since 2018 and three, including Abu Akleh, have been killed in the same period, according to Reporters Without Borders. Palestinian reporters Ahmed Abu Hussein and Yasser Mortaja, also clearly identified as press, were shot dead by Israeli snipers in Gaza in 2018. At least 45 Palestinian journalists have been killed by Israeli soldiers since 2000, according to the Palestinian Ministry of Information.

"Abu Akleh was most likely shot precisely because she was a high-profile Al Jazeera reporter, known for her fearless reporting of Israeli

At least 45 Palestinian journalists have been killed by Israeli soldiers since 2000, according to the Palestinian Ministry of Information

crimes", Cook writes. "Both the army and its soldiers bear grudges, and they have lethal weapons with which to settle scores."

Israel does little to hide its callous disregard for the lives of Palestinians, international activists, and journalists.

"Suppose that Shireen Abu Akleh was killed by Israeli army fire", Avi Benyahu, a former IDF spokesperson stated. "There's no need to

apologise for that."

Reporters and photographers, in Israel's eyes, are responsible for their own deaths.

"When 'terrorists' fire at our soldiers in Jenin, the soldiers must retaliate in full force even in the presence of journalists in from Al Jazeera in the area – who usually stand in the army's way and impede their work", said Knesset member Itamar Ben Gvir.

Israeli forces have killed at least 380 Palestinians, including 90 children, during the past year, according to the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA). This includes at least 260 Palestinians killed in Gaza during Israel's latest assault in May 2021. The pace of Israeli killings of Palestinians has been steadily increasing in the wake



Ron Fassbender

A hand made banner in Whitehall proclaims, "Her voice will resonate forever".

of armed Palestinians murdering 18 people in cities across Israel since the end of March. In March, Israeli forces killed 12 Palestinians, including three children. In April, Israeli forces killed at least 22 Palestinians, including three children. Abu Akleh was covering an Israeli raid on the Jenin refugee camp where army units said they were hunting for Palestinian attackers.

The killing of Abu Akleh would have been treated very differently if she was killed by Russian soldiers in Ukraine. There would have been no equivocations about who carried out the murder. Her death would have been denounced as a war crime. No one would have acquiesced to let the Russian military carry out the

investigation.

The world is divided into worthy and unworthy victims, those who deserve our compassion and support and those who do not. Ukrainians are white and largely Christian. We see the struggle against the Russian occupier as a battle for freedom and democracy. We provide \$40-billion in weapons and humanitarian aid. We impose punishing sanctions on Moscow. We make the Ukrainian cause our own.

The 55-year-long fight for Palestinian freedom is no less just, no less worthy of our support. But Palestinians are occupied by our Israeli ally. They are not white. Most are not Christian, although Abu Akleh was Christian. They are not deemed worthy. They suffer and die alone. The war crimes carried out by Israel go unheeded and unpunished.

The Palestinians doggedly refuse to give up. This makes them as heroic, maybe more heroic, than Ukrainian fighters. We are on the wrong side of history in Israel. Abu Akleh's blood is on our hands. **CT**

Chris Hedges is a Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist who was a foreign correspondent for fifteen years for the *New York Times*, where he served as the Middle East Bureau Chief and Balkan Bureau Chief for the paper. He previously worked overseas for the *Dallas Morning News*, the *Christian Science Monitor*, and *NPR*. He is the host of the *Chris Hedges Report*.

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JOHN P. RUEHL

Ukraine war accelerates the space race

The growing number of countries active in Earth's orbit and beyond have also revitalised fears of the possibility of the militarisation of space

Shortly after Russia was sanctioned for invading Ukraine in late February, Russia's state-run space agency, Roscosmos, announced that it was officially suspending the US from an upcoming Venus exploration mission. Weeks later, on March 17, the European Space Agency (ESA) announced the suspension of a joint mission to Mars with Roscosmos, and further said that it would not be taking part in upcoming Roscosmos missions to the moon.

These decisions have naturally generated concern across the space industry and political landscape. For decades, Russian and Western countries have collaborated in space despite flare-ups in tensions on Earth. In 1975, the US Apollo capsule linked up with the Soviet Soyuz spacecraft briefly as a symbol of cooperation amid the Cold War. In 1995, the US space shuttle Atlantis docked with the Russian space station Mir.

And in 1998, the International Space Station (ISS) was launched, featuring a Russian Orbital Segment (ROS) and a United States Orbital Segment (USOS), the latter being operated by NASA, the ESA, the Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency (JAXA), and the Canadian Space Agency (CSA).

Sustained cooperation on the ISS has been a notable exception to the growing tensions between Russia and the Western states over the last decade.

But in April, Dmitry Rogozin, head of Roscosmos, declared that Russia would end cooperation on the ISS, as well as other joint projects, if sanctions against Russia were not lifted.

While such threats have been issued before, notably after Russia's 2014 annexation of Crimea, the heightened confrontation between Russia and the West since the start of the Ukrainian invasion has reinforced this possibility.

NASA, meanwhile, chose to downplay Rogozin's claims and stated that it will continue to operate the ISS until at least 2030. But Roscosmos has previously stated that it intends to develop its own space station by 2025, and has also revealed plans for a potential manned mission to the moon. Russia's GLONASS satellite navigation system, which achieved global coverage in 2011, has also become a viable rival to the United States' GPS system.

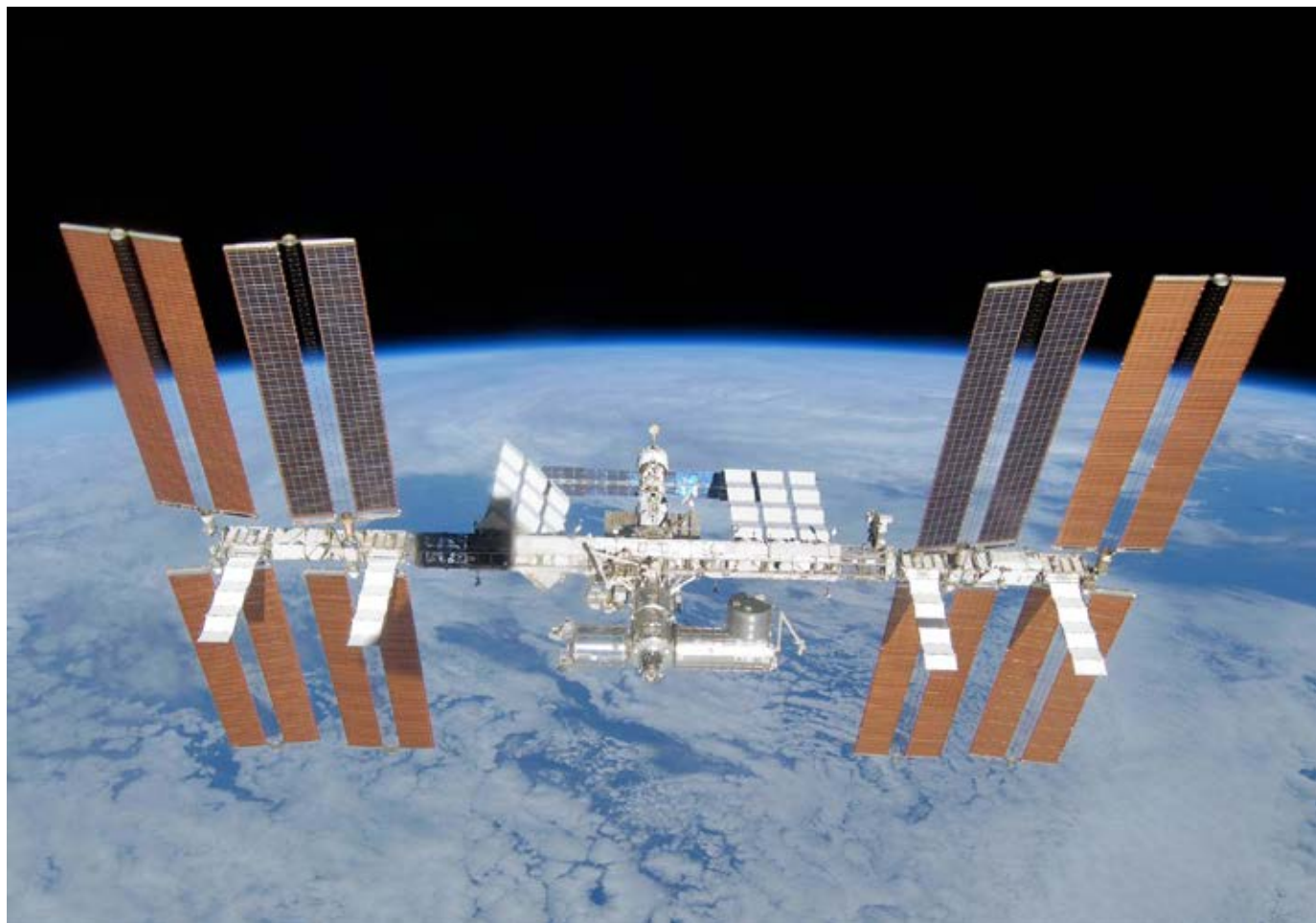
These developments show the Kremlin's growing commitment to pursuing its own interests in space

without partnering with Western states.

In comparison, Roscosmos has increased its collaboration with the China National Space Administration (CNSA), particularly after the first wave of Western sanctions in 2014. In 2021, China and Russia announced plans to build a lunar research station, a direct rival to NASA's Gateway project, which will be coordinated with the space agencies from Europe, Japan, and Canada.

China has already created its own space station, the Tiangong Space Station, which was launched in 2021. While far smaller than the ISS, China's space agency has six more launches planned this year to complete the installation. China also sent a rover to the far side of the moon in 2019, as well as to Mars in 2021, and has announced plans for its own manned moon mission this decade.

While the space programmes of some countries in the Global South, including India, Brazil, Indonesia, and Iran, are certainly less impressive, their development demonstrates the growing accessibility to space, which has long been dominated by Russia, China, and Western states. More than 70 countries now have space agencies, while 14



Russia has said that it will end cooperation on the International Space Station due to tensions over the invasion of Ukraine.

are capable of orbital launch.

For these countries, success in space in recent years has often come from collaborating with existing space powers. In 2005, Iran's first satellite was built and launched in Russia, while in 2008, China, Iran, and Thailand launched a joint research satellite on a Chinese rocket.

