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# ColdType

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# THE TRIALS OF JULIAN ASSANGE



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# INSIGHTS



Bob Lord

## THE FIRST TRILLIONAIRE: NO CAUSE FOR CELEBRATION

It's been a full decade now since I first predicted – warned, to be a bit more precise – that America would have its first trillionaire before 2040.

I stand by that warning today. Unfortunately, everything I said ten years ago has aged well. Too well.

I explained back then how tax policy was supercharging the accumulation of obscene fortunes in America. Policy makers, I noted, had lifted the lid on wealth accumulation by decreasing taxes on inheritances and income from capital. That policy failure would go on to become substantially

worse in 2017 with the passage of the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act.

Others would see this same ominous trend. In an interview with CNBC, several experts recognised the distinct possibility the world would have its first trillionaire by 2039, the year CNBC would turn 50. They offered various explanations for how that would happen, with most of them agreeing it would “take several Bill Gates-like successes from one individual to reach the trillion-dollar mark.”

I saw things differently, telling CNBC: “It might take the founder of

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five of today's Microsofts to reach a trillion, but we're going to see larger and larger Microsofts."

More recently, the idea that a larger Microsoft would deliver our first billionaire has gained traction. Three years ago, *USA Today* reported on predictions that Amazon would raise Jeff Bezos' wealth to trillionaire level as early as 2026.

Those predictions have turned out to be a bit aggressive – Bezos' wealth climb has levelled off – but they may have been beneficial in an odd way. Historically, far too many Americans have looked at billionaire wealth the way they look at sports, as I noted in 2014:

"The super-rich are setting new records, \$10-billion, \$50-billion, and soon enough \$100-billion. Rather than objecting, our nation celebrates the increasingly obscene fortunes of the super-rich as we do athletes breaking sports records.

"Reaching \$1-trillion will be what hitting 73 home runs was before we knew Barry Bonds cheated to get there.

"Will our first trillion-dollar fortune also be tainted by misdeeds of the achiever? Could that be what finally wakes us from our slumber?"

In 2020, with Americans dying in large numbers from the pandemic, Bezos had become to billionaire wealth hoarding what Barry Bonds had become to home run records. As noted by *USA Today*, the reporting on Bezos becoming the first trillionaire occurred when Amazon workers were publicly protesting over safety issues.

Which caused the appropriate response to his predicted trillionaire status – anger – at least on Twitter. One tweet noted: "Jeff Bezos will some time in the near future have more money than the Netherlands.

Totally normal. Nothing out of order here." Another considered a headline announcing Bezos' impending trillionaire status the most "disgusting and disturbing" he'd seen.

The reaction to trillionaire talk three years ago, unfortunately, may have been an anomaly, not the turning point I hoped it would be.

A case in point: The Motley Fool, a financial and investing advice company, has recently been promoting investment in a corporation it suggests could be as large as 17 Amazons, with a market capitalization of \$17-trillion, an accumulation that would create the world's first trillionaire.

The promotional material doesn't give the name of the corporation. To find it, you'd at least need to provide an email address, which would mean lots of unwanted promotional emails. Apparently, this corporation has technology that could supercharge artificial intelligence, or AI. But the identity of that corporation – or the founder who stands to become the first trillionaire – isn't the point here. After all, absent significant reform of America's tax policy, we will see our first trillionaire, probably not much more than a decade from now.

Worse, too many folks may think that would be a good thing. In its promotional ad, Motley Fool gushes over how excited the prospect of a \$17-trillion corporation headed by a trillionaire has investors, as if the super rich becoming richer rates as a good thing in and of itself.

Most troubling: Motley Fool is using the prospect of someone achieving a net worth over \$1-trillion as a selling point. This sort of advertising works because we have millions of investors out there who emulate the billionaire class.

Which brings us back to tax policy. Halting, then reversing, the obscene concentration of wealth in America will require Americans in overwhelming numbers demanding real tax reform. Without that tax reform, the concentration of wealth will worsen and, before we know it, we'll see the arrival of our first trillionaire. And as our concentration of wealth worsens, the political power of billionaires will only continue to increase.

We'll never have the collective mentality, as a nation, to take on the ultra-rich if millions of Americans identify with them and see the chase to become the first trillionaire the same way they see a football team's pursuit of an undefeated season. We see this same identification in the response of everyday Americans to estate tax reform. In large numbers, many Americans oppose the estate tax because they think it will apply to them one day.

To be sure, many Americans do understand the perils of concentrated wealth. But to make real progress on tax reform, we need more than a bare majority of Americans opposing extreme wealth concentration and supporting higher taxation of the rich. We need to reach the point where for every average American citizen who sees billionaires as role models, another ten see them as the wealth hoarders they are. Which means we should be fearing, not cheering, the prospect of an American trillionaire. **CT**

**Bob Lord**, a veteran tax attorney, is an Institute for Policy Studies associate fellow, and is currently serving as a senior advisor on tax policy for [www.patrioticmillionaires.org](http://www.patrioticmillionaires.org).



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# INSIGHTS

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Aisidare Hickson / Flickr



This woman was one of several arrested in Trafalgar Square in November 2022 for peacefully resisting the government's inaction on the climate and cost of living crisis. She had been sitting on the road during a "Just Stop Oil" demo holding a placard declaring "We will not pay for greed."

George Monbiot

## PUNISHMENT WITHOUT TRIAL IN THE UK

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Apparently, it's not enough for the police to be given powers to shut down any protest they choose. It's not enough for peaceful protesters to face 10 years in prison for seeking to defend the living planet, or to be deprived of the right to explain their actions to a jury. Now they are also being pursued through another means altogether: the civil courts. And the penalties imposed in these cases, with or without trial, legal aid or presumption of innocence, can be much greater.

The law in England and Wales permits corporations and government bodies to create their own system of punishment. The tool it

grants them is a simple one, with massive, complex and ever-ramifying consequences. It's called the civil injunction.

A corporation might apply to a court for an interim injunction. In doing so, it doesn't need to prove any claims it makes. It can name not only people who have protested against it, but anyone it feels inclined to name. Papers are then served on the named people, who have an opportunity to contest the injunction. If, as is often the case, they don't understand the implications, they are likely to miss their chance. In any case, there is no legal aid, so people without knowledge of the law must defend them-

selves against companies using the best lawyers money can buy. Sometimes the final injunction is granted by a court within days; sometimes it can take years. In either case, the interim measure applies until the final injunction is granted.

These injunctions can be used to prevent any protest by the people they name at or around company property. If you break one, the corporation can apply for an "order of committal." Again, there's no legal aid and no jury. If the court finds you in breach, you can be deemed guilty of contempt, facing up to two years in prison, an unlimited fine and potential confiscation of your assets. This is on top of any penalties incurred under criminal law for the same action. In other words, you can face double jeopardy: two prosecutions for the same offence.

But this is not the worst of it. National Highways Ltd, a company owned by the government, is using a new strategy: passing on the costs of obtaining its injunctions to the people named in them. Once a company has obtained a costs order from the court, it can force the people it names to pay the fees charged by its lawyers. Yes, even if you have adhered to the terms of the injunction, you are charged simply for being named. If you cannot pay, bailiffs might come to your home and confiscate your property.

The people I've spoken to, who have been enjoined by National Highways, say they have each been charged £1,500 for its legal fees, and are expecting further bills, which they believe could amount to £5,000 a head.

National Highways tells me, "Cost orders are at the discretion of the court ... National Highways takes seriously its duty to manage public

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# INSIGHTS

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money and to recover for the benefit of the public purse any sum which the court orders is due to be paid to National Highways.”

Some of the people it names also feature on injunctions taken out by other organisations, either because, as dedicated campaigners, they’ve protested in several places, or because they’re “the kind of people” who might. Transport for London, which has taken out injunctions against campaigners with Just Stop Oil and Insulate Britain, tells me it has also obtained a costs order. Knowing how successful legal strategies spread like wildfire, environmental campaigners fear they could now face costs from multiple claimants, for having the temerity to oppose the destruction of the habitable planet.

Some companies expecting to obtain a costs order may have little incentive to limit their expenses. Quite the opposite: for some, the costlier their lawyers, the greater the hit for those the injunction names. This is how the rich crush the poor.

An environmental campaigner named on several injunctions tells me she sees this tactic as “the way to wear us down.” If you are pushed into poverty by legal costs, “your life becomes incredibly difficult and you don’t have the time and opportunity to protest.” Another injunctioned protester told *Yorkshire Bylines*, “at least in criminal law if you’re found guilty you know what the penalty is. Here, we have absolutely no idea ... What’s the endpoint?” Another campaigner tells me, “many of us are feeling terrified and overwhelmed ... This has become an absolute fucking nightmare and we don’t know what to do about it.”

If companies decide they want to take you out, there is nothing to stop them from bombarding you with injunctions. Either you drown in paperwork as you apply to the courts to have your name removed, or you face the impossible and ever-growing costs of financing their lawyers.

The human rights barrister Adam Wagner tells me that while in criminal prosecutions people of limited means might have to pay only a small proportion of the prosecution’s costs, in these cases there’s no such protection. “The costs orders can be huge,” he says. They can “hang over people’s lives for years or even forever, stop them getting mortgages, loans etc. It’s pernicious.”

This is just one of three new injunction tactics being used against people seeking to defend our life support systems. Another is injunctions against “persons unknown,” meaning everyone. No one can contest such orders without having themselves named as a defendant and facing massive potential costs. Oil companies, among others,

are using these injunctions to stop all protests at their premises. This “persons unknown” instrument is being challenged before the supreme court by Friends of the Earth and others, who expect a ruling soon. The third tactic is a power in this year’s Public Order Act, enabling the government to bring civil proceedings against protesters: double jeopardy is now baked into the law.

These measures are a blatant injustice, a parallel legal system operating without the defences available in criminal law, that can inflict ruinous and open-ended costs. They amount to a system of private fines, to be levied at will and out of the blue against political opponents.

Perhaps you aren’t bothered. Perhaps you don’t care about activists. But this is an attack on you, too. It’s an attack on the democratic right to protest in which our freedoms are rooted. It’s an attack on the living world on which we all depend. **CT**

**George Monbiot** is a *Guardian* columnist. His website is [www.monbiot.com](http://www.monbiot.com).

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Manolo De Los Santos & Kate Gonzales

## A SCARY BEDTIME STORY ABOUT CUBA AND CHINA

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**O**n June 8, the US media added to its long storybook of tales to scare people away from normal relations with Cuba. The *Wall Street Journal* published an article on that day claiming that China has plans to set up a

“spy base” in Cuba, to “eavesdrop” on the United States and “identify potential strike targets.” *WSJ* has already published two more pieces since rapidly ramping up its narrative against the Cuban state and fermenting more paranoia as the news



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spreads across mainstream news outlets in the United States.

Meanwhile, Cuban officials held a press conference on June 8 to deny the allegations. Cuba's Vice Foreign Minister Carlos de Cossío stated that "All these are fallacies promoted with the deceitful intention of justifying the unprecedented tightening of the blockade, destabilisation, and aggression against Cuba and of deceiving public opinion in the United States and the world."

Even John Kirby, National Security Council spokesman who was the former press secretary for the Pentagon, has denied the *WSJ* report, calling it "inaccurate."

This is just another addition to the long legacy of lies that the United States has been spinning in an attempt to further alienate the Cuban people. One just has to remember the "Havana syndrome" that mysteriously affected diplomats in Cuba; it was first blamed on foreign powers as an attack but was later revealed to have no basis. Or maybe the claims about 20,000 Cuban soldiers supposedly based in Venezuela to maintain the government there, when in reality, the vast majority of Cubans present in Venezuela were medical workers. Or perhaps the idea that Cuban doctors sent across the world are enslaved, when it is simply their understanding that their duty to humanity is to provide health care to those who need it. All of these lies have been told just in the past few years alone.

These falsified stories all swirl into fomenting the atmosphere of paranoia and suspicion that prevents normal US-Cuba relations. In the wake of the Havana syndrome myth, Trump was able to interrupt the path Obama set toward nor-

malisation, setting 243 additional and comprehensive sanctions, and further preventing the island from meeting its basic needs. The United States continues to live out its Cold War fantasies through these lies, at the cost of the Cuban people's lives and well-being.

And yet, it maintains its hypocrisy. Cossío was careful to point out that Cuba would never allow a foreign military base on their island, as it is a signatory of the Declara-



Cuba's Vice Foreign Minister Carlos de Cossío

tion of Latin America and the Caribbean as a Zone of Peace. Cuba is also currently sponsoring and hosting peace talks between Colombia and the National Liberation Army (ELN). They have also agreed to a ceasefire, ending decades of violence in the country. Cuba already suffers from the illegal US occupation of Guantanamo, to further rub salt in the wound. The United States has its infamous military base there, which is known for the inhumane treatment and torture it deals out to its prisoners. While it accuses China of military expansion, the US has hundreds of mili-

tary bases all over the globe.

Cuba has demonstrated that it desires peace in the region, and normal relations with its neighbour, the United States. But the US refuses to accept this proposal. Instead, it maintains the most comprehensive sanctions in history against the small island. It falsely places Cuba on the state sponsors of terrorism list, even though it is in fact a sponsor of peace. Instead, the US government and its media apparatuses choose to fabricate myths and legends, painting Cuba as the evil monster under the bed. It chooses to scare the US people away from the possibility that ending the blockade against Cuba could be good for people from both countries. **CT**

**Manolo De Los Santos** is the co-executive director of the People's Forum and is a researcher at *Tricontinental: Institute for Social Research*. He co-edited, most recently, *Viviremos: Venezuela vs. Hybrid War* (LeftWord Books/1804 Books, 2020) and *Comrade of the Revolution: Selected Speeches of Fidel Castro* (LeftWord Books/1804 Books, 2021). He is a co-coordinator of the People's Summit for Democracy.

