

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

NOTE: *I am now safely ensconced in that “undisclosed secure location,” south of the border (yes, secure south of the border...), but will be here for only a couple more weeks before returning to the recently overheated Central Coast of California, as the entire Southwest experiences record-breaking heat and massive loss of winter snowpack. Expect some severe water shortages this summer.*

The Two Burner Stove: War in an Overheating World.

It is well established that the military, especially the wars it prosecutes, is among the top sources of not only climate-altering carbon emissions, but also massive ecological damage wherever it goes. “If the global military were a country, it would rank as the [fourth largest emitter of greenhouse gases](#), just between India and Russia.” According to the International Union of Scientists calculations, “The world’s militaries collectively account for an estimated [5.5%](#) of all global greenhouse gas emissions.” Of course, the US military spends more than the next nine or ten countries *combined*.

Trump’s “little excursion,” so far, several weeks of bombing every significant piece of infrastructure in Iran, has now become the epitome of military destruction with no clear purpose other than to impose death and destruction to the nation whose agreement to restrain itself from producing nuclear weapons he tore up—any accomplishment of President Obama cannot, in his vindictive racist frame of mind, be allowed to survive. And some indications that the nuclear talks were close to agreement when he and Netanyahu attacked.

Almost completely ignored by the mass media, the fact remains that this intense action is increasing the military share of pollution, carbon emissions, ecological damage, extended epidemiological destruction, and climate instability, in significant ways. The damage to the Iranian people will last for decades.

At the same time, we have a growing number of reports and forecasts that give strong evidence of not only the extremely warm winter just now ending—well winter ending, if not the heat—but forecasts also portend a very hot summer, expected to break records as a predicted stronger than ever El Nino builds in the Pacific Ocean. As Bill McKibben pointed out in his [Substack](#)

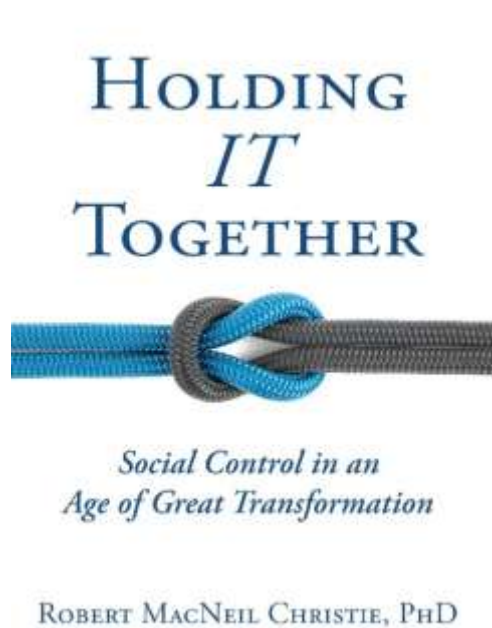
[newsletter](#), which went online Monday, two days ago, the environmental and human disaster in Iran is happening in the context of building weather extremes around the world, including drought in Iran, with about a third of the global population about to experience heating so strong that normal human activities outdoors will be untenable. War and climate degradation are *NOT* unrelated.

It is hard to imagine what comes next, but it is even harder to imagine how our set-in-their-ways human institutions can respond to the much larger global crisis of Earth System destabilization. The perpetrators of an expanding “Middle East war”—more accurately, the *U.S.-Israel war on Iran* (US media immediately project wording that distances the war from our consciousness by the referential distance of its terminology)—are in full denial of the accelerating climate chaos and consequent human suffering. The ad hoc US autocrat—unrestrained by the putative checks and balances constitutionally intended for the other two branches to implement—has dismantled most of the modest efforts in the U.S. to mitigate environmental damage, or even gather environmental information. The severe cuts to the budget of NOAA have meant loss of the very important data normally drawn from many weather balloons in diverse locations. The politics of destruction seems to have no limits.

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I know that putting the advert below for *Holding IT Together* in every issue of this newsletters may seem redundant, but, hey, it costs me nothing. I don’t charge myself a penny. So, it is a free reminder to buy and read the book. How could I turn that down?

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Published July 26, 2024, and the product of decades of research and reflection, [Holding IT Together: Social Control in an Age of Great Transformation](#) explains the global changes that have resulted in the catastrophic convergence of the crises of climate, ecosystems, economies, and politics, and the societal chaos, which we now see intensifying every day. In it, I also describe the deep changes that are necessary in order to effectively head off societal collapse so we can more comfortably shape the New Great Transformation of our institutions and our ways of living necessary in a world of less intensive energy consumption. We *will* transition away from fossil fuels, like it or not, and the sooner and more intentionally the better. Later would be catastrophic. Petroleum products provided great affluence for some for a while, yet are

already causing chaos and environmental destruction for everyone.

