

**TIME TO END WAR PROFITEERING** | Sarah Anderson  
**2019 - STUPID, EXPENSIVE AND IDIOTIC** | Conn Hallinan  
**THE GLOBAL WAR OF ERROR** | Tom Engelhardt

ISSUE 198

# ColdType

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MID-JANUARY 2020



# World War III

Worried that this month's Iran-US confrontation could herald an all-out fight that will end in global annihilation? Forget it! We've had that war and global capitalism won, writes **CJ Hopkins**

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# ColdType

Issue 198 | Mid-January 2020

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**ColdType** 7 Lewis Street, Georgetown, Ontario, Canada LG7 1E3

**Contact ColdType:** Write to Tony Sutton at [editor@coldtype.net](mailto:editor@coldtype.net)

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Conn Hallinan's annual awards to individuals, companies and governments that make reading the news a daily adventure. Here is his latest selection

# The most stupid, expensive and idiotic mistakes of 2019

## Life Imitates Art Award

The US Border Control and the Trump administration that are currently holding between 11,000 and 14,000 immigrant children under the age of 18 in internment camps. According to the *London Review of Books*, a Border Patrol agent gave a three-year old the choice of being with her mother or her father. When the father was being taken away the child began to cry, only to be scolded by the Agent: "You said with Mom." The child's name: Sofi.

## Dr Strangelove Award

The US Defense Department for its unique solution to the problem of supplying troops in war zones. Between 2001 and 2010, US soldiers escorting fuel convoys in Afghanistan and Iraq accounted for more than half the casualties suffered by American forces. The solution? Portable nuclear power plants that would generate between 1 and 10 megawatts and service up to 1,000 troops. The 'micro-nukes' would be 'semiautono-

mous', that is, they wouldn't need on-site operators. Even small reactors contain significant amounts of highly radioactive and long-lived isotopes, like cesium-137. What could go wrong?

## Golden Jackal Award

The US arms company Raytheon, with a tip of the hat to Lockheed Martin and Boeing, for landing more than \$1-billion in intermediate missile contracts. The contracts were awarded shortly after the Trump Administration withdrew from the Intermediate Nuclear Force Agreement (INF) in 2018.

Intermediate missiles are considered especially destabilising because their short flight time means all sides must keep their missiles on a hair trigger.

"The withdrawal from the INF Treaty has fired the starting pistol on a new Cold War",

says Beatrice Fihn of the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons.

Runner up is ArmorMe, a company that produces children's backpacks. Field-tested by the Israeli military, the backpack includes a sheet of bullet resistant Kevlar. According to the company, the backpack "looks and feels like a regular eco-friendly canvas backpack – so your child will fit in with his or her friends" But if a shooter shows up, it provides "protection for your child, peace-of-mind for yourself."

## The Fake News Award

The US government's Radio Marti. The station, run by the Agency for Global Media that also includes Voice of America, got caught faking a mortar attack during a broadcast from Managua, Nicaragua. One of the journalists involved in the de-



PARANOIA! Bullet-resistant backpack.



HYPER-EXPENSIVE  
FLOP: The F-35 Lightning  
stealth fighter

ception, Tomas Regalado Jr, is the son of Tomas Regalado Sr, who oversees Radio and TV Marti'. Radio Marti broadcast several shows last year that described philanthropist and Democratic Party donor George Soros as "a non-believing Jew of flexible morals."

### The Golden Lemon Award

**Lockheed Martin** (again) for its F-35 Lightning stealth fighter, at \$1.5-trillion dollars, the most expensive weapon system in US history. According to *Defense News*, pilots have to carefully watch their speed lest they damage the airframe and stealth coating. Apparently cockpit pressure spikes cause 'excruciating' air and sinus pain. The pilot's \$400,000 helmets don't work very well, and each helmet is designed to fit only one pilot. It takes several

days to get a replacement helmet if one breaks.

The June readiness rate for the F-35 – that is the percentage of planes that can make it into the air – was 8.7 percent, not quite up to the 80 percent readiness standard for all other aircraft. But things are looking up: In May only 4.7 percent of the planes were ready to fly.

Over 300 F-35s have been sold to allies, with Japan a prime customer. One of those F-35s crashed in April, killing its pilot and grounding the fleet. According to the Japanese, the plane had been forced to make seven emergency landings before the crash. The Americans and the Japanese are desperately trying to find the wreckage, because "The F-35A is an airplane that contains significant amounts of secrets that need to be protected" from opponents,

said Japanese Defence Minister Takeshi Iwaya.

A modest proposal: give our F-35s to all potential enemies and let them have a really expensive plane that doesn't work.

### Catherine de' Medici Award\*

**The Pentagon** for contaminating drinking water at military bases with polyfluoroalkyl, or PFAS, a major ingredient of fire fighting foam. The chemical causes cancer, kidney failure, immune system suppression and other health problems. The military has known about the contamination for decades but failed to tell anyone about it until recently. Scientists have dubbed PFAS the 'forever chemical', because it is virtually indestructible.

According to the Pentagon, the military is now moving on

the problem. “I’m proud of what the Department of Defense has done in the last two-plus years”, says the military’s deputy assistant for the environment, Maureen Sullivan. But asked how many people could be affected, she replied that she “couldn’t hazard a guess – we’re tracking water sources – not people.”

*\*Catherine de’ Medici 1519-1589 was known as the “great poisoner.”*

## School buses were used to transport troops or people to political rallies, leaving kids without a safe way to attend school

In the meantime, **Huntington Ingalls Industries** was awarded \$15.2-billion to build two aircraft carriers to add to the US’s 10-carrier fleet. The Russians have one (and it is small, old and recently damaged in a fire) and China has two (with plans for one more).

### Great Moments in Science Award

**Republican Senator Mile Lee (Utah)**, who contends that the solution to climate change won’t be found by governments or programs like the Green New Deal, but by having “more babies.”

**Republican Representative Mike Kelly (Pennsylvania)** who says he is a “person of colour, I’m white. I’m Anglo Saxon,” and proud to be from Ireland. Well, Kelly is right about the white and Irish part. The O’Kellys were from Tyrone in the north, but the Anglo Saxons (and Normans) invaded in 1169, drove the Kellys out of Tyrone and ruled the island for more than 800 years. A visit to Geni.com might help.

### The Terminator Award

**The US, United Kingdom, South Korea, Russia, Israel and Australia** for trying to torpedo a United Nations treaty

banning ‘lethal autonomous weapons systems’. The Campaign to Stop Killer Robots is trying to require ‘meaningful human control over the use of force’ in such devices lest “Lives be taken based on algorithms.” Some 28 governments back a ban on such weapons.

### The Henry VIII Award

**Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman** who doubled the number of beheadings in 2018 and is on track to break that record in 2019. Before Salman came to power in 2017, the Saudis had beheaded 67 people in the preceding eight months. He increased the pace to 133 in 2018, and is on pace to behead more than 170 people in 2019. While many are South Asians coerced into smuggling drugs, others are oppressed Shiites from Saudi Arabia’s oil-rich eastern provinces. Of the 37 beheaded on a single day in April, 33 were Shiites.

Victims are not allowed lawyers and torture is an accepted way of carrying out investigations. Three were minors, a violation of international law. No American administration has protested the execution of the minors or the use of torture to extract confessions.

### The Marie Antoinette Award

**Francois de Rugy**, president of the French Assembly and close ally of President Emmanuel Macron. The Macron administration is trying to increase the age of retirement and cut pension plans. Macron also sliced unemployment benefits and public



**BENEFIT CUTS:** Okay for the poor, but not for wealthy farmers.

### The Golden Grinch Award

**The Trump administration** for cutting food stamps for up to 750,000 people and limiting benefits for an estimated 3.7-million people, while spending \$649-billion on this year’s military budget. While the government was handing out \$28-billion to farmers hurt by the White House’s trade war with China (the vast majority of which, according to the Environmental Working Group, went to large, corporate farms), it was altering the poverty index to make it more difficult for the poor to receive nutritional assistance.

services, while cutting taxes for the wealthy.

In the meantime, de Rugy has been hosting lavish dinners for friends and family at his official residence, the Hotel de Lassay, featuring lobster tails and bottles of 2004 Mouton-Rothschild at \$560 a pop.

Runner up in this category is the **British Foreign Office**, which spent \$15.8-million to buy a full-floor apartment in New York City to house the British Consul General. Meanwhile, the Conservative government refuses to pay for re-housing the survivors of the terrible 2017 Grenfell fire that incinerated more than 70 people.

And when the British Foreign Office rescues women who are forced into marriages in places like Pakistan and Somalia, the victims are billed for services. Four women, whom the Foreign Office saved from a religious institution in Somalia, where they were chained and whipped to force them into marriage, billed them \$900 apiece for their rescue. The women's passports were confiscated until they paid.

### The Golden Oops Award

**US Strategic Air Command** that tweeted that it was prepared to drop something 'much bigger' than the New Year's Eve crystal ball in Times Square. The tweet was followed by a video of a B-2 bomber dropping bombs. The blowback on social media was so fierce that the military quickly pulled the video and apologised that it "was in poor taste and does not



HEROES: Captain Pia Kemp (top), Greta Thunberg (above).

reflect our values."

### The Kudo Award

**The Stansted 15**, who broke into the Stansted International Airport north of London in September and chained themselves together to block the British Home Office from deporting refugees from Ghana and Nigeria.

**Captain Pia Klemp**, for rescuing more than 1,000 refugees from drowning in the Mediterranean. She is facing a 20-year prison sentence in Italy, even though not rescuing them would have been a violation of Article 98 of the 1982 UN Law of Sea.

Artist **Philipp Ruch**, who

constructed a replica of Berlin's Holocaust Memorial next to the house of far-right Alternative For Germany Thuringia state legislator Bjorn Hocke. Hocke has called the Berlin memorial a "monument of shame."

Environmental activist **Greta Thunberg**, the little Swede that could.

### The Ethnic Sensitivity Award

**The US State Department's** director of policy planning, **Kiron Skinner**, who, at a public talk last April, said competition between the US and China was bitter, because "it's the first time that we will have a great-power competitor that is not Caucasian." This would come as a surprise to Pearl Harbor veterans. So exactly who does Skinner think we fought at Midway, Guadalcanal, and Saipan? **CT**

.....  
**Conn Hallinan** can be read at *dispatchesfromtheedgeblog.wordpress.com* and *middleempireseries.wordpress.com*

Farmfree foods might be the only thing that get us - and much of the rest of the living world - through this century, writes **George Monbiot**

# Saving our bacon

8

**I**T sounds like a miracle, but no great technological leaps were required. In a commercial lab on the outskirts of Helsinki, I watched scientists turning water into food. Through a porthole in a metal tank, I could see a yellow froth churning. It's a primordial soup of bacteria, taken from the soil, using hydrogen extracted from water as its energy source. When the froth was siphoned through a tangle of pipes, and squirted onto heated rollers, it turned into a rich yellow flour.

This flour is not yet licensed for sale. But the scientists, working for a company called Solar Foods, were allowed to give me some. I asked them, filming our documentary *Apocalypse Cow*, to make me a pancake: I would be the first person on Earth, beyond the lab staff, to eat such a thing. They set up a frying pan in the lab, mixed the flour with oat milk, and I took my small step for man. It tasted ... just like a pancake.

But pancakes are not the intended product. Such flours

are likely soon to become the feedstock for almost everything. In their raw state, they can replace the fillers now used in thousands of food products. When the bacteria are modified, they will create the specific proteins needed for cultured meat, milk and eggs. Other tweaks will produce lauric acid – good-bye palm oil – and long-chain omega-3 fatty acids: hello cultured fish. The carbohydrates that remain when proteins and fats have been extracted could replace everything from pasta flour to potato crisps. The first commercial factory built by Solar Foods should be running next year.

The hydrogen pathway is around ten times as efficient as photosynthesis. But because only part of a plant can be eaten, while the bacterial flour is mangetout, you can multiply that efficiency several times. And because it will be brewed in giant vats, the land efficiency, the company estimates, is roughly 20,000 times greater. Everyone on Earth could be

handsomely fed, using a tiny fraction of its surface. If, as the company intends, the water is electrolysed with solar power, the best places to build these plants will be deserts.

