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WRITING WORTH READING ■ PHOTOS WORTH SEEING

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UKRAINE: BEFORE THE NIGHTMARE

Reflections of life in
a country before
it was shattered by war

Photos by Dougie Wallace – Pages 18-23

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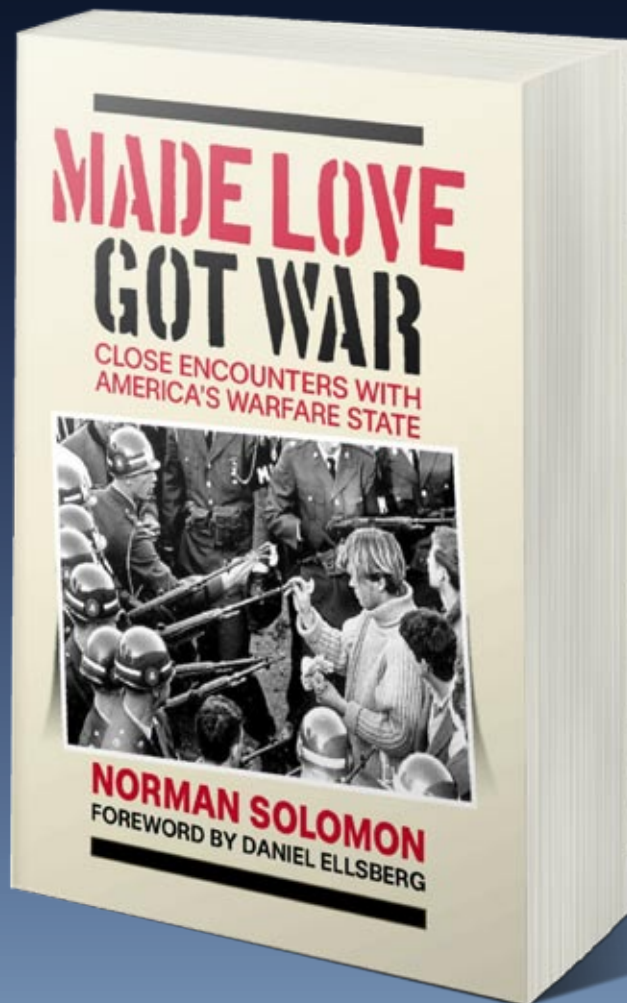
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INSIGHTS



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JOHN CLARKE

The dangerous tide of Russophobia

Putin's invasion of Ukraine should certainly be condemned by all on the left, but the broader context of global rivalry and Nato expansion can't be left out of the picture. Certainly, the present invasion shouldn't be held up as a unique act of aggres-

sion, while the even bloodier role of the US led Western powers, in such countries as Iraq and Afghanistan, is disregarded.

In this regard, a long simmering mood of Russophobia has now reached dangerous levels of absurdity in the West. Those in

power are certainly inflicting punitive and enormously damaging sanctions on the Russian economy but the extent to which a rising tide of xenophobic backwardness has emerged in response to this political lead is quite horrifying.

A comprehensive study of the scale and range of vindictive expressions of anti-Russian feeling that have been put into effect in Western countries would comprise of a sizeable volume, but a few examples will suffice here. Early in March, Madrid's Teatro Real cancelled performances by the legendary Bolshoi Ballet in a ludi-

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crous effort to register opposition to Putin's invasion. Soprano Anna Netrebko was forced to cancel upcoming engagements with the Metropolitan Opera in New York City, when she refused to repudiate the Russian president.

No such coerced loyalty oath would have helped the noted Russian pianist, Alexander Malofeev, however, when he was cancelled by the Montreal Symphony Orchestra. He was not representing the Russian government and, indeed, has been a courageous critic of the invasion. He was, nonetheless, prevented from performing solely on the grounds of his nationality. Tchaikovsky's responsibility for the attack on Ukraine is even more questionable, yet the Cardiff Philharmonic Orchestra went so far as to quash a performance of his music.

If the intended playing of the 1812 Overture, with its martial theme, was considered "inappropriate at this time", the Russian composer's work offers a range of alternatives but these weren't considered simply because the line of least resistance was to cave in to the present ugly mood.

If the cancelling of talented musical artists is shocking and deplorable, the present wave of ignorance is also replete with examples of ridiculous pettiness. In Canada, the Ontario provincial government pulled Russian vodka from the shelves because, as Premier Doug Ford put it with rhetorical flourish, "The people of Ontario will always stand against tyranny and oppression."

A chain of restaurants in France faced a campaign of threats and intimidation because it served a

dish called poutine from Quebec and this name sounds rather like "Putin". This particular business issued a clarification stressing that the similarity was purely coincidental, but a restaurant back in Quebec actually removed poutine from its menu for the duration of the invasion to escape the backlash to which it was subjected.

Perhaps the depths of absurdity are to be found in the decision to cancel Russian language, history and dance sessions at St Wilfrid's CE Primary School in Warrington, Lancashire. "Furious residents" aggressively lobbied the local council to obtain this result. It is hard to imagine a more spiteful and futile way to lash out against the language and culture of another people because of actions taken by a government. Yet, sadly, it speaks to the dangerous and disorientating impact that a carefully orchestrated mood of war fever can have.

The ability to counter this ugly mood is also, predictably, hampered by the readiness of social democratic parties to jump on the anti-Russian bandwagon with an unqualified enthusiasm they are unable to generate in solidarity with the Palestinian people and others in the firing line of Western powers. UK Labour Party leader Keir Starmer's loyalty to the Nato alliance has, of course, reached the level of a shameless attack on the Stop the War coalition and a slanderous effort to present those raising voices for peace and de-escalation as a veritable fifth column.

Here in Canada, Jagmeet Singh, the leader of the New Democratic

Party (NDP) has also proven himself a loyal servant of the geopolitical interests of Western imperialism. He has actively pressured the Trudeau Liberal government to go further in imposing penalties and sanctions on Russia. In this way, ugly xenophobic sentiments have been encouraged and intensified.

There are a number of previous examples of just how destructive such outpourings of backwardness can be when they are whipped up by those in political power. The onset of World War I saw a hideous wave of anti-German hatred that served to line up mainstream opinion in favour of the slaughter that unfolded. In Canada, in 1916, "the southwestern Ontario community of Berlin ceased to be". The residents of the town "rooted in its century-old Germanic heritage was forced to deny its own existence". At the behest of "bullies and xenophobes", Berlin was humiliatingly renamed "Kitchener", an act that represented the kind of forced declaration of loyalty we are seeing today imposed on Russian artists.

When the people of European countries are subjected to an orchestrated campaign of hostility, fuelled by rivalry and war, the results are hideous enough. However, when overt racism is given an opening, matters become even more vile and reactionary. In both the US and Canada, during World War II, the persecution of people of Japanese origin was as brutal as it was shameful. This led to internment, not simply of Japanese citizens, but of all those who were the descendants of immigrants from Japan, even if they held US or Canadian citizenship.

In British Columbia, 22,000 Jap-

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Japanese Canadians were affected by this racist initiative. Having first been subjected to mob violence, the community was then removed, after “a 100 mile wide strip along the coast was designated a ‘protected area’ by the federal government”. For months, Japanese families were held in animal stalls before being shipped into the interior. Families were separated, with the men forced to work on road gangs and the women and children held in camps in wilderness areas.

The obvious more recent comparison we must draw on is the horrible intensification of Islamophobia that was ushered in by the war on terror. The impact of this exercise is still ongoing and needs little elaboration. However, it is a grimly instructive example of the violent passions that can be unleashed when political leaders and media work to whip up a lynch mob mentality towards a constructed “enemy within.”

The harsh truth is that the invasion of Ukraine is but one manifestation of an escalating global rivalry between the US-led West and its key foes, Russia and China. Working class people in all the countries involved have no interest in this conflict. We should deplore an act of aggression such as the invasion of Ukraine, but we absolutely must not line up with ‘our’ imperialist side by giving support to the further eastward expansion of the belligerent Nato alliance. Instead, we must work to build a movement that opposes war and that can defeat xenophobic war fever with international working class solidarity. **CT**

John Clarke was an organiser with the Ontario Coalition Against Poverty (OCAP) for nearly three decades. He is presently the Packer Visitor in Social Justice at Toronto’s York University. He blogs at www.johnclarkeblog.com.

ment in Chile on murder charges. Russians were treated to the old dictator’s advice on choosing a leader who could imitate Pinochet’s “strong hand,” a police state, while promoting a hyper-capitalist economy.

And Putin fit the Pinochet profile.

To understand how Russia became, in effect, a military-corporate dictatorship, we have to go back to the 1990s when the former USSR, after the Wall fell, went along with the scheme known as “shock therapy” – substantially crafted by Larry Summers, the man who would become Clinton’s treasury secretary. Yeltsin’s oligarchs grabbed 60 percent of Russia’s state assets for peanuts – including the world’s largest producing oil fields.

The “therapy” was deadly. The US-designed smash-and-grab pushed 60 percent of Russians into poverty and half the population into starvation: calorie intake per person fell by almost half. Russian men, who had a longer life expectancy than Americans under the USSR, literally died by the millions – their life expectancy dropped to 57 years.

The suffering and resulting Pinochet fever hit its apotheosis with Russia’s 1998 default on its debts. Ben Judah, author of the must-read Putin biography, *Fragile Empire*, explains the repercussions: “It was the moment when the elite got scared and moved over further toward authoritarianism. According to Grigory Satarov, Yeltsin’s former aide, it was then that [Yeltsin] ditched the idea of

GREG PALAST

Russia’s Pinochet: The rise of Putin

Vladimir Putin did not arrive from outer space on an abalone shell.

Putin went from the virtually unknown deputy mayor of Saint Petersburg to Russia’s president and potentate by winning a weird competition organised by Russian billionaire Boris Be-

rezovsky who sought a “Russian Pinochet” to succeed Boris Yeltsin as president.

The competition, dubbed “Operation Successor”, went so far as to send Russia’s “Larry King”, Mikhail Leontyev, to interview General Pinochet for Russian TV while Pinochet was under indict-

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["reformer" Boris] Nemtsov as the successor and decided Russia needed a robust military man. Intellectuals began to debate the need for a 'Russian Pinochet' to defend the market."

The chance that Yeltsin, a notorious drunk, could get re-elected, was close to zero.

Berezovsky and other oligarchs, in Davos, Switzerland, attending that mating event of the rich and powerful, were horrified that the monied elite were giving their affection to Gennady Zyuganov, leader of the newly re-branded Communist Party of the Russian Federation. Polls showed Zyuganov was certain to defeat Yeltsin in upcoming elections.

Berezovsky and other oligarchs, panicked that Zyuganov would seize their ill-gotten gains, formed what they called the "Davos Pact" to re-elect Yeltsin – at all costs. And that cost a lot: they bought up the media, and iced out Zyuganov. Bill Clinton jumped in, sending in an army of US elections and PR consultants.

While Yeltsin wanted to pick one of his US-trained free-market economists as his running mate for prime minister, the oligarchs told him they'd found that Russian Pinochet, the little-known apparatchik Vladimir Putin. They groomed Putin by having Yeltsin promote him rapidly through several posts including chief of the FSB, the successor of the KGB, where Putin had started his career.

But even that wasn't enough to re-elect Yeltsin. Yeltsin's "victory" required what in Russia are called, "administrative resources"

Wikipedia



Boris Yeltsin

– wholesale vote theft. Dmitry Medvedev, later Putin's prime minister is quoted in *Fragile Empire*, saying he didn't know who won that election, but "it was not Boris Nikolayevich Yeltsin."

In 1999, Russia was falling apart. Literally. While big hunks of the USSR had years earlier scampered away (Kazakhstan, Lithuania, Ukraine and others), smaller regions were now declaring independence, including the Muslim region of Chechnya.

Yeltsin ordered a military expedition to recapture Chechnya. It failed disastrously.

But then Putin took charge, invading Chechnya. But this time, Putin took a page from Pinochet's playbook: mass slaughter of civilians. When Chechens resisted the Russian invasion, Putin simply levelled their capital city, Grozny, killing, according to Reuters, 25,000 to 50,000 Chechens, most of them civilians. Notably, 14,000 Russian soldiers died – yet Putin's popularity soared.

This is a sobering reminder for those who think Putin can't withstand too many Russian body bags returning from Ukraine.

It is beyond strange to me that

some of my progressive friends are playing Putin as a victim, an innocent man "provoked" by US expansion of Nato. Oh, come on! Ukraine applied for Nato membership 14 years ago – and it was laughed off by Nato members.

No doubt, expanding was diplomatic malfeasance, but it never constituted a real threat to Russian sovereignty, certainly not from the non-Nato Ukraine. Let's not forget that Ukraine transferred all its nuclear warheads to Russia, hardly an act of aggression. (And let's not forget, as Joe Biden seems to have forgotten, that as part of the transfer of Ukraine's nukes, the US and Russia guaranteed the safety of Ukraine against all acts of aggression.)

Putin's power originated from manipulation of an election. Whether you call it, "administrative measures" or "vote suppression", it's the endless story of the moneyed at war with democracy.

When, in 1999, Yeltsin was finally pushed to invite Putin to become prime minister, there was still the formality of having to get elected. Yeltsin said that Putin told him, "Elections, I just hate them."

That surprises no one, least of all the ghost of Pinochet.

Me? I kind of like elections. I stand with democracy. I stand with Ukraine. **CT**

Greg Palast is the author of *The New York Times* bestsellers, *The Best Democracy Money Can Buy* and *Billionaires & Ballot Bandits*, out as major motion non-fiction movie: *The Best Democracy Money Can Buy: The Case of the Stolen Election*, available on Amazon and Amazon Prime.

INSIGHTS

CAITLIN JOHNSTONE

The fiction of 'international' law

Australian whistleblower David McBride just made the following statement on Twitter:

“I’ve been asked if I think the invasion of Ukraine is illegal. My answer is: If we don’t hold our own leaders to account, we can’t hold other leaders to account.

“If the law is not applied consistently, it is not the law. It is simply an excuse we use to target our enemies.

