

# The World As It Is

## Dispatches on the Myth of Human Progress

As this paperback goes to press, we are in the final stages of the grotesque political theater that passes for electoral politics. Highly choreographed, devoid of substance, awash in corporate money and the skillful manipulation of the masses by public relations firms, the campaigns effectively mask the actual centers of corporate power (pxi).

The personal narratives and the rhetoric of candidates do not impede or obstruct the engines of corporate power, providing fodder only for the vapid chatter that passes for news on the airwaves. We will swallow our cup of corporate poison (pxi).

We can take it from nurse Romney, who will tell us not to whine and play the victim, or we can take it from nurse Obama, who will assure us that this hurts him even more than it hurts us, but one way or another the corporate hemlock will be shoved down our throats (pxi).

The choice before us is how it will be administered. Corporate power, no matter who is running the ward after January 2013, is poised to carry out U.S. history's most savage assault against the poor and the working class, not to mention the Earth's ecosystem (pxi).

No one in power, no matter what the bedside manner, has any intention or ability to stop it. By participating in the cash-drenched charade of a two-party democratic election, voters dutifully play their assigned role as a Democrat or a Republican, giving legitimacy to a corporate system dedicated to our impoverishment and disempowerment (pxi).

Our corporate oligarchs are harvesting the nation, grabbing as much as they can, as fast as they can, in the inevitable descent. And while Romney was, courtesy of the magazine *Mother Jones*, exposed as a shallow hypocrite, Obama is in a class by himself (pxii).

There is hardly a campaign promise from 2008 that Obama has not broken. This list includes his pledges to support the public option in health care, close Guantanamo, raise the minimum wage, regulate Wall Street, support labor unions in their struggles with employers, reform the Patriot Act, negotiate an equitable peace between the Israelis and the Palestinians, curb our imperial expansion in the Middle East, stop torture, protect reproductive rights, carry out a comprehensive immigration reform, cut the deficit by half, create 5 million new energy jobs, and halt home foreclosures (pxii).

Obama, campaigning in South Carolina in 2007, said that as president he would fight for the right of collective bargaining but when he got his chance during labor disputes in Madison, Wisconsin, and Chicago he turned his back on working men and women (pxii).

Cities and states are frantically staving off collapse. They cannot pay for most pension plans and are borrowing at higher and higher interest rates to keep themselves afloat. The country's 19,000 municipalities face steadily declining or stagnant property tax revenues, along with spiralling costs (pxiii).

The costs of our most basic needs, from food to education to health care, are at the same time being pushed upward with no control or regulation. Tuition and fees at four-year colleges climbed 300 percent between 1990 and 2011, fueling the college loan crisis that has left graduates with more than \$1 trillion in debt (pxiii).

Fiscal implosion is only a matter of time. And the corporate state is preparing. Obama's assault on civil liberties outpaced that of George W. Bush. The refusal to restore habeas corpus, the use of the Authorization to Use Military Force Act to justify the assassination of U.S. citizens, the passing of the Hedges, Chris (2013) *The World as it is: Dispatches on the Myth of Human Progress*. Nation Books, New York.

FISA Amendments Act to monitor and eave sdrop on tens of millions of citizens without warrant, the employment of the Espionage Act six times to threaten whistle-blowers inside the government with prison time give you a hint of the shackles the Democrats, as well as the Republicans, intend to place on all those who contemplate dissent (pxiv).

Obama is not in charge. Romney would not be in charge. Politicians are the public face of corporate power. They are corporate employees. Their personal narratives, their promises, t heir rhetoric, and their idiosyncrasies are meaningless (pxiv).

And that, perhas, is why the cost of the two presidential campaigns is estimated to reach an obscene 2.5 billion dollars. The corporate state does not produce a product that is different. It produces brands that are differrent. And brands cost a lot of money to sell (pxiv).

## Politics

### It's Not Going To Be OK

The daily bleeding of thousands of jobs will soon turn our economic crisis into a political crisis. The street protests, strikes and riots that have rattled France, Turkey, Greece, Ukraine, Russia, Latvia, Lithuania, Bulgaria and Iceland, will descend on us.

It is only a matter of time. And not much time. When things start to go sour, the United States could plunge into a long period of precarious social instability. At no period in American history has our democracy been in such peril or has the possibility of totalitarianism been as real.

Our way of life is over. Our profligate consumption is finished. Our children will never have the standard of living we had. The poverty and despair will sweep across the landscape like a plague. This is the bleak future. It has been decades in the making. It cannot be undone with a trillion or two trillion dollars in bailout money. Our empire is dying. Our economy has collapsed.

How will we cope with our decline? Will we cling to the absurd dreams of a superpower and a glorious tomorrow, or will we responsibly face our stark new limitations? Will we heed those who are sober and rational, those who speak of a new simplicity and humility, or will we follow the demagogues and charlatans who rise up out of the slime in moments of crisis to offer fantastic visions?

Will we radically transform our system into one that protects the ordinary citizen and fosters the common good, that defies the corporate state, or will we employ the brutality and technology of our internal security and surveillance apparatus to crush all dissent? We won't have to wait long to find out.

There were a few isolated individuals who saw it coming - Sheldon S. Wolin, Naomi Klein and Ralph Nader rang the alarm bells. They were largely ignored or ridiculed. Our corporate media and corporate universities proved, when we needed them most, intellectually and morally useless.

The basic systems are going to stay in place; they are too powerful to be challenged. The corporate structure is not going to be challenged. Without radical and drastic remedies the response to mounting discontent and social unrest will probably lead to greater state control and repression. There will be a huge expansion of government power.

Our political culture has remained unhelpful in fostering a democratic consciousness. The political system and its operatives will not be constrained by popular discontent or uprisings. Consumer goods and a comfortable standard of living, along with a vast entertainment industry that provides spectacles and diversions will keep the citizenry politically passive.

The current widespread political passivity is dangerous. It is often exploited by demagogues who pose as saviors and offer dreams of glory and salvation. Democracy is not ascendant. It is not dominant. It is beleaguered. The extent to which young people have been drawn away from public concerns and given this extraordinary range of diversions makes it very likely that they could rally to a demagogue.

The corporate state has successfully blocked any real debate about alternative forms of power. Corporations determine who gets heard and who does not. And those who critique corporate power are given no place in the national dialogue.

In the 1930s there were all kinds of alternative understandings, from socialism to more extensive governmental involvement. There was a different range of approaches. We are supposed to work with the financial system, so the people who created this system are put in charge of the solution. There has to be some major effort to think outside the box.

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The puzzle is the lack of social unrest. Popular protests will be dismissed and ignored by the corporate media. That is what happened when tens of thousands protested the war in Iraq. This will permit the state to suppress local protests ruthlessly.

Anti-war protests in the 1960s gained momentum from their ability to spread across the country. Such dynamics may not happen this time. The ways they can isolate protests and prevent them from becoming a contagion are formidable.

This country once prided itself on its experimentation and flexibility. It has become rigid. It is probably the most conservative of all the advanced countries. The American left has crumbled. It sold out as a bankrupt democratic party, abandoned the working class, and has no ability to organize.

Unions are a spent force. The universities are mills for corporate employees. The media churn out info-entertainment or fatuous pundits. The left no longer has the capacity to be a counterweight to the corporate state. If the extreme right gains momentum there will probably be very little organized resistance.

The Left is amorphous. Left parties may be small in number in Europe, but they are a coherent organization that keeps going. Here we don't have any of that. We have a few voices here, a magazine there, and that's about it. It goes nowhere.

### The False Idol of Unfettered Capitalism

We all stray from the ten commandments. We all violate some commandments and do not adequately honor others. We are human. But moral laws bind us and make it possible to build a society based on the common good. They keep us from honoring the false covenants of greed, celebrity, and power that destroy us.

These false covenants have a powerful appeal. They offer feelings of strength, status, and a false sense of belonging. They tempt us to be God. They tell us the things we want to hear and believe. They appear to make us the center of the universe. But these false covenants, inevitably carry within them the denigration and abuse of others.

These false covenants divide us. A moral covenant recognizes that all life is sacred and love alone is the force that makes life possible. It is the unmentioned fear of death which frightens us the most, even as we do not name this fear. It is death we are trying to flee.

The smallness of our lives, the transitory nature of existence, the inevitable road to old age, are what the ideals of power, celebrity and wealth tell us we can escape. They assure us that we need not endure the pain and suffering of being human. We follow the idol and barter away our freedom.

We place our identity and our hopes in the hands of the idol. We need the idol to define ourselves, to determine our status and place. We invest in the idol. We sell ourselves into bondage. The consumer goods we amass, the status we seek in titles and positions, the ruthlessness we employ to advance our careers, the personal causes we champion, the money we covet become pathetic statements of our being.

They are squalid little monuments to ourselves. The more we strive to amass power and possessions, the more intolerant and anxious we become. Impulses and emotions, not thoughts but mass feelings, propel us forward. These impulses, carefully manipulated by a consumer society, see us intoxicated with patriotic fervor and a lust for war, a desire to vote for candidates who appeal to us emotionally or to buy this car or that brand.

Politicians, advertisers, social scientists, television evangelists, the news media, and the entertainment industry have learned what makes us respond. It works. None of us are immune. But when we act in their interests we are rarely acting in our own.

The moral philosophers we have ignored, once a staple of a liberal arts education, are a check on the deluge. They call us toward mutual respect and self-sacrifice. They force us to confront the broad, disturbing questions about meaning and existence. And our callous refusal to heed these questions as a society allowed us to believe that unfettered capitalism and the free markets were forces of nature - the only routes to prosperity and power.

They turned out to be idols, and like all idols they have now demanded their human sacrifice. Moral laws were not written so they could be practiced by some and not by others. They call on all of us to curb our worst instincts so we can live together, to refrain from committing acts of egregious exploitation that spread suffering.

Moral teachings are guideposts. They keep us, even when we stray, as we all do, on the right path. The strange, disjointed fragments of our lives can be comprehended only when we acknowledge our insecurities and uncertainties, when we accept that we will never know what life is about or what it is supposed to mean.

We must do the best we can, not for ourselves, but for those around us. Trust is the compound that unites us. The only lasting happiness in life comes with giving life to others. The quality of all life is determined by what we give and how much we sacrifice. We live not by exalting our own life but by being willing to lose it.

The moral life, in the end, will not protect us from evil. The moral life protects us, however, from committing evil. It is designed to check our darker impulses, warning us that pandering to impulses can have terrible consequences. It seeks to hold community together. It is community that gives our lives, even in pain and grief, a healing solidarity.

These moral laws are about freedom. They call us to reject and defy powerful forces that rule our lives and to live instead for others, even if this costs us status and prestige and wealth. Turn away from the moral life and you end in disaster. You sink into a morass of self-absorption and greed. You breed a society that celebrates fraud, theft, and violence, you turn neighbour against neighbour, you confuse presentation and image with your soul.

All cultures have sought to remind us of these basic moral restraints, ones that invariably tell us that successful communities do not permit their members to exploit one another but rather to ensure that they sacrifice for the common good. The economic and social collapse we face was presaged by a moral collapse.

And our response must include a renewed reverence for moral and social imperatives that acknowledge the sanctity of the common good. It is by recovering moral questions, too often dismissed or ignored in universities and boardrooms across the country, laughed at on the stock exchange, ridiculed on reality television, that we will again find it possible to be whole.

## Resist or Become Serfs

America is devolving into a Third-World nation. And if we do not immediately halt our elite's rapacious looting of the public treasury, we will be left with trillions in debt that can never be repaid, and widespread human misery that we will be helpless to ameliorate. Our anemic democracy will be replaced with a robust national police state.

The elite will withdraw into heavily guarded gated communities where they will have access to security, goods, and services that cannot be afforded by the rest of us. Tens of millions of people, brutally controlled, will live in perpetual poverty. This is the inevitable result of unchecked corporate capitalism.

The stimulus and bailout plans are not about saving us. They are about saving them. We can resist - which means street protests, disruptions of the system, and demonstrations - or become serfs. We have been in a steady economic decline for decades.

Our universities and mass media, entranced by power and naively believing that global capitalism was an unstoppable force of nature, rarely asked the right questions or gave a prominent voice to those who did. Our elites hid their incompetence and loss of control behind an arrogant façade of specialized jargon and obscure economic theories.

The lies employed to camouflage the economic decline are legion. President Reagan included 1.5 million U.S. Army, Navy, Air Force, and Marine service personnel with the civilian workforce to magically reduce the nation's unemployment rate by two percent.

President Bill Clinton decided that those who had given up looking for work, were no longer to be counted as unemployed. This trick disappeared some five million unemployed from the official unemployment rolls. A sixth of the country is now effectively unemployed. And we are shedding jobs at a faster rate than in the months after the 1929 crash.

The corporate state, and the political and intellectual class that served the corporate state, constructed a financial and political system based on illusions. Corporations engaged in pyramid lending that created fictitious assets. These fictitious assets became collateral for more bank lending.

The elite skimmed off hundreds of millions in bonuses, commissions, and salaries from this fictitious wealth. Politicians, who dutifully served corporate interests rather than those of citizens, were showered with campaign contributions and given lucrative jobs when they left office.

Universities, knowing it was not good business to challenge corporatism, muted any voices of conscience while they went begging for corporate donations and grants. Deceptive loans and credit card debt fueled the binges of a consumer society and hid falling wages and the loss of manufacturing jobs.

The trillions of dollars of government funds spent to sustain these corrupt corporations could have renovated our economy. We could have saved tens of millions of Americans from poverty. The government could have started ten new banks with \$35 billion each and a ten-to-one leverage to open credit markets.

Vast, unimaginable sums are being placed into these dirty, corporate hands without oversight. And they will use this money as they always have - to enrich themselves at our expense. A handful of former executives have conceded that the bailouts are a waste.

These are signs of hyper-decay. You spend this kind of money and do not know if it will work. Bankrupt corporate capitalism is on its way to bankrupting the socialism that is trying to save it. That is the end stage. If they no longer have socialism to save them then we are into feudalism. We are into private police, gated communities and serfs with a twenty-first-century nomenclature.

Not long ago, such profligate government spending was unthinkable. A year before the bailouts began, the entire Federal Reserve was evaluated at only \$800 billion. And as the meltdown shows no signs of abating, and the bailouts show no sign of working, the recklessness and desperation of our capitalist overlords have increased.

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The cost, to the working and middle classes, is becoming unsustainable. We have been borrowing at a rate of \$2 billion a day over the last ten years, and at some point it has to stop. The moment China, the oil-rich states, and other international investors stop buying U.S. Treasury Bonds, the dollar will become junk.

Inflation will rocket upward. We will become Weimar Germany. A furious and sustained backlash by a betrayed and angry populace will sweep aside the Democrats and most of the Republicans. A cabal of protofascist misfits, from Christian demagogues to simpletons like Sarah Palin will find a following with promises of revenge and moral renewal.

The elites, the ones with their Harvard Business School degrees and expensive vocabularies, will retreat into their sheltered enclaves of privilege and comfort. We will be left bereft and abandoned outside the gates.

## Buying Brand Obama

Barack Obama was a brand. And brand Obama was designed to make us feel good about our government while corporate overlords looted the treasury. Our elected officials continued to have their palms greased by armies of corporate lobbyists, our corporate media diverted us with gossip and trivia, and our imperial wars expanded in the middle east.

Brand Obama was about being happy consumers. We were entertained. We felt hopeful. We liked our president. We believed he liked us. But as is the case with all branded products spun out from the manipulative world of corporate advertising, we were being duped into doing and supporting a lot of things that were not in our interest.

What, for all our faith and hope, did Brand Obama give us? His administration spent, lent or guaranteed \$12.8 trillion in taxpayer dollars to Wall Street and insolvent banks in a doomed effort to reflate the bubble economy, a tactic that at best forestalls catastrophe and will leave us broke in a time of profound crisis.

Brand Obama allocated nearly \$1 trillion to defense-related spending and the continuation of our doomed imperial projects in Iraq, where military planners now estimated that seventy thousand troops will remain for the next fifteen to twenty years.

Brand Obama expanded the war in Afghanistan, including the use of drones sent on cross-border bombing runs into Pakistan that have doubled the number of civilians killed. Brand Obama refused to ease restrictions so workers can organize and did not consider single-payer, not-for-profit health care for all Americans.

And Brand Obama did not prosecute the Bush administration for war crimes, including the use of torture, and refused to dismantle Bush's secrecy laws or restore habeas corpus. Brand Obama offered us an image that appeared radically individualistic and new.

It inoculates us from seeing that the old engines of corporate power and the vast military-industrial complex continue to plunder the country. Corporations, which control our politics, no longer produce products that are essentially different., what they produce are brands that are different.

Brand Obama did not threaten the core of the corporate state any more than did Brand George W. Bush. The Bush Brand collapsed. We became immune to its studied folksiness. We saw through its artifice. Benetton and Calvin Klein were the precursors to Brand Obama using ads to associate themselves with risqué art and progressive politics. It gave their products an edge.

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But the goal, as with all brands was to make passive consumers mistake a brand for an experience. The abandonment of the radical economic foundations of the women's and civil-rights movements by the conflation of causes that came to be called political correctness successfully trained a generation of activists in the politics of image, not action.

Obama, who became a global celebrity, was molded easily into a brand. He had almost no experience other than two years in the Senate, lacked any moral core, and could be painted as all things to all people. His brief Senate voting record was a miserable surrender to corporate interests.

He was happy to promote nuclear power as "green" energy. He voted to continue the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. He reauthorized the Patriot Act. He would not back a bill designed to cap predatory credit card interest rates. He opposed a bill that would have reformed the notorious General Mining Act of 1872. He refused to support the single-payer health-care bill House Resolution 676.

He supported the death penalty. And he backed a class-action "reform" bill that was part of a huge lobbying effort by financial firms. The law, known as the Class Action Fairness Act, would effectively shut down state courts as venues in which to hear most class-action lawsuits and deny redress in many of the courts where cases have a chance of defying powerful corporate challenges.

While Gaza was being bombarded and hit with air strikes in the weeks before Obama took office, the Obama team let it be known that it would not object to the planned resupply of 'smart bombs' and other hi-tech ordinance that was already flowing into Israel.

Even his one vaunted antiwar speech as a state senator, was swiftly reversed. He told the Chicago Tribune on July 27, 2004 that "there's not that much difference between my position and George Bush's position at this stage. The difference, in my mind, is who's in a position to execute".

Obama then dutifully stood silent until the Iraq war became unpopular. Obama's campaign won the vote of hundreds of marketers, agency heads, and marketing-services vendors gathered at the Association of National Advertisers' annual conference in October 2009.

The Obama campaign was named Advertising Age's marketer of the year for 2008, edging out runners up Apple and Zappos.com. Take it from the professionals: Brand Obama was a marketer's dream. President Obama does none thing and Brand Obama gets you to believe another. This is the essence of successful advertising.

You buy or do whatever the advertiser wants because of how he or she can make you feel. Celebrity culture has leeches into every aspect of our culture, including politics, to bequeath to us "junk politics". Junk politics does not demand justice or the reparation of rights. Junk politics personalizes and moralizes issues rather than clarifying them.

It's impatient with articulated conflict, enthusiastic about America's optimism and moral character, and heavily dependent on feel-your-pain language and gesture. The result of junk politics is that nothing changes - meaning zero interruption in the processes and practices that strengthen existing, interlocking systems of socioeconomic advantage.

It redefines traditional values, tilting courage toward braggadocio, sympathy toward mawkishness, humility toward self dis-respect, and identification with ordinary citizens toward distrust of brains. Junk politics miniaturizes large, complex problems at home while maximizing threats from abroad.

It's also given to abrupt unexplained reversals of its own public stances, often spectacularly bloating problems previously miniaturized. It seeks at every turn to obliterate voters' consciousness of socioeconomic and other differences in their midst.

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An image-based culture, one dominated by junk politics, communicates through narratives, pictures, and carefully orchestrated spectacle and manufactured pseudo-drama. Scandalous affairs, hurricanes, earthquakes, untimely deaths, lethal new viruses, train wrecks - these events play well on computer screens and television.

International diplomacy, labor union negotiations, and convoluted bailout packages do not yield exciting personal narratives or stimulating images. A governor who patronizes call girls becomes a huge story. A politician who proposes curbing wasteful spending is boring.

Kings, queens and emperors once used their court conspiracies to divert their subjects. Today cinematic, political, and journalistic celebrities distract us with their personal foibles and scandals. They create our public mythology. Acting, politics, and sports have become interchangeable.

In an age of images and entertainment, in an age of instant emotional gratification, we do not seek reality. Reality is complicated. Reality is boring. We are incapable of handling or unwilling to handle its confusion. We ask to be indulged and comforted by clichés, stereotypes, and inspirational messages that tell us we can be whoever we seek to be, that we live in the greatest country on Earth, that we are endowed with superior moral and physical qualities, and that our future will always be glorious and prosperous, because of our own attributes, or national character, because we are blessed by God.

Reality is not accepted as an impediment to our desires. Reality does not make us feel good. In his book *Public Opinion*, Walter Lippmann distinguished between “the world outside and the pictures in our heads”. He defined a “stereotype” as an oversimplified pattern that helps us find meaning in the world.

Lippmann cited examples of the crude “stereotypes we carry about in our heads” of whole groups of people such as “Germans”, “Southern Europeans”, “Negroes”, “Harvard men” and others. These stereotypes, Lippmann noted, give a reassuring and false consistency to the chaos of existence.

They offer easily grasped explanations of reality and are closer to propaganda because they simplify rather than complicate. Pseudo-events - dramatic productions orchestrated by publicists, political machines, television, Hollywood, or advertisers, are very different.

They have the capacity to appear real even though we know they are staged. They are capable, because they can evoke a powerful emotional response, of overwhelming reality and replacing it with a fictional narrative that often becomes accepted as truth.

The unmasking of a stereotype damages and often destroys its credibility. But pseudo-events, whether they show the president in an auto plant or a soup kitchen or addressing troops in Iraq, are immune to this deflation. The exposure of the elaborate mechanisms behind the pseudo-event only adds to its fascination and its power.

This is the basis of the convoluted television reporting on how effectively political campaigns and politicians have been stage-managed. Reporters, especially those on television, no longer ask whether the message is true but whether the pseudo-event worked or did not work as political theater.

Pseudo-events are judged on how effectively we have been manipulated by illusion. Those events that appear real are relished and lauded. Those that fail to create a believable illusion are deemed failures. Truth is irrelevant. Those who succeed in politics, as in most of the culture, are those who create the brands and pseudo-events that offer the most convincing fantasies. And this is the art Obama mastered.

A public that can no longer distinguish between truth and fiction is left to interpret reality through illusion. Random facts or obscure bits of data and trivia are used to bolster illusion and give it credibility or are discarded if they interfere with the message.

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The worse reality becomes, the more people seek refuge in the comfort of illusions. When opinions cannot be distinguished from facts, when there is no universal standard to determine truth in law, in science, in scholarship, or in reporting the events of the day, the world becomes a place where lies become true, where people can believe what they want to believe.

This is the real danger of pseudo-events and why pseudo events are far more pernicious than stereotypes. They do not explain reality, as stereotypes attempt to, but replace reality. Pseudo events redefine reality by the parameters set by their creators.

These creators, who make massive profits peddling these illusions, have a vested interest in maintaining the power structures they control. The old production-orientated culture demanded "character". The new consumption-orientated culture demands "personality".

The shift in values is a shift from a fixed morality to the artifice of presentation. The old cultural values of thrift and moderation honored hard work, integrity and courage. The consumption-orientated culture honors charm, fascination, and likeability.

The social role demanded of all in the new culture of personality is that of a performer. Every American has to become a performing self. The junk politics practiced by Obama was a consumer fraud. It was about performance. It was about lies. It was about keeping us in a perpetual state of childishness.

But the longer we live in illusion, the worse reality will be when it finally shatters our fantasies. Those who do not understand what is happening around them and who are overwhelmed by a brutal reality they did not expect or foresee search desperately for saviours. They beg demagogues to come to their rescue.

This is the ultimate danger of the Obama brand. It effectively masks the wanton internal destruction and theft being carried out by our corporate state. These corporations, once they have stolen trillions of taxpayer wealth, will leave tens of millions of Americans bereft, bewildered, and yearning for even more potent and deadly illusions, ones that could swiftly snuff out what is left of our diminished open society.

## Hold Your Applause

What do words of peace and cooperation mean from us when we torture - yes, we still torture - only Muslims? What do these words mean when we sanction Israel's brutal air assaults on Lebanon and Gaza? How did it look for Obama to call for democracy and human rights from Egypt, where we lavishly funded and supported the despotic regime of Hosni Mubarak?

We may have thrilled at Obama's rhetoric, but few of the 1.3 billion Muslims in the world are as deluded. They grasp that nothing changed for Muslims in the Middle East under the Obama administration. The wars of occupation go on or have been expanded. Israel continues to flout international law, gobbling up more Palestinian land and carrying out egregious war crimes in Gaza.

The expanding imperial projects and tightening screws of repression lurched forward under Obama. We were not trying to end terror or promote democracy. We ensured that our corporate state had a steady supply of cheap oil to which we are addicted.

And the scarcer oil becomes, the more aggressive we become. This is the game playing out in the Muslim world. The Bush White House openly tortured. The Obama White House tortured and pretended not to. Obama may have banned waterboarding but torture, including isolation, sleep and sensory deprivation, and force-feeding, continued to be used to break detainees.

President Obama had promised to close Guantanamo, where only one percent of the prisoners held offshore by the United States are kept. And the Obama administration had sought to obscure the fate and condition of thousands of Muslims held in black holes around the globe.

The Obama administration sought to prevent detainees at Bagram prison in Afghanistan from gaining access to courts where they may have revealed the circumstances of their imprisonment. It sought to continue the practice of rendering prisoners to unknown and unknowable locations outside the United States.

And it sought to keep secret many of the records regarding our treatment of those detainees. Muslim rage is stoked because we station tens of thousands of American troops on Muslim soil, occupy two Muslim nations, make possible the illegal Israeli occupation of Palestine, support repressive Arab regimes, and torture thousands of Muslims in offshore penal colonies where prisoners are stripped of their rights.

The rage comes because we have constructed massive military bases, some the size of small cities, in Iraq, Afghanistan, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and Kuwait, and established basing rights in the Gulf states of Bahrain, Qatar, Oman, and the United Arab Emirates.

The rage comes because we have expanded our military empire into neighbouring Uzbekistan, Pakistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan. It comes because we station troops and special forces in Egypt, Algeria and Yemen. And this vast network of bases and military outposts looks suspiciously permanent.

The Muslim world fears, correctly, that we intend to dominate Middle East oil supplies and any Caspian Sea oil infrastructure. And it is interested not in our protestations of good will but in the elemental right of justice and freedom from foreign occupation. We would react, should the situation be reversed, no differently.

The brutal reality of expanding foreign occupation and harsher and harsher forms of control are the tinder for Islamic fundamentalism, insurrections, and terrorism. We can blame the violence on a clash of civilizations. We can naively tell ourselves we are envied for our freedoms.

We can point to the Koran. But these are fantasies that divert us from facing the central dispute between us and the Muslim world, from facing our own responsibility for the virus of chaos and violence spreading throughout the Middle East.

We can have peace when we shut down our bases, stay the hand of the Israelis to create a Palestinian state, and go home, or we can have long, costly and ultimately futile regional war. We cannot have both.

### **The Truth Alone Will Not Set You Free**

The ability of the corporate state to pacify the country by extending credit and providing cheap manufactured goods to the masses is gone. The pernicious idea that democracy lies in the choice between competing brands and the freedom to accumulate vast sums of personal wealth at the expense of others has collapsed.

The conflation of freedom with the free market has been exposed as a sham. The travails of the poor are rapidly becoming travails of the middle class, especially as unemployment insurance runs out and people get a taste of Bill Clinton's draconian welfare reform.

And class warfare, once buried under the happy illusion that we are all going to enter an age of prosperity with unfettered capitalism, is returning with a vengeance. Our economic crisis barrels forward, and this crisis will lead to a period of profound political turmoil and change.

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Those who care about the plight of the working class and the poor must begin to mobilize quickly, or we will lose our last opportunity to save our embattled democracy. The most important struggle will be to wrest the organs of communication from corporations that use mass media to demonize movements of social change and empower protofascist movements such as the Christian Right.

American culture was systematically destroyed in the twentieth century by corporations. These corporations used mass communication, as well as an understanding of the human subconscious to turn consumption into an inner compulsion. Old values were all destroyed to create mass corporate culture.

New desires and habits were implanted by corporate advertisers to replace the old. Individual frustrations and discontents could be solved, corporate culture assured us, through the wonders of consumerism and cultural homogenization. American culture was replaced with junk culture and junk politics.

And now, standing on the ash heap, we survey the ruins. The very slogans of advertising and mass culture have become the idiom of common expression, robbing us of the language to make sense of the destruction. We confuse this manufactured commodity culture with American culture.

How do we recover what was lost? How do we reclaim the culture destroyed by corporations. How do we fight back now that the consumer culture has fallen into a state of decay? What can we do to reverse the cannibalization of government and the national economy by corporations?

All periods of profound change occur in a crisis. It was a crisis that brought us the New Deal, now largely dismantled by the corporate state. It was also a crisis that gave the world Adolf Hitler and Slobodan Milosevic. We can go in either direction. Events move at the speed of light when societies and cultural assumptions break down.

There are powerful forces, which have no commitment to the open society, ready to seize the moment to snuff out the last vestiges of democratic egalitarianism. Our bankrupt liberalism, which naively believed Barack Obama was the antidote to our permanent war economy and Wall Street fraud, will either rise from its coma or be rolled over by an organized corporate elite and their right-wing lapdogs.

The corporate domination of the airwaves, of most print publications, and an increasing number of Internet sites means we will have to search, and search quickly, for alternative forms of communication to thwart the rise of totalitarian capitalism.

Balance and objectivity in the corporate media creates an idea where both sides are balanced. In certain ways it mirrors the two-party system, the notion that if you are going to have a Democrat speak you need to have a Republican speak. It offers the phantom of objectivity.

It creates the notion that the universe of discourse is limited to two positions. Issues become black or white. They are not seen as complex with a multitude of factors. Corporate and government propaganda, aimed to sway emotions, rarely uses facts to sell positions.

And because progressives have lost the gift of rhetoric, they are largely helpless. Effective communication requires not simply an understanding of the facts, but how those facts will take place in the public mind. The emergence of corporate and government public relations, which drew on studies of mass psychology by Sigmund Freud and others after world war 1, found its bible in Walter Lippmann's book, Public Opinion.

Lippmann argued that the key to leadership in the modern age would depend on the ability to manipulate "symbols which assemble emotions after they have been detached from their ideas. The public mind could be mastered through an intensification of feeling and degradation of significance.

Hedges, Chris (2013) *The World as it is: Dispatches on the Myth of Human Progress*. Nation Books, New York.

These corporate forces, which sold World War 1 to the public, learned how to skillfully mobilize and manipulate the emotional responses of the public. The control of the airwaves and domination through corporate advertising of most publications restricted news to reporting facts, to “objectivity and balance”, while the real power to persuade and dominate a public remained under corporate and government control.

Pamphleteering, which played a major role in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in shaping the public mind, recognized that “the human mind is not left-brain or right-brain, that it is not divided by reason which is good and emotion which is bad”.

The forces of social reform, those organs that support a search for truth and self-criticism, have mistakenly shunned emotion and rhetoric because they have been used so powerfully within modern society to disseminate lies and manipulate public opinion.

But this refusal to appeal to emotion means “we gave up the ghost and accepted the idea that human beings are divided into selves, binary systems between emotion and reason, and that emotion gets you into trouble and reason is what leads you forward. This is not true”.

The public is bombarded with carefully crafted images meant to confuse propaganda with ideology and knowledge with how we feel. Human rights and labour groups, investigative journalists, consumer watchdog agencies, and advocacy agencies, in the face of this manipulation, inundated the public sphere with reports and facts.

But facts alone make little difference. and as we search for alternative ways to communicate in a time of crisis, we must also communicate in new forms. We must appeal to emotion as well as to reason. It is recovery of this style, one that turns the abstraction of fact into a human flesh, one that is not afraid of emotion and passion, which will permit us to counter the force of corporate propaganda.

We may know that fossil fuels are destroying our ecosystem. We may be able to cite the statistics. But the oil and natural gas industry continues its flagrant rape of the planet. It is able to do this because of money it uses to control legislation and a massive advertising campaign that paints the oil and natural gas industry as part of the solution.

The modern world has become a world where the irrational has become rational, where lies become true. and facts alone will be powerless to thwart the mendacity spun out through billions of dollars in corporate advertising, lobbying, and control of traditional sources of information.

We will have to descend into the world of the forgotten and film with anger and honesty that have been blunted by the parameters of traditional journalism. The distinctions among artists, social activists, and journalists have to be erased.

These distinctions diminish the power of reform, justice, and an understanding of the truth. And it is for this purpose that these distinctions are there. As a writer, part of what you are aiming for is to present things in ways that will resonate with people, which will give voice to feelings and concerns, feelings that may not be fully verbalized.

You can't do that simply by providing them with data. One of the major problems of the present is that those structures designed to promote a progressive agenda are antediluvian. Corporate ideology, embodied in neoconservatism, has seeped into the attitudes of most self-described liberals. It champions unfettered capitalism and globalization as eternal.

The loss of historical memory has only contributed to this fantasy. But the fantasy, despite the desperate raiding of taxpayer funds to keep the corporate system alive, is now coming undone. The lie is being exposed. And the corporate state is running scared.

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It is very important for people like us to think about ways to present the issues, whether we are talking about the banking crisis, health care, or housing and homelessness. We have to think about presenting these issues in ways that are two steps ahead of the media rather than two steps behind.

That is not something we should view as an impossible task. It is a very possible task. There is evidence of how possible that task is, especially if you look at the underground press in the 1960s. The underground press, which started cropping up all over the country, was not a marginal phenomenon.

It leached into the society. It developed an approach to news and communication that was ten steps ahead of the mainstream media. The proof is that even as it declined, so many structures that were innovated by the underground press began to affect and inform the stylistic presentation of mainstream media.

This is not about looking backwards. If you can't see the past you can't see the future. If you can't see the relationship between the present and the past, you can't understand where the present might go. Who controls the past controls the present, who controls the present controls the future, as George Orwell said. This is a succinct explanation of the ways in which power functions.

The battle ahead will be fought outside the journalistic mainstream. The old forms of journalism are dying or have sold their souls to corporate manipulation and celebrity culture. We must now wed fact to rhetoric. We must appeal to reason and emotion. We must not be afraid to openly take sides, to speak on behalf of the disempowered.

We have a chance in the coming crisis to succeed. Pessimism is never useful. Realism is useful, understanding the forces that are at play. To quote Antonio Gramsci, "pessimism of the intellect, optimism of the will".

## The Man in the Mirror

In celebrity culture we destroy what we worship. The commercial exploitation of Michael Jackson's death was orchestrated by the corporate forces that rendered Jackson insane. Jackson, robbed of his childhood and surrounded by vultures who preyed on his fears and weaknesses, was so consumed by self-loathing he carved his African-American face into an ever-changing Causcasian death mask and hid his apparent pedophilia behind a Peter Pan illusion of eternal childhood.

He could not disentangle his public and private self. He became a commodity, a product, one to be sold, used and manipulated. He was infected by the moral nihilism and personal disintegration at the core of our corporate culture. And his fantasies of eternal youth, delusions of majesty, and desperate, disfiguring quests for physical transformation were expressions of our own yearning. He was a reflection of us in the extreme.

His memorial service - a variety show with a coffin - had an estimated 31.1 million television viewers. The ceremony was carried live on nineteen networks, including the major broadcast and cable news outlets. It was the final episode of the long-running Michael Jackson series.

It concluded with Jackson's daughter, Paris, being prodded to stand in front of a microphone to speak about her father. Before the girl could get a few words out, Michael's sister Janet Jackson told Paris to "speak up". As the child broke down, the adults around her adjusted the microphone so we could hear her sobs. The crowd clapped. It was a haunting echo of what destroyed her father.

The stories we like best are "real-life" stories - early fame, wild success, and then a long, bizarre, and macabre emotional train wreck. O.J. Simpson offered a tamer version of the same plot. So does Britney Spears. Jackson, by the end, was heavily in debt and had weathered a \$22 million out-of-court

settlement payment to Jordy Chandler, as well as seven counts of child abuse and two counts of administering an intoxicating agent in order to commit a felony.

We fed on his physical and psychological disintegration, especially since many Americans are struggling with their own descent into overwhelming debt, loss of status, and personal disintegration. The lurid drama of Jackson's personal life meshed perfectly with the ongoing dramas on television, in movies, and in the news. News thrives on "real-life" stories, especially those involving celebrities.

News reports on television are minidramas complete with a star, a villain, a supporting cast, a good-looking host, and a dramatic, if often unexpected, ending. The public greedily consumed "news" about Jackson, especially in his exile and decline, that often outdid most works of fiction.

Those who created Jackson's public persona and turned him into a piece of property are the agents, publicists, marketing people, promoters, scriptwriters, television and movie producers, advertisers, video technicians, photographers and wardrobe consultants who create the vast stage of celebrity for profit.

They are the puppet masters. No one achieves celebrity status, without these armies of cultural enablers and intermediaries. The memorial service for Jackson was a celebration of celebrity. There was the queasy sight of groups of children, including his own singing over the coffin.

There were photo montages in which a shot of Jackson shaking hands with Nelson Mandela was immediately followed by one of him with Kermit the Frog. Fame reduces all of the famous to the same level. Fame is its own denominator. And every anecdote seemed to conform that when you spend your life as a celebrity, you have no idea who you are.

We measure our lives by these celebrities. We seek to be like them. We emulate their look and behaviour. We escape the messiness of life through the fantasy of their stardom. We, too, long to attract admiring audiences for our grand, ongoing movie. We try to see ourselves moving through our lives as a camera would see us, mindful of how we hold ourselves.

We invent movies that play inside our heads with us as stars. We wonder how an audience would react. Celebrity culture has taught us, almost unconsciously, to generate interior personal screenplays. We have learned ways of speaking and thinking that grossly disfigure the way we relate to the world and those around us.

Jackson desperately feared growing old. He believed he could control race and gender. He transformed himself through surgery and perhaps female hormones from a brown-skinned African American male to a chalk-faced androgynous ghoul with no clear sexual identity.

While he pushed these boundaries to the extreme, he did only what many Americans do. Twelve million cosmetic plastic surgery procedures are performed each year in the United States. They were performed because, in America, most human beings, rich and poor, famous and obscure, have been conditioned to view themselves as marketable commodities.

They are objects, like consumer products. They have no intrinsic value. They must look fabulous and live on fabulous sets. They must remain young. They must achieve notoriety and money, or the illusion of them, to be a success. And it does not matter how they get there.

The moral nihilism of our culture licenses a dark voyeurism into other people's humiliation, pain, weakness, and betrayal. Education, community-building skills, honesty, transparency, and sharing are qualities that will see you ridiculed and voted off any reality show.

Fellow competitors for prize money and a chance for fleeting fame elect to “disappear” the unwanted. Those cast aside become, at least to the television audience, nonpersons. Celebrities who can no longer generate publicity, good or bad, vanish. Life, these shows teach, is a brutal world of unadulterated competition and constant quest for notoriety and attention.

And life is about the personal humiliation of those who oppose us. Those who win are the best. Those who lose deserve to be erased. Those who fail, those who are ugly or poor, are belittled and mocked. In a commodity culture, human beings are used, betrayed, and discarded - which is pretty much the story of Jackson's life.

This story arc has been very good for his music sales and perhaps for his father's new recording company, which Joe Jackson made sure to plug at public events after his son's death. Compassion, competence, intelligence, and solidarity are useless assets when human beings are commodities.

Those who do not achieve celebrity status, who do not win the prize money or make millions in Wall Street firms, deserve their fate. The cult of self, which Jackson embodied, dominates our culture. The cult stresses and cultivates traits that are much the same as the classic traits of psychopaths: superficial charm, grandiosity, and self-importance; a need for constant stimulation; and the incapacity for remorse or guilt.

Jackson, from his phony marriages to his questionable relationships with young boys, had all these qualities. This is also the ethic promoted by corporations. It is the ethic of unfettered capitalism. It is the misguided belief that personal style and personal advancement, mistaken for individualism, are the same as democratic equality. It is the celebration of image over substance.

We have a right, in the cult of the self, to get whatever we desire. We can do anything, even belittle and destroy those around us, including our friends, to make money, to be happy, and to become famous. Once fame and wealth are achieved, they become their own justification, their own morality.

How one gets there is irrelevant. It is this perverted ethic that gave us Wall Street banks and investment houses that willfully trashed the nation's economy, that stole money from tens of millions of small shareholders who had bought stocks to finance their retirement or the college expenses of their children.