Technology sharing, domestic innovation, and decreasing costs have also allowed more countries to compete in space. India made history in 2013 after it sent its own orbiter to Mars, notably on a smaller budget than the space movie *Gravity*, which came out the same year.

The growing number of countries active in Earth's orbit and beyond have also revitalised fears of the pos-

sibility of the militarisation of space. So far, only Russia, China, the US, and India have successfully demonstrated anti-satellite weapons. Other countries, however, including Iran and Israel, are believed to either be developing or already have similar capabilities.

Of course, Western countries remain far ahead technologically than any other state or group of states. NASA's Artemis 1 mission, for example, aims to place humans on the moon again by 2025, while three NASA rovers are currently active on Mars. NASA's unmanned X-37B programme – which began in 1999, was transferred to the US military in 2004, and is now being run by the Air Force's Rapid Capabilities Office – has so far conducted four missions,

while collaborative projects with the ESA have further underlined Western dominance in space.

But a growing phenomenon in space is the role of private companies. They have been involved in many of NASA's and the ESA's high-profile projects, including Boeing's involvement in the X-37B project. Largely based in the US and the UK, these companies have helped reduce costs and have increased opportunities for government space agencies, and they will be essential for exploiting the vast resources on the moon, asteroids, and other celestial bodies.

Though hundreds of space-related companies exist, a handful have

stood out as pioneers of the modern space age. Blue Origin and Virgin Galactic, owned by entrepreneurs Jeff Bezos and Richard Branson respectively, both made history in 2021 after conducting their own manned space flights. Blue Origin, defense contractor Lockheed Martin, and other corporations have also signed contracts to create private space stations in the future.

The most notable private company operating in space, however, is SpaceX, which is owned by entrepreneur Elon Musk. In recent years, the company has helped reduce the United States' dependency on Russian Soyuz rockets to bring astronauts and deliveries to the ISS following the termination of the NASA programme as a consequence of the Ukraine war.

SpaceX has launched more than 2,000 Starlink satellites into space, with plans to launch more than 12,000 by 2026. Most will form part of the Starlink project that aims to

The use of Elon Musk's Starlink satellites was no doubt seen in Moscow as a direct challenge to the Kremlin

provide internet access to populations around the world.

Ukrainian Vice Prime Minister Mykhailo Fedorov tweeted at Elon Musk in February to use the Starlink project to bring internet to Ukraine after some services were disrupted by the Russian invasion. Within days, Starlink was active across the country, and in early May, Ukrainian officials stated that 150,000 Ukrainians were using the service daily.

The use of Starlink satellites was no doubt seen in Moscow as a direct challenge to the Kremlin. While Rus-

sia is currently unlikely to attack the network, it has raised questions as to how future confrontations between private companies and countries in space might play out. The growing use of private military companies on Earth by both states and the private sector could inspire similar moves to protect government and private assets in space.

The growing profile of private space-related companies threatens to upend the rules of regulations regarding space, most of which were written decades ago. This includes the 1967 Outer Space Treaty, which through Article VI established that countries have the legal authority to regulate space and not international bodies, with private companies not yet having started space exploration when the treaty was finalised. The Artemis Accords, a modern US-sponsored agreement to regulate space created in 2020, has so far only been signed by 16 countries.

Nonetheless, the increasingly competitive space industry has already demonstrated that even smaller countries can play a large role in it.

Overseeing the development of technologies and tempering the weaponisation of space, by both countries and companies, should become a priority globally to help ensure that growing competition in space does not lead to avoidable and destructive consequences on Earth.

CT

John P. Ruehl is an Australian-American journalist living in Washington, DC He is a contributing editor to Strategic Policy and a contributor to other foreign affairs publications. This article was produced by Globetrotter.

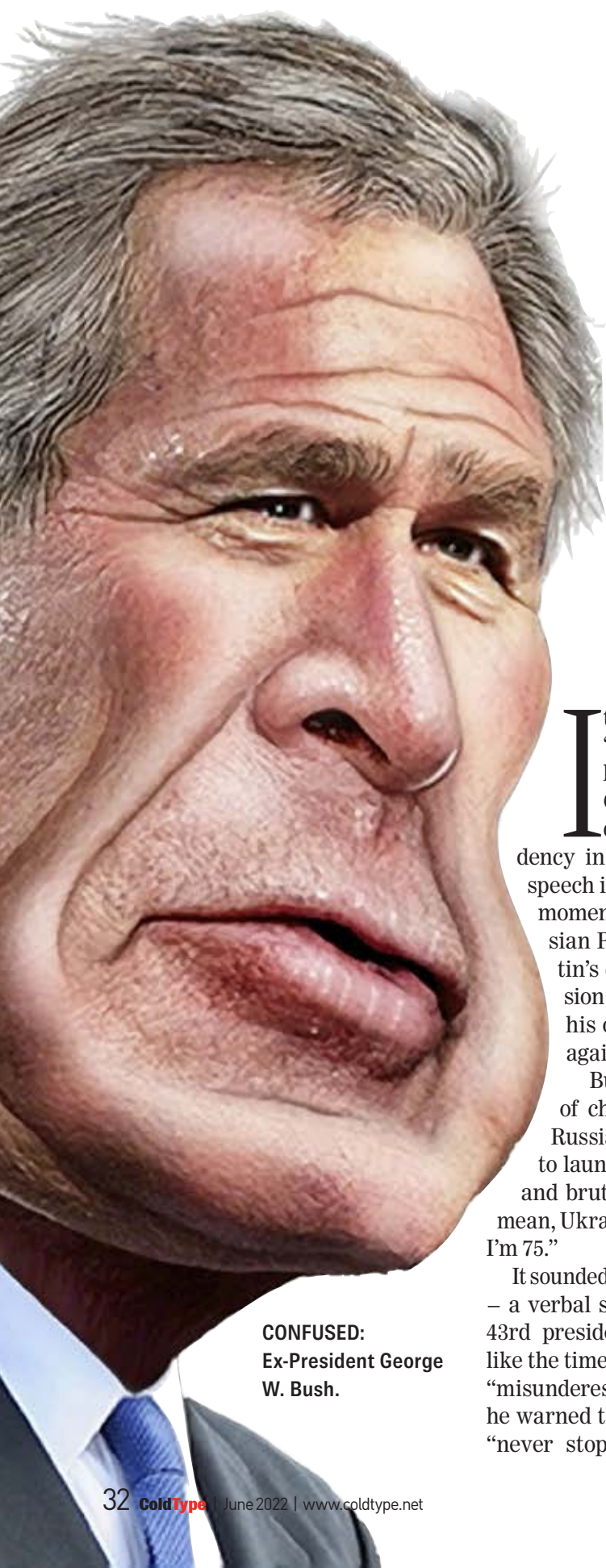
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JONATHAN COOK

Bush's admission of guilt was no 'gaffe'

Former president's confusion over the invasions of Iraq and Ukraine should lead to western soul-searching, not mirth

It was apparently a “gaffe” of the kind we had forgotten since George W Bush stepped down from the US presidency in early 2009. During a speech in Dallas last month, he momentarily confused Russian President Vladimir Putin's current war of aggression against Ukraine and his own war of aggression against Iraq in 2003.

Bush observed that a lack of checks and balances in Russia had allowed “one man to launch a wholly unjustified and brutal invasion of Iraq... I mean, Ukraine. Iraq too. Anyway... I'm 75.”

It sounded like another “Bushism” – a verbal slip-up – for which the 43rd president was famous. Just like the time he boasted that people “misunderestimated” him, or when he warned that America's enemies “never stop thinking about new

ways to harm our country and our people – and neither do we”.

Maybe that explains why his audience laughed. Or maybe not, given how uncomfortable the laughter sounded. Bush certainly wanted his mistake to be seen as yet another slip-up, which is why he hurriedly blamed it on his age. The senility defence doubtless sounds a lot more plausible at a time when the incumbent president, Joe Biden, regularly loses track of what he is saying and even where he is.

The western media, in so far as it has bothered to report Bush's speech, has laughed along nervously too. It has milked the incident largely for comic effect: “Look, we can laugh at ourselves – unlike that narcissist Russian monster, Putin.”

The BBC accorded Bush's comment status as a down-page brief news item. Those that gave it more attention preferred to term it a “gaffe” or an amusing “Freudian slip.”

But the focus on the humour of

CONFUSED:
Ex-President George W. Bush.

the moment is actually part of the media's continuing war on our understanding of recent history. It is intended to deflect us, the audience, from thinking about the real significance of Bush's "gaffe".

The only reason the media is now so belatedly connecting – if very indirectly – “a wholly unjustified and brutal invasion” of Ukraine and what happened in Iraq is because of Bush's mistake.

Had it not happened, the establishment media would have continued to ignore any such comparison. And those trying to raise it would continue to be dismissed as conspiracy theorists or as apologists for Putin.

The implication of what Bush said – even for those mockingly characterising it in Freudian terms – is that he and his co-conspirator, UK Prime Minister Tony Blair, are war criminals and that they should be on trial at the Hague for invading and occupying Iraq.

Everything the current US administration is saying against Putin, and every punishment meted out on Russia and ordinary Russians, can be turned around and directed at the United States and Britain.

Should the US not be under severe economic sanctions from the “civilised world” for what it did to Iraq? Should its sportspeople not be banned from international events? Should its billionaires not be hunted down and stripped of their assets? And should the works of its long-dead writers, artists and composers not be shunned by polite society?

And yet, the western establishment media are proposing none of the above. They are not calling for Blair and Bush to be tried for war crimes. Meanwhile, they echo western leaders in labelling what Russia is doing in Ukraine as genocide and labelling Putin as an evil madman.

The western media are as uncom-

Blair continues to be sought out by the British and US media for his opinions on domestic and world affairs

fortable taking Bush's speech at face value as his audience was. And for good reason.

That is because the media are equally implicated in US and UK crimes in Iraq. They never seriously questioned the ludicrous “weapons of mass destruction” justification for the invasion. They never debated whether the “Shock and Awe” bombing campaign of Baghdad was genocidal.

And, of course, they never described either Bush or Blair as madmen and megalomaniacs and never accused them of waging a war of imperialism – or one for oil – in invading Iraq. In fact, both continue to be treated by the media as respected elder statesmen.

During Trump's presidency, leading journalists waxed nostalgic for the days of Bush, apparently unconcerned that he had used his own presidency to launch a war of aggression – the “supreme international crime.”