**W**e are on the cusp of the biggest economic transformation, of any kind, for 200 years. While arguments rage about plant-versus meat-based diets, new technologies will soon make them irrelevant. Before long, most of our food will come neither from animals nor plants, but from unicellular life. After 12,000 years of feeding humankind, all farming except fruit and veg production is likely to be replaced by ferming: brewing microbes through precision fermentation. I know some people will be horrified by this prospect. I can see some drawbacks. But I believe it comes in the nick of time.

Several impending disasters are converging on our food supply, any of which could be catastrophic. Climate breakdown





**GOODBYE TO ALL THIS:** Fishing and farming are the greatest causes of extinction and loss of diversity and abundance of wildlife.

threatens to cause what scientists call “multiple breadbasket failures”, through synchronous heatwaves and other impacts.

The UN forecasts that by 2050 feeding the world will require a 20 percent expansion in global water use. But water use is already maxed out in many places: aquifers are vanishing, rivers are failing to reach the sea.

The glaciers that supply half the population of Asia are rapidly retreating. Inevitable global heating – due to greenhouse gases already released – is like-

ly to reduce dry season rainfall in critical areas, turning fertile plains into dustbowls.

A global soil crisis threatens the very basis of our subsistence, as great tracts of arable land lose their fertility through erosion, compaction and contamination.

Phosphate supplies, crucial for agriculture, are dwindling fast. Insectageddon threatens catastrophic pollination failures. It is hard to see how farming can feed us all even until 2050, let alone to the end of the century and beyond.

Food production is ripping the living world apart. Fishing and farming are, by a long way, the greatest cause of extinction and loss of the diversity and abundance of wildlife. Farming is a major cause of climate breakdown, the biggest cause of river pollution and a hefty source of air pollution.

Across vast tracts of the world’s surface, it has replaced complex wild ecosystems with simplified human food chains. Industrial fishing is driving cascading ecological collapse in seas around the world.

Eating is now a moral minefield, as almost everything we put in our mouths – from beef to avocados, cheese to chocolate, almonds to tortilla chips, salmon to peanut butter – has an insupportable environmental cost.

But just as hope appeared to be evaporating, the new technologies I call “farmfree food” create astonishing possibilities to save both people and planet.

**F**armfree food will allow us to hand back vast areas of land and sea to nature, permitting rewilding and carbon drawdown on a massive scale. It means an end to the exploitation of animals, an end to most deforestation, a massive reduction in the use of pesticides and fertiliser, the end of trawlers and longliners. It’s our best hope of stopping the Great Extermination. And, if it’s done right, it means cheap and abundant food for everyone.

Research by the thinktank

RethinkX suggests that proteins from precision fermentation will be around ten times cheaper than animal protein by 2035. The result, it says, will be the near-complete collapse of the livestock industry. The new food economy will “replace an extravagantly inefficient system that requires enormous quantities of inputs and produces huge amounts of waste with one that is precise, targeted, and tractable.” Using tiny areas of land, with a massively reduced requirement for water and nutrients, it “presents the greatest opportunity for environmental restoration in human history.”

Not only will food be cheaper, it will also be healthier. Because farmfree foods will be built up from simple ingredients, rather than broken down from complex ones, allergens, hard fats and other unhealthy components can be screened out. Meat will still be meat, though it will be grown in factories on collagen scaffolds, rather than in the bodies of animals. Starch will still be starch, fats will still be fats. But food is likely to be better, cheaper and much less damaging to the living planet.

It might seem odd for someone who has spent his life calling for political change to enthuse about a technological shift. But nowhere on earth can I see sensible farm policies developing. Governments provide an astonishing £560-billion a year in farm subsidies, and almost all of them are perverse and

## Millions of people, will lose their jobs because the new processes are so efficient, the employment they create won't match the employment they destroy

destructive, driving deforestation, pollution and the killing of wildlife. Research by the Food and Land Use Coalition found that only 1 percent of the money is used to protect the living world. It failed to find “any examples of governments using their fiscal instruments to directly support the expansion of supply of healthier and more nutritious food.”

Nor is the mainstream debate about farming taking us anywhere, except towards further catastrophe. There's a widespread belief that the problem is intensive farming, and the answer is extensification (producing less food per hectare). It's true that intensive farming is highly damaging, but extensive farming is even worse.

Many people are rightly concerned about urban sprawl. But agricultural sprawl – which covers a much wider area – is a far greater threat to the natural world. Every hectare of land used by farming is a hectare not used for wildlife and complex living systems.

A paper in *Nature* suggests that, per kilo of food produced, extensive farming causes greater greenhouse gas emissions, soil loss, water use and nitrogen and phosphate pollu-

tion than intensive farming. If everyone ate pasture-fed meat, we would need several new planets on which to produce it.

Farmfree production promises a far more stable and reliable food supply, that can be grown anywhere, even in countries without farmland. It could be crucial to ending world hunger.

But there is a hitch: a clash between consumer and producer interests. Many millions of people, working in farming and food processing, will eventually lose their jobs. Because the new processes are so efficient, the employment they create won't match the employment they destroy.

RethinkX envisages an extremely rapid “death spiral” in the livestock industry. Only a few components, such as the milk proteins casein and whey, need to be produced through fermentation for profit margins across an entire sector to collapse. Dairy farming in the United States, it claims, will be “all but bankrupt by 2030”. It believes that the US beef industry's revenues will fall 90 percent by 2035.

While I doubt the collapse will be quite that fast, in one respect the thinktank underestimates the scale of the transformation. It fails to mention the extraordinary shift taking place in feedstock production, of the kind pioneered in Helsinki. This is likely to hit arable farming as hard as cultured milk and meat production will hit livestock farming. Solar Foods could reach cost parity with the world's cheapest form of pro-

tein (soya from South America) within five years.

Instead of pumping ever more subsidies into a dying industry, governments should be investing in a crash programme to help farmers into other forms of employment, while providing relief funds for those who will suddenly lose their livelihoods.

Another hazard is the potential concentration of the farm-free food industry. We should strongly oppose the patenting of key technologies, to ensure the widest possible distribution of ownership. If governments regulate this properly, they could break the hegemony of the massive companies that now control global food commodities. If they don't, they could reinforce it. In this sector, as in all others, we

## We should strongly oppose the patenting of key technologies, to ensure the widest possible distribution of ownership

need strong anti-trust laws. We must also ensure that the new foods always have lower carbon footprints than the old ones: farmfree producers should power their operations entirely from low-carbon sources. This is a time of momentous choices, and we should make them together.

We can't afford to wait passively for technology to save us. Over the next few years, we

could lose almost everything, as magnificent habitats such as the rainforests of Madagascar, West Papua and Brazil are felled to produce cattle, soya or palm oil.

By temporarily shifting towards a plant-based diet with the lowest possible impacts (no avocados or out-of-season asparagus), we can help buy the necessary time to save magnificent species and places, while the new technologies mature. But farmfree food offers hope where hope was missing. We will soon be able to feed the world without devouring it. **CT**

*George Monbiot's film*

*Apocalypse Cow is free to view on Channel. His website is [www.monbiot.com](http://www.monbiot.com)*

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# World



Worried the Iran-US assassination crisis could herald global annihilation?

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**S**O, 2020 is off to an exciting start. It's barely the middle of January, and we've already made it through World War III, which was slightly less apocalyptic than expected. Forensic teams are still sifting through the ashes, but preliminary reports suggest that the global capitalist empire has emerged from the carnage largely intact.

It started in the Middle East, of course, when Donald Trump (a 'Russian-asset') ordered the murder of Iranian general Qasem Soleimani outside the Baghdad Airport, presumably after clearing it with Putin, which, given Iran and Russia's relationship, doesn't really make much sense.

But whatever. According to the US government and the corporate media, Soleimani was a 'terrorist', who had been working with Assad (another 'terrorist') to destroy ISIS (who are also 'terrorists') and elements of Al-Qaeda (who used to be 'terrorists') with the sup-

port of the Russians (who are kind of 'terrorists') and doing all sorts of other unspecified but allegedly imminent 'terrorist' things.

Apparently, Soleimani had flown to Baghdad on a secret commercial 'terrorist' flight and was on his way to some kind of covert 'terrorist' diplomatic meeting to respond to a de-escalation proposal from Saudi Arabia (who are definitely not 'terrorists') when the US military preventatively murdered him with a General Atomics Aeronautical Systems MQ-9B Reaper drone.

**I**ran (officially a 'terrorist' country since January 1979, when they overthrew the brutal Western puppet that the CIA and MI6 had installed as their 'Shah' in 1953, after they regime-changed the Iranian prime minister, after he nationalised the Anglo-Persian Oil Company, later to be known as British Petroleum) reacted

to the preventative murder of their 'terrorist' general like a bunch of 'terrorists.'

The Ayatollah Khamenei (you guessed it, a 'terrorist') issued a series of 'terrorist' threats against the 50,000 US military personnel more or less completely surrounding his country on bases all across the Middle East. Millions of Iranians (currently 'terrorists', except for members of MeK), who, according to the US officials, hated Soleimani, took to the streets of Tehran and other cities to mourn his death, burn American flags, and chant 'death to America' and other 'terrorist' slogans.

The empire went to DEFCON 1. The 82nd Airborne was activated. The State Department advised Americans vacationing in Iraq to get the hell out of there. #worldwar3 started trending on Twitter.

Freedom-loving countries throughout the region stood by to be annihilated. Saudi Arabia postponed its previously sched-

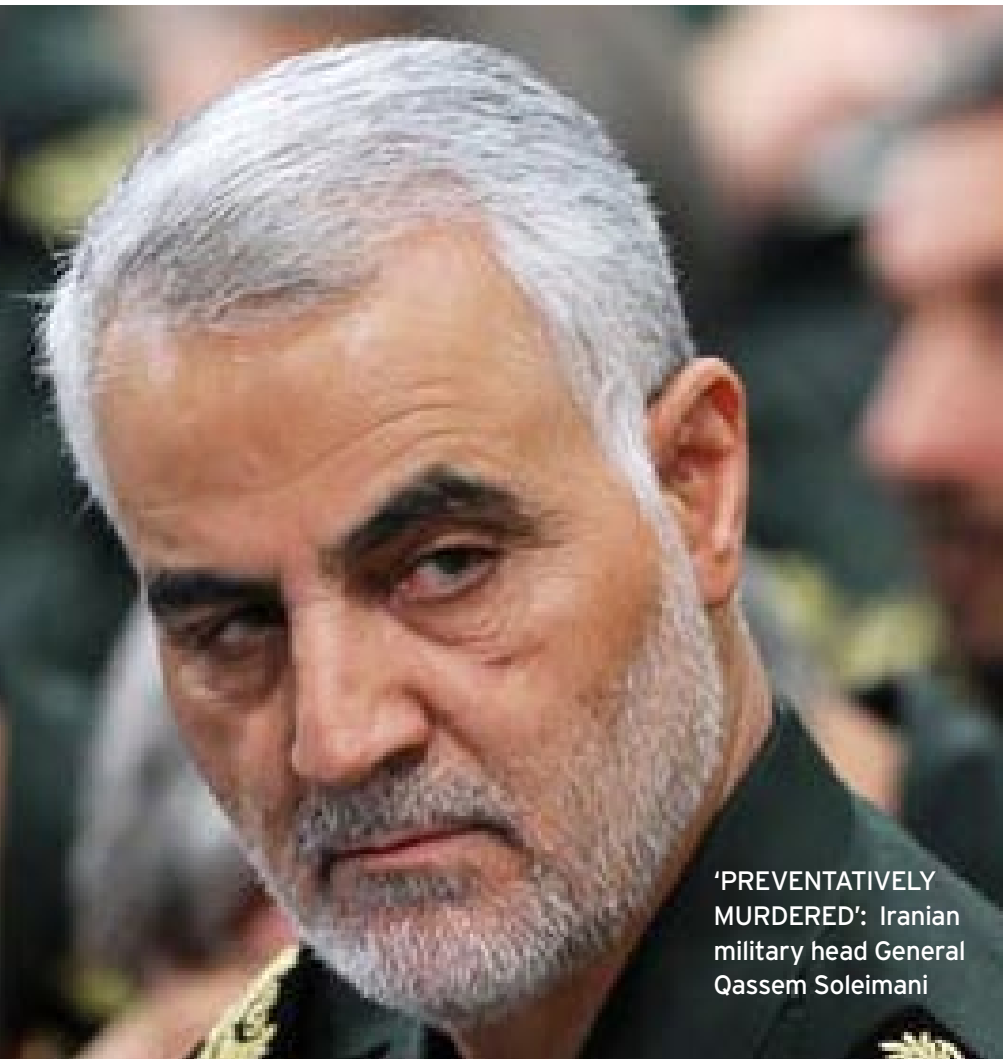
Photo: Iranian Supreme Leader's Office





# War III

Well, don't. We've just had that war and global capitalism won, writes **CJ Hopkins**



'PREVENTATIVELY MURDERED': Iranian military head General Qassem Soleimani

uled weekend edition of public head-chopping. Israel dialed up its non-existent nukes. The Kuwaitis posted armed guards on their incubators. The Qataris, Bahrainians, United Arab Emirates, and other loyal empire outposts did whatever those folks do when they're facing nuclear Armageddon.