**Kate Gonzales** is the editorial coordinator at 1804 Books. Born and raised in New York City, she has worked in development and education for arts and political organisations, and organised with grassroots movements in Hungary and New Jersey. Kate studied anthropology at Bard College, where she wrote her thesis on *Filipino migrant nationalism*.

This article was produced by *Globetrotter*

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# INSIGHTS

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Sam Pizzigati

## DEFENSE COMPANY BOSSES RAKE IN THE CASH

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**D**oes anyone have a sweeter deal than military contractor CEOs?

The United States spent more last year on defense than the next 10 nations combined. A deal just brokered by the White House and House Republicans increases that amount even further – to \$886-billion. Defense contractors will pocket about half of that.

Just eight years ago, the national defense community made do with over \$300-billion less. But making do with “less” doesn’t come easy to corporate titans like Dave Calhoun, the CEO at Boeing, the nation’s second-largest defense contractor.

In March, Boeing’s annual filings revealed that Calhoun had missed his CEO performance targets and would not be receiving a \$7-million bonus. As a result, Calhoun had to be content with a mere \$22.5-million in 2022 – but to sweeten the deal, the Boeing board granted their CEO an extra stack of shares worth some \$15-million at today’s value.

The Government Accountability Office may have had incidents just like that in mind when it urged the Pentagon to “comprehensively assess” its contract financing arrangements a few years ago.

This past April, the Department of Defense finally attempted to do it.

“In aggregate,” its report concludes, “the defense industry is financially healthy, and its financial health has improved over time.” But despite “increased profit and cash flow,” the DoD found, corporate contractors have chosen “to reduce the overall share of revenue” they spend on R&D.

Instead, they’re “significantly in-



**Flying high:** Bosses at US arms manufacturers are getting outrageous bonuses on the back of soaring weapons making.

creasing the share of revenue paid to shareholders in cash dividends and share buybacks.” Those dividends and buybacks have jumped by an astounding 73 percent!

Contractor CEOs have been lining their pockets accordingly.

In 2021, the most recent year with complete stats, the nation’s top five weapons makers – Lockheed Martin, Boeing, Raytheon, General Dy-

namics, and Northrop Grumman – grabbed over \$116-billion in Pentagon contracts and paid their top executives \$287-million, Pentagon-watcher William Hartung noted this past December.

Taxpayers subsidise these more-than-ample paychecks. Corporate giants like Boeing and Raytheon depend on government contracts for about half the dollars they rake in. For Lockheed Martin, General Dynamics, and Northrop Grumman, it’s at least 70 percent.

“Huge CEO compensation,” Hartung observes, “does nothing to advance the defense of the United States and everything to enrich a small number of individuals.”

Even before Biden and Republicans agreed to

increase spending, the National Priorities Project at the Institute for Policy Studies (IPS) calculated the “militarised portion” of the federal budget at 62 percent of all discretionary spending.

**W**e have precious little to show for this enormous expenditure.

“The post-9/11 ‘war on terror,’ for example, has cost more than \$8-trillion and contributed to a horrific death toll of 4.5-million people in affected regions,” the IPS report notes. “Meanwhile, a US military budget that outpaces Russia’s by more than 10 to 1 has failed to prevent or end the Russian war in Ukraine.”

So what can we do? The IPS analysts advocate reducing the national military budget by at least \$100-billion and reinvesting the savings in social programs.

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# INSIGHTS

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Progressive members of Congress, meanwhile, have also been pushing for a major change in contracting standards. Rep. Jan Schakowsky's "Patriotic Corporations Act" would give companies with smaller pay gaps between their CEOs and workers a leg up in the bidding for federal defense contracts.

Or we could go the FDR route. In the year after Pearl Harbor, FDR issued an order limiting top corporate executive pay to \$25,000 after taxes – a move Roosevelt said was needed "to correct gross inequities and to provide for greater equality

in contributing to the war effort."

By the war's end, America's wealthy were paying federal taxes on income over \$200,000 at a 94 percent rate. That top rate hovered around 90 percent for the next two decades and helped give birth to the first mass middle class the world had ever seen.

Miracles can happen. **CT**

**Sam Pizzigati** co-edits *Inequality.org* at the Institute for Policy Studies. His books include *The Case for a Maximum Wage* and *The Rich Don't Always Win*. This op-ed was distributed by *OtherWords.org*.

prose from the previous one.

I'm currently working on a book that's tentatively titled *How Cormac Works: McCarthy, Language, and Style*. In it, I trace McCarthy's career-long commitment to playing with style, particularly his approach to narration and his techniques for conveying a mood.

**D**epending on the book – and even passages within certain books – McCarthy's writing can be characterised as minimalistic, meandering, esoteric, humorous, terrifying, pretentious, sentimental or folksy.

Some novels depend heavily on dense passages of narrative exposition and philosophising, while others lean heavily on everyday dialogue. Some books celebrate regional voices and vernacular, and others adopt a neutral, removed and clinical tone.

It is possible to see McCarthy's literary range and stylistic experimentation in two of his most famous novels, *Blood Meridian*, which came out in 1985, and *The Road*, which was published over two decades later, in 2006, and was turned into a movie in 2009.

In *Blood Meridian*, set in the de-

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Bill Hardwig

## CORMAC MCCARTHY'S FEARLESS WRITING

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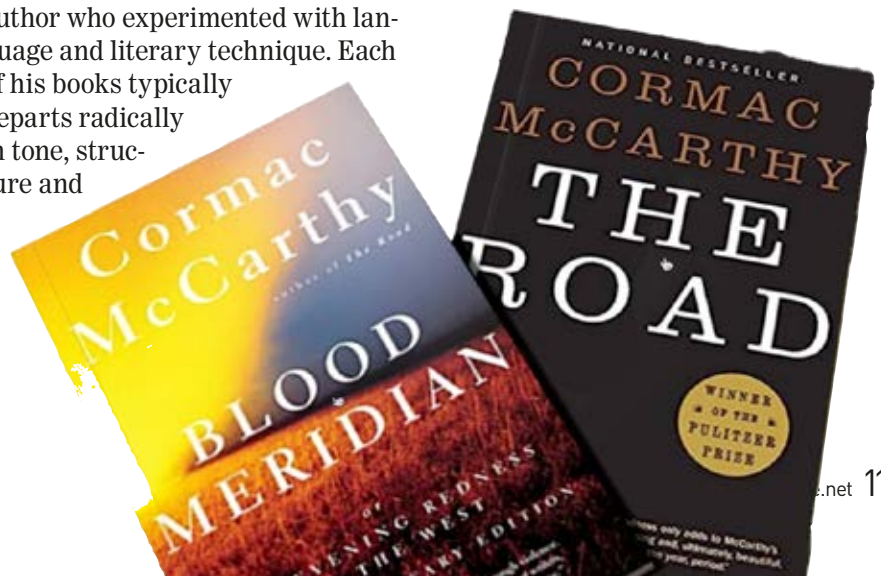
**C**ormac McCarthy, who died on June 13, at the age of 89, is often characterised rather narrowly as a Southern writer, or perhaps a Southern Gothic writer.

McCarthy did lean heavily on his Tennessee upbringing in his first four novels, and he set many others in the deserts of the Southwest US. However, as a writer, he saw himself as a part of an expansive literary community, one that stretched back to the classical and Elizabethan periods, and one that drew on a variety of genres, cultures and influences.

His unique and varying writing style has been compared with that of many of the greatest authors of American letters, with scholars

highlighting connections to the writings of Herman Melville, Ernest Hemingway, James Joyce, Toni Morrison, Thomas Pynchon, Fyodor Dostoevsky, Flannery O'Connor and William Faulkner.

As such an unwieldy list of compatriots suggests, McCarthy is an author who experimented with language and literary technique. Each of his books typically departs radically in tone, structure and





# INSIGHTS

sert of the Southwest US and Mexico, McCarthy's prose is dense, with details piling up one after another.

Take the famous scene in which a mercenary gang of American scalp hunters encounters a band of Comanche warriors:

"A legion of horribles, hundreds in number, half naked or clad in costumes attic or biblical or wardrobed out of a fevered dream with the skins of animals and silk finery and pieces of uniform still tracked with the blood of prior owners, coats of slain dragoons, frogged and braided cavalry jackets, one in a stovepipe hat and one with an umbrella and one in white stockings and a blood-stained wedding veil and some in headgear or cranefeathers or rawhide helmets that bore the horns of bull or buffalo and one in a pigeon-tailed coat worn backwards and

otherwise naked and one in the armor of a Spanish conquistador. ..."

The entire sentence is much too long to quote here. But you get the picture: There is very little punctuation and there are few places to even take a breath.

The narration in other moments of the novel catalogs the desert landscape of the US West in similarly painstaking and tedious – if also beautiful – detail. The prose feels drawn out, slow and repetitive, like the subject of the novel: the United States' western expansion in the 19th century, a campaign of escalating destruction that McCarthy characterises in the novel as "some heliotropic plague."

*The Road*, a later novel similarly committed to the idea of incessant

movement, could not be more different in its style, pacing and rhythm. The prose in that novel, which won the 2007 Pulitzer Prize for fiction, is concise and is marked by a linguistic restraint that's entirely absent in *Blood Meridian*.

Rather than dense and overwhelming passages, this novel is constructed of short and distinct paragraphs that are separated by white space and often unrelated to what comes directly before or after:

"It was colder. Nothing moved in that night world. A rich smell of woodsmoke hung over the road. He pushed the cart on through the snow. ...

"In his dream she was sick and he cared for her. The dream bore the look of sacrifice but he thought differently. ...

"On this road there are no godspoke men. They are gone and I am left and they have taken with them the world. Query: How does the never to be differ from what never was?

Dark of invisible moon. The nights now only slightly less black.

...

"People sitting on the sidewalk in the dawn half immolate and smoking in their clothes. Like failed sectarian suicides. ..."

Each paragraph in this passage is different in tone, subject matter, place, and time from what comes before and appears after.

It might be tempting to see such difference as an evolution, as McCarthy honing and taming his narrative voice from his earlier work. But his final long novel, *The Passenger*, which was published in 2022, returns again to the rambling prose reminiscent of McCarthy's big novels in the middle of his career, *Suttree* and *Blood Meridian*.

Some readers find McCarthy's

## HURWITT'S EYE

Mark Hurwitt



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# INSIGHTS

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stylistic flourishes and experimentation excessive – or, even worse, pretentious. But they always struck me as reflecting his love of words and the endless possibilities of language.

In a blurb that was originally written for McCarthy’s first novel, *The Orchard Keeper*, Ralph Ellison wrote, “McCarthy is a writer to be read, to be admired, and quite honestly – envied.”

As I learned of McCarthy’s death, I

couldn’t help but think of this quote that marked the beginning of his career, and to think how right Ellison was to champion McCarthy’s craft – the careful use of language that sustained his work for six decades across 12 novels. **CT**

*Bill Hardwig is Associate Professor of English, University of Tennessee. This article first appeared at [www.theconversation.com](http://www.theconversation.com).*

tough to grow old.” In the words of a blisteringly honest friend: “You know how they call them ‘the golden years’? Well, they suck.” Clearly, Biden is showing signs of his advanced age. Especially troubling is the apparent decline in his mental acuity. He occasionally looks confused and lost on stage. He tries his best to cover for this, even breaking into a hop or trot to try to show his vigour, but, honestly, he shouldn’t be running for president and another four-year term.

“Whose finger do you want on the nuclear button?” is a question that comes up during presidential elections. I can’t say I trust Joe Biden. Neither do I trust Donald Trump. (Trump’s personal problems are an entirely different story.)

The “choice” of Biden versus Trump is no choice at all. Both are untrustworthy. And if, yet again, those are America’s two leading candidates, we should all recognize how far mighty America has truly fallen. **CT**

*WJ Astore is a retired air force lieutenant colonel, professor of history, and senior fellow at the Eisenhower Media Network. He runs the Bracing Views blog at [www.bracingviews.org](http://www.bracingviews.org).*



JFK said we could put a man on the Moon, and we did. Biden says we can build a railroad from the Pacific across the Indian Ocean – a noble goal!

WJ Astore

## BIDEN: OFF THE RAILS AND OFF THE MAP

Recently, Joe Biden went off script at a gun safety event in Connecticut, concluding his speech by saying, “God save the queen, man.” He also recently boasted of building a railroad from the Pacific to the Indian Ocean, among other verbal slips.

I’m not making fun of Joe Biden.

I just want to restate what the consensus used to be: that being President of the United States is extremely demanding. It requires physical stamina and, even more importantly, mental acuity and clarity.

Biden is 80 years old. In the words of my dad, who lived to be 86, “It’s

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Michael Gould-Wartofsky

# AMERICAN INQUISITION

Field notes from the frontlines  
of the US government's war on the left

*"There must be some kind of way  
out of here..."*

**A**s night fell over the South River Forest, the music festival was in full swing. Young and old swayed to the sounds of Suede Cassidy. Families gathered around the grill. Little ones frolicked in an inflatable bouncy house bedecked with a banner that read: "Stop Cop City."

While the band played on, a strike force of Georgia state troopers assembled in the shadows. They were there to clear the way for the creation of the Atlanta Public Safety Training Center, better known as "Cop City," a \$90-million training ground for the future of urban warfare. It would destroy more than half of that urban forest. For years, the project had faced mounting local opposition and this festival was, in essence, a coming-out party for the movement to defend a priceless bit of urban green space from the bulldozer's blade.

Now, accompanied by the dull hum of drones and the buzz of helicopters overhead, officers of the "peace" descended from all directions, their fingers on the triggers of their semi-automatics. The orders came down with the force of live rounds: "Get on the ground! Now!"

"I was playing *All Along the Watchtower*, funnily enough," re-

members Suede Cassidy frontman Jeremiah Percival. "Around half-way through our set, they started arresting people... pointing AR-15s... traumatising kids for nothing. It was very stormtrooperesque. It's a good reminder to know how fascism is in this country and how it's very much alive."