And Blair continues to be sought out by the British and US media for his opinions on domestic and world affairs. He is even listened to deferentially when he opines on Ukraine.

But this is not simply about a failure to acknowledge the recent historical record. Bush's invasion of Iraq is deeply tied to Putin's invasion of Ukraine. And for that reason, if no other, the western media ought to have been driving home from the outset the parallels between the two – as Bush has now done in error.

That would have provided the geo-

political context for understanding – without necessarily justifying – Russia's invasion of Ukraine and the West's role in provoking it. Which is precisely why the media have worked so hard to ignore those parallels.

In invading Iraq, Bush and Blair created a precedent that powerful states could redefine their attack on another state as “pre-emptive” – as defensive rather than aggressive – and thereby justify the military invasion in violation of the laws of war.

Bush and Blair falsely claimed both that Iraq threatened the West with weapons of mass destruction and that its secular leader, Saddam Hussein, had cultivated ties with the extreme Islamists of al-Qaeda that carried out the 9/11 attacks on the US. These pretexts ranged from the entirely unsubstantiated to the downright preposterous.

Putin has argued – more plausibly – that Russia had to take pre-emptive action against covert efforts by a US-led Nato to expand its military sphere of influence right up to Russia's borders. Russia feared that, left unchecked, the US and Nato were preparing to absorb Ukraine by stealth.

But how does that qualify Russia's invasion as defensive? The Kremlin's fears were chiefly twofold.

First, it could have paved the way for Nato stationing missiles minutes away from Moscow, eroding any principle of mutual deterrence.

And second, Nato's incorporation of Ukraine would have drawn the western military alliance directly into Ukraine's civil war in the eastern Donbas region. That is where Ukrainian forces, including neo-Nazi elements like the Azov Brigade, have been pitted in a bloody fight against ethnic Russian communities.

In this view, absent a Russian invasion, Nato could have become an active participant in propping up Ukrainian ultra-nationalists killing ethnic Russians – as the West is now effectively doing through its arming of Ukraine to the tune of more than \$40-billion.

Even if one discounts Russia's concerns, Moscow clearly has a greater strategic interest invested in what its neighbour Ukraine is doing on their shared border than Washington ever had in Iraq, many thousands of miles away.

Even more relevant, given the West's failure to acknowledge, let alone address, Bush and Blair's crimes committed in Iraq, is Russia's suspicion that US foreign policy is unchanged two decades on. On what basis would Moscow believe that Washington is any less aggressive or power-hungry than it was when it launched its invasion of Iraq?

The western media continue to refer to the US attack on Iraq, and the subsequent bloody years of occupation, as variously a "mistake", a "misadventure" and a "blunder". But surely it does not look that way to Moscow, all the more so given that Washington followed its invasion of Iraq with a series of proxy wars against other Middle Eastern and North African states such as Libya, Syria and Yemen.

To Russia, the attack on Iraq looks more like a stepping stone in a continuum of wars the US has waged over decades for "full-spectrum dominance" and to eradicate competitors for control of the planet's resources.

With that as the context, Moscow might have reasonably imagined that the US and its Nato allies were eager for yet another proxy war, this time using Ukraine as the battlefield. Recent comments from Biden administration officials, such as De-

fence Secretary Lloyd Austin, noting that Washington's tens of billions of dollars in military aid to Kyiv is intended to "weaken Russia", can only accentuate such fears.

Back in March, Leon Panetta, former US secretary of defence and CIA director under Barack Obama, who is in a position to speak more freely than serving officials, said Washington was waging "a proxy war with Russia, whether we say so or not".

He predicted where US policy would head next, noting that the aim would be "to provide as much military aid as necessary". Diplomacy has been a glaringly low priority for Washington.

Barely concealed from public view is a desire in the US and its allies for another regime change operation – this time in Russia – rather than end the war and the suffering of Ukrainians.

Last month, the *New York Times* very belatedly turned down the war rhetoric a notch and called on the Biden administration to advance negotiations. Even so, its assessment of where the blame lay for Ukraine's destruction was unambiguous: "Mr Putin will go down in history as a butcher."

But have Bush or Blair gone down in history as butchers? They most certainly haven't. And the reason is that the western media have been complicit in rehabilitating their images, presenting them as statesmen who "blundered" – with the implication that good people blunder when they fail to take account of how entrenched the evil of everyone else in the world is.

This false distinction means western leaders and western publics continue to evade responsibility for western crimes in Iraq and elsewhere.

That was why in late February – in reference to Ukraine – a TV jour-

nalist could suggest to Condoleezza Rice, who was one of the architects of the illegal war of aggression on Iraq as Bush's national security adviser: "When you invade a sovereign nation, that is a war crime." The journalist apparently did not consider for a moment that it was not just Putin who was a war criminal but the very woman she was sitting opposite.

It was also why Rice could nod solemnly and agree with a straight face that Putin's invasion of Ukraine was "against every principle of international law and international order – and that's why throwing the book at them [Russia] now in terms of economic sanctions and punishments is a part of it".

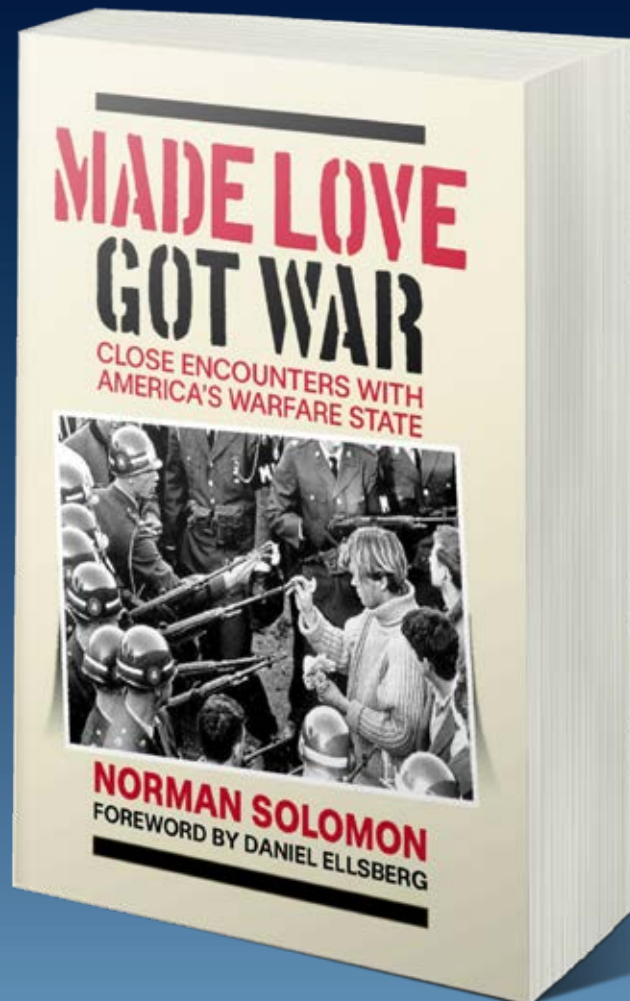
But a West that has refused to come to terms with its role in committing the "supreme international crime" of invading Iraq, and has been supporting systematic crimes against the sovereignty of other states such as Yemen, Libya and Syria, cannot sit in judgment on Russia. And further, it should not be trying to take the high ground by meddling in the war in Ukraine.

If we took the implications of Bush's comment seriously, rather than treating it as a "gaffe" and viewing the Iraq invasion as a "blunder", we might be in a position to speak with moral authority instead of flaunting – once again – our hypocrisy. **CT**

Jonathan Cook won the *Martha Gellhorn Special Prize for Journalism*. His books include *Israel and the Clash of Civilisations: Iraq, Iran and the Plan to Remake the Middle East* (Pluto Press) and *Disappearing Palestine: Israel's Experiments in Human Despair* (Zed Books). Cook's web site is www.jonathan-cook.net.

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TODD MILLER

The Border-Industrial Complex

Robotic dogs and autonomous surveillance towers are the new wall that keep southern migrants from America's wealth

First, it was the Customs and Border Protection (CBP) vehicles speeding along on the road in front of our campsite. Then it was the Border Patrol's all-terrain vehicles moving swiftly on a ridge above us. I was about 10 miles north of the border with Mexico, near Peña Blanca Lake in southern Arizona, camping with my six-year-old son and some other families. Like fire trucks racing to a blaze, the Border Patrol mobilisation around me was growing so large I could only imagine an emergency situation developing.

I started climbing to get a better look and soon found myself alone on a golden hill dotted with alligator junipers and mesquite. Brilliant vermilion flycatchers fluttered between the branches. The road, though, was Border Patrol all the way. Atop the hill opposite mine stood a surveillance tower. Since it loomed over our campsite, I'd been looking at it all weekend. It felt strangely like part of French philosopher Michel Foucault's panopticon – in other words, I wasn't sure whether I was being watched or not. But I suspected I was.

After all, that tower's cameras could see for seven miles at night and its ground-sweeping radar operated in a 13-mile radius, a capability,

one Border Patrol officer told me in 2019, worth "100 agents". In the term of the trade, the technology was a "force multiplier".

I had first seen that tower freshly built in 2015 after CBP awarded a hefty contract to the Israeli company Elbit Systems. In other words, on top of that hill, I wasn't just watching some unknown event developing; I was also in the middle of the border-industrial complex.

During Donald Trump's years in office, the media focused largely on the former president's fixation with the giant border wall he was trying to have built, a xenophobic symbol so filled with racism that it was far easier to find people offended by it than towers like this one. From where I stood, the closest stretch of border wall was 10 miles to the south in Nogales, a structure made of 20-foot-high steel bollards and covered with coiled razor wire. (That stretch of wall, in fact, had been built long before Trump took office.)

