

## **LOOK UP! The HOPEFUL REALIST Newsletter:** ***Looking at the World Today as if Facts Matter***

**Robert MacNeil Christie, PhD**

*Here we explore the latest facts, actions, and perspectives on the New Great Transformation of the Earth System, as it unfolds before our eyes. We apply the Hopeful Realism we all need to work through the greatest predicament in human history.*

### ***Latest News from the Hopeful Realist***

#### **Our Two Intersecting Mega-Crises are One.**

Under the significant constraints of a back injury and consequent limits on physical activity after spinal neurosurgery—no bike riding for at least three months, and initially limited work at the keyboard, since both put strain on the muscles around the healing cervical vertebrae—I have watched far too much television. But, if you take the right attitude, everything is a learning experience.

I am staying with a friend during my recovery from neurosurgery at UCLA Spine Center, where some very skilled folks cut open the back of my neck to do their impressive work. My friend likes to watch those super-hero/monster fantasy post-apocalyptic movies that are so popular now. So, I have watched several and have observed certain patterns emerge, which imply some things about American culture. It is no surprise that so many Americans fall for conspiracy theories. Both mass media and politicians traffic in plots of evil and heroic rescue. Fantasy movies are all about evil plots by mysterious powerful forces and the super heroes who will surely overcome evil to rescue the rest of us mere mortals. I even watched [\*Book of Eli\*](#) with Denzel Washington, a sort of Mad Max type movie with some story elements and deeper characters built in. But when evil conspiracies are infused into the language of politics, the public discourse becomes as unreal as a monster movie.

I am certainly not a media determinist, but I have observed that the modern popular entertainment that so many people engage with, including video games, does reflect some key elements of the industrial consumer culture. In my non-scientific sample of movies with monsters and super-heroes—both with powers that defy physics, biology, and chemistry as we know them—I detected among other mental constructs, a set of assumptions about our modern world that were projected into their ‘futuristic’ apocalyptic scripts. There is always an evil force that threatens the good people and the hero who tries to protect them. That evil force always has an element of mystery and at least an implied conspiracy of some kind, and there are plenty of cliff-hangers.

Finally, of course, there is always a singular hero, a powerful individual devoted to ‘truth, justice, and the American way.’ That phrase popped into my head just now out of my 1950s memory of Super Man comic books we kids read standing at the magazine rack at the corner

grocery store until the relatively patient owner said, “Buy it or put it back.” Oh, so I checked with Google, and without being asked its “AI Overview” paragraph appeared instantly and said that the phrase “...originated in a 1942 episode of the Adventures of Superman radio series.” Well, that was a bit before my comic book reading years. However, AI said it, so it must be true, unless we were both ‘hallucinating,’ as AI has been demonstrated to do in a variety of ways (since it has no sentient point of view) and I might have been hallucinating too, only a couple of days after ‘awakening’ from three hours of anesthesia in the OR. ‘They say,’ it takes a month to clear all the anesthetics from your system for each hour you were under ‘sleeping’ that they impose.

So, what’s the point, you may be asking by now? Well, this framing by the industrial-consumer cultural vernacular of villain and hero struggling to the death, just as it pits ‘man against nature,’ has particular effects on both individual and societal capacities for rational decision making and cooperation, among other things. It is far simpler than Joseph Campbell’s [\*The Hero’s Journey\*](#).

The global predicament of how to mount a genuine course of action to stem the tide of accelerating climate/ecological chaos, is inherently societal, or ‘collective’ in nature. Yet the corporate dominated discourse on ‘solutions’ to ‘climate change,’ carefully focuses on individual ‘solutions,’ such as recycling more, which requires an extra set of daily tasks, and buying an electric vehicle, which most folks cannot afford. Of course, most folks know that neither are real solutions of the larger problem of planetary pollution and its impact on Earth System stability. At the larger scale the focus of cultural modernity is on treating symptoms and normalizing what is far from normal ‘problems’—just like most of modern medicine—thus avoiding its own culpability as to cause.

The growing threat posed by the rapidly expanding power of the MAGA autocratic attempt to ‘control-delete’ the Constitution of the United States of America, is treated in a similar way if it is recognized as such at all, as an inconvenient set of bad public policies resolvable by the next election (if there is one). But it is so much more.