In the USA, it was mass hysteria. The corporate media starting pumping out stories about Soleimani having 'blood on his hands', and being 'the number one terrorist in the world', and having ruthlessly genocided hundreds of American soldiers, who, back in 2003, had preventatively invaded and destroyed Iraq and were preventatively slaughtering and torturing its people to keep them from attacking America with their non-existent WMDs.

Americans (most of whom had never even heard of Soleimani until their government murdered him, and many of whom

can't find Iran on a map) took to Twitter to call for the immediate nuking of Iran from orbit. Mayor Bill de Blasio ordered a division of heavily-armed anti-terror forces to stand around in New York City with their rifles in the classic 'sling-ready' position to prevent the Iranians from swimming the Atlantic (along with their communist killer dolphins), crawling up onto East Hampton Beach, taking the LIRR into town, and committing some devastating 'terrorist' atrocity that would be commemorated throughout eternity on key rings, T-shirts, and jumbo coffee mugs.

Trump, disciplined Russian agent that he is, held his nerve and maintained his cover, performing his 'total moron' act as only a seasoned Russian operative can. While Iran was still mourning, he started publicly jabbering about Soleimani's dismembered corpse, bombing Iranian cultural sites, and otherwise bombastically taunting Iran like an emotionally-challenged street-corner drunk. His strategy was clearly to convince the Iranians (and the rest of the world) that he is a dangerous imbecile who will murder the officials of any foreign government that Mike Pompeo tells him to, and then incinerate their museums and mosques, and presumably the rest of their 'shithole' countries, if they even think about retaliating.

Nevertheless, retaliate the Iranians did. In a sadistic display of cold-hearted 'terrorism', they launched a firestorm of ballistic 'terror' missiles at two US mili-

## I confess, even I tuned into Trump's speech, which was one of the most disturbing public spectacles I have ever witnessed

tary bases in Iraq, killing no one and injuring no one, but damaging the hell out of some empty buildings, a helicopter, and a couple of tents. First, though, in order to maximise the 'terror', they called the Swiss embassy in Tehran and asked them to warn the US military that they would be launching missiles at their bases shortly. As the *Moon of Alabama* website reported: 'The Swiss embassy in Tehran, which represents the US, was warned at least one hour before the attack happened. Around 0:00 UTC the US Federal Aviation Administration issued a Notice to Airmen (NOTAM) which prohibited civil US flights over Iraq, Iran, the Persian Gulf and the Gulf of Oman.'

In the wake of the Iranians' devastating counter-strike, and the mass-non-casualties resulting therefrom, anyone with an Internet connection or access to a television descended into their anti-terror bunkers and held their breath in anticipation of the nuclear hell Trump was sure to unleash. I confess, even I tuned into his speech, which was one of the most disturbing public spectacles I have ever witnessed.

Trump burst through the doors of the White House Grand

Foyer, dramatically backlit, freshly 'tanned', scowling like a WWF wrestler, and announced that, as long as he is president, 'Iran will never be allowed to have nuclear weapons' ... as if any of the events of the preceding week had had anything to do with nuclear weapons (which the Iranians don't need and do not want, except in some neo-conservative fantasy wherein Iran intends to commit national suicide by nuking Israel off the face of the Earth).

I didn't make it through his entire address, which he delivered in a breathless, robotic staccato (possibly because Putin, or Mike Pompeo, was dictating it word-for-word into his earpiece), but it was clear from the start that all-out, toe-to-toe nuclear combat with the Axis of Resistance, or the Axis of Terror, or the Axis of Evil, or the Axis of Whatever, had been averted.

**B**ut, seriously, all mass hysteria aside, despite whatever atrocities are still to come, World War III is not going to happen. Why, you ask, is it not going to happen? OK, I'll tell you, but you're not going to like it.

World War III is not going to happen because World War III already happened ... and the global capitalist empire won. Take a look at NATO maps of the area, then take a look at the Smithsonian map of where the US military is 'combating terrorism'. And there are plenty of other maps you can google. What you will be looking at is the global capitalist empire. Not the Ameri-

can empire, the global capitalist empire.

If that sounds like a distinction without a difference ... well, it kind of is, and it kind of isn't. What I mean by that is that it isn't America (ie, America the nation-state, which most Americans still believe they live in) that is militarily occupying much of the planet, making a mockery of international law, bombing and invading other countries, and assassinating heads of state and military officers with complete impunity. Or, rather, sure, it is America ... but America is not America.

America is a simulation. It is the mask the global capitalist empire wears to conceal the fact that there is no America ... that there is only the global capitalist empire.

The whole idea of 'World War III', of powerful nation-states conquering other powerful nation-states, is pure nostalgia. 'America' does not want to conquer Iran. The empire wants to restructure Iran, and then absorb it into the empire. It doesn't give a rat's ass about democracy, or whether the women are allowed to wear mini-skirts, or any other 'human rights.' If it did, it would be restructuring Saudi Arabia and applying 'maximum pressure' to Israel.

Likewise, the notion that 'America' has been making a series of unfortunate 'strategic mistakes' in the Middle East is a convenient illusion. Granted, its foreign policy makes no sense from the perspective of a nation-state, but it makes perfect sense from the perspective of the empire. While 'America'

## America is the mask the global capitalist empire wears to conceal the fact that there is no America ... that there is only the global capitalist empire

appears to be mindlessly thrashing around like a bull in a china shop, the empire knows exactly what it's doing, what it has been doing since the end of the Cold War, opening up formerly inaccessible markets, eliminating internal resistance, aggressively restructuring any and all territories that are not playing ball with global capitalism.

I know it's gratifying to wave the flag, or burn it, depending on your political persuasion, whenever things flare up militarily, but at some point we (ie, we Americans, Brits, Western Europeans, et al) are going to need to face the fact that we are living in a global empire, which is actively pursuing its global interests, and not in sovereign nation-states pursuing the interests of nation-states. (The fact that the nation-state is defunct is why we've been experiencing a resurgence of 'nationalism.' It isn't a return to the 1930s. It is the death throes of the nation-state, nationalism, and national sovereignty ... the supernova of a dying star.)

World War III was an ideological battle between two aspiring hegemonic systems. It is over. It's a global capitalist world. As Mr.

Jensen put it in the movie Network: "You are an old man who thinks in terms of nations and peoples. There are no nations. There are no peoples. There are no Russians. There are no Arabs. There are no third worlds. There is no West. There is only one holistic system of systems, one vast and immense, interwoven, interacting, multivariate, multinational dominion of dollars. Petro-dollars, electro-dollars, multi-dollars, reichmarks, rins, rubles, pounds, and shekels. It is the international system of currency which determines the totality of life on this planet. That is the natural order of things today."

That system of systems, that multivariate, multinational dominion of dollars, has us all by the short hairs, folks. All of us. And it won't be satisfied until the world is transformed into one big, valueless, neo-feudal, privatised market ... so maybe we should forget about World War III, and start focusing on World War IV.

You know the war I'm talking about, don't you? It's the global capitalist empire versus the 'terrorists.' **CT**

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**CJ Hopkins** is an award-winning American playwright, novelist and political satirist based in Berlin. His dystopian novel, *Zone 23*, is published by Snoggswothy, Swaine & Cormorant. Volume I of his *Consent Factory Essays* is published by Consent Factory Publishing. He can be reached at [cjhopkins.com](http://cjhopkins.com) or [consentfactory.org](http://consentfactory.org).

The US idea of 'normal' means being obedient, compliant, and enslaved, writes **Caitlin Johnstone**

# 'Iran must begin acting like a normal nation', says totally normal nation

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**T**HE government that runs a globe-spanning empire led by a reality TV host keeps talking about the lack of normality in the nation of Iran.

"What we want all countries to join in", said State Department spokesperson Morgan Ortagus in a recent Fox News interview, "is to help us not only to de-escalate any tensions with Iran, but to help us bring Iran to a place where they are ready to stop their terrorist and malign behaviour, and where they are ready to discuss with the United States, with Europe, with everyone, about how they can change their behaviour to act like a normal nation".

"We want Iran to simply behave like a normal nation",

Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said in a press statement the other day. "We believe that the sanctions we imposed today further that strategic objective."

These would be the additional sanctions which have been expanded to include virtually the entire Iranian economy, deliberately targeting Iran's already sanction-starved populace, with the explicit goal of fomenting a civil war in that nation. Which is of course a perfectly normal thing to do, from a perfectly normal nation.

This would be the same Iran whose cultural heritage sites were threatened with destruction if it retaliated for the totally normal assassination of its top military official

via flying robot. The same Iran whose financial system was just threatened with destruction using the totally normal hegemony of American central banking. Perfectly normal, perfectly healthy.

So what can Iran do to become a 'normal nation?' Well, since it's the US making this demand, we can assume that it's the model Iran should look to.

- In order to become a normal nation, Iran will need to expand its interests from the region and begin toppling noncompliant governments and invading nations all around the world.

- In order to become a normal nation, Iran will need to circle the planet with hundreds of Iranian military bases.

- In order to become a normal







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nation, Iran will need to obtain thousands of nuclear weapons, and use a couple of them.

● In order to become a normal nation, Iran will need to become the most dominant military, economic and cultural force in the world, and then use that dominance to destroy any government, political party, ideology, faction, movement or person who stands in its way.

● In order to become a normal nation, Iran will need to arm violent extremist factions all around the world with the goal of eliminating all governments that refuse to bow to its interests.

● In order to become a normal nation, Iran will need to become the dominant producer of films, music and TV shows and use

this influence to propagandise its power structure's ideology to every cultural sphere.

● In order to become a normal nation, Iran will need to begin meddling in scores of democratic elections all around the world and then crying for years at the possibility of any nation returning the favour.

● In order to become a normal nation, Iran will need to shore up economic control of the world so that it can crush any sort of disobedience by starving civilians and depriving them of medical care while pretending that it's a force for peace.

● In order to become a normal nation, Iran will need to indefinitely occupy a vast region on the other side of the planet with thousands upon thousands of troops and trillions of dollars in military equipment, to no benefit of a single ordinary Iranian, and against the will of the people who live there.

● In order to become a normal nation, Iran will need to create a presidency led by a reality TV star oligarch who is only supported because Iran's populace is so disgusted with the status quo of their government.

I am kidding, of course. The US government does not want Iran to become like the US. The US government does not want any nation to become like the US. The US likes its abnormality among nations just the way it is, thank you very much. The US is the exception to all its own rules. That's how American exceptionalism works. This is one of those "do as I say, not as I do" situations.

The US doesn't want Iran to be like America. The US wants Iran to be like the other nations which have allowed themselves to be absorbed into the blob of the US-centralised empire.