“We will pay a heavy price for our hubris of 2003 in the future. We didn’t just fail to punish Bush and Blair: we rewarded them. We re-elected them. We knighted them.

If you want to see Putin in his true light imagine him landing a jet and then saying ‘Mission Accomplished.’”

As far as I can tell this point is logically unassailable. International law is a meaningless concept when it only applies to people the US power alliance doesn’t like. This point is driven home by the life of McBride himself, whose own government responded to his publicising suppressed information about war crimes committed by Australian forces in Afghanistan by charging him as a criminal.

Neither George W Bush nor Tony Blair are in prison cells at The Hague where international law says they ought to be. Bush is still painting away from the comfort of

his home, issuing proclamations comparing Putin to Hitler and plat-forming arguments for more inter-ventionism in Ukraine. Blair is still merrily warmongering his charred little heart out, saying Nato should not rule out directly attacking Russian forces in what amounts to a call for a thermonuclear world war.

They are free as birds, singing their same old demonic songs from the rooftops.

When you point out this obvious plot hole in discussions about



George W. Bush



Tony Blair

the legality of Vladimir Putin’s invasion you’ll often get accused of “whataboutism”, which is a noise that empire loyalists like to make when you have just highlighted damning evidence that their government’s behaviours entirely invalidate their position on an issue. This is not a “whataboutism”; it’s a direct accusation that is completely devastating to the argument being made, because there really is no counter-argument.

The Iraq invasion bypassed the laws and protocols for military action laid out in the founding charter of the United Nations. The current US military occupation of Syria violates international law. International law only exists to the extent to which the nations of the world are willing and able to enforce it, and because of the US empire’s military power – and more importantly because of its narrative control power – this means international law is only ever enforced with the approval of that empire.

This is why the people indicted and detained by the International Criminal Court (ICC) are always from weaker nations – overwhelmingly African – while the USA can get away with actually sanctioning ICC personnel if they so much as talk about investigating American war crimes and suffer no consequences for it whatsoever. It is also why Noam Chomsky famously said that if the Nuremberg laws had continued to be applied with fairness and consistency, then every post-WWII US president would have been hanged.

This is also why former US National Security Advisor John Bolton once said that the US war machine is “dealing in the anarchic environment internationally where different rules apply”, which “does require actions that in a normal business environment in the United States we would find unprofessional.”

Bolton would certainly know. In his bloodthirsty push to manufacture consent for the Iraq invasion he spearheaded the removal of the director-general of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemi-

Wikipedia

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cal Weapons (OPCW), a crucial institution for the enforcement of international law, using measures which included threatening the director-general's children. The OPCW is now subject to the dictates of the US government, as evidenced by the organisation's coverup of a 2018 false flag incident in Syria which resulted in air strikes by the US, UK and France during Bolton's tenure as a senior Trump advisor.

The US continually works to subvert international law enforcement institutions to advance its own interests. When the US was seeking UN authorisation for the Gulf War in 1991, Yemen dared to vote

against it, after which a member of the US delegation told Yemen's ambassador, "That's the most expensive vote you ever cast". Yemen lost not just \$70-million in US foreign aid but also a valuable labour contract with Saudi Arabia, and a million Yemeni immigrants were sent home by America's Gulf state allies.

Simple observation of who is subject to international law enforcement and who is not makes it clear that the very concept of international law is now functionally nothing more than a narrative construct that's used to bludgeon and undermine governments that disobey the US-centralised empire. That's why in the lead-up to this

confrontation with Russia we saw a push among empire managers to swap out the term "international law" with "rules-based international order", which can mean anything and is entirely up to the interpretation of the world's dominant power structure.

It is possible that we may see Putin ousted and brought before a war crimes tribunal one day, but that won't make it valid. You can argue with logical consistency that Putin's invasion of Ukraine is wrong and will have disastrous consequences far beyond the bloodshed it has already inflicted, but what you can't do with any logical consistency whatsoever is claim that it is illegal. Because there is no authentically enforced framework for such a concept to apply.

As US law professor Dale Carpenter said, "If citizens cannot trust that laws will be enforced in an evenhanded and honest fashion, they cannot be said to live under the rule of law. Instead, they live under the rule of men corrupted by the law". This is all the more true of laws which would exist between nations.

You don't get to make international law meaningless and then claim that an invasion is "illegal". That's not a legitimate thing to do. As long as we are living in a Wild West environment created by a murderous globe-spanning empire which benefits from it, claims about the legality of foreign invasions are just empty sounds. **CT**

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

HURWITT'S EYE

MARK HURWITT



INSIGHTS

LINDSAY OWENS

Not just inflation, it's price gouging

If you've been slammed lately by higher prices on everything from groceries to rental cars and gas prices, you're probably wondering what on earth is behind these skyrocketing costs.

Corporations are quick to blame this new reality on the pandemic, but another major culprit is hiding in plain sight: their own profiteering.

Four times a year, corporations are required by law to update their investors on how they're doing in terms of sales and profits. These are called "earnings reports", and the companies will usually hold calls with the investors to walk them through the latest report.

My organisation, Groundwork Collaborative, recently got our hands on the transcripts from hundreds of these earnings calls. And you won't believe what CEOs are boasting about.

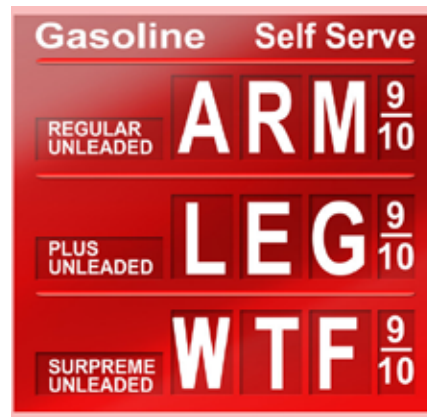
Knowing that the current inflation frenzy is a convenient scapegoat, these companies are charging customers even more to pad their profit margins. They are just admitting it – they're openly bragging to investors about how well it's working.

"I think we've done a great job with our pricing", boasted the CFO of Hormel, a maker of popular grocery brands. "I think it's been very effective". As prices went up, the company improved its operat-

ing income by 19 percent in the first quarter of 2022 compared to 2021.

Constellation Brands, the parent company of popular beers Modelo and Corona, is also engaging in bald-faced profiteering. On its January call, Constellation's CFO admitted that its consumer base "skews a bit more Hispanic", and the company wants to "take as much as [we] can" from them.

And now, the conflict in Ukraine is providing yet another opportu-



nity for oil and gas companies to pad their bottom lines. "It's tragic what's going on in Eastern Europe", said one oil executive in late February. "But if anything, these high prices, the volatility, drive even more energy security and long-term contracting."

This pandemic profiteering is taking a massive toll on consumers, workers, and small businesses.

Low-income Americans

are pinching pennies to feed their families and pay their bills. And while mega-companies can use their market power to raise prices and generate record profits, small businesses and independent retailers are struggling to keep their doors open.

The appalling price gouging and monopolistic behaviour we're monitoring comes on top of decades of disinvestment in our workers and supply chain, excessive corporate power, and financial markets maximising short-term profits. This broken system left us wholly unprepared to accommodate increases in demand.

But, make no mistake: next time you experience sticker shock in the checkout line, it's a safe bet that corporate executives and shareholders are reaping the rewards.

People are catching on: A new poll from Data for Progress and Groundwork finds that 63 percent of voters believe that "large corporations are taking advantage of the pandemic to raise prices unfairly on consumers and increase profits."

Policy makers are taking notice, too. The New York Attorney General's office just announced new price gouging rules, paving the way for other states to follow suit.

And days after President Biden promised action on pandemic price gouging, congressional oversight panels opened investigations into the three major ocean shipping alliances. These outfits control about 80 percent of seaborne cargo and have seen their profits increase seven-fold from the previous year.

Finally, a recently-introduced bill, the COVID-19 Price Gouging Prevention Act, would help the

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Federal Trade Commission and State Attorneys General protect people across the country from pandemic profiteering.

Without competition and robust regulation to keep them in check, big corporations have gotten away with using the pandemic to push up

prices and fatten their profit margins – and if they aren't reined in, high prices could be here to stay. **CT**

Lindsay Owens is the Executive Director of Groundwork Collaborative. This op-ed was distributed by *OtherWords.org*.

We are being watched from cradle to grave.

Planet of the Apes (1968). Based on Pierre Boulle's novel, the film takes place on a planet where apes are the masters and humans are treated as brutes and slaves. The truth is eventually revealed that the planet was once controlled by technologically advanced humans who destroyed civilisation. The lesson is obvious, but will we listen?

THX 1138 (1970). George Lucas' directorial debut, this is a sombre view of a dehumanised society totally controlled by a police state. The people are force-fed drugs to keep them passive, and they no longer have names but only letter/number combinations such as THX 1138. Any citizen who steps out of line is quickly brought into compliance by robotic police equipped with "pain prods" – electro-shock batons.

A Clockwork Orange (1971). Director Stanley Kubrick presents a future ruled by sadistic punk gangs and a chaotic government that cracks down on its citizens sporadically. This film may accurately portray the future of western society that grinds to a halt as oil supplies diminish, environmental crises increase, chaos rules, and the only thing left is brute force.

Soylent Green (1973). Set in a futuristic overpopulated New York City, the people depend on synthetic foods made of mysterious ingredients. The theme is chaos where the world is ruled by ruthless corporations whose only goal is greed and profit.

JOHN W. WHITEHEAD & NISHA WHITEHEAD

Dystopian movies for a dystopian world

We have arrived, way ahead of schedule, into the dystopian future dreamed up by such science fiction writers as George Orwell, Aldous Huxley, Margaret Atwood and Philip K. Dick.

All of this has come about with little more than a whimper from an oblivious American populace, but we have been warned about such an ominous future in novels and movies for years. The following 15 films may be the best representation of what we now face as a society.

Fahrenheit 451 (1966). Adapted from Ray Bradbury's novel, this film depicts a futuristic society in which books are banned, and firemen ironically are called on to burn contraband books. This film is an adept metaphor for our obsessively politically correct society where virtually everyone now pre-censors speech. Here, a brain-washed people addicted to television and drugs do little to resist governmental oppressors.



Cover for **2001: A Space Odyssey**.

2001: A Space Odyssey (1968). The plot of Stanley Kubrick's masterpiece revolves around the idea that at some point in human evolution, technology in the form of artificial intelligence will become autonomous and human beings will become mere appendages of technology. In fact, at present, we are seeing this development with massive databases generated and controlled by the government that sweep all websites and other information devices collecting information on average citizens.

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Blade Runner (1982). Set in a 21st-century Los Angeles, the film imagines a future dominated by mega-corporations and synthetically produced human slaves, where human life is cheap, and where anyone can be exterminated at will by the police (or blade runners). Based upon a Philip K. Dick novel, this exquisite Ridley Scott film questions what it means to be human in an inhuman world.

Nineteen Eighty-Four (1984). The best adaptation of Orwell's dark tale, this film visualises the total loss of freedom in a world dominated by technology and its misuse, and the crushing inhumanity of an omniscient state. The government controls the masses by controlling their thoughts, altering history and changing the meaning of words.

Brazil (1985). Sharing a similar vision of the near future as 1984 and Franz Kafka's novel *The Trial*, this is arguably director Terry Gilliam's best work. Here, a mother-dominated, hapless clerk takes refuge in flights of fantasy to escape the ordinary drabness of life. Caught within the chaotic tentacles of a police state, the longing for more innocent, free times lies behind the vicious surface of this film.

They Live (1988). John Carpenter's bizarre sci-fi social satire action film depicts a world controlled by ominous beings who bombard the citizens with subliminal messages such as "obey" and "conform." Carpenter manages to make an effective political point that we, the prisoners of our devices, are

too busy sucking up the entertainment trivia beamed into our brains to start an effective resistance movement.

The Matrix (1999). The story centres on a computer hacker, known by the alias "Neo", who discovers that AI-dominated technology keeps humans suspended in the Matrix, an illusionary world that keeps humans docile while resorting to SWAT team tactics to keep things under control.

Minority Report (2002). Based on a short story by Philip K. Dick and directed by Steven Spielberg, the film offers a special effect-laden, techno-vision of a futuristic world in which the government is all-seeing, all-knowing and all-powerful. And if you dare to step out of line, dark-clad police SWAT teams will bring you under control.

V for Vendetta (2006). This film depicts a society ruled by a corrupt and totalitarian government where everything is run by an abusive secret police. A vigilante named V dons a mask and leads a rebellion against the state. The subtext here is that authoritarian regimes through repression create their own enemies – that is, terrorists – forcing government agents and terrorists into a recurring cycle of violence. And who is caught in the middle? The citizens, of course.

Children of Men (2006). This film portrays a futuristic world without hope since humankind has lost its ability to procreate. Civilization has descended into chaos and is held together by a military state and a government that attempts to

keep its totalitarian stronghold on the population.

Land of the Blind (2006). In this dark political satire, tyrannical rulers are overthrown by new leaders who prove to be just as evil as their predecessors. Citizens who are perceived as questioning the state are sent to "re-education camps" where the state's concept of reality is drummed into their heads

All of these films – and the writers who inspired them – understood what many of us are still struggling to come to terms with: that there is no such thing as a government organised for the good of the people. Even the best intentions among those in government inevitably give way to the desire to maintain power and control at all costs.

Eventually, as I make clear in my book *Battlefield America: The War on the American People* and in its fictional counterpart *The Erik Blair Diaries*, even the sleepwalking masses (who remain convinced that all of the bad things happening in the police state – the police shootings, the police beatings, the raids, the roadside strip searches – are happening to other people) will have to wake up. **CT**

John W. Whitehead is a constitutional lawyer, and founder and president of the Rutherford Institute. His books *Battlefield America: The War on the American People* and *A Government of Wolves: The Emerging American Police State* are available at amazon.com.

Nisha Whitehead is executive director of the Rutherford Institute – www.rutherford.org.