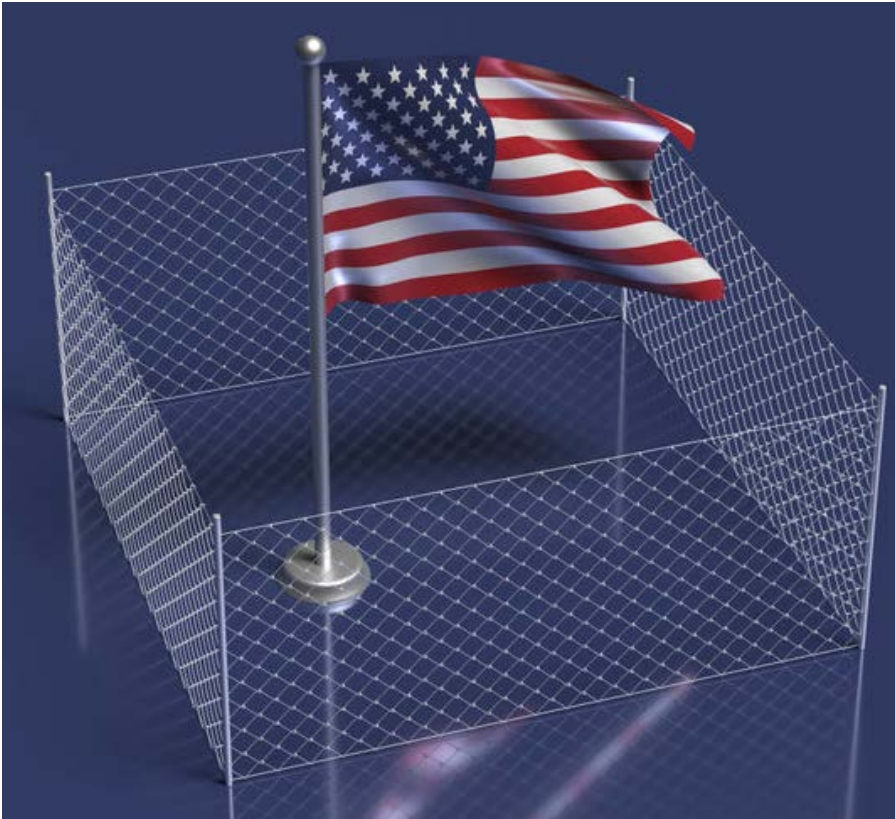
What I was now witnessing, however, could be called Biden's wall. I'm speaking about a modern, high-tech border barrier of a different sort, an increasingly autonomous surveillance apparatus fuelled by "public-private partnerships". The technology for this "virtual wall" had been in the works for years, but the Biden

administration has focused on it as if it were a humane alternative to Trump's project.

In reality, for the Border Patrol, the "border-wall system", as it's called, is equal parts barrier, technology, and personnel. While the Biden administration has ditched the racist justifications that went with it, its officials continue to zealously promote the building of a border-wall system that's increasingly profitable and ever more like something out of a science-fiction movie.

As March ended, one week before my camping trip, I saw it up close and personal at the annual Border Security Expo in San Antonio, Texas.

The golden chrome robotic dog trotted right up to me on the blue carpet at the convention center hall. At my feet, it looked up as if it were a real dog expecting me to lean over and pet it. According to the Department of Homeland Security's Science and Technology Directorate, this "dog" will someday patrol our southern border. Its vendor was undoubtedly trying to be cute when he made the dog move its butt back and forth as if wagging its tail (in reality, two thin, black antennae). Behind the vendor was a large sign



with the company's name in giant letters: Ghost Robotics. Below that was "Robots That Feel the World", a company slogan right out of the dystopian imagination.

According to its organisers, this was the most well-attended Border Security Expo in its 15-year history. About 200 companies crowded the hall, trying to lure officials from CBP, US Immigration and Customs Enforcement, border sheriffs' departments, and international border forces into buying their technologies, sensors, robots, detectors, and guns. As I stood staring at that surreal dog, behind me the company Teledyne Flir was showing off its video surveillance system: a giant retractable mast sitting in the bed of a black pickup truck. On the side of the truck were the words "Any Threat. Anywhere."

Another company, Saxon Aerospace (its slogan: "Actionable Intelligence, Anytime, Anywhere"), had a slick, white, medium-sized drone

on display. One vendor assured me that the drone market had simply exploded in recent years. "Do you know why?" I asked. His reply: "It's like when a dog eats blood and gets carnivorous."

Elsewhere, the red Verizon Frontline mobile command-and-control truck looked like it could keep perfect company with any Border Patrol all-terrain vehicle unit; while Dell, the Texas-based computer firm, displayed its own frontline mobile vehicle, promising that "whether you're providing critical citizen services, innovating for the next generation, or securing the nation, we bring the right technology... and far-reaching vision to help guide your journey."

And don't forget 3M, which has moved well beyond its most famous product, Scotch tape, to provide "rugged and reliable equipment across DoD [Department of Defense], DoJ [Department of Justice], DHS [Department of Homeland Security], and US state and local

agencies". Top defence contractors like Airbus (with a shiny black helicopter on display in the centre of the expo hall) were also present, along with top border contractors like General Dynamics, Lockheed Martin, and Elbit Systems.

Just the day before the expo opened, the Biden administration put out its fiscal year 2023 budget, which proposed \$97.3-billion for the DHS, that agency's largest in its two-decade history. The Customs and Border Protection part of that, \$17.5-billion, would similarly be the most money that agency has ever received, nearly \$1.5 billion more than last year. Although Immigration and Customs Enforcement received just a marginal increase, it will still get \$8.5-billion. Combine just those two and that \$26-billion would be the highest sum ever dedicated to border and immigration enforcement, significantly more than the \$20-billion that the Trump administration started out with in 2017. As DHS secretary Alejandro Mayorkas put it, such a budget will help secure our "values". (And in an ironic sense, at least, how true that is!)

"Notably", Mayorkas added, "the budget makes smart investments in technology to keep our borders secure and includes funding that will allow us to process asylum claims more efficiently as we build a safe, orderly, and humane immigration system."

What Mayorkas didn't mention was that his border plans involve ever more contracts doled out to private industry. That's been the case since 9/11 when money began to pour into border and immigration enforcement, especially after the creation of the Department of Homeland Security in 2002. With ever-growing budgets, the process

of privatising the oversight of our southern border increased significantly during the administration of President George W. Bush. (The first Border Security Expo was, tellingly enough, in 2005.) The process, however, soared in the Obama era. During the first four years of his presidency, 60,405 contracts (including a massive \$766-million to weapons-maker Lockheed Martin) were issued to the tune of \$15-billion. From 2013 to 2016, another 81,500 contracts were issued for a total of \$13.2-billion.

In other words, despite his wall, it's a misconception to think that Donald Trump stood alone in his urge to crack down on migration at the border. It's true, however, that his administration did up the ante by issuing 87,293 border-protection contracts totalling \$20.9-billion. For Biden, the tally so far is 10,612 contracts for \$8-billion. If he keeps up that pace, he could rack up nearly \$24-billion in contracts by the end of his first term, which would leave Trump's numbers and those of every other recent president in the dust.

If so, the contracts of the Trump and Biden administrations would total nearly \$45-billion, slightly surpassing the \$44.3-billion spent on border and immigration enforcement from 1980 to 2002. In the media, border and immigration issues are normally framed in terms of a partisan divide between Democrats and Republicans. While there is certainly some truth to that, there are a surprising number of ways in which both parties have reached a kind of grim border consensus.

As Maryland Democratic Congressman Dutch Ruppersberger, a member of the House appropriations committee, said ever so beamingly on a screen at that Expo conference, "I have literally put my money where

if the "big, beautiful" wall was the emblem of Donald Trump's border policy, then for the Biden moment, think robo-dogs

my mouth is, championing funding for fencing, additional Border Patrol agents, and state-of-the-art surveillance equipment." And as Clint McDonald, a member of the Border Sheriff's Association, said at its opening panel, the border is "not a red issue, it's not a blue issue. It's a red, white, and blue issue."

When I asked the Ghost Robotics vendor if his robo-dog had a name, he replied that his daughter "likes to call it Tank". He then added, "We let our customers name them as they get them". While we were chatting, a prospective customer asked, "What about weapons mountable?" (That is, could buyers weaponise that dog?) The vendor immediately assured him that they were already working with other companies to make that happen.

Later, when I asked Border Patrol Chief Raul Ortiz about the surveillance dogs, he downplayed their significance, stressing the media hype around them, and saying that no robo-dogs were yet deployed anywhere on the border. Nonetheless, it was hard not to wander that hall and think, This, much more than a wall, could be our border future. In fact, if the "big, beautiful" wall was the emblem of Donald Trump's border policy, then for the Biden moment, think robo-dogs.

The night before I stood on that hill in Arizona, I had heard people

passing through the campsite where my son and I were sleeping in a tent. Their footsteps were soft and I felt no fear, no danger. That people were coming through should hardly have been a surprise. Enforcement at our southern border has been designed to push such border-crossing migrants into just the sort of desert lands we were camping in, often under the cover of night.

The remains of at least 8,000 people have been found in those landscapes since the mid-1990s and many more undoubtedly died since thousands of families continue to search for lost loved ones who disappeared in the borderlands. Those soft footsteps I heard could have been from asylum seekers fleeing violence in their lands or facing the disaster of accelerating climate change – wilted crops and flooded fields – or economic dispossession in countries where foreign corporations and local oligarchies rule the day. Or all of that combined.

For years, I've been talking to migrants who crossed isolated and hazardous parts of the Arizona desert to bypass the walls and guns of the Border Patrol.

I thought of them when, on the last day of that Border Security Expo, I watched Palmer Luckey, the CEO of Anduril, a new border surveillance company, step up to the podium to introduce a panel on "The Digital Transformation of the Border". The 20-something Luckey, already worth \$700-million, had floppy brown hair and wore a Hawaiian shirt, cargo shorts, and flip-flops. He told the audience of border industry and Homeland Security officials that he was wearing shades because of recent laser surgery, not an urge to look cool.

He did look cool, though, as if he were at the beach. And he does represent the next generation of border

tech. Since 2020, his company has received nearly \$100-million in contracts from Customs and Border Protection.

His introduction to the panel, which sounded to me more like a pitch for financing, offered a glimpse of how the border-industrial complex works. It was like listening to a rehearsal for the lobbying appearances he and his company would undoubtedly make in Congress for the 2023 budget. In 2021, Anduril spent \$930,000 lobbying. It also gave political candidates nearly \$2-million in campaign contributions.

Luckey's message was: fund me and you'll create a "durable industrial base", while ensuring that border security will not be a "pipe dream". Indeed, in his vision, the new border-surveillance infrastructure he represents will instead be an autonomous "pipeline", delivering endlessly actionable information and intelligence directly to the cell phones of Border Patrol agents.

