

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

Positive Reinforcement: It Can Be a Big Negative.

You remember, when something happening causes more of it to happen, resulting in an exponential increase of it happening, that's positive reinforcement. But positive reinforcement may not be positive in relation to what we want to happen. Sometimes a little bit is quite enough. On the other hand, negative reinforcement results from the thing happening reducing the likelihood that it will happen as much—it's a damper. A curiosity in theory, either may portend disaster in the real world, although negative reinforcement often results in stabilizing a system. Maybe the founders of the U.S. Constitution had that in mind when they designed the three branches of government to provide 'checks and balances' for each other.

Addiction is an example of positive reinforcement. Taking the drug makes the addict want to take it again and again. But there are many kinds of addiction. Some cigarette smokers say, "I can quit whenever I want to," but they never do. Heroin addicts say that smoking cigarettes is harder to quit than kicking the habit of shooting heroin in their veins. I can't say from personal experience, since I have never been addicted to either. I have met the rare person who can and does quit smoking on the basis of the decision alone; my father was one. He chain smoked unfiltered Camel cigarettes. In addition to having a very determined personality, the throat cancer that took part of his jaw bone was also a motivator; he simply quit, that was it. Sometimes it's a social habit, as when a person smokes only when in the company of friends who smoke, but does not otherwise smoke. That is rare.

However, there are many kinds of addiction, some very dysfunctional and others benign. Think of some of the habits you have that take up time but do no harm, such as compulsively completing the newspaper crossword puzzle. Serial killers represent the extreme end of a continuum of those who are addicted to violence. Others may 'merely' engage in psychological abuse. For the social predator who enjoys making others suffer, any retaliation on the part of the victim may act as a positive reinforcement of the initial violent behavior. For the torturer who enjoys his work, when the victim loses consciousness, it is a disappointment because suffering requires consciousness. Unfortunately, for some fairly complicated reasons, we have no shortage of people in modern societies who enjoy inflicting pain, sometimes physical, sometimes

psychological or social, and sometimes financial, on others. It is a big disappointment to have one in the White House.

When a war is initiated primarily in order to inflict violence, it cannot end well, especially when the “Secretary of War” treats it like a video game while self-righteously invoking the authority of Jesus Christ, and ‘getting off’ on things that go bang and destroy thing and people. Moreover, the complexities of war result in unpredictable effects. It is easy to see the direct effects of a missile a bomb, or an attack drone, but the consequences do not stop there. Far from it

In the case of the current war on Iran, the relations among parties to the conflict and many other affected nations are exceptionally complex. When the U.S. and Israel attacked Iran, very complex consequences began to play out; that is far from over. The consequences for international energy finance and use affect many the economies of many nations not party to the conflict, even to the extent of shifting alliances. The NATO members were not consulted, yet the president *post factum* demanded that they participate after snubbing them in other contexts. They declined. Drone technology has significantly shifted the parameters of combat there as well as in Ukraine. That further complicated war plans that were already not feasible on an operational basis.

Rogue military adventurism does not befit a ‘democratic society,’ especially when the goal is either vague or shifts with the winds of battle. Even more important, once initiated, such a war can escalate via positive reinforcement among opponents and activate other unanticipated factors, even as they fail at seeking an exit strategy. Bibi got what he wanted, almost.

The electoral loss of Victor Orbán in Hungary was a stunning defeat for fascism in Europe. It may signal a reversal of the prospects for authoritarian politicians there and here. Maybe it can be the first round in a new positive reinforcement of democracy in the world. What are the odds?

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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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HOLDING *IT* TOGETHER



*Social Control in an
Age of Great Transformation*

ROBERT MACNEIL CHRISTIE, PHD

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](https://www.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](https://www.amazon.com) as well as from independent bookstores via [Bookshop.org](https://www.bookshop.org). It is now also available at a discount directly from the publisher, [BearClawPress.com](https://www.bearclawpress.com)

My eBook ***HOPEFUL REALISM: A Climate Manifesto*** remains available as a **free** download from [Kindle Unlimited](https://www.amazon.com/kindle-unlimited). The regular Kindle eBook price is \$6.99. Please give it a rating/review on [GoodReads.com](https://www.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/>

LOOK UP! A Bi-weekly Featured Commentary

"HORMUZ NEWS THAT YOU probably can't USE..." [apologies to Steven Colbert]

What manner of news from Hormuz could you possibly use? Not an easy question to answer.

Most of the news related to that strait is misinformed or lopsided by naïve notions of war. The media universally oversimplifies the military/political situation as merely a matter of relative firepower—missiles, drones, fighter-bomber jets, or naval vessels. To them, "asymmetric warfare" is just another phrase. All the experts I listen to, are baffled by the U.S. prosecution of the war on Iran, especially at the level of both strategy and tactics. Now, by expert I mean not academics, pentagon bureaucrats, war industry consultants/lobbyists, or congressional staffers. The real expertise comes from seasoned on-the-ground veterans of [military intelligence](#) services, especially in the Middle East. To them, nothing in this escapade makes military or even political sense. Malcolm Nance in his podcast, "[Black Man Spy](#)," has more depth of knowledge and analysis than any other I've seen. And his understanding of Middle East cultures is direct and personal.