The heads of these corporations, like the winners on a reality television program who lied and manipulated others to succeed, walked away with hundreds of millions of dollars in compensation and bonuses. The ethic of Wall Street is the ethic of celebrity.

The saturation coverage of Jackson's death is an example of our collective flight into illusion. The obsession with the trivia of his life conceals the despair, meaninglessness, and emptiness of our own lives. It deflects the moral questions arising from mounting social injustice, growing inequalities, costly imperial wars, economic collapse, and political corruption.

The wild pursuit of status, wealth, and fame has destroyed souls, as it destroyed Jackson, and it has destroyed our economy. The fame of celebrities masks the identities of those who possess true power - corporations and the oligarchic elite. And as we sink into an economic and political morass, as we barrel toward a crisis that will create more misery than the Great Depression, we are controlled, manipulated, and distracted by the celluloid shadows on the wall of Plato's cave.

The fantasy of celebrity culture is not designed simply to entertain. It is designed to drain us emotionally, confuse us about our identity, make us blame ourselves for our predicament, condition us to chase illusions of fame and happiness, and keep us from fighting back. And in the end, that is all the Jackson coverage was really about: another tawdry and tasteless spectacle to divert a dying culture from the howling wolf at the gate.

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## So Much for the Promised Land

Conditions for black men and women in America are sliding backward, with huge numbers of impoverished and unemployed removed from society and locked up - the “disappearing” of blacks. The unemployment rate in most inner cities is in the double digits, and segregation, especially in city schools and wealthy states like New Jersey, is the norm.

African American communities are more likely than others to be redlined, declared poor-risk areas from whose inhabitants loans should be withheld, by banks and preyed on by unscrupulous mortgage lenders, which is why such a high percentage of foreclosures are in blighted, urban neighbourhoods.

Brutal and sometimes fatal beatings of black and Hispanic prisoners by guards at New York’s Rikers Island was a window into a daily reality usually not seen or acknowledged by the white mainstream. Black people are tired of going to jail. They don’t want to go to jail anymore.

But there are no jobs. What service can they provide? Those individuals coming home, these ex-felons, have more credibility to stop the violence in the inner city than the police do. It is their sons and nephews and their immediate families that are being the provocateurs of that violence. But if we are asking them to stop crime, what incentive are we providing them to do that?

How much money did the American economy lose because of the derivatives and the credit default swaps? There were only two men prosecuted for that level of crime: Bernard Madoff and Allen Stanford. How much is the drug industry worth in the United States? It is not worth 45 trillion dollars.

How many African American and Hispanic men are incarcerated for being the same kind of capitalist? If we swap dope for derivatives there wouldn’t be a Wall Street because they would be behind bars. If we prosecute derivatives the same way you prosecute dope, which is not different in how it undermines a family, Wall Street wouldn’t exist.

A bunch of guys on Wall Street have done more to devastate the white community than any black man ever could. The only difference between the world of high finance and drug dealers are the commodities they deal. The mentality is the same.

The most prominent faces of color, such as Obama and his former attorney general, Eric Holder, mask an insidious new racism that tells blacks that they have enough, that progress has been made, and that it is up to them to take advantage of what the society offers them.

And black politicians and intellectuals are the delivery systems for this message. We blame the victims, those for whom jobs and opportunities do not exist, while we orchestrate the largest transfer of wealth upward in American history. We sustain with taxpayer dollars a power elite and oligarchy responsible for dismantling the manufacturing base and social-service programs that one gave working people and their families hope.

Apologists for the system call their demands for black personal responsibility “tough love”. But the stance, music to the ears of the white elite, is morally indefensible. It ignores the harsh reality visited on the poor by the cruelty of unfettered capitalism. It ignores the institutional racism that makes sure the poor remain poor.

The most published and publicized blacks on the American public scene today are well-dressed, comfortably educated, avowedly New Age, and resolutely middle class. The evolution of their relationship to the black majority during the past three decades can be summed up in a single word: good-bye!

There are no natural relationships because of the decentralization of street gangs. You don't have a leadership structure that can be talked to by members of the community to bring peace. You have basically guerrilla warfare going on in the inner city of Chicago.

There is no structure or hierarchy where you can go talk to one person in the neighbourhood that can go down the pecking order to bring peace. You have different groups that have different motivations, and that factionalism is at the base of the violence.

But there is no alternative when you don't have jobs, when you have an educational system that has failed and bad home environments. When Barack Obama did not speak to these issues, it was almost a double devastation to a certain degree.

It is different if President Bush doesn't say anything or Bill Clinton doesn't say anything. But when Barack Obama couldn't say the obvious, it does a double devastation to those young men who wanted hope and wanted to believe in the system to redress these issues.

Courtiers come in different colors in America, but their function is the same. They are hedonists of power. They are invited into the inner circles of the elite, including the White House and Harvard University, as long as they faithfully serve the system. They are offered comfort and privilege, but they pay with their souls.

Loose and easy language about equality, resonant resolutions about brotherhood fall pleasantly on the ear, Martin Luther King Jr. once said, "but for the Negro, there is a credibility gap he cannot overlook. He remembers that with each modest advance, the white population promptly raises the argument that the Negro has come far enough. Each step forward accents an ever-present tendency to backlash".

### **Nader Was Right: Liberals are Going Nowhere With Obama**

The American empire was not altered under Barack Obama. It killed as brutally and indiscriminately in Iraq, Afghanistan, and Pakistan as it did under George W. Bush. It steals from the U.S. Treasury to enrich the corporate elite rapaciously. It did not give us universal healthcare, abolish the Bush secrecy laws, end torture, restore habeas corpus, or halt the warrantless wiretapping and monitoring of citizens.

It did not push through significant environmental reform, regulate Wall Street, or end our relationship with private contractors that provide mercenary armies to fight our imperial wars and produce useless and costly weapons systems. The sad reality is that all the well-meaning groups and individuals who challenge our permanent war economy and the doctrine of preemptive war were once again suckered by the Democratic Party.

They were had. It is not a new story. The Democrats have been doing this to us since Bill Clinton. It is the same old merry-go-round, only with Obama branding. And if we have not learned by now that the system is broken, that has citizens we do not matter to our political elite, we are in serious trouble.

Our last hope is to step outside of the two-party system and build movements that defy the democrats and the Republicans. If we fail to do this, we will continue to undergo a slow-motion corporate coup-d'état that will end in feudalism.

If a few million of us had had the temerity to stand behind our ideals rather than our illusions and the empty slogans peddled by the Obama campaign, we would have a platform. We forgot that social reform never comes from accommodating the power structure but from frightening it.

The Liberty Party that fought slavery, the suffragists who battled for women's rights, the labor movement, and the civil-rights movement knew that the question was not how we get good people to rule - but how we limit the damage the powerful can do to us.

These mass movements were engines for social reform, the correctives to our democracy, and the true protectors of the rights of citizens. We have surrendered this power. It is vital to reclaim it. We are not at the Bangladesh level in terms of passivity, but we are getting there. No one sees anything changing.

There is no new political party to give people a choice. The progressive forces have no hammer. When they abandoned our campaign, they told the Democrats we have nowhere to go and will take whatever you give us. The Democrats are under no heat in the electoral arena from the left.

There comes a point when the public imbibes the ultimatum of the plutocracy. They have bought into the belief that if it protests, it will be brutalized by the police. If they have Muslim names, they will be subjected to Patriot Act treatment. This has scared the hell out of the underclass. They will be called terrorists.

This is the third television generation. They have grown up watching screens. They have not gone to rallies. Those are history now. They hear their parents and grandparents talk about marches and rallies. They have little toys and gizmos that they hold in their hands. They have no idea of any public protest or activity. It is a tapestry of passivity.

The working class have been broken. How many times have their employers threatened them with going abroad? How many times have they threatened the workers with outsourcing? The polls on job insecurity are record-high by those who have employment.

And the liberal intelligentsia have failed them. The intellectuals have bought into carping and making lecture fees as the senior fellow at the institute of so-and-so. Look at the top fifty intelligentsia - not one of them supported our campaign, not one of them has urged for street action and marches.

Our task is to build movements that can act as a counterweight to the corporate rape of America. We must opt out of the mainstream. We must articulate and stand behind a viable and uncompromising socialism, one that is firmly and unequivocally on the side of working men and women.

The working class is being plunged into desperation that will soon rival the misery endured by the working classes in India and China. And the democratic party, including Obama, was a willing accomplice. Obama squandered his positive response around the world.

In terms of foreign and military policy, it was a distinct continuity with Bush. Iraq, Afghanistan, the militarization of foreign policy, the continued expansion of the Pentagon budget, and pursuing more globalized trade agreements are the same as Bush.

This should not surprise us. The United States has interests dictated by its physical location, its economy, its alliances, and above all, its values. Naïve realists, a large tribe, fail to understand that ideals will inevitably guide American foreign policy, even if they do not always determine it.

Because the Obama foreign and defense policy senior team consisted of centrist experts from the Democratic Party, it was unlikely to make radically different judgements about the world, and about American interests in it, than its predecessors.

Obama expanded the assistance to our class of Wall Street extortionists through subsidies, loan guarantees, and backup declarations to financial conglomerates such as Citigroup. His stimulus package did not address the crisis in our public works infrastructure; instead it doled out funds to Medicaid and unemployment compensation.

There was no huge public works program to remodel the country. The president refused to acknowledge the obvious: We can no longer afford our empire. Obama could have created a new constituency that

does not exist because everything is so fragmented, scattered, haphazard, and slapdash with the stimulus.

He could have tog local labour unions, the local Chambers of Commerce, and the mayors to say “The more we cut the military budget, the more you get in terms of public works”. Administration leaders don’t see the distinction between public power and corporate power.

This is their time in history to reassert public values represented by workers, consumers, taxpayers and comm unities. They are creating a jobless recovery, the worst of the worst, with the clear specter of inflation on the horizon. We are heading for deep water.

Massive borrowing acts as an anesthetic. it prevents us from facing the new limitations we must learn to cope with domestically and abroad. It allows us to live in the illusion that we are not in a state of irrevocable crisis, that our decline is not real, and that catastrophe has been averted. But running up the national debt can work only so long.

No one can predict the future. No one knows the variables. No one predicted the move on tobacco. No o ne predicted gay rights. You never know what will light the fire. You have to keep the pressure on. But the whole liberal-progressive constituency is going nowhere.

## This isn't Reform, It's Robbery

Capitalists should never be allowed near a health-care system. They hold sick children hostage as they force parents to bankrupt themselves in a desperate scramble to pay for medical care. The sick do not have a choice. Medical care is not a consumable good.

We can choose to buy a used car or a new car, shop at a boutique or a thrift store, but there is no choice between illness and health. And any debate about health care must acknowledge that the for-profit health-care industry is the problem and must be destroyed.

This is an industry that hires doctors and analysts to deny care to patients in order to increase profits. It is an industry that causes half of all bankruptcies. And the twenty thousand Americans who die each year because they did not receive adequate health care condemn these corporations as complicit in murder.

The current health-care debate in Congress has nothing to do with death panels or public options or socialized medicine. The real debate, the only one that counts, is how much money our blood-sucking insurance, pharmaceutical, and for-profit health services are going to be able to siphon off from new health-care legislation.

The proposed plans rattling around Congress all ensure that the profits for these corporations will increase and the misery for ordinary Americans will be compounded. The corporate state, enabled by both Democrats and Republicans, is yet again cannibalizing the Treasury.

It is yet again pushing Americans, especially the poor and the working class, into levels of despair and rage that will continue to fuel the violent, protofascist movements leaping up around the edges of American society. And the traditional watch dogs - those in public office, the press and citizens groups - are as useless as the perfumed fops of another era who busied their days with court intrigue at Versailles, Canada never looked so good.

The democrats are collaborating with lobbyists for the insurance industry, the pharmaceutical industry, and for-profit health-care providers to craft the current health care reform legislation. Corporate and industry players are inside the tent this time. So there is a vacuum on the outside.

And these lobbyists have already killed a viable public option and made sure nothing in the bills will impede their growing profits and capacity for abuse. The way they make money is by abusing people. And if a public-option plan is not ready and willing to abuse patients, it is stuck with the expensive patients.

The conditions that have now been set for the plans include a hobbled public option. Under the best case scenario, there will be tens of millions who will remain uninsured at the outset, and the number will climb as more and more people are priced out of the insurance market.

They are using money to campaign against us. The money for their commercials came from health-care interests that collect fees from American patients. The bills now in Congress will, at best, impose on the country the failed model in Massachusetts.

That model will demand that Americans buy health insurance from private insurers. There will be some subsidies for the very poor, but not for anyone above a modest income. Insurers will be allowed to continue to jack up premiums, including for the elderly.

Bankruptcies due to medical bills and swelling premiums will mount along with rising deductibles and co-payments. Health care will be beyond the reach of many families. In Massachusetts, one in six people who have mandated insurance still say they cannot afford health care, and thirty thousand people were evicted from the state program this month because of budget cuts. Expect the same debacle nationwide.

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For someone making \$40,000 a year, you are required to lay out \$5000 for an insurance premium for coverage that covers nothing until you have spent \$2000 out of pocket. You are \$7000 out of pocket before you have any coverage at all. For most people, that means you are already bankrupt before you have insurance.

If anything, that has made them worse off. Instead of having that \$5000 to cover some of their medical expenses, they have laid it out in premiums. The United States spends twice as much as other industrialized nations on health care although 45.7 million Americans remain without health coverage and millions more are inadequately covered.

Fourteen thousand Americans now lose their health care each day. A report in the journal Health Affairs estimates that, if the system is left unchanged, one of every five dollars spent by Americans will go to health coverage. Private insurance bureaucracy and paperwork consume nearly one-third of every health-care dollar.

Streamlining payment through a single nonprofit payer would save more than \$400 billion per year, enough to provide comprehensive high-quality coverage for all Americans. The lobbyists have, as they did with the obscene bailouts for banks and investment firms, hijacked legislation in order to fleece the citizens.

The five largest private health insurers and their trade group spent more than \$6 million on lobbying in the first quarter of 2009. Pfizer, the world's biggest drug maker, spent more than \$9 million during the last quarter of 2008 and the first quarter of 2009.

The Washington Post reported that up to thirty members of Congress from both parties who hold key committee memberships have major investments in health-care companies totalling between \$11 million and \$27 million. President Barack Obama's director of health care policy, who will not discuss single payer as an option, has served on the boards of several health care corporations.

Obama and the congressional leadership shut out advocates of single-payer. The media, including papers such as the New York Times, treats single-payer as a fringe movement. The television networks rarely mention it. And yet between 45 and 60 percent of doctors favor single-payer.

Between 40 and 62 percent of the American people, including 80 percent of registered Democrats, want universal, single-payer, not for profit health care for all Americans. The ability of corporations to discredit and silence voices that represent at least half of the population is another sad testament to the power of our corporate state.

## Defy your Empire

Globalization and unfettered capitalism have been swept into the history books along with the open-market theory of the 1920s, the experiments of fascism and communism, and the New Deal. It is time for a new economic and political paradigm.

It is time for a new language to address our reality. The voices of change, those who speak in powerful and yet unfamiliar words cried out on September 25 and 26, 2009 when protestors from around the country gathered to defy heads of state, bankers, and finance ministers from the world's twenty-two largest economies who convened for a meeting of the G20.

If we heeded these dissident voices we have a future. If we did not, we commit collective suicide. The international power elites went to Pittsburgh to preach the mantra that globalization is inevitable and eternal. They discussed a corpse as if it were living.

They urged us to remain in suspended animation and place our trust in the inept bankers and politicians who orchestrated the crisis. This is the usual tactic of bankrupt elites clinging to power. They denigrate Hedges, Chris (2013) *The World as it is: Dispatches on the Myth of Human Progress*. Nation Books, New York.

and push to the margins the realists - none of whom were inside the security perimeters - who gave words to our disintegration and demanded a new, unfamiliar course.

The powerful discredit dissent and protest. But human history always begins anew with disobedience. This disobedience is the first step toward freedom. It makes possible the recovery of reason. The longer we speak in the language of global capitalism, the longer we utter platitudes about the free market, the longer we live in a state of collective self-delusion.

Our power elite, who profess to hate government and government involvement in the free market, have been stealing hundreds of billions of dollars of our money to nationalize mismanaged corporations and save them from bankruptcy.

We hear angry and confused citizens, their minds warped by hate talk-radio and television, condemn socialized medicine although we have become, at least for corporations, the most socialized nation on Earth. The schizophrenia between what we profess and what we actually embrace has rendered us incapable of confronting reality.

The longer we speak in the old language of markets, capitalism, free trade, and globalization, the longer the entities that created this collapse will cannibalize the nation. What are we now? What do we believe? What economic model explains the irrationality of looting the U.S. Treasury to permit speculators at Goldman Sachs to make obscene profits?

How much longer can we believe the fantasy that global markets will replace nation states and that economics will permit us to create a utopian world where we will all share the same happy goals? Corporations are pushing through legislation in the United States that will force us to buy defective, for-profit health insurance, a plan that will expand corporate monopolies and profits at our expense and leave tens of millions without adequate care.

Corporations are blocking all attempts to move to renewable and sustainable energy to protect staggering profits of the oil, natural gas, and coal industries. Corporations are plunging us deeper and deeper as a nation into debt to feed the permanent war economy and swell the military budget, which consumes half of all discretionary spending.

Corporations use lobbyists and campaign contributions to maintain arcane tax codes that offer them tax havens and tax evasions. Corporations are draining the Treasury while the working class shed jobs, sees homes foreclosed, and struggles to survive in a new terrifying global serfdom. This has been the awful price of complacency.

Protests began several days before the summit. Many of the activities were coordinated by Pittsburgh's Thomas Merton Center. There was a march on September 25 for anyone who has lost a job, a home, a loved one to war, lost value to a retirement plan, gotten sick from environmental pollution, or lived without adequate health care, water, or food.

There were at least three tent cities. Unemployed workers set up one tent city at the Monumental Baptist Church on September 20, and five days later they marched on the Convention Center. The encampment and the march was organized by the Bail Out the People Movement.

There was a religious procession calling for social justice and a concert organized by Students for a Democratic Society.

The secret service denied protesters permits while it determined the size of the "security perimeter" it imposed around the world leaders. Pittsburgh contracted to bring in an extra four thousand police officers at an estimated cost of 9.5 million dollars.

Hedges, Chris (2013) *The World as it is: Dispatches on the Myth of Human Progress*. Nation Books, New York.

Activist groups reported incidents of surveillance and harassment. The struggle to thwart the voices of citizens was fierce as the struggle to amplify the voices of the criminal class that is trashing the world's economy. These elites appeared from behind closed doors with their communiques and resolutions to address us in their specialized jargon of power and expertise.

Recommitments to free-trade agreements in the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) came from the World Trade Organization and NAFTA, which have all thrust a knife into the backs of the working class. They insisted that the world can be managed and understood exclusively through their distorted lens of economics.

But that day is over. They are the apostles of a dead system. They maintain power through fraud and force. We do not expect them to go without a struggle. But they have nothing left to say to us. Those who profess to favor freedom, yet deprecate agitation, are men who want crops without plowing up the ground.

They want rain without thunder and lightning. They want the ocean without the awful roar of its many waters. This struggle may be a moral one; or it may be a physical one; or it may be both moral and physical, but it must be a struggle. Power concedes nothing without a demand. It never did and it never will.

This was an opportunity to defy the titans of the corporate state and speak in words that describe our reality. The power elite fear these words. If these words seep into the population, if they become part of our common vernacular, the elite and the systems they defend will be unmasked.

Our collective self-delusion will be shattered. These words of defiance expose the lies and crimes the elite use to barrel us toward neofeudalism. And these words, when they become real, propel men and women to resist. The end of something often resembles the beginning.

More often than not our nose-to-the-glass view makes us believe that the end we are living is in fact a new beginning. This confusion is typical of an old civilization's self-confidence - limited by circumstances and by an absence of memory - and in many ways resembling the sort often produced by senility.

Our rational need to control understanding and therefore memory has simply accentuated the confusion. Nothing seems more permanent than a long-established government about to lose power, nothing more invincible than a grand army on the morning of its annihilation.

### **Food is Power, and the Powerful Are Poisoning Us**

Our most potent political weapon is food. If we take back our agriculture, if we buy and raise produce locally, we can begin to break the grip of corporations that control a food system as fragile, unsafe, and destined for collapse as our financial system.

If we continue to allow corporations to determine what we eat, as well as how food is harvested and distributed, then we will become captive to rising prices and shortages and increasingly dependent on cheap, mass produced food filled with sugar and fat.

Food, along with energy, will be the most pressing issue of our age. And if we do not build alternative networks soon, the social and political ramifications of shortages and hunger will be devastating. The effects of climate change, especially with widespread droughts in Australia, Africa, California and the Midwest, coupled with the rising cost of fossil fuels, have already blighted the environments of millions.

The poor can often no longer afford a balanced diet. The increases in food prices have been horrific for the approximately one billion people who subsist on less than a dollar per day. 162 million of these people survive on less than fifty cents per day.

The global poor spend as much as sixty percent of their income on food, according to the International Food Policy Research Institute. There have been food riots in many parts of the world, including Austria, Hungary, Mexico, Namibia, Zimbabwe, Morocco, Yemen, Mauritania, Senegal, and Uzbekistan.

Russia and Pakistan have introduced food rationing. Pakistani troops guard imported wheat. India has banned the export of rice, except for high-end basmati. And the shortages and price increases are being felt in the industrialized world as we continue to shed hundreds of thousands of jobs and food prices climb.

There are 33.2 million Americans, one in nine, who depend on food stamps. Twenty states have as many as one in eight dependent on food stamps, according to the Food Research Center. The average monthly benefit was \$113.87 per person, leaving many, even with government assistance, without adequate food.

The USDA says 36.2 million Americans struggle to get enough food, and one third of them sometimes have to skip or cut back on meals. Food shortages have been tinder for social upheaval throughout history. But this time around, because we have lost the skills to feed and clothe ourselves, it will be much harder for most of us to become self-sustaining.

The large agribusinesses have largely wiped out small farmers. They have poisoned our soil with pesticides and contaminated animals in filthy and overcrowded stockyards with high doses of antibiotics and steroids. They have pumped nutrients and phosphorus into our water systems, causing algae bloom and fish die-off in our rivers and streams.

Crop yields, under the onslaught of changing weather patterns and chemical pollution, are declining in the Northeast, where a blight has nearly wiped out the tomato crop. The draconian Food Modernization Safety Act, another gift from our governing elite to corporations, means small farms will continue to dwindle in number.

Web sites such as La Via Campesina do a good job of tracking these disturbing global trends. The entire economy built around food is unsafe and unethical. Food is the greatest place for communities to start taking back power. The national food system is collapsing by degrees.

More than fifty percent of what Americans eat comes from the Central Valley in California. What happens when gasoline becomes \$5 a gallon or drought sweeps across the cropland? The monolithic system of food production is highly unstable. It has to be replaced with small, diverse sources that provide greater food security.

The ties most Americans had to rural communities during the Great Depression kept many alive. A barter economy replaced the formal economy. Families could grow food or had relatives to feed them. But in a world where we do not know where our food comes from, or how to produce it, we have become vulnerable.

And many will be forced, as food prices continue to rise, to shift to a diet of cheap, fatty, mass-produced foods, already a staple of the nation's poor. Junk food, a major factor in obesity, diabetes, and heart disease, is often the only food those in the inner city can buy because supermarkets and nutritious food are geographically and financially beyond reach. As the economy continues to deteriorate, the middle class will soon join them.

It is clear to anyone who looks carefully at any crowd that we are wasting our bodies exactly as we are wasting our land. Our bodies are fat, weak, joyless, sickly, ugly, the virtual prey of the manufacturers of Hedges, Chris (2013) *The World as it is: Dispatches on the Myth of Human Progress*. Nation Books, New York.

medicine and cosmetics. Our bodies have become marginal; they are growing useless like our “marginal land” because we have less and less use for them.

After the games and idle flourishes of modern youth, we use them only as shipping cartons to transport our brains and our few employable muscles back and forth to work. The people will eat what the corporations decide for them to eat. They will be detached and remote from the sources of their life, joined to them only by corporate tolerance.

They will have become consumers purely - consumptive machines, which is to say, the slaves of producers. What model farms very powerfully suggest, then, is that the concept of total control may be impossible to confine within the boundaries of specialist enterprise - that it is impossible to mechanize production without mechanizing consumption.

It is impossible to make machines of soil, plants, and animals without making machines also of people. The nascent effort by communities to reclaim local food production is the first step toward reclaiming lives severed and fragmented by corporate culture.

It is more than a return to local food production. It is a return to community. It brings us back to the values that sustain community. It is a return to the recognition of the fragility, interconnectedness, and sacredness of all living systems and our dependence on each other.

It turns back to an ethic that can save us. The commercial revolution did not stop with the subjugation of the Indians, but went on to impose substantially the same catastrophe upon the small farms and the farm communities, upon the shops of small local tradesmen of all sorts, upon the workshops of independent craftsmen, and upon the households of citizens.

It is a revolution that is still going on. The economy is still substantially that of the fur trade, still based on the same general kinds of commercial items: technology, weapons, ornaments, novelties, and drugs. The one great difference is that by now the revolution has deprived the mass consumers of any independent access to the staples of life - clothing, shelter, food, even water.

Air remains the only necessity that the average user can still get for himself, and the revolution has imposed a heavy tax on that by way of pollution. Commercial conquest is far more thorough and final than military defeat. The inevitable result of such an economy is that no farm or any other usable property can safely be regarded by anyone as a home.

No home is ultimately worthy of our loyalty, nothing is ultimately worth doing, and no place or task or person is worth a lifetime of devotion. Waste, in such an economy, must eventually include several categories of humans - the unborn, the old, disinvested farmers, the unemployed, the unemployable. Indeed, once our homeland, our source, is regarded as a resource, we are all sliding downward toward the ash heap or the dump.

## Liberals are Useless

Liberals are a useless lot. They talk about peace and do nothing to challenge our permanent war economy. They claim to support the working class, and vote for candidates that glibly defend the North American Free Trade Agreement. They insist they believe in welfare, the right to organize, universal health care, and a host of other socially progressive causes, and will not risk stepping out of the mainstream to fight for them.

The only talent they seem to possess is the ability to write abject cloying letters to politicians - as if they read them - asking the president to come back to his “true” self. This sterile moral posturing, which is not only useless but also humiliating, has made America’s liberal class an object of public derision.

Obama was a brand. He was a product of the Chicago political machine. He had been skillfully packaged as the new face of the corporate state. You have a tug of war with one side pulling. The corporate interests pull on the Democratic Party the way they pull on the Republican Party. If you are a “least worst” voter you don’t want to disturb John Kerry on the war, so you call off anti-war demonstrations.

There is no pull. That is the dilemma of the Nation and the Progressive and other similar publications. There is no breaking point. And when there is no breaking point you do not have a moral compass. Liberals are the defeated, self-absorbed Mouse Man in Dostoevsky’s Notes from Underground.

They embrace cynicism, a cloak for their cowardice and impotence. They have come to believe that the conscious inertia of the underground surpasses all other forms of existence. They too use inaction and empty moral posturing, not to effect change but rather to engage in an orgy of self-adulation and self-pity.

They too refuse to act or engage with anyone not cowering in the underground. This choice does not satisfy the liberal class but they do not have the strength to change. The gravest danger we face as a nation is not from the far Right, although it may well inherit power, but from a bankrupt liberal class that has lost the will to fight and the moral courage to stand up for what it espouses.

Anyone who says he or she cares about the working class in America should have walked out on the Democratic Party in 1994 with the passage of NAFTA. And it has been only downhill since. The imperial projects and the corporate state did not alter under Obama. The state kills as ruthlessly as it did under Bush.

It, too, bows before the conservative Israel lobby, refuses to enact serious environmental or health care reform, regulate Wall Street, end our relationship with private mercenary contractors, or stop handing obscene sums of money, some \$1 trillion a year, to the military and arms industry.

At what point do we stop being a doormat. At what point do we fight back? We may lose if we step outside the mainstream, but at least we will salvage our self-esteem and integrity. Liberals like the poor but they don’t like the smell of the poor.

## The Creed Of Objectivity Killed the News

Reporters who witness the worst of human suffering and return to newsrooms angry see their compassion washed out or severely muted by the layers of editors who stand between the reporter and the reader. The creed of objectivity and balance, formulated at the beginning of the nineteenth century by newspaper owners to generate greater profits from advertisers, disarms and cripples the press.

The creed of objectivity becomes a convenient and profitable vehicle with which to avoid confronting unpleasant truths or angering a power structure on which news organizations depend for access and profits. It banishes empathy, passion, and a quest for justice.

Reporters are permitted to watch but not to feel or to speak in their own voices. They function as “professionals” and see themselves as dispassionate and disinterested social scientists. This vaunted lack of bias, enforced by bloodless hierarchies of bureaucrats, is the disease of American journalism.

The very notion that on any given story all you have to do is report what both sides say and you’ve done a fine job of objective journalism debilitates the press. Most stories aren’t two-sided, they’re 17 sided at least. It’s of no help to either the readers or the truth to quote one side saying “cat” and another side saying “dog”, while the truth is there’s an elephant crashing around out there in the bushes.

The press’s most serious failures are not its sins of commission, but its sins of omission - the stories we miss, the stories we don’t see, the stories that don’t hold press conferences, the stories that don’t come from ‘reliable sources’.

Hedges, Chris (2013) *The World as it is: Dispatches on the Myth of Human Progress*. Nation Books, New York.

This abject moral failing has left the growing numbers of Americans shunted aside by our corporate state without a voice. It has also, with the rise of a ruthless American oligarchy, left the traditional press on the wrong side of our growing class divide.

The elitisms, distrust and lack of credibility in the media come directly from this steady and willful disintegration of the media's moral core. The moral void has been exploited by twenty-four-hour cable news shows and trash talk-radio programs.

The failure of the fact based press to express empathy or outrage for our growing underclass has permitted the disastrous rise of "faith-based" reporting. The bloodless and soulless journalism of the traditional media has bolstered the popularity of partisan outlets that present a view of the world that often has no relation to the real, but responds very effectively to the emotional needs of viewers.

Fox News, is in some sense, no more objective than the New York times, but there is one crucial and vital difference. Fox News and most of the other cable outlets do not feel constrained by verifiable facts. Within the traditional news establishment, facts may have been self-selected or skillfully stage-managed by public relations specialists, but what was not verifiable was not published.

The cable news channels have cleverly seized on the creed of objectivity and redefined it in populist terms. They attack news base on verifiable fact for its liberal bias, for failing to be objective, and promise a return to "genuine" objectivity.

The objectivity of the traditional media has an inherent political bias. But it is a bias that caters to the power elite and it is a bias that is confined by fact. The traditional quest for "objectivity" is also based on an ethnocentric conceit: it pretended to discover Universal Truth, to proclaim Universal Laws, and to describe Universal Man.

Upon inspection it appeared however that its universal man resembled a type found a round Cambridge Massachusetts, or Cambridge, England. Its Universal Laws resemembred those felt to be useful by Congress and Parliament, and its universal truth bore english and American accents.

Objectivity creates the formula of quoting Establishment specialists or experts within the narrow confines of the power elite who debate policy nuance like medieval theologians. As long as one viewpoint is balanced by another, usually no more than what Sigmund Freud would term "the narcissism of minor difference", the job of a reporter is deemed complete.

But this is more often a way to obscure rather than expose the truth. Reporting, while it is presented to the public as neutral, objective and unbiaased, is alwa ys highly interpretive. It is defined by rigid stylistic parameters. Reporters begin with a collection of facts, statements, positions, and anecdotes and then select those that create the "balance" permitted by the formula of daily journalism.

The closer reporters get to official sources, for example, those covering Wall Street, Congress, the White House, or the State Department, the more constraints they endure. When reporting depends heavily on access, it becomes very difficult to challenge those who grant or deny that access.

This craven desire for access has turned huge sections of the Washington media, along with most business reporters, into courtiers. The need to be included in news briefings and background interviews with government or business officials, as well as the desire for leaks and early access to official documents, obliterates journalistic autonomy.

We can record the fury of a Palestinian whose land has been taken from him by Israeli settlers - but we must always refer to Israel's 'security needs' and its 'war on terror'. If Americans are accused of "torture", we call it "abuse". If Israel assassinates a Palestinian, we call it a "targeted killing".

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If Armenians lament their holocaust of 1,500,000 souls in 1915, we remind readers that Turkey denies this all too real and fully documented genocide. If Iraq has become a hell on earth for its people, we recall how awful Saddam was. If a dictator is on our side, we call him a “strongman”. If he’s our enemy, we call him a tyrant, or part of the “axis of evil”. And above all else, we use the word “terrorist”. Terror, terror, terror - seven days a week.

We source everything to officials: “American officials”, “intelligence officials”, “official sources”, anonymous policemen or Army officers. And if these institutions charged with our protection abuse their power, then we remind readers and listeners and viewers of the dangerous age in which we now live, the age of terror - which means we must live in the Age of the Warrior, someone whose business and profession and vocation and mere existence is to destroy our enemies.

In the classic example, a refugee from Nazi Germany who appears on television saying monstrous things are happening in his homeland must be followed by a Nazi spokesman saying Adolf Hitler is the greatest boon to humanity since pasteurized milk.

Real objectivity would require not only hard work by news people to determine which report was accurate, but also a willingness to put up with the abuse certain to follow publication of objectively informed judgement. To escape the hard work or the abuse, if one man says Hitler is an ogre, we instantly give you another to say Hitler is a prince.

The public may not learn much about these fairly sensitive matters, but neither does it get another excuse to denounce the media for unfairness and lack of objectivity. In brief, society is teeming with people who become furious if told what the score is.

Journalists, because of their training and distaste for shattering their own exalted notion of themselves, lack the inclination and vocabulary to discuss ethics. They will, when pressed, mumble something about telling the truth and serving the public.

They prefer not to face the fact that my truth is not your truth. News is a signal, a “blip”, an alarm that something is happening beyond our small circle of existence, as Walter Lippmann noted. Journalism does not point us toward truth, since there is always a vast divide between truth and news.

Ethical questions open journalism to the nebulous world of interpretation and philosophy, and for this reason journalists flee from ethical inquiry like a herd of frightened sheep. Journalists, while they like to promote the image of themselves as fierce individualists, are in the end another species of corporate employees.

They claim as their clients an amorphous public. They seek their moral justification in the service of this nameless, faceless mass and speak little about the vast influence of the power elite to shape and determine reporting. Does a public even exist in a society as fragmented and divided as ours?

Or is the public, as Walter Lippmann wrote, now so deeply uninformed and divorced from the inner workings of power and diplomacy as to make it a clean slate on which our armies of skilled propagandists can leave a message?

The symbiotic relationship between the media and the power elite worked for nearly a century. It worked as long as our power elite, no matter how ruthless or insensitive, was competent. But once our power elite became incompetent and morally bankrupt, the media along with the power elite, lost their final vestige of credibility.

The media became, as seen in the Iraq war and the aftermath of the financial upheaval, a class of courtiers. The media, which has always written and spoken from presuppositions and principles that reflect the elite consensus, now peddle a consensus that is flagrantly artificial.

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Our elite oversaw the dismantling of the country's manufacturing base and the betrayal of the working class by the passage of NAFTA, and the media dutifully trumpeted this as a form of growth.

Our elite deregulated the banking industry, leading to nationwide bank collapses, and the media extolled the value of the free market. This reporting may have been objective and impartial, but it defied common sense. The harsh reality of shuttered former steel-producing town and growing human misery should have, in the hands of any good cop reporter, exposed the fantasies.

But the media long ago stopped thinking and lost nearly all its moral autonomy. Real reporting, grounded in a commitment to justice and empathy could have informed and empowered the public as we underwent a slowmotion corporate coup d'etat.

It could have stimulated a radical debate about structures, laws, privilege, power, and justice. But the traditional media, by clinging to an outdated etiquette designed to serve corrupt power structures, lost their social function. Corporations, which once made many of these news outlets very rich, have turned to more effective forms of advertising.

Profits have plummeted. And yet these media courtiers, lost in the fantasy of their own righteousness and moral probity, cling to the hollow morality of "objectivity" - with comic ferocity. The world will not be a better place when these fact-based news organizations die. We will be propelled into a culture where facts and opinions will be interchangeable, where lies will become true, and where fantasy will be peddled as news.

The tragedy is that the moral void of the news business contributed as much to its own annihilation as the protofascists who feed on its carcass.

## Calling All Rebels

There are no constraints left to halt America's slide into a totalitarian capitalism. Electoral politics are a sham. The media have been debased and defanged by corporate owners. The working class has been impoverished and is now being plunged into profound despair.

The legal system has been corrupted to serve corporate interests. popular institutions, from labour unions to political parties, have been destroyed or emasculated by corporate power. And any form of protest, no matter how tepid, is blocked by an internal security apparatus that is starting to rival that of the East German secret police.

The mounting anger and hatred, coursing through the bloodstream of the body politic, make violence and counterviolence inevitable. Brace yourself. The American empire is over. And the descent is going to be horrifying. Those singled out as internal enemies will include people of color, immigrants, gays, intellectuals, feminists, Jews, Muslims, union leaders, and those defined as "liberals".

They will be condemned as anti-American and blamed for our decline. The economic collapse, which remains mysterious and enigmatic to most Americans will be pinned by demagogues and hate-mongers on these hapless scapegoats. Random acts of violence, already leaping around the fringes of American society, will justify harsh measures of internal control that will snuff out the final vestiges of our democracy.

The corporate forces that destroyed the country will use the information systems they control to mask their culpability. The old game of blaming the weak and the marginal, a staple of despotic regimes, will empower the dark undercurrents of sadism and violence in American society and deflect attention from the corporate vampires who have drained the blood of the country.

We are going to be poorer. health care is going to eat up more and more of our income. We are going to have less and less for other things. We are going to have some huge disasters sooner or later caused by

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our failures to invest. Dams and bridges will break. Buildings will collapse. There are water mains that are twenty-five to fifty feet wide. There will be huge infrastructure disasters. Our intellectual resources are in decline. We are failing to educate young people and instill in them rigor.

We are going to continue to pour money into the military. It is possible that we will have a revolution, a civil war that will see the end of the United States of America. If we see the end of this country, it will come from the right and our failure to provide people with the basic necessities of life.

Revolutions occur when young men see the present as worse than the unknown future. We are not there. But it will not take long to get there. The politicians running for office who are denigrating the government, are sowing the seeds for the destruction of the country.

A lot of people on the right hate the United States of America. They would say they hate the people they are arrayed against. But the whole idea of the United States is that we criticize government. We remake it to serve our interests. They do not want that kind of society.

They reject, as Aristotle said, the idea that democracy is to rule and to be ruled in turns. They see a world where they are right and that is it. If we do not want to do it their way, we should be vanquished. This is not the idea on which the United States was founded.

The engines of social reform are dead. Liberal apologists, who long ago should have abandoned the Democratic Party, continue to make pathetic appeals to the tone-deaf corporate state while the working and middle-class are ruthlessly stripped of rights, income, and jobs.

Liberals self-righteously condemn imperial wars and wall street greed, but not the Democrats who are responsible. And the longer the liberal class dithers and speaks in the bloodless language of policies and programs, the more hated and irrelevant it becomes.

No one has discredited American liberalism more than liberals themselves. We have entered an age in which, as William Butler Yeats wrote, "the best lack all conviction and the worst/ Are full of passionate intensity. If we end up with violence in the streets on a large scale, not random riots, but insurrection and things break down, there will be a coup d'état from the right.

We have already had an economic coup d'état. It will not take much to go further. How do we resist? How, if this descent is inevitable, do we fight back? Why should we resist at all? Why not give in to cynicism and despair? The power elite, including most of those who graduate from our top universities and our liberal and intellectual classes, have sold out for personal comfort. Why not us?

The French moral philosopher Albert Camus argued that we are separated from one another. Our lives are meaningless. We cannot influence fate. We will all die and our individual beings will be obliterated. And yet Camus wrote that "one of the only coherent philosophical positions is revolt.

It is a constant confrontation between man and his obscurity. It is not aspiration, for it is devoid of hope. That revolt is the certainty of a crushing fate, without the resignation that ought to accompany it".

A living man can be enslaved and reduced to the historic condition of an object. But if he dies in refusing to be enslaved he affirms the existence of another kind of human nature which refuses to be classified as an object. The rebel, for Camus, stands with the oppressed - the unemployed workers thrust into impoverishment and misery by the corporate state, the Palestinians in Gaza, the civilians in Iraq and Afghanistan, the disappeared held in our global black sites, the poor in our inner cities and depressed rural communities, immigrants, and those locked away in our prison system.