The individualistic ‘solution’ to this political-economic transformation of the very fundamentals of life in the U.S. is to get out the vote in the next election. That is definitely not how you stop a coup from succeeding. Much more is needed. Expert research on stopping autocratic attempts and replacing dictatorship with democracy, such as the classic work by [Gene Sharp](#), and more recently by Erica Chenoweth and Maria J. Stephan, demonstrates the necessity of the mobilization of nonviolent [civil resistance](#) with widespread participation, as the most effective way to overcome a coup.

I just saw a post on [Facebook](#) that is purported to have been a reposting of a “Message to Democrats,” written by Liz Cheney. I have not confirmed the authenticity as to the author. But that doesn’t matter as much as the fact that it is ‘an original’ in that it breaks the mold of conventional public discourse on political change. Besides, Liz is one of the few politicians who has the cojones to write such an original diatribe about how miserably the Democrats have failed to respond in a way that fits the emergency character of our political and constitutional crisis. But it also outlines several examples of what actually works for movements of civil resistance to

succeed in overthrowing or preventing authoritarian regimes from taking control of an otherwise democratic system.

For me, two ideas are coming together in response to the political and environmental emergencies we still fail to face seriously.

First, as I have reported before, the literature on who survives emergencies of all kinds—from burning buildings to sinking ships, to being lost in the wilderness, even of those who had a chance to survive the 9/11 cataclysm—those who survive are consistently the people who quickly recognize that they are no longer in their ‘normal reality,’ and that their everyday assumptions no longer apply. Think of it as an instantaneous paradigm shift, a rapid shift of one’s mindset.

Second, to survive, we must act on the suspension of our conventional assumptions, responding strictly in relation to the observable real situation we are in. As a civilization, we have completely failed these two tests of survivability so far. No culture is designed to undergo a rapid paradigm shift, an immediate deep transformation. Yet, that is exactly what we need.

The deeper thing that strikes me is that the two biggest threats to our lives, our environment, and our society have the very same source: the unbridled growth of the industrial civilization that we have pretended could go on forever on a finite planet, and the fact that we have so far allowed that civilization to devolve into a pseudo-democracy that inevitably led to an autocratic attempt by the smoldering remnants of white nationalism, egged on by the most pathological president and the nation has ever seen.

Perhaps the worst part of it is the rising desire of the new “techified” hyper-libertarian of Silicon Valley power players to follow the far-right think tanks’ strategy—as reflected in the Heritage Foundation’s Project 2025, and more—to simply gut the ‘administrative state.’ Musk’s DOGE apparatchiks are doing just that by wholesale firing of key federal employees and cutting the funding of routine costs of operation, by requiring political approval of every expenditure then sitting on purchase requests instead of denying them outright.

The mandate of any administration is to manage and oversee the operations of legislatively mandated agencies and programs, not to destroy them. The goal of destroying every government operation they don’t like, which is most, is being achieved via the back door, as challenges in the courts are slowly processed. It is much easier to destroy just about anything than to rebuild it. That is the goal of their techno-autocratic actions, which in themselves constitute the epitome of waste, fraud, and abuse—of the federal government.

None of this will end well. Even an immediate turnaround will take years to recover the operational effectiveness Musk lies about improving as he boasts of vast improvements in ‘efficiency,’ as he destroys operational capacity everywhere he goes.

We desperately need a widespread social movement of nonviolent civil resistance. The continuation of the autocratic attempt will otherwise turn our national ‘democratic experiment’ into a collapsing fascist regime, while its ‘leaders’ continue to deny to the end that the Earth

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*Holding IT Together: Social Control in an Age of Great Transformation* can be purchased

I know that putting the advert below for *Holding IT Together* in every issue of these newsletters

## A close-up photograph of a knot, likely a reef knot (square knot), on a rope. The rope is composed of two distinct sections: a bright blue section on the left and a black section on the right. The knot is formed by the blue section looping over and under the black section. The background is a plain, light gray.

ROBERT MACNEIL CHRISTIE, PhD

**“Buy it!”** says the author.

Here are excerpts from some prominent editorial reviews:

*A dense and sweeping call to change the direction of human society before it's too late. Still, his core message is strikingly direct and forceful. It's hard to imagine any reader not being convinced that just such a massive change is necessary.* ~ **Kirkus Reviews**

*Christie embeds history surrounding social deconstruction and construction with the kinds of modern references that readers will relish...[He] offers an unprecedented opportunity for readers to apply the basics of economic understanding to the major issues facing humanity's survival today... Hope is embedded throughout his approach.* ~ **Midwest Book Review**

*Both a wake-up call and a guide, this book calls for decisive action toward a sustainable, equitable future, making it an essential resource for policymakers, activists, and concerned citizens alike.* ~ **The Prairies Book Review**

With the publication of [\*\*\*Holding It Together: Social Control in an Age of Great Transformation\*\*\*](#), by Bear Claw Press, I seek a wide span of possible readers. After all, the book's content has important implications for the lives of everyone.