"It was after dark," recalls Stop Cop City activist Priscilla Grim. "I was walking to see the concert. And I noticed that there was a drone tracking me. And the next thing I knew, men started chasing me, and I fell. They had me turn over on my stomach. And there was the red light of the gunsight to the right of my head. It was... frightening!"

Priscilla and 22 other protesters nabbed that night would go on to be charged with "domestic terrorism" – conduct allegedly "intended to intimidate the civilian population" or to "alter, change, or coerce the policy of the government of this state" – under a Georgia statute originally meant to deter would-be killers in the wake of the Charleston AME massacre. "I was completely shocked when I heard that I was being charged with domestic terrorism," Priscilla told me. "For wearing black! In a forest! It's absurd. It's illegitimate. It's an abuse... And as a survivor of 9/11, I am insulted that the state of Georgia thinks that they can do this."

Today, no fewer than 42 such cas-



es are being prosecuted by Georgia's attorney general. All 42 defendants stand accused of damaging property, not people. The only injuries that occurred were by police and correctional officers on the bodies of the accused. Some were then held for a month or more before being formally charged with a crime.

**G**eorgia is hardly alone. The New York City Police Department recently attempted to charge multiple protesters with "terrorism" after they peacefully occupied a subway station to protest the choking to death of Jordan Neely, an unhoused New Yorker, by an ex-Marine.

In an absurd turn of events, the





Derek Simeone

Seattle Police Department officers arrest a protestor during a march on Capitol Hill. Taken during the George Floyd protests.

charges were ultimately downgraded from “terrorism” to “criminal trespassing” before being dropped altogether.

And across the country, such police work continues under the guise of counterterrorism. Since the George Floyd movement, it’s been possible to see the makings of a future American inquisition in which the machinery of state is increasingly weaponised against the body politic itself – especially against its most leftwing, most marginalised parts.

Though the fanatics of the far right have been responsible for the preponderance of deadly political violence in recent years, it’s the heretics of the left – antiracists and antifascists, environmentalists and

anticapitalists, pro-choice feminists and LGBTQ+ liberationists – who have attracted the most attention from police, prosecutors, and inquisitorial politicians.

It is they who have been profiled as “domestic terrorists,” branded as “violent extremists,” and subjected to terrorism-based sentencing enhancements, often yielding harsher prison terms and crueller punishments than those for their right-wing counterparts. As a result of such disparities, hundreds of participants in the George Floyd protests remain caged in federal facilities to this day.

On May 31, 2020, just days after George Floyd’s murder, President Trump’s Department of Justice (DOJ) all but declared war on

the burgeoning racial-justice movement. Attorney General William P. Barr went before the press and promised to deploy federal forces to apprehend “radical agitators,” identify “criminal organisers and instigators,” and “coordinate” with “our state and local partners.”

“The rioting is domestic terrorism,” Barr went on to state, “and will be treated accordingly.”

Acting Deputy Secretary of Homeland Security (DHS) Ken Cuccinelli had a nearly identical message for the media: “Cities across America burn at the hands of antifa and anarchists while many political leaders are refusing to call it what it is: domestic terrorism.” A DHS whistleblower later affirmed that Cuccinelli and others had specifically instructed him to play up “the prominence of violent ‘left-wing’ groups” in his intelligence assessments – and downplay threats of terror from the far right.

And so began a long, hot summer of inquisition into, and counterinsurgency against, the Black Lives Matter movement. By the second week of June, more than 13,643 protest participants had been arrested by state and local authorities. Some, like a group of three teens in Oklahoma City, even faced charges of felony “terrorism” for alleged acts of property destruction.

By the time the protests were over, 326 people had been apprehended by federal agents, including members of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms, and the Department of Homeland Security’s Border Patrol Tactical Unit (BORTAC). At least 54 US Attorneys’ offices were involved, as were all 56 of the FBI’s Joint Terrorism Task Forces.

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In May 2023, new reporting on FBI activities would reveal that the agency had improperly run “batch queries” of foreign intelligence sources for information on 133 individuals, all of whom were arrested “in connection with civil unrest and protests” in 2020. They were looking for “counter-terrorism derogatory information on the arrestees.” According to recently declassified documents from the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Court, they were also spying on American citizens without “any specific potential connections to terrorist-related activity.”

In 20 of the cases prosecuted at the federal level, there is evidence of direct involvement by FBI agents in the arrests themselves. And in two particularly egregious cases, US Marshals and their deputies functionally acted as judges, juries, and executioners, with “Violent Offender Task Forces” fatally shooting two suspects – antifascist activist Michael Reinoehl in Washington and Black Lives Matter advocate Winston Smith in Minnesota – on sight.

Until January 6, 2021, the supposed danger posed by left-wing “extremism” continued to be deemed greater than, or at least equal to, the threat of right-wing terrorism. No matter that the right had been responsible for the lion’s share of lethal incidents linked to extremism of any kind.

There were, of course, no terrorism bulletins released ahead of the events of January 6. Nor would there be terrorism enhancements after the fact awaiting those who participated in the Capitol siege. Such charges were reserved for Americans of a different description.

The inquisition did not end with Trump’s first term. For all the rhetoric about criminal justice reform

## In 20 of the cases prosecuted at the federal level, there is evidence of direct involvement by FBI agents in the arrests themselves

– and for all the conspiracy theories claiming that the president had “quietly” pardoned thousands of Black Lives Matter protesters in 2021 – Joe Biden’s Department of Justice has doubled down in a determined fashion on an inquisitorial strategy of counterinsurgency in the name of counterterrorism.

In the White House’s “National Strategy for Countering Domestic Terrorism,” released in June 2021, the administration pledged to “disrupt and deter those who launch... attacks in a misguided effort to force change in government policies that they view as unjust.” Subsequent documents, like last fall’s “Strategic Intelligence Assessment,” a joint product of the FBI and the DHS, confirmed what many in the Black Lives Matter movement already knew: that federal intelligence agencies had set their sights on “threat actors” motivated by “real or perceived racism or injustice in American society.”

Over the course of the Biden presidency, the DOJ has prosecuted Trump-era protest crimes with vigour and enthusiasm, while federal prosecutors have expanded the use of terrorism sentencing enhancements, delivering dozens of political prisoners to the doorstep of the Federal Bureau of Prisons. A grossly disproportionate share of them have been people of African descent.

The vast majority of federal cases involve offenses against property or “commerce.” At least 17 have faced

felony charges for unlawful use of the Internet (for instance, “using an instrument of interstate commerce to incite riots”). One of every three defendants was charged with obstructing “interstate commerce,” one in five with crimes of “civil disorder,” and another one in five for “conspiring,” “attempting,” or “aiding and abetting” some underlying crime they did not themselves commit.

Take the case of a young Black woman named Tia Pugh, of Mobile, Alabama, who was initially charged with two simple misdemeanours for breaking a window on the night of May 31, 2020.

“We were attacked first,” she would recall. “I was getting my people out of there... We get killed for less.” After being tracked down on Facebook, then interrogated by the FBI, she was brought up on felony charges for interfering with the police “during the commission of a civil disorder” which “adversely affected commerce.” Facing more than five years in prison, her sentence was reduced to time served after she spent more than a year in pre-trial detention in an Alabama jail.

Though many have seen their charges dropped, others have seen their cases pursued to the bitter end by local prosecutors. Black activist Brittany Martin was, for instance, convicted in 2022 of “breaching the peace” for shouting in officers’ faces during a peaceable assembly in Sumter, South Carolina, in 2020. Although the alleged offence typically carries a maximum penalty of 30 days, prosecutors charged her with a crime of a “high and aggravated nature.” Last spring, she was sentenced, while pregnant, to no fewer than four years behind bars.

By any measure, the white supremacist movement is now officially acknowledged to pose the deadliest terrorist threat in America. The White House, the DOJ, and the DHS



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have made much of their commitment to confronting such far-right forms of terror, but the numbers coming from the federal government tell a different story.

On June, the DOJ's Office of the Inspector General released its annual internal audit, assessing the Department's strategy to "address the domestic violent extremism threat." The audit revealed that investigations into white supremacist, "racially motivated," and "anti-government/anti-authority" activity fell dramatically from 2021 to 2022. At the same time, the number (and share) of investigations involving "abortion-related" (including "pro-choice") extremism skyrocketed, increasing by more than 800 percent and surpassing that recorded in any other year on record.

There is little mystery as to who is being targeted by such investigations since the *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health* decision, which revoked a pregnant parent's right to choose. Last year, FBI Director Christopher Wray clarified which side was the most suspect and which side considered the most victimised: "You might be interested to know that, since the Dobbs decision, probably in the neighbourhood of 70 percent of our abortion-related violence cases, are cases of violence or threats against pro-life... where the victims are pro-life organisations. And we're going after that."

The case of Pilsen Community Books (PCB), a worker-owned bookstore on Chicago's Lower West Side, is illuminating in this regard. PCB was recently revealed to be the subject of an FBI "assessment," based on three factors: its status as a "not police friendly place"; its role as a "meeting, planning, and networking venue"; and its recent use by "pro-abortion extremists...to prepare for a pro-abortion direct action." In other words, it's a dangerous hotbed of constitutionally protected activity.

## If Black Lives Matter and the movement for bodily autonomy are any indication, it may be that we have a lower tolerance for state terror than we once did

"Everything is very much out there in terms of what we believe and what we do," says worker-owner Mandy Medley. "I was shocked that the FBI would be interested in us this way... Community organising is not illegal and should not be treated as such."

Elsewhere, the Department of Homeland Security and its national network of 80 "fusion centres" have been hard at work collecting and aggregating data on "anarchist" or "environmental violent extremists." And they've cast a wide net, even ensnaring writers and artists in their web of surveillance.

Meanwhile, back in Washington, DC, inquisitorially-minded Republican politicians have been pressuring the FBI and DHS to crack down ever harder on their ideological adversaries. Last month, Marjorie Taylor Greene (R-GA) introduced legislation that would designate "Antifa," and "any other affiliated group or subsidiary of Antifa" to be a domestic terrorist organisation based on its "unlawful conduct" and its belief in "communism, anarchism, socialism... and lawlessness." That same month, the House Committee on Homeland Security held a hearing on "Countering Left-Wing Organized Violence," at which Greene called for a clampdown on the newest enemy of the state: "The movement that wants to use trans terrorism against Americans." No men-

tion was made of the very real movement that approves of the use of terror against trans Americans.

One such trans American was Manuel Terán, an indigenous forest defender known as Tortuguita, who was killed by a barrage of 57 bullets one cold January day in that Atlanta forest. While it was a state trooper who fired the fatal bullet, it was DHS, the FBI, and the Georgia Bureau of Investigation that provided the intelligence for the operation. In the months since Tortuguita's killing, those very agencies have continued to beat the drums of war, warning of the threat of "violent extremists in Georgia" and singling out those motivated by "anti-law enforcement sentiment."

It may be that this latest American inquisition has simply come full circle, returning us to our historical roots: to a society where the caging of Black people, the spilling of indigenous blood, and the violent policing of the body politic are the stuff of business as usual – a society where state terror, in the name of counter-terrorism, is accepted as a way of life.

On the other hand, if Black Lives Matter and the movement for bodily autonomy are any indication, it may be that we, as a society, have a lower tolerance for state terror than we once did. **CT**

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Philip Kraske

# US FOREIGN POLICY: THE BEAUTY OF BEING UNBOUND

Silences filled with a consensus of propaganda contaminate almost everything we read, see and hear. War by media is now a key task of mainstream journalism

**H**as there ever been a time like this in American foreign policy? The president is a foggy-headed grandpa, the public is hypnotised by accounts of a monstrous Putin, and best, most lovely, most delicious of all: nobody gripes about anything the administration does abroad.

Dissent has fled to the Internet, e-cheek by e-jowl with teenage influencers, tulip hobbyists, and Philip Kraske thrillers, there to do no harm. Way back when, Marshall McLuhan was right: the medium is indeed message. Yes, the high mandarins of foreign policy are on a roll. It's open bar, playground time, a frat party in high gear.

Embarrass China? They deserved it. Destroy the Nord Stream pipeline? Don't mind if we do. Arm Taiwan? Think of the sales! Shoot a couple of drones over the Kremlin? Well, let's let the Ukies give it a shot, and if anyone beefs about attempted assassination, we'll have the media label it a Russian false-flag op.

Lyndon Johnson and Richard Nixon must be turning green with envy in their tombs. No opposition! No chanting protesters! From the *Times*, *Journal* and *Post* not a word of criticism – quite the contra-

ry. They're banging the drums for more, and when some outlying misfit leaks documents showing everyone in government knows Ukraine is going to lose, they help put him in the slammer.

They've had enough of Julian Assange and his dreary State Department cables. We're at war; this is no time to toss a monkey wrench into the works.

The Russians and Chinese watch all this with rising anxiety: it's easy to detect from their ever-more-strident statements. It's not that they aren't prepared or don't feel sufficiently armed; it's that the Americans are now unpredictable. Whatever position papers told world leaders in 2021 about what to expect from a Biden Administration, all of that has been tossed into the round file. Xi and Putin must improvise on the fly, parrying Washington's random thrusts.

**N**othing they say wrinkles Washington foreheads, nothing gets their attention: not threats, not fists banged the table, not reasoned positions about legitimate security concerns. Red lines laid down? To Americans they look a very pale pink

shading into green. China calls new American policy on Taiwan "absolutely intolerable"? The Americans hear "wardrobe malfunction." The top people in Russia and China must look at the unfolding drama of blithe recklessness and wonder if anything short of a nuclear strike will bring the Americans to deal seriously with them.