To stand with them does not mean to collaborate with parties, such as the Democrats, who can mouth the words of justice while carrying out acts of oppression. It means open and direct defiance. The power

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structure and its liberal apologists dismiss the rebel as impractical and see the rebel's outsider stance as counterproductive.

They condemn the rebel for expressing anger at injustice. The elites and their apologists call for calm and patience. They use the hypocritical language of spirituality, compromise, generosity, and compassion to argue that there is no alternative but to accept and work with the systems of power.

The rebel, however, is beholden to a moral commitment that makes it impossible to stand with the power elite. The rebel refuses to be bought off with foundation grants, invitations to the White House, television appearances, book contracts, academic appointments or empty rhetoric.

The rebel is not concerned with self-promotion or public opinion. The rebel knows that, as Augustine wrote, hope has two beautiful daughters, anger and courage - anger at the way things are and the courage to see that they do not remain the way they are. The rebel is aware that virtue is not rewarded. The act of rebellion defines itself.

Those in power have disarmed the liberal class. They do not argue that the current system is just or good, because they cannot, but they have convinced liberals that there is no alternative. But we are not slaves. We have a choice. We can refuse to be either a victim or an executioner. We have the moral capacity to say no, to refuse to cooperate.

Any boycott or demonstration, any occupation or sit-in, any strike, any act of obstruction or sabotage, any refusal to pay taxes, any fast, any popular movement, and any act of civil disobedience ignites the soul of the rebel and exposes the dead hand of authority.

There is a time when the operation of the machine becomes so odious, makes you so sick at heart, that you can't take part, you can't even passively take part, and you've got to put your bodies on the gears and upon the wheels, upon the levers, upon the apparatus, and you've got to make it stop. And you've got to indicate to the people who run it, to the people who own it, that unless you are free, the machine will be prevented from working at all.

The capacity to exercise moral autonomy, the capacity to refuse to cooperate, offers us the only route left to personal freedom and a life with meaning. Rebellion is its own justification. Those of us who come out of the religious left have no quarrel with Camus. Camus is right about the absurdity of existence, right about finding worth in the act of rebellion rather than some bizarre dream of an afterlife or Sunday School fantasy that God rewards the just and the good.

"Oh my soul", the ancient Greek Pindar wrote, "do not aspire to immortal life, but exhaust the limits of the possible." We differ with Camus only in that we have faith that rebellion is not ultimately meaningless. Rebellion allows us to be free and independent human beings, but rebellion also chips away, however imperceptibly at the edifice of the oppressor and sustains the dim flames of hope and love.

And in moments of profound human despair these flames are never insignificant. They keep alive the capacity to be human. We must become, as Camus said, so absolutely free that "existence is an act of rebellion". Those who do not rebel in our age of totalitarian capitalism and who convince themselves that there is no alternative to collaboration are complicit in their own enslavement.

They commit spiritual and moral suicide.

## How the Corporations Broke Ralph Nader and America, Too

Ralph Nader's descent from being one of the most respected and powerful men in the country to being a pariah illustrates the totality of the corporate coup. Nader's marginalization was not accidental. It was

orchestrated to thwart the legislation that Nader and his allies - who once consisted of many in the Democratic Party - enacted to prevent corporate abuse, fraud, and control.

He was targeted to be destroyed. And by the time he was shut out of the political process with the election of Ronald Reagan, the government was in the hands of corporations. Nader's fate mirrors our own.

The press discovered citizen investigators around the mid-1960s. The press gravitates to novelty. There was collaboration. Nader provided the newsworthy material and the press covered it. The legislation passed. Regulations were issued. Lives were saved. Other civic movements began to flower.

Nader was singled out for destruction. General Motors had him followed in an attempt to blackmail him. It sent an attractive woman to his neighbourhood Safeway supermarket in a bid to meet him while he was shopping and seduce him; the attempt failed, and GM, when exposed, had to issue a public apology.

But far from ending their effort to destroy Nader, corporations unleashed a much more sophisticated and well-funded attack. In 1971, the corporate lawyer and future U.S. Supreme Court Justice, Lewis Powell wrote an eight page memo titled "Attack on American Free Enterprise System".

in which he named Nader as the chief nemesis of corporations. It became the blueprint for corporate resurgence. Powell's memo led to the establishment of the Business Roundtable, which amassed enough money and power to direct government policy and mold public opinion.

The Powell memo outlined ways corporations could shut out those who in "the college campus, the pulpit, the media, the intellectual and literary journals", were hostile to corporate interests.

Powell called for the establishment of lavishly funded think tanks and conservative institutes to churn out ideological tracts that attacked government regulation and environmental protection. His memo led to the successful effort to place corporate-friendly academics and economists in universities and on the airwaves, as well as drive out those in the public sphere who questioned the rise of unchecked corporate power and deregulation.

It saw the establishment of organizations to monitor and pressure the media to report favorably on issues that fattered corporate interests. And it led to the building of legal organizations to promote corporate interests in the courts and appointment of sympathetic judges to the bench.

It was off to the races, Nader said. You could barely count the number of right-wing, corporate-funded think tanks. These think tanks specialized, especially against the tort system. We struggled through the Nixon and early Ford years, when inflation was a big issue.

Nixon did things that horrified conservatives. He signed into law OSHA, the environmental protection agency, and air and water pollution acts because he was afraid of the people from the rumble that came out of the 1960s. He was the last Republican president to be afraid of liberals.

The corporations carefully studied and emulated the tactics of the consumer advocate they wanted to destroy. Ralph Nader came along and did serious journalism; that is what his early stuff was, such as Unsafe at Any Speed. Corporate America was terrified of the serious journalistic work that Nader was doing.

They went to school on Nader. They said, "We see how you do this. You gather material, and you get people who are articulate, you hone how you present this". And the corporations copycatted him with one big difference: they had no regard for the truth.

Nader may have had a consumer ideology, but he was not trying to sell you a product. He was trying to tell the truth as best he can determine it. It does not mean it is the truth. It means it is the truth as best he and his people can determine the truth. and he told you where he was coming from.

Between 1966 and 1973, Congress passed 25 pieces of consumer legislation, nearly all of which Nader had a hand in authoring. Then something very interesting happened. The pressure of these meetings by the corporations like General Motors, the oil companies, and the drug companies with the editorial people coincided with the emergence of the most destructive force to the citizen movement: Abe Rosenthal, the editor of the New York Times.

Rosenthal was a right-winger from Canada who hated communism, came to the United States, and hated progressivism. Rosenthal, who banned social critics like Noam Chomsky from being quoted in the paper demanded that no story built around Nader's research could be published unless there was a corporate response.

Corporations, informed of Rosenthal's dictate, refused to comment on Nader's research. The authority of the Times set the agenda for national news coverage. Once Nader disappeared from the Times, other major papers and networks did not feel compelled to report on his investigations. It was harder and harder to be heard.

There was, before we were silenced, a brief, golden era of journalism, Nader lamented. "We worked with the press to expose corporate abuse on behalf of the public. We saved lives. This is what journalism should be about; it should be about making the world a better and safer place for our children and our families, but then it ended and we were shut out."

"We were thrown on the defensive and once on the defensive it was difficult to recover." The break came in 1979 when they deregulated natural gas. Our last national stand was for the consumer protection agency. The press in the 1980s would say, "Why should we cover you?". "Who is your base in Congress?"

"I used to be known as someone who could trigger a congressional hearing pretty fast in the House and Senate", Nader said. "They started looking towards the neoliberals and the neocons, and the deregulation mania. We put out two reports on the benefits of regulation and they disappeared. They did not get covered at all".

"We would defeat some things here and there, block a tax loophole and defeat a deregulatory move. We were successful in staunching some of the deregulatory efforts".

Nader, locked out of the legislative process, decided to send a message to the Democrats. He went to New Hampshire and Massachusetts during the 1992 primaries and ran as "none of the above". In 1996 he allowed the Green Party to put his name on the ballot before running hard in 2000 in an effort that spooked the Democratic party.

The Democrats, fearful of his grassroots campaign, blamed him for the election of George W. Bush, an absurdity that found fertile ground among those who had abandoned rational inquiry for the thought-terminating clichés of television. Nader's status as a pariah corresponded with an unchecked assault by corporations on the working class.

The long-term unemployment rate, which in reality is close to twenty percent, the millions of foreclosures, the crippling personal debts that plague households, the personal bankruptcies, Wall Street's looting of the U.S. Treasury, the evaporation of savings and retirement accounts, and the crumbling of the country's vital infrastructure are taking place as billions in taxpayer subsidies, obscene profits, bonuses, and compensation are enjoyed by the corporate overlords.

Hedges, Chris (2013) *The World as it is: Dispatches on the Myth of Human Progress*. Nation Books, New York.

We will soon be forced to buy the defective products of the government-subsidized drug and health insurance companies, which will remain free to raise co-payments and premiums, especially if policyholders get seriously ill. The oil, gas, coal and nuclear power companies have made a mockery of Barack Obama's promises to promote clean, renewable energy.

And we are rapidly becoming a third-world country, cannibalized by corporations, with two-thirds of the population facing financial difficulty and poverty. The system is broken. And the consumer advocate who represented the best of our democracy was broken with it.

As Nader pointed out after he published *Unsafe at Any Speed* in 1965, it took nine months to federally regulate the auto industry for safety and fuel efficiency. The large hedge funds and banks are using billions in taxpayer subsidies to engage once again in the speculative games that triggered the first financial crisis and will almost certainly trigger a second.

The corporate media that abet our vast historical amnesia do nothing to remind us of how we got here. They speak in the hollow and empty slogans handed to them by public relations firms, their corporate paymasters, and the sound-bite society.

If you organize one percent of the people in this country along progressive lines, you can turn the country around, as long as you give them infrastructure, Nader said. "Take all the conservatives who work in Wal-Mart: How many of them would be against the living wage? Take all the conservatives who have pre-existing conditions: How many would be for single-payer, not-for-profit health insurance? When you get down to the concrete, when you have an active movement that is visible and media-savvy, when you have a community, a lot of people will join. And lots more will support it.

The problem is that most liberals are estranged from the working class. They largely have the good jobs. They are not hurting. The real tragedy is that citizen's movements should not have to rely on the commercial media and public television and radio are disgraceful. The right has won through intimidation.

### Noam Chomsky Has Never Seen Anything Like This

Noam Chomsky is America's greatest intellectual. His massive body of work includes nearly one hundred books, has for decades deflated and exposed the lies of the power elite and the myths they perpetrate. Chomsky has done this despite being blacklisted by the commercial media, turned into a pariah in the academy, and by his own admission, being a pedantic and at times a slightly boring speaker.

He combines moral autonomy with rigorous scholarship, a remarkable grasp of detail, and a searing intellect. He curtly dismisses our two-party system as a mirage orchestrated by the corporate state, excoriates the liberal intelligentsia for being fops and courtiers, and describes the drivel of the commercial media as a form of "brainwashing".

And as our nation's most prescient critic of unregulated capitalism, globalization and the poison of empire he warns us that we have little time left to save our anemic democracy. "It is very similar to late Weimar Germany", Chomsky says.

"The parallels are striking. There was also tremendous disillusionment with the parliamentary system. The most striking fact about Weimar was not that the Nazis managed to destroy the Social Democrats and the Communists, but that the traditional parties, the conservative and Liberal parties, were hated and disappeared.

It left a vacuum which the Nazis very cleverly and intelligently managed to take over. The United States is extremely lucky that no honest, charismatic figure has arisen", Chomsky goes on. "Every charismatic

figure is such an obvious crook that he destroys himself, like McCarthy or Nixon or the evangelist preachers”.

“If somebody comes along who is charismatic and honest, this country is in real trouble because of the frustration, disillusionment, the justified anger, and the lack of any coherent response. What are people supposed to think when someone says “I have got an answer, We have an enemy”?”

“There it was the Jews. Here it will be illegal immigrants and blacks. We will be told that white males are a persecuted minority. We will be told that we have to defend ourselves and the honor of the nation. Military force will be exalted. People will be beaten up”.

“This could become an overwhelming force. And if it happens it will be more dangerous than Germany. The United States is a world power. Germany was powerful but had more powerful antagonists. If the polls are accurate it is not the Republicans but the right-wing republicans, the crazed republicans, who will sweep the next election.

“I have never seen anything like this in my lifetime”, Chomsky says. “I am old enough to remember the 1930s. My whole family was unemployed. There were far more desperate conditions than today. But it was hopeful. People had hope. The Congress of Industrial Organizations was organizing.

No one says it anymore but the communist party was the spearhead for labour and civil rights organizing. Even things like giving my unemployed seamstress aunt a week in the country. It was a life. There is nothing like that now. The mood of the country is frightening.

The level of anger, frustration, and hatred of institutions is not organized in a constructive way. It is going off into self-destructive fantasies. I listen to talk radio”, Chomsky said. “I don’t want to hear Rush Limbaugh. I want to hear the people calling in. They are like suicide pilot Joe Stack, who crashed a plane into Austin Texas, government building on February 18, 2010. “What is happening to me? I have done all the right things. I am a God-fearing Christian. I work hard for my family. I have a gun. I believe in the values of the country, and my life is collapsing”.

Chomsky has, more than any other American intellectual, charted the downward spiral of the American political and economic system. He reminds us that genuine intellectual inquiry is always subversive. It challenges cultural and political assumptions. It critiques structures.

It is relentlessly self-critical. It explodes the self-indulgent myths and stereotypes we use to elevate ourselves and ignore our complicity in acts of violence and oppression. And it makes the powerful, as well as their liberal apologists, deeply uncomfortable.

Chomsky reserves his fiercest venom for the liberal elite in the media, the universities, and the political system, which serve as a smoke screen for the cruelty of unchecked capitalism and imperial war. He exposes their moral and intellectual posturing as a fraud.

And this is why Chomsky is hated, and perhaps feared, more among liberal elites than among the right wing he also excoriates. When Christopher Hitchens decided to become a windup doll for the Bush administration after the attacks of 9/11, one of the first things he did was write a vicious article attacking Chomsky.

Hitchens, unlike most of those he served, knew which intellectual in America mattered. “I don’t bother writing about Fox News”, Chomsky said. “It is too easy. What I talk about are the liberal intellectuals, the ones who portray themselves and perceive themselves as challenging power, as courageous, as standing up for truth and justice.

They are basically the guardians of the faith. They set the limits. They tell us how far we can go. They say, “Look how courageous I am”. But do not go one millimeter beyond that. At least for the educated sectors, they are the most dangerous in supporting power”.

Chomsky, because he steps outside of every group and eschews all ideologies, has been crucial to American discourse for decades, from his work on the Vietnam War to his criticisms of the Obama administration. He stubbornly maintains his position as an iconoclast, one who distrusts power in any form.

“Most intellectuals have a self-understanding of themselves as the conscience of humanity”, said middle east scholar Norman Finkelstein. “They revel in and admire someone like Vaclav Havel. Chomsky is contemptuous of Havel”.

“I try to encourage people to think for themselves, to question standard assumptions, chomsky said. “Don’t take assumptions for granted. Begin by taking a skeptical attitude toward anything that is conventional wisdom. Make it justify itself. It usually can’t. Be willing to ask questions about what is taken for granted.

“Try to think things through for yourself. There is plenty of information. You have got to learn how to judge, evaluate, and compare it with other things. You have to take some things for granted otherwise you can’t survive. But if there is something significant and important, don’t take it on trust.

“As soon as you read anything that is anonymous, you should immediately distrust it. If you read in the newspapers that Iran is defying the international community as, “Who is the international community?” India is opposed to sanctions. China is opposed to sanctions. Brazil is opposed to sanction.

“The non-Aligned Movement is vigorously opposed to sanctions and has been for years. Who is the international community, then? It is Washington and anyone else who happens to agree with it. You can figure that out, but you have to do the work. it’s the same on issue after issue”.

Chomsky’s courage to speak on behalf of those, such as the Palestinians, whose suffering is often minimized or ignored in mass culture holds up the possibility of a moral life. And perhaps even more than his scholarship, his example of intellectual and moral independence sustains all who defy the cant of the crowd to speak the truth.

“I cannot tell you how many people, myself included, and this is not hyperbole, whose lives were changed by him”, said Finkelstein, who has been driven out of several university posts for his intellectual courage and independence.

“Where it not for Chomsky I would have long ago succumbed. I was beaten and battered in my professional life. It was only the knowledge that one of the greatest minds in human history has faith in me that compensates for this constant, relentless, and vicious battering”.

“There are many people who are considered nonentities, the so-called little people of this world, who suddenly get an email from Noam Chomsky. It breathes new life into you. Chomsky has stirred many, many people to realize a level of their potential that would be forever lost”.

## **BP and the Little Eichmanns**

Cultures that do not recognize that human life and the natural world have a sacred dimension, an intrinsic value beyond monetary value, cannibalize themselves until they die. They ruthlessly exploit the natural world and the members of their society in the name of progress until exhaustion or collapse, blind to the fury of their own self-destruction.

The oil pouring into the Gulf of Mexico, estimated to be perhaps as much as 100,000 barrels a day, is part of our foolish death march. It is one more blow delivered by the corporate state, the trade of life for gold. But this time collapse, when it comes, will not be confined to the geography of a decaying civilization. It will be global.

Those who carry out this global genocide - men like BP's chief executive Tony Hayward, who, during the Gulf oil crisis, assured us that "The Gulf of Mexico is a very big ocean. The amount of oil and dispersant we are putting into it is tiny in relation to the total water volume" - are, to steal a line from Winston Churchill, "little Eichmanns."

They serve Thanos, the forces of death, the dark instinct Sigmund Freud identified within human beings that propels us to annihilate all living things, including ourselves. These deformed individuals lack the capacity for empathy. They are at once banal and dangerous.

They possess the peculiar ability to organize vast, destructive bureaucracies and yet remain blind to the ramifications. The death they dispense, whether in the pollutants and carcinogens that have made cancer an epidemic, or the deaths in 2008 of forty thousand Americans who could not afford proper medical care, is part of the cold and rational exchange of life for money.

The corporations, and those who run them, consume, pollute, oppress and kill. The little Eichmanns who manage them reside in a parallel universe of staggering wealth, luxury and splendid isolation that rivals that of the closed court of Versailles.

The elite, sheltered and enriched, continue to prosper even as the rest of us and the natural world start to die. They are numb. They will drain the last drop of profit from us until there is nothing left. And our business schools and universities churn out tens of thousands of these deaf, dumb, and blind systems managers, who are endowed with sophisticated management skills and the incapacity for common sense, compassion, or remorse.

These technocrats mistake the art of manipulation with knowledge. "The longer one listened to him, the more obvious it became that his inability to speak was closely connected with an inability to think, namely, to think from the standpoint of somebody else", Hannah Arendt wrote of Adolf Eichmann in her book *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A report on the Banality of Evil*.

"No communication was possible with him, not because he lied but because he was surrounded by the most reliable of all safeguards against words and the presence of others, and hence against reality as such". Our ruling class of technocrats is effectively illiterate.

One of the reasons that he is unable to recognize the necessary relationship between power and morality is that moral traditions are the product of civilization and he has little knowledge of his own civilization", Saul writes of the technocrat.

Saul calls these technocrats "hedonists of power" and warns that their "obsession with structures and their inability or unwillingness to link these to the public good make power an abstract force - a force that works, more often than not, at cross-purposes to the real needs of a painfully real world".

BP, which made \$6.1 billion in profits in the first quarter of 2009, never obtained permits from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration before putting its pollution well in place. The protection of the ecosystem did not matter. But BP is hardly alone.

Drilling with utter disregard to the ecosystem is common practice among oil companies, according to a report in the *New York Times*. Our corporate state has gutted environmental regulation as tenaciously as it has gutted financial regulation.

Hedges, Chris (2013) *The World as it is: Dispatches on the Myth of Human Progress*. Nation Books, New York.

Corporations make no distinction between our personal impoverishment and the impoverishment of the ecosystem that sustains the human species. And the abuse, of us and the natural world, was as rampant under Barack Obama as it was under George W. Bush.

The branded figure who sat in the white house was a puppet, a face used to mask an insidious system under which we as citizens have been disempowered and under which we become, along with the natural world, collateral damage.

As Karl Marx understood, unfettered capitalism is a revolutionary force. And this force is consuming us.

In his book *The Great Transformation*, written in 1944, Karl Polanyi laid out the devastating consequences that grow out of a so-called self-regulated free market. He grasped that “fascism, like socialism, was rooted in a market society that refused to function”.

He warned that a financial system always devolved, without heavy government control, into Mafia capitalism, and a Mafia political system, which is a good description of our corporate government. Polanyi warned that when nature and human beings are objects whose worth is determined by the market, then human beings and nature are destroyed.

Speculative excesses and growing inequality, he wrote, always dynamite the foundations for a continued prosperity and ensure “the demolition of society”.

“In disposing of a man’s labour power the system would, incidentally, dispose of the physical, psychological, and moral entity ‘man’ attaches to that tag”.

Robbed of the protective covering of cultural institutions, human beings would perish from the effects of social exposure; they would die as victims of acute social dislocation through vice, perversion, crime and starvation. Nature would be reduced to its elements, neighbourhoods and landscapes defiled, rivers polluted, military safety jeopardized, the power to produce food and raw materials destroyed.

Finally, the market administration of purchasing power would periodically liquidate business enterprise, for shortages and surfeits of money would prove as disastrous to business as floods and droughts in primitive society. Undoubtedly, labour, land, and money markets are essential to a market economy.

But no society could stand the effects of such a system of crude fictions even for the shortest stretch of time unless its human and natural substance as well as its business organizations were protected against the ravages of this satanic mill.

The corporate state is a runaway freight train. It shreds the Copenhagen Accords signed as part of the Kyoto climate protocols. It plunders the U.S. Treasury so speculators can continue to gamble with billions in taxpayer subsidies in our perverted system of casino capitalism.

It disenfranchises our working class, decimates our manufacturing sector, and denies us funds to sustain our infrastructure, public schools, and our social services. It poisons the planet. We are losing, every year across the globe, an area of farmland greater than Scotland to erosion and urban sprawl.

An estimated twenty five people will die every day somewhere in the world because of contaminated water. And some twenty million children are mentally impaired each year by malnourishment. America is dying in the manner in which all imperial projects die, Joseph Tainter, in his book “*The Collapse of Complex Societies*”, argues that the costs of running and defending an empire eventually become so burdensome, and the elite becomes so calcified, that it becomes more efficient to dismantle the imperial superstructures and return to local forms of organization.

Hedges, Chris (2013) *The World as it is: Dispatches on the Myth of Human Progress*. Nation Books, New York.

At that point, the great monuments to empire are abandoned, fall into disuse, and are overgrown. But this time around, Tainter warns, because we have nowhere left to migrate and expand, “world civilization will disintegrate as a whole”. This time around we will take the planet down with us.

We in the lucky countries of the west now regard our two-century bubble of freedom and affluence as normal and inevitable; it has even been called the ‘end’ of history, in both a temporal and teleological sense. Yet this new order is an anomaly: the opposite of what usually happens as civilizations grow.

Our age was bankrolled by the seizing of half the planet, extended by taking over most of the remaining half, and has been sustained by spending down new forms of natural capital, especially fossil fuels. In the New World, the west hit the biggest bonanza of all time. And there won’t be another like it.

The moral and physical contamination is matched by a cultural contamination. Our political and civil discourse has become gibberish. It is dominated by elaborate spectacles, celebrity gossip, the lies of advertising and scandal. The tawdry and the salacious occupy our time and energy. We do not see the walls falling around us.

We invest our intellectual and emotional energy in the inane and the absurd, the empty amusements that preoccupy a degenerate culture, so that when the final collapse arrives we can be herded, uncomprehending and fearful, into the inferno.

### **This Country Needs a Few Good Communists**

The witch hunts against communists in the United States were used to silence socialists, anarchists, pacifists, and all those who defied the abuses of capitalism. Those “anti-red” actions were devastating blows to the political health of the country. The communists spoke the language of class struggle.

They understood that Wall Street, along with corporations such as BP, is the enemy. They offered a broad social vision that allowed even the non-communist left to employ a vocabulary that made sense of the destructive impulses of capitalism.

But once the Communist Party, along with other radical movements, was eradicated as a social and political force, once the liberal class took government imposed loyalty oaths and collaborated in the witch hunts for phantom communist agents, we were robbed of the ability to make sense of our struggle.

We became fearful, timid, and ineffectual. We lost our voice and became part of the corporate structure we should have been dismantling. Hope in this age of bankrupt capitalism will come with the return of the language of class conflict.

It does not mean we have to agree with Karl Marx, who advocated violence and whose worship of the state as a utopian mechanism led to another form of enslavement of the working class, but we have to speak in the vocabulary Marx employed.

We have to grasp, as Marx did, that corporations are not concerned with the common good. They exploit, pollute, impoverish, repress, kill, and lie to make money. They throw poor families out of homes, let the uninsured die, wage useless wars to make profits, poison and pollute the ecosystem, slash social assistance programs, gut public education, trash the global economy, and crush all popular movements that seek justice for working men and women.

They worship only money and power. and, as Karl Marx knew, unfettered capitalism is a revolutionary force that consumes greater and greater numbers of human lives until it finally consumes itself. The nightmare in the Gulf of Mexico is the perfect metaphor for the corporate state. It is the same nightmare seen in abandoned steel mills in Ohio. It is a nightmare that Iraqis, Pakistanis, and Afghans, mourning their dead, live each day.

Capitalism was once viewed in America as a system that had to be fought. But capitalism is no longer challenged. And so, even as Wall Street steals billions of taxpayer dollars and the Gulf of Mexico is turned into a toxic swamp, we do not know what to do or say.

We decry the excesses of capitalism without demanding a dismantling of the corporate state. The liberal class has a misguided loyalty, illustrated by environmental groups that have refused to exorcise the Obama White House over the ecological catastrophe in the Gulf of Mexico.

Liberals bow before a Democratic Party that ignores them and does the bidding of corporations. The reflexive deference to the Democrats by the liberal class is the result of cowardice and fear. It is also the result of an infantile understanding of the mechanisms of power.

The divide is not between Republican and Democrat. It is a divide between the corporate state and the citizen. It is a divide between capitalists and workers. And, for all the failings of the communists, they got it. Unions, organizations formerly steeped in the doctrine of class struggle and filled with those who sought broad social and political rights for the working class, have been transformed into domesticated partners of the corporate state and the capitalist class.

They have been reduced to simple bartering tools. The social demands of unions early in the twentieth century that gave the working class weekends off, the right to strike, the eight-hour day, and Social Security have been abandoned.

Universities, especially in political science and economics departments, parrot the discredited ideology of unregulated capitalism and have no new ideas. Artistic expression, along with most religious worship, is largely self-absorbed narcissism.

The Democratic Party and the media have become corporate servants. The loss of radicals within the labour movement, the Democratic Party, the arts, the church, and the universities has obliterated one of the most important counterweights to the corporate state. And the purging of these radicals has left us unable to make sense of what is happening around us.

The fear of communism, like the fear of Islamic terrorism, has resulted in the steady suspension of civil liberties, including freedom of speech, habeas corpus, and the right to organize, values the liberal class claim to support. It was the orchestration of fear that permitted capitalists to ram through the Taft-Hartley Act in 1948 in the name of anticommunism, the most destructive legislative blow to the working class until NAFTA.

It was fear that created the Patriot Act, extraordinary rendition, offshore penal colonies where we torture, and the endless wars in the Middle East. And it was fear that was used to silence us as we were fleeced by Wall Street. If we do not stop being afraid and name our enemy, we will continue toward a state of neofeudalism.

The robber barons of the late nineteenth century used goons and thugs to beat up workers and retain control. The corporations, employing the science of public relations have used actors, artists, writers, scholars and film makers to manipulate and shape public opinion.

Corporations employ the college-educated liberal elite to saturate the culture with lies. The liberal class should have defied the emasculation of radical organizations, including the Communist Party. Instead, it was lured into the corporate embrace. It became a class of collaborators.

National cohesion, because our intellectual life has become so impoverished, revolves around the empty pursuits of mass culture, brands, consumption, status, and the bland uniformity of opinions disseminated by corporate-friendly courtiers. We speak and think in the empty slogans and clichés we are given. And they are given to us by the liberal class.

Hedges, Chris (2013) *The World as it is: Dispatches on the Myth of Human Progress*. Nation Books, New York.

The idea of a life dedicated to values that cannot possibly be realized by a commercial civilization - has gradually lost its allure. And, it is this, rather than the abandonment of a particular program, which constitutes our rout. The belief that capitalism is the unassailable engine of human progress is trumpeted through every medium of communication: official propaganda, institutional advertising and scholarly writings of people who, until a few years ago, were its major opponents.

The truly powerless people are these intellectuals - the new realists - who attach themselves to the seats of power, where they surrender their freedom of expression without gaining any significance as political figures.

It is crucial to the history of the American intellectuals in the past few decades that whenever they become absorbed into the accredited institutions of society they not only lose their traditional rebelliousness but to one extent or another, they cease to function as intellectuals.

The institutional world needs intellectuals because they are intellectuals but it does not want them as intellectuals. It beckons to them because of what they are but it will not allow them either to remain or entirely cease being what they are.

It needs them for their knowledge, their talent, their inclinations and passions; it insists that they retain a measure of these endowments, which it means to employ for its own ends, and without which intellectuals would be of no use to it whatever.

A simplified but useful equation suggests itself: the relation of the institutional world to the intellectuals is as the relation of middlebrow culture to serious culture, the one batters on the other, absorbs and raids it with increasing frequency and skill, subsidizes and encourages it enough to make further raids possible - at times the parasite will support its victim.

Surely this relationship must be one reason for the high incidence of neurosis that is supposed to prevail among intellectuals. A total estrangement from the sources of power and prestige, even a blind unreasoning rejection of every aspect of our culture, would be far healthier if only because it would permit a free discharge of aggression.

The liberal class prefers comfort to confrontation. It will not challenge the decaying structures of the corporate state. It is intolerant within its ranks of those who do. It has been exposed as a dead force in American politics. We must find our way back to the old radicals, to the discredited Marxists, socialists, and anarchists. Language is our first step toward salvation. We cannot fight what we cannot describe.

## Obama's Healthcare Bill Was Enough to Make You Sick

A close reading of Obama's healthcare bill was deeply depressing. The legislation not only mocked the lofty promises made by President Barack Obama, exposing most as lies, but sadly reconfirmed that our nation is hostage to unchecked corporate greed and abuse.

The simple truth, that single-payer, nonprofit health care for all Americans would dramatically reduce costs and save lives is censored out of the public debate by media that rely on these corporations as major advertisers and sponsors, as well as a morally bankrupt Democratic Party that is as bought off by corporations as the Republicans.

The two-thousand page piece of legislation would have left at least twenty-three million people without health insurance, a figure that translates into an estimated twenty-three thousand unnecessary deaths a year among people who cannot afford health care.

It would have permitted prices to climb so that many of us would be paying close to ten percent of our annual income to buy commercial health insurance. At least \$447 billion in taxpayer subsidies were handed to insurance firms. There was no check in the legislation to halt rising health-care costs.

Hedges, Chris (2013) *The World as it is: Dispatches on the Myth of Human Progress*. Nation Books, New York.

The elderly could be charged three times the rates provided to the young. Companies with predominately female workforces could be charged higher gender-based rates. The dizzying array of technical loopholes in the bill meant that these companies, which profit off human sickness, suffering, and death, could continue their grim game of trading away human life for money.

The legislation included a few tiny improvements used as bait to sell it to the public. The bill promised, for example, to expand community health centers and increase access to primary-care doctors. It allowed children to stay on their parent's plan until they turn twenty-six.

It included those with preexisting conditions in insurance plans, although many technicalities and loopholes made it easy for insurance companies to drop patients. Most of the more than thirty million people currently without insurance, and the forty-five thousand who die each year because they lack medical care, essentially remained out in the cold.

We live in fear of losing our health care. Millions of people have lost their health care. We fear bankruptcy. The inability to pay medical bills is the number one cause of bankruptcy. We fear not being able to afford medications. Millions of people skip medications. They skip these medications to the detriment of their health.

We are not free. And we won't be free until health care is a human right, until healthcare is not tied to a job, because we still have an employment based system, and until health care has nothing to do with immigration status.

We don't care if you are documented or undocumented. It should not matter what your health-care status is, if you have a disease or you don't. It should not matter how much money you have or don't, because many of our programs are based on income eligibility rules.

Until we abolish the private, for-profit health insurance industry in this country we are not free. Until we take the profit motive out of health care we cannot live the way we want to live. The legislation didn't do any of that. It didn't change those basic facts of our health care system.

Obama's numerous betrayals - from his failure to implement serious environmental reform at Copenhagen, to his expansion of the current wars, to his refusal to create jobs for our desperate class of unemployed and underemployed, to his gutting of public education, to his callous disregard for the rights of workers and funneling of trillions in taxpayer money to banks - is a shameful list.

Passing universal, single-payer, nonprofit health care for all Americans might have delivered to Obama, at least one worthwhile achievement. Single-payer, nonprofit health care has widespread popular support, with nearly two-thirds of the public behind it.

It is backed by fifty-nine percent of doctors. And it would have helped roll back, at least a bit, the corporate assault on the citizenry. Medical bills lead to sixty-two percent of personal bankruptcies, and nearly eight percent of these people had insurance.

The United States spends twice as much as other industrialized nations on healthcare. Private insurance, bureaucracy, and paper work consume thirty-one percent of every health-care dollar. Streamlining payment through a single nonprofit payer would save more than \$400 billion per year, enough to provide comprehensive, high-quality coverage for all Americans.

Candidate Obama promised to protect women's rights under Roe vs Wade, something that his legislation did not do. He told voters he would create a public option then refused to consider it. The health care reform bill saddled Americans with an expensive package of onerous individual mandates, new taxes on workers' health plans, countless sweetheart deals with the insurers and big pharma, and a perpetuation

of the fragmented, dysfunctional, and unsustainable system that is taking such a heavy toll on our health and economy today.

Obama said he was going to have everybody at the table but that was a lie. Our voice was not allowed to be there. We did not get media attention. There was a blackout on our movement. We did actions all over the country, but we could not get coverage. We had the “Mad as Hell” doctors go across the country in a caravan, and they had rallies and meetings.

If that had been a bunch of AMA republican doctors, the media would have been on the caravan reporting live. They turned us into a fringe movement, although poll after poll shows that the majority of people want some kind of single-payer system.

Our for-profit health system is driven by insurance companies whose goal is to avoid covering the elderly and the sick. These groups, most in need of medical care, diminish profits. Medicare, paid for by the government, removes responsibility for many of the old.

Medicaid, also paid for by the government, removes the poor people, who have a greater tendency to have chronic health problems. Hefty premiums, which those who are seriously ill and lose their jobs often cannot pay, remove the very sick.

If you are healthy and employed, which means you are less likely to need expensive or complex treatment, the insurance companies swoop down like birds of prey. These corporations need to control our perceptions of health care. Patients must be viewed as consumers. Doctors, identified as “health care providers” must be seen as salespeople.

Insurance companies, which will soon be able to use billions in taxpayer dollars to bolster their lobbying efforts know that single-payer, non profit insurance means their extinction. And they will employ considerable resources to make sure single-payer, non-profit coverage is denied to the public.

They correctly see this as a battle for their lives. And if human beings have to die so they can survive, they are willing to make us pay this price. The for-profit health-care industry, along with the Democratic Party, consciously set out to confuse the public debate.

It created Health Care for America NOW! in 2008 and provided it with tens of millions of dollars, supposedly to build a public campaign for a public option. But the organization had no intention of permitting a public option. The organization was a very clever way to distract members of the single-payer movement and co-opt some of them.

They told them that the public option would become single-payer, that is was a back door to single-payer, although there was no evidence that was true. Physicians for a National Health Plan attempted to fight back. It worked with a number of organizations under a coalition called the Leadership Conference for Guaranteed Health Care.

The group, which included the National Nurses Union and Health Care Now, sought meetings with members of Congress. But when the first debate on healthcare reform took place in the Senate Finance Committee, they were locked out.

Single-payer advocates were eventually heard by a few of the House and Senate committees. But the hearings were a charade, part of Washington’s cynical political theater. It was the insurance and pharmaceutical lobbyists who were in charge. They dominated the public debate. They wrote the legislation.

They determined who received lavish campaign contributions and who did not. And they won. We are talking about life and death. and once again it came down to the Democratic Party trumping the needs of the people.

## Calling All Future Eaters

The human species during its brief time on earth has exhibited a remarkable capacity to kill itself off. The Cro-magnons dispatched the gentler Neanderthals. The conquistadors, with the help of smallpox, decimated the native populations of the Americas.

Modern industrial warfare in the twentieth century took at least one hundred million lives, most of them civilians. And now we sit passive and dumb as corporations and the leaders of industrialized nations ensure that climate change will accelerate to levels that could mean the extinction of our species.

Homo sapiens, as the biologist Tim Flannery points out, are the “future-eaters”. In the past, when civilizations went belly up through greed, mismanagement and the exhaustion of natural resources, human beings migrated somewhere else to pillage anew.

But this time the game is over. There is nowhere else to go. The industrialized nations spent the last century seizing half the planet and dominating most of the other half. We giddily exhausted our natural capital, especially fossil fuel, to engage in an orgy of consumption and waste that poisoned the Earth and attacked the ecosystem on which human life depends.

It was quite a party if you were a member of the industrialized elite. But it was pretty stupid. Collapse this time round will be global. We will disintegrate together. And there is no way out. The ten-thousand year experiment of settled life is about to come to a crashing halt.

And humankind, which thought it was given dominion over the Earth and all living things, will be taught a painful lesson in the necessity of balance, restraint and humility. There is almost no human monument or city ruin that is more than five thousand years old.

Civilization occupies a mere 0.2 percent of the two and a half million years since our first ancestor sharpened a stone. Bye-bye, New York, Bye-bye, Paris. Bye-bye, Tokyo. Welcome to the new experience of human existence, in which rooting around for grubs on islands in Northern latitudes is the prerequisite for survival.

We view ourselves as rational creatures. But is it rational to wait like sheep in a pen as oil and natural gas companies, coal companies, chemical industries, plastics manufacturers, the automotive industry, arms manufacturers, and leaders of the industrial world, take us to mass extinction?

It is too late to prevent profound climate change. But why add fuel to the fire? Why allow our ruling elite, driven by the lust for profits, to accelerate the death spiral? Why continue to obey the laws and dictates from our executioners? The news is grim.

The accelerating disintegration of Arctic Ocean sea ice means that summer ice will probably disappear within the next decade. The open water will absorb more solar radiation, significantly increasing the rate of global warming. The Siberian permafrost will disappear, sending up plumes of methane gas from underground.

The Greenland ice sheet and the Himalayan-Tibetan glaciers will melt. The Arctic is often cited as the canary in the coal mine for climate warming. Now, as a sign of climate warming, the canary has died. It is time to start getting out of the coal mines.

But reality is rarely an impediment to human folly. The world's greenhouse gases have continued to grow. Global emissions of carbon dioxide from burning fossil fuels since 2000 have increased by three percent per year. At that rate, annual emissions will double every twenty five years.

For three million years, the natural carbon cycle has ensured that the atmosphere contained less than 300ppm of CO<sub>2</sub>, which sustained the wide variety of life on the planet. The idea now championed by our corporate elite, at least those in contact with the reality of global warming, is that we will intentionally overshoot 350 ppm and then return to a safer climate through rapid and dramatic emission cuts.

This, of course, is a theory designed to absolve the elite from doing anything now. But as Clive Hamilton writes in his book *Requiem for a Species: Why we resist the Truth about Climate Change*, even "if carbon dioxide concentrations reach 550 ppm, the global temperatures would continue to rise for at least another century.

Copenhagen was perhaps the last chance to save ourselves. Barack Obama and other leaders of the industrialized nations blew it. Radical climate change is certain. It is only a question now of how bad it will become. The engines of climate change will, climate scientists have warned, soon create a domino effect that could thrust the Earth into a chaotic state for thousands of years before it regains equilibrium.

Whether human beings would still be a force on the planet, or even survive, is a moot point. One thing is certain: there will be far fewer of us. We have fallen prey to the illusion that we can modify and control our environment, that human ingenuity ensures the inevitability of human progress, and that our secular god of science will save us.

The intoxicating belief that we can conquer all has come up against a greater force, the Earth itself. The prospect of runaway climate change challenges our technological hubris, our Enlightenment faith in reason and the whole modernist project.

The Earth may soon demonstrate that, ultimately, it cannot be tamed and that the human urge to master nature has only roused a slumbering beast. We face a terrible political truth. Those who hold power will not act with the urgency required to protect human life and the ecosystem.