I was thinking about his pitch again as I stood atop that hill watching the border apparatus quickly mobilise. I was, in fact, looking at yet another Border Patrol vehicle driving by when I suddenly heard a mechanical buzzing overhead that made me think a drone might be nearby. At our southern border, the CBP not only operates the sizeable Predator Bs (once used in US military and CIA operations abroad), but small and medium-sized drones.

I could see nothing in the sky, but something was certainly happening. It was as if I were at the Expo again, but now it was real life. I was, in fact, in the middle of the very surveillance-infrastructure pipeline Luckey had described, where towers talk to each other, signal to drones, to the all-terrain vehicle unit, and to

The border is not in crisis. It's the people walking through the desert, arrested so far from home, who are actually in crisis

roving Border Patrol cars.

Then the buzzing sound stopped as a CBP helicopter lifted into the air, its loud propellers roaring.

After that dramatic helicopter exit, I wondered if there was indeed a border emergency and decided to get in my car and see what I could find out, leaving my son with our friends. As I rounded a corner, I came across Border Patrol agents and vehicles at the side of the road with a large group of people who, I assumed, were migrants. About four individuals had already been put in the back of a green-striped Border Patrol pickup truck, handcuffed and arrested. They had the tired look I knew so well of people who had walked an entire night in an unknown, hazardous landscape, had failed, and were now about to be deported. The agents of the ATV detail were lounging around in their green jumpsuits as their quads idled, as if this were all in a day's (or night's) work, which indeed it was.

I remembered then hearing those footsteps as my son slept soundly and thought: The border is not in crisis. That's impossible. The border's inanimate. It's the people walking through the desert – the ones who crept past us and those in the back of that truck or soon to be put in other trucks like it, arrested so far from home – who are actually in crisis. And it's a crisis almost beyond the ability of anyone who hasn't been displaced to imagine. Otherwise,

why would they be here

The ongoing border-crisis story is another example of what Uruguayan writer Eduardo Galeano once would have called an "upside down" world, so twisted in its telling that the victim becomes the victimiser and the oppressor, the oppressed. If only there were a way we could turn that story – and how so many in this country think about it – right-side up.

As I was mulling all of that over, I suddenly noticed the omnipresent "eye" of the Elbit Systems tower "staring" at me again. Its superpower cameras were catching the whole scene. Perhaps its radar had detected this group to begin with. After all, the company's website says, "From the darkest of nights to the thickest of brush, our border solutions help predict, detect, identify, and classify items of interest". Not people, mind you, but the handcuffed "items of interest" in the back of that truck.

As I watched the scene unfold, I remembered a moment at that Expo when a man from the Rio Grande Valley asked a panel of Department of Homeland Security officials a rare and pointed question. Gesturing toward the hall where all the companies were hawking their wares, he wondered why, if there was so much money to be made in border security, "would you even want a solution?"

The long uncomfortable silence that followed told me all I needed to know about the real border crisis in this country. **CT**

Todd Miller has written on border and immigration issues for the New York Times, Al Jazeera America, and the NACLA Report on the Americas. His latest book is Build Bridges, Not Walls: A Journey to a World Without Borders. This article first appeared at www.tomdispatch.com.



EDWARD CURTIN

It's about time

The US government is pushing the world to the brink of disaster in full awareness of the consequences. Its actions are insane, yet insanity has become the norm

With the start of World War III by the United States “declaring” war against Russia by its actions in Ukraine, we have entered a time when the end of time has become very possible. I am speaking of nuclear annihilation.

I look down at my great-uncle’s gold Elgin pocket watch from the 19th-century. His name was John Patrick Whalen, an Irish immigrant to the US who fled England’s colonialist created famine in Ireland. It tells me it is 5:15 pm on April 21, 2022, a date, coincidentally, with a history. No doubt John looked at his watch on this date in 1898 when the United States, after the USS Maine exploded from within in Havana harbour (a possible false flag attack), declared war on Spain in order to confiscate Spanish territories: Cuba, Puerto Rico, Guam, and the Philippines. One colonial power replaced another and then proceeded over the long decades to wage war and slaughter these island peoples. Imperialism never dies. It is timeless.

124 years go by in a flash and it’s still the same old story. In 1898 the yellow press screamed Spanish devils and today it screams Russian devils. Then and now the press called for war. If the human race is still

here in another 124 years, time and the corporate media will no doubt have told the same story – war and propaganda’s lies to an insouciant and ignorant population too hypnotised by propaganda to oppose them. This despite the apocalyptic sense that permeates our lives because of demonic technology and its use to transform humans into machines who can’t think clearly enough to perceive reality and realise the threat posed by that quintessential technological invention – nuclear weapons.

This is not uplifting, but it’s true. The nuclear weapons are primed and ready to fly. The US insists on its first-strike right to launch them. It openly declares it is seeking the overthrow of the Russian government. Russia says it will use nuclear weapons only if its existence is threatened, which has become increasingly so because of US provocations over a long time period and its current expanding arming of Ukraine’s government and its neo-Nazi forces.

The Russian President Vladimir Putin and Foreign Secretary Sergei Lavrov have just warned the US that such involvement has made nuclear war a “serious” and “real”

risk; in Lavrov’s words “we must not underestimate it,” which is a mild form of diplomatic speech. Putin said that Russia has made all the preparations to respond if it senses a strategic threat to Russia and that response will be “instant, it will be quick.” The US response is to shrug these statements off, just as it has done so for many years with Putin’s complaints about NATO forces moving up to its border. Incredibly, Biden has said, “For God’s sake, this man (Putin) cannot remain in power.”

Despite endless media/intelligence anti-Russian propaganda – “a vast tapestry of lies”, to use Harold Pinter’s phrase – many fine writers have provided the historical details to confirm the truth that the US has purposely provoked the Russian war in Ukraine by its actions there and throughout Eastern Europe, which the mainstream media avoid completely.

This US aggressive history against Russia is part of a much larger history of imperial hubris extending back to the 19th-century. I will therefore here follow Thoreau’s advice – “If you are acquainted with the principle, what do you care for a myriad instances and applications?” – since how many times do people need to hear lies such as “Iraq has weapons of mass destruction” in

order to justify wars of aggression around the world. The historical facts are very clear, but facts and history don't seem to matter to many people.

Pinter again, in his Nobel Address, bluntly told the truth about the US's history of systematic and remorseless war crimes: "Nothing ever happened. Even while it was happening it wasn't happening. It didn't matter. It was of no interest." Which is still the case.

So time is my focus, for the last days have arrived unless there occurs a radical awakening to the obvious truth that the US government is pushing the world to the brink of disaster in full awareness of the consequences. Its actions are insane, yet insanity has become the norm. Insane leaders and a catatonic, hypnotised public lead to disaster.

I write these words with an old fountain pen, a high school graduation gift, to somehow comfort and remind myself that when we were this close once before in October 1962, Kennedy and Khrushchev miraculously found a solution to the Cuban Missile Crisis; and to find hope now, and that when my time is up and I join John Patrick in the other world, things will have changed for my children and grandchildren. It is admittedly the hope of a desperado.

The last few years of the Covid-19 propaganda have served to further distort people's sense of time, a distortion years in the making through the introduction of digital technology with its accompanying numerical time clicks and its severing of our natural sense of time that is tied to the rising and falling of the tides and the turning of the days and seasons, a feeling that is being lost. Such felt sense of time's texture could be slow or faster, but it had limits. We

It seems as if the global situation could burst out of control in an altogether unpredictable fashion, if Putin begins to feel that Ukraine is a lost war

now live in a world without limits, which, as the ancient Greeks knew, demands payback.

For years before Covid-19, the sense of speed time was dominant, supported by the politically-introduced state of a constant emergency after September 11, 2001 with the urgency to hurry and keep up or one would fall behind. Keep up with what was never explained. Hurry why? Fast and faster was the rule with constant busyness that served the very useful social function of leaving no time for thinking, which was the point, but it made many feel as though they were engaged. And constantly alert for "terrorists" to come knocking. Thus the long wars in Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, Libya, Yemen, etc., all of which continue via various subterfuges.

Then, presto, all this frenzied time sense came to a stop with the 2020 lockdowns, when time got very slow, but not slow in the natural sense but an enforced slowness. People were locked up. Not only was it stupefying but stultifying and an existential drag. This went on for two years with the prisoners allowed short respites, only to be rounded back up and locked down again. Jabbed and jolted was the plan. When will it ever end? was the common cry, as despair and depression spread and scrambled minds led to suicides and mindless screen entertainment. This was planned education for a trans-human future

in which the cell phone will be central to totalitarian control if people do not rebel.

Those behind the Covid-19 and war propaganda are fanatical technocrats who seek total control of the world's population through digital technology. Now they have temporarily let the people out of one type of cell and dramatically sped up time with frantic war propaganda against Russia. The great English writer John Berger said it perfectly:

"Every ruling minority needs to numb, and, if possible, to kill the time-sense of those whom it exploits. This is the authoritarian secret of all methods of imprisonment."

Everyone is now doing time while scrolling messages on the walls of their cell phones. A twisted, convoluted, distorted, mechanical time in which it seems that there is no history and the future is an endless road of more of the same.

Some say we have all the time in the world. I say no, that we have entered a new time, perhaps the end-time, when the world's end is a very real possibility.

Hypnotised people can agree to anything, even mass-suicide, unless they snap out of it. This can only happen with a return to slowness in the old sense, when people once felt time in their hearts' rhythms attuned to the rising and falling of nature's reality. Time to think and contemplate the fate of the earth when nuclear war is contemplated. Yes, "We must not underestimate it."

It's about time.

Isn't it always?

CT

Edward Curtin's new book, *Seeking Truth in a Litany of Lies: Critical and Lyrical Essays*, is available from Clarity Press – www.claritypress.com. Read more of Curtin's essays at his website www.edwardcurtin.com.



JOHN ROTHWELL

The Rights Stuff

Hundreds of banner-waving, protesters gathered at Calder Plaza in Grand Rapids, Michigan, on May 14, joining tens of thousands more who rallied across America to urge their political leaders to protect reproduction rights and provide abortion access for all women. The protests followed a leak of a Supreme Court draft opinion that would overturn *Roe v. Wade*.

Michigan's Attorney General Dana Nessel drew the loudest cheers of the event when she told the rally that if *Roe v. Wade* was overturned, she would not enforce the state's 1931 abortion ban.