If you are a researcher or teacher and would be interested in sending me a short review (two or three paragraphs), or would consider it for use in a class you teach, please go to the [BearClawPress.com](http://BearClawPress.com) website, click on the [Review/Exam Copies](#) tab (upper right) fill in the information, and I will send you a [pdf](#) or [ePub](#) copy free. Also, copies can be bought at a nice discount from the list price at Bear Claw Press.

Otherwise, please buy, read, and offer a customer [rating-review](#) for ***Holding IT Together*** on [Goodreads.com](http://Goodreads.com) or Amazon.com. Without a significant number of customer reviews, good or bad, the Amazon algorithm will ignore a book into oblivion, regardless of its quality.

Some have estimated that Amazon.com sells around seventy percent of all books sold. Nevertheless, I hope many who buy ***Holding IT Together*** will do so at their local independent bookstore. Of course, both paper and eBook versions are available on [Amazon.com](http://Amazon.com) as well as from independent bookstores via [Bookshop.org](http://Bookshop.org). It is now also available at a discount directly from the publisher, [BearClawPress.com](http://BearClawPress.com)

My eBook ***HOPEFUL REALISM: A Climate Manifesto*** remains available as a **free** download from [Kindle Unlimited](#). The regular Kindle eBook price is \$6.99. Please give it a rating/review on [GoodReads.com](http://GoodReads.com). Or, [review and rate](#) *Hopeful Realism* on its Amazon page. You can do so by clicking the button on the lower left of the book's Amazon page below "Customer Reviews," and say a few words about what you think about the issues and how I frame them.

**Note:** As always, past issues of this Newsletter are available, archived on my web site:

<https://thehopefulrealist.com/hopeful-realist-newsletter/>

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## ***LOOK UP! A Bi-weekly Featured Commentary***

### **The “Deep State” Scam.**

Is there really a “deep state”? Well, in a manner of speaking, yes. But is it an evil conspiracy by the “libs” to take away our freedoms? No.

Of course it is more complicated than that. When I first heard the term, it was used by Mike Lofgren, a former long-time congressional budget analyst who viewed government and its complications from the inside. Lofgren saw the growing many layered complexity of the federal government as it grew and increasingly favored large institutional interests and became more distant from the people.

Lofgren’s 2016 [book](#), *The Deep State: The Fall of the Constitution and the Rise of a Shadow Government*, recognized that the distance from the people and dominance by financially powerful institutions threatens the rights and freedoms of citizens while bowing to the interests of the powerful. Lofgren had an intimate view of the federal government operations from the inside.

In an interview with Bill Moyers I heard, Lofgren made sense of it all in much the same way that Sheldon Wolin’s concept of “inverted totalitarianism” did in his [book](#), *Democracy Incorporated: Managed Democracy and the Specter of Inverted Totalitarianism*. Today, the threat of totalitarianism comes from the MAGA movement’s figurehead and his techno-libertarian autocrats inserted at the top.

Wolin, a renowned political scientist, offered a more outside empirical—grounded in facts—assessment of the modern ‘administrative state.’ He recognized the deep penetration of corporate power in the operations as well as legislative elements of government.

However, the term, “deep state,” has now been taken over by the extreme right-wing faction that wallows in conspiracy theories. It has become an ideological trope, a metaphor for everything they hate about the government, imaginary or not, and which helps form the illusions of the MAGA cult. But it runs much deeper than that.

On the one hand, Trump is a grifter of the highest skill. A narcissistic sociopath, he cares nothing for the policies he espouses and conveniently disavows with less than a moment’s notice. He is, as they say, a ‘transactional politician,’ who’s sole criterion for decisions is the extent to which he profits, both politically and financially, from any particular decision. He is also, at heart, an autocrat who pines to be as powerful as the dictators around the world who he admires and attempts to emulate.