Decisions about the fate of the planet and human civilization are in the hands of moral and intellectual trolls such as BP's Tony Hayward. These political and corporate masters are driven by a craven desire to accumulate wealth at the expense of human life.

They showed this drive everywhere in their handling of the mess they created in the Gulf of Mexico. China's transformation into totalitarian capitalism, done so world markets can be flooded with cheap consumer goods, is contributing to a dramatic rise in carbon dioxide emission, which in China are expected to be more than double by the year 2030.

The degradation of the planet by corporations is accompanied by a degradation of human beings. In the factories in Guangdong we see the face of our adversaries. The sociologist Ching Kwan Lee found "satanic mills" in China's industrial southeast that run "at such a nerve-racking pace that worker's physical limits and bodily strength are put to the test on a daily basis".

Some employees put in workdays of fourteen to sixteen hours, with no rest day during the month until payday. In these factories it is normal for an employee to work four hundred hours or more a month, especially those in the garment industry.

Most workers, Lee found, endure unpaid wages, illegal deductions, and substandard wage rates. They are often physically abused at work and do not receive compensation if they are injured on the job. Every year a dozen or more workers die from overwork in the city of Shenzhen alone.

Hedges, Chris (2013) *The World as it is: Dispatches on the Myth of Human Progress*. Nation Books, New York.

In Lee's words, the working conditions "go beyond the Marxist notions of exploitation and alienation". Each year scores of workers threaten to commit suicide, Lee writes, by jumping off high-rises or setting themselves on fire over unpaid wages.

"If getting paid for one's labour is a fundamental feature of capitalist-employee relations, strictly speaking many Chinese workers are not yet labourers", Lee writes. The leaders of these corporations now determine our fate. They are not endowed with human decency or compassion.

Yet their lobbyists make the laws. Their public relations firms craft the propaganda and trivia pumped out through systems of mass communication. Their money determines elections. Their greed turns workers into global serfs and our planet into a wasteland.

As climate change advances, we will face a choice between obeying the rules put in place by corporations or rebellion. Those who work human beings to death in overcrowded factories in China and turn the gulf of Mexico into a dead zone are the enemy.

They serve systems of death. They cannot be reformed or trusted. The climate crisis is a political crisis. We will either defy the corporate elite, which will mean civil-disobedience, a rejection of traditional politics for a new radicalism, and the systematic breaking of laws, or see ourselves consumed.

Time is not on our side. The longer we wait, the more assured our destruction becomes. The future, if we remain passive, will be wrested from us by events. Our moral obligation is not to structures of power, but to life.

### Do Not Pity the Democrats

There is no longer any major institutions in American society, including the media, the educational system, the financial sector, labour unions, religious institutions, and our dysfunctional political parties, that can be considered democratic.

The intent, design, and function of these institutions, controlled by corporate money, are to bolster the hierarchical and antidemocratic power of the corporate state. These institutions, often mouthing liberal values, abet and perpetuate mounting inequality. They operate increasingly in secrecy.

They ignore suffering or sacrifice human life for profit. They control and manipulate all levers of power and mass communication. They have muzzled the voices and concerns of citizens. They use entertainment, celebrity gossip, and emotionally-laden public relations lies to seduce us into believing in a Disneyworld fantasy of democracy.

The menace we face does not come from the insane wing of the Republican Party. Do not fear Glenn Beck or Sarah Palin. Do not fear the Tea Party movement, the "birthers", the legions of conspiracy theorists, or the militias. Fear the underlying corporate structure, which no one, from Barack Obama to the right-wing nut cases who pollute the airwaves, can alter.

If the hegemony of the corporate state is not soon broken, we will descend into a technologically enhanced age of barbarism. Investing emotional and intellectual energy in electoral politics is a waste of time. Resistance means a radical break with the formal structures of American society.

We must cut as many ties with consumer society and corporations as possible. We must build a new political and economic consciousness centered on the tangible issues of sustainable agriculture, self-sufficiency, and radical environmental reform.

The democratic system, like the liberal institutions that once made piecemeal reform possible, is dead. It exists only in name. It is no longer a viable mechanism for change. And the longer we play our scripted and absurd role in this charade, the worse it will get.

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Do not pity the democratic party. They will get what they deserve. They sold the citizens out for cash and power. They lied. They manipulated and deceived the public, from the bailouts to the abandonment of universal health care, to serve corporate interests.

They refused to halt the wanton corporate destruction of the ecosystem on which all life depends. They betrayed the ideals of democracy. And they, as much as the republicans, are the problem. All resistance will take place outside the arena of electoral politics.

The more we expand community credit unions, community health clinics, and food cooperatives, and build alternative energy systems, the more empowered we will become. The failure of liberals to defend the interests of workingmen and women as our manufacturing sector was dismantled, labour unions were destroyed, and social services were slashed has proved to be a disastrous and fatal misjudgment.

Liberals, who betrayed the working class, have no credibility. This is one of the principal reasons the antiwar movement cannot attract the families whose sons and daughters are fighting and dying in Iraq and Afghanistan. The liberal hypocrisy has opened the door for a virulent right wing.

If we are to reconnect with the working class we will have to begin from zero. We will have to rebuild the ties with the poor and the working class the liberal establishment has severed. We will have to condemn the liberal class as vociferously as we condemn the right wing.

We will have to remain true to the moral imperative to foster the common good and the tangible needs of housing, health care, jobs, education and food. If we express the legitimate rage of the dispossessed working class as our own, if we denounce and refuse to cooperate with the Democratic Party, we can begin to impede the march of the right-wing trolls who seem destined to inherit power.

If we again prove compliant we will discredit the socialism we should be offering as an alternative to a perverted Christian and corporate fascism. The Tea Party movement is a conviction revolt. Most of the participants in the Tea party rallies are not poor. They are small business people and professionals.

They feel that something is wrong. They see that the two parties are equally responsible for the subsidies and bailouts, the wars and the deficits. They know these parties must be replaced. The corporate state, whose interests are being championed by Tea Party leaders, is working hard to make sure the anger of the movement is directed towards government rather than corporations and Wall Street.

And if these corporate apologists succeed, a more overt form of corporate fascism will emerge without a socialist counterweight. "Poor people do not organize", Nader lamented. "They never have. It has always been people who have fairly good jobs. You don't see Wal-Mart workers massing anywhere.

"The people who are most militant are the people who had the best blue-collar jobs. Their expectation level was high. When they felt their jobs were jeopardized they got really angry. But when you are on \$7.25 an hour you want to hang on to \$7.25 an hour. It is a strange thing".

People have institutionalized oppressive power in the form of surrender. It is not that they like it. But what are you going to do about it? You make the best of it. The system of control is staggeringly dictatorial. It breaks new ground and innovates in ways no one in human history has ever innovated.

You start in American history where these corporations have influence. Then they have lobbyists. Then they run candidates. Then they put their appointments in top government positions. Now, they are actually operating the government.

The corporate state is the ultimate maturation of American-type fascism. They leave wide areas of personal freedom so that people can confuse personal freedom with civic freedom - the freedom to go where you want, eat where you want, work where you want, sleep when you want, play when you want.

If people have given up on any civic or political role for themselves, there is a sufficient amount of elbow room to get through the day. They do not have the freedom to participate in the decisions about war, foreign policy, domestic health and safety issues, taxes or transportation.

That is its genius. But one of its Achilles' heels is that the price of the corporate state is a deteriorating political economy. They can't stop their greed from getting the next morsel. The question is, at what point are enough people going to have a breaking point in terms of their own economic plight? At what point will they say enough is enough?

It is anti-corporate movements as exemplified by the Scandinavian energy firm Kraft&Kultur that we must emulate. Kraft&Kultur sells electricity exclusively from solar and water power. It has begun to merge clean energy activities with cultural events, bookstores, and political consciousness that actively defies corporate hegemony.

The failure of the Obama administration to use the bailout and stimulus money to build public works such as schools, libraries, roads, clinics, highways, public transit has snuffed out any hope of serious economic, political, or environmental reform coming from the centralized bureaucracy of the corporate state.

And since the government did not hire enough auditors and examiners to monitor how the hundreds of billions of taxpayer funds funneled into Wall Street were being spent, we will soon see reports of widespread mismanagement and corruption.

The rot and corruption at the top levels of our financial and political systems, coupled with the increasing deprecation felt by tens of millions of Americans, are volatile tinder for a horrific right-wing backlash in the absence of a committed socialist alternative.

We do not have much time left. And the longer we refuse to confront corporate power, the more impotent we become as society breaks down. The game of electoral politics, given legitimacy by the right and so-called left on the cable news shows, is just that - a game.

It diverts us from what should be our daily task: dismantling, piece by piece, the iron grip that corporatism holds over our lives. Hope is a word that is applicable only to those who grasp reality, however bleak, and do something meaningful to fight back - which does not include the farce of elections and involvement in mainstream political parties.

Hope involves fighting against the real forces of destruction, not chanting "Yes We Can!" in rallies orchestrated by marketing experts, television crews, pollsters, and propagandists. Hope, in the hands of realists, spreads fear into the black heart of the corporate elite. But hope, real hope, remains thwarted by our collective self-delusion.

## Israel and Palestine

### Mutually Assured Destruction

Israel's air, land, and sea blockade of Lebanon, which included jet fighter strikes against the airport in Beirut, presaged a new era in the Middle East, one in which the center has collapsed and Muslim and Jewish extremists, capable only of the language of violence, determined the parameters of existence.

These strikes, like the suicide bombings carried out by Islamic militants in Iraq and Israel, exposed the Ahab-like self-immolation that inflected the region. And unless it is halted soon, unless those fueling these conflicts learn to speak another language, unless they break free from an indulgence in collective necrophilia, the Middle East will slip into a death spiral.

The crisis was a long time coming. The Bush administration never had any interest in helping broker Middle East peace agreements. This willful negligence was seen as befriending Israel, along with the bizarre demands of the Christian Right.

In fact, the administration befriended only an extreme political wing in Israel that had done a pretty effective job of endangering the Jewish state by dismantling all mechanisms for peace and turning Israel into an international pariah. As the machinery of Middle East diplomacy rusted shut with disuse, it was gleefully replaced by harsher Israeli closures, curfews, shelling, and air strikes.

Palestinians have been reduced by Israel to a subsistence existence matched only by that in the poorer African countries. The tools of repression against Palestinians now match those once imposed on South African blacks by the apartheid regime, with the exception that the South African government never sent war planes to bomb townships.

And why should this not be so. In this binary worldview, force is the only thing Arabs understand. This logic only fuels those in the Arab world who also speak exclusively in the language of violence. The escalating repression by the U.S. occupiers in Iraq, has become the most potent recurring tool for Islamic extremists.

It has rendered each side deaf and dumb. As those under the boot of Israel or the United States lose all hope for justice, as they give up on peaceful recourse to ameliorate their plight, as they fall into despair, despair throws them by default, into the hands of extremists.

And as the extremists grow and their attacks become more deadly, this despair likewise helps silence those in Israel and the United States who call for compassion, restraint and understanding. It is difficult to argue with those holding up bloodied corpses. Each side finds it useful to keep the supply coming.

In this demented world, friend and foe need each other. Hamas and Hezbollah yearn, on some level, for Israeli air strikes against civilians just as the hard right in Israel yearns, in some dark way, for suicide bombers. The indiscriminate violence of one justifies the indiscriminate violence of the other.

The violence stokes the fear that is the driving force behind all messianic, violent movements - American, Jewish, and Muslim. And since these groups have nothing to offer other than violence, they need fear to keep those around them compliant.

The atrocities committed by one, real or imagined, make possible the atrocities of the other. Does anyone in the Israeli government really believe that attacking Lebanon and killing more than sixty Lebanese civilians will ensure the freedom of the two captured Israeli soldiers?

Hostages, including Israeli hostages, have been taken captive in Lebanon before, and most have been freed through long and painful negotiations. If the Israelis do believe in the violent path they have taken, it is a sad indication of how out of touch they are with the world that opposes them.

We cannot ascribe equal amounts of moral blame to all sides. Israel is the oppressor in Gaza, the West Bank, and now Lebanon. The United States is the oppressor in Iraq. And there can be no hope for a peaceful resolution to these conflicts until Iraqis are freed from U.S. occupation and Palestinians are allowed to build a viable state.

The distorting and dehumanizing effects of occupation made possible the proliferation of extremist groups that, albeit on a smaller scale, simply hand back to the occupiers some of their own medicine. The numbers, after all, make clear that most of the victims are Palestinian, Iraqi, and now Lebanese civilians, although the numbers game can also obscure the fact that the murder of any innocent by any group is indefensible.

This is the world of the apocalypse. It is the world where those on either extreme become indistinguishable. And if we do not find a new way to speak, and soon, there will be untold suffering - not only for many innocents in the Middle East but also eventually innocents at home.

It was the Israeli occupation of southern Lebanon that spawned and empowered Hezbollah. It was the decades-long occupation and humiliation of Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank by Israel that spawned and empowered Hamas, and it is the brutal U.S. occupation that has bred legions of extremists in Iraq.

and when Hezbollah promises "open war" against Israel, it is time to run for cover, especially when George W. Bush was our best hope for peace.

### Israel's Barrier to Peace

There is a twenty-five-foot high concrete wall in Nuhayla Auynaf's front yard. Auynaf lives with the wall. She is as drawn to it as she is repelled by it. It absorbs her. She goes out on her second-floor balcony every morning and looks at it. She implores it for answers, as if it is a Sphinx that will answer the riddle of her new existence.

"my old life ended with the wall", She says. The wall, built by Israel a year before, blocked her from the neighbouring Israeli town of Kfar Saba, where she used to shop. It cut her off from Israel. It made it hard to reach the rest of the rest bank.

The lone Israeli checkpoint with its guard towers, floodlights, concrete barriers, dust, stench, crowds, special pass cards, intrusive searches, and rude remarks by border police, were more than she could bear. She tried to pass through once. "I could not stand the humiliation", she says. "I turned back. I sent home. Now I never leave".

The wall reduces her world to its ugly perimeter. Her five boys beg to go to the seaside. The wall makes this impossible. No one goes to the sea anymore. There are days when the checkpoint is sealed, days after suicide bombings, or days when the Israeli soldiers shut it down abruptly without explanation.

on those days she sometimes gathers up her children and walks the empty streets, wandering like prisoners in a circle. Other families do the same. It gives her a sense of movement. Families pass each other two, three, four times in an afternoon. All are thinking the same thoughts.

Her son Ibrahim, six, sits on her lap. He has a scar on his leg. He was shot two years ago by Israeli soldiers. He does not like to leave home. The world frightens him. The family was one of the wealthiest in Qalqilyah before the wall ruined them.

They spent \$200,000 on their home. Once the wall went up the family car parts business was wiped out. Aynaf's husband makes less than ten percent of what he once earned. He cannot reach suppliers. Customers, those in Israel and those in other areas of the West Bank, can no longer get to his store.

She hangs laundry on the balcony. Her only view is the wall. "I live in a zoo", she says. "They come and watch me. I am a caged animal. They have the freedom to come and go, to look or not look, to be kind or cruel. I have no freedom".

She fears madness. She points to an elderly woman 200 feet away squatting under a fig tree. "The wall was the end", she says. "When it was finished she went mad". When Israelis built the wall they seized her land. She was left with a small garden lot.

Her fields, the ones where she worked as a girl are inaccessible. They belong to Israel now. Much of what she says is incoherent. She spits out the names of Ariel Sharon and George Bush and Yasir Arafat, hissing with anger. "I am a bird in a net", the old woman whispers.

Qalqilyah is a ghetto. It is completely surrounded by the wall. Only those with special Israeli-issued permits can go in and out of Qalqilyah. Qalqilyah, like all ghettos is dying. And it is being joined by dozens of other ringed ghettos as the serpentine barrier snakes its way up and down two sides of the West Bank gobbling up Palestinian land and lays down nooses around Palestinian cities, towns, villages, and fields.

Construction began on the barrier in 2002 with the purported intent of safeguarding Israel from suicide bombers and other types of attacks. If and when the barrier is completed, it will see the West Bank cut up into three large enclaves and numerous small, ringed ghettos.

There were, before the wall was built, forty-two thousand people living here. Mayor Maa'rouf Zahran says at least six thousand have left. Many more, with an unemployment rate close to seventy percent, will follow.

There are hundreds of acres of farmland on the other side of the wall, some of the best farmland in the West Bank, harder and harder to reach given the gates, checkpoints and closures. There are some thirty two farming villages on the outskirts of Qalqilyah, cut off from their land, sinking into poverty and despair.

Olive groves, with trees hundreds of years old, have been uprooted and bulldozed into the ground. The barrier is wiping out the middle class in the West Bank, the last bulwark against Islamic fundamentalism. It is plunging the West Bank into the squalor that defines life in the Gaza Strip, where Palestinians struggle to live on less than \$2 a day. It is the Africanization of Palestinian land.

It is also ethnic cleansing, less overtly violent than that carried out by the Serbs in Bosnia, but as effective. Thousands of Palestinians have left, never to return. Cities such as Bethlehem are emptying. This, Palestinians say, is the real goal: to make life impossible and force them to leave.

The Israelis, who have thought hard about making the project as linguistically benign as possible, call the barrier "the seam line". They insist that it is not meant to be a border. They say it will make Israel more secure.

They said that once Gaza is enclosed, suicide attacks from the Gaza Strip would end. They promise that once the West Bank is sealed off, terrorists will not be able to cross into Israel. The promise of security for the weary Israeli populace is like manna from heaven.

This assumes, of course, that the barrier will separate Palestinians from Jews. It ignores the one million Israeli Arabs living inside Israel, some of whom have already elected to use their bodies as weapons. It

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ignores the presence of Jewish settlers in some two hundred settlements who live within yards of Palestinians.

But most ominously, it ignores the consequences of total enclosure. The West Bank, like Gaza, will erupt with high-octane rage. Hamas was an insignificant group with little following in 1988. The Islamist radicals are now the vanguard of the resistance.

Every pillar of concrete driven into the soil of the West Bank will bring forth screeching bands of killers. It happened in Gaza. It will happen here. Security will never come with the barrier, but then, security is not the point. What is happening is much more insidious.

If the barrier is being built for security, why is so much of the West Bank being confiscated by Israel? Why is the barrier plunging in deep loops into the West Bank to draw far-flung settlements into Israel? Why are thousands of acres of the most fertile farmland and so many of the West Bank's aquifers being seized by Israel?

The barrier does not run along the old 1967 border or the 1949 armistice line between Israel and the Arab states, which, in the eyes of the United Nations, delineates Israel from the West Bank. It will contain at least fifty percent of the West Bank, including the whole of the Western Mountain Aquifer, which supplies the West Bank Palestinians with more than half their water.

The barrier is the most catastrophic blow to the Palestinians since the 1967 occupation of the West Bank and Gaza. The barrier itself mocks any claim that it is temporary. It cost \$1 million per mile. It cuts the entire 224-mile length of the West Bank off from Israel, but because of its diversions into the West Bank to incorporate Palestinian land, it will be about 400 miles in length.

A second barrier is being built on the Jordan river beside the West Bank. To look at the map of the barrier is to miss the point. The barrier interconnects with every other piece of Israeli-stolen real estate in Palestinian territory.

And when all the pieces are in place, the Israelis will no doubt offer up the little ringed puddles of poverty and despair and misery to the world as a Palestinian state. The small town of Mas'ha lies in the path of the barrier.

It has been in decline since the start of the uprising, when Israel blocked the road leading down from the town to Tel Aviv. The closure ended the businesses of the dozens of fruit and vegetable sellers who lined the road with shops and markets.

The closure trapped most Palestinians inside the West Bank, and because of this the barrier for Israelis is an abstraction. It does not slice through any Israeli land. It does not change Israeli life. It only solidifies the status quo.

"Thousands of us have been denied entry visas by the Israelis at the airport", says Munir Ibrahim Amer. "Many of us who get picked up are deported. If I give you my name I will be on their blacklist. They will not let me in. They will put a "No Entry" stamp on my passport".

She had been in and out of Palestine, she says, for more than a year. She was one of the first internationals to get into the Jenin refugee camp after the April 2002 Israeli attack against armed militants that left scores dead and sections of the camp destroyed.

"I could not breathe because of the smell of dead bodies", she says. "I saw children collect body parts for their parents. None of us could eat. It was terrible. And the world stood by and did nothing".

She was an Islamic studies major. She speaks Arabic. She became involved in protests in Italy against the Occupation. She joined a group called International Women's Peace Service, which sends activists to protest the construction of what it terms "the apartheid wall".

She has been in and out of the West Bank and Gaza for more than a year, surviving on the meager funds from the organization. The activists surround the house when the bulldozer lumbers through the yard on the way to grade the track on the hill below.

Three activists chain themselves to a shed next to the house when they think the bulldozer might turn to attack. When Maria speaks of the bulldozer, it is as if it is a living object, some Leviathan rising out of the bowels of the earth to swallow up Palestine.

"When we do an action it is beautiful", she says. "It is what life is about, living together, not fighting simply for our own happiness. The real pursuit of happiness is not about making me happy. It is about living together and sharing".

There is the sudden roar and screech of army jeeps. A dozen Israeli soldiers pile out of the vehicles in helmets and flak jackets. They spread out along the road, facing the activists, who are now roused from their mattresses.

The soldiers cradle black M16 assault rifles. "Oh Hell", she says quickly, pushing the start button on her camera and pointing down at the scene below us, "and another jeep is coming, I have to call the media office and alert them".

The ragged band of forty-five activists spread out in the yard. The soldiers watch, silent, bemused, the way a child watches a line of ants he is about to crush. In a few moments the soldiers depart.

The activists wait in the sun for a few minutes and then go back under the tarps. They begin to discuss tactics. Someone proposes singing "Give Peace a Chance" if the soldiers come again. Another suggests building a small model of a Palestinian village in the path of the bulldozer.

They begin a heated discussion over what to write on their banners. When people agree, rather than clap, they raise their arms and flutter their fingers. A member of the group suggests they write condemnations of the wall uttered by world leaders including President Bush.

The mention of the American president raises the temperature of the debate. "I spent ten years working in Saudi Arabia to buy this land and start our nursery", says Hani. "In a few hours the Israelis bulldozed my greenhouses and my plants into the ground".

The family moved into the house in 1981. They made a decent living. They had many Israeli customers. They grew things. "A year ago army jeeps appeared in the village and scattered leaflets around the mosque", he says. "Soldiers came to our house. They told us our house was in the way of the fence and would be demolished. They said they would compensate us".

But he does not believe them. He says the Israelis determine the worth of the land and property, and he says other Palestinians tell him the Israelis usually never pay: "They will build their wall", he says, "and they will take revenge on me and my family for allowing these internationals to protect us. They will demolish my home".

There are tens of thousands of Palestinians whom Israeli courts have declared squatters in their own homes, homes they were born and raised in, homes that have been in the family for generations.

Youssif was born in the hamlet. As far as he can tell, his family has been here for 180 years, but probably longer. He owns about one hundred acres of olive groves, making him one of the largest landowners here. When they were occupied by Israeli troops in 1967 they were given Israeli identification cards. Hedges, Chris (2013) *The World as it is: Dispatches on the Myth of Human Progress*. Nation Books, New York.

The cards said they were residents of the West Bank. "It all began to change after the start of the first Palestinian uprising in 1987," Youssif says. Israeli officials forbade any new construction. When anyone tried to build a house or expand existing ones, Israeli bulldozers tore the structures down.

After the Oslo peace agreement the pressure eased, only to come back in greater force with the latest uprising. The road was closed. The children in the village, who formerly had gone to Jerusalem for their schooling, were barred from the city. The Israelis expanded the boundaries of the Jerusalem municipality.

The farmers have become west bank squatters, illegally encamped inside Israel. It is a neat little legal trick. Members of the community pooled their money to hire an Israeli lawyer. But even when they get to the Supreme Court, even when they result in a decision in favour of the Palestinians, cases can be immediately overruled by the state on grounds of national security.

National security, as in the U.S., is the god destroying us all. "I am not allowed to be on my own land, according to Israeli law", Youssif says. Youssif pulls out a topographical map. It is marked with colored zones and lines to indicate settlements, the barrier under construction around Jerusalem, the land that has been confiscated, the land that will be confiscated, and the new demarcation lines for the hamlet.

The blue line, he explains, is the new boundary for Jerusalem. The hamlet is within the boundary. The yellow line is the barrier, which, when we look up, we can see being built down the hill in front of a new hilltop settlement.

He traces his finger around the roads, the settlements, and the barrier to show how the hamlet will be encircled, how he and his neighbours will soon lose nearly all their land and live illegally in a ghetto with no running water.

Most Palestinians carry maps. They keep them tucked into their shirt pockets and pull them out at the slightest provocation. They spread them on the ground and chart for you the course of their own demise. It happens so often it gets boring. The ritual is repeated over and over and seems to be part of the struggle to cope with the scale and horror of what is happening.

A group of Israeli soldiers appeared in the hamlet four months ago. They said Israel was willing to compensate farmers whose homes had been built before 1992. They told the farmers to submit compensation forms. The army would determine the price to be paid.

The other homes, they said, would be demolished. If any home was built after 1992, the family would receive nothing. None of the farmers filed for compensation. Then the physical harassment began. Soldiers arrived early one morning in July, roused six farmers from their beds, and drove them to a nearby military outpost.

They were told they would be released when they signed papers saying they would not enter Israeli territory. The farmers signed the papers. They spent the rest of the night walking home. "I signed", says Abid Ataya, "I didn't realize that according to them I live in an Israeli area".

Soldiers come frequently to demand other signatures. They were there the night before, their jeeps roaring into the hamlet at 2:30am. The soldiers handcuffed twenty farmers and took them to the military outpost. All refused to sign. In the morning, after squatting all night outside the compound, they were released.

"The soldiers laughed at us", Mahmoud Ali Hussein, 43, says. "They told us when the wall was finished we would not be able to enter Israel or the West Bank. They told us we would have no land. They sent us home and told us to wait. They said our time is almost up".

The farmers sit, bewildered, trying to comprehend it all, the ability to declare reality to be one way when it is another, the ability to swiftly and irrevocably destroy their life, the only life they have known. “Does a condemned prisoner sign an agreement authorizing his own execution?”, asks Mahmoud.

“Too much pressure makes explosions. When you deny us education, medical care, and work, what do you think we will do? When you take our homes and our land from us, when we cannot feed our families, when you strip us of our dignity, how do you think we will behave?”

Allegra is a Jew. She met her husband Abed in 1996, when he was under interrogation and being tortured. “He was then sent to two and a half years of administrative detention, and I continued to represent him. When he was released, helped me set up my law office and worked with me. That’s how we fell in love”, she says.

They married and spent their honeymoon trapped in their apartment under almost continuous curfew. She was eight months pregnant when Abed was arrested for the thirteenth time. He was set to a prison at Ofra. He is held on “secret evidence”, which means he has not been told the charges against him.

Abed has never been sentenced. His six-month military detention order had been extended for another six months in June. It, too, was done in secret. It can be renewed indefinitely. Amnesty International has adopted him as a prisoner of conscience.

His health is precarious. When he was sixteen, he was arrested for throwing stones at Israeli soldiers, He was tied to a chair in contorted positions. His back and stomach were under tremendous pressure. He was in great pain. His head was covered with a bag soaked in urine.

Allegra has sued the army for the torture he underwent in 1996. He was also tortured on three other occasions while in detention. “They have told him he will be released if we drop the lawsuit”, she says. “He will not”.

She is an Israeli citizen, but because her husband is Palestinian, because of his ethnicity, he is refused citizenship. She was born in Long Island. He was born here. This is how it works in Israel. Israel is a democracy only for Jews. If she had married a Jew he would have a passport and citizenship.

“What democratic state builds its laws based on a person’s ethnicity?” she asks. “The goal of the South African apartheid regime was to separate whites and blacks to preserve white privilege. How is this different from what is being done to the Palestinians?”.

“Who is really being shut out by this wall?”, she adds. “Whos is being shut in? Israel will be a closed society when the wall is finished. It will even further shun reality”.

There is no escape. The barrier is closing in from every side, grinding and crushing everything in its path. There is a feeling of claustrophobia, the sense of inevitable doom, the awful fatalness of it all. Palestinians cling to what they have like shipwrecked sailors cling to the hull of a sinking boat. There is mass migration. They are being forced from their homes.

Some have moved into their fields. They have set up squalid little encampments in vegetable patches. It is their last stand. The roadblocks and checkpoints mean that farmers cannot get their produce to urban areas in the West Bank. Israeli suppliers, who can use the settler roads, have now taken over these markets.

Because vegetables are bottled up in agricultural areas, prices have plummeted. “We may not have enough money next year to plant a crop”, Youssif says. “If anyone touches the fence”, says Jamal Hassouna, “even a child, they are not allowed to pass. Every soldier is a little Ariel Sharon”.

Two green armored jeeps from the Border Police roar down the asphalt strip enclosed by the two electric fences. They halt and five policemen climb out. They hold their M16s at an angle. They are wearing helmets. One soldier watched by two others, goes to open the padlock on the gate on the other side.

He swings the gate open and the motley crowd walks out into the empty space, across the tarred road and the dirt road to the yellow gate on the other side. They show the police their special permits before they are allowed through the yellow gate.

The police are silent. But on many nights the farmers are insulted, cursed, made to lift their shirts, or humiliated by being told they have to crawl through the gates. To spare themselves the harassment, wives and children no longer cross.

There are many farmers who, although they are never told why, are no longer allowed to pass. Their fields are dying. Iyad Abu Hamdi was tending his crop of peppers a few days ago when a patrol of the border police arrived in his field.

The two policemen began to make lewd remarks to his wife, who was working with him. They ordered her to make coffee. She obeyed. They ordered her sister to bring them water. She refused. They threw their thermos at his brother and told him to fill it with water. He also refused.

“They began to beat my brother”, Hamid says. “They tossed the coffee in our faces. They cursed us. They shouted at us. They confiscated our identification cards. The soldiers told my wife to accept their advances or they would ruin her reputation”.

When he says, “accept their advances”, his voice quivers with emotion and he turns his head away. “This happened on August 3”, he began again. “I have not been allowed to cross since. They slam the gate shut in my face. My crop is dying”.

The tears roll down his cheeks. They, too, are serpent’s teeth.

## Coveting the Holocaust

Norman Finkelstein, who for his writings has been virtually black-listed in some political and intellectual circles, noted in his book “The Holocaust Industry” that the Jewish Holocaust has allowed Israel to cast itself and “the most successful ethnic group in the United States” as eternal victims.

Finkelstein, son of Jewish survivors of the Nazi Holocaust, goes on to argue that this status has enabled Israel, which has “a horrendous human rights record”, to play the victim as it oppresses Palestinians. The victim status has permitted U.S. Jewish organizations to get their hands on billions of dollars in reparations, much of which never finds its way to the dwindling number of Holocaust survivors.

Finkelstein’s mother, who was in the Warsaw ghetto, received \$3,500, while the World Jewish Congress walked away with roughly \$7 billion in compensation. The organization pays lavish salaries to its employees and uses the funds to fuel its own empire. For many the Nazi Holocaust is used not to understand and deal with the past, but to manipulate the present.

Finkelstein correctly writes that the fictitious notion of “unique suffering leads to feelings of unique entitlements”. There is a fine and dangerous line between the need for historical truth and public apology and the gross misuse of human tragedy.

Historical amnesia, as anyone who has lived in the Middle East or the Balkans knows, makes reconciliation and healing impossible. It fosters a dangerous sense of grievance and rage. It makes any real dialogue impossible. Nearly one hundred years after the murderous rampage by the Turks, it can still be a crime to name the Armenian holocaust under Article 301 of the Turkish Penal Code. Article 301

Hedges, Chris (2013) *The World as it is: Dispatches on the Myth of Human Progress*. Nation Books, New York.

prohibits anyone from defaming Turkey. One of the most courageous violators of that law is the writer Orhan Pamuk, who has criticized his country's refusal to confront its past, and who won the 2006 Nobel Prize in Literature.

But he is a solitary figure in Turkey. Historical black holes also empower those who insist that the Nazi Holocaust is unique, that it is somehow beyond human comprehension and stands apart from other human activity. These silences make it easier to turn tragedy into myth.

They make it easier to misread the real lesson of the Holocaust, which is that the line between the victim and the victimizer is razor-thin. Most of us can be seduced and manipulated into killing our neighbors. Few are immune. The communists, not the Jews, were the Nazis' first victims, and the handicapped were the first to be gassed in the German death factories.

This is not to minimize the suffering of the Jews, but these victims, too, deserve attention. And what about Roma, homosexuals, prisoners of war, and German political dissidents? What, on a wider scale, about the Cambodians, the Rwandans, and the millions more who have been slaughtered by utopian idealists who believe the eradication of other human beings will cleanse the world?

What about the Palestinians who lived in Palestine and were soon to be pushed off their land? and, as important, what about African Americans and Native Americans? Why should billions in reparations be paid to Jewish slave laborers and not a dime to those enslaved by our own country?

These questions circle back to the dangerous sanctification of any genocide, the belief that one ethnic group can represent goodness, solely because its members are victims, and another evil because from its ranks come the thugs who carry out mass slaughter.

Once these demented killing machines begin their work, the only thing unique is the method of murder. The lesson of any genocide is not that one group of human beings is better than another, but that in the intoxication of the moment, gripped by the mass hypnosis of state propaganda and the lust for violence, we can all become killers.

All the victims must be heard. None are unique. And all of us have to be on guard lest we be seduced. We carry within us - German, Jew, Armenian, or Christian - dark and dangerous lusts that must be held in check. When we sanctify ourselves we do so at the expense of others.

## Bring Down the Wall

The last hope of halting Israel's steady ghettoization of Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza Strip is the imposition of sanctions against Israel, especially the revocation of \$9 billion in U.S. loan guarantees. If we allow Israel to complete its massive \$2 billion project to ring Palestinians in militarized, podlike encampments in Gaza and the West Bank we will condemn Israel and the Palestinians to endless cycles of violence that could ultimately doom the Jewish state.

There is little dispute about the illegality of Israel's actions. The International Court of Justice has called on Israel to dismantle the security barrier under construction in the West Bank and asked outside states not to render any aid or assistance to the infrastructure.

But this call has been ignored, although even the U.S. State Department has gently admonished Israel for its behaviour. The U.S. loans that make the barrier and expansion of Jewish settlements possible were granted with the stipulation that if the Israeli government used the funds to build housing and infrastructure beyond the 1967 border known as the green line, these funds would be deducted from the loans.

Israel is pumping hundreds of millions of dollars - some reports say as much as half a billion yearly - into its colonization of the West Bank. Since 1967, Israel has spent more than \$10 billion on its settlements, and the total estimated cost for the snaking security barrier is at least \$1.5 billion.

The barrier is being used not only to annex Palestinian land but also to give Israel control of Palestinian aquifers and at least forty thousand acres of Palestinian farmland. It has devastated Palestinian communities, often cutting them in half or denying farmers access to farmland.

Travel, even between communities in the West Bank, has become difficult, especially for men, and many have lost their jobs, plunging with their families into squalor and despair. The spate of deadly attacks by Palestinian suicide bombers in Israel gave Israel the right to impose draconian measures.

A barrier running along the Green line was Israel's prerogative. But the barrier is being used as an excuse to seize Palestinian land. When it is done, the Palestinians in the West Bank, like those in Gaza, will be caged like animals with little ability to move, even to neighboring towns, find work, or live beyond subsistence level.

The assault on Palestinian society has been accompanied by an alarming increase in Israeli attacks against Palestinians, including the current Israeli offensive in Gaza. Fifteen tank shells landed in November 2006 in the town of Beit Hanoun, killing nineteen people and wounding forty.

Four women and nine children were among the dead. Israeli leaders, angered over Palestinian rocket attacks, have dismissed calls for restraint. Unless Israel feels pressure, it will never seek accommodation with the Palestinians, relying instead on increasing forms of repression and mounting violence.

These measures, depriving Palestinians of hope and dignity, are the fuel of radical movements and ensure not peace but unending war. Israel has ignored the terms stipulated for the U.S. loan guarantees, and so we have a choice: to uphold our own demands and international law, or be a party to Israeli policies that will lead to an unraveling of the region's stability.

## Israel's Toy Soldiers

If you are a young Muslim American and head off to the Middle East for a spell in a fundamentalist madrassa, or religious school, Homeland Security will probably greet you at the airport when you return. But if you are an American Jew and you join hundreds of teenagers from Europe and Mexico for an eight-week training course run by the Israel Defense Forces, you can post your picture wearing an Israeli army uniform and holding an automatic weapon on MySpace.

The Marva program, part summer camp part indoctrination, was launched in Israel in 1981. It allows participants, who must be Jewish and between the ages of 18 and 28, to fire weapons, live in military barracks in the Negev desert, and saunter around in an Israeli military uniform saluting and taking long hikes with military packs.

The Youth and Education Corps of the Israel Defense Forces run four 120-strong training sessions a year. Upon arrival, the participants experience an abrupt change into army life: wearing uniforms, accepting army discipline, and learning the programs and lessons integral to the program.

The program includes military content such as: navigation, field training, weapons training, shooting ranges, marches and more, as well as educational content such as: Zionism, Jewish Identity, history and knowledge of the land of Israel. All of this is taught in Hebrew in an intensive eight weeks.

The participants finish the program after completing a short, intensive, exhilarating military experience that allows them to taste Israel in a way they never could before - as part of the Israel Defense Forces. The site reads: "They leave the program with a feeling of belonging and a strong connection to Israel,

and many return to Israel to continue the connection that was created in the framework of the Marva course”.

How have we reacted when we discovered that American Muslims were being taught in a foreign country to fire machine guns at paper figures and simulate military maneuvers? And what about the summer schools in Gaza, organized by Islamic Jihad and designed to train young Palestinians in the basics of military life?

These Gaza camps, uncovered in 2001, were widely denounced by Israel as proof that the Palestinians were teaching their children to hate and kill.

The argument in favor of such military programs in Israel, as opposed to the same or similar programs in Pakistan, is that these young men and women are not going to come back and use what they have learned to harm Americans. They are not terrorists. Muslims, however, have not cornered the market on terrorism and violence. Radical Jews have also been involved in terrorist attacks in Israel and the United States.

Those who go through the Marva summer program are indoctrinated as thoroughly as Muslims who go overseas and are told they are part of a greater jihad for Islam. The results, given Israel's close alliance with the United States, may not harm those in power in the United States, but they may well harm Americans defined as the enemy, especially Muslims, should we suffer another 9/11.

The program inculcates hatred and a belief in the efficacy of violence to solve the problems in the Middle East. It identifies Israel with militarism. It feeds participants the idea that a Jew born in Brooklyn has a birthright to settle in Israel that is denied to an American of Palestinian descent.

Jerusalem, aside from being one of the most beautiful cities in the world, is also one of the most literate, creative, and intellectual. Do these young men and women really learn the best of Israel when they spend eight weeks playing soldier and glorifying the military?

Is the cause of Israel advanced by mirroring the twisted militarism of Islamic fundamentalists? Terrorists arise in all cultures, all nations, and all religions. We have produced more than our share. Ask the people of Vietnam or Iraq. The danger of military programs such as these is that they solidify an us-and-them mind-set. They romanticize violence.

They widen the divide that leads to conflict. They make dialogue impossible. There are great Israeli institutions. A summer working for such organizations, rather than wearing an army uniform, unleashing bursts of automatic fire in the desert, and singing Israeli patriotic songs, might actually help.

## The World as it is

War creates a world without empathy. Those who have empathy cannot drop tons of iron fragmentation bombs on crowded Palestinian refugee camps in Gaza, killing more than 120 Palestinians in a week, of whom one in five were children and more than half were civilians.

Those who have empathy do not thunder at the Palestinians that they face a Shoah, meaning catastrophe or holocaust. Those with empathy are unable to rejoice, as many leaders of Hamas did, over slaughter, as if the murder of “our” innocents justifies the murder of “their” innocents.

We live in a world, at home and in the Middle East, hardened and distorted by hate. We communicate in the language of fear and violence. Human beings are no longer viewed as human beings. They are no longer endowed in our eyes, or the eyes of those who oppose us, with human qualities.

They do not love, grieve, suffer, laugh, and weep. They represent cold abstractions of evil. The death-for-death ethic meant we communicated only by producing corpses. And we are all guilty, Americans, Palestinians, Iraqis, and Israelis. But we are not all guilty equally.

Israel and the United States bear the responsibility for a world that has unleashed twisted killers such as Abu Dheim. Decades of repression in Gaza, as well as the callous occupation of Iraq, have bequeathed to us a new generation of jihadists and gunmen who walk into yeshivas and spray automatic fire at students bent over books.