Yes, to Biden's team, consequences are for the little people. "Among America's most distinguishing features," writes Patrick Lawrence in his excellent book *Time No Longer*, [is the idea that] Europe was where history took place. America was immune to history's ravages. It was changeless." For that is the subtext of the administration's ever-bolder punches: at the end, those lovely oceans will halt nearly any foreign riposte, and what gets through our trillion-dollar military will dispatch. Besides, a war would take place either far across the Pacific or in Europe – but war there is so picturesque.

It is also the message they transmit to Americans, who hear about the distant gains and losses in Ukraine as if it were a baseball team having a mediocre season. To the odd informed citizen seriously troubled by developments, they listen in

the same inert way one waits for a traffic light to change.

Europeans are more uneasy about Ukraine, knowing in their bones how history can grab a people by the scruff of the neck and give them a good shaking. But even here dissent scarcely exists. Governments and opposition parties alike sympathise, sympathise deliriously, with Ukraine. For they know they'd damn well better.

As Australian blogger Caitlin Johnstone notes is the case with Australia in regard to China, politicians here fear America – its media, covert ops, and sanctions – more than they do Russia. In Brussels nobody mentions the Nord Stream matter, though inflation is rising and everyone knows why. The major media here follow the lead of the *New York Times* and repeat the clichés about Putin's sanity, his totally unprovoked war.

**A**bsent any dissent, Joe Biden's foreign-policy crew engages in an orgy of, to put it kindly, creativity. Is there a Robert McNamara anywhere among them, agonising over the these constant provocations of Russia and China? "His friends have recounted that a conscience-stricken McNamara would shut his office door and cry," recalls RFK, Jr., in his book *American Values*. Can you imagine Biden, Blinken, Sullivan, Nuland, Austin or Burns someday confessing to their hubris? The idea is laughable: they eagerly sacrifice Ukraine – and are working on Taiwan – in pursuit of their second American century. Their moral compass has no needle, their intelligence no common sense. Even Machiavelli would question the wisdom of slapping the faces of powerful – and allied – adversaries.

What will the Biden team try next? To slip Putin a mickey in his vodka? Arrest him at some international meeting and spirit him to the nearest American embassy? Force or shoot his plane down somewhere? Bomb Russian pipelines to China? Hit an oil refinery near a major city? Start a wave of terrorist bombings on the Moscow subway? Let loose another virus on either humans, pigs, or chickens?

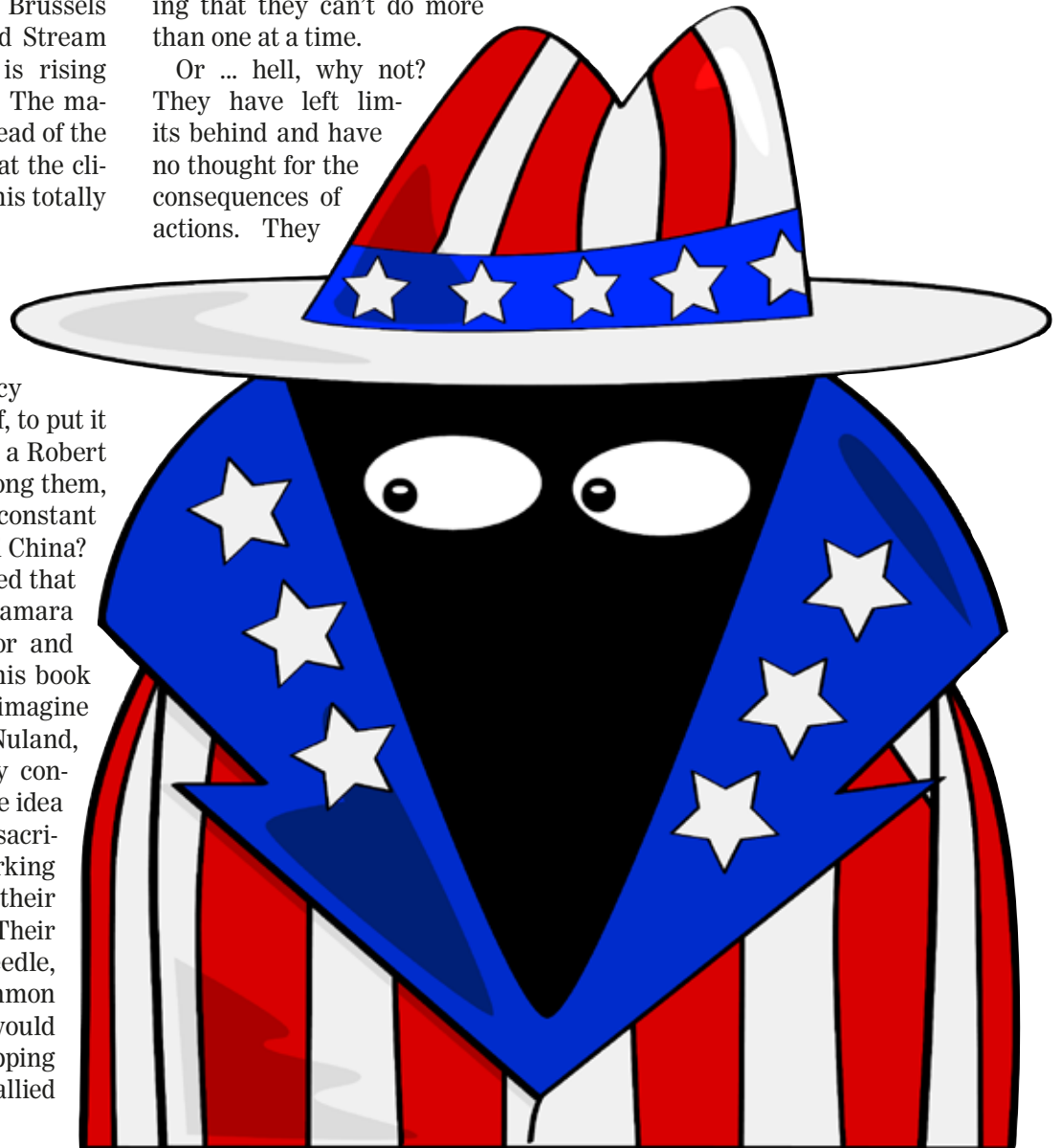
As the saying goes, "all the options are on the table," though this table may need a few extensions, and Biden's crew must drool over it as they browse, their only regret being that they can't do more than one at a time.

Or ... hell, why not? They have left limits behind and have no thought for the consequences of actions. They

are truly living that infamous quote attributed to Karl Rove: "We're an empire now, and when we act, we create our own reality."

The trouble is, one's own reality is just a story, a narrative, like their current one about how they are powerful enough to take whatever shots they want at other nuclear powers. Reality, however, is what streaks overhead at hypersonic speed. **CT**

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Jonathan Cook

# DANIEL ELLSBERG LAUDED BY SAME MEDIA THAT LETS ASSANGE ROT

The stark difference in treatment of the two truth-tellers is a measure of how state criminality is now completely unchecked

**R**ightly, there's been an outpouring of tributes to Daniel Ellsberg following the announcement of his death on June 16, aged 92. His leaking of the Pentagon Papers in 1971 revealed that Washington officials had systematically lied for decades about US military conduct in Vietnam.

The disclosure of 7,000 pages of documents, and subsequent legal battles to stop further publication by the *New York Times* and *Washington Post*, helped to bring the war to a close a few years later.

As an adviser to US Secretary of Defence Robert McNamara in the 1960s, Ellsberg had seen first-hand the Pentagon's brutal military operations that caused mass civilian casualties. Entire villages had been burned, while captured Vietnamese were tortured or executed. Deceptively, the US referred to these as "pacification programmes".

But most of those today loudly hailing Ellsberg as an "American hero" have been far more reluctant to champion the Ellsberg of our times: WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange.

For years, Assange has been rotting in a London high-security prison while the Biden administration

seeks his extradition on charges that ludicrously equate his publication of the Afghan and Iraq war logs – a modern Pentagon Papers – with "espionage".

Like Ellsberg, Assange exposed the way western states had been systematically lying while they perpetrated war crimes. Like Ellsberg, he was fraudulently labelled a threat to national security and charged with espionage. Like Ellsberg, if found guilty, he faces more than 100 years in jail. Like Ellsberg, Assange has learned that the US Congress is unwilling to exercise its powers to curb governmental abuses.

But unlike Ellsberg's case, the courts have consistently sided with Assange's persecutors, not with him for shining a light on state criminality. And, in a further contrast, the western media have stayed largely silent as the noose has tightened around Assange's neck.

**T**he similarities in Assange's and Ellsberg's deeds – and the stark differences in outcomes – are hard to ignore. The very journalists and publications now extolling Ellsberg for his historic act of bravery have been enabling, if only through years

of muteness, western capitals' moves to demonise Assange for his contemporary act of heroism.

The hypocrisy did not go unnoticed by Ellsberg. He was one of the noisiest defenders of Assange. So noisy, in fact, that most media outlets felt obliged in their obituaries to make reference to the fact, even if in passing.

Ellsberg testified on Assange's behalf at a London extradition hearing in 2020, observing that the pair's actions were identical. That was not entirely right, however.

Assange published classified documents passed to WikiLeaks by Chelsea Manning, just as the *New York Times* published the secrets handed to them by Ellsberg. Given that media freedoms are protected by the US First Amendment, whereas whistleblowing by an official is not, Assange's treatment is even more perverse and abusive than Ellsberg's.

In contrast to his case, Ellsberg added, the WikiLeaks founder could never receive a fair hearing in the US. His trial has already been assigned to a court in the eastern district of Virginia, home to the US intelligence agencies.

Late last year, as Assange's prospects of extradition to the US in-





creased, Ellsberg admitted that he had been secretly given a backup copy of the leaked Afghan and Iraq war logs, in case WikiLeaks was prevented from making public the details of US and UK criminality.

Ellsberg pointed out that his possession of the documents made him equally culpable with Assange under the justice department's draconian "espionage" charges. During a BBC interview, he demanded that he be indicted too.

If the praise being lavished on Ellsberg in death demonstrates anything, it is the degree to which the self-professed watchdogs of western state power have been tamed over subsequent decades into being the most docile of lapdogs.

In the Assange case, the courts and establishment media have clearly acted as adjuncts of power, not checks on it. And for that reason, if no other, western states are gaining greater and greater control over their citizenry in an age when mass digital surveillance is easier than ever.

For those reluctant to confer on Assange the praise being heaped on Ellsberg, it is worth remembering how similarly each was viewed by US officials in their respective eras.

Henry Kissinger, President Richard Nixon's national security adviser and then secretary of state, called Ellsberg the "most dangerous man in America."

Mike Pompeo, President Donald Trump's director of the Central Intelligence Agency, declared Assange and WikiLeaks a "non-state, hostile

intelligence service." Pompeo's CIA also secretly plotted ways to kidnap or assassinate Assange in London.

Both Ellsberg and Assange were illegally surveilled by government agencies.

In Ellsberg's case, Nixon's officials wiretapped his conversations and tried to dig up dirt by stealing files from his psychiatrist's office. The same team carried out the Watergate break-in, famously exposed by the US media, that ultimately brought Nixon down.

In Assange's case, the CIA spied on him day and night after he was given political asylum in the Ecuadorian embassy, even violating his privileged conversations with his lawyers. Astonishingly, this law-breaking has barely been remarked on by the media, even though it should have been grounds alone for

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throwing out the extradition case against him.

Nixon officials tried to rig Ellsberg's trial by offering the judge in his hearings the directorship of the Federal Bureau of Investigation.

In Assange's case, a series of judicial irregularities and apparent conflicts of interest have plagued the proceedings, again ignored by the establishment media.

In June, High Court judge Jonathan Swift rejected what may amount to a last-ditch attempt by Assange's legal team to halt his extradition. Swift's previous career was as a government lawyer. Looking back on his time there, he noted that his "favourite clients were the security and intelligence agencies."

But if the modern White House is as hostile to transparency as its predecessors – and armed with more secret tools to surveil critics than ever before – the media and the courts are offering far less remedy than they did in Ellsberg's time.

Even the Obama administration understood the dangers of targeting Assange. His relationship to Manning was no different from the *New York Times'* to Ellsberg. Each publicised state wrongdoing after classified documents were divulged to them by a disenchanted official.

Prosecuting Assange was seen as setting a precedent that could ensnare any publisher or media outlet that made public state secrets, however egregious the crimes being exposed. For that reason, Obama went full guns blazing against whistleblowers, locking up more of them than all his predecessors combined. Whistleblowers were denied any right to claim a public-interest defence. State secrecy was sacrosanct, even when it was being abused to shield evidence of criminality from public view.

Asked whether Obama would have pursued him through the courts, as Nixon did, Ellsberg an-

## Prosecuting Assange was seen as setting a precedent that could ensnare any publisher or media outlet that made public state secrets

swered: "I'm sure that President Obama would have sought a life sentence in my case."

It took a reckless Trump administration to go further, casting aside the long-standing legal distinction between an official who leaks classified documents in violation of their employment contract, and a publisher-journalist who exposes those documents in accordance with their duty to hold the powerful to account.

**N**ow Biden has chosen to follow Trump's lead by continuing Assange's show trial. The new presumption is that it is illegal for anyone – state official, media outlet, ordinary citizen – to disclose criminal activity by an all-powerful state.

In Assange's case, the White House is openly manoeuvring to win recognition for itself as official above the law.

In the circumstances, one might have assumed that the courts and media would be rallying to uphold basic democratic rights, such as a free press, and impose accountability on state officials shown to have broken the law.

In the 1970s, however imperfectly, the US media gradually unravelled the threads of the Watergate scandal till they exposed the unconstitutional behaviour of the Nixon administration. At the same time, the liberal press rallied behind Ellsberg, making common cause with him in

a fight to hold the executive branch to account.