“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 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 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 as well as from independent bookstores via Bookshop.org. It is now also available at a discount directly from the publisher, 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. 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:

LOOK UP! A Bi-weekly Featured Commentary

What New Economy? Human Flourishing vs. System Power

It is now abundantly clear that the neo-liberal economy that has dominated the world in recent decades, simply does not serve the interests of the people of Earth. It does not serve the wellbeing of the people of the U.S., not the people of the EU, least of all the people of the Global South. The nations that were once colonies remain largely under the control of their former colonial overlords, which have continued to oppress them ever since the “Age of Exploration” when pillage was much more blatant than the more subtle relations of domination through debt and military threat we see today.

In his classic 1978 essay, “[The Power of the Powerless](#),” Vaclav Havel makes the extremely important distinction between the “*aims of life*” and the “*aims of the system*,” in discussing the dilemmas of life under the rule of “post-totalitarian” systems of Eastern Europe dominated by the Soviet Union of that era. While he focused on Czechoslovakia in that time, the distinction is universal. To what extent, for example, does the U.S. government serve the “aims of life” of its people? Or does it serve the “aims of the system” more—that complex system of government and corporate interests, which I would prefer to call “the corporate state”?

By “post-totalitarian,” Havel meant the authoritarian state that ruled not so much by the force of violence or its threat, but by the passive consent of the people, who knew that failure to conform would mean isolation from any viable role in the economy, and social ostracism as well. I could not avoid considering the obvious comparison with the sovereignty that the industrial-consumer cultures exert over the consciousness of the people in today’s “advanced” industrial “democracies,” which, when you think about it, are really not all that democratic. The ritual formalities of electoral politics may be necessary, but they are not sufficient to sustain a democracy.

Compliance is internalized, especially when it takes the form of consumerism. That is because to consume is to be a compliant member of the work-buy-work-more-to-buy-more ‘lifestyle’ of the general population of industrial nations. In that culture, the US reigns supreme. That is what keeps the dominant neo-liberal economy going and the people compliant with the requirements of the power elites.

Yet, because it is a self-aggrandizing system drawing most of the value generated by the economy into the highest reaches of the system’s power elites, growing discontent and despair arises among the people. Much of it is coopted and exploited by that very same power elite, what some now call “the Epstein class,” and for good reason. The power elite that controls most societies today consists of the wealthiest persons and corporations in the world, which have no interest in the potential flourishing of human beings; they have no moral center, nor

do they feel empathy, only concern for their position among the other members of the elite itself, as well as hypervigilance regarding the protection of their wealth. That was fully evident in the Epstein files, at least for the few who read the released documents in full, as was revealed and elaborated by Anand Giridharadas and Ezra Kline in their recent [conversation](#) on Kline's podcast. Giridharadas is elaborating on his findings from the Epstein files, analyzing the social psychology of the network of the world's richest people in a new series in his podcast, [The Ink](#).

According to [Emily Atkin](#) Editor in Chief at [Heated](#), “Only **8 percent of all corporate broadcast climate segments mentioned fossil fuels**, the main driver of climate change. So even when corporate news networks do cover climate change, [they systemically refuse to explain why it's happening](#).” If that is not passive compliance with the counter-factual agenda of the oil-soaked nascent autocratic regime, then I do not know what is.

This phenomenon reflects the extreme distance the current self-appointed rulers of the oligarchic economy are from having any semblance of attention to the needs of the people over whom they now rule—without democratic authority. By asserting unconstitutional illegal power, without legislative or judicial restraint, they become autocratic authority by default—not dissimilar to the rulers of Czechoslovakia in 1978.

The aims of life, which would be enhanced by a full on program of climate action, stand in direct opposition to the aims of the autocratic regime now operating to capture the political system for unrestrained corruption and plunder.

In short, the existing global economy and especially that of the U.S., does not serve the interests of the people. That is what an economy should be for. Autocracy does the exact opposite. It exploits the people and corrupts the nation for its own power and increased wealth.

We clearly need a **new economy**, and a number of people have suggested what it might look like. Many have now heard of the “donut economy,” an idea developed primarily by Kate Raworth, which would shift priorities to serving human wellbeing by focus on the elements of economic operations in the real world of ecosystems and climate, thereby reducing industrial output significantly. A parallel idea is “degrowth economics,” in which the volume of energy and material throughput in the economy is reduced from its current high levels in order to protect the planet from extractive damage.