The long, slow drip of collective humiliation and abuse, along with the tiny and large indignities that go into transforming human beings into fanatics, is rarely understood by those on the outside. It ticks away like a clock until it suddenly explodes in our face.

Because we do not know where it came from, it strikes us as incomprehensible, irrational, the product of a demented form of humanity. These killers, however, are not formed by the Koran or Islam or a culture that is morally inferior to our own.

They are formed by a forty-year occupation, by the continued expansion of Jewish settlements, by the refusal to allow the return of expelled refugees, by the use of fighter jets to bomb squalid refugee camps, and by an Israeli siege of Gaza that has blocked fuel, electricity, and essential supplies and created a humanitarian crisis for 1.5 million Palestinians. It is what the Israelis have done to the Palestinians, what we have done to the Iraqis, that has brought us to this impasse.

We unleashed this violence and only we can end it. Hamas was a nonentity, a tiny group of radicals who wielded no influence and had little following in 1988. But the steady drumbeat of Israeli repression and violence led to Hamas' slow rise to supplant Arafat's Fatah party.

By 2006 Hamas was elected to power. This election, by all accounts free and fair, saw Jerusalem and Washington begin a covert effort to overthrow Hamas, according to documents obtained by Vanity Fair and the Guardian. The Fatah Leader Muhammad Dahlan was, according to these documents, given cash, weapons, and assistance through Egypt and Jordan to start a Palestinian civil war.

Hamas stepped in to thwart the attempted coup. It drove Dahlan and Fatah out of Gaza. The current bifurcation of Palestinian territories, with Hamas in control of Gaza and Fatah in control of the West Bank, began. Amnesty International and other humanitarian aid groups have said that living conditions in Gaza are at their worst since Israel occupied the strip in 1967.

The report estimated that eighty percent of Gaza residents are now dependent on food aid, compared with sixty three percent two years ago. It noted that unemployment is about forty percent among the general population and seventy percent in the private sector.

The aid groups document power cuts to hospitals of as long as twelve hours a day, fifty million liters of sewage pouring into the sea daily, and water and sewage systems on the brink of collapse. The groups have called on the European Union and the U.K. government to pressure Israel to open border crossings and begin negotiations with Hamas.

Washington and Jerusalem have little interest in a peaceful settlement. They are blinded by their own military prowess. They do not grasp that continuing the violence and tightening the siege will spur more desperate and embittered young men and women to acts of vengeance.

The only route left is to hear the cries of all the victims, Israeli and Palestinian, to recapture empathy. Hamas' offer to negotiate a truce is the only escape route. There is no option other than finally to give the Palestinians control over their lives and land.

It is the only option that will, as well, save us in Iraq. The occupation of Palestinian territory, like the occupation of Iraq, is illegal, increasingly violent, and counterproductive. The Oslo Accords, in the hands of former Israeli prime ministers Benjamin Netanyahu and Ariel Sharon, stangled and thwarted. Peace eludes us in Palestine, Israel and Iraq not because people do not want peace but because we are governed by moral and intellectual trolls.

The Palestinian Liberation Organization, headed by the Fatah party, was once considered a terrorist organization. It was illegal for an Israeli to have contact with the Palestinian Liberation Organization. Israelis who called for negotiations with the PLO were attacked and vilified.

The Israeli government, however, under the pragmatism of Yitzhak Rabin, violated its own ban and began secret negotiations. These led to the Oslo peace agreement. Fatah, today, is touted by Jerusalem and Washington as a ally in the war against Hamas and a partner for peace.

The dynamics of power have changed. They will change again. Hamas is a reality that, however distasteful, is not going to go away. Any peace deal reached without Hamas is doomed to fail. The only question left is how many more people are going to die needlessly in Israel, in Palestine, and in Iraq before Israeli and American leaders begin to deal with the world as it is, not as they wish it to be.

### Party to Murder

Can anyone following the Israel attacks on Gaza - the buildings blown to rubble, the children killed on their way to school, the long rows of mutilated corpses, the wailing mothers and wives, the crowds of terrified Palestinians not knowing where to flee - wonder why we are hated?

Our self-righteous celebration of ourselves and our supposed virtue is as false as that of Israel. We have become monsters, militarized bullies, heartless and savage. We are a party to human slaughter, a flagrant war crime, and do nothing.

We forget that the innocents who suffer and die in Gaza are a reflection of ourselves, of how we might have been should fate and time and geography have made the circumstances of our births different. We forget that we are all absurd and vulnerable creatures.

We all have the capacity to fear and hate and love. "Express thyself to feel what wretches feel", King Lear said, entering the mud and straw hovel of Poor Tom, "... and show the heavens more just." Privilege and power, especially military power, is a dangerous narcotic.

Violence destroys those who bear the brunt of its force, but also those who try to use it to become gods. It is not a war. It is murder. The U.N. special rapporteur for human rights in the occupied Palestinian territory, former Princeton University Law Professor Richard Falk, has labeled what Israel is doing to the Palestinians in Gaza as "a crime against humanity".

Falk, who is Jewish, has condemned the collective punishment of the Palestinians in Gaza as "a flagrant and massive violation of international humanitarian law as laid down in Article 33 of the Fourth Geneva Convention".

He has asked the International Court to "investigate the situation, and determine whether the Israeli civilian leaders and military commanders responsible for the Gaza siege should be indicted and prosecuted for violations of International Criminal Law".

Falk's unflinching honesty enraged Israel. He was banned from entering the country during his attempt to visit Gaza and the West Bank. The foreign media have been, like Falk, barred by Israel from entering Gaza to report on the destruction.

As of December 2008, Israel's stated aim of halting homemade rockets fired from Gaza into Israel remains unfulfilled. Gaza militants have fired more than one hundred rockets and mortars into Israel, killing four people and wounding nearly two dozen more, since Israel unleashed its air assault.

Israel has threatened to launch a ground assault and has called up 6,500 reservists. It has massed tanks on the Gaza border and declared the area a closed military zone. The rocket attacks by Hamas are, as Falk points out, also criminal violations of international law.

But as Falk notes, "Such Palestinian behavior does not legalize Israel's imposition of collective punishment of life- and health-threatening character of the people of Gaza, and should not distract the U.N. or international society from discharging their fundamental moral and legal duty to render protection of the Palestinian people".

"It is an unfolding humanitarian catastrophe that each day poses the entire 1.5 million Gazans to an unspeakable ordeal, to a struggle to survive in terms of their health", Falk says.

A recent study reports that forty-six percent of all Gazan children suffer acute anaemia. There are reports that the sonic booms associated with Israeli overflights have caused widespread deafness, especially among children.

Gazan children need thousands of hearing aids. Malnutrition is extremely high in a number of different dimensions and affects seventy-five percent of Gazans. There are widespread mental disorders, especially among young people without the will to live.

Over fifty percent of Gazan children under the age of twelve have been found to have no will to live. Before the air assaults, Gaza spent twelve hours a day without power, which can be a death sentence to the severely ill in hospitals.

There are few drugs and little medicine, including no cancer or cystic fibrosis medication. Hospitals have generators but often lack fuel. Medical equipment, including one of Gaza's three CT scanners, has been destroyed by power surges and fluctuations.

Medical staff cannot control the temperature of incubators for new borns. And Israel has revoked most exit visas, meaning some of those who need specialized care, including cancer patients and those in need of kidney dialysis, have died.

Of the 230 Gazans estimated to have died last year because they were denied proper medical care, several spent their final hours at Israeli crossing points, where they were refused entry to Israel. The statistics gathered on children are increasingly grim.

About forty-five percent of children in Gaza have iron deficiency from lack of fruit and vegetables, and eighteen percent have stunted growth. There is no structure of an occupation that endured for decades and involved this kind of oppressive circumstances.

The magnitude, the deliberateness, the violations of international humanitarian law, the impact on health, lives and survival, and the overall conditions warrant the characterization of a crime against humanity.

This occupation is the direct intention by the Israeli military and civilian authorities. They are responsible and should be held accountable. The point of the Israeli attack is to break Hamas, the radical Islamic group elected to power in 2007.

But Hamas has repeatedly proposed long-term truces with Israel and offered to negotiate a permanent truce. During the last cease-fire, Hamas upheld the truce although Israel refused to ease the blockade. It

was Israel that initiated an armed attack that violated the truce and killed six Palestinians. It was only then that Hamas resumed firing rockets at Israel.

Israel has put the Gazans in a set of circumstances where they either have to accept whatever is imposed on them or resist in any way available to them. That is a horrible dilemma to impose upon a people. This does not alleviate the Palestinians, and Gazans in particular, for accountability for doing these acts involving rocket fire, but it also imposes some responsibility on Israel for creating these circumstances.

Israel seeks to break the will of the Palestinians to resist. The Israeli government has demonstrated little interest in diplomacy or a peaceful solution. The rapid expansion of Jewish settlements on the West Bank is an effort to thwart the possibility of a two-state solution by gobbling up vast tracts of Palestinian real estate.

Israel also appears to want to thrust the impoverished Gaza strip onto Egypt. Dozens of tunnels had been the principal means for food and goods, connecting Gaza to Egypt. Israel had permitted the tunnels to operate, most likely as part of an effort to further cut Gaza off from Israel.

This ended, however, when Israeli fighter jets bombed more than forty tunnels along Gaza's border with Egypt. The Israeli military said that the tunnels, on the Gaza side of the border, were used for smuggling weapons, explosives, and fugitives. Egypt has sealed its border and refused to let distraught Palestinians enter its territory.

"Israel all along has not been prepared to enter into diplomatic process that gives the Palestinians a viable state", Falk says. "The Israelis feel time is on their side. They feel they can create enough facts on the ground so people will come to the conclusion a viable state cannot emerge".

The use of terror and hunger to break a hostile population is one of the oldest forms of warfare. Those who orchestrate such sieges do not grasp the terrible rage born of long humiliation, indiscriminate violence, and abuse.

A father or a mother whose child dies because of lack of vaccines does not forget. A boy whose ill grandmother dies while detained at an Israel checkpoint does not forget. A family that loses a child in an air strike does not forget. No one who endures humiliation, abuse, and the murder of family members forgets.

This rage becomes a virus within those who, eventually, stumble out into the daylight. Is it any wonder that seventy-one percent of children interviewed at a school in Gaza recently said they wanted to be a "martyr"?

The Israelis in Gaza, like the American forces in Iraq and Afghanistan, are foolishly breeding the next generation of militants and Islamic radicals, Jihadists, enraged by the injustices done by Israel and the United States, seek to carry out reciprocal acts of savagery, even at the cost of their own lives.

The violence unleashed on Palestinian children will, one day, be the violence unleashed on Israeli children. This is the tragedy of Gaza. This is the tragedy of Israel.

### **Lost in the Rubble**

Israeli militias in 1948 drove some 800,000 Palestinians from their homes, farms, towns, and villages into exile in the West Bank, Gaza, and neighbouring countries. Israeli historian Ilan Pappé's book *The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine* details the deliberate Israeli policy of removing Palestinians from their land.

Hamas, which assumed power in free and fair elections, insists that the real goal of Israel is to break the will of the Palestinians in Gaza and destroy Hamas as an organization. Since Israel unleashed its air and Hedges, Chris (2013) *The World as it is: Dispatches on the Myth of Human Progress*. Nation Books, New York.

sea campaign, at least 430 Palestinians have been killed, including sixty-five children, and 2,250 others have been wounded according to Gaza medics.

The bombardment has demolished dozens of houses and raised fears of severe food shortages and disease in the enclave, where most Gazans depend on foreign aid. The Israeli assault began on November 4 2008, when Israel broke the truce Hamas had observed for several months.

Israel then blocked food supplies delivered by the U.N. Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East and the U.N. World Food Program. It cut off diesel fuel used to run Gaza's power station. It banned journalists and aid workers from entering Gaza. The U.N. World Food Program called the situation in Gaza appalling and said that "many basic food items are no longer available on the market."

All this is being carried out by a modern military against a population with no capacity to resist. The Israeli leadership has warned that this will be a long campaign and hinted that it may be followed by a ground invasion.

Israeli tanks are massed on Gaza's border. The continued pounding of Gaza and the rising death toll are sure to ignite the rage of the Palestinians outside Gaza. Israeli police forces are already positioning themselves to deal with what they have labelled "spontaneous terrorism", meaning public outbursts of support for Gaza that could turn violent.

Barack Obama's only comment on the one-sided slaughter under way in Gaza was: "If my daughters were living in a house that was being threatened by rocket attacks, I would do whatever it takes to end that situation".

He repeated word for word the Israeli cliché used to justify an Israeli policy that U. N. Special Rapporteur Richard Falk has labeled "a crime against humanity". If self-defense applies to Israel as a justification for violence, why doesn't it apply to the Palestinians? It is Israel, not the Palestinians, which defies U.N. resolutions and international law by occupying and seizing ever-larger chunks of Palestinian land.

The walls of Gaza are plastered with poster-sized photographs of "martyrs" shot by the Israelis. Many are pictured holding a weapon in front of the gold-topped al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem. These are studio photos taken long before their deaths.

The gun was a prop and the glittering mosque a carefully chosen backdrop. All that was real in these photos was the yearning of these young men to fight against Israel and for a Palestinian state - and to die. And for a moment, at least until the pictures fade or peel away, the slain youths will have their brief lives and heroism recognized.

Gaza, like Kosovo's capital Pristina, is a derelict, concrete slum where car exhaust mingles with the stench of raw sewage. There are 1.5 million Palestinians - seventy percent of whom are either refugees from what is now Israel or the descendants of refugees.

They live crammed into a dusty, flat, coastal area twice the size of Washington, D.C. Most are stateless and have never left the Palestinian territories and Israel. Families are piled in boxy, concrete rooms capped with corrugated tin roofs weighed down by rocks. They have little furniture. Water and electricity service work only sporadically.

The population growth rate is one of the highest on the planet: a 3.7 percent annual birthrate, compared with 1.7 percent in Israel. Donkey carts crowd the streets, and orange garbage bins, donated by the European Union, overflow with putrid heaps of refuse.

The only route left for most young men in Gaza to affirm themselves is through death. The decision of the young men, sometimes boys, to die is usually a conscious one. It is born of despair and rage. It is born of a sense of impotence and humiliation.

It is born of a belief that to forgo sacrifice, even death, is to dishonor those who have gone before, to neglect family members, relatives, and friends who lost their land, endured the decades-long humiliation and abuse of occupation, and suffered or died resisting.

The young in Gaza have nothing to do. There are no jobs. They have nowhere to escape to. They cannot marry because they cannot afford housing. They cannot leave Gaza, even for Israel. They sleep, sometimes ten to a room, and live on less than \$2 a day, surviving on U.S. or Hamas charities and food donations.

Martyrdom is the only route offered to those who want to achieve a measure, however brief, of recognition and glory. Palestinians have been tortured on accounts of abuse, despair, and injustice. Families tell and re tell stories of being thrown off their land and of relatives killed or exiled.

All can tick off names of martyrs within their own clan who died for the elusive Palestinian state. The only framed paper in many Palestinian's homes is a sepia land deed from the time of the British mandate. Some elderly men still keep the keys to houses that have long since vanished.

From infancy, Palestinians are inculcated with the virus of nationalism and the burden of revenge. And, as in Bosnia, such resentment seeps into the roots of society for generations until it resurfaces or is finally rectified, often after much bloodletting.

### **Israel Crackdown Puts Liberal Jews on the Spot**

The Israeli government, its brutal war crimes in Gaza exposed in detail, has implemented a series of draconian measures to silence and discredit dissidents, leading intellectuals, and human-rights organizations inside and outside Israel.

It is busy expelling or excluding peace activists and foreign nationals from the Palestinian territories. The campaign, if left unchecked, will be as catastrophic for Palestinians as it will be for Israel. The Goldstone report, which is more than five hundred pages, investigated Israel's twenty-two day air and ground assault on Gaza from December 2008 to January 2009.

The United Nations and the European Parliament have endorsed the report. The report found that Israel used disproportionate military force against Hamas militants in the Gaza Strip while failing to take adequate precautions to protect the civilian population against military assault.

The Israeli attack killed 1,434 people, including 960 civilians, according to the Palestinian Center for Human Rights. More than six thousand homes were destroyed or damaged, leaving behind some 3 billion dollars in destruction in one of the poorest places on earth.

No Israelis were killed by Hamas rockets fired into Israel during the assault. The report went on to indict the occupation itself. It examines the beginning of the occupation and condemns Israel for the border closures, the blockade, and for the wall or security barrier in the West Bank.

It has references to the right of return, investigates Israeli use of torture, and criticizes the wilful destruction of the Palestinian economy. The report marks and catalyzes the breakup of the Diaspora Jewish support for Israel because Goldstone is the classical Diaspora Jew.

He is a lawyer and upholder of human rights and a liberal. "Liberal" has a distinct connotation. It means to believe in the rule of law. It means to believe in international institutions. It means to believe in Human Rights. Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch are liberal organizations.

Hedges, Chris (2013) *The World as it is: Dispatches on the Myth of Human Progress*. Nation Books, New York.

What the Goldstone phenomenon registers and catalyzes is the fact that it is impossible to reconcile liberal convictions with Israel's conduct. It is impossible to be both liberal and defend Israeli policy. The campaign against Israeli dissidents has taken on the form of venomous denunciations of activists and jurists.

It includes a bill before the Israeli parliament, the Knesset, which will make it possible to imprison the leaders of Israeli human-rights groups if they fail to comply with crippling new registration conditions. Human rights activists from outside Israel who work in the Palestinian territories are being rounded up and deported.

The government is refusing to issue work visas to employees of 150 nongovernmental organizations operating in the West Bank and East Jerusalem, including Oxfam, Save the Children, and Doctors without borders (p186).

The purge is underway because of the belief within the Netanyahu government that these groups and activists provide evidence of Israeli war crimes in Gaza. Israel has no intention of lifting the blockade on Gaza, halting settlement expansion or reversing its division of the West Bank into impoverished ghettos of Palestinians.

The growing brutality and violence of the occupation coupled with Israel's increasingly isolated international status, have unleashed a crackdown against all those within the Jewish state who are blamed for the bad publicity.

The Knesset bill, if passed, will force human-rights groups to register as political bodies and turn over identification numbers and addresses of all members to the government. These groups will lose their tax-exempt status.

The new law will effectively end European Union and other outside funding. The groups will be mandated to provide the government with the records of all foreign donations and account for how these donations are spent.

Any public statement, event, or speech by these groups, even if it lasts half a minute, must include a declaration that they are being supported and funded by a foreign power. Those who fail to follow these guidelines, including local volunteers, can face a year in jail.

This is the first time the human-rights dimension of the Israel Palestine conflict has moved center stage. It has temporarily displaced the fatuous peace process. It is the first time that human-rights reports have counted.

There are literally tens if not hundreds of thousands of pages of accumulation of human-rights reports condemning Israel going back roughly to the first intifada to the present. The human rights organizations since the 1990s have been quite sharp in their criticism of Israel human-rights policy, but nobody ever reads the reports.

The Goldstone report was the first time the findings of these human-rights organizations moved center stage. People stopped talking about the peace process and started talking about Israel's human-rights record.

There is growing disenchantment among Israelis with the endless occupation of Gaza and the West Bank as well as endemic government corruption. The discontent, along with the international condemnation, is inhibiting Israel's ability to muster international support for further attacks.

Israel attacked Gaza to restore what it called its deterrence capacity, its ability to terrorize the Arab world into submission. But it actually diminished its deterrence capacity because it can't attack. If they were to attack now, anywhere, all hell would break loose and they wouldn't get sympathy.

The numbers of refuseniks are proliferating with groups such as the Courage to Refuse, Shministim, and New Profile supporting those who will not serve in the Israeli Defence Forces. It is not that many Israelis lack a conscience, it is not that many cannot delineate right from wrong:

it is that the Netanyahu government is determined to see that these courageous voices within Israel will be silenced along with those of the Palestinians.

### **Israel's Racist in Chief**

It was unthinkable during the 1990s that an Israeli politician who openly advocated ethnically cleansing the Palestinians from Israeli-controlled territory could sit on the Cabinet. The racist tirades of Jewish protofascists such as Meir Kahane stood outside the law, were vigorously condemned by most Israelis, and were prosecuted accordingly.

Kahane's repugnant Kach Party, labeled by the United States, Canada, and the European Union as a terrorist organization, was outlawed by the Israeli government in 1988 for inciting racism.

Israel has changed. And the racist virus spread by Kahane has returned to Israel in the figure of Israel's powerful new foreign minister, Avigdor Lieberman. Lieberman openly calls for an Arab-free Israel - an Israel free of Arabs.

There has been a steady decline from the days of the socialist Labour Party, which founded Israel in 1948 and held within its ranks many leaders, such as Yitzhak Rabin, who were serious about peaceful coexistence with the Palestinians.

The moral squalor of Prime Minister Bibi Netanyahu and Lieberman reflects the country's degeneration. Labour, like Israel, is a shell of its old self. Lieberman's Yisrael Beiteinu Party, with fifteen seats in the Knesset, is likely to bring down the Netanyahu government the moment his power base is robust enough to move him into the Prime Minister's office. He is the new face of the Jewish state.

Lieberman, a former night-club bouncer who was a member of the Kach Party, has the personal and political habits of the Islamic goons he opposes. He was found guilty in 2001 of beating a 12 year old boy and fined by an Israeli court.

He is being investigated for multimillion dollar fraud and money laundering and is rumoured to have close ties with the Russian mafia. He lives, in defiance of International law, in the Jewish settlement of Nokdim on occupied Palestinian land.

Lieberman, as did his mentor Kahane, calls for the eradication of Palestinians from Israel and the territories it occupies. During the massive bombardment of Gaza in December 2008-January 2009, he said that Israel should fight Hamas the way the United States fought Japan in the second world war.

He noted that the occupation of Japan was unnecessary to achieve victory, alluding to the dropping of atomic bombs on Nagasaki and Hiroshima. When he assumed his position as foreign minister, he announced that the peace agreement reached at the Annapolis Conference in November 2007 was dead.

He said in 2004 that ninety percent of Israel's Palestinian citizens "have no place here. They can take their bundles and get lost". This statement was especially galling since Lieberman, unlike Palestinians who can trace back their ancestry for generations in the area, is a relative newcomer; he immigrated to Israel in 1978 from Moldova and retains a heavy Russian accent.

Hedges, Chris (2013) *The World as it is: Dispatches on the Myth of Human Progress*. Nation Books, New York.

Lieberman, from the floor of the Knesset, openly fantasized about executing the handful of Palestinian Knesset members. He has suggested bombing Egypt's Aswan Dam, an act that would lead to a massive loss of Egyptian lives.

As Ariel Sharon's minister of transportation, he offered to bus several hundred Palestinian prisoners to the sea and drown them. Hamas, the Iranian government, and the Taliban have been condemned by Washington for advocating policies that mirror the attitudes expressed by Lieberman towards the Palestinians.

Ahmad Tibi, an Arab deputy in the Knesset, has called on the international community to boycott Israel as it did Austria when far-right leader Jorg Haider joined the country's government. This seems a fair request.

Racism, as long as it is directed toward Arabs, does little to perturb our conscience or hinder our support of Israel. The Israeli leadership, following the assassination of Rabin by a Jewish extremist with ties to Kach, never again sought a viable settlement with the Palestinians.

Successive Israeli prime ministers talked the language of peace and negotiations largely to placate the international community and Washington while they vigorously expanded Jewish settlements on Palestinian land, seized huge tracts of the West Bank, and imposed a brutal collective punishment on the Palestinians in Gaza.

Palestinians have become, by Israeli design, impoverished, reduced to a level of bare subsistence, and dependent on the United Nations for food assistance. They live ringed by Israeli troops in ghettos in the West Bank and Gaza, which is a massive, fetid open-air prison.

And when these little Bantustans become restive, Israel swiftly turns off the delivery of basic food and supplies or uses F-16 fighter jets or heavy artillery to bomb the squalid concrete hovels. The public embrace by a senior Israeli official of a policy of ethnic cleansing is ominous.

It signals a further evolution of the Israeli state from one that at least paid lip-service to equality to one that increasingly resembles the former apartheid regime in South Africa. Racism, once practiced in private and condemned in public, has become to many Israelis acceptable.

### **The Tears of Gaza Must be Our Tears**

Martin Luther King Jr. said, "The arc of the moral universe is long but it bends towards justice", and that arc is descending with a righteous fury that is thundering down upon the Israeli government. You may have the bulldozers, planes, and helicopters that smash houses to rubble, the commandos who descend from ropes on ships and kill unarmed civilians on the high seas as well as in Gaza, the vast power of the state is behind you.

We will keep working and praying, keep protesting and denouncing, keep pushing up against your navy and your army, with nothing but our bodies, until we prove that the force of morality and justice is greater than hate and violence.

And then, when there is freedom in Gaza, we will forgive...you. We will ask you to break bread with us. We will bless your children even if you did not find it in your heart to bless the children of those you occupied. And maybe it is this forgiveness, maybe it is the final, insurmountable power of love, which unsettles you most.

"Closures" mean heavily armed soldiers who ring Palestinian ghettos, deny those trapped inside food or basic amenities and carry out a brutal policy of collective punishment, which is a crime under international law.

Hedges, Chris (2013) *The World as it is: Dispatches on the Myth of Human Progress*. Nation Books, New York.

“Disputed land” means land stolen from the Palestinians. “Clashes” mean, almost always, the killing or wounding of unarmed Palestinians, including children. “Jewish neighbours in the West Bank” mean fortress-like compounds that serve as military outposts in the campaign of ethnic cleansing of the Palestinians.

“Targeted assassinations” mean extrajudicial murders. “Air strikes on militant bomb-making posts” mean the dropping of huge iron fragmentation bombs from fighter jets on densely crowded neighbourhoods, a practice that always leaves scores of dead and wounded, whose only contact with a bomb was the one manufactured in the United States and given to the Israeli Air Force as part of our complicity in the occupation.

“The peace process” means the cynical, one-way route to the crushing of the Palestinian people. These are some names. There are others. The boat to Gaza was named the Audacity of Hope. But these are not Barack Obama’s words, these are the words of Reverend Jeremiah Wright. They are borrowed words.

And Jerry Wright is not afraid to speak the truth, not afraid to tell us to stop confusing God with America. “We bombed Hiroshima, we bombed Nagasaki, and we nuked far more than the thousands killed in New York and the Pentagon and we never batted an eye”, Reverend Wright said.

We have supported state terrorism against the Palestinians and black South Africans, and now we are indignant because the stuff we have done overseas is now brought right back into our own front yard. America’s chickens are coming home to roost.

Nothing is more reprehensible than those habits of mind in the intellectual that induce avoidance, that characteristic turning away from a difficult and principled position which you know to be the right one, but which you decide not to take.

You do not want to appear too political; you are afraid of seeming controversial; you want to keep a reputation for being balanced, objective, moderate; your hope is to be asked back, to consult, to be on a board or prestigious committee, and so to remain within the responsible mainstream; someday you hope to get an honorary degree, a big prize, perhaps even an ambassadorship.

If anything can denature, neutralize, and finally kill a passionate intellectual life it is the internationalization of such habits. Despite the abuse and vilification that any outspoken supporter of Palestinian rights and self-determination earns for him or herself, the truth deserves to be spoken, represented by an unafraid and compassionate intellectual.

And what of the long line of Jewish prophets that run from Jeremiah, Isaiah, and Amos to Hannah Arendt, who reminded the world when the state of Israel was founded that the injustice meted out to the Jews could not be rectified by an injustice meted out to the Palestinians, what of our own Prophets, Noam Chomsky or Norman Finkelstein, outcasts like all prophets.

What of Uri Avenery or the Israeli poet Aharon Shabtai? And if to be Jew means this, name me a Jew. Name us all Muslims and Christians and Jews. Name us as human beings who believe that when one of us suffers, all of us suffer, that we never have to ask for whom the bell tolls, it tolls for us all, that the tears of the mother in Gaza are our tears, that the wails of the bloodied children in Al Shifa Hospital are the wails of our own children.

Let me name those who send these tanks and fighter jets to bomb the concrete hovels in Gaza with families crouching, helpless, inside. Let me name those who deny children the right to a childhood and the sick a right to care, those who torture, those who carry out assassinations in hotel rooms in Dubai and on the streets of Gaza City.

Those who foul the truth with official propaganda and state lies. Let me call them, not by their honorific titles and positions of power, but by the name they have earned for themselves by draining the blood of the innocent into the sands of Gaza. Let me name them for who they are: terrorists.

## Formalizing Israel's Land Grab

Time is running out for Israel. And the Israeli government knows it. The Jewish Diaspora, especially the young, has a waning emotional and ideological investment in Israel. The demographic boom means that Palestinians in Israel and the occupied territories will soon outnumber Jews.

And Israel's increasing status as a pariah nation means that informal and eventually formal state sanctions against the country are probably inevitable. Desperate Israeli politicians, watching opposition to their apartheid state mount, have proposed a perverted form of what they term "the one-state solution".

It is the latest tool to thwart a Palestinian state and allow Israel to retain its huge settlement complexes and land seizures in East Jerusalem and the West Bank. The idea of a single state was backed by Moshe Arens, a former defense minister and foreign minister from the Likud Party.

The Israel vision, however, does not include a state with equal rights for Jewish and Palestinian citizens. The call for a single state appears to include pushing Gaza into the unwilling arms of Egypt and incorporating the West Bank and East Jerusalem into Israel.

Palestinians within Israeli-controlled territory, however, will remain burdened with crippling travel, work, and security restrictions already in place. Palestinians in the occupied territories cannot reclaim lost property or acquire Israeli citizenship, yet watch as Jews born outside of Israel with no prior tie to the country become Israeli citizens and receive government-subsidized housing.

Palestinians in the West Bank live in roughly eight squalid, ringed ghettos and are governed by military courts. Jews living in the West Bank and East Jerusalem, like all full Israeli citizens, are subject to Israeli civilian law and constitutional protection.

Palestinians cannot serve on the armed forces or the security services, while Jewish settlers are issued automatic weapons and protected by the Israel Defense Forces. If Israel sheds Gaza, the Jewish state will be left with 5.8 million Jews and 3.8 million Arabs.

And, at least in the near future, Jews will remain the majority. This seems to be the main attraction of the plan. The physical and political landscape of the West Bank and East Jerusalem, known as "facts on the ground", has altered dramatically in the past two decades.

Huge fortress-like apartment complexes ring East Jerusalem and dominate the hillsides in the West Bank. The settler population is now more than 462,000 with 271,400 living in the West Bank and East Jerusalem, and 191,000 living in and around Jerusalem.

The settler population has grown at a rate of 4.6 percent per year since 1990, while Israeli society as a whole has grown at 1.5 percent. The net effect of the Israeli seizure of land in East Jerusalem, which includes recent approval for an additional nine thousand units, and the West Bank is to promulgate a form of administrative ethnic cleansing.

Palestinian families are being pushed off land they have owned for generations and evicted from their homes by Israeli authorities. Dozens of families, tossed out of dwellings they have occupied in East Jerusalem for decades, have been forced onto the streets.

Groups such as Ateret Cohanim, an ultra-orthodox Jewish private organization that collects funds from abroad, purchase Palestinian properties and pursue legal strategies to evict families that have long resided in East Jerusalem.

Israel's judicial system and police, in violation of international law, facilitate and enforce these evictions and land seizures. Heavily armed settlers carry out frequent unprovoked attacks, ad hoc raids, and house evictions to supplement the terror imposed by the police and military.

They are the civilian arm of the occupation. The acquiescence in settler violence is particularly objectionable from the perspective of international humanitarian law because the settlers are already unlawfully present in occupied territory, making it perverse to victimize those who should be protected - the Palestinians - and offer protection to those who are lawbreakers - the settlers.

Incorporating Palestinians in East Jerusalem and the West Bank into a single Israeli state would see Israel impose gradations of citizenship. The real proposal, the envisioned outcome of this kind of proposal, is an extension of Israeli control over the occupied territory as a permanent reality.

It is presently a de facto annexation. The creation of a single state would give the arrangement a more legalistic cover. It would seek to resolve the issue of occupied territory without the bother of international negotiations.

The effect is to fragment the Palestinian people in such defining ways as to make it almost impossible to envision the emergence of a viable Palestinian sovereign state. The longer it continues the more difficult it is to overcome, and the more serious are the abridgements of fundamental Palestinian rights.

The punishing conditions imposed by the Israeli blockade of the Palestinians in Gaza have been replicated for the roughly forty-five thousand Palestinians who live in "Area C", the sixty percent of the West Bank that remains under complete Israeli military control.

In a recent report called "Life on the Edge", Save the Children UK argues that Israeli policies of land confiscation, expanding settlements, and lack of basic services such as food, water, shelter, and medical clinics are at "a crisis point".

The report concludes that food security problems in Area C are even worse than in Gaza. According to the report, "Seventy-nine percent of communities surveyed recently don't have enough nutritious food; this is higher than the blockaded Gaza where the rate is 61 percent.

Palestinian children growing up in Area C experience malnutrition and stunted growth at double the level of children in Gaza. Forty-four percent of these children were found to suffer from diarrhea, often with lethal effects. Save the Children UK writes that "Israel's restrictions on Palestinian access to and development of agricultural land mean that thousands of children are going hungry and are vulnerable to killer illnesses like diarrhea and pneumonia.

Jihad al-Shommali of the Defense for Children International Palestine Section said of the problems of Area C children: "Children are being forced to cross settlement areas and risk beatings and harassment by settlers, or walk for hours, just to get to school. Many children are losing hope in the future".

This overall pattern suggests systematic violations by Israel of Article 55 of Geneva IV and Article 69 of the First Geneva Protocol of 1977 that delimits Israel's obligations to ensure adequate provision of the basic needs of people living under its occupation, especially in Area C, where it exercises undivided control.

The annexation of Palestinian territory has been reinforced by the construction of a 435 mile wall. The barrier cuts the West Bank off from Israel and has been built in a configuration which plunges deep into the West Bank.

The settlements and the land to the west of the wall, which makes up 9.4 percent of the West Bank, have already been absorbed into Israel. The seizure of nearly forty percent of the West Bank includes Israeli control of most of the Palestinian water supply.

The Jewish settlers in the West Bank are allotted per capita four to five times the amount of water allotted to Palestinians by the Israeli government. The settlements in East Jerusalem and the West Bank violate part 6 of Article 49 of the Fourth Geneva Convention, which prohibits the transfer of the population of an occupying power to the territory temporarily occupied.

Israel's stubborn rejection of the demand of Security Council Resolution 242 that it withdraw from Palestinian territories it occupied in 1967 creates a background that resembles, and in some dimensions exceeds, in important respects the situation confronting the government of Kosovo.

Lengthy negotiations have not resolved the issue of the status of Palestine, nor do they give any reasonable prospect that any resolution by negotiation or unilateral withdrawal will soon occur.

Under these circumstances, it would seem that one option available to the Palestinian Liberation Organization acting on its own or by way of the Palestinian Authority under international law would be to issue a unilateral declaration of status, seeking independence, diplomatic recognition and membership of the United Nations.

The recent Kosovo advisory opinion of the World Court in The Hague provides a well-reasoned legal precedent for such an option.

## The Middle East

### Inside Egypt

There are two Egypts. One is crushed by poverty and groaning under the weight of an autocratic regime in place for nearly three decades. This Egypt is increasingly desperate, as the country's population growth soars, and its economy, burdened by corruption and a stifling state bureaucracy, stagnates.

Out of the bowels of this Egypt have come mouting antigovernment street demonstrations, anger, frustration, and renewed terrorist violence by Islamic militants. The second Egypt, the one on view to foreign visitors, bears little in common with the first Egypt.

It is a manicured and heavily guarded Egypt of air-conditioned hotels, Nile cruises, majestic archeological sites, afternoons by swimming pools, evenings in disco clubs, posh restuarants, and shops crammed with glas jewelry cases filled with silver and gold hieroglypic pendants.

But the clash between these two Egypts is mounting. It has left tourists, confided to these islands of privilege, caught in the middle, seen as symbols of all that is denied to most Egyptians. And once again, as they were a decade ago, foreigners are targeted and killed by armed militants.

Islamic radicalism has ebbed and flowed in Egypt for a century. It follows a pattern: Severe state repression cripples the movement for about ten years, and militant campaigns then reappear, with each successive incarnation spawning more radical and deadlier tactics.

This war has ebbed and flowed since 1928, when the homegrown fundamentalist movement known as the Muslim Brotherhood was organized. Advocating a return to the "pure" Islam of the Prophet, the brotherhood grew during the 1940s into a radical political movement prone to antigovernment violence.

It helped topple Egypt's monarchy in 1952 and almost succeeded in assassinating Egyptian president Gamal Abdel Nasser in 1954. One of the extremist groups that grew out of the Brotherhood, Islamic Jihad, did succeed in killing President Anwar Sadat in 1981.

Sadat's successor, Hosni Mubarak, immediately declared a national state of emergency, suspending civil liberties and other freedoms that have never been restored. Despite these crackdowns, Egypt, the intellectual capital of the Arab world, has continued to produce ideas nad political figures with influence beyond its borders.

Most notorious of these is Ayman al-Zawahiri. A leader of Islamic Jihad, he helped organize al-Qaeda and served as Osama bin Laden's chief adviser. Qus has been settled for thousands of years. The local folklore holds that it wa the place where the ancient Egyptians embalmed and mummified the dead.

This messy and foul-smelling work was usually done, Etyptologist believe, in tents set up around the burial places. The remains of what must have been an imposing temple are tucked down an alley in the heart of the city.

It has never been excavated, in large part because the owners of the houses that ring it know they are perched on top of an archeological site and are hostile to all outsiders poking around the ruins. The heavy blocks that once composed the top of the building bear carvings of the falcon-headed god Horus, god of the sky, and numerous hieroglyphs.

The blocks are in a sandy courtyard flanked by mud and concrete hovels that reach three or four stories in the air. Goats next to the granite blocks root around in piles of garbage. Laundry hangs from the windows.

The poverty of Egypt has left the country of sixty million with a strange mixture of the modern and the ancient, often coexisting in ways that befuddle the outsider. Workers in Qus covet secure jobs in the sugar and paper mills.

The belief in folklore, ingrained in xenophobia, and superstition, however, coexist with modern medicine, factories, and cell phones. This tension, as it does in much of the Middle East, spawns confusion and alienation, especially for those who leave the vital and close kinship ties of the village and seek work in the urban slums of Cairo.

There are in Qus several small shops where herbs and potions are sold for ailments, real and imagined. Small glass bottles with oddly coloured liquids promise to replace hair and increase fertility, sexual prowess, and intelligence.

It is one of these shops we decide to visit. The shop is hidden in a narrow alley, too small for cars but wide enough for donkey carts. It is dingy and has the sour smells of herbs and spices that lie in burlap sacks on the dirt floor.

In the center of the shop is a massive granite wheel. The wheel, which is upright, has a beam, worn to a shiny smoothness over the years, poling out of its center. It resembles a huge Tinkertory that has lost one of its wheels.

The end of the beam has a harness. When the harness is hitched to the cow currently resting out back, it is pushed slowly around the bowl-shaped stone below. The granite wheel grinds the herbs and spices into a mush that is distilled by a press into liquid and sold in small vials (p213).

### **A Culture of Atrocity**

All troops, when they occupy and battle insurgent forces, as in Iraq, or Gaza, or Vietnam, are swiftly placed in what the psychiatrist Robert Jay Lifton terms "atrocity-producing situations". In this environment, surrounded by a hostile population, in simple acts such as going to a store or driving down a street, you can be killed.

This constant fear and stress leads troops to view everyone around them as the enemy. The hostility is compounded when the enemy, as in Iraq, is elusive, shadowy, and hard to find. The rage that soldiers feel after a roadside bomb explodes, killing or maiming their comrades, is one that is easily directed eventually to innocent civilians seen as supporting the insurgents.

It is a short psychological leap, but a massive moral one. It is a leap from killing - the shooting of someone who has the capacity to harm you - to murder - the deadly assault against someone who cannot harm you.

The war in Iraq primarily involves murder. There is very little killing. U.S. Marines and soldiers have become, acclimated to atrocity. The American killing project is not described in these terms to the distant public.

The politicians speak in the abstract of glory, honor, heroism, of the necessity of improving the world, in lofty phrases of political and spiritual renewal. As in most wars, the media are slavishly compliant. The reality of the war is not transmitted to the American public.

The media chronicle the physical and emotional wounds visited on those who kill in our name. The Iraqis, those we kill, are largely nameless, faceless dead. Those who kill large numbers of people always claim it is a regrettable but necessary virtue.

The reality and the mythic narrative of war collide when embittered combat veterans return home. They find themselves estranged from the world around them, a world that still believes in the myth of war and the virtues of the nation.