TOM ENGELHARDT

Deja vu all over again

We are now the Armageddon-makers and, sadly enough,
it seems that we're just gearing up

He's our very own emperor from hell, an updated version of Nero who, in legend, burned down Rome on a whim, though ours prefers drowning Washington. Why, just the other day, Donald Trump – and you knew perfectly well who I meant – bent the ears of 250 top Republican donors for 84 minutes. Among other things, he assured those all-American (not Russian) oligarchs – and let me quote him in the *Washington Post* on this – that “the global warming hoax, it just never ends...” He mocked the concept of sea levels rising, disputing widely held science. “To which I say, great, we have more waterfront property.”

Admittedly, he's talking about flooded property, including possibly whole cities going underwater in the decades to come, but what the hell! Yes, indeed, he was the president of the United States not so long ago and, if all goes well (for him, not us), he or some doppelganger, could win the Oval Office again in 2024, ensuring the arrival of that new, all-too-wet waterfront property. And yes, he offered up that little gem – about the 9,000th time he's called climate change a “hoax” (sometimes blaming it on China) – just as a new scientific report came out suggest-

ing that, if things don't improve in fossil-fuel-burning terms, up to half of the Amazon rain forest, one of the great carbon sinks on Earth, could be transformed into savanna. To quote the *Washington Post* again:

“The warming consequences of suddenly losing half the rainforest would be felt thousands of miles away and for centuries into the future, scientists warn. It would mean escalating storms and worsening wildfires, chronic food shortages and nearly a foot of sea level rise inundating coastal communities. It could trigger other tipping points, such as the melting of ice sheets or the disruption of the South American monsoon”.

Hey, Donald, what could possibly go wrong on this all-too-embattled planet of ours?

Of course, at this moment, three of the four largest greenhouse gas emitters, Russia, the US (which is

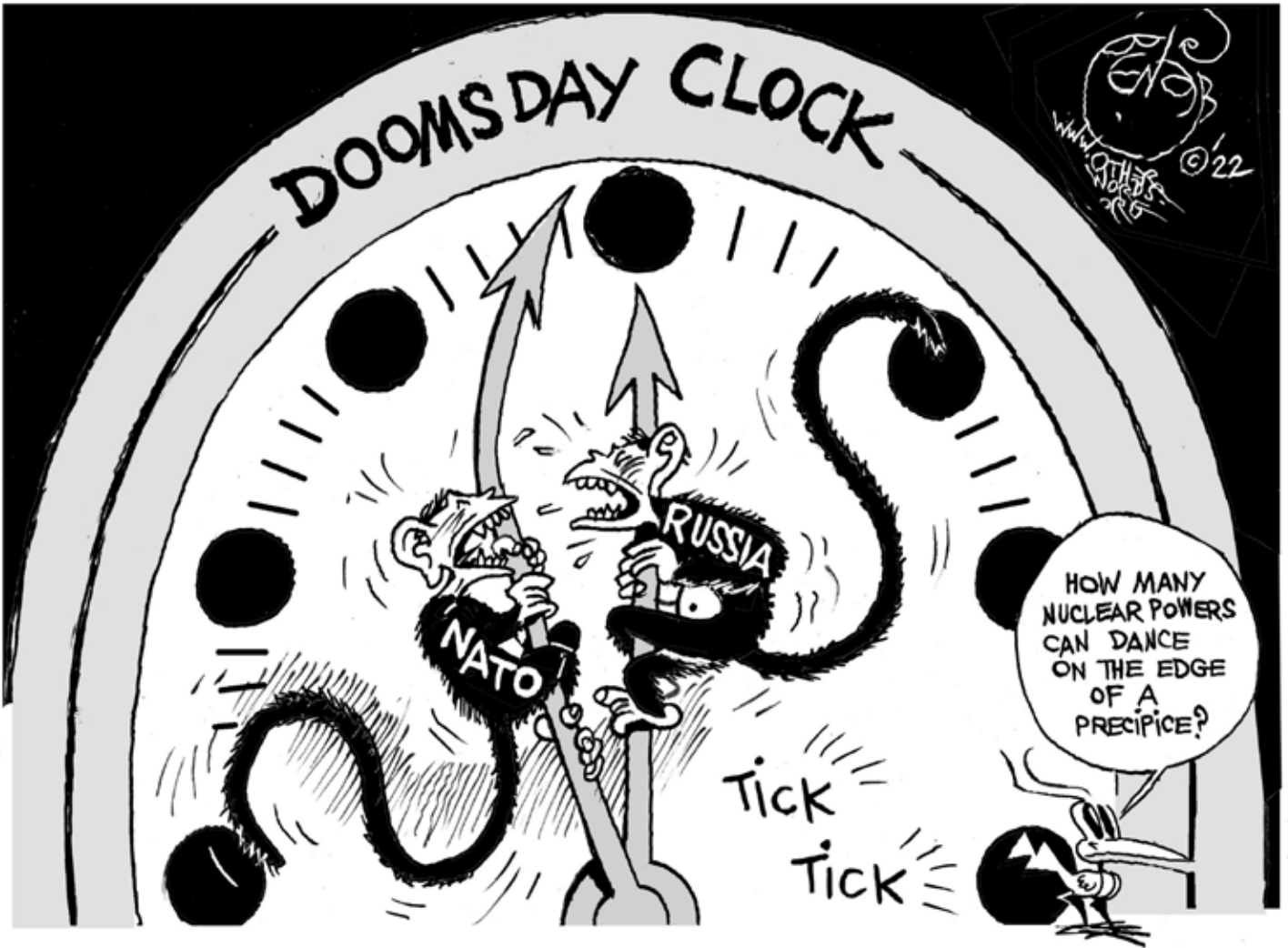
now allowing more drilling for oil and gas than even during Trump's presidency), and China, are locked in what could only be thought of as a deadly embrace over Vladimir Putin's disastrous invasion of Ukraine. And the grim war the Russian president launched seems likely to guarantee yet more fossil-fuel use on a planet that needs so much less of it, even as he also put the issue of nuclear war back on the table for the first time since the Cold War ended. How appropriate, if you're heading into Cold War II to once again raise the possibility – forget about the next Chernobyl – of turning World War III into a nuclear one.

At this point, if you don't mind a genuine understatement, what a strange planet we now live on.

Once upon a time, whatever your religion, Armageddon was the property of the gods; until August 6, 1945, that is, when a lone B-29 bomber, the *Enola Gay* (named after its pilot's mother), dropped the first atomic bomb on the city of Hiroshima, essentially obliterating it.

Thought of another way, however, we humans took the power to end the world (at least as we've known it) out of the hands of the gods in the 19th-

How appropriate, if
you're heading into
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of turning World War III
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century when the fossil-fuel based industrialisation of Planet Earth began in earnest in Great Britain. In other words, credit our cleverness. In the space of a mere 200 or so years, we've developed two different ways of devastating or even ending our life on this planet. Consider that a genuine accomplishment for humanity.

As it happens, recent nuclear and climate-change news should have brought that reality to mind again. But before I even get to Vladimir Putin, the invasion of Ukraine, and the latest report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), let me mention that, more or less any week, there's a new study

(or two or three) of our climate future suggesting ever more extreme peril for us in the decades (or even months) to come: ever fiercer droughts, intensifying heat, more extreme wildfires, more melting ice, and ever rising sea levels.

Of course, like the rest of us, you

In the space of a mere 200 or so years, we've developed two different ways of devastating or even ending our life on this planet

already know that story, right? And of one thing you can be sure, the next scientific study, whatever it is, will only offer yet more extreme climate news (with the rarest of exceptions). In fact, I had barely begun writing notes for this piece when that IPCC study arrived on the scene with, of course, the latest round of dreadful news about where we're heading – to a potentially “irreversible” hell in a handbasket, natch. UN Secretary-General António Guterres called it a “code red for humanity”, lamenting that the evidence it details was unlike anything he had ever seen on the subject and describing it as an “atlas of human suffering and a damning indictment of failed climate

leadership”.

Damning indeed on a planet where, even before the Ukrainian nightmare, it was obvious that key leaders were doing anything but greening this world fast enough for the health of humanity. And that, of course, is just the background against which all of us now operate, whether we think about it or not – and in the midst of events in Ukraine, it’s not being given much thought at all – on a planet going to... well, why insult “the dogs”?

Which brings me back to Vladimir Putin. The strange thing about that other form of planetary suicide, atomic weaponry, is that, since at least the end of the Cold War, it’s generally not been on the table (so to speak) or much in the news. Yes, in the Trump years, the president did implicitly threaten to rain nuclear hell on North Korea – he called it “fire and fury” – and, at one point, spoke of ending the Afghan War with just such a strike, but most of the time from 1990 to last month, nuclear weapons (Iran, which didn’t have them, aside) simply weren’t part of the conversation.

Now, don’t get me wrong. In those same decades, nuclear arsenals only spread and grew. Nine countries now possess such weaponry and the three great powers on the planet – the US, China, and Russia – have all been hard at work. Russia has been “modernising” its vast arsenal and China moving rapidly to build up its own.

Since Barack Obama’s presidency, the US military-industrial complex has also been – and, yes, this is indeed the term often used – “modernising” its already mind-boggling arsenal to the tune of \$1.7-trillion to \$2-trillion dollars over three decades. That includes, for instance, a new intercontinental ballistic missile known as the Ground-Based Strategic Deterrent

Most of the time from 1990 to last month, nuclear weapons (Iran, which didn’t have them, aside) simply weren’t part of the conversation

that, it’s already estimated, will take at least 264-billion of our tax dollars over its lifetime (and that’s before the cost overruns even begin!). Keep in mind that this country already had an unmodernised arsenal all too capable of destroying this planet many times over into the distant future. With our 1,357 deployed nuclear weapons (3,750, if you count the “inactive” ones), including land-based nuclear missiles, those transported by strategic bombers, and our nuclear subs wandering the world’s waters with their own devastating nukes on board, global destruction would be a given.

With all that activity long underway to remarkably little attention, nuclear weapons – and apocalyptic possibilities – have once again hit the headlines thanks to Vladimir Putin. After all, as his troops headed into Ukraine, he suddenly and all too publicly issued a directive putting his nuclear forces on “high alert” and offered this gem to the world:

“Whoever tries to hinder us, and even more so, to create threats to our country, to our people, should know that Russia’s response will be immediate. And it will lead you to such consequences that you have never encountered in your history”.

To make his point even clearer, he promptly oversaw the test launching of four nuclear-capable ballistic missiles. Since the US still has plenty of tactical nuclear weapons based in Europe, consider us once again, as

in the original Cold War, on edge and in a nuclear stand-off. Meanwhile, in Ukraine, the Russians threaten to repeat, of all things, the Chernobyl disaster by taking the nuclear plants they once set up and serviced there in a wartime blaze of horror. One has already been captured under hair-raising circumstances.

Looking back, maybe the strangest thing of all is that most Americans, maybe most people on the planet, essentially forgot about nukes. In retrospect, you have to wonder how that was ever possible, especially if you’re my age and remember ducking and covering at school in repeated nuclear test drills, while the media of that time focused on whether people should share their personal nuclear shelters with their friends and neighbours. And mind you, that was in the years when, in reality, Russian nuclear weapons couldn’t yet reach this country (though the US already had the ability to devastate the communist world).

Here, then, is a strange irony: in the years when we were most truly paying attention, they couldn’t have done anything to US. Once they truly could, we essentially began forgetting those weapons. Now, however, the potential destruction of humanity is back on the table – and this time around, brilliantly enough, in two different ways.

Believe me, when you’ve been on this planet for 77 years, you feel like you’ve seen everything. And then, of course, it turns out that you haven’t. Not by a long shot. Not faintly. At 14, my grandfather, a Jew, ran away from his home in the city of Lemberg when it was still part of the Austro-Hungarian empire. Between World Wars I and II, it was called Lvov and

belonged to Poland. During that second great war, the Jewish population there was slaughtered by the Nazis. Since the end of that nightmarish war, it's been known as Lviv and it's been part of Ukraine, or rather, if Vladimir Putin has his way, the place that until recently was known as Ukraine. As a result, Lviv is again in the news, big time.

I mean, invading Ukraine at this moment? How truly mad. It's still hard to take in what's happening, including the million-plus children who have already fled that country. Of course, ever more people are in motion on this planet today thanks both to war and climate change. Yet, in a sense, there's really nowhere left to go, is there?

As it turns out, our leaders have done all too good a job of providing options for ending the world. I mean, in a century when it should be hard not to know that, if the burning of fossil fuels isn't brought under control, life as we've known it will cease to exist, two great powers with preening, overweening leaders thought it made far more sense to order their militaries to invade other countries based on lies. Because of that, cities were destroyed and deaths made all too plentiful. Vladimir Putin's ongoing invasion and destruction of Ukraine has been denounced by much of the world led by Joe Biden's America. Russia is now experiencing potentially devastating sanctions, while from sports to entertainment to fast food, much of the planet has been turning its back on Russia.

But here's the odd thing: Russia invaded its neighbour, which once indeed had been part of the Soviet Union. The other great and invasive power I had in mind struck two countries thousands of miles away – Iraq (based on the lie that its autocratic ruler was developing nuclear and other weapons of mass destruc-

If you look at the American experience, whether in Vietnam, Iraq, or Afghanistan, the one thing you know is that this can't end well

tion) and Afghanistan. And yes, as the present conflict will undoubtedly prove a catastrophe for Russia and the people of Ukraine, so those wars proved disasters for the United States but even more so for Afghans and Iraqis. Strangely enough, however, the world didn't condemn the US for its acts. No sanctions were put in place. No weaponry was sent to Afghans or Iraqis to help them defend themselves against the occupying imperial power. And stranger yet, in retrospect, the present president of the United States, then a senator, voted to invade Iraq and subsequently even developed a plan to divide that US-occupied country into three different states.

And so it goes on this endangered planet of ours, while the greenhouse gasses from unending fossil-fuel burning invade our atmosphere with devastating effect, yet create next to no headlines at all.

Today, 76 years after World War II ended (I was 1 at the time), the heartland of Europe is again embroiled in war, death, and destruction. And more than three decades after the Cold War ended, the new tsar of Russia, now a rickety petro-state with an economy smaller than Italy's, is responsible.