A dozen or so anti-abortion protesters, mostly men, set up a counter rally and prayer session. Their presence motivated a large group of abortion-rights protesters to march and chant pro-choice slogans. **CT**









Republican
Candidate:

"If rape is inevitable,
you should just lie back
and enjoy it"

Supreme Court Partisans:

After your rape, enjoy
your forced pregnancy,
courtesy of U.S.



John Rothwell is a freelance journalist based in Grand Rapids, Michigan.

ROBERT LIPSYTE

Where are the men?

No more bystanders in the post-Roe era

For 50 years now, people have told desperate, heart-breaking stories about what it was like to search for an abortion in the days before *Roe v. Wade*. These were invariably narratives of women in crisis. They sometimes involved brief discussions about economic inequality, police-state intrigue, and unwanted children, but for the most part men were invisible in them, missing in action. Where were they? And where are they now that a wall of fundamental rights seems to be crumbling away not just for women, but for all of us? This is another example of what I used to call the Bystander Boys.

As a sportswriter, my work over these decades often brought me into a universe of male entitlement and the sort of posturing I thought of as *faux* masculinity. Even in that chest-beating environment, I was struck by the absence in abortion stories of what in another time would have been called *manliness*. What happened to that mostly storybook ideal of the brave, modest, responsible, big-hearted protector? I figured out early on not to waste time searching for him among football quarterbacks or baseball coaches, or even cops and Army officers. Much, much later, I found more people with the right stuff –

that “manly” ideal – among single mothers and feminist lawyers.

As it happened, there weren’t a lot of male heroes during the women’s movement of the 1970s or even the more recent #MeToo upsurge. Most men, except for the power boys who treated everyone else as girls, were too fearful or starstruck to intervene. The most grotesque models were, of course, the athletes who stood by silently while their teammates raped stoned or drunken women.

In the pre-pill early 1960s, when unwanted pregnancy was a constant chilling spectre for my pre-Boomer “silent” generation, men usually talked about abortion only if their girlfriends had missed a period – when they were trying to track down Dr. Robert Spencer, that coal-country Pennsylvania doctor who performed illegal abortions with relative impunity. They might even share their fears of what an unwanted kid would do to their careers, but rarely did they bring up the typical back-alley butchery of abortion in those years that came from the hijacking of the most fundamental of rights.

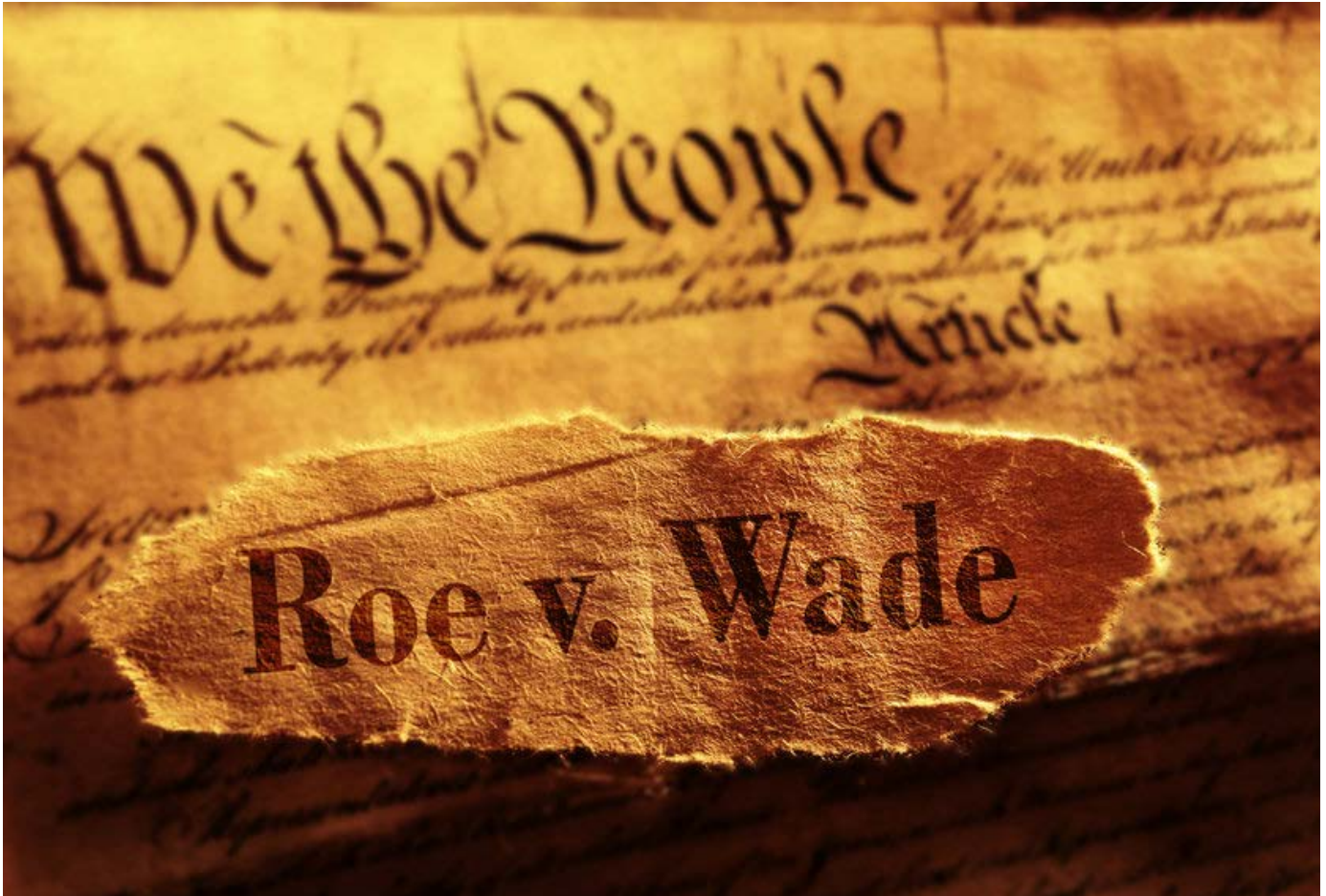
Where are those guys even today, much less their sons and grandsons, presumably still active partners in the reproductive process? Forget

about moral responsibility – what about the jeopardy our lives are in as the possibility of a Trumpian-style authoritarian future closes in around us? Sixty years ago, it already seemed remarkably clear to me how crucial it was that men stop leaving women to face this nightmare essentially alone – and it still does.

The Dismissal

With that in mind, let me tell you my own ancient abortion story, though it always felt somewhat pallid compared to others – what my kids would have sneered at as a “first-world story” if I had told them. Still, I think it does capture the fear and helplessness of a time which, sadly enough, just might be coming around again.

The year was 1961, 12 years before *Roe v. Wade*. I had already been married to my first wife for two years and she was justifiably convinced that we were still too shaky, emotionally and professionally, to have children. We were both 23. She was an undergraduate, working on the side in a doctor’s office. I was an ambitious *New York Times* reporter, covering sports for that paper and



cops for its Sunday magazine. When she discovered that she was pregnant, we briefly argued about what to do. I liked the idea of fatherhood and was convinced that it wouldn't hamper my career. (No wonder, since in the spirit of the time, I assumed she'd be doing all the work.) But I did at least understand that, in the end, it was her choice, not mine.

Through her medical connections, she found a Fifth Avenue doctor who would perform the then-illegal operation for \$500, which we could just barely scrape together. We called that upcoming operation "the dismissal" in what we both understood to be a pathetically smart-assed way of avoiding a confrontation with the actual fears and mixed emotions generated by our choice. At that time, it was, of course, criminal, dangerous, and (in what passed for

When she discovered that she was pregnant, we briefly argued about what to do. I was convinced that it wouldn't hamper my career

proper society) largely despised.

I was scared for Maria's well-being and the possible consequences of acting illegally. I was particularly fearful that the *Times* might find out and, in some fashion, hold it against me. In a confused and twisted way, I was also disturbed about acting against the moral conventions of my society and time. It made me feel like a bad person and, believe me, those were wrenching feelings that began

to bubble back into my memory recently as the most humane of judicial amendments came under assault by truly evil forces.

I was also – however contradictory this might sound – righteously angry on that crisp, clear fall afternoon as Maria and I walked to the doctor's ground-floor office across from New York's Central Park. I knew even then that religious bigots and the mercenary politicians backing them stood in the way of our health and freedom. Admittedly, I could never have imagined that, more than half a century later, the same combination of forces would be using abortion as part of an authoritarian plot to seize control of all aspects of our lives. Back then, I probably would have smirked at such seeming paranoia, had I seen it in some sci-fi film.

The doctor's door opened before I rang the buzzer and the arm of an older woman – the doctor's wife I later discovered – shot out, grabbed Maria's sleeve and began pulling her inside. We kissed quickly. I noted how terrified Maria's eyes were. And then she was gone.

I had been instructed to leave the area and call in two hours (from a pay phone on the street, of course, since no one then had a mobile phone). After wandering in the park for a while, I found myself drifting back toward the doctor's office. Reporters always have that urge to stay near the action. As dusk was settling, I noticed nondescript black and gray sedans beginning to double-park illegally along Fifth Avenue and in the side streets flanking that office. They disgorged athletic-looking women in non-chic clothes. In that fashionable neighbourhood, they were distinctly *not* local residents.

The Raid

As they clustered on the sidewalk, I remember thinking that they looked like a women's semi-pro softball team I had once covered, as well as the women cops I had met recently doing a *Times* magazine piece about a squad of Manhattan detectives.

I realised then that I was watching a raid. I felt ice water in my veins as I hurried to a telephone booth from which I could observe the cops closing in on the doctor's office. What should I do? Warn the doctor? Less than an hour had passed since Maria had gone inside. If they aborted the abortion now, would that spare them criminal charges? What if she was numbing into the anaesthesia? I imagined the doctor, scalpel in hand, panicking and injuring my

The cops swarmed the office door and went inside. They briskly collected a middle-aged couple and stuffed them into a parked sedan

wife. I couldn't bring myself to take that chance. So, made powerless by my decision, I simply waited and watched.

Soon enough, the cops swarmed the office door and went inside. I moved closer. Several of them were standing guard there and others were stationed along the block. They briskly collected a middle-aged couple heading toward the office and stuffed them into a parked sedan.