Nixon's attorney general, John Mitchell, charged Ellsberg with espionage and accused the *New York Times* of the same. Claiming the paper had undermined national security, he threatened it with ruinous legal action. The *Times* ignored the threats and carried on publishing, forcing the justice department to obtain an injunction.

The courts, meanwhile, took the side of both Ellsberg and the media in their legal battles. In 1973, the federal court in Los Angeles threw out the case against Ellsberg before it could be put to a jury, accusing the government of gross misconduct and illegal evidence gathering against him.

Meanwhile, the Supreme Court prioritised freedom of the press, denying the government prior restraint. Ultimately, these cases and others forced Nixon from office in disgrace.

The contrast with Assange's treatment by the media and the courts could not be starker.

The media, even "liberal" outlets he worked with on the Afghan and Iraq logs, including the *New York Times* and the *Guardian*, have struggled to show even the most rudimentary kind of solidarity, preferring instead to distance themselves from him. They have largely conspired in US and UK efforts to suggest Assange is not a "proper journalist" and therefore does not deserve First Amendment protections.

These media outlets have effectively partnered with Washington in suggesting that their collaboration with Assange in no way implicates them in his supposed "crimes".

As a result, the media has barely bothered to cover his hearings or explain how the courts have twisted themselves into knots by ignoring the most glaring legal obstacles to

his extradition: such as the specific exclusion in the UK's 2007 Extradition Treaty with the US of extraditions for political cases.

Unlike Ellsberg, who became a cause celebre, Assange has been disappeared from public view by the states he exposed and largely forgotten by the media that should be championing his cause.

**E**llsberg emerged from his court victory over the Pentagon Papers to argue: "The demystification and desanctification of the president has begun. It's like the defrocking of the Wizard of Oz."

In this assessment, time has proved him sadly wrong, as he came to recognise. In recent months, Ellsberg had become an increasingly voluble critic of US conduct in the Ukraine war. He drew parallels with the lies told by four administrations – those of Truman, Eisenhower, Kennedy and Johnson – to hide the extent of Washington's involvement in Vietnam before the US went public with its ground war.

Ellsberg warned that the US was waging a similarly undeclared war in Ukraine – a proxy one, using Ukrainians as cannon fodder – to "weaken the Russians." As in Vi-

## Ellsberg understood the need for more whistleblowers to come forward to expose their states' crimes, and for a watchdog media to give their full backing

etnam, the White House was gradually and secretly escalating US involvement.

As also in Vietnam, western leaders were concealing the fact that the war had reached a stalemate, with the inevitable result that large numbers of Ukrainians and Russians were losing their lives in fruitless combat.

He called former British Prime Minister Boris Johnson's hidden, early role in stymying peace talks between Russia and Ukraine "a crime against humanity". Referring to history repeating itself, he observed: "It's an awakening that's in many ways painful."

Most of all, Ellsberg feared that the West's war machine – addicted to Cold War belligerence, obscured under the supposedly "defensive" umbrella of Nato – wanted once again to confront China.

In 2021, as the Biden administration intensified its hostile posturing towards Beijing, Ellsberg revealed that back in 1958 Eisenhower's officials had drawn up secret plans to attack China with nuclear weapons. That was during an earlier crisis over the Taiwan Strait.

"At this point, I'm much more aware of... how little has changed in these critical aspects of the danger of nuclear war, and how limited the effectiveness has been to curtail what we've done," he told an interviewer shortly before he died.

What Ellsberg understood most keenly was the desperate need – if humanity was to survive – both for more whistleblowers to come forward to expose their states' crimes, and for a tenacious, watchdog media to give their full backing.

Watching the media abandon Assange to his persecutors, Ellsberg could draw only one possible conclusion: that humanity's odds were shortening by the day. **CT**

*Jonathan Cook's 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). His web site is [www.jonathan-cook.net](http://www.jonathan-cook.net).*

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Vijay Prashad

# ISRAEL CANNOT REBUT APARTHEID

In late June, after visiting Palestine and Israel on behalf of a group formed by Nelson Mandela, two former senior UN officials – Ban Ki-moon and Mary Robinson – published a scathing report on their findings

**O**n June 24, Chief of Staff of the Israeli Defence Forces (IDF) Herzl Halevi, Chief of Shin Bet (intelligence) Ronen Bar and Police Commissioner Kobi Shabtai released a joint statement. They pointed to “violent attacks... by Israeli citizens against innocent Palestinians,” which they characterised as “nationalist terror in every sense.”

Such a statement is rare, particularly the description of the violence as “nationalist terror” and the rendering of Palestinian victims as “innocent.” Typically, high-ranking officials in the Israeli government portray such attacks as retaliation for terror attacks by Palestinians.

Three days before this statement, the US government said it had heard “troubling reports of extremist settler violence against Palestinian civilians.”

Settler groups – or, more accurately named, Israeli nationalist terrorist groups – have been running rampages across the West Bank alongside the Israeli armed forces, killing Palestinians at will to sow fear in this part of Palestine and urging further ethnic cleansing, euphemistically referred to as “demographic engineering.”

Israeli violence against Palestinians is not new, but it has been es-

calating rapidly. From January to May, the United Nations calculated that Israeli forces have killed 143 Palestinians (112 in the West Bank and 31 in Gaza) – more than twice the number of Palestinians killed in the same period last year. In 2022, 181 Palestinians were killed in total (151 in the West Bank and 30 in Gaza).

Meanwhile, UN agencies found 2022 was the sixth year of consecutive annual increases in settler attacks, which have been rising since 2006, after the Second Intifada was crushed by Israel.

**I**n 2009, the UN warned that 250,000 Palestinians in 83 communities in the West Bank “are at risk of heightened violence” from Israeli settlers. They called these “price tag” attacks because the settlers want to exact a high price from Palestinians for their existence in lands that Israelis call Judea and Samaria.

At a cabinet meeting on June 25, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu told his colleagues that he too found the “calls to grab land illegally and actions of grabbing land illegally” to be “unacceptable.” A close reading of Netanyahu’s statement to the Cabinet finds, however, that he did not differ with the poli-

cy of land grabs and demographic engineering.

The violent actions of the settlers, he said, “do not strengthen settlement – on the contrary, they hurt it. I say this as someone who doubled settlement in Judea and Samaria despite great and unprecedented international pressure to carry out withdrawals that I have not carried out and will not carry out.”

These settlements, which Netanyahu extols, are illegal according to international law. As recently as 2016, the UN Security Council voted for resolution 2334, which “condemn[s] all measures aimed at altering the demographic composition, character, and status of the Palestinian Territory occupied since 1967, including East Jerusalem, including, inter alia, the construction and expansion of settlements, transfer of Israeli settlers, confiscation of land, demolition of homes, and displacement of Palestinian civilians.”

Over the past few years, a suite of policies and actions by the Israeli government has raised the spectre of apartheid, the Afrikaans word meaning “the state of being apart.” This term has increasingly been used to describe the institutionalised discrimination of Palestinians by Israel within the 1948 lines of Israel, in the Occupied Palestinian Territory (the OPT, which is made



Tayseer Barakat, Palestine, "Shoreless Sea #11," 2019.

up of East Jerusalem, Gaza and the West Bank) from 1967, and exiled in the diaspora.

In 2017, the U.N.'s Economic and Social Commission of West Asia (ESCWA) published a strong report, *Israeli Practices towards the Palestinian People and the Question of Apartheid*. ESCWA's then leader, Rima Khalaf, said that Israel's apartheid regime works on two levels.

First, it fragments the Palestinian people (inside Israel, the OPT and the diaspora). Second, it oppresses Palestinians through "an array of laws, policies, and practices that ensure domination of them by a ra-

cial group and serve to maintain the regime."

The use of the word apartheid to describe Israel's treatment of Palestinians is now nearly ubiquitous. Amnesty International, for instance, published a 2022 report with a powerful title: *Israel's Apartheid against Palestinians: Cruel System of Domination and Crime against Humanity*. In a blunt conclusion, Amnesty wrote:

"Israel has perpetrated the international wrong of apartheid, as a human rights violation and a violation of public international law wherever it imposes this system. ... [A]lmost all of Israel's civilian administration and military authorities, as well as governmental and

quasigovernmental institutions, are involved in the enforcement of the system of apartheid against Palestinians across Israel and the OPT and against Palestinian refugees and their descendants outside the territory."

[CN: Former Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak said in 2010: "As long as in this territory west of the Jordan River there is only one political entity called Israel it is going to be either non-Jewish, or non-democratic. If this bloc of millions of Palestinians cannot vote, that will be an apartheid state."

Three years earlier, former Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert said, "If the day comes when the two-state solution collapses, and we face



a South African-style struggle for equal voting rights (also for the Palestinians in the territories), then, as soon as that happens, the State of Israel is finished.”]

**F**rom June 20 to 22, two former senior UN officials, Ban Ki-moon (former UN secretary-general) and Mary Robinson (former UN high commissioner for human rights and president of Ireland), visited Palestine and Israel. They went to the region on behalf of The Elders, a group formed by Nelson Mandela in 2007 to bring together former government staff and top officials from multilateral institutions to address the dilemmas of humanity.

When they left Tel Aviv, the two Elders published a scathing report on their visit.

Based on their conversations with human rights organisations and their own investigations, Ban and Robinson pointed to “ever-growing

## Ban Ki-moon and Mary Robinson pointed to “ever-growing evidence that the situation meets the international legal definition of apartheid”

evidence that the situation meets the international legal definition of apartheid.” When they discussed this evidence with Israeli officials, they “heard no detailed rebuttal of the evidence of apartheid.” The Government Guidelines for Netanyahu’s Cabinet, Ban and Robinson pointed out, “clearly show an intent to pursue permanent annexation rather than temporary occupation, based on Jewish supremacy. Measures include the transfer of administrative powers over the occupied West Bank from military to civilian authorities, accelerating the approval

processes for building settlements, and constructing new infrastructure that would render a future Palestinian state unviable.”

These are powerful words from senior officials who held two of the highest offices of the United Nations. **CT**

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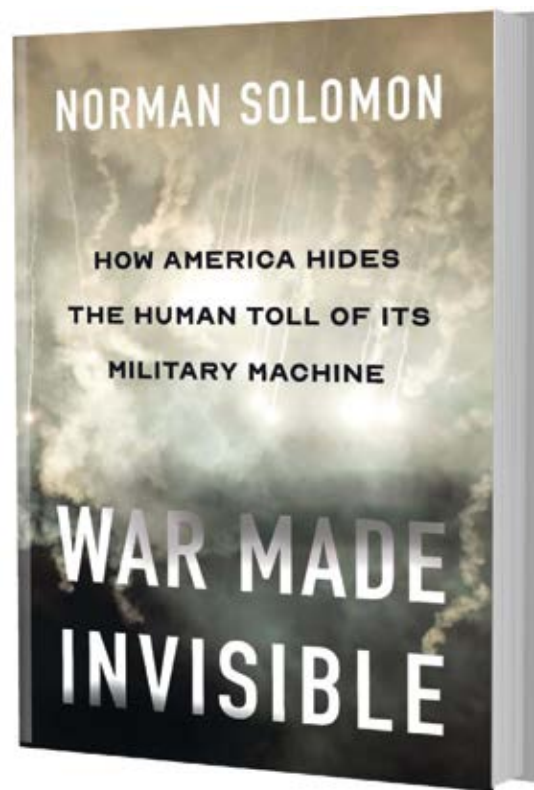
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John & Nisha Whitehead

# FBI CREATE CRIMINALS SO THEY CAN ARREST THEM

The US government isn't protecting Americans from threats to their freedoms.

The US government is creating those threats

*"Whoever fights monsters should see to it that in the process he does not become a monster."*

— Friedrich Nietzsche

**W**e're not dealing with a government that exists to serve its people, protect their liberties and ensure their happiness.

Rather, we are the unfortunate victims of the diabolical machinations of a make-works programme carried out on an epic scale whose only purpose is to keep the powers-that-be permanently (and profitably) employed.

Case in point: the FBI.

The US government's henchmen have become the embodiment of how power, once acquired, can be so easily corrupted and abused. Indeed, far from being tough on crime, FBI agents are also among the nation's most notorious lawbreakers.

Whether the FBI is planting undercover agents in churches, syna-

gogues and mosques; issuing fake emergency letters to gain access to Americans' phone records; using intimidation tactics to silence Americans who are critical of the government, or persuading impressionable individuals to plot acts of terror and then entrapping them, the overall impression of the nation's secret police force is that of a well-dressed thug, flexing its muscles and doing the boss' dirty work.

Clearly, this is not a government agency that appears to understand, let alone respect, the limits of the Constitution.

Indeed, this same government agency has a pattern and practice of entrapment that involves targeting vulnerable individuals, feeding them with the propaganda, know-how and weapons intended to turn them into terrorists, and then arresting them as part of an elaborately orchestrated counterterrorism sting.

Basically, it works like this: in order to justify their crime-fighting





superpowers, the FBI manufactures criminals by targeting vulnerable individuals and feeding them anti-government propaganda; then, undercover agents and informants equip the targeted individuals with the training and resources to challenge what they've been indoctrinated into believing is government corruption; and finally, the FBI arrests the targeted individuals for engaging in anti-government, terrorist activities.

This is what passes for the government's perverse idea of being tough on crime.

For example, undercover FBI agents pretending to be associated with ISIS have been accused of seeking out online and befriending a 16-year-old with brain development issues, persuading him to secretly send them small cash donations in the form of gift cards, and then the moment Mateo Ventura, turned 18, arresting him for providing financial support to an Islamic terrorist group.

If convicted, the teenager could spend up to 10 years in prison.

Yet as the *Intercept* explains, "the only 'terrorist' he is accused of ever being in contact with was an undercover FBI agent who befriended him online as a 16-year-old... This law enforcement tactic has been criticised by national security researchers who have scrutinised the FBI's role in manufacturing terrorism cases using vulnerable people who would have been unable to commit crimes without prolonged government assistance and encouragement... the Ventura case may indicate that authorities are still open to conjuring terrorists where none existed."