● The US would be perfectly happy for Iran to act like Saudi Arabia: arming terrorist factions, beheading heretics, committing war crimes and deliberately creating humanitarian disasters for geostrategic convenience, yet aligning fully with US military, financial, and resource control agendas.

● The US would be perfectly happy for Iran to begin acting like Israel: a nuclear-armed military outpost which constantly bombs adjacent nations, interferes in the US and other nations' politics to shore up support, works toward the slow extermination of its indigenous population and fires upon protesters with live ammunition.

● The US would be perfectly happy for Iran to begin acting like Canada, the UK, Australia, New Zealand or the EU: obedient military/intelligence assets who function as extra American states when it comes to foreign policy and international affairs.

That is what the US means by acting "normal". Not acting moral. Not acting healthy. Certainly not acting like the US. It means acting obedient, compliant, and enslaved.

Which is precisely what Iran is resisting. **CT**

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

When will the far more powerful of the two superpowers of the Cold War era finally leave the graveyard of empires? asks **Tom Engelhardt**

# The global war of error

**Y**ES, our infrastructure stinks, our schools are failing, the USA is a nightmare of inequality, and there's a self-promoting madman in the White House, so isn't it time to take pride in the rare institutional victories America has had in this century? Arguably, none has been more striking than the triumphal success of the American war system.

Oh, you're going to bring that up immediately? Okay, you're right. It's true enough that the US military can't win a war anymore. In this century, it's never come out on top anywhere, not once, not definitively.

And yes, just to get a step ahead of you, everywhere it's set foot across the Greater Middle East and Africa, it seems to have killed startling numbers of people and uprooted so many more, sending lots of them into exile and so unsettling other parts of the world as well. In the process, it's also had remarkable success spreading

failed states and terror groups far and wide.

Al-Qaeda, whose 19 suicidal hijackers so devastatingly struck this country on September 11, 2001, was just a modest outfit then (even if its leader dreamt of drawing the US into conflicts across the Islamic world that would promote his group big time). Nineteen years later, its branches have spread from Yemen to West Africa, while the original al-Qaeda still exists. And don't forget its horrific progeny, the Islamic State, or ISIS (originally al-Qaeda in Iraq). Though the US military has declared it defeated in its 'caliphate' (it isn't, not truly), its branches have multiplied from the Philippines deep into Africa.

And the Afghan War, that original American invasion of this century, remains hell on Earth more than 18 years later. In December, the *Washington Post* broke a story about interviews on that conflict conducted by the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan



Reconstruction with 400 key insiders, military and civilian, revealing that it was a war of (well-grasped) error. As that paper's reporter, Craig Whitlock, put it: "Senior US officials failed to tell the truth about the war in Afghanistan throughout the 18-year campaign, making rosy pronouncements they knew to be false and hiding unmistakable evidence the war had become unwinnable."

Many of those generals and other officials who had claimed, year after year, that there was 'progress' in Afghanistan, that the US had turned yet another 'corner,' admitted to the Inspector General's interviewers that they had been lying to the rest



LEAVING: Rangers from 1st Battalion, 75th Ranger Regiment await a CH-47 for extraction an operation in Ghazni Province, Afghanistan.

Photo by Pedro Amador / US Defence dept.

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of us. In truth, so long after the invasion of 2001, this wasn't exactly news (not if you had been paying attention anyway). And it couldn't have been more historically familiar. After all, US military commanders and other key officials had, in a similar fashion, regularly hailed 'progress' in the Vietnam War years, too. As US war commander General William Westmorland put it in an address to the National Press Club in 1967, "We have reached an important point where the end begins to come into view", a sentiment later boiled down by American officialdom to seeing 'the light at the end of the tunnel.'

In fact, half a century later,

these, too, have proved to be tunnel years for the US military in its global war on terror, which might more accurately be called a global war of error. Take Iraq, the country that, in the spring of 2003, President George W Bush and crew so triumphantly invaded, claiming a connection between its autocratic ruler, Saddam Hussein, and al-Qaeda, while citing the dangers of the weapons of mass destruction he supposedly possessed. Both claims were, of course, fantasies propagated by officials dreaming of using that invasion to establish a Pax Americana in the oil-rich Middle East forever and a day. ("Mission accomplished!")

So many years later, Americans are still dying there; American air and drone strikes are still ongoing; and American troops are still being sent in, as Iraqis continue to die in significant numbers in a country turned into a stew of displacement, poverty, protest, and chaos. Meanwhile, ISIS (formed in an American prison camp in Iraq) threatens to resurge amid the never-ending mess that invasion created – and war with Iran seems to be the order of the day.

And just to continue down a list that's little short of endless, don't forget Somalia. The US military has been fighting there, on and off, with strik-

ingly negative consequences since the infamous Blackhawk Down disaster of 1993. Last year, American air strikes rose again to record levels there, while – no surprise – the terror outfit Washington has been fighting in that country since 2006, al-Shabaab, an al-Qaeda offshoot, seems only to be gaining strength.

Hey, even the Russians got a (grim) win in Syria; the US, nowhere. Not in Libya, a failed state filled with warring militias and bad guys of every sort in the wake of a US-led overthrow of the local autocrat. Not in Niger, where four American soldiers died at the hands of an ISIS terror group that still thrives; not in Yemen, yet another failed state where a Washington-backed Saudi war follows perfectly in the US military's footsteps in the region. So, yes, you're right to challenge me with all of that.

Nonetheless, I stand by my initial statement. In these years, the American war system has proven to be a remarkable institutional success story. Think of it this way: in the military of the 21st-century, failure is the new success. In order to grasp this, you have to stop looking at Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, Somalia, and the rest of those embattled lands and start looking instead at Washington, DC. While you're at it, you need to stop thinking that the gauge of success in war is victory. That's so mid-20th-century of you! In fact, almost the opposite may be true when it comes to the American way

## Failure, in other words, is the new success and that applies as well to the 'industrial' part of the military-industrial complex

of war today.

After more than 18 years of what, once upon a time, would have been considered failure, tell me this: Is the Pentagon receiving more money or less? In fact, it's now being fed record amounts of tax dollars (as is the whole national security state). Admittedly, Congress can't find money for the building or rebuilding of American infrastructure – China now has up to 30,000 kilometers of high-speed rail and the US not one – and is riven by party animosities on issue after issue, but funding the Pentagon? No problem. When it comes to that, there's hardly a question, hardly a dispute at all. Agreement is nearly unanimous.

**F**ailure, in other words, is the new success and that applies as well to the 'industrial' part of the military-industrial complex. That reality was caught in a *Washington Post* headline the day after a CIA drone assassinated General Qassem Suleimani: "Defense stocks spike after airstrike against Iranian commander." Indeed, the good times clearly lay ahead. In the age of Trump, when the last secretary of defense was a

former Boeing executive and the present one a former lobbyist for arms-maker Raytheon, it's been weapons galore all the way to the bank.

Who cares if those weapons really work as advertised or if the wars in which they're used are winnable, as long as they're bought at staggering prices (and other countries buy them as well)? If you don't believe me, just check out Lockheed Martin's F-35 jet fighter, the most expensive weapons system ever (that doesn't really work). Hey, in 2019, that company got a \$2.43-billion contract just for spare parts for the plane!

And this version of a success story applies not just to funding and weaponry but to the military's leadership as well. Keep in mind that, after almost two decades without a victory in sight, if you check any poll, you'll find that the US military remains the most admired institution around (or the one Americans have most 'confidence' in). And under the circumstances, tell me that isn't an accomplishment of the first order.

For just about every key figure in the US military, you can now safely say that failure continues to be the order of the day. Consider it the 21st-century version of a military insurance policy: keep on keeping on without ever thinking outside the box and you'll be pushed up the chain of command to ever more impressive positions (and, sooner or later, through Washington's infamous 'revolving door' onto the corporate boards

of weapons makers and other defense firms). You'll be hailed as a great and thoughtful commander, a genuine historian of war, and a strategist beyond compare. You'll be admired by one and all.

Americans of another age would have found this strange indeed, but not today. Take, for instance, former Secretary of Defense and Marine General James 'Mad Dog' Mattis who led troops into Afghanistan in 2001 and again in the invasion of Iraq in 2003. In 2004, as commander of the 1st Marine Division, he was asked about a report that his troops had taken out a wedding party in western Iraq, including the wedding singer and his musicians, killing 43 people, 14 of them children. He responded: "How many people go to the middle of the desert ... to hold a wedding 80 miles from the nearest civilization?"

And then, of course, he only rose further, ending up as the head of US Central Command, or CENTCOM, which oversees America's wars in the Greater Middle East (and you know how that went), until he retired in 2013 and joined the corporate board of General Dynamics, the nation's fifth largest defence contractor. Then, in 2016, a certain Donald J. Trump took a liking to the very idea of a general nicknamed 'mad dog' and appointed him to run the Department of Defense (which should probably be renamed the Department of Offense). There, with full honours, the former four-star general oversaw the very same wars until, in Decem-

**Once upon a time, such a crew of commanders would have been considered a military of losers. They are now winners in a war of error**

ber 2018, deeply admired by Washington journalists among others, he resigned in protest over a presidential decision to withdraw American troops from Syria (and rejoined the board of General Dynamics).

In terms of the system he was in, that may have been his only genuine 'error', his only true 'defeat'.

**F**ortunately for the Pentagon, another commander who had risen through the same dead-end wars, four-star Army General Mark Milley, having been appointed head of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, knew just what to whisper in the president's ear – the magic word 'oil', or rather some version of protect (ie take) Syrian oil fields – to get him to send American troops back into that country to continue the local version of our never-ending wars.

By now, Milley's rise to glory will seem familiar to you. In announcing his appointment as Army chief of staff in 2015, for instance, Secretary of Defense Ashton Carter called him "a warrior and a statesman". He added, "He not only has plenty of operational and joint experience in Afghanistan, in Iraq,

and on the Joint Staff, but he also has the intellect and vision to lead change throughout the Army". Exactly!

Milley had, in fact, fought in both the Afghan and Iraq wars, serving three tours of duty in Afghanistan alone. In other words, the more you don't win – the more you are, in a sense, in error – the more likely you are to advance. Or as retired General Gordon Sullivan, president of the Association of the United States Army and a former chief of staff himself, put it then, Milley's command experience in war and peace gave him "firsthand knowledge of what the Army can do and of the impact of resource constraints on its capabilities."

In other words, he was a man ready to command who knew just how to handle this country's losing wars and keep them (so to speak) on track. Once upon a time, such a crew of commanders would have been considered a military of losers, but no longer. They are now the eternal winners in America's war of error.

In September 2013, Milley, then an Army three-star general, typically offered this ludicrously rosy assessment of Afghanistan's American-trained and American-supplied security forces: "This army and this police force have been very, very effective in combat against the insurgents every single day."

As Tony Karon wrote recently, "Either Milley was dissembling or he was deluded and therefore grotesquely

incompetent”. One thing we know, though: when it comes to public military assessments of the Afghan War (and the global war on terror more generally), he was typical. For such commanders, it was invariably ‘progress’ all the way.

**J**ust in case you don’t quite see the pattern yet, after the *Washington Post’s* Afghanistan Papers came out last December, offering clear evidence that, whatever they said in public, America’s commanders saw little in the way of ‘progress’ in the Afghan War, Milley promptly stepped up to the plate. He labelled that report’s conclusions ‘mischaracterisations’. He insisted instead that the endlessly optimistic public comments of generals like him had been “honest assessments ... never intended to deceive either the Congress or the American people.”

Oh, and here’s a final footnote (as reported in the *New York Times* last year) on how Milley (and top commanders like him) operated – and not just in Afghanistan either: “As Army chief of staff, General Milley has come under criticism from some in the Special Operations community for his involvement in the investigation into the 2017 ambush in Niger that left four American soldiers dead. He persuaded Patrick M Shanahan, who was acting defense secretary, to curtail a broader review, and also protected the career of an officer who some blamed for

### **Milley and Mattis are just typical of the commanders who rose to ever more prestigious positions on the basis of losing endless conflicts?**

the ambush. General Milley’s backers said he prevented the officer from leading another combat unit.”