It seemed like a long time before the office door opened and the cops came out with the doctor's wife, a white-bearded man in a white coat, a teenage girl wrapped in a blanket, and Maria, pale and shaking after the operation. I couldn't be a bystander for one more second. Nobody stopped me as I ran to her, yelling, "That's my wife!"

The cops were matter of fact, almost kindly. They assured us that if Maria agreed to accompany them to Bellevue Hospital and submit to an examination to ascertain whether she had an abortion, there would be no charges against her. I felt helpless. I didn't know what to do or who to call.

Gripped by a certain desperation, I asked whether the medical exam would be the end of it? No, I was told, she would need to appear before a grand jury trying the doctor. I insisted on going to Bellevue with her. The cops conferred. Okay, they said, and took me along.

I sat in the chilly hallway of that

hospital for a long, long time. Passing cops chatted with me in a relatively friendly way. Several of them all but apologized. Abortions were against the law, they pointed out, shrugging, as if to say, what can we do? Finally, I took Maria home. She slept for a day. There were visits from a nurse at the doctor's office where she worked.

Sometime later, she did indeed testify before a grand jury. The doctor's name eventually appeared in a splashy *New York Post* story. He was running an abortion "factory," so the claim went, and the raid on his office was considered a big bust.

The Choice

And that was pretty much the end of it for us, not to speak of our marriage a year later. The only related event: a call from the Police Department's public information chief, a deputy commissioner, demanding an apology and a retraction of things I had written in my recent magazine article about the squad of women detectives. He said he knew just why I had written so negatively about them and assured me that if I didn't send him that apology, he would inform key people at the *Times* about my recent "unlawful activity." He let that phrase hang in the air.

I felt chills. My career, I feared, was over. At that moment, I remember thinking about how my dad had talked me into getting a junior-high-school English-teaching license as a back-up to my risky journalism career.

Still, I felt I had no choice and told that deputy commissioner to go to hell. He snickered and hung up. I never heard from him again. Sometime later, a magazine editor from the *Times* discreetly indicated to me that he'd brushed off some complaint

from a police flack and told me not to worry.

End of story, although I thought about it again when *Roe v. Wade* became the law of the land in 1973 and, with Maria's permission, I wrote about what happened to us as part of a boomlet of pre-*Roe* horror stories published then. The bloody wire coat hanger that women so notoriously used to try to induce abortions at home, which once seemed all too real to me, was becoming a quaint symbol of another age. We could breathe easy on this, as it was obviously settled law for all time.

In retrospect, I realise that I was surprised by how blithely a new generation took for granted legal access to safe abortions. As a feminist married to a feminist journalist in the 1970s, my nascent thoughts about those Bystander Boys of the pre-*Roe* era transformed into far better images of "liberated males" I knew, mostly writers and academics, who supported the women's movement, even if the mainstream media wrote them off as softies.

Everything started coming back to me, though, with Politico's scoop on Supreme Court justice Samuel Alito's draft opinion that threatens to end *Roe v. Wade* (and potentially so much more). In that

**Abortion isn't the
whole abortion story,
the bullies are
preparing to go after
the entire schoolyard,
not just the girls**

"opinion," you can see one of the many bullies of this era at work. When it came out, the Republican congressional crew were, of course, already well launched on the tactics they had undoubtedly learned so long ago in some schoolyard, intimidating any onlookers who wanted to stop them from terrorizing the girls.

Meanwhile, the everyday dudes, starting with President Biden, were generally cutting and running from both the reproductive nightmare Alito's opinion had set loose in our world and its larger social implications, including the Trumpist campaign to control us all.

It's time, though, for the boys to become men, to step out on the streets, organize, demonstrate, march (maybe wearing knitted penis caps), guard clinics, escort patients, make noise. Older men like me who can evoke the terrible

pre-*Roe* days should tell their stories, at least to their grandsons, especially the ones who claim that their impractical progressive ideals prohibit them from voting in lesser-of-two-evils elections (too common these days, it seems.)

Just hold your nose, sonny, if it means doing the right thing.

And perhaps it's most important to keep reminding ourselves and everyone we know that abortion isn't the whole abortion story, that the bullies are preparing to go after the entire schoolyard, not just the girls, and (as has become so common these days) they're going to stomp into the school-board meeting as well. Sooner or later, they'll try to take over the school itself and, eventually, the mind and soul of this country thanks to the holes they're about to tear in the Constitution. There are more of us than them and, if we stand together and fight, we can still win. No place for bystanders now. **CT**

Robert Lipsyte is a former sports and city columnist for the *New York Times*. He is the author, among other works, of *SportsWorld: An American Dreamland*. This article first appeared at www.tomdispatch.com.

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CAITLIN JOHNSTONE

The Western media's blatant war lies

The fact that both Silicon Valley and the news media have accepted that it is their job to manipulate public thought about this war tells you all you need to know about how free the liberal democracies of the western world really are

The Ukrainian government is quickly learning that it can say anything, literally anything at all, about what's happening on the ground there and get it uncritically reported as an actual news story by the mainstream western press.

The latest story making the rounds is a completely unevicenced claim made by a Ukrainian government official that Russians are going around raping Ukrainian babies to death. *Business Insider*, the *Daily Beast*, the *Daily Mail* and *Yahoo News* have all run this story despite no actual evidence existing for it beyond the empty assertions of a government who would have every incentive to lie.

"A one-year-old boy died after being raped by two Russian soldiers, the Ukrainian Parliament's Commissioner for Human Rights said on Thursday", reads a report by *Business Insider* which was subsequently picked up by *Yahoo News*. "The accusation is one of the most horrific from Russia's invasion of Ukraine, but is not unique."

At the end of the fourth paragraph we get to the disclaimer that every critical thinker should look for when reading such stories in the mainstream press:

"Insider could find no independent evidence for the claim."

In its trademark style, the *Daily Beast* ran the same story in a much more flamboyant and click-friendly fashion.

"The dead boy is among dozens of alleged child rape victims which include two 10-year-old boys, triplets aged 9, a 2-year-old girl raped by two Russian soldiers, and a 9-month-old baby who was penetrated with a candlestick in front of its mother, according to Ukraine's Commissioner for Human Rights", the *Daily Beast* writes.

The one and only source for this latest spate of "the Russians are raping babies to death" stories is a statement on a Ukrainian government website by Ukraine's Human Rights Commissioner Lyudmyla Denisova. The brief statement contains no evidence of any kind, and its English translation concludes as follows:

"I appeal to the UN Commission for Investigation Human Rights Violations during the Russian military invasion of Ukraine to take into account these facts of genocide of the Ukrainian people.

"I call on our partners around the world to increase sanctions pressure

on Russia, to provide Ukraine with offensive weapons, to join the investigation of rashist crimes in our country!

"The enemy must be stopped and all those involved in the atrocities in Ukraine must be brought to justice!"

This is what passes for journalism in the western world today. Reporting completely unfounded allegations against US enemies based solely on assertions by a government official demanding more weapons and sanctions against those enemies and making claims that sound like they came from an It's Always Sunny in Philadelphia bit.

We cannot say definitively that these rapes never happened. We also cannot say definitively that the Australian government isn't warehousing extraterrestrial aircraft in an underground bunker in Canberra, but we don't treat that like it's an established fact and publish mainstream news reports about it just because we can't prove it's false. That's not how the burden of proof works.

Obviously the rape of children is a very real and very serious matter, and obviously rape is one of the many horrors which can be inflicted upon people in the lawless environment of war. But to turn strategically convenient government assertions



The Daily Beast
@thedailybeast

A growing number of accusations that Russian soldiers are raping the youngest and most vulnerable war victims is the latest disturbing twist in a modern war defined by archaic brutality



Russians Accused of Raping and Killing a 1-Year-Old Child, Says Ukraine official

Horrific allegations from Ukraine's Human Rights Commissioner include a 9-month-old baby being penetrated with a candlestick and triplets, 9, being raped in front of their mother.



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A 1-year-old boy died after being raped by 2 Russian soldiers, Ukraine says

Sinéad Baker 15 hours ago



10:47 PM · May 20, 2022 · Twitter Web App

CRY RAPE: Media reports from the *Daily Beast* and *Business Insider*.

about such matters into a news story based on no evidence whatsoever is not just journalistic malpractice but atrocity propaganda.

The US and its proxies have an

established history of using atrocity propaganda, as in the infamous “taking babies from incubators” narrative that was circulated in the infamous 1990 Nayirah testimony

which helped manufacture consent for the Gulf War.

Atrocity propaganda has been in use for a very long time due to its effectiveness at getting populations mobilised against targeted enemies, from the Middle Ages when Jews were accused of kidnapping Christian children to kill them and drink their blood, to 17th-century claims that the Irish were killing English children and throwing them into the sea, to World War I claims that Germans were mutilating and eating Belgian babies.

Atrocity propaganda frequently involves children, because children cannot be construed as combatants or non-innocents, and generally involves the most horrific allegations the propagandists can possibly get away with at that point in history. It creates a useful appeal to emotion which bypasses people’s logical faculties and gets them accepting the propaganda based not on facts and evidence but on how it makes them feel.

And the atrocity propaganda is functioning exactly as it’s meant to. Do a search on social media for this bogus story that’s been forcibly injected into public discourse and you’ll find countless individuals expressing their outrage at the evil baby-raping Russians. Democratic Party operative Andrea Chalupa, known for her controversial collusion with the Ukrainian government to undermine the 2016 Trump campaign, can be seen citing the aforementioned *Daily Beast* article on Twitter to angrily admonish the *New York Times* editorial board for expressing a rare word of caution about US involvement in the war.

“Before writing this, the members of the *New York Times* Editorial Board should have asked themselves

who among them wanted to have their children, including babies and infants, raped by Russian soldiers, because that is what's happening in Ukraine", Chalupa tweeted.

See that? How a completely unevicenced government assertion was turned into an official-looking news story, and how that official-looking news story was then cited as though it's an objective fact that Russian soldiers are running around raping babies to death in Ukraine? And how it's done to help manufacture consent for a geostrategically crucial proxy war, and to bludgeon those who express any amount of caution about these world-threatening escalations? That's atrocity propaganda doing exactly what it is meant to do.

Now on top of all the other reasons we're being given why the US and its allies need to send Ukraine more and more war machinery of higher and higher destructive capability, they also need to do so because the Russians are raping babies to death. Which just so happens to work out nicely for the US-centralised empire's goals of unipolar domination, for the Ukrainian regime, and for the military-industrial complex.