We know that the current president has surrounded himself with sycophants, yes-men who would never say, "Mr. President, that will not work." Never mind the lack of mission clarity or any sense of an end-game. The illusion that air power can force the fanatical Iranian regime to submit to the demands of the president pervades the U.S. regime's will to power over an

enemy and a geography about which they seem totally ignorant. Their worldview has high walls. The president has purged all the top military professionals and listens only to General Cain, who merely reinforces whatever he wants to do, despite tactical or strategic obstacles impossible to overcome. His 'sounding board' is the mad Lora Loomer.

The fanatical Iranian theocracy has been building its cultural and political, as well as material infrastructure to fight the American 'devils' for decades. They have built an internal organizational structure that is not hindered by taking out the top leaders. Every intelligence operator and analyst knows that. So, why are orders given that would seem to be based on ignorance of these facts? Well, in the minds of the juvenile inner circle of presidential yes men, facts that contradict the U.S. regime's intention—to make war, period—do not come into the discussion. This is a classic failure of all dictatorships.

"But, we live in a democracy; it's just that the president is violating the law and getting away with it," you say? Sorry, but a democracy is a living operating process for a society to make decisions and take actions in the interests of the whole population, not some narrow elite that has taken control of the executive branch of government and overly influences the other two. Victor Orban retained formal 'democratic' institutions, which his dictatorship totally corrupted. The founders intended that each of the three branches of the federal government operate as checks on any overreach by the others. If both legislature and judicial branches bow to the executive and do nothing in response to gross violations of law and Constitution, then we have, in effect, a dictatorship.

The autocratic character of the current U.S. regime continues to construct what looks like the greatest inside heist in history from the U.S. government and its economy—from insider war contracts to plundering the markets via trading on war prospects on the basis of inside knowledge of the next erratic presidential move toward Iran, not to mention family financial ties to global oligarchs. That whole corruption story would fill several books, just to outline the diverse gambits meant to line the pockets of the president and his family. Kristi Nome was fired largely because she did not cut her boss in on her graft.

Some other news from Hormuz, which you might be able to use, is reflected in the international impact on energy and its effects on economies around the world. It is a complex web, but the closure of the Strait of Hormuz offers us all a lesson on how difficult the new great transformation of industrial-consumer economies from fossil-fuel dependence to low energy-use configurations, will be. In addition to distracting from the "Epstein class" scandal, the rapidly deteriorating climate/ecological crises are ignored by the news media as they obsess over Melania's meaningless efforts to dissociate herself from it all.

While the combatant nations, the Israeli, Iranian, and U.S. regimes—each autocratic in its own way—go about creating, in addition to human suffering, vast energy waste and toxic pollution in the form of munitions expenditures and oil refinery and transportation hub fires, the acceleration of climate chaos continues unabated. Accelerating crop failures and food insecurity are amplified and a broader reach of actual starvation. The abject failure of the most powerful nations to get started on trying to make the inevitable transformation at least partly livable for as much of the world's population as possible is extended indefinitely.

Today's Featured Image:

Twenty percent of all the world's oil and liquefied natural gas moves through the Strait of Hormuz. Ninety percent of all international transactions are conducted in U.S. Dollars. "Petro-dollars" prevail, for now. Although not much discussed in this context, the War on Iran is playing out as a global struggle over energy and finance. The global economy is driven by a web of financial and energy transactions every day, and this war also threatens the primacy of the dollar in the global economy.



Source: Sunday Guardian

Trump started his war on Iran because he was played by Bibi Netanyahu into using it to satisfy his will to exert power over as much of the world as he can. But, wars never go as planned, especially when prosecuted by amateur sociopaths with no sense or experience with real military tactics or strategy. Now, it is out of control as multiple nations play their own hand at responding to a situation not of their making, but which has major influence over their economies...

Books and other Sources Related to the New Great Transformation

I'd been looking for some good examples of what some call "Cli-Fi," which explore the near future in relation to the new great transformation of societies as the industrial-consumer global political economy approaches collapse of its own weight and the disruptions to climate and the ecosystems that supply us all with the means of survival. I saw some praise for *10:59* as an "apocalyptic thriller." Well, no book review here, but this novel raises one of the most fundamental issues of our time. It focuses on overpopulation, an institutional plot to radically reduce it, and the moral dilemmas involved. But the real underlying issue is human triage in an age when survival is already at risk.

N. R. Baker. 2020. *10:59*. A novel. Kington, UK: Burning Chair Publishing.

I have said for some time now that efforts to reduce population are too little too late, because while rates of growth around the world are declining, by the time they result in actual reduction in the number of people on the planet, vast numbers will have already died of starvation and resource wars, assuming, that is, that the present "business [and wars] as usual" continue. This novel, in the former context, raises the issue of who shall live. With over eight billion people and climate/ecological crises emerging differentially around the world, I cannot avoid foreseeing great dilemmas of who can attain the means of survival and who cannot.

Quotable Quotes

Aisha Marzuki offers from her broad experience in human and community development a cultural model for an ecological civilization on a human scale, which addresses many of the important implications of attempting to transform our current unsustainable industrial-consumer economies into livable caring communities.

We're watching the features of a system requiring infinite growth meeting finite limits: climate breakdown, institutions failing, widespread burnout, young people who can't imagine a stable future.

~ Aisha Marzuki. *Jariya Field Guide*.

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Her practical field guide, grounded in traditional indigenous culture and social psychology, is freely downloadable and ought to be read by anyone who wants to participate in re-humanizing our present societies in harmony with the natural world.

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