Whatever you do, in other words, don’t give up the ghost (of error). Think of this as the formula for ‘success’ “ in that most admired of institutions, the US military. After all, Milley and Mattis are just typical of the commanders who rose (and are still rising) to ever more prestigious positions on the basis of losing (or at least not winning) an endless series of conflicts. Those failed wars were their tickets to success. Go figure.

In other words, the men who fought the 21st-century equivalents of Vietnam – though against right-wing Islamists, not left-wing nationalists and communists – the men who never for a second figured out how to win ‘hearts and minds’ any better than General William Westmorland had half a century earlier, are now triumphantly running the show in Washington. Add in the corporate types who endlessly arm them for battle and lobby for more of the same while raking in the dough and you have a system that no one involved would want to change. It’s a for-

mula for success that works like a dream (even if someday that dream is sure to end up looking like a nightmare).

Once upon a time, in the early 1990s, I wrote a book called *The End of Victory Culture*. In it, I traced how a deeply embedded American culture of triumph evaporated in the Vietnam War years, “its graveyard for all to see”, as “the answers of 1945 dissolved so quickly into the questions of 1965”. Speaking of the impact of that war on American culture, I added: “There was no narrative form that could long have contained the story of a slow-motion defeat inflicted by a non-white people in a frontier war in which the statistics of American victory seemed everywhere evident.”

Little did I know then how deeply a version of what might be called ‘defeat culture’ would embed itself in American life. After all, Donald Trump couldn’t have been elected to “make America great again” without it. From the evidence of these years, nowhere was that culture more deeply absorbed (however unconsciously) than in the military itself, which has, in our time, managed to turn it into a version of the ultimate success story.

Afghanistan has, of course, long been known as ‘the graveyard of empires’. The Soviet Union fought Islamic militants (backed by the Saudis and the United States) for nine years there before, in 1989, the Red Army limped home in defeat to watch a drained empire implode two years later. That left the

US as the 'sole superpower' on Planet Earth and its military as the uncontested greatest one of all.

And it took that military just a decade to head for that same graveyard. In this century, Americans have lost trillions of dollars in the never-ending wars Washington has conducted across the Greater Middle East and parts of Africa, wars that represent an eternal reign (rain?) of error. I've long suspected that the Soviet Union wasn't the only superpower with problems in 1991. Though it was anything but obvious at the time, I've since written: "It will undoubtedly be clear enough ... that the US, seemingly at the height of any power's

**Someday,  
the US military's  
Global war of error will  
come to an end and one  
thing seems certain:  
it won't be pretty**

power in 1991 when the Soviet Union disappeared, began heading for the exits soon thereafter, still enwreathed in self-congratulation and triumphalism."

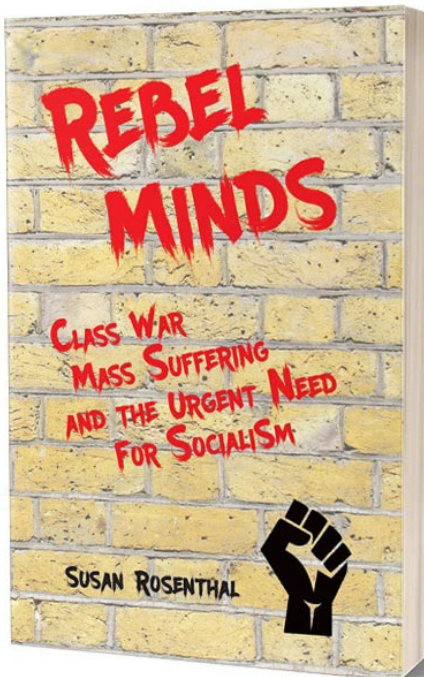
The question is: When will the far more powerful of the two superpowers of the Cold War era finally leave that graveyard of empires (now spread across a significant swath of the planet)? Still commanded by the losers of

those very wars, will it, like the Red Army, limp home one day to watch its country implode? Will it leave a world of war, of the dead, of countless refugees and rubbleised cities, and finally return to see its own society disintegrate in some fashion?

Who knows? But keep your eyes peeled in 2020 and beyond. Someday, the US military's war of error will come to an end and one thing seems certain: it won't be pretty. **CT**

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**Tom Engelhardt** is a co-founder of the *American Empire Project* and the author of a history of the Cold War, *The End of Victory Culture*. He runs [www.tomdispatch.com](http://www.tomdispatch.com) - where this essay was first published.

**"A brilliant explanation of suffering"** – Lesley Thomas



# REBEL MINDS

Class War, Mass Suffering,  
and the Urgent Need for Socialism

**By Susan Rosenthal**

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At times of national crisis, leaders are supposed to, well, lead. But Australian PM Scott Morrison has a remarkable habit of doing all the wrong things as wildfires rip through his country, writes **Kenneth Surin**

# Scotty from Marketing and Australia's Big Burn

**WAS** in Australia a month ago, experiencing some of the effects of the huge wildfires that had been burning there since August.

The authorities were saying then that the conflagrations would probably not start to die down until cooler weather arrived with the end of the Australian summer (March 2020 or thereabouts).

March 2020 was also the time when rainfall was expected to arrive and abate the prolonged drought accompanying the wildfires. Meanwhile, the fires have grown in scale and turned even more deadly. The devastation is monumental.

When the Amazon rainforest caught fire last January, 906,000 hectares were destroyed. 2.6-million hectares were burnt across the Siberian steppe last July. Since the fires began in Australia, more than 5-million hectares (12.35-million acres) have been incinerated. To quote from a report in the *Guardian*: "The direct death toll stands at 23, with

more expected. Some species have been pushed to extinction, and more than half a billion animals are estimated to have been killed. Farmers have reported running out of bullets as they work to end the suffering of half-dead livestock".

Prime wine-producing land in the central state of South Australia has also been extensively destroyed, as have UNESCO biospheres and tourist towns.

Smoke from the fires drifted across the Tasman Sea, a distance of 1,400 miles, and turned glaciers in New Zealand brown.

Australian navy ships have been rescuing hundreds of people from beaches in towns whose roads have been cut-off by the fires.

The fires are also causing severe disruption to power supplies, as sub-stations and transformers are engulfed by them.

Reuters reports (January 4, 2020) that "the bushfires ... are generating so much heat that they are creating their own weather systems including

dry lightning storms and fire tornadoes. ... A RFS firefighter was killed on Monday by a fire tornado caused by the collapse of a pyrocumulonimbus cloud formation that rolled over the fire truck he was in."

The Prime Minister, the former PR man and Donald Trump's pal Scott Morrison, once spearheaded a multi-million-dollar campaign to enhance tourism when he was head of Tourism Australia.

The Saatchi PR agency provided the campaign its slogan – #Wherethebloodyhellareyou.

Morrison's handling of the fire and drought emergency has been maladroit (to put it mildly), and the Saatchi slogan – which helped give Morrison the soubriquet "Scotty from Marketing" – has now been turned against him, as he disappears from public view for days before reappearing in disaster-affected towns for photo ops with their traumatised but unwelcoming victims.

Morrison has a tin ear (some say he has two), and says and





Rescue NSW firefighters protect properties from an out-of-control bushfire in South West Sydney.

does all the wrong things, despite having used A\$190,000 of public money to pay consultants for ‘empathy training’ when he dealt with drought-stricken farmers.

When an exhausted and soot-covered firefighter in the town of Cobargo— 240 miles south of Sydney, where 3 people out of its population of 776 had died— told him he hadn’t eaten all day, Morrison just shook his hand and said, “Well I’ll let you get back to it”.

Several people in Cobargo refused to shake hands with him. The Huffington Post reports on video footage in which a firefighter refuses to shake Morrison’s hand: “I don’t really want to shake your

hand,” the firefighter says.

Morrison then leans down to grab the fireman’s hand but he again refuses. The prime minister then walks away — patting the man’s shoulder as he leaves.

“Oh, well. Nice to see you,” Morrison can be heard saying.

Morrison was later heard telling a fire official: “Tell that fella I’m really sorry, I’m sure he’s just tired.”

“No, no, he’s lost a house,” the incident controller tells him”.

When the mood of bystanders—like the firefighter many were rendered homeless by the blaze— started to turn ugly, Morrison and his gun-toting security squad made a swift exit from Cobargo as furious

hecklers yelled “scumbag”, “fuck-off”, and “you’re not welcome, you fuckwit”. Again, this was caught on video.

At the start of the crisis, a group of 23 retired emergency and fire chiefs had requested a meeting with Morrison to discuss it and ask for more specialized equipment to deal with hotter and more prolonged bushfires, but the request was turned down.

Last week Morrison hosted a reception and a game of backyard cricket for the Australian and New Zealand cricket teams at the prime minister’s official residence, saying in his welcoming remarks, after a cursory reference to “terrible events”, that “Australians will be gath-

ered whether it's at the SCG or around television sets all around the country and they'll be inspired by the great feats of our cricketers from both sides of the Tasman [Sea] and I think they'll be encouraged by the spirit shown by Australians". Many believe the reception should not have taken place.

As a result of these and other clangers, critics on social media have declared Morrison's "empathy training" to be a complete waste of public money.

Morrison did not call-out the Australian Defence Force Reserve to assist civilian firefighters until 4th January, when 3000 reservists were mobilized. That day the temperature in Penrith, in Sydney's west, reached 48.9C/120.02F.

Despite many offers from foreign governments of extra water-bombing aircraft throughout the crisis, it was not until January 4 that Morrison committed funds to lease 4 extra planes – 2 long range fixed-wing DC-10s with 30,000 litres capacity and 2 medium range large air tankers with an 11,000 litre capacity. Experts say this underestimates what is needed.

A 2016 request from the National Aerial Firefighting Centre (NAFC), which currently oversees a fleet of 145 aircraft, for a "national large air-tanker fleet" to assist firefighting operations was dismissed in September 2017, with the government saying it would continue its A\$15 million annual support for the NAFC

without expanding the national capability. (ScoMo, as Morrison is called, is now having this moniker morph into ScumMo.)

The Australian public are well-aware of ScoMo's record as a climate-change denier who's opposed carbon taxes, and even proposed outlawing boycotts by environmental activists.

In his most recent press conference, ScoMo announced last week that there would be no change to Australia's climate policy. He said it was impossible to establish a connection between climate change and a single event like the current Big Burn.

**U**nder the terms of the Tokyo Agreement, Australia (the world's largest exporter of coal) pledged to cut carbon emissions by 26% from 2005 levels by 2030, but Morrison's government has already started to work-round this commitment— earlier this month at a United Nations summit in Madrid, Australia resorted to sharp practice by using its old carbon credits to count toward future emissions targets.

The understandable upshot is that unflattering construals are placed on any one of ScoMo's fumbling efforts to deal with this disaster.

Morrison, though, is in a difficult personal situation, albeit one entirely of his own making.

If he becomes more proactive in firefighting efforts, and more visible at disaster sites, the more opportunities there will be for the media to contrast this newly acquired show of

"empathy" with ScoMo's previous record of climate-change denialism and his so-far unenergetic response to the crisis.

ScoMo's unsuccessful strategy has been to play-down the severity of the crisis (completely in line with his indifference to climate-change), and to restrict himself to sporadic public appearances in the hope that this will be just enough to convince Aussies he cares for their well-being.

He's failed on both scores. Public opinion is now strongly opposed to climate-change denialism.

Research in 2019 by the US Studies Centre at the University of Sydney found 78% of Australians supporting reduced fossil-fuel use and 64% raising taxes to implement this policy.

A look at the Twitter responses to ScoMo's handling of the crisis indicates widespread agreement with the incensed hecklers who chased him out of Cobargo.

What trick will ScoMo now have up his sleeve? Well, he has an unflinching trust in marketing. As I finished this article, ScoMo's office put out a political-campaign ad, complete with a jaunty jingle, lauding his government's firefighting efforts.