Confused yet? Well, you should be on this god-forsaken planet of ours.

If you look at the American expe-

rience, whether in Vietnam, Iraq, or Afghanistan (or the Russian experience in that same country), the one thing you know is that this can't end well, not for Vladimir Putin or Joe Biden or Donald Trump or the rest of us, not on a planet that humanity insists on taking down. A tip of my hat goes to the outraged Russians who have hit the streets to protest the war in Ukraine, as Americans did (myself included), however briefly, in that spring of 2003 when the invasion of Iraq loomed.

Given our world, we should all probably be in the streets now. I mean, here we are heading into Cold War II, while facing the possibility of World War III on a planet that, thanks to the way we live and produce energy, is heading for hell. Think of climate change in its own way as perhaps the equivalent of World War IV, though somehow, while Ukraine is endlessly in the headlines, the climate emergency, no matter how horrifying the news, remains in the shadows, even as the Republicans call for yet more fossil-fuel drilling.

The peacing of Earth? Not likely. The greening of Earth? Not likely either, it seems. In our own fashion, we have indeed taken the place of ancient gods of every sort. We are now the Armageddon-makers and, sadly enough, it seems that we're just gearing up. **CT**

Tom Engelhardt created and runs the website *TomDispatch.com*. He is also a co-founder of the *American Empire Project* and the author of a highly praised history of American triumphalism in the Cold War, *The End of Victory Culture*. A fellow of the *Type Media Center*, his sixth and latest book is *A Nation Unmade by War*.

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DOUGIE WALLACE

Ukraine – before the nightmare

Photographer's reflections of daily life in a country that has since been shattered by war



REFLECTIONS ON LIFE is a series of photographs that show the faces of passengers glimpsed through the windows of trams. The images were taken in the city of Lviv, Ukraine, in 2010, as part of Scottish photographer Dougie Wallace's project recording the daily commute in cities including Lisbon, Portugal, Alexandria, Egypt, Tirana, Albania, and Sarajevo, in Bosnia and Herzegovina, which also suffered a catastrophic war in the early 1990s like that which is now wreaking havoc on Ukraine's towns and cities.

Wallace says, "As I took the photos, I became increasingly fascinated with the concept of reflections and their ability to change and make us reconsider our perceptions of everyday life.

"As the tragic events of the recent Russian invasion of Ukraine unfolded on my TV screen, it made me reach for those photos and remember the good times I had in Ukraine, during KaZantip, an electronic dance music festival which took place each year from 1992 to 2014, when war broke out in Crimea.

"One of my fondest memories of those days before war shattered the country", adds Wallace, "is of the overwhelming number of women tram drivers in Lviv. Their cabins were often adorned with curtains, ornaments or a bouquet of flowers, while room was found for a handbag and even a snack. Looking back at all the strangers in my images, I wonder what has happened to them – where are they now? It's devastating to see the destruction and human suffering caused by war."

CT









● See more of Dougie Wallace's work at www.dougiewallace.com

ERIKA SCHELBY

Blaming ‘evil’ Putin misses the point

Pointing fingers won’t help – an attitude shift is what the world needs if we’re looking for an opportunity to build a lasting peace

The decades-old long war in Afghanistan has barely ended and already there is a new one, this time in Europe. Most governments, the media, and the United Nations General Assembly quickly reached a consensus: the contemptible aggressor is Vladimir Putin. Public opinion strongly supports Ukraine. In the West, large demonstrations form almost daily to demand peace.

The Global South, however, is not so eager to participate in sanctions against Russia. China, India, Brazil, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Indonesia, and much of Latin America will not join in. Several countries rely on grain imports from Ukraine and Russia, and worry about major shortages caused by supply chain disruptions. The efforts for peace are commendable – but could they fizzle out too soon? Is this well-meaning, but perhaps myopic, movement the best we can hope for, or should we aim for something better for Ukraine, Russia, and the rest of the planet if by stepping outside the framework of the Western neoliberal capitalist war machine?

During the early days of the invasion, Western media showed brave Ukrainians training for the war against the Russian Army with wooden replica rifles. While they

may be brave, it is impossible to ignore that they started this fight with insufficient equipment against an army that outnumbered them.

Furthermore, according to the international law of armed conflict, civilians who take part in hostilities lose certain legal protections and can become targets. That is already happening before our eyes on TV. Even if the civilian resistance is partially successful, it will suffer too many casualties.

Is this what freedom supporters want for the Ukrainians who have already borne much during their last 100 years of history? It is easy to fight proxy wars when you sit safely at home and have no skin in the game. Give them weapons, sure, so they can really fight! If they are heroic and resilient, this may turn into a nasty, longer-term struggle, house ruin to house ruin, street by street. It will brutalise the population, dev-

astate the country, and damage the environment for ever. It could also evolve into a quagmire with fallout more devastating than the already-awful tragedy of the US invasion of Afghanistan. Incremental escalation also increases the risks for the use of tactical nuclear weapons.

And if the Ukrainians, despite their cheerleaders in the West, do not last long against a mighty military machine, then the coldly calculated result may just be an appalling waste of life, a sad futility that simultaneously triggered a huge wave of bereaved women and children as refugees.

According to the Costs of War Project at Brown University’s Watson Institute, “38 million people have been displaced by the post-9/11 wars in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iraq, Syria, Libya, Yemen, Somalia, and the Philippines”. Are the architects of Nato expansion ready to accept responsibility for their deeds and take in huge numbers of Ukrainian refugees?

I am not drawn to these possibilities. It is eerie and disturbing to witness how quickly people become fanatical in blaming the newest villain or the momentary evil empire. It begins with Putin, proceeds to Russian

It is eerie and disturbing to witness how quickly people become fanatical in blaming the newest villain or the momentary evil empire

vodka, and will end where? It also creates some type of love-of-freedom euphoria. But will it last when the time comes to face the costs of this catastrophe?

In any event, it may have been an unwise and rash move to invite newly independent countries of the former Warsaw Pact to become members of Nato. What's the hurry? For those who lived under Soviet control in Eastern Europe, it will take more than the three decades that have passed so far to reduce the negative stockpiles of experience, emotion, resentment, and revanchist impulse. Providing incentives for building a healthy economy and showing the road to EU membership were good options, but using former Soviet-controlled countries to become a bulwark against the Russian bear was not. Finland, which again ranks as number one in the 2021 World Happiness Report, is a small successful country that has chosen a different approach while living next door to Russia.

The bear is dangerous when rejected, provoked, and angered. So where was the strategic empathy? Russia knows that it is unloved in these former satellite countries. It understands that it is nearly encircled and almost under siege by the push against its borders and by efforts to pull even Ukraine into Nato. And so perhaps it is understandable that it has rolled itself up like a hedgehog facing peril, showing its prickly exterior. After all, it has been invaded repeatedly but has not done much westward invading itself, except when chasing intruders out. Yet the chance to loosen things up slowly after the Soviet era while supporting more democratic developments was squandered. The Russian people didn't get much of a break.

There are Atlanticists who will not accept that Russia is part of Eu-

rope. But like it or not, it was, and is, and will be – at least up to the Urals. Denial will only maintain a festering trench of potential conflict, and it could drive that vast country into the “briar patch” of China's Xi Jinping, as David P. Goldman recently put it in *Asia Times*.

The political and economic leaders of the Western alliance who are used to things going their way are in need of a reality check; the rest of the world is no longer willing to tolerate their irrational addiction to the con-



frontational and rapacious behaviour that is misnamed foreign policy. No, the end of the Cold War wasn't the “end of history”. And as Andrew Bacevich wrote in the *Boston Globe*, “The argument made by several recent US administrations that Nato expansion does not pose a threat to Russian security doesn't pass the sniff test. It assumes that US attitudes toward Russia are benign. They are not and haven't been for decades.”

This is the key: passing the sniff

test. A change in attitude is required. That is not a weakness. It is good sense and the positive will to help life and the living. The last thing the US, Europe, and the abused planet need is more obscene destruction, new stockpiles of mental contamination, and, as the UN reports, the additional 10 million fleeing and internally displaced Ukrainian people so far. It adds insult to injury. And the only participants you will hear laughing are the sanction-free oil and gas producers/promoters on their way to the bank.

In addition, the dominant drumbeat of war drowns out much of diverse public communication. Such a one-dimensional mainstream narrative contributes nothing to de-escalation – it does the opposite. President Biden's recent State of the Union speech barely touched on the existential threat of the climate crisis. Yes, it is good to see how the majority of the international community stands with Ukraine. But a Woodstock-like freedom frenzy will be too short in duration for the making of peace. That requires cool heads, warm hearts, at least half an ounce of humility, and the firm determination to stop the insanity of this preventable war. **CT**

Erika Schelby is the author of Looking for Humboldt and Searching for German Footprints in New Mexico and Beyond (Lava Gate Press, 2017) and Liberating the Future from the Past? Liberating the Past from the Future? (Lava Gate Press, 2013), which was shortlisted for the International Essay Prize Contest by the Berlin-based cultural magazine Lettre International. Schelby lives in New Mexico. This article was produced by Globetrotter at www.globetrotter.media.

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CHRIS HEDGES

The lie of American innocence

Our hypocrisy on war crimes makes
a rules-based world, one that abides by
international law, impossible

The branding of Vladimir Putin as a war criminal by Joe Biden, who lobbied for the Iraq war and staunchly supported the 20 years of carnage in the Middle East, is one more example of the hypocritical moral posturing sweeping across the United States.

It is unclear how anyone would try Putin for war crimes since Russia, like the United States, does not recognise the jurisdiction of the International Criminal Court in The Hague. But justice is not the point. Politicians like Biden, who do not accept responsibility for our well-documented war crimes, bolster their moral credentials by demonising their adversaries. They know the chance of Putin facing justice is zero. And they know their chance of facing justice is the same.

We know who our most recent war criminals are, among others: George W. Bush, Dick Cheney, Donald Rumsfeld, General Ricardo Sanchez, former CIA Director George Tenet, former Asst. Atty. Gen. Jay Bybee,

former Dep. Asst. Atty. Gen. John Yoo, who set up the legal framework to authorise torture; the helicopter pilots who gunned down civilians, including two Reuters journalists, in the “Collateral Murder” video released by WikiLeaks. We have evidence of the crimes they committed.

But, like Putin’s Russia, those who expose these crimes are silenced and persecuted. Julian Assange, even though he is not a US citizen and his WikiLeaks site is not a US-based publication, is charged under the US Espionage Act for making public numerous US war crimes.

Assange, currently housed in a high security prison in London, is fighting a losing battle in the British courts to block his extradition to the United States, where he faces 175 years in prison. One set of rules for Russia, another set of rules for the United States. Weeping crocodile tears for the Russian media, which is

being heavily censored by Putin, while ignoring the plight of the most important publisher of our generation speaks volumes about how much the ruling class cares about press freedom and truth.

If we demand justice for Ukrainians, as we should, we must also demand justice for the one million people killed – 400,000 of whom were noncombatants – by our invasions, occupations and aerial assaults in Iraq, Afghanistan, Syria, Yemen, and Pakistan. We must demand justice for those who were wounded, became sick or died because we destroyed hospitals and infrastructure. We must demand justice for the thousands of soldiers and marines who were killed, and many more who were wounded and are living with lifelong disabilities, in wars launched and sustained on lies. We must demand justice for the 38 million people who have been displaced or become refugees in Afghanistan, Iraq, Pakistan, Yemen, Somalia, the Philippines, Libya, and Syria, a number that exceeds the total of all those displaced

in all wars since 1900, apart from World War II, according to the Watson Institute for International & Public Affairs at Brown University. Tens of millions of people, who had no connection with the attacks of 9/11, were killed, wounded, lost their homes, and saw their lives and their families destroyed because of our war crimes. Who will cry out for them?

Every effort to hold our war criminals accountable has been rebuffed by Congress, by the courts, by the media and by the two ruling political parties. The Center for Constitutional Rights, blocked from bringing cases in US courts against the architects of these preemptive wars, which are defined by post-Nuremberg laws as “criminal wars of aggression,” filed motions in German courts to hold US leaders to account for gross violations of the Geneva Convention, including the sanctioning of torture in black sites such as Guantánamo and Abu Ghraib.

Those who have the power to enforce the rule of law, to hold our war criminals to account, to atone for our war crimes, direct their moral outrage exclusively at Putin’s Russia. “Intentionally targeting civilians is a war crime”, Secretary of State Anthony Blinken said, condemning Russia for attacking civilian sites, including a hospital, three schools and a boarding school for visually impaired children in the Luhansk region of Ukraine. “These incidents join a long list of attacks on civilian, not military locations, across Ukraine”, he said. Beth Van Schaack, an ambassador-at-large for global criminal justice, will direct the effort at the State Department, Blinkin

Those who have the power to enforce the rule of law, to hold our war criminals to account, to atone for our war crimes, direct their moral outrage exclusively at Putin’s Russia

said, to “help international efforts to investigate war crimes and hold those responsible accountable.”

This collective hypocrisy, based on the lies we tell ourselves about ourselves, is accompanied by massive arms shipments to Ukraine. Fuelling proxy wars was a specialty of the Cold War. We have returned to the script. If Ukrainians are heroic resistance fighters, what about Iraqis and Afghans, who fought as valiantly and as doggedly against a foreign power that was every bit as savage as Russia? Why weren’t they lionised? Why weren’t sanctions imposed on the United States? Why weren’t those who defended their countries from foreign invasion in the Middle East, including Palestinians under Israeli occupation, also provided with thousands of anti-tank weapons, anti-armour weapons, anti-aircraft weapons, helicopters, Switchblade or “Kamikaze” drones, hundreds of Stinger anti-aircraft systems, Javelin anti-tank missiles, machine guns and millions of rounds of ammunition? Why didn’t Congress rush through a \$13.6-billion package to provide military and humanitarian assistance, on top of the \$1.2-billion already provided to the Ukrainian military, for them?

Well, we know why. Our war

crimes don’t count, and neither do the victims of our war crimes.