These ideas are central to building a viable low-energy consuming economy that favors human wellbeing over growth of the existing global political economy, which serves its system-interests, not human flourishing. But these ideas, valuable as they are, are very far from and largely do not address **how to get there from here**.

Jeremy Lent's forthcoming book, *Ecocivilization: Making a World that Works for All* (May 2026) will undoubtedly extend our understanding of what it means to create an ecological civilization—given the deep understanding of human consciousness and culture exhibited in his first two books, *The Patterning Instinct* and *The Web of Meaning*—in contrast with the massive ecological overshoot, which is central to the current global political economy. However, it is critically important to not only build that understanding, but also to develop the **methods**

needed for implementing the New Great Transformation of human societies to achieve that end.

That will require not only much more contemplation, but also a great deal of creativity in actions to mobilize populations to overcome the intransigence of extant institutions (corporate and governmental), which steadfastly resist change in their practices as well as culture. We simply cannot wait to work out all the theoretical details of an ecological civilization to begin the processes of transformation and/or replacement of existing extractive institutions, necessary to achieve the New Great Transformation of societies to become viable members of the ecosystems we inhabit.

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Today's Featured Image:

War is one of the greatest sources of atmospheric pollution and ecological damage of all. And, it seems that the perpetrators of the war-of-choice on Iran are hell-bent on inflicting as much pain and suffering on the civilian population as they were on persecuting the Palestinian people. The Black Rain falling on Tehran will cause generations of cancer and genetic damage. Collective punishment seems the order of things for autocrats as well as wannabe dictators. The destruction of humans and the planet fit into their calculus of power, without a murmur of regret.



Source: Conflict and Environment Observatory / @sentdefender

Hardly a "little excursion," directed by a Fox Fixed News Failure, the death and destruction seems an end in itself, given the lack of any identifiable end-goal of the War-on-Iran. Narcissistic sociopaths actually enjoy inflicting pain on others, as a celebration of their illegal and unconstitutional power.

Books and other Sources Related to the New Great Transformation

As I have mentioned more times than I can remember, the 1972 prediction of the end of industrial growth via material shortages, pollution, and associated chaos, by the authors of [*The Limits to Growth*](#), was remarkably accurate in estimating these outcomes during the first decades of the twenty-first century. Gaya Herrington has offered valuable twenty-first century insights into the potential for and means to avoid the global collapse that without massive human intervention may be inevitable.

Gaya Herrington. 2022. *Five Insights for Avoiding Global Collapse: What a 50-Year-Old Model of the World Taught Me About a Way Forward for Us Today*. (Downloadable book at: <https://www.mdpi.com/books/monograph/6206-five-insights-for-avoiding-global-collapse>.)

It is almost too late, but also incredibly imperative that humans collectively think about, plan, and execute corrective measures immediately. How to accomplish such a monumental task cannot be fully explicated beforehand. However, we must begin mobilizing without delay to take the actions we know are important.

Quotable Quotes

Malcolm Nance is a retired Navy Chief Petty Officer with the experience of a long career in intelligence operations. He has lots of reasons to be a vocal critic of contemporary US foreign policy, based on his extensive international experience and patriotic perspective. Ken Harbaugh is another Navy veteran and podcaster, with whom I was unfamiliar when I listened to their conversation with Steve Schmidt on his “The Warning” Substack podcast.

For We are witnessing pure mental illness masquerading as foreign policy.

~ Malcolm Nance

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No one is allowed who is more competent than the Clown In Chief, so, we have an incompetent clown show.

~ Ken Harbaugh

When the former Republican strategist, Steve Schmidt, who is dedicated to the Constitution and to human dignity, and these two articulate Navy veterans discuss the current national barbarity, facts and values receive enlightening exposition. The contrasting careers of these three patriots merge in a remarkably astute assessment of the current world military-political crisis. For an eye opening experience, listen/watch at:

https://steveschmidt.substack.com/p/weekend-iran-war-update-with-malcolm?utm_source=podcast-email&publication_id=836444&post_id=190281540&utm_campaign=email-play-on-substack&utm_content=watch_now_button&r=qkbtm&triedRedirect=true&utm_medium=email

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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://www.thehopefulrealist.com), read [HOPEFUL REALISM: A Climate Manifesto.](#), and, buy my new book, [***Holding It Together: Social Control in an Age of Great Transformation***](#) .