And that wasn't even the extent of obscene mass media atrocity propaganda conducted on behalf of Ukrainian officials for the day. *Newsweek* has a new article out titled "Russians Targeting Kids' Beds, Rooms With Explosives: Ukrainian Bomb Team", which informs us that "The leader of a Ukrainian bomb squad has said that Russian forces are targeting children by placing explosive devices inside their rooms and under their beds."

Then at the end of the second paragraph we again find that magical phrase:

"Newsweek has not independent-

I guarantee that none of these completely evidence-free claims will be subject to censorship by the 'fact checkers' of social media platforms

ly verified the claim."

The *Newsweek* report is based on part of an embarrassing ABC News Australia puff piece about a Ukrainian team which is allegedly responsible for removing landmines in areas that were previously occupied by Russian forces. The puff piece refers to the team as a "unit of brave de-miners" while calling Russian forces "barbaric".

ABC uncritically reports all the nefarious ways the evil Russians have been planting explosives with the goal of killing Ukrainian civilians, including setting mines in children's beds and teddy bears and placing them under fallen Ukrainian soldiers. Way down toward the bottom of the article we see the magical phrase again:

"The ABC has not been able to independently verify these reports, but they back up allegations made by Ukraine's President."

Ahh, so what you're being told by Ukrainian forces "backs up" what you've been told by the president of Ukraine. Doesn't get any more rock solid than that, does it? Great journalism there, fellas. The Ukrainian government stands everything to gain and nothing to lose by just saying whatever it needs to say in order to obtain more weapons, more funding and increasingly direct assistance from western powers, so if it knows the western media will uncritically report every claim it makes, why not lie? Why not tell

whatever lie you need to tell in order to advance your own interests and agendas? It would be pretty silly of them not to take advantage of the opening they're being given.

The mass media have been cranking out atrocity propaganda about what's happening in Ukraine since before the invasion even started, like when they reported in February that Russia has a list of dissidents, journalists and "vulnerable populations such as religious and ethnic minorities and LGBTQI+ persons" who it plans on rounding up and torturing when it invades. Funny how we stopped hearing about that one.

This is all happening while the western political/media class continues to shriek about the dangers of "disinformation" and the urgent need to strictly regulate its circulation on the internet, even after US officials admitted that they've been circulating disinformation about Russia and Ukraine. I guarantee you none of these completely evidence-free claims will be subject to censorship by the "fact checkers" of social media platforms.

The fact that both Silicon Valley and the mainstream news media have accepted it as a given that it is their job to manipulate public thought about this war tells you everything you need to know about how free and truth-based the so-called liberal democracies of the western world really are. We are being deceived and confused into consenting to agendas that could very easily lead to nuclear armageddon, and if we ever raise our voices in objection to this we are branded Putin propagandists and disinformation agents.

It's getting very, very bad. Turn around, people. Wrong way. **CT**

Caitlin Johnstone is an Australian blogger and author. Her website is www.caitlinjohnstone.com.



The author, hard at work at his writing station.

LINH DINH

Chasing chickens, sleeping in cars

Conversation is a human necessity. It heals or even redeems terrible ordeals.
If no one hears you, minor pains fester into permanent abscesses

Once or twice a week, I get a two-egg sandwich from a 60-year-old guy who has a crudely lettered stand on Ba Cu Street. It's across the street from a huge Buddhist temple in my new hometown, Vung Tao, with a garish gate, and not far from Pizza Hut, where you can get a pie with squid,

shrimps, (fake) crab sticks and mozzarella, or one with Chinese sausage, paté and mozzarella.

Selling them for less than 20 banh mi each morning, he makes just over five bucks a day. Still, his life is OK, for he has endured much worse. During the 80's, he was a bicycle cop near Front Beach, where each night dozens of prostitutes (or "chickens"

in Vietnamese slang) waited for domestic and international clients.

"The Soviet workers didn't make much, so they would chase after old women", he laughs. "One ran into the bush to get away from them."

"But she wasn't a chicken..."

"No, she was a mamasan. These Soviet guys loved to drink. They'd drink Nàng Hương [Miss Fragrant]

Vodka. They'd eat dogmeat with the Vietnamese hoodlums."

"So they sort of fit in."

He nods. "We were paid very poorly. I'd skip breakfast, or just eat rice with fish sauce. For lunch, I'd have rice with boiled water spinach. We didn't have meats. We'd beg from the fishermen. They'd give us anchovies, but sometimes bigger fish."

"They gave it to you because you were a cop!"

"Yes," he smiles, showing gapped, discoloured teeth. "I quit after seven or eight years. I was too dissatisfied. My friends who stayed now get 10 million [\$431] a month in retirement!"

"Kids today have no idea. Do you tell your kids and grandkids about how your life was?"

"I do."

"But they don't really understand. They have it too good."

"They have it so good."

He has a cousin in the US. She left in the '80's with her ARVN husband, who had spent five years in a reeducation camp.

"The US was OK in the '80's. I'd say it was still OK until 1995 or so. Now, it's a mess. You know, brother, you wouldn't be able to run this stand over there. It'd be outlawed."

"I hear you can't even put a chair in front of your own door and sit on it!"

"No, it's not that bad, but they do have too many laws. In Vietnam, I can have a room with 20 hammocks that I rent out, it's no problem, but in the US, there's no way you can have 20 guys in a room. It's not allowed, but why not?! No one is causing a problem. Still, the neighbours would complain."

"Here, you do what you want."

"Which makes sense. If a guy can't afford his own room, let him sleep with 10 or 20 other guys. Why not? Since they have nowhere to go,



PROPHETIC: Philapelphia, 2016.

the poorest Americans sleep on sidewalks. Old people, too. Is that a superpower? Many sleep in their own car, but in many places, that, too, is not allowed. Some try to sleep under their car, but they outlaw that too!"

He shakes his head, chuckles incredulously.

Until Covid, Vietnam had improved, year by year, over three decades, so optimism has also increased. During that same period, the US has slipped, then nosedived, so where are we? With food and gas prices stratospheric, and record murder and drug overdose rates, even the dumbest doofuses know things are fucked up. Still, there are those who insist it's just a minor dip. Happy days will be here again!

Among the weirder predictions is Mike Adams' vision of Chinese troops invading the West Coast by November. They'll arrive hidden in shipping containers. Swarming inland, they will be met by American nuclear bombs, so if you're in New Mexico, Nevada and Colorado, etc., expect your beef chow fun to be

suddenly lit up supernaturally, as screaming Mandarin rings in your ears. There are worse ways to go.

Just now, a hyphenated American, G. Joseph, told me he agreed "things are really bad back there", so "living in Europe in a quaint smallish country, things seem better if you ignore the threat of looming compulsory jabs or the possibility that after enough poking, the Russian bear would get really mad and let his nukes loose".

Since the southern hemisphere seemed safest, why didn't I stay in Namibia, he asked?

Though the southern hemisphere should be safest during World War III, I returned to Vietnam because I was exhausted from drifting from one country to another. Here, I'm in my element, and there are close friends in Vung Tau I can have long conversations with. One recent session at a restaurant lasted 11 hours! The grilled beef was excellent, too.

Conversation is a human necessity, of course. It heals or even redeems terrible ordeals. If no one hears you, minor pains fester into permanent abscesses.

Plus, the food options in Vung Tau are much, much better than in Windhoek. When you can eat well, especially for cheap, you simply feel better. If you had just months left, say, wouldn't you rather spend it as sanely as possible? Eat, talk, laugh!

With that, let's close with a food joke. You'll get a glimpse of the Vietnamese mindset, then and now. Though I embellished on a much-told tale, such is story telling.

Under an enormous moon, inside a thatch hut, with bamboos rustling outside, a Nghe An couple is having dinner with their two boys, aged nine and six. Each rustic has a bowl of rice, and there's a wooden fish on a cutesy plate in the middle of the threadbare reed mat. (They don't

That night, the boy
dreams of an enormous
wooden fish he can
stare at forever, in a land
of obscene, unlimited
satiety

even have a table.) Shovelling rice down their maws, they glance at this fish.

Suddenly, the father whacks the six-year-old across the head. To the tearful, cowering and trembling boy, he then screams, "Stop staring at that fish non-stop! You're eating more than your share!"

Nodding, his wife speaks up, "It's good you're teaching him some manners. If his greed goes unchecked,

he'll grow up to be a highway bandit!"

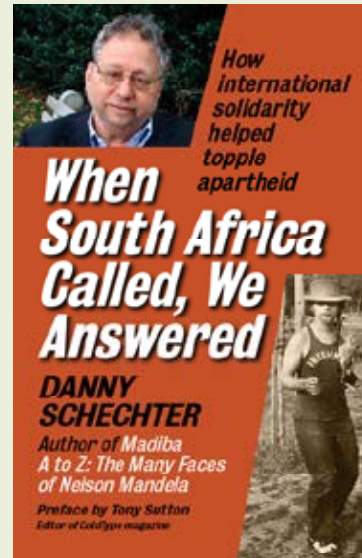
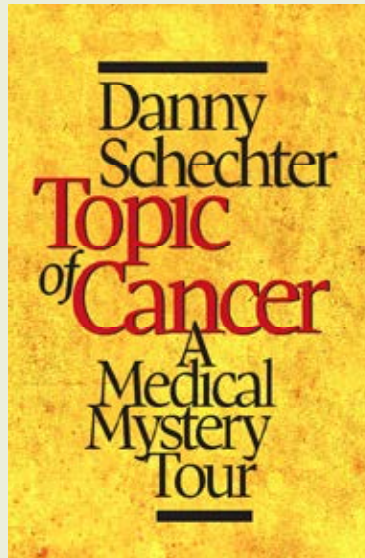
Turning to the boy, she snarls, "What are you waiting for?! Apologise to your dad!"

Obeying, the boy folds his arms, bows his head and murmurs, "Sorry, dad."

That night, the boy dreams of an enormous wooden fish he can stare at forever, in a land of obscene, unlimited satiety where visual lust is never punished by sudden whacks on the head. Waking, he realises his life goal must be to emigrate to Orange County, California. **CT**

Linh Dinh is the author of six books of poems, two of stories, a novel and the non-fiction Postcards From the End of America. He blogs at www.linhdinhphotos.blogspot.com.

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