In another incident, the FBI used an undercover agent/informant to seek out and groom an impressionable

young man, cultivating his friendship, gaining his sympathy, stoking his outrage over injustices perpetrated by the US government, then enlisting his help to blow up the Herald Square subway station. Despite the fact that Shahawar Matin Siraj ultimately refused to plant a bomb at the train station, he was arrested for conspiring to do so at the urging of his FBI informant and used to bolster the government's track record in foiling terrorist plots. Of course, no mention was made of the part the government played in fabricating the plot, recruiting a would-be bomber, and setting him up to take the fall.

These are Machiavellian tactics with far-reaching consequences for every segment of the population, no matter what one's political leanings, but it is especially dangerous for anyone whose views could in any way be characterised as anti-government.

As Rozina Ali writes for the *New York Times Magazine*, "The government's approach to counterterrorism erodes constitutional protections for everyone, by blurring the lines between speech and action and by broadening the scope of who is classified as a threat."

For instance, it was reported that the FBI had been secretly carrying out an entrapment scheme in which it used a front company, ANOM, to sell purportedly hack-proof phones to organised crime syndicates and then used those phones to spy on them as they planned illegal drug shipments, plotted robberies and put out contracts for killings using those booby-trapped phones.

All told, the FBI intercepted 27 million messages over the course of 18 months.

What this means is that the FBI was also illegally spying on individuals using those encrypted phones who may not have been involved in any criminal activity whatsoever.

Even reading a newspaper article



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is now enough to get you flagged for surveillance by the FBI. The agency served a subpoena on *USA Today/Gannett* to provide the internet addresses and mobile phone information for everyone who read a news story online on a particular day and time about the deadly shooting of FBI agents.

This is the danger of allowing the government to carry out widespread surveillance, sting and entrapment operations using dubious tactics that sidestep the rule of law: “we the people” become suspects and potential criminals, while government agents, empowered to fight crime using all means at their disposal, become indistinguishable from the corrupt forces they seek to vanquish.

To go after terrorists, they become terrorists.

To go after drug smugglers, they become drug smugglers.

To go after thieves, they become thieves.

For instance, when the FBI raided a California business that was suspected of letting drug dealers anonymously stash guns, drugs and cash in its private vaults, agents seized the contents of all the safety deposit boxes and filed forfeiture motions to keep the contents, which include millions of dollars’ worth of valuables owned by individuals not accused of any crime whatsoever.

It’s hard to say whether we’re dealing with a kleptocracy (a government ruled by thieves), a kakistocracy (a government run by unprincipled career politicians, corporations and thieves that panders to the worst vices in our nature and has little regard for the rights of American citizens), or if we’ve gone straight to an idiocracy.

This certainly isn’t a constitutional democracy, however.

## The FBI has been criticised for luring people into fake terror plots and giving them with money, weapons and motivation to carry out the plots

Some days, it feels like the FBI is running its own crime syndicate complete with mob rule and mafia-style justice.

In addition to creating certain crimes in order to then “solve” them, the FBI also gives certain informants permission to break the law, “including everything from buying and selling illegal drugs to bribing government officials and plotting robberies,” in exchange for their cooperation on other fronts.

*USA Today* estimates that agents have authorised criminals to engage in as many as 15 crimes a day (5,600 crimes a year). Some of these informants are getting paid astronomical sums: one particularly unsavoury fellow, later arrested for attempting to run over a police officer, was actually paid \$85,000 for his help laying the trap for an entrapment scheme.

In a stunning development reported by the *Washington Post*, a probe into misconduct by an FBI agent resulted in the release of at least a dozen convicted drug dealers from prison.

In addition to procedural misconduct, trespassing, enabling criminal activity, and damaging private property, the FBI’s laundry list of crimes against the American people includes surveillance, disinformation, blackmail, entrapment, intimidation tactics, and harassment.

For example, the Associated Press lodged a complaint with the Dept. of Justice after learning that FBI

agents created a fake AP news story and emailed it, along with a clickable link, to a bomb threat suspect in order to implant tracking technology onto his computer and identify his location. Lambasting the agency, AP attorney Karen Kaiser railed, “The FBI may have intended this false story as a trap for only one person. However, the individual could easily have reposted this story to social networks, distributing to thousands of people, under our name, what was essentially a piece of government disinformation.”

Then again, to those familiar with COINTELPRO, an FBI program created to “disrupt, misdirect, discredit, and neutralise” groups and individuals the government considers politically objectionable, it should come as no surprise that the agency has mastered the art of government disinformation.

The FBI has been particularly criticised in the wake of the 9/11 terrorist attacks for targeting vulnerable individuals and not only luring them into fake terror plots but actually equipping them with the organisation, money, weapons and motivation to carry out the plots – entrapment – and then jailing them for their so-called terrorist plotting. This is what the FBI characterizes as “forward leaning – preventative – prosecutions.”

The FBI has also repeatedly sought to expand its invasive hacking powers to allow agents to hack into any computer, anywhere in the world.

Suffice it to say that when and if a true history of the FBI is ever written, it will not only track the rise of the American police state but it will also chart the decline of freedom in America: how a nation that once abided by the rule of law and held the government accountable for its actions has steadily devolved

into a police state where justice is one-sided, a corporate elite runs the show, representative government is a mockery, police are extensions of the military, surveillance is rampant, privacy is extinct, and the law is little more than a tool for the government to browbeat the people into compliance.

This is how tyranny rises and freedom falls.

The powers-that-be are not acting in our best interests. Almost every tyranny being perpetrated by the US government against the citizenry – purportedly to keep us safe and the nation secure – has come about as a result of some threat manufactured in one way or another by our own government.

Think about it.

Cyberwarfare. Terrorism. Bio-chemical attacks. The nuclear arms

race. Surveillance. The drug wars. Domestic extremism. The COVID-19 pandemic.

In almost every instance, the US government (often spearheaded by the FBI) has in its typical Machiavellian fashion sown the seeds of terror domestically and internationally in order to expand its own totalitarian powers.

Consider that this very same government has taken every bit of technology sold to us as being in our best interests – GPS devices, surveillance, nonlethal weapons, etc. – and used it against us, to track, control and trap us.

Are you getting the picture yet?

The US government isn't protecting us from threats to our freedoms.

The US government is creating the threats to our freedoms. It is, as I make clear in my book *Bat-*

*tlefield America: The War on the American People* and in its fictional counterpart *The Erik Blair Diaries*, the source of the threats to our freedoms.

**John W. Whitehead** is a constitutional attorney and author is founder and president of *The Rutherford Institute*. His most recent books are the best-selling *Battlefield America: The War on the American People*, the award-winning *A Government of Wolves: The Emerging American Police State*, and a debut dystopian fiction novel, *The Erik Blair Diaries*.

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Stefan Szymanski

# MESSI SIGNING KICKS OFF SOCCER BIDDING WAR

Lionel Messi is heading to the US as Saudi Arabia kicks off high-stakes bidding war with MLS for aging soccer stars

**T**he announcements on consecutive days that Real Madrid and France soccer star Karim Benzema is joining the Saudi Pro League and that Lionel Messi, thought by many to be soccer's GOAT, intends to play in the States' Major Soccer League

Lionel Messi

United Soccer may mark the beginning of a new international bidding war for superannuated soccer stars. MLS has recruited aging talent from big European clubs, but the Saudi interest is new. Benzema's move to Al-Ittihad – costing more

than US\$200-million – follows the acquisition of Cristiano Ronaldo by fellow Saudi club Al Nassr in 2022 for \$100-million.

The Benzema announcement on June 6 furthered speculation that the kingdom is attempting to build a soccer league that will be competitive with Europe's elite: the English Premier League, La Liga in Spain, Germany's Bundesliga and Serie A in Italy.

Although it seems unlikely that the Saudi Pro League will make any dent in the popularity of those established European leagues any time soon, the trend of big-name signings may be the detriment of smaller leagues – chief among them MLS – which will struggle to compete with the power of the Saudi sporting purse.

Confirmation of the Benzema move came on the same day that LIV Golf, funded by the Saudi Public Investment Fund, announced its merger with the PGA – prompting comments about “sportswashing,” the use of investment in sports to launder the image of Saudi Arabia's repressive, brutal and authoritarian regime.

However, there is one important difference between the Benzema story and LIV Golf. Saudi Arabians in particular – and the Arab peo-

ple of the Middle East in general – have never shown much interest in golf. It was brought to the region by well-to-do British and American expats, and took hold only among local elites.

Golf Saudi was created in 2018 and launched an ambitious mass participation program as part of the kingdom's Vision 2030 project, precisely because few Saudis played the game.

The same cannot be said of soccer. The game is beloved across the Arab world, and as soccer writer Simon Kuper and I wrote in *Soccernomics*, the nations of the Middle East would have produced competitive international teams long ago were it not for the region's long-standing political instability. Some observers have described soccer as “the second religion of the Arab world.”

**T**he strategy of buying aging stars from European leagues to promote interest in an emerging soccer nation is a long-standing tradition.

In the 2016-17 season, China made waves when it started spending large sums in the transfer market to attract luminaries such as former Manchester United star Carlos Tevez and the Brazilian midfielder Oscar. The Australian A-League

Fanny Schertzer



brought in players such as Liverpool's Robbie Fowler and Brazil's Juninho in its early years, while Japan's J. League launched in 1993 with aging World Cup legends Zico and Gary Lineker.

But the greatest examples of this strategy come from the United States. Back in the 1970s, the North American Soccer League assembled what may be the greatest collection of international stars ever to play outside of Europe or South America. Pelé, Johan Cruyff, Franz Beckenbauer, George Best and Bobby Moore – sporting legends in their home countries – all played in the league. But it was not enough to save the NASL from collapse in 1984.

Its successor, MLS, launched in 1996 with the intention of avoiding some of the high spending associated with NASL. And in the early years, the league resisted the temptation of bringing in big European stars. But having almost folded in the early 2000s, the league changed course spectacularly with the signing of David Beckham for LA Galaxy in 2007 at the peak of the soccer star's celebrity – if not soccer – power.

There followed a steady stream of aging international stars entering the league: Italian Alessandro Nesta in 2012, former Chelsea star Didier Drogba and Spain's David Villa in 2015, English midfielders Steven Gerrard and Frank Lampard in 2016, and strikers Wayne Rooney and Zlatan Ibrahimovic in 2018.

Beckham graduated from player to owner with the

## Beckham graduated from player to owner, and there had long been rumours that he was working to secure the addition of Messi to the MLS roster

addition of the Inter Miami franchise in 2020, and there had long been rumours that he was working to secure the addition of Messi to the MLS roster. Messi's confirmation that he intends to move to the Inter Miami is a triumph both for Beckham and MLS, but it doesn't remove the Saudis as a competitor in the long term and may push up the costs involved for all.

Since Beckham's arrival as a player, MLS has flourished. In 2007 the league consisted of only 13 franchises, with the newly added Toronto FC paying a \$10-million expansion fee to join. In May 2023, it was announced that San Diego would become the 30th MLS franchise, for a reported

fee of \$500-million. According to *Forbes*, the average value of an MLS franchise is now \$579-million.

This is remarkable, since for that price you could buy almost any soccer club in Europe outside of the top 20. *Forbes*

Karim Benzema

also reckons that no fewer than seven of the 30 most valuable soccer clubs in the world are in MLS.

It's also remarkable because the standard of play in MLS is not that high, compared with what is offered in Europe. Statistical research by me and others has shown that in soccer, you get what you pay for – to the point where the overall team payrolls generate reliable forecasts of long-term results.

The website *Transfermarkt* provides summary valuation of league squads, and currently values MLS players at \$1.3-billion, compared with \$11.3-billion for the English Premier League, \$5.1-billion for La Liga, \$4.9-billion for Serie A and \$4.6-billion for the Bundesliga. The squad valuations for MLS are closer to those of the Belgian Jupiler League.

The valuation of MLS franchises is not based on the quality of the play, but on the prospects for growth if soccer becomes a mainstream spectator sport in the United States. MLS's die-hard supporters represent a tiny fraction of the US sports market. Eventually, MLS is going to have to field better players to continue its ascent – and that means competing in the international market.

The worry for MLS is that it now has a new competitor for the best aging players: Saudi Arabia. MLS wanted Ronaldo and it wanted Benzema too. Inter Miami and MLS may soon have Messi, but they had to overcome competition from Saudi team Al Hilal. The Messi move is a great coup for MLS. But the emergence of the Saudis as competitors suggests that future opportunities will be diminished, and that the league will have to pay more for the stars it can attract. **CT**

*Stefan Szymanski is Professor of Sport Management, University of Michigan. This article first appeared at [www.theconversation.com](http://www.theconversation.com).*



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Tom Engelhardt

# LIVING ON A SMOKEBOMB OF A PLANET

September 11 returns, this time as climate change

Last month, at nearly 79, I managed to visit Mars for the first time. You know, the red planet, or rather – so it seemed to me – the orange planet. And take my word for it, it was eerie as hell. There was no sun, just a strange orange haze of a kind I had never seen before as I walked the streets of that world (well-masked) on my way to a doctor's appointment.

Oh, wait, maybe I'm a little mixed up. Maybe I wasn't on Mars. The strangeness of it all (and perhaps my age) might have left me just a bit confused. My best hunch now, as I try to put recent events in perspective, is that I wasn't in life as I'd previously known it. Somehow – just a guess – that afternoon I might have become a character in a science-fiction novel. As a matter of fact, I had only recently finished rereading Walter M. Miller, Jr.'s sci-fi classic *A Canticle for Leibowitz*, last visited in 1961 at age 17. It's about a world ravaged by humanity (using nukes, as a matter of fact) and, so many years later, still barely in recovery mode.