And this hypocrisy makes a rules-based world, one that abides by international law, impossible.

This hypocrisy is not new.

There is no moral difference between the saturation bombing the US carried out on civilian populations since World War II, including in Vietnam and Iraq, and the targeting of urban centres by Russia in Ukraine or the 9/11 attacks on the World Trade Center. Mass death and fireballs on a city skyline are the calling cards we have left across the globe for decades. Our adversaries do the same.

The deliberate targeting of civilians, whether in Baghdad, Kyiv, Gaza, or New York City, are all war crimes. The killing of at least 112 Ukrainian children, as of March 19, is an atrocity, but so is the killing of 551 Palestinian children during Israel’s 2014 military assault on Gaza. So is the killing of 230,000 people over the past seven years in Yemen from Saudi bombing campaigns and blockades that have resulted in mass starvation and cholera epidemics. Where were the calls for a no-fly zone over Gaza and Yemen? Imagine how many lives could have been saved.

War crimes demand the same moral judgment and accountability. But they don’t get them. And they don’t get them because we have one set of standards for white Europeans, and another for non-white people around the globe. The western media has turned European and American volunteers flocking to fight in Ukraine into heroes, while Muslims in the west who join resist-

ance groups battling foreign occupiers in the Middle East are criminalised as terrorists. Putin has been ruthless with the press. But so has our ally, the de facto Saudi ruler Mohammed bin Salman, who ordered the murder and dismemberment of my friend and colleague Jamal Khashoggi, and who last month oversaw a mass execution of 81 people convicted of criminal offences. The coverage of Ukraine, especially after spending seven years reporting on Israel's murderous assaults against the Palestinians, is another example of the racist divide that defines most of the western media.

World War II began with an understanding, at least by the allies, that employing industrial weapons against civilian populations was a war crime. But within 18 months of the start of the war, the Germans, Americans and British were relentlessly bombing cities. By the end of the war, one-fifth of German homes had been destroyed. One million German civilians were killed or wounded in bombing raids. Seven-and-a-half million Germans were made homeless. The tactic of saturation bombing, or area bombing, which included the firebombing of Dresden, Hamburg and Tokyo, which killed more than 90,000 Japanese civilians in Tokyo and left a million people homeless, and the dropping of the atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, which took the lives of between 129,000 and 226,000 people, most of whom were civilians, had the sole purpose of breaking the morale of the population through mass death and terror. Cities such as Leningrad, Stalingrad, Warsaw, Coventry, Royan, Nanjing and Rot-

Industrial war destroys existing value systems that protect and nurture life, replacing them with fear, hatred, and a dehumanisation of those who we are made to believe deserve to be exterminated

terdam were obliterated.

It turned the architects of modern war, all of them, into war criminals.

Civilians in every war since have been considered legitimate targets. In the summer of 1965, then-Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara called the bombing raids north of Saigon that left hundreds of thousands of dead an effective means of communication with the government in Hanoi. McNamara, six years before he died, unlike most war criminals, had the capacity for self-reflection. Interviewed in the documentary, "The Fog of War", he was repentant, not only about targeting Vietnamese civilians but about the aerial targeting of civilians in Japan in World War II, overseen by Air Force General Curtis LeMay.

"LeMay said if we'd lost the war, we'd all have been prosecuted as war criminals", McNamara said in the film. "And I think he's right ... LeMay recognised that what he was doing would be thought immoral if his side had lost. But what makes it immoral if you lose, and not immoral if you win?"

LeMay, later head of the Strategic Air Command during the Korean War, would go on to drop tons of napalm and firebombs on civilian targets in Korea which, by his own esti-

mate, killed 20 percent of the population over a three-year period.

Industrial killing defines modern warfare. It is impersonal mass slaughter. It is administered by vast bureaucratic structures that perpetuate the killing over months and years. It is sustained by heavy industry that produces a steady flow of weapons, munitions, tanks, planes, helicopters, battleships, submarines, missiles, and mass-produced supplies, along with mechanised transports that ferry troops and armaments by rail, ship, cargo planes and trucks to the battlefield. It mobilises industrial, governmental and organisation structures for total war. It centralises systems of information and internal control. It is rationalised for the public by specialists and experts, drawn from the military establishment, along with pliant academics and the media.

Industrial war destroys existing value systems that protect and nurture life, replacing them with fear, hatred, and a dehumanisation of those who we are made to believe deserve to be exterminated. It is driven by emotions, not truth or fact. It obliterates nuance, replacing it with an infantile binary universe of us and them. It drives competing narratives, ideas and values underground and vilifies all who do not speak in the national cant that replaces civil discourse and debate. It is touted as an example of the inevitable march of human progress, when in fact it brings us closer and closer to mass obliteration in a nuclear holocaust. It mocks the concept of individual heroism, despite the feverish efforts of the military and the mass media

to sell this myth to naïve young recruits and a gullible public. It is the Frankenstein of industrialised societies. War, as Alfred Kazin warned, is “the ultimate purpose of technological society”. Our real enemy is within.

Historically, those who are prosecuted for war crimes, whether the Nazi hierarchy at Nuremberg or the leaders of Liberia, Chad, Serbia, and Bosnia, are prosecuted because they lost the war and because they are adversaries of the United States.

There will be no prosecution of Saudi Arabian rulers for the war crimes committed in Yemen or for the US military and political leadership for the war crimes they carried out in Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria and Libya, or a generation earlier in Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos. The atrocities we commit, such as My

Politicians and generals wield their destructive fury as if they were toys. Those who decry the madness, who demand the rule of law, are attacked and condemned

the architects and overlords of our industrial slaughter, including Franklin Roosevelt, Winston Churchill, Gen. Curtis LeMay, Harry S. Truman, Richard Nixon, Henry Kissinger, Lyndon Johnson, Gen. William Westmoreland, George W. Bush, Gen. David Petraeus, Barack Obama and Joe Biden are never held to account. They leave power to become venerated elder statesmen.

The mass slaughter of industrial warfare, the failure to hold ourselves to account, to see our own face in the war criminals we condemn, will have ominous consequences. Author and Holocaust survivor Primo Levi understood that the annihilation of the humanity of others is prerequisite for their physical annihilation. We have become captives to our machines of industrial death. Politicians and generals wield their destructive fury as if they were toys. Those who decry the madness, who demand the rule of law, are attacked and condemned. These industrial weapons systems are our modern idols. We worship their deadly prowess. But all idols, the Bible tells us, begin by demanding the sacrifice of others and end in apocalyptic self-sacrifice. **CT**

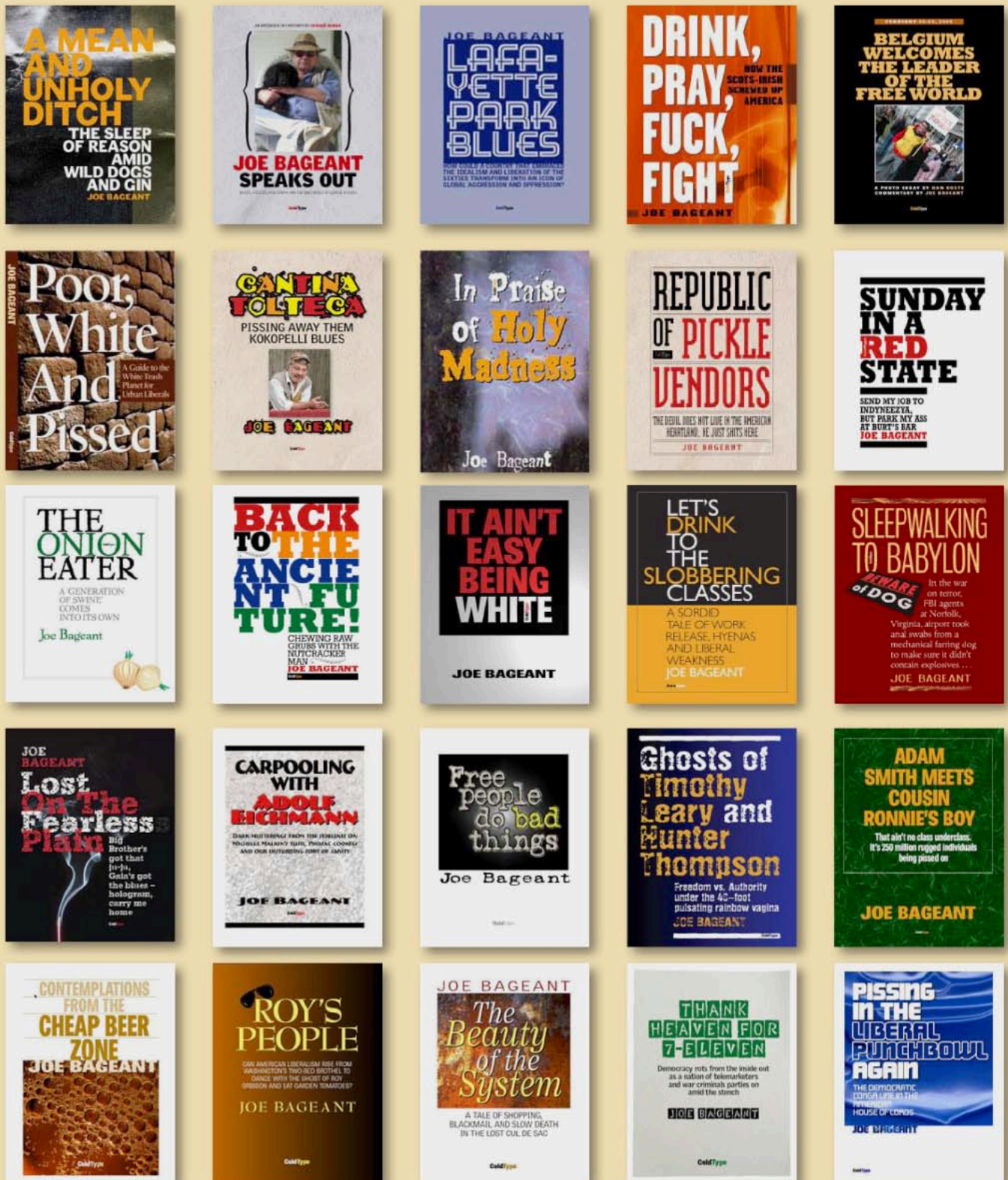
Lai, where 500 unarmed Vietnamese civilians were gunned down by US soldiers, which are made public, are dealt with by finding a scapegoat, usually a low-ranking officer who is given a symbolic sentence. Lt. William Calley served three years under house arrest for the killings at My Lai. Eleven US soldiers, none of whom were officers, were convicted of torture at the Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq. But

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



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JONATHAN COOK

If Putin is a war criminal, what is Madeleine Albright?

Media propaganda could not be starker:
it has whitewashed US war crimes promoted
and defended by the late US diplomat
that overshadow even Putin's

Obituaries of Madeleine Albright, the first woman to be appointed US secretary of state, in 1997 by President Bill Clinton, could not have been more gushing.

With the news of her death aged 84 on March 23, western politicians and media united in lauding her as “a trailblazer”, “a champion of democracy”, and “a force for freedom”. Hillary Clinton observed of Albright: “So many people around the world are alive and living better lives because of her service.”

In one sweep, Clinton's comment erased from the historical record the hundreds of thousands of Iraqi children that, even Albright once conceded, were killed by policies she helped enact and promote.

Media tributes exhibited little interest in those deaths either. Journalists praised her instead for reinvigorating Nato's role as the world's policeman in Kosovo in 1999 after the fall of the Soviet Union, and for en-

forcing punishing sanctions through the 1990s on the regime of Iraq's dictator Saddam Hussein.

The barely veiled subtext of the coverage was that Albright's death marked the close of a post-war chapter in which the US was able to offer moral leadership to the world. That role is supposedly now under threat from the actions of Russia's president, Vladimir Putin, in Ukraine.

While Albright is being eulogised, Putin is denounced as a war criminal by US President Joe Biden, while two former British prime ministers have demanded he be subjected to a Nuremberg-style trial. More generally, the media have cast the Russian leader as a new Hitler.

A tweet from the UK's foreign secretary, Liz Truss, emphasised what was supposedly at stake: “We need to stand by [Albright's] values now more than ever.”

The western media's starkly dif-



When asked about the US sanctions that were responsible for the deaths of 500,000 children in Iraq, Madeleine Albright said, “We think the price is worth it.”



ferent treatment of Albright and Putin, however, reveals nothing about either's claim to moral authority. It tells us a great deal more about the media's determination to obscure some crimes – the ones that reflect badly on the West – and emphasise others.

Most baffling is the absence in almost all of the coverage of Albright's death of any reference to possibly the most defining interview she gave – and certainly the one that provided the most memorable and appalling of her pronouncements.

Back in 1996, when she was serving as Bill Clinton's ambassador to the United Nations, she was asked by the 60 Minutes news show whether she could justify devastating sanctions imposed by the US on Iraq following the 1991 Gulf war. The policy had starved Iraq of medicines and food. As the interviewer pointed out, by the time of their conversation at least 500,000 Iraqi children had been killed. Notably, Albright did not try to dispute that figure.

When asked "Is the price worth it?", she responded: "We think the price is worth it." Albright's decision to press on with sanctions during her years as secretary of state resulted in Denis Halliday, a senior UN official, resigning from his post. Later, in summer 1999, he concluded that as many as 1.5 million Iraqis had died from the sanctions, either from malnutrition or inadequate healthcare. He characterised the policy as genocidal.

The US and its allies, he said, were "deliberately, knowingly killing thousands of Iraqis each month. And that definition fits genocide." Hans von Sponeck, who succeeded Halliday, quit two years later. Before his resignation, he observed: "For how long should the civilian population, which is totally innocent on all this, be exposed to such punish-

ment for something they have never done?"

Savage as the policy was, it did nothing to weaken Saddam's grip on power or cause the Iraqi people to rise up against him – as Albright and other administration officials implied it would. In fact, the sanctions only entrenched the Iraqi leader's rule.