Iraqi physicians, overseen by epidemiologists at Johns Hopkins University's Bloomberg School of Public Health, published a study in the British medical journal *Lancet*. The study estimated that 655,000 more people than normal have died in Iraq in the first four years after the invasion.

Of the total 655,000 estimated "excess deaths", 601,000 resulted from violence. The remaining deaths occurred from disease and other causes, according to the study. This works out at about five hundred additional violent deaths per day throughout the country.

Official figures have ceased to exist. The Iraqi government stopped releasing the number of civilian casualties, and the U.S. military does not usually give reports about civilians killed or wounded by U.S. forces.

"It's a psychological thing. When one U.S. soldier gets killed or injured, they shoot in vengeance", Alaa Safi told the *Los Angeles Times*. He said his brother, Ahmed, was killed when U.S. troops riddled the streets of their south western Baghdad neighbourhood with bullets after a sniper attack.

War is the pornography of violence. It has a dark beauty, filled with the monstrous and the grotesque. The bible calls it "the lust of the eye" and warns believers against it. War allows us to engage in primal impulses we keep hidden in the deepest, most private interiors of our fantasy lives.

It allows us to destroy not only things but also human beings. In that moment of wholesale destruction, we wield the power of the divine, the power to give or annihilate life. Armed units become crazed by the frenzy of destruction.

All things, including human beings, become objects - objects to gratify, destroy, or both. Almost no one is immune. The contagion of the crowd sees to that. Human beings are machine-gunned and bombed from the air, automatic grenade launchers pepper hovels and neighborhoods with high powered explosives, and convoys tear through Iraq, seeding freight trains of death.

These soldiers and Marines have at their fingertips the heady ability to call in firepower that obliterates landscapes and villages. The moral universe is turned upside down. No one walks away uninfected. War thrusts us into a vortex of barbarity, pain, and fleeting ecstasy. It thrusts us into a world where law is of little consequence.

It takes little in wartime to turn ordinary men and women into killers. Most give themselves willingly to the seduction of unlimited power to destroy. All feel the peer pressure to conform. Few, once in battle, find the strength to resist gratuitous slaughter. Physical courage is common on a battlefield. Moral courage is not.

Military machines and state bureaucrasies, which seek to make us obey, seek also to silence those who return from war and speak the truth. Besides, the public has little desire to puncture the mythic, heroic narrative.

The essence of war, which is death, is carefully masked from view. The few journalists who attempt to speak the truth about war, to describe the experience of constantly being on the receiving end of American firepower, soon become pariahs, no longer able to embed with the military, dine out with officials in the Green Zone, or get press credentials.

And so the vast majority of the media lie to us, although not overtly, it is the lie of omission, but it is a lie nonetheless. The veterans who return, even if they do not speak about the atrocities they have committed or witnessed in Iraq, will spend the rest of their lives coping with what they have done.

They will suffer delayed reactions to stress. They will endure, as have those who returned from Vietnam, a crisis of faith. The God they knew, or thought they knew, failed them. The high priests of our civic religion, from politicians to preachers to television pundits, who promised them glory and honor through war betrayed them.

War always involves betrayal, betrayal of the young by the old, of idealists by cynics, and of troops by politicians. The bitter knowledge of betrayal is seeping into the ranks of the American military. It is bringing us a new wave of enraged and disenfranchised veterans who will never again trust the country that sent them to war.

We make our heroes out of clay. We laud their gallant deeds. We give them uniforms with colored ribbons for the acts of violence they committed or endured. They are our false repositories of glory and honor, of power, of self-righteousness, of patriotism and self-worship, all that we want to believe about ourselves.

They are our plaster saints, the icons we cheer to defend us and make us and our nation great. They are the props of our demented civic religion, our love of power and force, our belief in our right as a chosen nation to wield this force against the weak. This is our nation's idolatry of itself.

Prophets are not those who speak of piety and duty from pulpits - there are few people in pulpits worth listening to. The prophets are the battered wrecks of men and women who return from Iraq and find the courage to speak the halting words we do not want to hear, words we must hear and digest in order to know ourselves.

These veterans, the ones who dare to tell the truth, have seen and tasted how war plunges us into barbarity, perversion, pain, and an unchecked orgy of death. And it is their testimonies, if we take time to listen, which alone can save us.

### **Becoming What We Seek To Destroy**

The bodies of dozens, perhaps well over a hundred, women, children and men, their corpses blown into bits of human flesh by iron fragmentation bombs dropped by U.S. warplanes in a village in the western province of Farah, illustrates the futility of the Afghan war.

We are not delivering democracy or liberation or development. We are delivering massive, sophisticated forms of industrial slaughter. And because we have employed the blunt and horrible instrument of war in a land we know little about and are incapable of reading, we embody the barbarism we claim to be seeking to defeat.

We are morally no different from the psychopaths within the Taliban, whom Afghans remember we empowered, funded, and armed during the ten-year war with the Soviet Union. Acid thrown into a girl's face or beheadings? Death delivered from the air or fields of shiny cluster bombs?

This is the language of war. It is what we speak. It is what those we fight speak. Afghan survivors carted some two dozen corpses from their villages to the provincial capital in trucks to publicly denounce the carnage. Some two thousand angry Afghans in the streets of the capital chanted "Death to America!".

But the grief, fear, and finally rage of the bereaved do not touch those who use high-minded virtues to justify slaughter. The death of innocents, they assure us, is the tragic cost of war. It is regrettable, but it happens. It is the price that must be paid.

Hedges, Chris (2013) *The World as it is: Dispatches on the Myth of Human Progress*. Nation Books, New York.

And so, guided by a president who once again has no experience of war and defers to the bull-necked generals and militarists whose careers, power, and profits depend on expanded war, we are transformed into monsters.

There will soon be 21,000 additional U.S. soldiers and Marines in Afghanistan in time for the expected surge in summer fighting. There will be more clashes, more air strikes, more deaths, and more despair and anger from those forced to bury their parents, sisters, brothers, and children.

The grim report of the killings in the air strike, issued by the International Committee of the Red Cross, which stated that bombs hit civilian houses and noted that an ICRC counterpart in the Red Crescent was among the dead, will become familiar reading in the weeks and months ahead.

We are the best recruiting weapon the Taliban possesses. We enabled it to rise from the ashes to control openly more than half the country and carry out daylight attacks in the Capital Kabul. And the war we wage is being exported like a virus to Pakistan in the form of drones that bomb Pakistani villages, and in increased clashes between the inept Pakistani military and a restive internal insurgency.

The American ground troops are midterm in a history that started roughly in 1984 and 1985, when the State Department decided to assist the mujahideen, the resistance fighters, through various programs and military aid.

The United States Agency for International development, the humanitarian arm serving political and military purposes, was the seed for having a different kind of interaction with the Afghans. The Afghans were very grateful to receive arms and military equipment from the Americans.

But the way USAID distributed its humanitarian assistance was very debatable. They have most of it to the Islamic groups. It is possibly because they were more interested in the future stability of Pakistan rather than saving Afghanistan.

Afghanistan was probably a good ground to hit and drain the blood from the Soviet Union. It seemed that Afghanistan was a tool to weaken the Soviet Union. It was mostly left to the Pakistani intelligence services to decide what would be best and how to do it, and how by doing so they could strengthen themselves.

The Pakistanis developed a close relationship with Saudi Arabia. The Saudis, like the Americans, flooded the country with money and also exported conservative and often radical Wahhabi clerics. The Americans, aware of the Pakistan-Saudi Arabia relationship looked the other way.

Washington sowed, unwittingly, the seeds of destruction in Afghanistan and Pakistan. It armed, trained, and empowered the militants who now kill them. The relationship bewildered most Afghans, who did not look favorably on this radical form of Islam.

Most Afghans wondered why American aid went almost exclusively to the Islamic radicals and not to more moderate and secular resistance movements. The population wondered why they did not have more credibility with the Americans.

The could not understand why the aid was stopped in Pakistan and distributed to political parties that had limited reach in Afghanistan. These parties stockpiled arms and started fighting each other. What the people got in the provinces was miniscule and irrelevant.

And how did the people see all this? They had great hopes in the beginning and gradually became disappointed, bitter, and then felt betrayed. This laid the groundwork for the current suspicion, distrust and disappointment with the U.S. and NATO.

A beleaguered Afghan population, brutalized by the chaos and violence, desperately hoped for stability and peace. The Soviets, like the Americans, spoke of equality, economic prosperity, development, education, women's rights, and political freedom.

But within two years, the ugly face of Soviet domination had unmasked the flowery rhetoric. The Afghans launched their insurgency to drive the Soviets out of the country. There is much personal and mental destruction. Over seventy percent of the population has never known anything else but war.

Kids do not go to school. War is normality. It gives that adrenaline rush that provides a momentary sense of high, and that is what they live on. And how can you build a nation on that? The Pashtuns have built an alliance with the Taliban to restore Pashtun power lost in the 2001 invasion.

The border between Pakistan and Afghanistan is, to the Pashtuns, a meaningless demarcation drawn by imperial powers through the middle of their tribal lands. There are thirteen million Pashtuns in Afghanistan and another twenty-eight million in Pakistan.

The Pashtuns are fighting forces in Islamabad and Kabul they see as seeking to wrest from them their honor and autonomy. They see little difference among the Pakistani military, American troops, and the Afghan army.

Islamabad, while it may battle Taliban forces in Swat or the provinces, does not regard the Taliban as a mortal enemy. The enemy is and has always been India. The balance of power with India requires the Pakistani authorities to ensure that any Afghan government is allied with it.

This means it cannot push the Pashtuns in the Northwest Frontier Province or in Afghanistan too far. It must keep channels open. The cat-and-mouse game between the Pakistani authorities and the Pashtuns, which drives Washington to fury, will never end.

Islamabad needs the Pashtuns in Pakistan and Afghanistan more than the Pashtuns need them. The United States fuels the bonfires of war. The more troops we send to Afghanistan, the more drones we send on bombing runs over Pakistan, the more air strikes we carry out, the worse the unraveling will become.

We have killed twice as many civilians as the Taliban have and that number is sure to rise. The term "collateral damage" is dehumanizing. People are sacrificed on the altar of an idea. Air Power is blind. We are faced with two stark choices.

We can withdraw and open negotiations with the Taliban or continue to expand the war until we are driven out. The corrupt and unpopular regimes of Hamid Karzai in Afghanistan and Asif Ali Zardari in Pakistan, are impotent allies.

The longer they remain tethered to the United States, the weaker they become. And the weaker they become, the louder become calls for intervention in Pakistan. During the Vietnam War, we invaded Cambodia to bring stability to the region and cut off rebel sanctuaries and supply routes.

This tactic only empowered the Khmer Rouge. We seem poised, in much the same way, to do the same for radical Islamists in Afghanistan and Pakistan. If the Americans step up the war in Afghanistan, they will be sucked into Pakistan.

Pakistan is a time bomb waiting to explode. You have a huge population, 170 million people. There is nuclear power. Pakistan is much more dangerous than Afghanistan. War always has its own logic. Once you set foot in war, you do not control it. It sucks you in.

## Iran Had a Democracy Before We Took It Away

Iranians do not need or want us to teach them about liberty and representative government. They have long embodied this struggle. It is we who need to be taught. It was Washington that orchestrated the 1953 coup to topple Iran's democratically elected government, the first in the middle east, and install the compliant Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi in power.

It was Washington that forced Prime Minister Mohammed Mosaddeq to spend the rest of his life under house arrest. We gave to the Iranian people the corrupt regime of the Shah and his savage secret police and the primitive clerics that rose out of the swamp of the dictator's Iran. Iranians know they once had a democracy until we took it away.

The fundamental problem in the Middle East is not a degenerate and corrupt Islam. The fundamental problem is a degenerate and corrupt Christendom. We have not brought freedom and democracy and enlightenment to the Muslim world.

We have brought the opposite. We have used the iron fist of the American military to implant our oil compeneis in Iraq, occupy Aftghanistan, and ensure that the region is submissive and cowed. We have supported a government in Israel that has carried out egregious war crimes in Lebanon and Gaza and is daily stealing ever-greater portions of Palestinian land.

We have established a network of military bases, some the size of small cities, in Iraq, Afghanistan, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and Kuwait, and we have secured basing rights in the Gulf States of Bahrain, Qatar, Oman, and the United Arab Emerites.

We have expanded our military operations to Ubekistan, Pakistan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajiistan, Egypt, Algeria, and Yemen. And no one naively believes, except perhaps us, that we have any intention of leaving. We are the biggest problem in the Middle East.

We have through our cruelty and violence created and legitimized the Mahmoud Ahmadinejands and the Osama Bin Ladens. The longer we lurch around the region dropping bombs and seizing Muslim land, the more these monsters, reflections of our own distorted image, will proliferate.

The theologian Reinhold Niebuhr wrote, "Perhaps the most significant moral characteristic of a nation is its hypocrisy". But our hypocrisy no longer fools anyone but ourselves. It will ensure our imperial and economic collapse.

The history of modern Iran is the history of people battling tyranny. These tyrants were almost always propped up and funded by foreign powers. This suppression and distortion of legitimate democratic movements over the decades resulted in the 1979 revolution that brought the Iranian clerics to power, unleashing another tragic cycle of Iranian resistance.

The central story of Iran over the last two hundred years has been national humiliation at the hands of foreign powers, who have subjugated and looted the country. For a long time the perpetrators were the British and Russians.

Beginning in 1953, the United States began taking over that role. In that year, the American and British secret services overthrew an elected government, wiped away Iranian democracy, and set the country on the path to dictatorship.

Then in the 1980s the U.S. sided with Saddam Hussein in the Iran-Iraq war, providing him with military equipment and intelligence that helped make it possible for his army to kill hundreds of thousands of Iranians.

Given this history, the moral credibility of the U.S. to pose as a promoter of democracy in Iran is close to nil. Especially ludicrous in the sight of people in Washington calling for intervention on behalf of democracy in Iran when just a short time ago they were calling for the bombing of Iran.

If they had their way then, many of the brave protestors in the streets of Tehran today, the ones they hold up as heroes of democracy - would be dead now. Washington has never recovered from the loss of Iran - something our intelligence services never saw coming.

The overthrow of the Shah, the humiliation of the embassy hostages, and the laborious piecing together of tiny shreds of paper from classified embassy documents to expose America's venal role in thwarting democratic movements in Iran and the region, allowed the outside world to see the dark heart of the American Empire.

Washington has demonized Iran ever since, painting it as an irrational and barbaric country filled with primitive, religious zealots. But Iranians, as these street protestors illustrate, have proved in recent years far more courageous in the defense of democracy than most Americans.

Where were we when our election was stolen from us in 2000 by Republican operatives and a Supreme Court that overturned all legal precedent to anoint George W. Bush president. Did tens of thousands of us fill the squares of our major cities and denounce the fraud?

Did we mobilize day after day to restore transparency and accountability to our election process? Did we fight back with the same courage and tenacity as the citizens of Iran? Did Al Gore defy the power elite and demand a recount at the risk of being killed?

President Obama retreated in his Cairo speech into our spectacle of moral nihilism, suggesting that our crimes matched the crimes of Iran, that there is, in his words "a tumultuous history between us". He went on "In the middle of the Cold War, the United States played a role in the overthrow of a democratically elected Iranian government".

"Since the Islamic Revolution, Iran has played a role in acts of hostage-taking and violence against U.S. troops and civilians". It all, he seemed to say, balances out. I am no friend of the Iranian regime, which helped create and arm Hezbollah, is certainly meddling in Iraq; has persecuted human-rights activists, gays, women, and religious and ethnic minorities; embraces racism and intolerance; and uses its power to deny popular will.

But Iran did not orchestrate a coup in the United States to replace an elected government with a brutal dictator who for decades persecuted, assassinated, and imprisoned democracy advocates. Iran did not arm and fund a neighbouring state to wage war against our country.

Iran is not sponsoring terrorism in the United States, as our intelligence services currently do in Iran. The attacks on Iranian soil included suicide bombings, kidnappings, beheadings, sabotage and "targeted assassinations" of government officials, scientists, and other Iranian leaders.

What would we do if the situation were reversed? How would we react if Iran carried out these policies against us? We are, and have long been, the primary engine for radicalism in the Middle East. The greatest favour we can do for democracy activists in Iran, as well as in Iraq, Afghanistan, the Persian Gulf, and the dictatorships of North Africa is withdraw troops from the region and begin to speak to Iranians and the rest of the world in the civilized language of diplomacy, respect, and mutual interests.

The longer we cling to the doomed doctrine of permanent war, the more we give credibility to the extremists who need, indeed yearn for, an enemy that speaks in their crude slogans of nationalist cant and violence.

The louder the Israelis and their idiot allies in Washington call for the bombing of Iran to thwart its nuclear ambitions, the happier are the bankrupt clerics who are ordering the beating and murder of demonstrators.

We may laugh when crowds supporting Ahmadinejad call us “the Great Satan”, but there is a very palpable reality that has informed the terrible algebra of their hatred. Our intoxication with our military prowess blinds us all to possibilities of hope and mutual cooperation.

It was Mohammad Khatami, the president of Iran from 1997-2005 whose refusal to countenance violence by his own supporters led to the demise of his lofty “civil society” at the hands of more ruthless, less scrupulous opponents.

It was Khatami who proclaimed that “the death of even one Jew is a crime”. And we sputtered back to this great and civilized man the primitive slogans of all deformed militarists. We were captive, as all bigots are, to our demons, and could not hear any sound but our own shouting.

It is time to banish these demons. It is time to stand not with the helmeted goons who beat protesters, not with those in the Pentagon who make endless wars, but with the unarmed demonstrators in Iran who daily show us what we must become.

The fight for the Iranian people is our fight. And, perhaps for the first time, we can match our actions to our ideals. We have no right under post-Nuremberg laws to occupy Iraq or Afghanistan. These occupations are defined by these statutes as criminal “wars of aggression”.

They are war crimes. We have no right to use force, including the state-sponsored terrorism we unleash on Iran, to turn the Middle East into a private gas station for our large oil companies. We have no right to empower Israel’s continuing occupation of Palestine, a flagrant violation of international law.

The resistance you see in Iran will not end until Iranians, and all those burdened with repression in the Middle East, free themselves from the tyranny that comes from within and without. Let us, for once, be on the side of those who share our democratic ideals.

### **Opium, Rape, and the American Way**

The warlords we champion in Afghanistan are as venal, as opposed to the rights of women and basic democratic freedoms, and as heavily involved in opium trafficking as the Taliban. The moral lines we draw between us and our adversaries are fictional.

The uplifting narratives used to justify the war in Afghanistan are pathetic attempts to redeem acts of senseless barbarity. War cannot be waged to instill virtue, including democracy or the liberation of women. War always empowers those who have penchant for violence and access to weapons.

War turns the moral order upside down and abolishes all discussion of human rights. War banishes the just and the decent to the margins of society. And the weapons of war do not separate the innocent and the damned.

An aerial drone is our version of an improvised explosive device. An iron fragmentation bomb is our answer to a suicide bomb. A burst from a belt-fed machine gun causes the same terror and bloodshed among civilians no matter who pulls the trigger.

We need to tear the mask off the fundamentalist warlords who after the tragedy of 9/11 replaced the Taliban. They used the mask of democracy to take power. They continue this deception. These warlords are mentally the same as the Taliban.

The only change is physical. These warlords during the civil war in Afghanistan from 1992 to 1996 killed sixty-five thousand innocent people. They have committed human rights violations, like the Taliban, against women and many others.

This is not war on terror. It is war on innocent civilians. Look at the massacres carried out by NATO forces in Afghanistan. Look what they did in the Farah province where more than 150 civilians were killed, most of them women and children.

They used white phosphorus and cluster bombs. Afghanistan's boom in the trade of opium, used to produce heroin, has funneled hundreds of millions of dollars to the Taliban, Al-Qaida, local warlords, criminal gangs, kidnappers, private armies, drug traffickers, and many of the senior figures in the government of Hamid Karzai.

The New York Times reported that the brother of President Karzai, Ahmed Wali Karzai, has been collecting money from the CIA although he is a major player in the illegal opium business. Afghanistan produces ninety-two percent of the world's opium in a trade that is worth some 65 billion dollars, the United Nations estimates.

The opium feeds some 15 million addicts worldwide and kills around 100,000 people annually. These fatalities should be added to the rolls of the war dead. Antonio Maria Costa, executive director of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, said that the drug trade has permitted the Taliban to thrive and expand despite the presence of 100,000 NATO troops.

The Taliban's direct involvement in the opium trade allows them to fund a war machine that is becoming technologically more complex and increasingly widespread. The Taliban earned 90 million to 160 million a year from taxing the production and smuggling of opium and heroin between 2005 and 2009, as much as double the amount it earned annually while it was in power.

Costa described the Afghan-Pakistani border as "the world's largest free trade zone in anything and everything that is illicit". The "perfect storm of drugs and terrorism" may be on the move along drug trafficking routes through Central Asia, he warned.

Profits made from opium are being pumped into militant groups in Central Asia, and "a big part of the region could be engulfed in large-scale terrorism, endangering its massive energy resources". Afghanistan has become a world center for drugs.

The drug lords are the only ones with power. How can we expect these people to stop the planting of opium and halt the drug trade? How is it that the Taliban, when they were in power, destroyed the opium production and a superpower not only cannot destroy the opium production but allows it to increase?

And while all of this goes on, those who support the war talk to us about women's rights. We do not have human rights now in the provinces. It is as easy to kill a woman in Afghanistan as it is to kill a bird. In some big cities like Kabul, some women have access to jobs and education, but in most of the country the situation for women is hell.

Rape, kidnapping, and domestic violence are increasing. These fundamentalists during the so-called free elections made a misogynist law against Shia women in Afghanistan. The law has been signed by Hamid Karzai. All these crimes are happening under the name of democracy.

Thousands of Afghan civilians have died from insurgent and foreign military violence. And American and NATO forces are responsible for almost half the civilian deaths in Afghanistan. Tens of thousands of Afghan civilians have also died from displacement, starvation, disease, exposure, lack of medical treatment, crime, and lawlessness resulting from the war.

Hedges, Chris (2013) *The World as it is: Dispatches on the Myth of Human Progress*. Nation Books, New York.

Neither Karzi or his rival Abdullah Abdullah, will do anything to halt the transformation of Afghanistan into a narco-state. NATO, by choosing sides in the battle between two corrupt and brutal opponents, has lost all its legitimacy in the country.

The Karzi government is filled with “glaring corruption and unabashed graft”. Karzai, is a president “whose confidants and chief advisers comprise drug lords and war crimes villains who mock our own rule of law and counter-narcotics effort”.

Where do you think the 36 billion dollars of money poured into the country by the international community have gone? The money went into the pockets of the drug lords and the warlords. There are 18 million people in Afghanistan who live on less than two dollars a day while these warlords get rich.

The Taliban and warlords together contribute to this fascism while the occupation forces are bombing and killing innocent civilians. When we do not have security, how can we even talk about human rights or women’s rights?

The election under the shade of Afghan warlordism, drug-lordism, corruption and occupation forces has no legitimacy at all. The result will be like the same donkey but with new saddles. It is not important who is voting. It is important who is counting. And that is our problem.

Many of those who go with the Taliban do not support the Taliban, but they are fed up with these warlords and this injustice, and they go with the Taliban to take revenge. Most of the people are against the Taliban and the warlords, which is why millions did not take part in this tragic drama of an election.

The U.S. wastes taxpayers’ money and the blood of their soldiers by supporting such a Mafia corrupt system of Hamid Karzai. They chained Afghanistan to the center of drugs. If Obama was really honest, he would have supported the democratic-minded people of Afghanistan.

The Afghan people are sandwiched between two powerful enemies. The occupation forces from the sky bomb and kill innocent civilians. On the ground, the Taliban and these warlords deliver fascism. As NATO kills more civilians, the resistance to foreign troops increases.

If the U.S. government and NATO do not leave voluntarily, the Afghan people will give them the same lesson they gave to Russia and the English, who three times tried to occupy Afghanistan. It is easier for the Afghans to fight against one enemy rather than two.

### **Afghanistan’s Sham Army**

Success in Afghanistan is measured in Washington by the ability to create an indigenous army that will battle the Taliban, provide security and stability for Afghan civilians, and remain loyal to the puppet government of Hamid Karzai.

A similar set of goals eluded the Red Army, although the Soviets spent a decade attempting to pacify the country. It eluded the British a century earlier. And the United States, too, will fail. American military advisers who work with the Afghan National Army, or ANA, speak of poorly trained and unmotivated Afghan soldiers who have little stomach for military discipline and even less for fighting.

They describe many ANA units as being filled with brigands who terrorize local populations, exacting payments and engaging in intimidation, rape and theft. They contend that the ANA is riddled with Taliban sympathizers.

And when there are combined American and Afghan operations against the Taliban insurgents, ANA soldiers are fickle and unreliable combatants, the U.S. advisers say. American military commanders in Afghanistan, rather than pump out statistics about enemy body counts measure progress by the swelling size of the ANA.

Hedges, Chris (2013) *The World as it is: Dispatches on the Myth of Human Progress*. Nation Books, New York.

The bigger the ANA, the better we are supposedly doing. The pressure on trainers to increase the numbers of the ANA means that training and vetting of incoming Afghan recruits is nearly non-existent.

The process of induction for Afghan soldiers begins at the Kabul Military Training Center. American instructors at the Kabul center routinely complain of shortages of school supplies such as whiteboards, markers, and paper.

They often have to go to markets and pay for these supplies on their own or do without them. Instructors are pressured to pass all recruits and graduate many who have been absent for a third to half the training time. Most are inducted into the ANA without having mastered rudimentary military skills.

Afghan soldiers leave the KMTC grossly unqualified. American mentors do what they can to try and fix these problems, but their efforts are blocked by pressure from higher, both in Afghan and American chains of command, to pump out as many soldiers as fast as possible.

Afghan soldiers are sent from the Kabul Military Training Center directly to active-duty ANA units. The units always have American trainers, known as a “mentoring team”, attached to them. The rapid increase in ANA soldiers has outstripped the ability of the American military to provide trained mentoring teams.

The teams, normally composed of members of the Army Special Forces, are now formed by plucking American soldiers, more or less at random, from units all over Afghanistan. “This is how my entire team was selected during the middle of my tour”, one officer said; “a random group of people from all over Kabul pulled from their previous assignments, thrown together and expected to do a job that none of us were trained in any meaningful way to do”.

“We are expected, by virtue of time-in-grade and membership of the U.S. military, to be able to train a foreign force in military operations, an extremely irresponsible policy that is ethno centric at its core and which assumes some sort of natural superiority in which an untrained American soldier has everything to teach the Afghans, but nothing to learn”.

“You’re luck enough if you had any mentorship training at all, something the Army provides in a limited capacity at pre-mobilization training at Fort Riley, but having none is the norm”, he said. Soldiers who receive their pre-mobilization training at Fort Bragg learn absolutely nothing about mentoring foreign forces aside from being given a booklet on the subject, and yet soldiers who go through Bragg before being shipped to Afghanistan are just as likely to be assigned to mentoring teams as anyone else”.

The differences between the Afghan military structure and the American military structure are substantial. The ANA handles logistics differently. Its rank structure is not the same. Its administration uses different military terms. It rarely works with the aid of computers or basic technology.

The cultural divide leaves most trainers, who do not speak Dari, struggling to figure out how things work in the ANA. The real purpose of American advisers assigned to ANA units, however, is not ultimately to train Afghans but to function as a liaison between Afghan units and American firepower and logistics.

The ANA is unable to integrate ground units with artillery and air support. It has no functioning supply system. It depends on the American military to do basic tasks. The United States even pays the bulk of ANA salaries.

“In the unit I was helping to mentor, orders for mission-essential equipment such as five-ton trucks went unfilled for months, and winter clothes came late due to national shortages”, the officer said. “Many soldiers in the unit had to make do for the first few weeks of Afghanistan’s winter without jackets or other cold-weather items”.

But what disturbs advisers most is the widespread corruption within the ANA that has enraged and alienated Afghans and proved to be a potent recruiting tool for the Taliban. “In the Afghan logistics battalion I was embedded with, the commander himself was extorting a local shopkeeper, and his staff routinely stole from the local store”, the adviser said.

“In Kabul, on one humanitarian aid mission I was on, we handed out school supplies to children, and in an attempt to lend validity to the ANA we had ANA members distribute supplies. As it turns out, we received intelligence reports that the very same group of ANA had been extorting money from the villagers under threat of violence”.

“In essence, we teamed up with well-known criminals and local thugs to distribute aid in the very village they had been terrorizing, and that was the face of American charity”.

We have pumped billions of dollars into Afghanistan and occupied the country for years. We currently spend \$4 billion a month on Afghanistan. But we are unable to pay for whiteboards and markers for instructors at the Kabul Military Training Center.

Afghan soldiers lack winter jackets. Kabul is in ruins. Unemployment is estimated at about forty percent. And Afghanistan is one of the most food-insecure countries on the planet. What are we doing? Where is the money going?

Look to the civilian contractors. These contractors dominate the lucrative jobs in Afghanistan. The American military, along with the ANA, is considered a poor relation. “When I arrived in theater, one of the things I was shocked to see was how many civilians were there”, the U.S. officer said.

“Americans and foreign nationals from Eastern Europe and South East Asia were holding jobs in great numbers in Kabul. There are a ton of corporations in Afghanistan performing labour that was once exclusively in the realm of the military”.

“If you’re a military cook, someone from Kellogg, Brown and Root has taken your spot. If you’re a logistician or military adviser, someone from MPRI, Military Professional Resources Inc., will probably take your job soon”.

“If you’re a technician or a mechanic, there are civilians from Harris Corp. and other companies there who are taking over more and more of your responsibilities”. The American military has been largely privatized, although General Stanley McChrystal, the commander of U.S. and NATO forces in Afghanistan, has still recommended a 40,000-troop increase.

The Army’s basic functions have been outsourced to no-bid contractors. What was once done by the military with concern for tactical and strategic advancement is done by war profiteers concerned solely about profit.

The aims of the military and the contractors are in conflict. A scaling down of the war or a withdrawal is viewed by these corporations as bad for business. But expansion of the war, as many veterans will attest, is making the situation only more precarious.

“American and Afghan soldiers are putting their lives at risk, Afghan civilians are dying, and yet there’s this underlying system in place that gains more from keeping all of them in harm’s way rather than taking them out of it”, the officer complained.

“If we bring peace and stability to Afghanistan, we may profit morally, we might make gains for humanity, but moral profits and human gains do not contribute to the bottom line. Peace and profit are ultimately contradictory forces at work in Afghanistan”.

The wells that are dug, the schools that are built, the roads that are paved, and the food distributed in Afghan villages by the occupation forces are used to obscure the huge profits made by contractors. Only an estimated ten percent of the money poured into Afghanistan is used to ameliorate the suffering of Afghan civilians.

The remainder is swallowed by contractors who siphon the money out of Afghanistan and into foreign bank accounts. This misguided allocation of funds is compounded in Afghanistan because the highest-paying jobs for Afghans go to those who can act as interpreters for the American military and foreign contractors.

The best educated Afghans are enticed away from Afghan institutions that desperately need their skills and education. It is this system of waste and private profit from public funds that keeps Kabul in ruins. It is this system that manages to feed Westerners all across the country steak and lobster once a week while an estimated 8.4 million Afghans suffer from chronic food insecurity and starvation every day.

When you go to Bagram Air Base, or Camp Phoenix or Camp Eggers, it's clear to see that the problem does not lie in getting supplies into the country. The question becomes who gets them. And we wonder why there's an insurgency.

The problem in Afghanistan is not ultimately a military problem. It is a political and social problem. The real threat to stability in Afghanistan is not the Taliban, but widespread hunger and food shortages, crippling poverty, rape, corruption, and a staggering rate of unemployment that mounts as foreign companies take away jobs from local workers and businesses.

Corruption and abuse by the Karzai government and the ANA, along with the presence of foreign contractors, are the central impediments to peace. The more we empower these forces, the worse the war will become.

The plan to escalate the number of American soldiers and Marines, and to swell the ranks of the Afghan national army, will not defeat or pacify the Taliban. "What good are a quarter-million well-trained Afghan troops to a nation slipping into famine?" the officer asked.

"What purpose does a strong military serve with a corrupt and inept government in place? What hope do we have for peace if the best jobs for the Afghans involve working for the military? What is the point in getting rid of the Taliban if it means killing civilians with air strikes and supporting a government of misogynist warlords and criminals?"

We as Americans do not help the Afghans by sending in more troops, by increasing military spending, by adding chaos to disorder. What little help we do provide is only useful in the short term and is clearly unsustainable in the face of our own economic crisis.

In the end, no one benefits from this war, not America, not Afghans. Only the CEOs and executive officers of war-profiteering corporations find satisfactory returns on their investments.

## **Death and After In Iraq**

Jess Goodell enlisted in the Marines immediately after she graduated from high school in 2001. She volunteered three years later to serve in the Marine Corps' first officially declared Mortuary Affairs unit, at Camp Al Taqaddum in Iraq.

Her job, for eight months, was to collect and catalog the bodies and personal effects of dead Marines. She put the remains of young Marines in body bags and placed the bags in metal boxes. Before being shipped to Dover Air Force Base, the boxes were stored, often for days, in a refrigerated unit known as a "reefer".

Hedges, Chris (2013) *The World as it is: Dispatches on the Myth of Human Progress*. Nation Books, New York.

The work she did was called “processing”. “We went through everything”, she said. We would get everything that the body had on it when the Marine died. Everyone had a copy of the Rules of Engagement in their left breast pocket.

You found notes that people had written to each other. You found lists. Lists were common, the things they wanted to do when they got home or food they wanted to eat. The most difficult was pictures. Everyone had a picture of their wife or their kids or their family.

And you had the younger kids who might be 18 years old and they had prom pictures . Everyone had a spoon in their flak jacket. There were pens and trash and wrappers and MRE food. All of it would get sent back to the Marine’s homes.

“We all had the diea that at any point this could be us on the table” she said. “I think Marines thought that we went over there to die. And so people wrote letters saying “If I die I want you to know I love you”. ‘I want my car to go to my younger brother’. Things like that.

They carried those letters on their bodies. We had a Marine that we processed and going thoruhg his wallet he had a picture of a sonogram of a foetus his wife had sent him. And a lot of Marines had tattoed their vital information under their armpit. It was called a meat tag”.

The unit processed about half a dozen suicides. The suicide notes she said, almost always cited hazing. Women, she said, were constantly harassed, especially sexually, but it often did not match the sytematic punishment and humiliation meted out to men who were deemed to be inadequate Marines.

She said that Marines who were overweight or unable to do the physical training were subjected to withering verbal and physical abuse. They were called “fat nasties” and “shit bags”. The harassed Marines would be assigne dto other individual Marines and become their slaves.

They would be sent on punishing funs in which many of them vomited. They would be forced to bear-crawl - walk on all fours - the length of a football field and back. This would be followed by sets of monkey fuckers - bending down, grabbing the ankles, crouching down and then standing up again - followed by a series of other exercises that went on until the Marines collapsed.

“They make these Marines do what they call “bitch-work”, Goodell said. “They are assigned to be someone else’s “bitch” for the day. We had a guy in our platoon, not in Iraq but in California, and he was overweight. He was on remedial PT, which meant he went to extra physical training.

When he came to work he was rotated. One day he was with this corporal or this sergeant. One day he was sent to me. I had him for an hour. I remember sending him outside and making him carry things. It was very common for them to dig a hole and fill it back up with sand or carry sandbags up to the top of a hill and then carry them down again”.

The unit was sent to collect the bodies of the Marines who killed themselves, usually by putting rifles under their chins and pulling the trigger. “We had a marine who was in a port-a-john when he blew his face off”, she said. “We had another Marine who shot himself through the neck.

Often they would do it in the corner of a bunker or an abandoned building. We had a couple that did it in the port-a-johns. We had to go in and peel and pull off chunks of flesh and brain tissue that had sprayed on the walls. Those were the most frustrating bodies to get.

On those bodies we were also on cleanup crew. It was gross. We sent the suicide notes home with the bodies. “We had the paperwork to do fingerprinting, but we wstarted getting bodies in which there weren’t any hands or we would get bodies that were just meat”, said Goodell, who published a memoir called “Shade it Black: Dath and After in Iraq”.

Hedges, Chris (2013) *The World as it is: Dispatches on the Myth of Human Progress*. Nation Books, New York.

The book title refers to the form that required those in the mortuary unit to shade in black the body parts that were missing from a corpse. “Very quickly it became irrelevant to have a fingerprinting page to fill out. By the time we would get a body it might have been a while and rigor mortis had already set in.

Their hands were usually clenched as if they were still holding onto their rifle. We could not unbend the fingers easily”. The unit was also sent to collect Marines killed by improvised explosive devices. The members would arrive on the scene and don white plastic suits, gloves, and face masks.

“One of the first convoys we went to was one where the Army had been travelling over a bridge and an IED had exploded”, she said. “It had literally shot a seven-ton truck over the side and down into a ravine. Marines were already going down into the ravine. We were just getting out of our vehicles.

We were putting on our gloves and putting coverings on our boots. I was coming around the Humvee and there was a spot on the ground that was a circle. I looked at it and thought something must have exploded here or near here.

I went over to look at it. I looked in and saw a boot. Then I noticed the boot had a foot in it. I almost lost my lunch. In the seven-ton truck the body of the assistant driver, who was in the passenger seat, was trapped in the vehicle”, she said. “We had to crawl in there to get it out. It was charred. I pulled the burnt upper torso from the truck. Then we removed a leg. Some of the remains had to be scooped up by putting our hands together as though we were cupping water.

That was very common. A lot of deaths were from IEDs or explosions. You might have an upper torso but you need to scoop the rest of the remains into a body bag. It was very common to have body bags that when you picked them up they would sink in the middle because they were filled with flesh. The contents did not resemble a human body”.

The members of the mortuary unit were shunned by the other Marines. The stench of dead flesh clung to their uniforms, hair, skin, and fingers. Two members of the mortuary unit began to disintegrate psychologically. One began to take a box of Nyquil tablets every day and drink large quantities of cold medicine.

“Our cammies would be stained with blood or with brains”, she said. “When you scoop up the meat it often would get on the cuffs of our shirts. You could smell it, even after you took off your gloves. We weren’t washing our cammies everyday.”

“Your cuff comes to your face when you eat. Physically we were stained with remains. We had a constant smell like rotten meat, which I guess is what it was since often the bodies had been in the sun and the heat for a long time”.

“The flesh had gone bad. The skin on a body in the hot sun slides off. The skin detaches itself from the layer beneath and slides around on itself”..

“Our platoon was to the Marines what the Marines are to much of America: We did things that had to be done but that no one wanted to know about”, she said. “The other Marines knew what we did, but they did not want to think it could happen to them”.

“I had one female Marine in my tent who would talk to me. The rest would not give me the time of day. The Marines in Mortuary Affairs knew that any day could be our day. Other Marines, who have to go out on the convoys, who have to get up the next day, have to get on with life”.

Her unit once had to recover two Marines who had drowned in a lake. It appeared one had leapt in to save the other. The bodies, which were recovered after a couple of days by Navy divers, were grotesquely swollen.

One of the Marines was so bloated and misshapened that the body was difficult to carry on a litter. "His neck was as wide as his bloated head, and his stomach jutted out like a barrel", she writes in the book. "His testicles were the size of cantaloupes. His face was white and puffy and thick. Not fat, but thick".

"It was unreal. He looked like a movie prop, with thick, gray, waxy skin and the thick purple lips. We couldn't stop looking at these bodies because they were so out of proportion and so disfigured and because, they looked like us".

It was hardest to look into the faces of the dead. She and the other members of the mortuary unit swiftly covered the faces when they worked on the bodies. They avoided looking at the eyes of the corpses. Once, the unit had to process seven Marines killed in an explosion. Seven or eight body bags were delivered to the bunker.

"We had clean body bags set up so we could sort the flesh", she said. "Sometimes things come in with nametags. Or sometimes one is hispanic and you could tell who was Hispanic and who was the white guy."

She processed one Marine whose face was twisted at the moment of death by rage. The face of this Marine began to haunt her. "I had this feeling that something awful had occurred", she said. "The way he had come in and stiffened, he had this look to his face that made my stomach curl. It looked angry".

"Often expressions on bodies would look fearful and hurt. The faces looked as though they had received tdeath. But this face looked like he had given death".

She and the other members of the unit became convinced they could feel and hear the souls of the dead Marines they had processed and housed in the reefers. And then there wa a body that was brought in one day that was not stiff.

"He was fully dressed in his cammies and his whole body was in tact", she said. "His hands were lying folded across his stomach". She and the others noticed that the Marine on the table was breathing lightly. The chest was going up and down. They frantically called their superiors to find out what to do. They were told to wait .

"Just wait? Wait for what?", she cried.