The scathing social media response was immediate, and along these lines: you can take ScoMo out of marketing, but you can't take the marketing out of ScoMo. **CT**

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*Kenneth Surin teaches at Duke University, North Carolina. He lives in Blacksburg, Virginia.*

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

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

– **Tony Sutton, Editor**



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

If we want to develop a more equal society, we must make radical changes to our political system, urges **Susan Rosenthal** in her latest book *Rebel Minds*

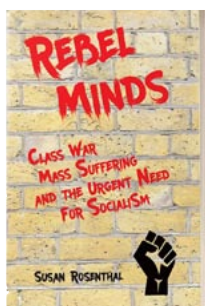
REVIEW BY **TONY SUTTON**

# An end to capitalism. An end to cash!

**T**HE UK working class lost much sympathy after its stunning rejection of Jeremy Corbyn's socialist manifesto in last December's general election. That they chose to be influenced by a three-word slogan – *Get Brexit Done* – from a Tory party that had savaged them with a programme of vicious austerity over the past nine years was an indication of both a lack of political awareness and the crushing power of unrelenting right-wing media propaganda.

Similarly, the continuing support for Donald Trump, who was propelled to the US presidency by another vacuous slogan – *Make America Great Again* – hardly invites affinity for the working class in shattered US heartland states. In more enlightened times, those voters would have chased Trump and his cronies out of town; but it seems certain they will re-elect the orange oaf later this year.

Despite the working class's



## **REBEL MINDS**

**Class War, Suffering and the Urgent Need for Socialism**  
**Susan Rosenthal**

Published by ReMarx Publishing

**UK: £15.00** (available from [www.bookmarksbookshop.co.uk](http://www.bookmarksbookshop.co.uk))

**Can\$18** (available from [www.remarxpub.com](http://www.remarxpub.com))

flair for electoral self-flagellation, Susan Rosenthal, the Canadian author of *Rebel Minds: Class War, Suffering and the urgent Need for Socialism*, is firmly on their side. A retired physician and avowed socialist, she opens *Rebel Minds* with the uncontestable assertion that “People all over the world want the same things: effective shelter,

nutritious food, clean water, sanitation, and access to information”, along with societal needs, especially “to know that others will support us in times of need.”

“Capitalism”, she declares, “delivers the opposite: deprivation, disrespect, distrust, disconnection, discrimination, meaningless work, social insecurity, pain, disease, premature death, and fear for the future”.

As an alternative to the present economic system that, she says, is rigged against ordinary people, *Rebel Minds* offers a ‘Marxist method of analysis’, forged in the belief that working-class people could run the world much better than billionaire rulers, who “fear Marxism because it exposes them as a class who are leading humanity to extinction ...”

**I**f the system is so obviously flawed, then how does capitalism continue to get away with such shameless, self-centred behaviour? That's the ques-



**MAKING A DIFFERENCE:** Members of the United Teachers of Los Angeles union rally to celebrate the end of their 2019 strike, in which they protested against low pay, large class sizes, inadequate support staffs of nurses and librarians, and the proliferation of charter schools.

tion that Rosenthal confronts in the early sections of *Rebel Minds*, where she analyses the physical and mental torment created by ever-increasing demands of profit-hungry bosses on workers who have become numbed by mindless and meaningless, drudgery in jobs that barely pay their bills.

This situation is aggravated when whole communities are ravaged by avaricious corporations that establish profitable industries, “destroy the environment in the process, then relocate to more profitable areas, abandoning entire regions to rot”. Rosenthal offers Detroit, former heart of the US auto industry, and the US Rust Belt as examples of capitalist contempt for workers, while

reminding us that every Western society has its own horror stories of the distress created when “good jobs and the dignity of work have been replaced by suffering, hopelessness and despair ... the belief that people in power don’t care about them or their communities”. The pain created by this devastation, she says, is one of the main causes of the trail of opioid addiction that has added even more misery and despair to the hardest-hit regions.

“Some will object to my blaming the capitalist class for human suffering”, says Rosenthal, “I say that they control society, so they are responsible for what happens. We are responsible for allowing them to keep us down and for liberat-

ing ourselves from their rule.”

**R**eaders will be forgiven for wondering if anything but another major financial catastrophe can slow down the growth of a pernicious system that creates fantastic riches for the few while increasing poverty and despair for the rest of us. Can the union movement revive sufficiently to even the odds around the bargaining table? I’m not so sure, given the response of many of the workers I meet in my local pub and coffee shop. I’m a strong believer in the bargaining power of union solidarity, but many of them are blinded by the arse-about-face notion – encouraged by the tabloid media – that un-

ionised workers are *greedy* because they are better paid and have greater job security than their non-unionised neighbours! When I suggest that, instead of moaning, they should join a union that will fight for *them*, the discussion tends to end in heated words revolving around ‘Russia,’ ‘socialism’ and ‘commie bastard . . .

Rosenthal is also a staunch union supporter, although not without reservations. She’s wary of their infiltration by a ‘manager class’ of leaders who are often more comfortable in the executive suite than the shopfloor. However, to cement the case for union solidarity, she quotes from a report from the Economic Policy Institute that every worker should read before their first day on the job, “Compared with non-union workers, the average union worker in America enjoys 28 percent higher wages and is more likely to have medical insurance, paid leave, a pension, and other benefits”.

**T**he second section of *Rebel Minds* is a harsh indictment of the role of psychiatry and the concept of mental illness – the theme of much of Rosenthal’s previous writing – which she says, “is unique to capitalism and . . . hides the role of the capitalist class in creating mass suffering.”

She illustrates practitioners’ inability to correctly diagnose ‘mental illness’ and ‘psychosis’ by recounting an experiment undertaken by Stanford Univer-

## Conquerors take what they want by force. Their justification is that ‘savage barbarians’ are no more entitled to the land than animals in the forest

sity professor David Rosenhan who “sent eight volunteers to eight different psychiatric hospitals across the US. All posed as people concerned about their ‘mental health’ because they heard noises and were admitted to hospital on that basis.

“Immediately after being admitted, all eight volunteers reported that the voices had stopped, they had no other symptoms, and they felt fine. Nevertheless, seven were labelled with ‘schizophrenia’ and one was labelled with ‘manic depression’. They were kept in hospital for up to 52 days. After being released, none were considered cured; all were labelled ‘in remission’. During their time in hospital, no staff member discovered that any of the phony patients was an imposter, although some of the other patients figured it out.”

After this and a follow-up experiment, Rosenhan suggested that “we refrain from sending the distressed to insane places’ and focus instead on helping people to solve their problems.”

*Rebel Minds* also details the historical misery created by capitalism, including colonialism, racism, eugenics and geno-

cide: “Conquerors take what they want by force. Their moral justification is the racist belief that ‘savage barbarians’ are no more entitled to the land, or compensation for its loss, than animals in the forest . . . Since the beginning of colonisation, every capitalist regime has practiced racism, eugenics and genocide against populations who stand in the way of capital accumulation.”

That exploitation continues: we are subjected to an almost daily dose of TV news coverage of protests and demonstration around the world. Much of that output, however, is stage-managed to emphasise the ‘battle for democracy’ in countries such as Hong Kong and Venezuela, while downplaying the fight against the sins of capitalism, evidenced by the near-total TV blackout of a year of increasingly violent government reaction to protests against the French state’s austerity measures.

What should the working class – and that’s what we all are, despite our cynical, corporate rebranding as ‘middle class’ – do to counter “the complex web of social institutions that keep the majority ‘in their place?’”

After telling us that moral outrage, personal change and reformation of the present system won’t help us escape the societal ‘deep shit’ that looms, Rosenthal asks, “Will we stand by while the ruling class destroy everything that humanity has accomplished over millennia, or will we defend our right to a viable future? Undoubtedly, the major-

ity choose to survive. The question is how?”

**S**o far, I agree with most of Rosenthal’s analysis, but I discover I’m what she terms a ‘Pessimist’ when I dig into the final chapters of *Rebel Minds*, where she reveals how we can conquer the capitalist ogre, offering a disappointing and, I’m sure, thoroughly unworkable, solution to the problems confronting the 21st-century labour force.

Rosenthal states, “A successful socialist revolution depends on millions of workers rising together to remove the capitalists from power as quickly and painlessly as possible”, pointing out that, “A supremely organised working class could take power without using violence; workers would simply escort their supervisors, managers and bosses out the door. The violence comes when capitalists refuse to accept majority rule and try to regroup, rearm, and

**Much work has to be done to fix our unequal society, but the solutions won’t be found in the pages of *Rebel Minds***

attack. We must anticipate and defend against this inevitability. The stronger the workers’ State, the less force will be required”.

Then, a few pages later, we’re told, “Transitioning to a communist, needs-based economy will take time. In the meantime, people will need to be paid for their work. This will not be a problem”, she says, as the wealth accumulated under capitalism belongs to the working class, so workers “have the right to use it to launch the new economy. . .

“When enough is being produced to meet everyone’s basic needs, money can be removed from the equation. . .

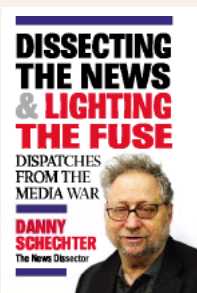
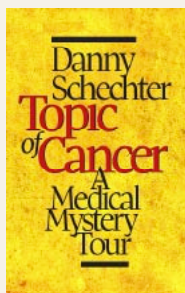
“Imagine not having to worry

about money: making it, losing it, keeping track of it, spending it, saving it, and never having enough! Making things free makes people free.”

There’s more along those lines as Rosenthal forecasts the eviction of greedy, rapacious capitalists, followed by the dawn of a brave new world, based on a revolutionary format that failed in 1917.

Yes, much has to be done to fix our unequal economies, but the solutions won’t be found in *Rebel Minds*. While Rosenthal adds to the debate about the injustices of capitalism, her dream of a Marxist revolution and cash-free society will find little support in the pubs and coffee shops frequented by the workers she seeks to inspire. They don’t want a revolution, just a fairer share of the contents of the corporate piggy bank. **CT**

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**Tony Sutton** is the editor of *ColdType*. Contact him at [editor@coldtype.net](mailto:editor@coldtype.net).



## Free Books by **Danny Schechter**

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Those credit cards in our wallets are reinforcing - with every purchase - a rich people-friendly America, writes **Sam Pizzigati**

# The seven square inches that make us more unequal

**W**HAT happens when we use our credit cards? We all think we know. We charge a purchase on our card, we incur a debt. If we pay off that debt within a month, we face no interest charge. End of story.

Not quite. Something else important is happening whenever we make a credit card charge: We're making already rich people considerably richer.

Our generosity - to the deep pockets above us - operates on two levels, one that will come as no surprise to anyone who's been following corporate pay patterns, the other reflecting a cash-register dynamic that hardly any of us know anything about.

The unsurprising reality? Our credit cards are bankrolling some of Corporate America's largest executive paychecks. KI Chenault, for instance, pocketed nearly \$400-million from American Express between his 2001 hiring as CEO and his retirement in early 2018. That same year, Visa's four highest-paid execs all pulled down over \$12.5-million each. Last year, the chief executive at Mastercard enjoyed a pay deal worth \$20.4-million.

**W**hat exactly makes sitting in the credit card industry's executive suites so lucrative? Must be all that interest the credit card industry collects from people who can't quickly pay off their balances, right? Again, not quite.

The interest consumers pay on their card purchases certainly does add up, and massively so. But our credit card giants, as former

US Treasury Department official Aar-

on Klein points out, actually get the bulk of their profit from the 'swipe fees' the credit card industry charges merchants.

These fees typically run three from to five percent of the purchase price. The larger your purchase, in other words, the more money credit card companies rake in from merchants. And that gives our credit card giants a powerful incentive to get as many affluent people as possible using their cards.

Enter the cash-back reward. Credit card companies spend billions every year 'rebating' cash to the holders of luxury high-end credit cards. Average consumers can get cash-back, too, but at nowhere near the rates that credit card execs extend to their wealthiest customers. The choicest high-end cards give the affluent who qualify for them three percent - and more - of their purchases back, triple the one percent cash-back rate that many average-income consumers can expect.