On the other hand, and in conjunction with Trump’s ego-driven politics, some of the key people who now surround him are extreme corporatist libertarians with technical skills. Now, that may sound like a self-contradictory term, but for the new techno-fascists who are emerging in Silicon Valley, i.e. Musk and his cronies, the vision of government is to destroy it because they believe that they—self-assessed as the world’s smartest people merely because they can control complex electronic systems and presumably manage the institutions they take over—are destined and have the right to rule the world.

I know that sounds weird, but that is because it is weird. These people listen to some of the most extreme techno-authoritarian fanatics in the world. The DOGE tactics of disarming a wide range of federal departments, programs, and general operations are 'back door' means to, instead of legislatively eliminating them, simply disabling them by firings and requiring that the most routine normal expenditures be authorized by a politically appointed official, and then refusing to approve, instead of deny, They just sit on requests for normal expenditures for paper, etc. to operate as authorized by Congressional mandate, so that there is no denial to be opposed.

All this is just about as evil as it is clever. The consequence, of course, is suffering of millions of citizens in diverse ways and in some cases death. That, by the way, is not hyperbole, it is observed fact. It does reflect, however, the deep and complex ways in which the people and the government are interconnected, something the techno-bro fascists would seem to not understand. But no, like all fascists throughout history, they just do not care.

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### ***Today's Featured Image:***

***Masked ICE agents with no identifying insignia, abduct Rümeyşa Öztürk, a Tufts University doctoral student, and LEGAL immigrant, then force her into an unmarked car. This is the same way the Chilean dictator Augusto Pinochet 'disappeared' people in Chile before he was overthrown in 1990.***

***They imprisoned Ms Ozturk in Vermont, then quickly moved her to an ICE deportation center in Louisiana, where opposition to such authoritarian tactics is very low. A federal judge in Vermont subsequently ordered her release. An increasingly implemented tactic of the Trump 'administration' is to commit openly illegal acts in diverse locations and organizations in hopes of scattering the targets for resistance. Legal responses—lawsuits—take time, allowing the violations of human rights to continue. Resistance must grow to effectively counter the autocratic attempt.***

### ***Books and other Sources Related to the New Great Transformation***

Gene Sharp was the pioneer in the study of nonviolent civil resistance movements. But Erica Chenoweth and Maria J. Stephan have taken it to the next level. They gathered and analyzed lots of data on a number of cases around the world from 1900 to 2006. The complexity of such movements and the conditions under which they occur produces a complex mix of outcomes. Nevertheless, the trends are clear even though exceptions occur too.



Erica Chenoweth and Maria J. Stephan. 2011. *Why Civil Resistance Works: The Strategic Logic of Nonviolent Conflict*. New York: Columbia University Press

I have talked to numerous friends and acquaintances who see the danger to democracy that the MAGA-Trump autocratic attempt represents. “What to do now?” That is the persistent question for those who would work to defend democracy. A friend who trains people in target shooting and is also a gun safety instructor says increasing numbers of progressives are buying guns out of fear of the violent point of view of the white supremacists who seem to want a civil war. Fear is definitely on the rise.

Yet, despite the common assumption that the only way to overcome a coup is through violent armed resistance, the data and analyses of Chenoweth and Stephan demonstrate that the most likely way to succeed in resisting dictatorships or autocratic coups is through nonviolent movements of civil resistance, which include a wide range of tactics and widespread participation. A popular movement currently seems to be on the rise.

### *Quotable Quotes*

One of the most fascinating, and disturbing, things about the conventional view of the climate crisis is its complete failure to grasp the critical factor of time. Thus, Ingmar Rentshog’s choice of name for the foundation he formed to get the message out about the science of climate and ecological devastation of the entire Earth System is prescient. Far too many people have no sense of either the factor of time or that of the power of exponential change over time.

*When truth becomes a threat, science becomes resistance.*  
~ Ingmar Rentshog, CEO, Founder, We Don’t Have Time.org

The critical impact of a systemic change may begin with a lag in time. By the time the change is recognized by ordinary observation, its impact may be well underway. Both time lag and exponential change contribute to the failure to ‘look up’ when disaster is incoming and accelerating. Rentshog’s organization is designed to use media to accelerate awareness of reality as the catastrophic convergence of contemporary crises approaches its point of no return.

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See you in two weeks. Meanwhile, stay safe, say hello to a neighbor or stranger, check out my blog posts at [The Hopeful Realist.com](https://TheHopefulRealist.com), read [HOPEFUL REALISM: A Climate Manifesto.](#), and, buy my new book, [Holding It Together: Social Control in an Age of Great Transformation](#).