She remembers the doc saying: "There's nothing we can do. Just wait".

"People don't wait for this sort of thing", she protested. "what are we waiting for? What if this Marine was your brother, would we wait?". They stood and watched as the man died. Goodell stormed out of the bunker.

"There was always a heaviness in the air", she said. "It felt like I was being watched. We could feel hands on our shoulders or hand on our heads. Everyone had stories of sounds they heard or things they had felt."

"I was on watch at the bunker and I heard the back door open. I assumed it was one of the Marines coming in to use the Internet or the phone. I waited for them to come up. They would always come up. But no one came up. I got up and didn't see anyone. I went back to my duty hut and I heard footsteps walk across the bunker. This kind of thing happened often".

Her return to the United States was difficult, filled with retreats into isolation, substance abuse, deep depression, and dysfunctional relationships. Slowly she pulled her life back together, finishing college and applying to graduate school so she can counsel trauma victims.

“Every single Marine I know goes to Iraq to help”, she said. “While I was there that is what I thought. That is why I volunteered. I thought I was going to help the Iraqis. I know better now. We did the dirty work. We were used by the government”.

“The military knows that young, single men are dangerous. We breed it in Marines. We push the testosterone. We don’t want them to be educated. They are deprived of a lot and rewarded with very little. It keeps us at ground level. We cannot question anyone. We do what we are told.

“I am still in contact with most of the people I knew”, she said. “They are not coping. One lives in Veterans Affairs, constantly seeing psychologists and psychiatrists. One was kicked out of the Marines for three DUIs. Another was kicked out of the Marines because he took cocaine.”

“Those who have gotten out are living below the poverty level. And what people do to cope is re-enlist. When they re-enlist they do better. The function. I am the only one who went to school of the 18 Marines in Mortuary Affairs.”

“But I am in counselling at Veterans affairs. I have been diagnosed with PTSD, anxiety, depression, and substance abuse. What separates me from them is that I have a great support system and I found my salvation through my education”.

## The Decay of Empire

### Surviving the Fourth of July

I survive the degradation that has become America because I read books. A land that exalts itself as a bastion of freedom and liberty while it tortures human beings stripped of their rights, in offshore penal colonies, a land that wages wars defined under international law as criminal wars of aggression, a land that turns its back on its poor, its weak, its mentally ill, in a relentless drive to embrace totalitarian capitalism.

I have five thousand books. They line every wall of my house. And I do not own a television. I survive the gradual, and I now fear inevitable, disintegration of our democracy because great literature and poetry, great philosophy and theology, the great works of history, remind me that there were other ages of collapse and despotism.

They remind me that through it all, men and women of conscience endured and communicated, at least with each other, and that it is possible to refuse to participate in the process of self-annihilation, even if this means we are pushed to the margins of society.

They remind me, as the poet W.H. Auden wrote in "September 1, 1939", that "ironic points of light/Flash wherever the Just/Exchange their messages". And if you tire as all who can think critically must, of the empty cant and hypocrisy of John McCain and Barack Obama, of the simplistic and intellectual deadening epistemology of television and the consumer age, you can retreat to your library.

Books were my salvation during the wars and conflicts I covered for two decades as a foreign correspondent in Central America, Africa, the Middle East, and the Balkans. They are my salvation now. The fundamental questions about the meaning, or meaninglessness, of our existence are laid bare when we sink to the lowest depths.

And it is those depths that Homer, Euripides, William Shakespeare, Fyodor Dostoyevsky, George Eliot, Joseph Conrad, Marcel Proust, Vasily Grossman, George Orwell, Albert Camus, and Flannery O'Connor understood.

"That's what the practice of any art is. It isn't to make a living," Kurt Vonnegut said, "It's to make your soul grow". The historian Will Durant calculated that there have been only twenty-nine years in all of human history during which a war was not underway somewhere.

Rather than being aberrations, war and tyranny expose a side of human nature masked by the often unacknowledged constraints that glue society together. Our cultivated conventions and little lies of civility lull us into a refined and idealistic view of ourselves.

But look at our last two decades: two million dead in the war in Afghanistan, 1.5 million dead in the fighting in Sudan, some 800,000 butchered in the ninety-day slaughter of Tutsis and moderate Hutus by soldiers and militias directed by the Hutu government in Rwanda, a half-million dead in Angola, a quarter of a million dead in Bosnia, 200,000 dead in Guatemala, 150,000 dead in Liberia, a quarter of a million dead in Burundi, 75,000 dead in Algeria, an estimated 600,000 dead in Iraq, and untold tens of thousands lost in the border conflict between Ethiopia and Eritrea, the fighting in Columbia, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, Chechnya, Sri Lanka, southeastern Turkey, Sierra Leone, Northern Ireland, Kosovo.

Civil war, brutality, ideological intolerance, conspiracy, and murderous repression are the daily fare for all but the privileged few in the industrialized world. "The gallows", the gravediggers in Hamlet aptly remind us, "is built stronger than the church".

I have little connection, however, with academics. Most professors of literature, who read the same books as I read, who study the same authors, are to literature what forensic medicine is to the human body. These academics seem to spend more time sucking the life out of books than absorbing the profound truths the authors struggle to communicate.

Perhaps it is because academics, sheltered in their gardens of privilege, often have hyper-developed intellects and the emotional maturity of twelve-year-olds. Perhaps it is because they fear the awful revelations in front of them, truths that, deeply understood, would demand they fight back.

It is easier to eviscerate the form, the style, and the structure with textual analysis and ignore the passionate call for our common humanity. "As long as reading is for us the instigator whose magic keys have opened the door to those dwelling-places deep within us that we would not have known how to enter, its role in our lives is salutary" - Proust wrote.

"It becomes dangerous, on the other hand, when, instead of awakening us to the personal life of the mind, reading tends to take its place..."

I have seen the pits in the torpid heat in El Salvador, the arid valleys in northern Iraq, and the forested slopes in Bosnia. Despite the promises never to forget the sacrifices of the dead, the loss and suffering eventually become superfluous.

The pain is relegated to the pages of dusty books, the corridors of poorly funded Veteran Affairs hospitals, and sustained by grieving families who still visit the headstones of men and women who died too young.

This will be the fate of our dead and wounded from Iraq and Afghanistan. It is the fate of all those who go to war. We honor them only in the abstract. The causes that drove the nation to war, and for which they gave their lives, are soon forgotten, replaced by new ones that are equally absurd.

Patriotic duty and the disease of nationalism lure us to deny our common humanity. Yet to pursue, in the broadest sense, what is human, what is moral, in the midst of conflict or under the heel of the totalitarian state, is often a form of self-destruction.

And while Shakespeare, Proust, and Conrad meditate on success, they honor the nobility of failure, knowing more value lies in how a life is lived than in what it achieves. Lear and Richard the second gain knowledge only as they are pushed down the ladder, as they are stripped of power and the illusions power makes possible.

### **America's Wars of Self-Destruction**

War is a poison. It is a poison that nations and groups must at times ingest to ensure their survival. But like any poison, it can kill you just as surely as the disease it is meant to eradicate. The poison of war courses unchecked through the body politic of the United States.

We believe that because we have the capacity to wage war we have the right to wage war. We embrace the dangerous self-delusion that we are on a providential mission to save the rest of the world from itself, to implant our virtues - which we see as superior to all other virtues - on others, and that we have a right to do this by force.

This belief has corrupted Republicans and Democrats alike. And if Barack Obama drank the dark elixir of war and imperial power offered to him by the national security state, he accelerated the downward spiral of the American empire.

Obama and those around him embraced the follow of the "war on terror". They may have wanted to shift the emphasis of this war to Afghanistan rather than Iraq, but this is a difference in strategy, not policy.

Hedges, Chris (2013) *The World as it is: Dispatches on the Myth of Human Progress*. Nation Books, New York.

By clinging to Iraq and expanding the war in Afghanistan, we ensure that the poison will continue in deadly doses.

These wars of occupation are doomed to failure. We cannot afford them. The rash of home foreclosures, the mounting job losses, the collapse of banks and the financial services industry, the poverty ripping apart the working class, our crumbling infrastructure, and the killing of hapless Afghans in wedding parties and Iraqis by our bombs are neatly interwoven.

These events form a perfect circle. The costly forms of death we dispense on one side of the globe are hollowing us out from the inside at home. The “war on terror” is an absurd war against a tactic. It posits the idea of perpetual, or what is now called “generational” war. It has no discernable end.

There is no way to define victory. It is, in metaphysical terms, a war against evil, and evil, as any good seminarian can tell you, will always be with us. The most destructive evils, however, are not those that are externalized.

The most destructive are those that are internal. These hidden evils, often defined as virtues, are unleashed by our hubris, self-delusion, and ignorance. Evil masquerading as good is evil in its deadliest form.

The decline of American empire began long before the current economic meltdown or the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. It began before the first Gulf War or Ronald Reagan. It began when we shifted from an empire of production to an “empire of consumption”.

By the end of the Vietnam war we saw our country transformed from one that primarily produced to one that primarily consumed. We started borrowing to maintain a lifestyle we could no longer afford. We began to use force, especially in the Middle East, to feed our insatiable demand for cheap oil.

The years after the second world war, when the United States accounted for one-third of world exports and half of the world’s manufacturing, gave way to huge trade imbalances, outsourced jobs, rusting hulks of abandoned factories, stagnant wages, and personal and public debts that most of us cannot repay.

The bill is now due. America’s most dangerous enemies are not Islamic radicals, but those who promote the perverted ideology of national security that is our surrogate religion. If we continue to believe we can expand our wars and go deeper into debt to maintain an unsustainable level of consumption, we will dynamite the foundations of our society.

The Big Lies are not the pledge on tax cuts, universal health care, family values restored, or a world rendered peaceful through forceful demonstration of American leadership. The Big Lies are the truths that remain unspoken: that freedom is an underside; that nations, like households, must ultimately live within their means; that history’s purpose, the subject of so many confident pronouncements, remains inscrutable.

Above all, there is this: Power is finite. Politicians pass over matters such as these in silence. As a consequence, the absence of self-awareness that forms such an enduring element of the American character persists.

Those clustered around Barack Obama, from Madeleine Albright to Hillary Clinton to Dennis Ross to Colin Powell, had no interest in dismantling the structure of the imperial presidency or the vast national security state. They kept these institutions in tact and sought to increase their power.

We had a childish belief that Obama would magically save us from our economic freefall, restore our profligate levels of consumption, and resurrect our imperial power. This naïve belief was part of our disconnection from reality. The problems we face are structural. The old America is not coming back.

The corporate forces that control the state will never permit real reform. This is the Faustian bargain made between these corporate forces and the Republican and Democratic parties. We will never, under the current system, achieve energy independence.

Energy independence would devastate the profits of the oil and gas industry. It would wipe out tens of billions of dollars in weapons contracts, spoil the financial health of a host of private contractors from Halliburton to Blackwater, and render obsolete the existence of U.S. Central Command.

There are groups and people who seek to do us harm. The attacks of September, 11, 2001, will not be the last acts of terrorism on American soil. But the only way to defeat terrorism is to isolate terrorists in their own societies, to mount cultural and propaganda wars, to discredit their ideas, to seek concurrence even with those defined as our enemies.

Force, while a part of this battle, is rarely necessary. The 2001 attacks that roused our fury and unleashed the “war on terror” also unleashed a worldwide revulsion against al-Qaida and Islamic terrorism, including throughout the Muslim world.

If we had the courage to be vulnerable, to build on this empathy rather than drop explosive ordinance all over the middle east, we would be far safer and more secure today. If we had reached out for our allies and partners instead of arrogantly assuming that American military power would restore our sense of invulnerability and mitigate our collective humiliation, we would have done much to defeat al-Qaida.

But we did not. We demanded that all kneel before us. And in our ruthless and indiscriminate use of violence and illegal wars of occupation, we resurrected the very forces that we could, under astute leadership, have marginalized.

We forgot that fighting terrorism is a war of shadows, an intelligence war, not a conventional war. We forgot that, as strong as we may be militarily, no nation, including us, can survive isolated and alone. The American empire, along with our wanton self-indulgence and gluttonous consumption, has come to an end.

We are undergoing a period of profound economic, political, and military decline. We can continue to dance to the tunes of self-delusion, circling the fire as we chant ridiculous mantras about our greatness, virtue, and power, or we can face the painful reality that has engulfed us.

We cannot reverse this decline. It will happen no matter what we do. But we can, if we break free from our self-delusion, dismantle our crumbling empire and the national security state with a minimum of damage to ourselves and others.

If we refuse to accept our limitations, if we do not face the changes forced upon us by a bankrupt elite that has grossly mismanaged our economy, our military, and our government, we will barrel toward internal and external collapse.

Our self-delusion constitutes our greatest danger. We will either confront reality or plunge headlong into the minefields that lie before us.

### **Confronting the Terrorist Within**

The wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, when viewed from the receiving end, are state-sponsored acts of terrorism. These wars defy every ethical and legal code that seek to determine when a nation can wage

war, from Just War theory to the statutes of international law largely put into place by the United States after the second world war.

These wars are criminal wars of aggression. They have left hundreds of thousands of people, who never took up arms against us, dead and seen millions driven from their homes. We have no right as a nation to debate the terms of these occupations.

And an Afghan villager, burying members of his family's wedding party after an American air strike, understands in a way we often do not that terrorist attacks can also be unleashed from the arsenals of an imperial power.

Barack Obama's decision to increase troop levels in Afghanistan and leave behind tens of thousands of soldiers and Marines in Iraq was a failure to rescue us from the status of a rogue nation. It codified Bush's "war on terror". And the continuation of these wars will corrupt and degrade our nation just as the long and brutal occupation of Gaza and the West Bank has corrupted and degraded Israel.

George W. Bush handed Obama a poisoned apple. And Obama bit into it. The invasions and occupations of Iraq and Afghanistan were our response to feelings of vulnerability and collective humiliation after the attacks of September 11, 2001.

They were a way to exorcise though reciprocal violence what had been done to us. Collective humiliation is also the driving force behind al-Qaida and most terrorist groups. The dark motivations of Islamic extremists mirror our own.

In *Dying to Win: The Strategic Logic of Suicide Terrorism*, Robert Pape found that most suicide bombers are members of communities that feel humiliated by genuine or perceived occupation. Almost every major suicide-terrorism campaign carried out attacks to drive out an occupying power.

This is true in Lebanon, Sri Lanka, Chechnya, and Kashmir, as well as Israel and the Palestinian territories. The large number of Saudis among the 9/11 hijackers appears to support this finding. Terrorists, many of whom come from the middle class, support acts of indiscriminate violence not because of direct, personal affronts to their dignity, but more for lofty, abstract ideas of national, ethnic or religious pride and the establishment of a utopian, harmonious world purged of evil.

The longer the United States occupies Afghanistan and Iraq, the more these feelings of collective humiliation are aggravated and the greater the number of jihadists willing to attack American targets.

We have had tens of thousands of troops stationed in the Middle East since 1990, when Saddam Hussein invaded Kuwait. The presence of these troops is the main appeal, along with the abuse meted out to the Palestinians by Israel, of al-Qaida.

Terrorism is not a supply-limited phenomenon where there are just a few hundred around the world willing to do it because they are religious fanatics. It is a demand-driven phenomenon. That is, it is driven by the presence of foreign forces on the territory that the terrorists view as their homeland.

The operation in Iraq has stimulated suicide terrorism and has given suicide terrorism a new lease on life. The decision by the Obama administration to embrace an undefined, amorphous "war on terror" will keep us locked in a war without end.

This war has no clear definition of victory, unless victory means the death or capture of every terrorist on earth - an impossibility. It is a frightening death spiral. It feeds on itself. The concept of a "war on terror" is no less apocalyptic or world-purifying than the dreams and fantasies of terrorist groups.

The vain effort to purify the world through force is always self-defeating. Those who insist that the world can be moulded into their vision are the most susceptible to violence as antidote. The more Hedges, Chris (2013) *The World as it is: Dispatches on the Myth of Human Progress*. Nation Books, New York.

uncertainty, fear, and reality impinge on this utopian vision, the more strident, absolutist, and aggressive are those who call for the eradication of “the enemy”.

Immanuel Kant called absolute moral imperatives that are used to carry out immoral acts “a radical evil”. He wrote that this kind of evil was always a form of unadulterated self-love. It was the worst type of self-deception. It provided a moral façade for terror and murder. The wars in Iraq and Afghanistan are a “radical evil”.

The tactic of suicide bombing, equated by many in the United States with Islam, did not arise from the Muslim world. It had its own roots in radical Western ideologies, especially Leninism, not religion. And it was the Tamil Tigers, a Marxist group that drew its support from the Hindu families of the Tamil regions of Sri Lanka, who invented the suicide vest for their May 1991 suicide assassination of Rajiv Gandhi.

Suicide bombing is what you do when you do not have artillery or planes or missiles and you want to create maximum terror for an occupying power. It was used by secular anarchists in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, who bequeathed to us the first version of the car bomb - a horse-drawn wagon laden with explosives that was ignited on September 16, 1920, on Wall Street.

The attack was carried out by an Italian immigrant named Mario Buda in protest over the arrest of the anarchists Sacco and Vanzetti. It left forty people dead and wounded more than two hundred. Suicide bombing was adopted later by Hezbollah, al-Qaida, and Hamas.

But even in the Middle East, suicide bombing was not restricted to Muslims. In Lebanon, during the attacks in the 1980s against French, American, and Israeli targets, only eight suicide bombings were carried out by Muslim fundamentalists.

Twenty-seven were the work of communists and socialists. Christians were responsible for three. The dehumanization of Muslims in U.S. social culture and the willful ignorance of the traditions and culture of the Islamic world reflect our nation’s disdain for self-reflection and self-examination.

They allow us to exult in the illusion of our own moral and cultural superiority. The world is far more complex than our childish vision of good and evil. We as a nation and a culture have no monopoly on virtue. We carry within us the same propensities for terror as those we oppose.

At the end of the sixteenth century, the Muslim Indian emperor Akbar the Great filled his court with philosophers, mystics, and religious scholars, as well as atheists, Christians, Jews, Buddhists and Zoroastrians. They debated ethics and belief.

Akbar was one of the great champions of religious dialogue and tolerance. He forbade any person to be discriminated against on the basis of belief. He declared that everyone was free to follow any religion. His enlightened rule took place as the inquisition was at its height in Spain and Portugal.

Tolerance, as well as religious and political plurality, is not exclusive to Western culture. The Judeo-Christian tradition was born and came to life in the Middle East. Its intellectual and religious beliefs were cultivated and formed in cities such as Jerusalem, Antioch, Alexandria, and Constantinople.

Many of the greatest tenets of Western civilization are Eastern in origin. Our concept of the rule of law and freedom of expression, the invention of printing, paper, the book were given to us by the Islamic world. The first law code was invented by the ancient Iraqi ruler Hammurabi.

One of the first known legal protections of basic freedoms and equality was promulgated in India, in the third century B.C. by the Buddhist emperor Ashoka. And, unlike Aristotle, he insisted on equal rights for women and slaves.

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The East and the West do not have separate, competing value systems. We do not treat life with greater sanctity than those we belittle. There are aged survivors in Hiroshima and Nagasaki who can tell us something about our high moral values and passionate concern for innocent human life, about our own acts of terrorism.

Eastern and Western traditions have within them varied ethical systems, some of which are repugnant and some of which are worth emulating. To hold up the highest ideals for our own culture and our denial that these great ideals exist in other cultures, especially Eastern cultures, is driven by our historical and cultural illiteracy.

The civilization we champion and promote as superior is, in fact, a product of the fusion of traditions and beliefs of the Orient and the Occident. We advance morally and intellectually when we cross those cultural lines, when we use the lens of other cultures to examine our own.

The remains of villages destroyed by our bombs, the dead killed from our munitions, leave us, too, with bloody hands. We can build a new ethic only when we face our complicity in the cycle of violence and terror. The fantasy of an enlightened West that spreads civilization to a savage world of religious fanatics is not supported by history.

The worst genocides and slaughters of the last century were perpetrated by highly industrialized nations. Muslims, including those of Saddam Hussein's brutal regime, have a long way to go before they reach the body count of the secular regimes of the Nazis, the Soviet Union, or the Chinese communists.

It was, in fact, the Muslim-led government in Bosnia that protected minorities during the war while the Serbian Orthodox Christians carried out mass executions, campaigns of genocide, and ethnic cleansing that left 250,000 dead.

Those who externalize evil and seek to eradicate that evil through violence lose touch with their own humanity and the humanity of others. They cannot make moral distinctions. They are blind to their own moral corruption.

In the name of civilization and high ideals, in the name of reason and science, they become monsters. We will never free ourselves from the self-delusion of the "war on terror" until we first vanquish the terrorist within.

### **Man is a Cruel Animal**

It was Joseph Conrad I thought of when I read an article in the Nation magazine about white vigilante groups that rose up out of the chaos of Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans to terrorize and murder Blacks. It was Conrad I thought of when I saw the ominous statements by authorities warning of potential civil unrest in the United States as we funnel staggering sums of public funds upward to our bankrupt elites.

We fool ourselves into believing that we are immune to the savagery and chaos of failed states. Take away the rigid social structure, let society continue to break down, and we become, like anyone else, brutes. Conrad saw enough of the world as a sea captain to know the irredeemable corruption of humanity.

The noble virtues that drove characters like Kurtz in Heart of Darkness into the jungle veiled abject self-interest, unchecked greed, and murder. Conrad was in the Congo in the late nineteenth century when the Belgian monarch King Leopold, in the name of Western civilization and antislavery, was plundering the country.

The Belgian occupation resulted in the death by disease, starvation, and murder of some 10 million Congolese. Conrad understood what we did to others in the name of civilization and progress. And it is

Conrad, as our society unravels internally and plows ahead in the costly, morally repugnant, and self-defeating wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, whom we do well to heed.

This theme of our corruptibility is central to Conrad. In his short story "An Outpost of Progress", he writes of two white traders, Carlier and Kayerts, who are sent to a remote trading station in the Congo. The mission is endowed with a great moral purpose - to export European "civilization" to Africa.

But the boredom and lack of constraints swiftly turn the two men, like our mercenaries and soldiers and Marines in Iraq and Afghanistan, into savages. They trade slaves for ivory. They get into a feud over dwindling supplies, and Kayerts shoots and kills his unarmed companion Carlier.

The managing director of the great civilizing company arrives by steamer at the end of the story. He is not met at the dock by his two agents. He climbs the steep bank to the trading station with the captain and engine driver behind him.

The director finds Kayerts, who, after the murder, committed suicide by hanging himself by a leather strap from a cross marked the grave of the previous station chief. Conrad saw cruelty as an integral part of human nature. This cruelty arrives, however, in different forms.

Stable, industrialized societies, awash in wealth and privilege, can construct internal systems that mask this cruelty, although it is nakedly displayed in their imperial outposts. We are lulled into the illusion in these zones of safety that human beings can be rational.

The "war on terror", the virtuous rhetoric about saving the women in Afghanistan from the Taliban or the Iraqis from tyranny, are two more in a series of long and sordid human campaigns of violence carried out in the name of a moral good.

Those who attempt to mend the flaws in the human species through force embrace a perverted idealism. Those who believe that history is a progressive march toward human perfectibility, and that they have the moral right to force this progress on others, no longer know what it is to be human.

In the name of the noblest virtues they sink to the depths of criminality and moral depravity. The self-delusion comes to us in many forms. It can be wrapped in the language of Western civilization, democracy, religion, the master race, the worker's paradise, the idyllic agrarian society, the new man, or scientific rationalism. The jargon is varied. The dark sentiment is the same.

Conrad understood how Western civilization and technology lend themselves to inhuman exploitation. He had seen in the Congo the barbarity and disdain for human life that resulted from a belief in moral advancement. He knew humankind's violent, primeval lusts.

He knew how easily we can all slip into states of extreme depravity. "Man is a cruel animal", he wrote to a friend. "His cruelty must be organized. Society is essentially criminal - or it wouldn't exist. It is selfishness that saves everything - everything we abhor, everything that we love".

Conrad rejected all formulas or schemes for the moral improvement of the human condition. Political institutions, he said "whether contrived by the wisdom of the few or the ignorance of the many, are incapable of securing the happiness of mankind".

He wrote that "international fraternity may be an object to strive for... but that illusion imposes by its size alone. Franchement, what would you think of an attempt to promote fraternity amongst people living in the same street, I don't even mention two neighbouring streets"?

He bluntly told the pacifist Bertrand Russell, who saw humankind's future in the rise of international socialism, that it was "the sort of thing to which I cannot attach any definite meaning. I have never ben

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able to find in any man's book or any man's talk anything convincing enough to stand up for a moment against my deep-seated sense of fatality governing this man-inhabited world".

Russell said of Conrad: "I felt, thought I do not know whether he would have accepted such an image, that he thought of civilized and morally tolerable human life as a dangerous walk on a thin crust of barely cooled lava which at any moment might break and let the unwary sink into fiery depths".

Conrad's novel *Heart of Darkness* ripped open the callous heart of civilized Europe. The great institutions of European imperial powers and noble ideals of European enlightenment, as Conrad saw in the Congo, were covers for rapacious greed, exploitation, and barbarity.

Kurtz is the self-deluded megalomaniac ivory trader in *Heart of Darkness* who ends up planting the shriveled heads of murdered Congolese on pikes outside his remote trading station. But Kurtz is also highly educated and refined.

Conrad describes him as an orator, writer, poet, musician, and the respected chief agent of the ivory company's Inner Station. He is "an emissary of pity, and science, and progress." Kurtz was a "universal genius" and a "very remarkable person".

He is a prodigy, at once gifted and multitalented. He went to Africa fired by noble ideals and virtues. He ended his life as a self-deluded tyrant who thought he was a god. "His mother was half-English and his father half-French", Conrad writes of Kurtz.

"All Europe contributed to the making of Kurtz; and by-the-by I learned that, most appropriately, the International Society for the Suppression of Savage Customs had entrusted him with the making of a report, for its future guidance..."

"He began with the argument that we whites, from the point of development we had arrived at, must necessarily appear to them savages in the nature of supernatural beings - we approach them with the might as of a deity and so on".

"By the simple exercise of our will we can exert a power for good practically unbounded. etc. From that point he soared and took me with him. Exterminate all brutes!"

## **We Are Breeding Ourselves to Extinction**

All measures to thwart the degradation and destruction of our ecosystem will be useless if we do not cut population growth. By 2050, if we continue to reproduce at the current rate, the planet will have between eight billion and ten billion people, according to a recent U.N. forecast.

This is an approximate doubling since 1980. And yet government commissioned reviews, such as the Stern report in Britain, do not mention the word population. Books and documentaries that deal with climate crisis, including Al Gore's *An Inconvenient Truth*, fail to discuss the danger of population growth.

This omission is odd, given that such a growth in population, even if we cut back on the use of fossil fuels, shut down all our coal-burning plants, and build seas of turbines, will plunge us into an age of extinction and desolation unseen since the end of the Mesozoic era, sixty-five million years ago, when the dinosaurs disappeared.

We are experiencing an accelerated obliteration of the planet's life-forms because, simply put, there are too many people. Most of these extinctions are the direct result of the expanding need for energy, housing, food, and other resources.

The Yangtze dolphin, Atlantic gray whale, West African rhino, Merriam's elk, California grizzly bear, silver trough, blue pike, and dusky seaside sparrow are all victims of human over-population. Population growth, as E.O. Wilson says is "the monster on the land".

Species are vanishing at a rate of a hundred to a thousand times faster than they did before the arrival of humans. If the current rate of extinction continues, Homo sapiens will be one of the few life-forms left on the planet, its members scrambling violently among themselves for water, food, fossil fuels, and perhaps air, until they too disappear.

Humanity, Wilson says, is leaving the Cenozoic, the age of mammals, and entering the Eremozoic - the era of solitude. As long as the Earth is viewed as the personal property of the human race, a belief embraced by everyone from born-again Christians to Marxists to free-market economists, we are destined soon to inhabit a biological wasteland.

The populations in industrialized nations maintain their lifestyles because they have the military and economic power to consume a disproportionate share of the world's resources. The United States alone gobbles up about twenty-five percent of the oil produced in the world each year.

These nations view their stable or even zero-growth birthrates as sufficient. It has been left to developing countries to cope with the emergent population crisis. India, Egypt, South Africa, Iran, Indonesia, Cuba and China, whose one-child policy has prevented the addition of 400 million people, have all tried to institute population control measures.

But on most of the planet, population growth is exploding. The United Nations estimates that 200 million women worldwide do not have access to contraception. The population of the Persian Gulf states, along with the Israeli-occupied territories, will double in two decades, a rise that will ominously coincide with precipitous peak oil declines.

In the overpopulated regions of the globe, human beings will ravage their local environments, cutting down rainforests and the few remaining wilderness areas in a desperate bid to grow food. And the depletion and destruction of resources will eventually create an overpopulation problem in industrialized nations as well.

The resources industrialized nations consider their birthright will become harder and more expensive to obtain. The rise of water levels along coastlines, which may submerge coastal nations such as Bangladesh, will disrupt agriculture and displace millions, who will attempt to flee to areas of the planet where life is still possible.

Rising temperatures and droughts have already begun to destroy croplands in Africa, Australia, Texas and California. As mentioned, the effects of this devastation will first be felt in places like Bangladesh but will soon spread within our borders.

Footprint data suggests that, based on current lifestyles, the sustainable population of the United Kingdom is about 18 million. This means that in an age of extreme scarcity, some 44 million people in Great Britain would not be able to survive.

Overpopulation will become a serious threat to the viability of many industrialized states the instant the cheap consumption of the world's resources can no longer be maintained. This moment may be closer than we think.

A world in which eight billion to ten billion people are competing for diminishing resources will not be peaceful. The industrialized nations will, as we have done in Iraq, turn to their militaries to ensure a steady supply of fossil fuels, minerals, and other renewable resources in the vain effort to sustain a lifestyle that will, in the end, be unsustainable.

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The collapse of industrial farming, possible only with cheap oil, will lead to an increase in famine, disease and starvation. And the reaction of those on the bottom will be the low-tech tactics of terrorism and war. Perhaps the chaos and bloodshed will be so massive that the problem of overpopulation will be solved through violence, but this is hardly a comfort.

James Lovelock, an independent British scientist who has spent most of his career locked out of the mainstream, warned several decades ago that disrupting the delicate balance of the Earth would be a form of collective suicide.

The atmosphere on Earth is not common among planets, he notes. Oxygen and nitrogen are generated and maintained at an equable level for life's purposes by living organisms themselves. Oxygen and nitrogen would disappear if the biosphere were destroyed.

The result would be a greenhouse atmosphere similar to that of Venus, a planet consequently hundreds of degrees hotter than Earth. As part of a theory that has been named the Gaia hypothesis, Lovelock argues that the atmosphere, oceans, rocks and soil are living entities.

They constitute, he says, a self-regulating system. In support of this thesis, Lovelock studied the cycle in which algae in the oceans produce volatile sulfur compounds. These compounds act as seeds to form oceanic clouds. This self-regulating system is remarkable because it maintains favorable conditions for human life.

Its destruction would not mean the death of the planet. It would not mean the death of all life-forms. But it would mean the death of Homo Sapiens. Lovelock advocates nuclear power and thermal solar power; the latter, he says, can be produced by huge mirrors mounted in deserts such as those in Arizona and the Sahara.

He proposes reducing atmospheric carbon dioxide with large plastic cylinders thrust vertically into the ocean. These, he says, could bring nutrient-rich lower waters to the surface, producing an algal bloom that would increase the cloud cover.

But he warns that these steps will be ineffective if we do not first control population growth. He believes the Earth is overpopulated by a factor of about seven. As the planet overheats overpopulation will make all efforts to save the ecosystem futile.

In his book *The Revenge of Gaia*, he said that if we do not radically and immediately cut greenhouse gas emissions, the human race might not die out but it would be reduced to "a few breeding pairs". Lovelock says a continued population boom will make the reduction of fossil fuel use impossible.

If we do not reduce our emissions by sixty percent, something that can be achieved only by walking away from fossil fuels, the human race is doomed, he argues. Time is running out. This reduction will never take place, he says, unless we can dramatically reduce our birthrate.

No effort to stanch the effects of climate change will work unless we practice vigorous population control. Overpopulation, in times of hardship, will create as much havoc in industrialized nations as in the impoverished slums around the globe.

Population growth is often overlooked, or at best considered a secondary issue, by many environmentalists, but it is as fundamental a consideration in our survival as reducing the emissions melting the polar ice caps.

## War is Sin

The crisis faced by combat veterans returning from war is not simply a profound struggle with trauma and alienation. It is often, for those who can slice through the suffering to self-awareness, an existential crisis. War exposes the lies we tell ourselves about ourselves.

It rips open the hypocrisy of our religions and secular institutions. Those who return from war have learned something often incomprehensible to those who have stayed at home. We are not a virtuous nation. God and fate have not blessed us above others.

Victory is not assured. War is neither glorious nor noble. and we carry within us the capacity for evil we ascribe to those we fight. Those who return to speak this truth, such as members of Iraq Veterans Against War, are our contemporary prophets.

But like all prophets they are condemned and ignored for their courage. The struggle, in a culture awash with lies, to tell what few have the fortitude to digest. They know that what we are taught in school, in worship, by the media, by the entertainment industry, and at home, that the melding of the state's rhetoric with the rhetoric of religion is empty and false.

The words these prophets speak are painful. We, as a nation, prefer to listen to those who speak from the patriotic script. We prefer to hear ourselves exalted. If veterans speak of terrible wounds visible and invisible, of lies told to make them kill, or evil committed in our name, we fill our ears with wax.

Not our boys, we say, not them, bred in our homes, endowed with goodness and decency. For if it is easy for them to murder, what about us? And so it is simpler and more comfortable not to hear. We do not listen to the angry words that cascade from their lips, wishing only that they would calm down, be reasonable, get some help, and go away.

We, the deformed, brand our prophets as madmen. We cast them into the desert. And this is why so many veterans are estranged and enraged. This is why so many succumb to suicide and addictions. War comes wrapped in patriotic slogans, calls for sacrifice, honor and heroism, and promises of glory.

It comes wrapped in the claim of privilege under divine providence. It is waged to make the nation and the world a better place, to cleanse evil. War is touted as the ultimate test of manhood, where the young can find out what they are made of.

War, from a distance, seems noble. It gives us comrades and power and a chance to play a small bit in the great drama of history. It promises to give us an identity as warriors, patriots, as long as we go along with the myth, the one the war-makers need to wage wars and the defense contractors need to increase their profits.

Up close, war is a soulless void. War is barbarity, perversion and pain. Human decency and tenderness are crushed. Those who make war work overtime to reduce love to smut, and all human beings become objects, pawns to use or kill.

The noise, the stench, the fear, the scenes of eviscerated bodies and bloated corpses, the cries of the wounded, all combine to spin those in combat into another universe. In this moral void, naively blessed by secular and religious institutions at home, the hypocrisy of our social conventions, our strict adherence to moral precepts, come unglued.

War, for all its horror, has the power to strip away the trivial and the banal, the empty chatter and foolish obsessions that fill our days. It lets us see, although the cost is tremendous. In his book *Out of the Night: The Spiritual Journey of Vietnam Vets*, the Reverend William P. Mahedy, tells of a soldier, a former altar boy, who says to him:

Hedges, Chris (2013) *The World as it is: Dispatches on the Myth of Human Progress*. Nation Books, New York.

“Hey, Chaplain, how come it’s a sin to hop into bed with a mama-san but it’s ok to blow away gooks out in the bush?” Military Chaplains, a majority of whom are evangelical Christians, defend the life of the unborn, tour America as a Christian nation, and eagerly bless the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan as holy crusades.

The hollowness of their morality, the staggering disconnect between reality and the values they claim to promote, is ripped open in war. In the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, where the enemy is elusive and rarely seen, murder occurs far more often than killing.

Families are massacred in air strikes. Children are gunned down in blistering suppressing fire laid down in neighborhoods after an improvised explosive goes off near a convoy. Artillery shells obliterate homes. And no one stops to look. The dead and maimed are left behind.

The utter failure of nearly all our religious institutions to address the essence of war has rendered them useless. These institutions have little or nothing to say in wartime because the god they worship is a false god, one that promises victory to those who obey the law and believe in the manifest destiny of the nation.

We all have the capacity to commit evil. It takes little to unleash it. For those of us who have been to war, this awful knowledge is the hardest to digest, the knowledge that the line between the victims and the victimizers is razor thin, that human beings find a perverse delight in destruction and death and that few can resist the pull.

At best, most of us become silent accomplices. Wars have to be fought to ensure survival, but they are always tragic. They always bring to the surface the worst elements of any society, those who have a penchant for violence and a lust for absolute power.

They turn the moral order upside down. It was the criminal class that first organized the defense of Sarajevo. When these goons were not manning roadblocks to hold off the besieging Bosnian Serb army, they were looting, raping, and killing the Serb residents in the city.

And politicians who speak of war as an instrument of power, those who wage war but do not know its reality, those powerful statesmen are as a moral as the religious stooges who assist them. And when the wars are over, what they have to say to us in their thick memoirs about war is hollow, vacant and useless.

“In theological terms, war is sin”, writes Mahedy: “This has nothing to do with whether a particular war is justified or whether isolated incidents in a soldier’s war were right or wrong. The point is that war as a human enterprise is a matter of sin.”

“It is a form of hatred for one’s fellow human beings. It produces alienation from others and nihilism, and it ultimately represents a turning away from God”.

Young soldiers and Marines do not plan or organize the war. They do not seek to justify it or explain its causes. They are taught to believe. The symbols of the nation and religion are interwoven. The will of God becomes the will of the nation.

This trust is forever shattered for many in war. Soldiers in combat see the myth used to send them to war implode. They see that war is not clean or neat or noble, but venal and frightening. They see into war’s essence, which is death.

In war, society’s institutions, including our religious institutions, which mold us into compliant citizens, are unmasked. This betrayal is so deep that many veterans never find their way back to faith in the nation or in any god.

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They nurse a self-destructive anger and resentment, understandable and justified, but also crippling. Ask a combat veteran struggling to piece his or her life together about God and watch the raw vitriol and pain pour out.

They have seen into the corrupt heart of America, into the emptiness of its most sacred institutions, into our staggering hypocrisy, and those of us who refuse to heed their words become complicit in the evil they denounce.

### **The American Empire is Bankrupt**

Barack Obama, and the criminal class on Wall Street, aided by corporate media that continue to peddle fatuous gossip and trash talk as news while we endure the greatest economic crisis in our history, may have fooled us, but the rest of the world knows we are bankrupt.

And these nations are damned if they are going to continue to prop up an inflated dollar and sustain the massive federal budget deficits, swollen to more than \$2 trillion, that fund America's imperial expansion in Eurasia and our system of casino capitalism.

They have us by the throat. They are about to squeeze. It is the first formal step by our major trading partners to replace the dollar as the world's reserve currency. If they succeed, the dollar will dramatically plummet in value, the cost of imports, including oil, will skyrocket, interest rates will climb, and jobs will hemorrhage at a rate that will make the last few months look like boom times.

State and federal services will be reduced or shut down for lack of funds. The United States will begin to resemble the Weimar Republic or Zimbabwe. And the rage that has kindled a handful of shootings and hate crimes will engulf vast segments of a disenfranchised and bewildered working and middle class.

The people of this class will demand vengeance, radical change, order, and moral renewal, which an array of protofascists, from the Christian Right to the goons who disseminate hate talk on Fox News, will assure the country they will impose.

This means the end of the dollar. It means China, Russia, India, Pakistan, Iran are forming an official financial and military area to get America out of Eurasia. The balance-of-payments deficit is mainly military in nature. Half of America's discretionary spending is military. The deficit ends up in the hands of foreign banks, central banks.

They don't have any choice but to recycle the money to buy U.S. government debt. The Asian countries have been financing their own military encirclement. They have been forced to accept dollars that have no chance of being repaid.

They are paying for America's military aggression against them. They want to get rid of this. China has already struck bilateral trade deals with Brazil and Malaysia to dominate their trade in China's yuan rather than the dollar, pound, or euro.

The governor of China's central bank has openly called for the abandonment of the dollar as reserve currency suggesting in its place the use of the International Monetary Fund's Special Drawing Rights. What the new system will be still remains unclear, but the flight from the dollar has clearly begun.

The goal is to build a multipolar world order that will break the economic and, by extension, military domination by the United States. China is frantically spending its dollar reserves to buy factories and property around the globe so it can unload its U.S. currency.

This is why Aluminium Corporation of China made so many major concessions in the failed attempt to salvage its 19.5 billion dollar alliance with Rio Tinto mining concern in Australia. It desperately needs to shed its dollars.