About half of Americans - those the credit industry rates





as 'subprime' – won't even get that. These households most often end up using debit cards that return zilch back on their purchases.

The affluent, credit industry analyst Aaron Klein adds, don't just get more cash back than anyone else. They also get a tax break. The IRS doesn't categorize credit-card rewards as taxable income. How much of an impact can this IRS stance have on the finances of wealthy households?

"Consider a wealthy family that racks up charges of \$250,000 a year on a top-of-the-line credit card that gives them 2.5 percent cash back," Klein asks. "That family gets a \$6,250 stocking stuffer from the payment system elves – worth more than \$10,000 in pre-tax wages."

People who overall only earn \$10,000, meanwhile, essentially end up subsidising the cash-

back bonanzas that flow to high-income households. And so do the rest of us who could never in a million years qualify for a lavish cash-back card.

How could that be? Simple. Retailers pay higher 'swipe fees' to credit card companies when they process a luxury-card purchase. Why don't these retailers just charge the holders of luxury cards more? They can't. Their contracts with credit card companies forbid that.

If merchants, Klein explains, "could pass the fees they pay for accepting a rewards credit card on to the customer using it, wealthier people would see higher prices, or customers using cash or debit would pay less."

Getting the picture? We have a rigged system here, a set of private- and public-sector policies that funnel money out of

ordinary households and into America's deepest pockets. The US Supreme Court approves. In 2018, by a 5-4 vote, justices gave credit card companies the green light to continue imposing, as one merchant group charged, "a gag order on retailers' ability to educate their customers on how high swipe fees drive up the price of merchandise."

Any system rigged to reward rich people can, of course, be unrigged. The current White House has no interest in leading the charge for that unrigging. Maybe the next one will. **CT**

**Sam Pizzigati** co-edits *Inequality.org*. His recent books include *The Case for a Maximum Wage* and *The Rich Don't Always Win: The Forgotten Triumph over Plutocracy that Created the American Middle Class, 1900-1970*. Follow him at [@Too\\_Much\\_Online](#).



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UN special rapporteur says UK authorities and leaders responsible for Psychological torture of detained Wikileaks publisher, writes **Oscar Grenfell**

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# Britain condemned for torture of Assange

**U**NITED Nations official Nils Melzer has publicly released a powerful letter he addressed to the British government on October 29, documenting the criminal culpability of the country's authorities, including its political leadership, in what he condemned last year as the 'psychological torture' of WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange.

Melzer's letter, published online on at the end of last year, was a response to earlier

correspondence from the British authorities, in which they blithely dismissed his finding that Assange was subject to ongoing psychological torture. This resulted in part from his almost seven-years of effective detention in Ecuador's London embassy, enforced by British threats to arrest him if he set foot outside the building, and his imprisonment since April 2019 in the maximum-security Belmarsh Prison.

Melzer had addressed a series of queries to the British

government over the conditions of Assange's incarceration, including why he was being held in conditions of virtual solitary confinement and denied the necessary means to prepare his defence for US extradition hearings in next month.

The British government had blandly declared its opposition to torture, while claiming that it was upholding Assange's legal rights. It answered none of Melzer's specific questions and dismissed his call for the WikiLeaks founder to be



Aerial view of HM Prisons Isis and Belmarsh in Thamesmead, South East London.

released from prison, despite warnings from medical professionals that his health has deteriorated to the point that his life is at risk.

In his latest document, Melzer stressed the scientific rigour of the assessment that Assange had been tortured, which was based on a four-hour consultation in Belmarsh Prison involving the UN rapporteur and two medical experts. The diagnosis stemmed from medically-verifiable evidence and conformed to ‘The Istanbul Protocol’ – the international standard for identifying the symptoms of torture.

**M**elzer pointed to the implications of Britain’s rejection of these findings, stating that “the conduct of Your Excellency’s Government in the present case severely undermines the credibility of the UK’s commitment to the prohibition of tor-

ture and ill-treatment, as well as to the rule of law more generally.”

Melzer bluntly wrote: “The official findings of my mandate, supported by two experienced medical experts specialised in the examination of torture victims, unquestionably provide ‘reasonable ground to believe’ that British officials have contributed to Mr. Assange’s psychological torture or ill-treatment, whether through perpetration, or through attempt, complicity or other forms of participation.

“Under Art. 12 of the Convention against Torture, British authorities do not have the political discretion to simply reject these findings, but have a clear and non-derogable treaty obligation to conduct a prompt and impartial investigation into these allegations and, if confirmed, to prosecute the perpetrators and provide redress and rehabilitation to Mr. Assange.”

The UN rapporteur documented that Britain had similarly stymied his calls for a judicial investigation into its involvement in the US-led torture programmes associated with the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan – which WikiLeaks and Assange have done so much to expose. This, he noted, “gives the impression of a broader policy of impunity, which would be incompatible with the UK’s legal obligations and would seriously undermine the credibility of its commitment to human rights and the rule of law.”

Melzer’s detailed letter outlined Britain’s involvement in the attempted frame-up of Assange on sexual misconduct allegations by Sweden, its collaboration with the US attempts to conduct what can only be described as an extraordinary rendition operation against the WikiLeaks founder and its persistent denial of his rights to

due process over the past 12 months.

The UN official's conclusion demonstrates that Assange is being subjected to a lawless attempt to silence him and to destroy WikiLeaks. Melzer wrote, "I am of the considered opinion that recurring and serious violations of Mr Assange's due process rights by UK authorities have rendered both his criminal conviction and sentencing for bail violation and the US extradition proceedings inherently arbitrary, to the point even of rendering any legal remedies a pointless formality devoid of prospect."

Melzer demanded the abandonment of the extradition proceedings, Assange's freedom and a criminal investigation into those responsible for his persecution.

Melzer also drew attention to reports that Assange's health has continued to deteriorate. Last year, dozens of eminent doctors wrote twice to the British authorities, as well as to the Australian government, voicing their fears that Assange could die in prison. Their calls for him to be moved to a university teaching hospital and provided with urgent medical treatment have been ignored.

The latest testimony concerning Assange's health situation was provided by British journalist Vaughan Smith, who tweeted that Assange had called his family on New Year's Eve. Smith wrote, "He told my wife and I how he was slowly dying in Belmarsh where, though only on remand, he is

## Dozens of eminent doctors wrote to the authorities, as well as to the Australian government, voicing their fears that Assange could die in prison

kept in solitary confinement for 23 hours a day and is often sedated."

**M**eanwhile, disturbing new indications have emerged of the conditions at Belmarsh, a facility designed to hold those convicted of the most serious crimes, including murder and terrorism offenses.

RT reported that Liridon Saliuka, a 29-year-old prisoner at Belmarsh, was found dead in his cell on January 2. According to RT's sources, the death was the third fatality in less than a year at the prison. The British authorities claim that Saliuka was a victim of self-inflicted wounds, but this has been disputed by his family.

RT wrote: "Saliuka's family claim there have been delays to the postmortem. His sister, Dita, revealed that her brother was involved in a car crash two years ago that left him requiring major reconstructive surgery. He was given metal plates that made it hard for him to walk or stand for long periods of time. A report by a surgeon, commissioned by his defence lawyer, had determined that he should be considered as 'permanently disabled'. However,

his family say he had recently been transferred from a special cell to a standard one."

A 2009 report by the Chief Inspector of British Prisons noted an 'extremely high' amount of force used against prisoners at Belmarsh. A number of detainees reported they had been intimidated, threatened or assaulted by staff. The inspector's 2018 report said many recommended "improvements" at the facility had not been 'embedded' and in some areas "we judged outcomes to have been poorer than last time."

That Assange, a journalist on remand, is being held in such a facility, demonstrates that the British state, no less than its American counterpart, is seeking nothing less than his physical and psychological destruction. While doing everything they can to facilitate Assange's extradition to the US, the British are seeking to replicate, on their own soil, the conditions that he would confront in a CIA prison in America.

The extraordinary assault on Assange's democratic rights is a stark symptom of a broader turn to authoritarianism, directed against the working class and the growing emergence of mass social and political opposition. This underscores the necessity for all defenders of civil liberties to do everything possible to prevent Assange's extradition to the US and secure his freedom.

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**Oscar Grenfell** wrote this article for the World Socialist Web Site - [www.wsws.org](http://www.wsws.org)

# Insights

## Olympics slammed for barring protest

By **Andrea Germanos**

**T**HE International Olympic Committee drew sharp criticism from rights advocates this month after the organisation issued revised guidelines banning athletes at the 2020 Tokyo Games from staging protests at the event including kneeling during their national anthem or raising their fists into the air.

“So the IOC is doubling down on the disgraceful treatment of athletes in 1968?” asked Sherrilyn Ifill, president and director-counsel of the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund. Ifill was referring to the iconic moment at the Mexico City Olympics when black Americans Tommie Smith and John Carlos, as they were awarded their gold and bronze medals, respectively, wore black gloves, took off their shoes, and held their fists high to protest poverty and racism. The IOC responded by



**PROUD ATHLETES:** Mural in Melbourne is dedicated to US athletes Tommie Smith (left) and John Carlos, with Australian Peter Norman.

expelling Smith and Carlos.

The IOC announced the guidelines for Rule 50 of the Olympic Charter Thursday. Among the specific actions now

banned are:

- Displaying any political messaging, including signs or armbands
- Gestures of a political

nature, like a hand gesture or kneeling

- Refusal to follow the Ceremonies protocol.

“When an individual makes their grievances, however legitimate, more important than the feelings of their competitors and the competition itself, the unity and harmony as well as the celebration of sport and human accomplishment are diminished”, the guidelines read. The new rules still allow athletes to express their views on social media and in interviews and at press conferences, the new document states.

Failure to abide by the guidelines will result in the athlete’s action being evaluated by their “respective National Olympic Committee, International Federation, and the IOC, and disciplinary action will be taken on a case-by-case basis as necessary.”

The update comes less than five months after the US Olympic and Paralympic Committee (USOPC) reprimanded US athletes Race Imboden and Gwen Berry for their act of protest at the medal podium. Imboden kneeled to protest “the multiple shortcomings of the country I hold so dear to my heart” including “a president who spreads hate,” and Berry protested social injustice in

America.

Tennis legend Martina Navratilova was in the chorus of opposition to the IOC’s new guidelines, tweeting, “God how I despise these Olympic politician opportunists. I wouldn’t last one day on one of these committees ...”

**C**ritics pointed out that while the new document asserts that the podium and playing field must be a politics-free zone, the IOC itself is not politically neutral.

“The truth is, it’s not the mixing of politics and sports that [IOC president Thomas] Bach and the IOC don’t like”, Nancy Armour opined at *USA Today*. “It’s the mixing of politics they don’t like with sports.”

She continued: “It’s just fine for Bach to lobby for the issues he finds important. Or to foster good relationships with world leaders who might someday bankrupt their economies in exchange for sparkling venues, five-star hotels, and Olympic traffic lanes that allow IOC members to avoid the general populace on the roads and in the airports.

“But God forbid athletes should stay silent about racism, homophobia, inequality, or

murderous regimes. You know, issues that have a direct effect on their lives.”

That the types of protest now barred appear to take specific aim at black athletes wasn’t lost on other critics either.

Advocacy group People for the American Way rejected the new guidelines in a Twitter thread that drew attention to an op-ed published at *HuffPost* in 2017 by Diallo Brooks, the group’s director of outreach and public engagement.

“The right to raise our voices, make a speech, march in a rally, or take a knee in protest – whether in front of a government building or a football field – is at the heart of what it means to live in a free country,” wrote Brooks.

“Young men of colour who play sports are more than just entertainers, and they should not be penalised for speaking out peacefully against injustice”, he wrote. “They must be allowed to have a voice. And when their voices are threatened, we have to raise our own and stand with them.” **CT**

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**Andrea Germanos** is a staff writer at *Common Dreams* – [www.commondreams.org](http://www.commondreams.org) – where this article was first published.