The policy was, in part, justified on the grounds that sanctions would force Saddam to disarm Iraq's weapons of mass destruction – the same WMD that would serve as the pretext for an illegal US invasion of Iraq carried out by the next administration of George W Bush.

The truth was that Iraq could not be disarmed because there were no WMD. The question is how could this defining foreign policy of the Clinton presidency – one associated so closely with Albright – not merit even a mention in the obituaries of the *New York Times* or the BBC?

Part of the answer is that the quote was quickly erased from public consciousness, with the aid of the media. In November 2003, an investigation by FAIR, a US media watchdog group, found that in the two months after the 9/11 attacks Albright's "worth it" comment was mentioned only once in the entire US media, and in a relatively minor publication, although child deaths in Iraq caused by the sanctions policy was one of the main reasons cited by Osama bin Laden for al-Qaeda's attacks on the Twin Towers in New York and the Pentagon.

In the few cases where the media did note Albright's sanctions comment, it was whitewashed.

A *Guardian* obituary swiped aside its importance: "The remark portrayed her as hardbitten, which was far from the case". Only journalists in

thrall to their own propaganda could assess the significance of a policy that killed many hundreds of thousands of children chiefly in terms of whether mention of it was unfair to Albright.

In fact, Albright was every bit as hardbitten as her comment indicated. When she spoke at a meeting at Ohio State University in early 1998, she was greeted by protesters angry at the suffering of Iraqis.

One demonstrator asked how she and other administration officials could sleep at night, observing: “If you want to deal with Saddam, deal with Saddam, not the Iraqi people.”

Albright was unfazed: “I am very proud of what we are doing. We are the greatest nation in the world, and what we are doing is being the indispensable nation, willing to make the world safe for our children and grandchildren, and for nations who follow the rules.”

Imagine the reaction were Putin to so casually justify a Russian policy killing hundreds of thousands of Ukrainian children – and do so on the grounds either that it was useful in keeping Russian children safe or that Ukrainian children deserved to suffer because their leaders had not “followed the rules”.

Putin has been called a madman, a psychopath, a megalomaniac, a new Hitler. If that is right, should Albright not be considered the same – rather than venerated, as she has been by the entire western media?

Immediately after the disastrous Ohio meeting, allies rushed to defend the US sanctions policy and those like Albright responsible for it. CNN reported that European and friendly Arab diplomats thought only that Albright was “poorly prepared” for the meeting and that the Clinton administration had “not done a good job of explaining its policy”.

Problems with US foreign policy were once again ascribed to pres-

Albright’s choices in Kosovo not only smashed international law, but created the precedent for subsequent wars of aggression

entation failures – even though the western media had actively colluded in whitewashing the administration’s crimes.

Albright’s other signature policy as US secretary of state emerged in 1999 in Kosovo, a breakaway province of Serbia plagued by ethnic violence between a Serbian minority and an ethnic Albanian majority that wished to secede.

The obituarists have celebrated Albright’s role in giving Nato a new lease of life after the western military alliance lost its Cold War rationale following the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. Under Albright, Nato became a US-led global policeman, supposedly pursuing humanitarian goals, that chose Kosovo as the first venue in which to flex its muscles. Soon a reinvigorated Nato was striding across eastern Europe towards Russia.

Albright’s choices in Kosovo not only smashed international law, but created the precedent for subsequent wars of aggression, such as Bush’s invasion of Iraq and Putin’s of Ukraine. For weeks on end, Nato bombed swathes of Serbia, including the capital Belgrade, without authorisation from the UN. It did so on behalf of the Kosovo Liberation Army, which only months earlier had been classified as a terrorist organisation by US officials. The rain of bombs hit hospitals, schools, cultural institutions

and destroyed bridges. Hundreds of civilians were killed.

Albright’s rationalisation of an illegal bombing campaign on non-military targets in Serbia gave cover to Putin, then at the start of his premiership, as he laid waste to Chechnya a few months after Nato’s strikes on Serbia. It was later copied by Bush in his “Shock and Awe” operation in Iraq.

Further, Albright’s military campaign in support of Kosovo’s secession, based on a vote for autonomy by its Albanian population, planted the seeds for Putin to annex Crimea after it carried out a similar vote to break from Ukraine in 2014.

The reality is that Albright’s passing does not mark, as the western media would have us believe, the end of a golden era of US diplomacy and moral leadership on the international stage. Rather, Albright was pivotal in ushering in a new era of international lawlessness that made US might right and rationalised the killing of hundreds of thousands of Iraqi children.

If Putin is a war criminal, as our political leaders and media are agreed he is, then Albright was no less of one. The only difference is that in the case of Putin the media are determined to show us Putin’s hands drenched in blood.

In the case of Albright, they have washed the blood completely from view. **CT**

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

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

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

– **Tony Sutton, Editor**



Read the digital editions of Frontline, exactly as they were published, free of charge, at www.issuu.com/frontline.south

YVES ENGLER

Revisiting Canada's role in Orange Revolution

Under the guise of “democracy promotion”, the Canadian embassy spent hundreds of thousands of dollars on financing the protests

To understand the present, one must study the past.

One of the wealthier parts of the Soviet Union, Ukraine's GDP per capita is now less than half Russia's and far below other neighbours. Every year since 1993 its population has declined and an eight-year-old war in the east of the country has killed some 14,000. Last month, Russia launched a brutal invasion that has killed thousands, caused tens of billions of dollars in damage and driven three million from the country.

Difficulty was foretold in its tentative steps towards independence. In March 1991 80 percent of Ukrainians voted to remain in the Soviet Union but within eight months 90 percent choose to leave the rapidly disintegrating USSR.

With the second largest land mass in Europe, Ukraine straddles central Europe and Russia in the east. Eastern and southern Ukraine was part of the Russian empire for two centuries while its west was once part of the Polish-Lithuanian/Austro-Hungarian empires. Lviv in the west is closer to Vienna than to the Eastern Ukrainian city of Kharkiv.

The country has significant political, linguistic and economic divisions largely based on geography. Western/central versus east/south-

ern fissures have been exploited by foreign powers.

Former US national security adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski laid out Washington's thinking about post-independence Ukraine in his 1997 book *The Grand Chessboard: American Primacy and Its Geostrategic Imperatives*. “Without Ukraine”, explained Brzezinski, “Russia ceases to be a Eurasian empire”. Brzezinski argued that drawing Ukraine into Washington's orbit would deliver a major blow to Russia and help the US become “the key arbiter of Eurasian power relations.”

To achieve this goal, the US instigated numerous military and civil society training, supplying and funding initiatives over the past three decades. The National Endowment for Democracy (NED), USAID and other US government agencies

have plowed multiple billions of dollars into training journalists, judges, trade unionists, etc., and otherwise bolstering Western-oriented civil society groups.

Ukraine's political fissures exploded into the limelight with the Orange Revolution. In 2004 western backed civil society groups protested a presidential election in which Viktor Yanukovich officially garnered 49.4 percent of the second-round vote and Viktor Yushchenko 46.7 percent. Two weeks of protests against the results spurred the Supreme Court to call for a re-run of the vote. In a story headlined “US campaign behind the turmoil in Kiev”, the *Guardian* reported that the “Orange Revolution” was “an American creation, a sophisticated and brilliantly conceived exercise in western branding and mass marketing”, which included “US consultancies, pollsters, diplomats, the two big American parties and US non-government organisations.”

The political figures who drove the Orange Revolution were a former central banker, Yushchenko, and minister Yulia Tymoshenko. Yushchenko advocated for Ukraine to join Nato and adopt International Monetary Fund (IMF) reforms.

Washington had become unhappy with President Leonid Kuchma who

The *Guardian* said the “Orange Revolution” was “a brilliantly conceived exercise in western branding and mass marketing”

was viewed as too independent. Kuchma extended the lease for Russia's Black Sea Fleet in Crimea, sold weapons to Saddam Hussein's Iraq, supported reversing the flow of an oil pipeline from the Caspian to Central Europe.

In his 2007 book *The New Cold War: Revolutions, Rigged Elections and Pipeline Politics in the Former Soviet Union*, Toronto *Globe and Mail* reporter Mark Mackinnon details the role played by the NED, USAID, George Soros' foundation, Canada and others in supporting the civil society opposition. Mackinnon writes, "with the Ukrainian opposition – jointly led by Tymoshenko and Viktor Yushchenko, the former central banker – signalling clearly at the end of 2003 that it wanted western help in overthrowing Kuchma, George Soros and the various groups funded by the National Endowment for Democracy went to work making it happen". The NED's National Democratic Institute, reported Mackinnon, even organised a secret pact between Yushchenko and Tymoshenko over who would be prime minister.

Canada assisted the opposition movement through its public declarations, funding, election monitors and coordination of foreign diplomats. "Agent Orange: Our secret role in Ukraine" detailed some of the ways Canada intervened in the country's politics. Beginning in January 2004, reported Mackinnon in that *Globe and Mail* article, Canadian ambassador Andrew Robinson "began to organise secret monthly meetings of western ambassadors, presiding over what he called 'donor coordination' sessions among



How ColdType covered Ukraine's Orange Revolution in April 2014. Read it at www.coldtype.net/reader.html

20 countries interested in seeing Mr. Yushchenko succeed. Eventually, he acted as the group's spokesman and became a prominent critic of the Kuchma government's heavy handed media control. Canada also invested in a controversial exit poll, carried out on election day by Ukraine's Razumkov Centre and other groups that contradicted the official results showing Mr. Yanukovich [winning]."

A month before the first round of voting Ukraine's foreign ministry reprimanded Robinson for complaining about media bias, accusing him of "excessive attention to Ukraine's internal affairs". A year after the uprising, Mike Blanchfield of the Canadian Press confirmed the substance of Kyiv's criticism. Reporting on internal files uncovered through an access to information request, Blanchfield noted that "the Foreign Affairs documents portray our man in Kyiv as a tough-minded straight

shooter who had no time for diplomatic niceties."

Canada even directly financed the Orange Revolution. Under the guise of "democracy promotion", the Canadian embassy spent hundreds of thousands of dollars on opposition-aligned civil society groups. According to Mackinnon, the Canadian embassy helped raise funds to bring veterans of Serbia's Optor and Georgia's Kmara, which had helped Washington topple 'pro-Moscow' governments in those countries, to train Ukrainian groups that began planning to protest the election months before the vote. The lead group in organising the Orange Revolution, Pora, received US\$30,000 from the Canadian embassy, which was its first donation.

Alongside others from that group, the head of Pora, Vlad Kaskiv – who was employed by Soros – later became an adviser to President Yushchenko.

Canada led the international condemnation of the vote, which galvanised domestic opposition. A few days after the poll, the House of Commons held an emergency debate on the Ukrainian election with Deputy Prime Minister Anne McLellan expressing "very, very deep concern" about voting irregularities. "Considering the allegations of serious and significant electoral fraud from international and Canadian election observers, the government of Canada cannot accept the announced results by the Central Election Commission reflect the true democratic will of the Ukrainian people", McLellan told Parliament.

Canadian officials got involved in the backroom wrangling over the vote. With the okay of the Prime Minister's Office, Liberal MP Borys

Wrzesnewskyj, a Canadian election observer, promised the deputy head of Ukraine's Central Elections Commission, Yaroslav Davydovych, and his family safe passage to Canada if he did "the right thing" by disputing Yanukovich's results.

Two days after a second round of voting Robinson and other ambassadors met Yushchenko who delivered his "appeal to the parliaments and nations of the world to bolster the will of the Ukrainian people, to support their aspiration to return to democracy." That day MP Wrzesnewskyj, whose sister, reported Mackinnon, was "close to Yushchenko's wife", told protesters at Maidan square: "It's quite clear to me that Viktor Yushchenko is, in fact, president of Ukraine."

Many of Canada's election observers were far from impartial. In a *National Post* article before the December 26 election rerun, Matthew Fisher wrote: "Western reporters in Ukraine last month were shocked at how openly some Canadian observers cheered for Viktor Yushchenko, the pro-Western opposition leader who the Supreme Court found had been cheated of victory. Like his passionate supporters, these Canadians wore orange garb. One of them was even alleged to have addressed a big Yushchenko rally.

"The journalists felt these people were so over-the-top in celebrating Yushchenko's Orange Revolution and so loud in condemning the voting process, they were an embarrassment to Canada."

Ottawa spent over \$3-million to send 500 observers to oversee the election rerun, the largest official delegation from any country. Another 500 were sent by the virulently pro-West Ukrainian Canadian Congress (UCC).

Paul Martin later celebrated Canada's election monitors. At the launch of a new UCC office in Win-

Vladimir Putin and others have repeatedly cited the Orange Revolution when criticising Washington's effort to turn Ukraine into a proxy against Russia

nipeg the Canadian Prime Minister said, "the comportment of these observers was impeccable, their commitment was unwavering, their contribution was inestimable, and they did it with an infectious enthusiasm, with expertise, and above all, with an acute sensitivity to local conditions and culture."

At that event the head of the Canadian monitoring mission, former Prime Minister John Turner, highlighted the objective of Canada's intervention in Ukraine. "I'm concerned that the Russians keep their hands off", said Turner when releasing his post-election report. To counter Russia, Turner called on the European Union to welcome Ukraine as a member.

After seeking to isolate Kuchma, Ottawa supported Yushchenko's government. Ukraine was selected as one of Canada's 25 priority aid countries and Ottawa pushed for its adherence to the World Trade Organization. In launching a trade promotion initiative dubbed "Canada Days in Ukraine" international trade minister Jim Peterson declared, "I think there is incredible potential in that market and I believe that the Orange Revolution has given us an opportunity to see that reforms are made in that country and businesses can be more secure in their operations."

But Ukrainians soured quickly on Yushchenko's neoliberal policies and the bickering between him and Orange Revolution ally Tymoshenko.

Yanukovych's Party of Regions won parliamentary elections in 2006 and he was elected president in 2010 (Yushchenko won 5 percent of the vote in that election).