I must admit that the streets I was traversing on June 7 certainly looked like they existed on just such a planet. After all, the ambience had a distinctly end-of-the-world (at least as I'd known it) feel to it.

Oh, wait! I checked the news on-

line and it turns out that it was neither Mars, nor a sci-fi novel. It was simply my very own city, New York, engulfed in smoke you could smell, taste, and see, vast clouds of it blown south from Canada where more than 400 wildfires were burning in an utterly out of control, historically unprecedented fashion across much of that country – as, in fact, all too many of them still are. That massive cloud of smoke swamped my city's streets and enveloped its most famous buildings, bridges, and statues in a horrifying mist.

That day, New York, where I was born and have lived much of my life, reportedly had the worst, most polluted air of any major city on the planet – Philadelphia would take our place the very next day – including an air quality index that hit a previously unimaginable 484. That day, my city was headline-making in a way not seen since September 11, 2001. In fact, you might think of that Wednesday as the climate-change version of 9/11, a terror (or at least terrorising) attack of the first order.

Put another way, it should have been a signal to us all that we – New Yorkers included – now live on a new, significantly more dangerous planet, and that June 7 may

someday be remembered locally as a preview of a horror show for the ages. Unfortunately, you can count on one thing: it's barely the beginning. On an overheating planet where humanity has yet to bring its release of greenhouse gasses from the burning of coal, oil, and natural gas under any sort of reasonable control, where summer sea ice is almost certain to be a thing of the past in a fast-heating Arctic, where sea levels are rising ominously and fires, storms, and droughts are growing more severe by the year, there's so much worse to come.

In my youth, of course, a Canada that hadn't even made it to summer when the heat hit record levels and fires began burning out of control from Alberta in the west to Nova Scotia and Quebec in the east would have been unimaginable. I doubt even Walter M. Miller, Jr., could have dreamed up such a future, no less that, as of a few weeks ago, 1,400 percent of the normal acreage of that country, or more than 8.7-million acres, had already burned (with so much more undoubtedly still to come); nor that Canada, seemingly caught unprepared, without faintly enough firefighters, despite recent all-too-flammable summers – having, in fact, to import them from around the world to help bring those blazes under some sort of control



Wildfire Smoke from Quebec consumes New Jersey and New York City.

– would be in flames. And yet, for that country, experiencing its fiercest fire season ever, one thing seems guaranteed: that’s only the beginning. After all, United Nations climate experts are now suggesting that, by the end of this century, if climate change isn’t brought under control, the intensity of global wildfires could rise by another 57 percent. So, be prepared, New Yorkers, orange is undoubtedly the colour of our future and we haven’t seen anything like the last of such smoke bombs.

Oh, and that June evening, once

I was home again, I turned on the NBC nightly news, which not surprisingly led with the Canadian fires and the smoke disaster in New York in a big-time way – and, in their reporting, no one even bothered to mention climate change. The words went unused. My best guess: maybe they were all on Mars.

In fact, you could indeed think of that June 7 smoke-out as the 2023 climate-change equivalent of September 11, 2001. Whoops! Maybe that’s a

far too ominous comparison and I’ll tell you why.

On September 11, 2001, at the World Trade Center in New York, the Pentagon in Washington, and aboard four hijacked jets, almost 3,000 people died. That was indeed a first-class nightmare, possibly the worst terrorist attack in history. And the US responded by launching a set of invasions, occupations, and conflicts that came to be known as “the global war on terror.” In every sense, however, it actually turned out to be a global war of terror, a 20-plus-year disaster of los-



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ing conflicts that involved the killing of staggering numbers of people. The latest estimate from the invaluable Costs of War Project is: almost a million direct deaths and possibly 3.7-million indirect ones.

**T**ake that in for a moment. And think about this: in the United States, there hasn't been the slightest penalty for any of that. Just ask yourself: Was the president who so disastrously invaded Afghanistan and then Iraq, while he and his top officials lied through their teeth to the American people, penalised in any way? Yes, I do mean that fellow out in Texas who's become known for his portrait painting in his old age and who, relatively recently, confused his decision to invade Iraq with Vladimir Putin's to invade Ukraine.

Or, for that matter, has the US military suffered any penalties for its record in response to 9/11? Just consider this for starters: the last time that military actually won a war was in 1991. I'm thinking of the first Gulf War and that "win" would prove nothing but a prelude to the Iraq disaster to come in this century. Explain this to me then: Why does the military that's proven incapable of winning a war since that 9/11 terror attack still get more money from Congress than the next – your choice – 9 or 10 militaries on this planet combined, and why, no matter who's in charge in Washington, including cost-cutting Republicans, does the Pentagon never – no, absolutely never – see a cut in its funding, only yet more taxpayer dollars? (And mind you, this is true on a planet where the real battles of the future are likely to involve fire and smoke.)

There may indeed be a "debt ceiling" in this country, but there seems to be no ceiling at all when it comes to funding that military. In fact, Re-

## It's not just this country that's in decline but Planet Earth itself as a livable place for humanity and for so many other species

publican hawks in the Senate only recently demanded yet more money for the Pentagon in the debt-ceiling debate (despite the fact that, amid other cuts, its funding was already guaranteed to rise by 3 percent or \$388-billion). As Senator Lindsey Graham so classically put it about that (to him) pitiful rise, "This budget is a win for China."

Now, I don't mean to say that there's been no pain anywhere. Quite the opposite. American troops sent to Afghanistan, Iraq, and so many other countries came home suffering everything from literal wounds to severe post-traumatic stress syndrome. (In these years, in fact, the suicide rate among veterans has been unnervingly high.)

And did the American people pay? You bet. Through the teeth, in fact, in a moment when inequality in this country was already going through the roof – or, if you're not one of the ever-greater numbers of billionaires, perhaps the floor would be the more appropriate image. And has the Pentagon paid a cent? No, not for a thing it's done (and, in too many cases, is still doing).

**C**onsider this the definition of decline in a country that, as Donald Trump and Ron DeSantis continue to make desperately clear, could be heading for a place too strange and disturbing for words, a place both as old as the present president of the

United States (should he win again) and as new as anyone can imagine.

Throughout history, it's true that great imperial powers have risen and fallen, but lest you think this is just another typical imperial moment when, as the US declines, China will rise, take a breath – oops, sorry, watch out for that smoke! – and think again. As those Canadian wildfires suggest, we're no longer on the planet we humans have inhabited these last many thousand years. We're now living in a new, not terribly recognisable, ever more perilous world. It's not just this country that's in decline but Planet Earth itself as a livable place for humanity and for so many other species. Climate change, in other words, is quickly becoming the climate emergency.

And as the reaction to 9/11 shows, faced with a moment of true terror, don't count on the response of either the United States or the rest of humanity being on target. After all, as that smoke bomb in New York suggests, these days, too many of those of us who matter – whether we're talking about the climate-change-denying Trumppublican Party or the leaders of the Pentagon – are fighting the wrong wars, while the major companies responsible for so much of the terror to come, the giant fossil-fuel outfits, continue to pull in blockbuster – no, record! – profits for destroying our future. And that simply couldn't be more dystopian or, potentially, a more dangerously smoky concoction. Consider that a form of terrorism even al-Qaeda couldn't have imagined. Consider all of that, in fact, a preview of a world in which a horrific version of 9/11 could become daily life.

So, if there is a war to be fought, the Pentagon won't be able to fight it. After all, it's not prepared for increasing numbers of smoke bombs, scorching megadroughts, ever more powerful and horrific storms, melting ice, rising sea lev-

els, broiling temperatures, and so much more. And yet, whether you're American or Chinese, that's likely to sum up our true enemy in the decades to come. And worse yet, if the Pentagon and its Chinese equivalent find themselves in a war, Ukraine-style or otherwise, over the island of Taiwan, you might as well kiss it all goodbye.

It should be obvious that the two greatest greenhouse gas producers, China and the United States, will rise or fall (as will the rest of us) on the basis of how well (or desperately poorly) they cooperate in the future when it comes to the overheating of this planet. The question is: Can this country, or for that matter the world, respond in some rea-

**If the Pentagon and its Chinese equivalent find themselves in a war over the island of Taiwan, you might as well kiss it all goodbye**

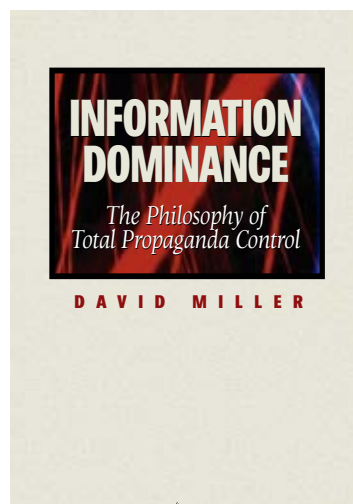
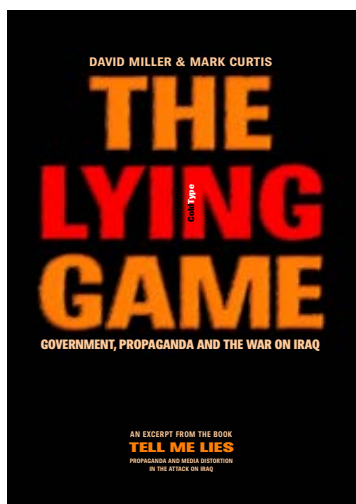
sonable fashion to what's clearly going to be climate terror attack after terror attack potentially leading to dystopian vistas that could stretch into the distant future?

Will humanity react to the climate emergency as ineptly as this country did to 9/11?

Is there any hope that we'll act effectively before we find ourselves on a version of Mars or, as Donald Trump, Ron DeSantis, and others like them clearly wish, fossil-fuelise ourselves to hell and back? In other words, are we truly fated to live on a smoke bomb of a planet? **CT**

*Tom Engelhardt created and runs the website TomDispatch.com. He was 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 book is A Nation Unmade by War. This article first appeared at [www.tomdispatch.com](http://www.tomdispatch.com).*

# FIGHTING THE INFORMATION WAR



## Two important ebooks from the ColdType archives

By David Miller and Mark Curtis

The relentless propaganda war we're seeing with Russia and China in Western crosshairs is not a recent occurrence, but has been gathering steam since the media-managed US war on Iraq 20 years ago. In these **two free ebooks** from the **ColdType Archives**, two prominent writers explain the genesis of the onslaught

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Joe Allen

# THE UNABOMBER PULLS THE PLUG

As you read this on your screen, tracked by surveillance algorithms and enticed to click on the next distraction, it's worth reflecting on Ted Kaczynski's dark vision

Uncle Ted is dead. After rotting in prison for thirty-seven years, guards found the Luddite icon unresponsive in his cell. Sources claim he committed suicide. Social media was immediately flooded with snarky memes and pixelated memorials – including a post on my own account – which is indicative of the state of affairs we find ourselves in. As much as it pains me to agree with Elon Musk, he's on point about one thing – we are already cyborgs.

Musk is right. And so was Ted.

Ironically, I first encountered Kaczynski's *Unabomber Manifesto* online in 1997, two years after it had been published in the newspapers. This was back in the days of hulking desktop computers and primitive HTML web pages. I still remember the headache-inducing yellow text on a black background.

Using spare prose and robotic logic, Ted issued an ominous warning about a mechanical prison that was enveloping the planet. "As society and the problems that face it become more and more complex and machines become more and more intelligent, people will let machines make more of their decisions for

them, simply because machine-made decisions will bring better results than man-made ones," he stated flatly, as if giving a clinical diagnosis. "At that stage the machines will be in effective control."

The idea chilled me, and the image of a digitised human herd has never left me. Twenty-eight years later, the relentless march of progress appears to be an exponential curve from bar codes to smartphones to digital implants. Just ask Musk if you don't believe me. However, the *Unabomber Manifesto* isn't just a diatribe against technology. It is a condemnation of civilisation itself. Neuralink implants are just additional wiring.

To me, the most disturbing element of the manifesto is Ted's sense of inevitability.





tability. It isn't that any one person or cabal is creating a techno-prison on purpose. Not necessarily. Rather, it's simply in the nature of technology to expand outward and destroy the natural world, and within society itself, to project power inward and crush human freedom.

The various inventors, investors, retailers, and operators of these devices are only doing what humans do – pursu-

ing pleasure and stoking their own egos. Our digital prison is just an emergent property of its parts, like murmuration of starlings flying into the blades of a wind turbine.

The inevitable result is the degradation of human nature, Ted argued, followed by the destruction of the natural environment, which will lead to the collapse of the entire system. Because most humans will have become utterly dependent on the technological system, that collapse would mean mass death and perhaps the extinction of the human race. Even if we somehow manage to keep the Machine rolling along for centuries, humanity will be nothing more than a mass of drug-addled, genetically engineered, mentally enfeebled power-slaves.

Ted saw only one way out. We must destroy the technological system before it destroys us. Of course, that would mean most of the people presently dependent on the system would die, anyway, but at least a few bands of primitive yokels would survive to carry humanity's torch and enjoy Mother Nature in peace. It was an appealing argument to my anarchic and somewhat paranoid teenage mind. When you're amped up on testosterone, TV, and fizzy

drinks, anything seems possible.

Of course, there's the nagging issue of the bombing campaign Ted used to extort the *Washington Post* and the *San Francisco Chronicle* into publishing his incendiary tract. "In order to get our message before the public with some chance of making a lasting impression," he wrote in his isolated cabin, "we've had to kill people."

It should go without saying that agreeing with Ted's argument is not an endorsement of his terrorism. Nor can one deny that his violent pleas for attention worked, even if it ultimately provided more ammo to the authoritarian system he was trying to destroy.

**D**espite his grim pessimism, Kaczynski managed to have a profound influence on tech gurus. His manifesto was discussed at length in Ray Kurzweil's first hit book, *The Age of Spiritual Machines*, if only to be dismissed. "Although [Kaczynski] makes a compelling case for the dangers and damages that have accompanied industrialisation, his proposed vision is neither compelling nor feasible," Kurzweil concluded. "After all, there is too little nature left to return to, and there are too many human beings. For better or worse, we're stuck with technology."