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## The man who tried to stop catastrophe with typewriter

By Paul Walsh

Photo: Adam Jones / flickr.com

**WHEN** things fragment, we look for something solid to hold onto. The ticker-tape of daily disasters – a fire here, a shooting there, a pointless military adventure somewhere else – makes us fearful and afraid of the future. And so we look to the past for warnings missed, as well as wisdom hidden. If we are really anxious we may even start to read poetry.

Kurt Tucholsky, the Weimar-era poet and satirist born on January 9 in 1890, is the man to turn to in such times. Serving as a soldier in the First World War, he left his gun leaning against a hut and walked away a pacifist. In 1919 he announced his life's work: "I want finally to pull out all the drawers of our German dresser to see what is to be found in them", exactly the darker sides of Weimar captured in the TV series *Babylon Berlin* that returns in 2020 for a new season of flashing sequins, cabaret and murder.



SHORT FAT BERLINER: Poster of Kurt Tucholsky, in East Berlin.

Described by writer Erich Kästner as "a short fat Berliner who tried to stop a catastrophe with a typewriter", Tucholsky also predicted the ominous rise of the Nazis and another war in Europe, writing that "New canons will come."

There are echoes of the Weimar Republic in our societies today. Rapid technological change was thought to corrupt the masses in the form of radio, mass media and talking films that came of age in the 1920s, just as social media is thought to corrode our democracies now. Siegfried Kracauer, an influential critic back then,

was caustic about the spread of entertainment to workers gifted with leisure for the first time, writing that: "No one could honestly say that a musical makes sense."

But Tucholsky's common-talk critique and cabaret songs suited the era. His

work was read out at political meetings, with one of his lyrics comparing the German Social Democrats (SPD) to 'radishes, red on the outside and white on the inside'; it was also decidedly modern. The 1929 picture book he created with artist John Heartfield, *Deutschland über Alles*, was a trailblazing attack on capitalism that

prefigured pop art, and later punk.

Yet Tucholsky felt impotent. The 'Homeless Left' was the name given to him and others who were critical of both the SPD – for their collaboration with the military --and the German Communist Party (KPD) for their Bolshevik tendencies. Tucholsky felt that his fiery critiques, however they struck his opponents, always landed flat. Growing street violence and political and economic instability all contributed to the darkening mood.

In 1924 he moved to France, satirising xenophobia

in a piece called *The Foreigner*: “Everybody still behaves as if a powerful constituent of a completely unified tribe were coming to us”, he wrote, “and not a miserable component of an anachronistic form of society. And the more powerless the natives are, the greater the powers they believe the foreigner to possess.”

It’s no surprise then that Tucholsky was annoyed by national maps. In *The Border*, from 1920, he rails against the arbitrary lines that divide people, writing that “neither borders or soldiers can separate men in the long run if they do not want to be kept apart.” His poem *The Trench* simply urges people to “Dump those flags!”

Just as in our time, people living through the chaos of a failing economic system in Weimar Germany bathed in a dark nostalgia fuelled by dreams of a stable past. In *The Creed of the Bourgeoisie* (1928) Tucholsky turns his fire on such dreams, like the view that “Under the Kaiser everything was better” and “The whole world is against Germany - out of envy”. Sound familiar?

“What can satire do? Anything!” he once wrote, but what would Tucholsky satirise today? His short piece *In One Sentence* from 1925 gives us a clue. In it he writes that if “you see a man who, with his chest thrown out, trumpets forth each word”; if you see “a man

who is determined to bring the full force of his personality to bear on the most idiotic cause”; if you see “a man who feels good only when he can be impressive”, he writes, then “you can bet your life that this man is a nationalist.”

**T**herefore, in another time of rising nationalism, a time of fragments very much like his own, Kurt Tucholsky’s writings hold for us the following political lesson: that things fall apart quickly when you’re not looking; that “a country is not only what it does – it is also what it puts up with, what it tolerates.”

He has a life lesson for us too that applies whether you’re

strolling through Berlin or Baghdad, New York or Tehran; whether it’s sunny or cloudy; whether you’re holding an umbrella or a warm hand – “Expect nothing. Today: that is your life.”

Because for Tucholsky, politics will always disappoint. Yet his satires also point to the possibility of a revolution-in-the-moment; a few of his sentences can spin you out of your thoughts and days: “Relax. Let go of the steering wheel. Amble through the world. It is so beautiful. Surrender to it, and it will surrender to you.” **CT**

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*Paul Walsh wrote this article for Open Democracy at whose website - [www.opendemocracy.net](http://www.opendemocracy.net) - it was first published.*

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## War profiteering is real. We need to end it

By Sarah Anderson

**E**XPERTS predict that as many as a million people could die if the current tensions between the US and Iran lead to a full-blown war. Millions more would become refugees across the Middle East, while working families across the US would bear the brunt of our casualties.

But there is one set of peo-

ple who stand to benefit from the escalation of the conflict: CEOs of major US military contractors.

This was evident in the immediate aftermath of the US assassination of a top Iranian military official on January 2. As soon as the news reached financial markets, these companies’ share prices spiked.

Wall Street traders know



that a war with Iran would mean more lucrative contracts for US weapons makers. Since top executives get much of their compensation in the form of stock, they benefit personally when the value of their company's stock goes up.

I took a look at the stock holdings of the CEOs at the top five Pentagon contractors (Lockheed Martin, Boeing, General Dynamics, Raytheon, and Northrop Grumman).

Using the most recent available data, I calculated that these five executives held company stock worth approximately \$319-million just before the US drone strike that killed Iranian leader Qasem Soleimani. By the stock market's closing bell the following day, the value of their combined shares had increased to \$326-million.

War profiteering is nothing new. Back in 2006, during the height of the Iraq War, I analysed CEO pay at the 34 corporations that were the top military contractors at that time. I found that their pay had jumped considerably after the September 11 attacks.

Between 2001 and 2005, military contractor CEO pay jumped 108 percent on average, compared to a 6 percent

increase for their counterparts at other large US companies.

Congress needs to take action to prevent a catastrophic war on Iran. De-escalating the current tensions is the most immediate priority. But Congress must also take action to end war profiteering. In 2008, John McCain, then a Republican presidential candidate, proposed capping CEO pay at companies receiving financial bailouts. He argued that CEOs relying on taxpayer funds should not earn more than \$400,000 – the salary of the US president.

**T**hat commonsense notion should be extended to all companies that rely on massive taxpayer-funded contracts. Senator Bernie Sanders, for instance, has a plan to deny federal contracts to companies that pay their CEOs excessively. He would set the CEO pay limit for major contractors at no more than 150 times the pay of the company's typical worker.

Currently, the sky's the limit for CEO pay at these companies – and the military contracting industry is a prime offender. The top five Pentagon contractors paid their top

executives \$22.5-million on average in 2018.

CEO pay restrictions should also apply to the leaders of privately held government contractors, which currently don't even have to disclose the size of their top executives' paychecks.

That's the case for General Atomics, the manufacturer of the MQ-9 Reaper that carried out the assassination of Soleimani. Despite raking in \$2.8-billion in taxpayer-funded contracts in 2018, the drone maker is allowed to keep executive compensation information secret.

We do know that General Atomics CEO Neal Blue has prospered quite a bit from taxpayer dollars. Forbes estimates his wealth at \$4.1-billion.

War is bad for nearly everyone. But as long as we allow the leaders of our privatised war economy to reap unlimited rewards, their profit motive for war in Iran – or anywhere – will persist. **CT**

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**Sarah Anderson** directs the *Global Economy Project* at the *Institute for Policy Studies* and co-edits *Inequality.org*. Follow her at @SarahDAnderson1 – this article was distributed by [www.otherwords.org](http://www.otherwords.org)

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Vinyl sales have been surging in the last few years, driven by a wide-age range of consumers

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## Youngsters choose vinyl and boost music sales

By **Marina Eckersley**

**V**INYLS sales have been surging in the last few years, as CD sales stay flat and digital downloads decrease. In the United Kingdom, data from 2016 reveals that vinyl LP sales revenue surpassed that of digital downloads. And in the United States, LP sales are on par with the sales of CDs.

In an era when so much music is at our fingertips through streaming services for under \$10 a month, who is spending their hard-earned cash on vinyl? Streaming is currently the primary and cheapest way to buy music. According to

the Recording Industry Association of America (RIAA) database, paid subscription streaming services such as Spotify dominated music sales revenue in the US in 2018, accounting for almost 50 per cent of revenue. But cassettes, CDs and digital downloads have all held that position in the past.

Teens of the 1980s (now aged approximately 45 to 54) and the '90s (now aged approximately 35 to 44) were the two largest age demographics buying vinyl in 2018, accounting for 24 and 21 percent respectively of new vinyl sales in the US, according to 2018 data from the RIAA.

Sales data shows that cassettes first surpassed vinyl LP sales in the US in 1983. Then CDs surpassed cassette sales in 1991.

At that point, vinyl LPs disappeared from most music stores, remaining only a DJ specialty. They accounted for only 0.8 percent of total music sales.

Tim Ford, vice-president of purchasing at Canada's Sunrise Records, says he recalls feeling forced to buy CDs in the '90s because they were cheaper than vinyl and more widely available for him as a broke teenager. Now, Ford and many other '80s and '90s kids are working adults with disposable incomes. Ford says 35-to-40-year-olds want music from their generation like their parents had.

These consumers are used to the concept of owning music, but now they want vinyl, because they think it's better quality, and they have the money for it.

Michael Greaves is another example of this type of vinyl consumer; he was a DJ in the '90s and has a collection of 1,200 CDs – many of which he bought eight for a penny. Now he works full-time as a music administrator and is an avid vinyl collector.

Greaves says he buys vinyl because “with vinyl you get a warmth you don't get with CDs.” There's just something about the crackle of a vinyl record that makes people feel

at home.

No artist is forced to put his or her music on streaming services and not every artist even has the legal right to do so. The popular albums of the '80s and '90s that aren't being widely reissued are going for hundreds of dollars on resale sites.

A mint-condition vinyl LP of De La Soul's 1989 album *3 Feet High and Rising*, for instance, is selling for more than \$360 on Discogs. That album isn't being widely reissued and is now unavailable on paid subscription streaming services such as Tidal, which is said to be because of artist and label disputes.

The initial excitement about streaming services seems to have worn off since Spotify launched in Sweden in 2008. Consumers are now seeing flaws in streaming, one of them being that we can never be fully assured of access to their favourite songs without owning a physical copy of them.

Andrew Winistorfer, editorial director at Vinyl Me, Please, a record-of-the-month club, says that young people today accept that you don't own music. CD sales were at their height at the same time that music piracy became popular and almost destroyed the music industry.

However, the young today still account for part of the new surge in vinyl sales. Winistorfer explains that vinyl is "the cooler way to have ... a physical

manifestation of this music that you like."

RIAA data shows that 25-to-34-year-olds and 18-to-24-year-olds accounted for 19 and 16 per cent respectively of US new vinyl sales in 2018. This is valuable to artists who are not being paid what they'd like to be on streaming services. For artists, selling other merchandise has become increasingly important.

Luckily for them, some fans are willing to pay for exclusive merchandise and experiences on crowdfunding platforms. A 2013 Indiegogo campaign for the Canadian band Protest The Hero raised nearly \$450,000 to fund an album and 1,299 copies of the signed, limited-edition vinyl LP were claimed as rewards.

Katy Perry has a vinyl record

coming out soon. It's a record-first release but her truest Katy Cats' will surely snatch up those 4,000 copies quickly to be able to hold a piece of their favourite artist in their hands.

Consumers have less control than they might think over what music they can access. What will happen if one day your favourite artist doesn't have the resources, desire or legal right to keep your favourite songs up on a streaming service? What if you simply want to hold the music you love in your hands? Teens of the 80s and 90s would probably tell you to buy the album — on vinyl. **CT**

*Marina Eckersley is Dalla Lana Fellow in Global Journalism, University of Toronto. This article first appeared at [www.theconversation.com](http://www.theconversation.com)*

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