The Orange Revolution heightened regional tensions, engendering significant bitterness in the Russian-oriented Crimea and Donbas, which was Yanukovych's power base. The events of 2004 set the stage for the conflict unleashed after Yanukovych was ousted in 2014. Vladimir Putin and others have repeatedly cited the Orange Revolution when criticising Washington's effort to turn Ukraine into a proxy against Russia.

Canadian officials claimed their aim in 2004 was to support democracy. But months before supporting the Orange Revolution the Canadian government helped overthrow thousands of elected officials in Haiti and a decade later participated in the ouster of President Yanukovych who won an election Canadian officials monitored.

Ottawa's primary objective in Ukraine has long been to promote neoliberalism and Washington's bid to create conflict between the country and its large neighbour. While Canadians should sympathise with Ukrainians critical of Russian influence – especially amidst their brutal war – is it more legitimate for countries halfway across the world to interfere and dominate that country?

As we condemn Russia's criminal invasion, we need to look at Canada's considerable role in Ukraine's unfolding tragedy. **CT**

*Yves Engler is a Montréal-based activist and author who has published 12 books including his latest *Stand on Guard For Whom? A People's History of the Canadian Military*. His website is www.yvesengler.com.*

THE TRIALS OF JULIAN ASSANGE



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NORMAN SOLOMON

Biden's unhinged call for regime change

His administration keeps ratcheting up the self-righteous rhetoric while moving the world closer to ultimate catastrophe

Ever since Joe Biden ended his speech in Poland on March 26 by making one of the most dangerous statements ever uttered by a US president in the nuclear age, efforts to clean up after him have been profuse. Administration officials scurried to assert that Biden didn't mean what he said. Yet no amount of trying to "walk back" his unhinged comment at the end of his speech in front of Warsaw's Royal Castle can change the fact that Biden had called for regime change in Russia.

They were nine words about Russian President Vladimir Putin that shook the world: "For God's sake, this man cannot remain in power."

With a reckless genie out of the bottle, no amount of damage control from the president's top underlings could stuff it back in. "We do not have a strategy of regime change in Russia, or anywhere else, for that matter", Secretary of State Antony Blinken told reporters the next day. Such words might plausibly have less than full weight; Blinken was chief of staff at the Senate Foreign Relations Committee when, in mid-2002, then-Senator Biden wielded the gavel at crucial hearings that completely stacked the witness deck in support of the subsequent US invasion of Iraq, with the explicit goal

of regime change.

The USA's commander in chief, brandishing the power to launch one of the world's two biggest nuclear arsenals, would be out of his mind to consciously announce a goal of dethroning the leader of the world's other nuclear superpower. Worst case would be that he was blurting out his government's actual secret goal, which would not speak well of impulse control.

But it's not much more reassuring to think that the president simply got carried away with his emotions. The day after, that was part of the messaging from Biden's cleanup detail. "Administration officials and Democratic lawmakers said Sunday the off-the-cuff remark was an emotional response to the president's interactions in Warsaw with [Ukrainian] refugees", the *Wall*

Street Journal reported.

However – before the cosmetics began to cover Biden's unscripted statement – the *New York Times* provided a quick news analysis under the headline "Biden's Barbed Remark About Putin: A Slip or a Veiled Threat?" The piece, by seasoned establishment reporters David Sanger and Michael Shear, noted that Biden's off-script close to his speech came with "his cadence slowing for emphasis". And they added: "On its face, he appeared to be calling for President Vladimir V. Putin of Russia to be ousted for his brutal invasion of Ukraine."

Mainstream journalists have avoided putting a fine point on the likelihood that World War III just got closer thanks to Biden's words, whether or not they were "a slip" or "a veiled threat". In fact, it might never be possible to know which it was. But that ambiguity underscores that his slip and/or threat was mind-blowingly irresponsible, endangering the survival of humanity on this planet.

Outrage is the appropriate response. And a special onus is on Democrats in Congress, who should be willing to put humanity above party and condemn Biden's extreme irresponsibility. But prospects for such condemnation look bleak.

The *Guardian* said the "Orange Revolution" was "a brilliantly conceived exercise in western branding and mass marketing"



"For God's sake, this man cannot remain in power." - Joe Biden delivers his message to Vladimir Putin world from Poland.

Biden's impromptu nine words underscore that we must not take anything for granted about his rationality. Russia's murderous war in Ukraine does not give Biden any valid excuse to make a horrendous situation worse. On the contrary, the US government should be determined to promote and pursue negotiations that could end the killing and find long-term compromise solutions. Biden has now made it even more difficult to pursue diplomacy with Putin.

Activists have a special role to play – by emphatically insisting that members of Congress and the Biden administration must focus on finding solutions that will save Ukrainian lives as well as put a stop to the slide toward military escalation and global nuclear annihilation.

To even hint that the US is seeking regime change in Russia – and to leave the world wondering whether the president is slipping or threatening – is a form of imperial insanity in the nuclear era that we must not tolerate.

"I'm addressing the people in the United States", former Greek finance minister Yanis Varoufakis said during an interview on Democracy Now just one day before Biden's speech in Poland. "How many times have an attempt by the American government to effect regime change anywhere in the world worked out well? Ask the women of Afghanistan. Ask the people of Iraq. How did that liberal imperialism work out for them? Not very well. Do they really propose to try this out with a nuclear power?"

Overall, in recent weeks, President Biden has jettisoned all but the flimsiest pretences of seeking a

diplomatic solution to end the horrors of the war in Ukraine. Instead, his administration keeps ratcheting up the self-righteous rhetoric while moving the world closer to ultimate catastrophe. **CT**

Norman Solomon is the national director of *RootsAction.org* and the author of a dozen books including *Made Love, Got War: Close Encounters with America's Warfare State*, published this year in a new edition as a free e-book (See Page 4). His other books include *War Made Easy: How Presidents and Pundits Keep Spinning Us to Death*. He was a Bernie Sanders delegate from California to the 2016 and 2020 Democratic National Conventions. Solomon is the founder and executive director of the *Institute for Public Accuracy*. *Accuracy*.



SAM PIZZIGATI

How did flying cars become the big thing?

Another reminder that plutocracies can indeed solve problems – for plutocrats

Someday soon, almost certainly within the next three years, automobile-sized transportation vehicles are going to be lifting straight up off the ground, hovering in the air, and then shooting off into the distance at speeds approaching 200 miles per hour.

Welcome to the world of electric flying cars, “eVTOL” as the insiders like to say, short for “electric vertical take-off and landing” aircraft. These battery-powered wonders have now caught the full attention of “serious people with serious money”, marvels

Andrew Macmillan of Vertical Aerospace, one of the many start-ups racing to make eVTOL Wall Street’s Next Big Thing.

Overall investments in flying cars have jumped a whopping 30 times over since 2019. Fledgling flying-car concerns are merging with stashes of cash known as “special purchase acquisition companies”, or SPACs, to create new companies worth billions. One of the more high-profile outfits, Joby Aviation, now carries a \$6.6-billion valuation.

Joby Aviation’s founder, Joe Ben Bevirt, sees his new industry as

nothing short of “transformational”. The “incredibly quiet” electric aircraft that companies like his are now fine-tuning, says Bevirt, “could become a ubiquitous mode of daily transportation”. They can “land where people want to go.”

“If the vision becomes reality”, an Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers appraisal noted earlier last month, “hundreds of eVTOLs will swarm over the skies of a big city during a typical rush hour, whisking small numbers of passengers at per-kilometer costs no greater than those of driving a

car.” That vision is thrilling deep pockets the world over, from billionaire celebs like Google’s Larry Page and LinkedIn’s Reid Hoffman to top execs at corporations ranging from Boeing and Airbus to American Airlines and Virgin Atlantic. Federal officials are getting involved as well. NASA is already collaborating with Joby Aviation on making the new eVTOLs “more accessible to the public”.

A bright new, environmentally friendly, flying-car future – all these heavy-hitters would like us to believe – will shortly be upon US. But not everyone is buying the hype. Indeed, the emerging eVTOL craze may end up providing us with a perfect case-study of who gets to see technology “solve” their problems in deeply unequal societies – and who gets to see their problems just continue to fester.

That vision of eVTOLs as a game-changing, affordable giant step toward environmental renewal? On closer inspection, argues *Bloomberg’s* David Fickling, this vision turns out to bear little correspondence to the physics of flight.

Yes, the new flying car prototypes can move efficiently once airborne. But rising up vertically to flying height takes enormous battery power. Flying cars can offset this initial energy expenditure if they fly at least 100 kilometers. The only problem: Some 85 percent of car trips today run shorter than 35 kilometers. At that distance, Fickling points out, flying cars operate no more efficiently than “a conventional gas-guzzling automobile”.

Flying cars also turn out to contribute mightily to sound pollution. The racket they make does diminish the higher flying cars fly. The problem here: The higher eVTOLs fly, the

Don’t expect a shorter commute anytime soon and try not to strain your neck as you look up to watch those flying cars whoosh by

more fuel they have to use. So pick your poison. Either way, eVTOLs have little to offer people of modest means.

For the rich, a totally different story. Flying cars can provide the affluent a real service. They can transport people of ample means to their airport connections without having to hassle surface traffic.

Everything comes down, the chief exec of Virgin Atlantic Airways explained last month, to the last few surface miles that separate airline passengers from their airports: “You can spend hours on relatively short airport journeys by public transport or sit in a traffic jam. eVTOLs can do the trip in 30 minutes, and people will pay a premium for that”.

The airline industry’s biggest players – United, American, Japan Airlines – have all been busily cutting deals with flying-car start-ups. The heavier a city’s traffic congestion, the higher the airline interest in eVTOLs. One Brazilian airline has already committed to buy as many as 250 flying cars from Vertical Aerospace. São Paulo, an urban transportation disaster area where “traffic snarl-ups typically block hundreds of miles of road”, currently rates as the world’s “busiest city for helicopter flights”. The new Brazilian airline flying car order, observers feel, could help “transform travel” in the city.

Transform travel? Yes, but only for the affluent. Investments in

eVTOLs, contends *Bloomberg’s* Fickling, are essentially functioning to “rebrand the dystopian old helicopter industry for a new generation of the super-rich”.

“A grimly plausible vision of the future will see NFT billionaires travel from San Francisco to their weekend escapes in Lake Tahoe, blithely ignorant of their true carbon footprints”, he writes. “The city-dwellers over whom they fly will be stuck in endless traffic, which the political system never seems to get round to solving”.

Real transformation in transportation – in São Paulo and every other traffic-choked major metropolis – would take significant new public investment in mass transit. But the rich have no interest in going down that road. They have no particular personal interest in ever setting foot in a bus – and even less interest in helping fund, through higher taxes, a more vibrant public transit network.

So don’t expect a shorter commute anytime soon and try not to strain your neck as you look up to watch those flying cars whoosh by. And please don’t forget the lesson in all this: Our plutocracies only solve the problems that plutocrats face. **CT**

Sam Pizzigati co-edits *Inequality.org*. His latest books include *The Case for a Maximum Wage* and *The Rich Don’t Always Win: The Forgotten Triumph over Plutocracy that Created the American Middle Class, 1900-1970*. His earlier book, *Greed and Good: Understanding and Overcoming the Inequality that Limits Our Lives*, now appears free online through *Inequality.org*. Twitter: @Too_Much_Online.

JANE BRAXTON LITTLE

From drought to deluge on a new planet

Those who contribute the least
to climate change suffer the most

S now began falling on Greenville, California, on December 24, big fluffy flakes that made lace on mittens before melting. Within hours it had coated the ashes, the brick chimneys that the flames had left behind, and the jagged remains of roofs strewn across my burned-out town. White mounds soon softened the look of charred cars that are everywhere, while even the scorched trees that stretch to the hilltops were coated in a forgiving winter wonder.

Any moisture would have been welcome. Over the seven months since the Dixie fire destroyed Greenville and several other rural communities in California's northern Sierra Nevada mountains, the drought that led to the flaming disaster had only deepened. October brought brief, drenching rains, but November and December were dry again. Soil that should have been moist was as desiccated as the air, while the humidity hovered just above single digits. We watched bulldozers move the dilapidated walls – what had not long ago been homes – into gigantic dump trucks in a haze of grime. Even the trees that survived had a withered look. Now, it was snowing – for Christmas! We greeted it with hearts as wide as the open mouths of kids savouring falling flakes.

Greenville, my adopted town of 46 years, had been devastated by a climate-change disaster. Sparked by the negligence of Pacific Gas & Electric (PG&E), the Dixie fire scorched nearly a million acres, the distance, if you care to measure, from Philadelphia to New York City.

On August 4, a pyrocumulus cloud collapsed on the ridge above the tarnished old Gold Rush community where I worked, erupting into red-hot embers that fell over a several square-mile area.

Trees were transformed into towering torches. Flames roared down the nearby mountain, racing through overcrowded forests left bone dry (after a century of ill-advised fire suppression) by a third year of drought. It took less than 45 minutes for that inferno to raze the historic 160-year-old downtown, including my journalism office on the second floor of the oldest building around. About 800 homes went up in flames.

O ver the next four months, we gathered in grief in twos and threes in the post offices and shops of neighbouring towns, soothing one another. Now, it was Christmas and snowing! We relaxed and rejoiced amid the ruins.

Little did we know that, driven by our overheated planet, we were about to be whiplashed from drought to deluge. Hotter days and hotter nights have corkscrewed our weather patterns into spiralling extremes, leaving entire regions around the world jerked from the hottest temperatures they've known to the coldest, from devastating fires to disastrous floods. This is uncharted territory and, scientists say, an all-too-grim preview of the future we're creating for ourselves.

By the fourth day of non-stop snow our euphoria had waned. Electricity was flickering on and off. The Internet was mostly off. We shovelled our steps and then the paths to our cars, only to find them covered all over again. Driveways were challenging and roads treacherous (if open at all). Snow was piling up across the Sierra Nevada, the gigantic tilted block of granite that lies along the state line with Nevada.

At Lake Tahoe, 75 miles to the south, 18 feet of snow was dumped on luxury second homes, collapsing decks, and taxing municipal snow-removal crews gone soft after years of mild winters. Highway 80, the main route over the mountains, was closed for three days by storms that made December the third snowiest month on record and the snowiest



December ever. Those storms catapulted the state's precipitation to 258 percent of its average for that point in the year. California water officials were giddy with expectation, predicting that our three-year-old drought would be broken.