There's nowhere to go but forward. With a shrug and a chuckle, Kurzweil goes on to predict that technology will keep advancing exponentially until we hit the Singularity. Artificial intelligence will gain consciousness and surpass human beings on every level, forcing us to merge with machines by way of brain implants and injectable nanobots. Worst of all, he's quite pleased about the prospect.

The tech icon Kevin Kelly quotes long tracts from Ted's manifesto in his masterful book *What*



*Technology Wants.* In fact, he dedicates an entire chapter to the subject entitled “The Unabomber Was Right.” As co-founder of *Wired* magazine, Kelly has been immersed in techno-culture as much as any person alive. “I was utterly dismayed,” he wrote, “to discover that one of the most astute analyses of the technium was written by a mentally ill mass murderer and terrorist.

As is his way, Kelly weighs Kaczynski’s arguments carefully, giving credit where credit is due. In the end, though, Kelly concludes that technological civilisation is simply what most humans want, even if we gripe about it. He holds out hope that the upsides will outweigh the negatives. And if they don’t, well, the subtext is there’s nothing to do about it. We might as well enjoy it while it lasts.

If there’s one thing all three men agree on, it’s the Myth of Inevitability. For Kurzweil and Kelly, technological advancement is simply “inevitable.” For Kaczynski, the ultimate inevitability is doom. Every plane, train, power station, and smartphone is a ticking time bomb, not unlike the crosswired neurons in Ted’s head. His suicide may have defused that bomb, but his ideas will endure on servers and continue to spread across the screens that he so detested.

**K**aczynski’s ideas about technology unfolded according to a rigid logic, not unlike a computer algorithm. His manifesto might as well have been written in programming language as a series of if/then commands. If technology advances, then human freedom suffers. If human freedom suffers, then technology must be destroyed. This was the foundational code behind Ted’s beef with technology.

In order to function efficiently, a



**One wonders if Ted was following the AI news cycle before his plug was pulled. Things appear to be unfolding much like he predicted**

technological system has to regulate human behaviour down to the slightest detail. Once the system has achieved a high level of sophistication, any semblance of human freedom is merely an illusion. So it is that the *Unabomber Manifesto* is a bestseller on Amazon, and distributed for free on various websites, even as corporate and government algorithms tag and track each recipient as if they were sheep in a factory farm. If you see something, say something.

One wonders if Ted was following the AI news cycle before his plug was pulled. Things appear to be unfolding much like he predicted, at least according to the hype. AlphaFold is modelling complex proteins in mere moments. ChatGPT is writing students’ papers for them. Mid-journey is creating derivative, but commercially viable artwork at the click of a button. The Department of Defense is amassing deadly drone swarms.

In 1993, the sci-fi writer Vernor

Vinge gave an ominous lecture at a NASA space engineering conference. Long before Kurzweil adopted the term, Vinge predicted a technological singularity that would change the world forever. “Within thirty years, we will have the technological means to create superhuman intelligence,” he wrote. “Shortly thereafter, the human era will be ended.” Well, here we are in 2023. As if on cue, every tech headline seems tailored to convince us that we and our posterity will soon be the organic detritus of the Machine’s evolution.

Ted’s manifesto, published in 1995, put forward a similar prediction. “Let us postulate that the computer scientists succeed in developing intelligent machines that can do all things better than human beings can do them,” he wrote. “If the machines are permitted to make all their own decisions, we can’t make any conjectures as to the results, because it is impossible to guess how such machines might behave. We only point out that the fate of the human race would be at the mercy of the machines.”

As you read this on your screen, tracked by surveillance algorithms and enticed to click on the next distraction, it’s worth reflecting on Ted’s dark vision. It drove him out of his mind, but we don’t have to follow him. Nor do we have to follow every dictate issued by the Machine.

Personally, I don’t believe any future is “inevitable.” We always have a choice about which direction to go. If we don’t start making hard decisions soon, though, all of those choices will be made for us.

RIP Uncle Ted

**CT**

**Joe Allen’s new book, *Dark Aeon: Transhumanism and the War Against Humanity* is now available for presale at amazon. Read his weekly newsletter at [www.JOEBOT.xyz](http://www.JOEBOT.xyz).**

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Chris Hedges

# THEY LIED ABOUT AFGHANISTAN. THEY LIED ABOUT IRAQ. AND THEY ARE LYING ABOUT UKRAINE

The US public has been conned, once again, into pouring billions of dollars into another endless war

**T**he playbook the pimps of war use to lure us into one military fiasco after another, including Vietnam, Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, Syria and now Ukraine, does not change. Freedom and democracy are threatened. Evil must be vanquished. Human rights must be protected. The fate of Europe and NATO, along with a “rules based international order” is at stake. Victory is assured.

The results are also the same. The justifications and narratives are exposed as lies. The cheery prognosis is false. Those on whose behalf we are supposedly fighting are as venal as those we are fighting against.

The Russian invasion of Ukraine was a war crime, although one that was provoked by NATO expansion and by the United States backing of the 2014 “Maidan” coup which ousted the democratically elected Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovich. Yanukovich wanted economic integration with the European Union, but not at the expense of economic and political ties with Russia. The war will only be solved through negotiations that allow eth-

nic Russians in Ukraine to have autonomy and Moscow’s protection, as well as Ukrainian neutrality, which means the country cannot join NATO. The longer these negotiations are delayed the more Ukrainians will suffer and die. Their cities and infrastructure will continue to be pounded into rubble.

But this proxy war in Ukraine is designed to serve US interests. It enriches the weapons manufacturers, weakens the Russian military and isolates Russia from Europe. What happens to Ukraine is irrelevant.

“First, equipping our friends on the front lines to defend themselves is a far cheaper way – in both dollars and American lives – to degrade Russia’s ability to threaten the United States,” admitted Senate Republican Leader Mitch McConnell.

“Second, Ukraine’s effective defense of its territory is teaching us lessons about how to improve the defences of partners who are threatened by China. It is no surprise that senior officials from Taiwan are so supportive of efforts to help Ukraine defeat Russia. Third, most of the money that’s been appropriated for Ukraine security assistance doesn’t

actually go to Ukraine. It gets invested in American defense manufacturing. It funds new weapons and munitions for the US armed forces to replace the older material we have provided to Ukraine. Let me be clear: this assistance means more jobs for American workers and newer weapons for American service members.”

Once the truth about these endless wars seeps into public consciousness, the media, which slavishly promotes these conflicts, drastically reduces coverage. The military debacles, as in Iraq and Afghanistan, continue largely out of view. By the time the US concedes defeat, most barely remember that these wars are being fought.

**T**he pimps of war who orchestrate these military fiascos migrate from administration to administration. Between posts they are ensconced in think tanks – Project for the New American Century, American Enterprise Institute, Foreign Policy Initiative, Institute for the Study of War, The Atlantic Council and The



Brookings Institution – funded by corporations and the war industry. Once the Ukraine war comes to its inevitable conclusion, these Dr. Strangeloves will seek to ignite a war with China. The US Navy and military are already menacing and encircling China. God help us if we don't stop them.

These pimps of war con us into one conflict after another with flattering narratives that paint us as the world's saviours. They don't even have to be innovative. The rhetoric is lifted from the old playbook. We naively swallow the bait and embrace the flag – this time blue and yellow – to become unwitting agents in our self-immolation.

Since the end of the Second World War, the government has spent between 45 to 90 percent of the federal budget on past, current and future military operations. It is the largest sustained activity of the US government. It has stopped mattering – at least to the pimps of war – whether these wars are rational or prudent. The war industry metastasises within the bowels of the American empire to hollow it out from the inside. The US is reviled abroad, drowning in debt, has an impoverished working class and is burdened with a decayed infrastructure as well as shoddy social services.

Wasn't the Russian military – because of poor morale, poor generalship, outdated weapons, desertions, a lack of ammunition that supposedly forced soldiers to fight with shov-



Setting the scene: George W. Bush lied his country into bloody war after the attack on New York's World Trade Center.

els, and severe supply shortages – supposed to collapse months ago? Wasn't Putin supposed to be driven from power? Weren't the sanctions supposed to plunge the ruble into a death spiral? Wasn't the severing of the Russian banking system from SWIFT, the international money transfer system, supposed to cripple the Russian economy? How is it that inflation rates in Europe and the United States are higher than in Russia despite these attacks on the Russian economy?

Wasn't the nearly \$150 billion in sophisticated military hardware, financial and humanitarian assistance pledged by the US, EU and 11 other countries supposed to have turned the tide of the war? How is

it that perhaps a third of the tanks Germany and the US provided were swiftly turned by Russian mines, artillery, anti-tank weapons, air strikes and missiles into charred hunks of metal at the start of the vaunted counter-offensive?

Wasn't this latest Ukrainian counter-offensive, which was originally known as the "spring offensive," supposed to punch through Russia's heavily fortified front lines and regain huge swathes of territory? How can we explain the tens of thousands of Ukrainian military casualties and the forced conscription by Ukraine's military? Even our retired generals and former CIA, FBI, NSA and Homeland Security officials, who serve as analysts on networks such as CNN and MSNBC, can't say the offensive has succeeded.

And what of the Ukrainian democracy we are fighting to protect? Why did the Ukrainian parliament revoke the official use of minority languages, including Russian, three days after the 2014 coup? How do we rationalise the eight years of warfare against ethnic Russians in the Donbass region before the Russian invasion in February, 2022? How do we explain the killing of over 14,200 people and the 1.5-million people who were displaced, before Russia's invasion took place last year?

How do we defend the decision by President Volodymyr Zelensky to ban eleven opposition parties, including The Opposition Platform for Life, which had 10 percent of the seats in the Supreme Council, Ukraine's unicameral parliament, along with the Shariy Party, Nashi, Opposition Bloc, Left Opposition, Union of Left Forces, State, Progress-

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sive Socialist Party of Ukraine, Socialist Party of Ukraine, Socialists Party and Volodymyr Saldo Bloc? How can we accept the banning of these opposition parties – many of which are on the left – while Zelensky allows fascists from the Svoboda and Right Sector parties, as well as the Banderite Azov Battalion and other extremist militias, to flourish?

How do we deal with the anti-Russian purges and arrests of supposed “fifth columnists” sweeping through Ukraine, given that 30 percent of Ukraine’s inhabitants are Russian speakers? How do we respond to the neo-Nazi groups supported by Zelensky’s government that harass and attack the LGBT community, the Roma population, anti-fascist protests and threaten city council members, media outlets, artists and foreign students? How can we countenance the decision by the US and its Western allies to block negotiations with Russia to end the war, despite Kyiv and Moscow apparently being on the verge of negotiating a peace treaty?

I reported from Eastern and Central Europe in 1989 during the breakup of the Soviet Union. NATO, we assumed, had become obsolete. President Mikhail Gorbachev proposed security and economic agreements with Washington and Europe. Secretary of State James Baker in Ronald Reagan’s administration, along with the West German Foreign Minister Hans-Dietrich Genscher, assured Gorbachev that NATO would not be extended beyond the borders of a unified Germany. We naively thought the end of the Cold War meant that Russia, Europe and the US, would no longer have to divert massive resources to their militaries.

The so-called “peace dividend,” however, was a chimera.

If Russia did not want to be the enemy, Russia would be forced to be-

## Little was known in British secondary schools about the treatment indigenous people suffered at the hands of their new masters

come the enemy. The pimps of war recruited former Soviet republics into NATO by painting Russia as a threat. Countries that joined NATO, which now include Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic, Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Albania, Croatia, Montenegro, and North Macedonia, reconfigured their militaries, often through tens of millions in western loans, to become compatible with NATO military hardware. This made the weapons manufacturers billions in profits.

It was universally understood in Eastern and Central Europe following the collapse of the Soviet Union that NATO expansion was unnecessary and a dangerous provocation. It made no geopolitical sense. But it made commercial sense. War is a business.

In a classified diplomatic cable – obtained and released by WikiLeaks – dated February 1, 2008, written from Moscow, and addressed to the Joint Chiefs of Staff, NATO-European Union Cooperative, National Security Council, Russia Moscow Political Collective, Secretary of Defense, and Secretary of State, there was an unequivocal understanding that expanding NATO risked conflict with Russia, especially over Ukraine.

“Not only does Russia perceive encirclement [by NATO], and efforts to

undermine Russia’s influence in the region, but it also fears unpredictable and uncontrolled consequences which would seriously affect Russian security interests,” the cable reads. “Experts tell us that Russia is particularly worried that the strong divisions in Ukraine over NATO membership, with much of the ethnic-Russian community against membership, could lead to a major split, involving violence or at worst, civil war. In that eventuality, Russia would have to decide whether to intervene; a decision Russia does not want to have to face. . . .”

“Dmitri Trenin, Deputy Director of the Carnegie Moscow Center, expressed concern that Ukraine was, in the long-term, the most potentially destabilising factor in US-Russian relations, given the level of emotion and neuralgia triggered by its quest for NATO membership . . .” the cable read. “Because membership remained divisive in Ukrainian domestic politics, it created an opening for Russian intervention. Trenin expressed concern that elements within the Russian establishment would be encouraged to meddle, stimulating US overt encouragement of opposing political forces, and leaving the US and Russia in a classic confrontational posture.”

The Russian invasion of Ukraine would not have happened if the western alliance had honoured its promises not to expand NATO beyond Germany’s borders and Ukraine had remained neutral. The pimps of war knew the potential consequences of NATO expansion. War, however, is their single minded vocation, even if it leads to a nuclear holocaust with Russia or China.

The war industry, not Putin, is our most dangerous enemy. **CT**

*Chris Hedges is a Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist who was a foreign correspondent for fifteen years for The New York Times.*

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