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China is trying to get rid of all the dollars they can in a trash-for-resource deal. They will give the dollars to countries willing to sell off their resources since America refuses to sell any of its high-tech industries, to the yellow peril.

It realizes these dollars are going to be worthless pretty quickly. The architects of this new global exchange realize that if they break the dollar they also break America's military domination. Our military spending cannot be sustained without this cycle of heavy borrowing.

There are three categories of balance-of-payment deficits. America imports more than it exports. This is trade. Wall Street and American corporations buy up foreign companies. This is capital movement. The third and most important balance-of-payment deficit for the past fifty years has been Pentagon spending abroad.

It is primarily military spending that has been responsible for the balance-of-payments deficit for the last five decades. To fund our permanent war economy we have been flooding the world with dollars. The foreign recipients turn the dollars over to their central banks for local currency.

The central banks then have a problem. If the central bank does not spend the money in the United States, the exchange rate against the dollar will go up. This will penalize exporters. This has allowed America to print money without restraint to buy imports and foreign companies, fund our military expansion, and ensure that foreign nations like China continue to buy our Treasury bonds.

This cycle appears now to be over. Once the dollar cannot flood central banks and no one buys our Treasury Bonds, our empire collapses. The profligate spending on the military, some \$1 trillion when everything is counted, will be unsustainable.

We will have to finance our own military spending and the only way to do this will be to sharply cut back on wage rates. The class war is back in business. Wall Street understands that. This is why it had bush and Obama give it \$10 trillion in a huge rip-off so it can have enough money to survive.

The desperate effort to borrow our way out of financial collapse has promoted a level of state intervention unseen since the first world war. It has also led us into uncharted territory. We have in effect had to declare war to get us out of the whole created by our economic system.

There is no model or precedent for this, and no way to argue that it's all right really, because under such-and-such model of capitalism there is no such model. It isn't supposed to work like this, and there is no road map for what's happened.

As the dollar plunges, the cost of daily living, from buying food to getting medical care, will become difficult for all but a few. States and cities will see their pension funds drained and finally shut down. The government will be forced to sell off infrastructure, including roads and transport, to private corporations.

We will be increasingly charged by privatized utilities for what was once regulated and subsidized. Commercial and private real estate will be worth less than half its current value. The negative equity that already plagues twenty-five percent of American homes will expand to include nearly all property owners.

It will be difficult to borrow and impossible to sell real estate unless we accept massive losses. There will be block after block of empty stores and boarded-up houses. Foreclosures will be epidemic. There will be long lines at soup kitchens and many, many homeless.

Our corporate controlled media, already banal and trivial, will work overtime to anesthetize us with useless gossip, spectacles, sex, gratuitous violence, fear, and tawdry junk politics. America will be

Hedges, Chris (2013) *The World as it is: Dispatches on the Myth of Human Progress*. Nation Books, New York.

composed of a large dispossessed underclass and a tiny empowered oligarchy that will run a ruthless and brutal system of neofeudalism from secure compounds.

Those who resist will be silenced, many by force. We will pay a terrible price, and we will pay this price soon, for the gross malfeasance of our power elite.

### **Globalization Goes Bankrupt**

Our global economy, like our political system, has been hijacked by a tiny oligarchy, composed mostly of wealthy white men who serve corporations. They have pledged or raised a staggering \$18 trillion, looted largely from state treasuries, to prop up banks and other financial institutions that engaged in suicidal acts of speculation and ruined the world economy.

They have formulated trade deals so corporations can speculate across borders with currency, food, and natural resources even as 1.02 billion people on the planet struggle with hunger. Globalization has obliterated the ability of many poor countries to protect food staples such as corn, rice, beans, and wheat with subsidies or taxes on imported staples.

The abolishment of these protections has permitted the giant mechanized farms to wipe out tens of millions of small farmers - bankrupting many and driving them off their land. Those who could once feed themselves can no longer find enough food, and the wealthiest governments use institutions such as the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, and the World Trade Organization like pit bulls to establish economic supremacy.

There is little that most governments seem able to do to fight back. But the game is up. The utopian dreams of globalization have been exposed as a sham. Force is all the elite have left. We are living through one of civilization's great seismic reversals.

The ideology of globalization, like all utopias sold as inevitable and irreversible, has become a farce. The power elite, perplexed and confused, cling to the disastrous principles of globalization and its outdated language to mask the political and economic vacuum before us.

The absurd idea that the marketplace alone could determine economic and political constructs caused the crisis. It led the G-20 to sacrifice other areas of human importance - from working conditions, to taxation, to child labor, to hunger, to health and pollution - on the altar of free trade.

It left the world's poor worse off and the United States with the largest deficits in human history. Globalization has become an excuse to ignore the mess. It has left a mediocre elite desperately trying to save a system that cannot be saved, and, more important, trying to save itself.

"Speculation", then-President Jacques Chirac of France once warned, "is the AIDS of our economies". We have reached the terminal stage. Each of Globalization's strengths has somehow turned out to have an opposing meaning.

The lowering of national residency requirements for corporations has morphed into a tool for massive tax evasion. The idea of a global economic system mysteriously made local poverty seem unreal, even normal. The decline of the middle class - the very basis of democracy - seemed to be just one of those things that happen, unfortunate but inevitable.

That the working class and the lower middle class, even parts of the middle class, could only survive with more than one job per person seemed to be expected punishment for not keeping up. The contrast between unprecedented bonuses for mere managers at the top and the four-job families below them seemed inevitable in a globalized world.

For two decades an elite consensus insisted that unsustainable third-world debts could not be put aside in a sort of bad debt reserve without betraying Globalism's essential principles and moral obligations, which included an unwavering respect for the sanctity of international contracts.

It took the same people about two weeks to abandon sanctity and propose bad debt banks for their own far larger debts. The institutions that once provided alternative sources of power, including the media, government, agencies of religion, universities, and labour unions, have proved morally bankrupt.

They no longer provide a space for voices of moral autonomy. No one will save us now but ourselves. The best thing that happened for the establishment was the election of a black president. It contained people for a given period of time, but time is running out.

Suppose something else happens? Suppose another straw breaks? What happens when there is a credit card crisis or a collapse in commercial real estate? The financial system is very, very fragile. The legs are being kicked out from underneath it.

The economic crisis is a structural crisis. The recovery is only a recovery for Wall Street. It can't be sustained. Obama did everything Wall Street demanded. If labour unions will get off their ass and stop focusing on narrow legislation for their members, if they will go back to being social unions that embrace broad causes, we have a chance of effecting change.

If this does not happen it will be a right-wing disaster.

### **Celebrating Slaughter: War and Collective Amnesia**

War memorials and museums are temples to the god of war. The hushed voices, the well-tended grass, the flapping of the flags allow us to ignore how and why our young died. They hide the futility and waste of war. They sanitize the savage instruments of death that turn young soldiers and Marines into killers, and small villages in Vietnam or Afghanistan or Iraq into hellish bonfires.

There are no images in these memorials of men or women with their guts hanging out of their bellies, screaming pathetically for their mothers. We do not see mangled corpses being shoved in body bags. There are no sights of children burned beyond recognition or moaning in horrible pain.

There are no blind and deformed wrecks of human beings limping through life. War, by the time it is collectively remembered, is glorified and heavily censored. I blame our war memorials and museums, our popular war films and books, for the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan as much as George W. Bush.

They provide the mental images and historical references to justify new conflicts. We equate Saddam Hussein with Adolf Hitler. We view ourselves as eternal liberators. These plastic representations of war reconfigure the past in the light of the present.

War memorials and romantic depictions of war are the social and moral props used to create the psychological conditions to wage new wars. War memorials are quiet, still, reverential, and tasteful. And, like church, such sanctuaries are important, but they allow us to forget that these men and women were used and often betrayed by those who led the nation into war.

The memorials do not tell us that some always grow rich from large-scale human suffering. They do not explain that politicians play the great games of world power and stoke fear for their own advancement. They forget that young men and women in uniform are pawns in the hands of cynics.

They do not expose the ignorance, raw ambition, and greed that are the engine of war. There is a burning need to turn the horror of mass murder into a tribute to the triumph of the human spirit. The reality is too unpalatable.

The human need to make sense of slaughter, to give it a grandeur it does not possess, permits the guilty to go free. The war-makers - those who make the war but never pay the price of war - live among us. They are our elder statesmen hanging in effigy. Any honest democracy would place them behind bars.

Primo Levi, who survived Auschwitz, fought against the mendacity of collective memory until he took his own life. He railed against the human need to mask the truth of the Holocaust and war by giving it a false, moral narrative.

He wrote that the contemporary history of the Third Reich could be “reread as a war against memory, an Orwellian falsification of memory, falsification of reality, negation of reality”. He wondered if “we who have returned” have “been able to understand and make others understand our experience”.

Levi wrote of the Jewish collaborator Chaim Rumkowski, who ran the Lodz ghetto on behalf of the Nazis, that “we are all mirrored in Rumkowski, his ambiguity is ours, it is our second nature, we hybrids molded from clay and spirit”.

“We, like Rumkowski, “come to terms with power, forgetting that we are all in the ghetto, that the ghetto is walled in, that outside the ghetto reign the lords of death, and that close by the train is waiting”. We are, Levi understood, perpetually imprisoned within the madness of self-destruction.

The rage Levi felt is a rage that most of us do not understand. A war memorial that attempted to depict the reality of war would be too subversive. It would condemn us and our capacity for evil. It would show that the line between the victim and the victimizer is razor thin, that human beings, when the restraints are cut, are intoxicated by mass killing, and that war, rather than being noble, heroic and glorious, obliterates all that is tender, decent, and kind.

It would tell us that the celebration of national greatness is the celebration of our technological capacity to kill. It would warn us that war is always morally depraved, that even in “good” wars such as World War 2, all can become war criminals.

We dropped the atomic bomb on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The Nazis ran the death camps. But the narrative of war is unsettling. It does not create a collective memory that serves the interests of those who wage war and permit us to wallow in self-exaltation.

There are times when a population is pushed into war, such as World War 2 and the Serb assault on Bosnia. But this violence always deforms and maims those who use it. The detritus of war, the old cannons and artillery pieces rolled out to stand near memorials, were curious and alluring objects in my childhood.

But these displays angered my father, a Presbyterian minister who was in North Africa as an Army sergeant during World War 2. The lifeless, clean, and neat displays of weapons and puppets in uniforms were being used, he said, to purge the reality of war. These memorials sanctified violence.

They turned the instruments of violence - the tanks, machine guns, rifles, and airplanes - into an aesthetic of death. These memorials, while they pay homage to those who made “the ultimate sacrifice”, dignify slaughter.

They perpetuate the old lie of honour and glory. They set the ground for the next inferno. The myth of war manufactures a collective memory that ennobles the next war. The intimate, personal experience of violence turns those who return from war into internal exiles.

They cannot compete against the power of the myth. The collective memory saturates the culture, but it is “a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing”.

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## Reality Check from the Brink of Extinction

If we all wait for the great, glorious revolution, there won't be anything left. If all we do is reform work, this culture will grind away. This work is necessary but not sufficient. We need to use whatever means are necessary to stop this culture from killing the planet.

We need to target and take down the industrial infrastructure that is systematically dismembering the planet. Industrial civilization is functionally incompatible with life on the planet, and is murdering the planet. We need to do whatever is necessary to stop this.

The oil and natural gas industry, the coal industry, arms and weapons manufacturers, industrial farms, deforestation industries, the automotive industry, and chemical plants will not willingly accept their own extinction. They are indifferent to the looming human catastrophe.

We will not significantly reduce carbon emissions by drying our laundry in the backyard and naively trusting the power elite. The corporations will continue to cannibalize the planet for the sake of money. They must be halted by organized and militant forms of resistance.

The crisis of global heating is a social problem. It requires a social response. The United States, after rejecting the Kyoto Protocol, went on to increase carbon emissions by twenty percent from 1990 levels. The European Union countries during the same period reduced their emissions by two percent.

The European Union, like the United States, will no longer abide by binding targets for emission reductions. Countries will unilaterally decide how much to cut. They will submit their plans to international monitoring. And while Kyoto put the burden of responsibility on the industrialized nations that created the climate crisis, the new plan treats all countries the same.

It is a huge step backward. All of the so-called solutions to global warming take industrial capitalism as a given. The natural world is supposed to conform to industrial capitalism. This is insane. It is out of touch with physical reality. What's real is real.

Any social system - it does not matter if we are talking about industrial capitalism or an indigenous Tolowa people - their way of life is dependent upon a real, physical world. Without a real, physical world you don't have anything. When you separate yourself from the real world you start to hallucinate.

You believe the machines are more real than real life. How many machines are within ten feet of you and how many wild animals are within a hundred yards? How many machines do you have a daily relationship with? We have forgotten what is real.

The latest studies show that polar ice caps are melting at a record rate and that within a decade the Arctic will be an open sea during summers. This does not give us much time. White ice and snow reflect eighty percent of sunlight back into space, while dark water reflects only twenty percent, absorbing a much larger heat load.

Scientists warn that the loss of the ice will dramatically change winds and sea currents around the world. And the rapidly melting permafrost is unleashing methane chimneys from the ocean floor along the Russian coastline.

Methane is a greenhouse gas twenty-five times more toxic than carbon dioxide, and some scientists have speculated that the release of huge quantities of methane into the atmosphere could asphyxiate the human species.

The rising sea levels, which will swallow countries such as the Marshall Islands and turn cities like New Orleans into a new Atlantis, will combine with severe droughts, horrific storms, and flooding to eventually dislocate more than a billion people.

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The effects will be suffering, disease, and death on a scale unseen in human history. We can save groves of trees, protect endangered species, and clean up rivers, all of which is good, but to leave the corporations unchallenged would mean our efforts would be wasted.

These personal adjustments and environmental crusades can too easily become badges of moral purity, excuses for inaction. They can absolve us from the harder task of confronting the power of corporations.

The damage to the environment by human households is miniscule next to the damage done by corporations. Municipalities and individuals use ten percent of the nation's water, while the other ninety percent is consumed by agriculture and industry.

Individual consumption of energy accounts for about a quarter of all energy consumption; the other seventy-five percent is consumed by corporations. Municipal waste accounts for only three percent of total waste production in the United States.

We can, and should, live more simply, but it will not be enough if we do not radically transform the economic structure of the industrial world. If your food comes from the grocery store and your water from a tap, you will defend to the death the system that brings these to you because your life depends on it.

If your food comes from a land base and your water comes from a river, you will defend to the death these systems. In any abusive system, whether we are talking about an abusive man against his partner or the larger abusive system, you force your victims to become dependent on you. We believe that industrial capitalism is more important than life.

Those who run our corporate state have fought environmental regulation as tenaciously as they have fought financial regulation. They are responsible for our personal impoverishment as well as the impoverishment of our ecosystem.

We remain addicted, courtesy of the oil, gas, and automobile industries and corporate-controlled government, to fossil fuels. Species are vanishing. Fish stocks are depleted. The great human migration from coastlines and deserts has begun.

And as temperatures continue to rise, huge parts of the globe will become uninhabitable. NASA climate scientist James Hansen has demonstrated that any concentration of carbon dioxide greater than 350 parts per million in the atmosphere is not compatible with maintenance of the biosphere on the "planet on which civilization developed and to which life on earth is adapted".

He has determined that the world must stop burning coal by 2030 if we are to have any hope of ever getting the planet back down below that 350 number. Coal supplies half of our electricity in the United States. We need to separate ourselves from the corporate government that is killing the planet.

We need to get really serious. We are talking about life on the planet. We need to shut down the oil infrastructure. I don't care, and the trees don't care, if we do this through lawsuits, mass boycotts, or sabotage. We need to make the economic system, which is the engine of so much destruction, manageable.

The movement for the emancipation of the Niger Delta has been able to reduce Nigerian oil output by twenty percent. We need to stop the oil economy. The reason the ecosystem is dying is not because we still have a dryer in our basement. It is because corporations look at everything, from human beings to the natural environment, as exploitable commodities.

It is because consumption is the engine of corporate profits. We have allowed the corporate state to sell the environmental crisis as a matter of personal choice when actually there is a need for profound social and economic reform. We are left powerless.

Aleksander Herzen, speaking a century ago to a group of Russian anarchists working to topple the Czar, reminded his followers that they were not there to rescue the system. "We think we are the doctors", Herzen said. "We are the disease".

## War Is a Hate Crime

Violence against lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people is wrong. So is violence against the people of Afghanistan and Iraq. But in the bizarre culture of identity politics, there are no alliances among the oppressed.

The Matthew Shepard and James Byrd Jr. Hate Crimes Prevention Act, the first major federal civil-rights law protecting lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people, passed in 2009, was attached to a \$680 billion measure outlining the Pentagon's budget, which includes \$130 billion for ongoing military operations in Iraq and Afghanistan.

The Democratic majority in Congress, under the cover of protecting some innocents, authorized massive acts of violence against other innocents. It was a clever piece of marketing. It blunted debate about new funding for war. And behind the closed doors of the caucus rooms, the Democratic leadership told Blue Dog Democrats that they could justify the vote as support for the war.

They told liberal Democrats, who are squeamish about unlimited funding for war, that they could defend the vote as a step forward in the battle for civil rights. Gender equality groups, by selfishly narrowing their concern to themselves, participated in the dirty game.

Every thinking person wants to take a stand against hate crimes but isn't war the most offensive of hate crimes? To have people have to make a choice, or contemplate the hierarchy of hate crimes, is cynical. If you are opposed to war you don't vote to authorize or appropriate money.

Congress, historically and constitutionally, has the power to fund or defund war. The more Congress participates in authorizing spending for war, the more likely it is that we will be there for a long, long time.

The truth is that the Democratic Congress could have ended the war when it took control just after 2006. It did not happen. The funding continues. Congress clearly has the authority at any time to stop the funding. And yet it doesn't.

Worse yet, it finds other ways to garner votes for bills that authorize funding for war. The spending juggernaut moves forward, a companion to the inconsistent force of war itself. The brutality of Matthew Shepard's killers, who beat him to death for being gay, is a product of a culture that glorifies violence and sadism.

It is a product of a militarized culture. We have more police, prisons, inmates, spies, mercenaries, weapons, and troops than any other nation on Earth. Our military, which swallows half of the federal budget, is enormously popular - as if it is not part of the government.

The military values of hypermasculinity, blind obedience, and violence are an electric current running through reality television and trash-talk programs where contestants endure pain while they betray and manipulate those around them in a ruthless world of competition. Friendship and compassion are banished.

This hypermasculinity is at the core of pornography, with its fusion of violence and eroticism, as well as its physical and emotional degradation of women. It is an expression of the corporate state, where human beings are reduced to commodities and companies have become protofascist enclaves devoted to maximizing profit.

Militarism crushes the capacity for moral autonomy and difference. It isolates us from each other. It has its logical fruition in Abu Ghraib, the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, along with our lack of compassion for our homeless, our poor, our mentally ill, our unemployed, our sick, and yes, our gay, lesbian, transgender and bisexual citizens.

In his study titled *Male Fantasies*, which draws on the bitter alienation of demobilized veterans in Germany following the end of World War One, Klaus Theweleit argues that a militarized culture attacks all that is culturally defined as feminine, including love, gentleness, compassion, and acceptance of difference.

It sees any sexual ambiguity as a threat to male “hardness” and the clearly defined roles required by the militarized state. The continued support for our permanent war economy, the continued elevation of military values as the highest good, sustains the perverted ethic, rigid social roles, and emotional numbness that Theweleit explored.

It is a moral cancer that ensures there will be more Matthew Shepards. Fascism, Theweleit argued, is not so much a form of government or a particular structuring of the economy or a system, but the creation of potent slogans and symbols that form a kind of psychic economy that places sexuality in the service of destruction.

The core of all fascist propaganda is a battle against everything that constitutes enjoyment and pleasure. And our culture, while it disdains the name of fascism, embraces its dark ethic. New York Times columnist Thomas Friedman spoke in this sexualized language of violence to justify the war in Iraq. A moment preserved on Youtube:

“What they needed to see was American boys and girls going house to house, from Basra to Baghdad, and basically saying “Which part of this sentence don’t you understand?” Friedman said. “You don’t think we care about our open society? Well suck on this!”.

This is the kind of twisted logic the killers of Matthew Shepard would understand. The philosopher Theodor Adorno wrote, in words gay activists should have heeded, that exclusive preoccupation with personal concerns and indifference to the suffering of others beyond the self-identified group made fascism and the Holocaust possible.

The inability to identify with others was unquestionably the most important psychological condition for the fact that something like Auschwitz could have occurred in the midst of more or less civilized and innocent people, Adorno Wrote:

What is called fellow travelling was primarily business interest: one pursues one’s own advantage before all else, and simply not to endanger oneself, does not talk too much. That is a general law of the status quo. The silence under the terror is only its consequence.

The coldness of the societal monad, the isolated competitor, was the precondition, as indifference to the fate of others, for the fact that only very few people reacted. The torturers know this, and they put it to test ever anew.

## The Pictures You Aren't Supposed To See

War is brutal and impersonal. It mocks the fantasy of individual heroism and the absurdity of utopian goals like democracy. In an instant, industrial warfare can kill dozens, even hundreds of people, who never see their attackers.

The power of these industrial weapons is indiscriminate and staggering. They can take down apartment blocks in seconds, burying and crushing everyone inside. They can demolish villages and send tanks, planes, and ships up in fiery blasts.

The wounds, for those who survive, result in terrible burns, blindness, amputation, and lifelong pain and trauma. No one returns the same from such warfare. And once these weapons are employed, all talk of human rights is a farce.

In Peter van Agtamael's 2<sup>nd</sup> *Tour Hope I don't Die* and Lori Grinker's *Afterwar: Veterans from a World in Conflict*, two haunting books of war photographs, we see pictures of war almost always hidden from public view.

These pictures are shadows, for only those who go to and suffer from war can fully confront the visceral horror of it, but they are at least an attempt to unmask war's savagery. Next to a photograph of the bloodied body of a soldier in an operating room, we read this description in Agtmael's book:

"Over ninety percent of this soldier's body was burned when a roadside bomb hit his vehicle, igniting the fuel tank and burning two other soldiers to death. His camouflage uniform dangled over the bed, ripped open by the medics who had treated him on the helicopter.

"Clumps of his skin had peeled away, and what was left of it was translucent. He was in and out of consciousness, his eyes stabbing open for a few seconds. As he was lifted from the stretcher to the ER bed, he screamed 'Daddy, Daddy, Daddy, Daddy', then 'Put me to sleep, please put me to sleep'.

"There was another photographer in the ER, and he leaned his camera over the heads of the medical staff to get an overhead shot. The soldier yelled, 'Get that fucking camera out of my face'. Those were his last words.

"I visited his grave one winter afternoon six months later", Agtmael writes, "and the scene of his death is never far from my thoughts".

"There were three of us inside, and the jeep caught fire", Israeli soldier Yossi Arditi, quoted in Grinker's book, says of the moment when a Molotov cocktail exploded in his vehicle. "The fuel tank was full and it was about to explode, my skin was hanging from my arms and face - but I didn't lose my head".

"I knew nobody could get inside to help me, that my only way out was through the fire to the doors. I wanted to take my gun, but I couldn't touch it because my hands were burning".

Arditi spent six months in the hospital. He had surgery every two or three months, about twenty operations, over the next three years.

Filmic and most photographic images of war are shorn of the heart-pounding fear, awful stench, deafening noise, and exhaustion of the battlefield. Most such images turn confusion and chaos, the chief elements of combat, into an artful war narrative.

They turn war into porn. Soldiers and Marines, especially those who have never seen war, buy cases of beer and watch movies like *Platoon*, movies meant to denounce war, and as they do they revel in the despicable power of the weapons shown.

The reality of violence is different. Everything formed by violence is senseless and useless. It exists without a future. It leaves behind nothing but death, grief and destruction. Chronicles of war, such as these two books, that eschew images and scenes of combat, begin to capture war's reality.

War's effects are what the state and the media, handmaidens of the war-makers, work hard to keep hidden. If we really saw war, what war does to young minds and bodies, it would be harder to embrace the myth of war.

If we had to stand over the mangled corpses of schoolchildren killed in Afghanistan and listen to the wails of their parents, we would not be able to repeat clichés about "liberating the women of Afghanistan" or "bringing freedom to the Afghan people".

This is why war is carefully sanitized. This is why we are given war's perverse and dark thrill but are spared from seeing war's consequences. Their mythic visions of war keep it heroic and entertaining. And the media are as guilty as Hollywood.

During the start of the Iraq war, television reports gave us the visceral thrill of force and hid from us the effects of bullets, tank rounds, iron fragmentation bombs, and artillery rounds. We tasted a bit of war's exhilaration, but were protected from seeing what war actually does.

The wounded, the crippled and the dead are, in this great charade, swiftly carted offstage. They are war's refuse. We do not see them. We do not hear them. They are doomed, like wandering spirits, to float around the edges of our consciousness, ignored, even reviled.

The message they tell is too painful for us to hear. We prefer to celebrate ourselves and our nation by imbibing the myth of glory, honor, patriotism, and heroism, words that in combat become empty and meaningless. And those whom fate has decreed must face war's effects often turn and flee.

Saul Alfaro, who lost his legs in the war in El Salvador, speaks in Grinker's book about the first and final visit from his girlfriend as he lay in an army hospital bed. "She had been my girlfriend in the military and we had planned to be married", he says.

"But when she saw me in the hospital she began to cry. Afterwards, she ran away and never came back". The public manifestations of gratitude are reserved for veterans who dutifully read from the script handed to them by the state.

The veterans trotted out for viewing are those who are compliant and palatable, those we can stand to look at without horror, those who are willing to go along with the lie that war is about patriotism and is the highest good.

"Thank you for your service", we are supposed to say. They are used to perpetuate the myth. We are used to honor it. Gary Zuspahn, who lives in a special enclosed environment in his parent's home in Waco, Texas, suffering from Gulf War syndrome, speaks in Grinker's book of feeling like "a prisoner of war" even after the war ended.

"Basically they put me on the curb and said, okay, fend for yourself", he says in the book. "I was living in a fantasy world where I thought our government cared about us and they take care of their own. I believed it was in my contract, that if you're maimed or wounded during your service in war, you should be taken care of. Now I'm angry".

Despair and suicide grip survivors. More Vietnam veterans committed suicide after the war than were killed during it. The inhuman qualities drilled into soldiers and Marines in wartime defeat them in peacetime.

This is what Homer taught us in the Iliad, the great book on war, and the Odyssey, the great book on the long journey to recovery by professional killers. Many never readjust. They cannot connect again with wives, children, parents, or friends, retreating into personal hells of self-destructive anguish and rage.

“They program you to have no emotion - like if somebody sitting next to you gets killed you must have to carry on doing your job and shut up”, Steve Annabell, a British veteran of the Falklands War, says to Grinker. “When you leave the service, when you come back from a situation like that, there’s no button they can press to switch your emotions back on”.

“So you walk around like a Zombie. They don’t deprogram you. If you become a problem they just sweep you under the carpet. To get you to join up they do all these advertisements but they don’t show you getting shot at and people with their legs blown off or burned to death”, Annabell says.

“They don’t show you what really happens. It’s just bullshit. And they never prepare you for it. They can give you all the training in the world, but it’s never the same as the real thing”. Those with whom veterans have most in common when the war is over are often those they fought.

“Nobody comes back from war the same”, says Horacio Javier Benitez, who fought the British in the Falklands and is quoted in Grinker’s book. “The person, Horacio, who was sent to war, doesn’t exist anymore. It’s hard to be enthusiastic about normal life; too much seems inconsequential. You contend with craziness and depression”.

“Many who served in the Malvinas”, he says, using the Argentine name of the islands, “committed suicide, many of my friends.” I miss my family”, reads a wall graffiti captured in one of Agtmael’s photographs. “Please God forgive the lives I took and let my family be happy if I don’t go home again”.

Next to the plea, someone had drawn an arrow toward the words and written in thick, black marker, “Fag!!!”

Look beyond the nationalist cant used to justify war. Look beyond the seduction of the weapons and the pornography of violence. Focus on the evil of war. War begins by calling for the annihilation of the others but ends ultimately in self-annihilation.

It corrupts souls and mutilates bodies. It destroys homes and villages and murders children on their way to school. It grinds into the dirt all that is tender and beautiful and sacred. It empowers human deformities who can speak only in the despicable language of force.

War is a scourge. It is a plague. It is industrial murder. And before you support war, especially the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, look into the hollow eyes of the men, women and children who know it.

## **The New Secessionists**

Acts of rebellion that promote moral and political change must be non-violent. And one of the most potent nonviolent alternatives in the country is the secessionist movement bubbling up in some two dozen states.

These movements do not always embrace liberal values. Most of the groups in the South champion a “neo-Confederacy” and are often exclusively male and white. Secessionists, who call for statewide referendums to secede, do not advocate the use of force.

It is unclear, however, if some will turn to force if the federal structure ever denies them independence. These groups at least grasp that the old divisions between liberals and conservatives are obsolete and meaningless. They understand that corporations have carried out a coup d’etat.

They recognize that our permanent war economy and costly and futile imperial wars are unsustainable, and they demand that we take popular action to prevent citizens from being further impoverished and robbed by Wall Street speculators and corporations.

The defining characteristic of the Second Vermont Republic is that there are two enemies, the United States government and corporate America. One owns the other one. We are not like the Tea Party. The underlying premise of the Tea Party movement is that the system is fixable.

Of all the western democracies, the United States stands near dead last in voter turnout, last in healthcare, last in education, highest in homicide rates, mortality, STDs among juveniles, youth pregnancy, abortion, and divorce.

The nation has trillions in deficits it can never repay, is beset by staggering income disparities, has destroyed its manufacturing base, and is the planet's most egregious polluter and greediest consumer of fossil fuels.

With some 40 million Americans living in poverty, tens of millions more in a category called "near-poverty" and a permanent underclass trapped by a real unemployment rate of seventeen percent, there is ample tinder for internal combustion.

If we do not undertake a dramatic reversal soon, the country and the global environment will implode with catastrophic consequences. The secessionist movement is gaining ground in several states, especially Texas, where elected officials increasingly have to contend with secessionist sentiments.

There is a feeling in Texas that we are being spent into oblivion. We are operating as the cash cow for states that cannot manage their budgets. With this Congress, Texas has been squarely in their crosshairs, from cap-and-trade to the alien transfer and exit program.

So many legislative pieces coming down the pike are offensive to people in Texas. The sentiment inside the legislature and state capital is one of guarded optimism. There are scores of folks within state government who are supportive of what we are doing, although there is a need to see the public support in a more tangible way.

Many in the Tea Party are expected to migrate to secessionist movements once they realize they cannot alter the structure or power of the corporate state through electoral politics. Polls in Texas show the secessionists have support from about thirty-five percent of the state's population, and Vermont is not far behind.

The Second Vermont Republic arose from the statewide antiwar protests in 2003. It embraces left-wing populism that makes it unique among the national movements, which usually veer more toward Ron Paul libertarianism.

The Vermont movement, like the Texas and Alaska movements, is well organized. It has a bimonthly newspaper called the Vermont Commons, which champions sustainable agriculture and energy supplies based on wind and water, and calls for locally owned banks that will open lines of credit to their communities.

Supporters of the Second Vermont Republic commemorate the anniversary by holding a mock funeral procession through the state capital, Montpelier, with a casket marked "Vermont". Secessionist candidates in Vermont are currently running for governor, lieutenant governor, eight state Senate seats, and two House seats.

The movement, at its core, is antiauthoritarian. It includes those who are libertarians and those who are on the anarchic community side. In traditional terms these people are left and right, but they have come very close in their antiauthoritarianism. Left and right no longer have meaning.

The movement correctly views the corporate state as a force that has so corrupted the economy, as well as the electoral and judicial process, that it cannot be defeated through traditional routes. It also knows that the corporate state is rapidly cannibalizing the nation and pushing the planet toward irrevocable crisis.

And it argues that the corporate state can be dismantled only through radical forms of nonviolent revolt and the dissolution of the United States. As an act of revolt it has many attributes. The only way we will ever stop these wars is when we stop paying for them.

Vermont contributes about \$1.5 billion to the Pentagon's budget. Do we want to keep supporting these wars. If not, let's pull out. We have two objectives. The first is returning Vermont to its status as an independent republic. The second is the peaceful dissolution of empire.

The United States government has lost its moral authority. It is corrupt to the core. It is owned, operated, and controlled by Wall Street and corporate America. It is unsustainable economically, socially, morally, militarily, and environmentally.

It is governable and therefore fixable. The question is, do you go down with the Titanic or do you seek other options? The leaders of the movement concede that sentiment still outstrips organization. There has not been a large proliferation of new groups, and a few of the old groups have folded because of lack of leadership and support.

But they insist that an increasing number of Americans are receptive to their ideas. Many of those who were disappointed by the treatment of Ron Paul have come to the conclusion that they cannot have a Libertarian Party or a libertarian Republican. They are beginning to talk about secession.

Secessionists have to be very careful not to be militaristic. This cannot be won by the gun. You can be emphatic in your secessionism, but it won't happen by carrying guns. I don't know what the Tea Party people think they are going to accomplish with guns.

It appears to be an assertion of individual rights. But the Tea Party people have not yet understood how they are going to get their view across. They still believe they can elect people, either Republicans or declared conservatives, to office in Washington and have an effect, as if you can escape the culture of Washington and the characteristics of government that has only gotten bigger and will only continue to get bigger.

Electing people to the House and Senate is not going to change the characteristics of the system. The most pressing problem is that the movement harbors within its ranks Southern secessionists who wrap themselves in the Confederate flag, begin their meetings singing "Dixie", and celebrate the slave culture of the South.

Secessionist groups such as the Southern National Congress and the more radical League of the South, which the Southern Poverty Law Center has labeled a "racist hate group", openly embrace a return to uncontested white, male power. And this aspect of the movement deeply disturbs its leaders.

What all these movements grasp, however, is that the American empire is over. It cannot be sustained. They understand that we must disengage peacefully, learn to speak with a new humility, and live with a new simplicity, or see an economic collapse that could trigger a perverted Christian fascism, a ruthless police state, and internecine violence.

Hedges, Chris (2013) *The World as it is: Dispatches on the Myth of Human Progress*. Nation Books, New York.

There are three or four possible scenarios that will bring down the empire. One possibility is war with Iran. Another will see the Chinese pull the plug on Treasury bills. Even if these do not happen, the infrastructure of the country is decaying.

This is a slower process. And they do not have the economy fixed. It is smoke and mirrors. This is why the price of gold is so high. The economy and the inability to stop the wars will alone be enough to bring us down. There is no escape now from our imperial overstretch.

## **No One Cares**

Hundreds of thousands of Iraqis and thousands more Afghani and Pakistani civilians have been killed. Millions have been driven into squalid displacement and refugee camps. Thousands of our own soldiers and Marines have died or been crippled physically and psychologically.

We sustain these wars, which have no real popular support, by borrowing trillions of dollars that can never be repaid, even as we close schools, states go into bankruptcy, social services are cut, our infrastructure crumbles, tens of millions of Americans are reduced to poverty, and real unemployment approaches seventeen percent.

Collective, suicidal inertia rolls us forward toward national insolvency and the collapse of empire. And we do not protest. The peace movement, despite the heroic efforts of a handful of groups such as Iraq Veterans against the war, the Green Party, and Code Pink, is dead. No one cares.

The roots of mass apathy are found in the profound divide between liberals, who are mostly white and well educated, and our disenfranchised working class, whose sons and daughters, because they cannot get decent jobs with benefits, have few options besides the military.

Liberals, whose children are more often to be found in elite colleges than in the Marine Corps, did not fight NAFTA in 1994 and the dismantling of our manufacturing base. They did nothing when the democrats gutted welfare two years later and stood by as our banks were turned over to Wall Street speculators.

They signed on, by supporting the Clinton and Obama Democrats, for the corporate rape carried out in the name of globalization and endless war, and they ignored the plight of the poor. And for this reason the poor have little interest in the moral protestations of liberals.

We have lost all credibility. We are justly hated for our tacit complicity in the corporate assault on workers and their families. Our passivity resulted, however, in much more than imperial adventurism and a permanent underclass.

A slow-motion coup by a corporate state has cemented into place a neofeudalism in which there are only masters and serfs. And the process is one that cannot be reversed through the traditional mechanisms of electoral politics.

## **The Best Among Us**

There are no excuses left. Either you joined the revolt taking place on Wall Street and in the financial districts of other cities across the country or you stand on the wrong side of history. Either you obstruct, in the only form left to us, which is civil disobedience, the plundering by the criminal class on Wall Street and accelerated destruction of the ecosystem that sustains the human species, or become the passive enabler of a monstrous evil.

Either you taste, feel and smell the intoxication of freedom and revolt or sink into the miasma of despair and apathy. Either you are a rebel or a slave. To be declared innocent in a country where the rule of law means nothing, where we have undergone a corporate coup, where the poor and working men and women are reduced to joblessness and hunger, where war, financial speculation, and internal Hedges, Chris (2013) *The World as it is: Dispatches on the Myth of Human Progress*. Nation Books, New York.

surveillance are the only real business of the state, where even habeas corpus no longer exists, where you, as a citizen, are nothing more than a commodity to corporate systems of power, one to be used and discarded, is to be complicit in this radical evil.

To stand on the sidelines and say “I am innocent” is to bear the mark of Cain; it is to do nothing to reach out and help the weak, the oppressed, and the suffering, to save the planet. To be innocent in times like these is to be a criminal.

Choose. But choose fast. The state and corporate forces are determined to crush this. They are not going to wait for you. They were terrified that Occupy Wall Street would spread. They had their long phalanxes of police on motorcycles, their rows of white paddy wagons, their foot soldiers hunting for you on the streets with pepper spray and orange plastic nets.

They had their metal barricades set up on every street leading into the New York financial district, where the mandarins in Brooks Brothers suits use your money, money they stole from you, to gamble and speculate and gorge themselves while one in four children outside those barricades depended on food stamps to eat.

Speculation in the 17<sup>th</sup> Century was a crime. Speculators were hanged. Today they run the state and the financial markets. They disseminate the lies that pollute our airwaves.

They know, even better than you, how pervasive the corruption and theft have become, how gamed the system is against you, how corporations have cemented into place a thin oligarchic class and an obsequious cadre of politicians, judges, and journalists who live in their little gated Versailles while 6 million Americans are thrown out of their homes, where a million people a year go bankrupt because they cannot pay their medical bills and 45,000 die from lack of proper care, where real joblessness is spiraling to over 20 percent, where the citizens, including students, spend lives toiling in debt peonage, working dead-end jobs, when they have jobs, a world devoid of hope, a world of masters and serfs.

The only word these corporations know is more. They are disembowling every last social service program funded by the taxpayers, from education to Social Security, because they want that money themselves. Let the sick die. Let the poor go hungry. Let families be tossed in the street.

Let the unemployed rot. Let children in the inner city or rural wastelands learn nothing and live in misery and fear. Let the students finish school with no jobs and no prospects of jobs. Let the prison system, the largest in the industrialized world, expand to swallow up all potential dissenters.

Let torture continue. Let teachers, firefighters, postal employees, and social workers join the ranks of the unemployed. Let the roads, bridges, dams, levees, powergrids, railway lines, subways, bus services, schools, and libraries crumble or close.

Let the rising temperatures of the planet, the freak weather patterns, the hurricanes, the droughts, the flooding, the tornadoes, the melting polar ice caps, the poisoned water systems, the polluted air increase until the species dies.

Who the hell cares? If the stocks of ExxonMobil or the coal industry or Goldman Sachs are high, life is good. Profit. Profit. Profit. That is what they chant behind those metal barricades. They have their fangs deep into your necks. If you do not shake them off very, very soon they will kill you.

And they will kill the ecosystem, dooming your children and your children's children. They are too stupid and too blind to see that they will perish with the rest of us. So either you rise up and supplant them, either you dismantle the corporate state, for a world of sanity, a world where we no longer kneel before the absurd idea that the demands of financial markets should govern human behavior, or we are frog-marched toward self-annihilation.

Hedges, Chris (2013) *The World as it is: Dispatches on the Myth of Human Progress*. Nation Books, New York.

Those on the streets around Wall Street were the physical embodiment of hope. They knew that hope has a cost, that it is not easy or comfortable, that it requires self-sacrifice and discomfort and finally faith. They slept on concrete every night. Their clothes soiled. They ate bagels and peanut butter.

They had tasted fear, been beaten and been sent to jail, been blinded by pepperspray, cried, hugged each other, laughed, sung, talked too long in general assemblies, seen their chants drift upward to the office towers above them, wondered if it was worth it, if anyone cares, if they would win.

But as long as they remained steadfast they pointed the way oiut of the corporate labyrinth. That was what it meant to be alive. They were the best among us.