Then, of course, it ended. Precipitation of any kind simply stopped. January clocked in as the driest ever for some parts of the state, as well as most of Nevada, Utah, and western Colorado. Last month was the driest February in 128 years, according to a multi-agency partnership monitoring drought. And here's the truth of it: if we keep letting greenhouse gases increase in the atmosphere from the burning of fossil fuels, we better get used to this sort of seesaw experience. Scientists say that, by century's end, such abrupt transitions between wet and dry will increase

by another 25 percent in northern California and possibly double that in southern California.

While California may be a poster child for extreme weather events, they are occurring almost everywhere. Such wild swings from tinder-dry to inundation are known as climate or weather whiplash. What causes them is a matter of scientific speculation and the subject of much cutting-edge research, says Daniel Swain, a climate scientist at the Institute of the Environment and Sustainability at the University of California, Los Angeles. Some scientists cite a connection between the polar vortex, a wall of wind that circles the Arctic, and jet streams, the bands of strong winds that generally blow from west to east. As the Arctic warms – at as much as triple the average global rate – it seems to be

destabilising those jet streams and so, according to a study published in *Environmental Research*, provoking abnormal and extreme weather across the planet.

Swain thinks we should imagine it as a colossal tug of war involving complex atmospheric dynamics over the Pacific Ocean. Yes, he says, the world is definitely getting warmer as greenhouse-gas concentrations rise. That, in turn, means wet times will generally be wetter and dry times drier, especially in California. He's also found emerging evidence, as he told me, of what he calls "a relatively weird" regional effect: the loss of Arctic sea ice might actually be counteracting the drying effect of the expanding subtropical zone, keeping California from becoming more arid still in a warming world.

Pople in my community know local weather and the land. Ranchers, loggers, and firefighters, they understand storms and seasons, soil, water, and trees in an up close and personal way. I've found my place among them over these years, writing about their work and their love of the landscape we share. We here in Greenville may not know anything about what the intersection of the polar vortex and jet streams or atmospheric dynamics are doing to our world, but we certainly know when our environment is off kilter. Being jerked from the drought that provoked the Dixie fire to that historic snowfall and back again has left us with little doubt: something with the weather is seriously bonkers.

The unexpected uncertainty of weather we once took for granted is spawning anxieties that add to the trauma of living through a town-destroying fire. Instead of one disaster and done, weather whiplash

threatens us with disaster after disaster. Having somehow survived fire, we've been thrust into a deeply uncertain future. The forests we turned to for hiking, fishing, and birdsong no longer promise solace. The natural world that welcomed and kept us in this valley ringed by mountains has become unreliable. What can we trust?

When it comes to weather whiplash, Australia is exhibit A for Anthropocene, the current geological epoch dominated by the human impact on the environment. Storms have been pounding that island nation's southeast coast since late February, earning the moniker "rain bombs" for their severity. In just two days, the town of Doon Doon in New South Wales received 42 inches of rain, roughly Washington, D.C.'s annual precipitation. Flooding has killed 22 people so far, prompting Prime Minister Scott Morrison to declare a national emergency. This round of extreme wet weather follows the catastrophic bushfires of 2020 that killed 28 people and more than a billion animals, while scorching an area nearly the size of Connecticut in a fashion never before seen.

Worse yet, as we in California have discovered, the recovery time for communities between such climate disasters is shrinking. Simon Bradshaw, a researcher at the Australian Climate Council, summed things up simply enough: "New South Wales was hit hard by the 2019-20 Black Summer bushfires and now it is in the grips of another climate-driven disaster."

Then there's Texas. During the last decade that state has reeled from one of the most significant droughts since the 1950s to a series of deluges that have rivalled any period of flooding Texas has ever experienced.

In just two days, the town of Doon Doon in New South Wales received 42 inches of rain, roughly Washington, D.C.'s annual precipitation

Rainfall in 2011 was 25 inches below average, forcing mandatory water restrictions. Meteorologist Jeff Lindner called the heat in Houston that August a 10,000-year event. Over the 2011 Labor Day weekend, vegetation primed by that drought combined with 40 mile-per-hour winds to produce the Bastrop fire, the single most devastating wildfire in that state's history. It burned more than 35,000 acres and around 1,600 homes, while the Tricounty fire incinerated over 19,000 acres and 100 homes.

Then the weather seesawed. By the time Hurricane Harvey made landfall at Port Aransas on August 27, 2017, the area had rocketed from drought to deluge. Rainfall for the year was nearly 30 inches above the annual average. Netherland, a city on the Gulf of Mexico, recorded more than 60 inches. The devastation Harvey wreaked affected an estimated 13 million people and included at least 107 deaths, nearly 135,000 homes damaged or destroyed (one third of the total number in four counties), and up to a million wrecked cars.

Governor Greg Abbott, a veteran climate-change denier who has threatened to sue President Biden over policies addressing the crisis, conceded that something was changing dramatically. "We need to recognise that this is going to be a new normal. A new and different normal for the entire region", he said.

Even when such weather swings don't create disasters, they have

tangible consequences. Across the American Midwest, for instance, weather whiplash is driving a decline in municipal water quality. After excessive flooding followed a drought in 2012, researchers at the University of Kansas noticed a nitrogen spike in surface waters in the area. In dry times, the nitrogen fertiliser that farmers put in their fields doesn't go into the plants it's intended to enrich. A 2017 study found that the nitrogen stays in the soil, which acts like a sponge, holding it in place. "But as soon as you wet it", Amy Burgin, one of its authors, points out, "like when you wring a sponge, the nitrogen can flood into the rivers."

Such increasingly high nitrate levels in drinking water forced the Des Moines Water Works to construct a \$4.1-million nitrate removal plant that costs \$7,000 a day to operate. As weather whiplash becomes ever more the norm, scientists expect surface-water nitrate spikes to occur throughout the agricultural Midwest.

Elsewhere, the changing patterns of various kinds of wildlife are only exacerbating the problems caused by weird weather. In eastern Oregon, for instance, widespread drought followed by deep snow has caused elk to move out of the hills to feed on the haystacks that are ranchers' paychecks. Conflicts between wildlife and humans are already common enough, but climate scientists expect them to increase as droughts, floods, and fires push animals off their normal ranges and into agricultural areas.

As I've learned all too personally, climate disasters are profoundly destabilising. They can wrench communities from their roots and turn them upside down. They are also

profoundly unjust. Those with the fewest resources and least responsible for the climate crisis are going to continue to bear the brunt of its impact.

And here's the only good news: climate change is a problem with a solution. We humans created it, which means it's solvable. That, however, would require societal and political will of a kind we simply haven't seen yet. And that's the bad news. We haven't mustered anything close to enough determination to halt the relentless increases in temperature driving the weather that's whiplashing us ever more violently. As United Nations Secretary General António Guterres put it, a recent report by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change is "a damning indictment of failed climate leadership... that reveals how people and the planet are getting clobbered by climate change."

Swain, the UCLA climate scientist, put it this way: "We're on a

We haven't mustered anything close to enough determination to halt the relentless increases in temperature driving the weather

train going faster and faster down the tracks with perfectly functional brakes. But the drivers, for whatever reasons, are choosing not to engage the brakes."

One of the great ironies of experiencing climate-change disaster may be that we are both its victims and its drivers. We could, at least theoretically, apply the brakes of the locomotive. In our fury over the forces of destruction beyond our control – the flames that incinerate and the floods that inundate our lives – perhaps we'll find the political will and guts to bring meaningful change, at least

on a very small scale right here in my town of Greenville.

In its charred devastation, we could now choose solar power over fossil fuels. (And if so, who would blame us for feeling smug about shunning PG&E?) We could choose community gardens over imported produce. All that, however, remains a distant future for a place with a single grocery store, a gas station, and little else. But if we must spend the rest of our lives healing, we can at least invest them in empowering one another and our community in a new way. We have so little left to lose. **CT**

Jane Braxton Little is an independent journalist who writes about science and natural resources for publications that include the Atlantic, Audubon, National Geographic, and Scientific American. She moved to Plumas County in 1969 for a summer that has yet to end. This article first appeared at www.tomdispatch.com

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MARK CURTIS

Why we ignored a D-Notice

A body run by the UK military has asked us to remove part of our story revealing British support for an African dictatorship. Here's why we said no to its "formal advice" not to publish

In February I received an email from a body called the DSMA committee asking my organisation Declassified to remove something from one of our articles.

That body, the Defence and Security Media Advisory Committee, is run by the Ministry of Defence's Director General for Security Policy. It exists supposedly to "prevent inadvertent public disclosure of information that would compromise UK military, counterterrorist and intelligence operations".

It is better known as the 'D-Notice' committee.

It's a voluntary system and the email, from retired navy Captain Jon Perkins, a deputy secretary of the committee, was very friendly and polite. He emphasised that the decision to publish information rested solely with Declassified.

We had written an article on Cameroon published two weeks before. It revealed for the first time details of how the British military is propping up its repressive regime, run by Paul Biya, Africa's oldest dictator, who has ruled with an iron fist since 1982. He turned 89 on Sunday.

Our chief reporter Phil Miller found that not only is Britain training Biya's military, which is accused

of torture and executions, but that a UK special forces officer has even drawn up a "crisis management" doctrine for the dictator.

That British officer has also cultivated "influential relationships" with Biya's right-hand man and his spy chief.

In other words, the UK is up to its neck in yet another dictatorship.

The DSMA email asked us to remove the name of the British senior military adviser, Lt Col 'Sid' Purser. "The publication of that name ... jeopardises the personal safety of the officer and indeed may also compromise his family", I was told.

The email added: "The detail thus runs contrary to the terms of DSMA Notice 5 (Sensitive Personal Information). May I therefore request that you remove the name from the article, perhaps instead referring to 'a British Officer'".

Declassified's journalism will never knowingly put anyone's life in danger. We take matters of personal safety very seriously in our work and would never recklessly publish details.

Indeed, prior to publication, we had told the MOD press office in detail what would be in our story. They

did not seek an injunction.

Instead they waited until after our article went online to request Purser's name be censored. We declined, and didn't hear anymore about the issue until the committee's email appeared a fortnight later.

We weighed the request up but in the end our decision was clear-cut. Cameroon is a dictatorship. Purser's highly political role directly links him to the survival of that regime. It's in the public interest to name a special forces officer there colluding with Biya's henchmen.

We also couldn't see how our article would create any additional risk to him. The Cameroon High Commission had previously announced that Purser had received a presidential medal and a news website had named him as having a counterterrorism role in Cameroon.

I was initially told the email from the committee was "informal DSM advice". But the committee website appears to make no provision for it to issue such "informal" advice.

I asked for clarification. Brigadier Geoffrey Dodds, the secretary of the committee, stepped in to say it was actually "formal" DSM advice.

This was still confusing. The committee's website refers to the issuing of D-Notices. This is when it sends

“guidance” to editors to “protect national security” on sensitive pieces of information.

It can include issuing a letter to be “distributed by email to all editors and through the Press Association and the Society of Editors’ networks”.

Had I received such a D-Notice, albeit one that had been sent only to Declassified? It remains unclear. If so, this would be the first sent by the committee to any media organisation since January 2019.

The committee says it sends few “formal” requests to editors to censor themselves.

So were these polite emails, asking Declassified to modify its journalism, applying no legal pressure whatsoever, still an attempt to stifle critical scrutiny of UK government policies?

And is the lack of clarity symptomatic of a system that operates mainly via nods and winks?

Declassified’s very first article, back in September 2019, showed how the DSMA committee successfully sought in June 2013 to use D-Notices to prevent media organisations publishing the full bombshell revelations of US whistleblower Edward Snowden.

Neither is this the first time the MOD has sought to confront US Less than a year after our launch, an unnamed military officer in the MOD press office proposed Declassified be “put on a list of organisations which the department would not engage with.

”They stopped providing any comment for our stories. Eventually, however, defence secretary Ben Wallace was forced to apologise to us and the blacklisting was stopped.

This game of officials asking journalists to self-censor, and their com-



pliance, is one that Declassified will never play.

The DSMA is a very traditional British institution. It is part of the chumocracy where media organisations are regularly willing to please Whitehall.

Many do so to retain “access”, so that they are slipped exclusives about this or that UK deployment or special operation. UK media organisations regularly simply write up MOD media releases and present them as “news” – just look at the recent coverage of Ukraine.

Probably most of what people read in their papers about the UK military comes from the MOD itself – something that is not widely understood. Mainstream defence journalists tend to welcome Britain’s wars and routinely fail to question key government military and intelligence policies.

They even have fora such as the Defence Correspondents Association, a select club of journalists invited for informal chats over wine with the defence secretary. It promotes the clubby-style of reporting that the DSMA also encourages.

To a large degree, the MOD controls what is reported in the UK media – not by coercion, still less conspiracy, but because journalists are willingly co-opted.

Take this fact, for example. In the six months from April-October 2021, the DSMA Committee was contacted on 78 occasions for “advice” on publishing. Of these requests, 34 were initiated by the media themselves.

The rest were initiated by government officials (29) and members of the public (15). Nearly 20% of the requests related to the special forces.

Sitting on the DSMA committee along with the MOD is a slew of mainstream media outlets. Representatives from broadcasters ITV, BBC and Sky are there. The press is present in the form of the managing editor of the Times and Sunday Times, and the deputy editor of the Telegraph. Then there’s the director of the Press Association and the Society of Editors.

No doubt they argue they’re on the committee to defend the interests of their media organisations, not to be cowed by the MOD. But why bother sitting on the committee at all? Why recognise any kind of informal state influence over what journalists write?

I also wonder this: how many other polite emails containing “advice” does the DSMA committee send to other journalists asking them to withdraw stories or key information?

And how many agree to those requests that we don’t know of? **CT**

Mark Curtis is the editor of *Declassified UK* – www.declassifieduk.org – and the author of five books and many articles on UK foreign policy.

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