

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**Highway of Horrible Headlines**

Here are a few of the headlines I've read recently. Most just stood out in my scan of major newspapers or specialized websites. Are the standard news and opinion outlets simply biased toward the negative? Or, is it that there are just a lot of horrible things going on? We can look back in history and find all sorts of negative news. So, what is going on here today? Well, sometimes the reality is that multiple crises converge, resulting in chaos and maybe collapse,

Nevertheless, we humans always have our agency, our ability to act in response to the conditions we encounter, if we are willing to recognize uncomfortable realities.

GAZA

- "Israel steps up deadly strikes and expands physical barrier in Gaza despite truce." *NBC News*, July 24, 2026
- Over 92 percent of homes in Gaza are damaged or destroyed, leaving roughly 1.7 million displaced people living across 1,600 tent camps and ruined structures." ~ *Aljazeera*

West Bank

- "Israeli ministers announce plans for new illegal settlements in Gaza and West Bank." *The Guardian*. July 18, 2026 by Emma Graham-Harrison.
- "UN warns West Bank settler violence hits 'all-time high' as calls grow to end occupation" *UN News*, United Nations. July 29, 2026.

Netanyahu-Trump War on Iran

- "US pauses attacks on Iran for a second day as peace talks continue: Trump weighs up his options after military chiefs warn of dwindling munitions stock-piles." *The Guardian* July 26, 2026.
- "Trump Seems Trapped by Iran War, Even as He Wields the World's Biggest Hammer: A president who thought there were no limits to his power has discovered several, leaving him more frustrated and erratic." By David E. Sanger. [New York Times](#). July 26, 2026.

Climate Chaos and Ecological Destruction

- "This Isn't A Heat Wave" Top Scientist's Warning About What's Over East Coast | Heat Dome." James E. Hansen, climate scientist interview with Jim Acosta. [YouTube](#).
- New Leader of Major US Climate Program Doesn't Believe the Science." 07.15.2026 by Miranda Green. [Atmos](#). July 15, 2026.

Meanwhile, ...

- "Police vetted dubious allegation only after Buttigieg was separated from children: The Michigan attorney general's office is investigating how the accusation that prompted the ex-Cabinet secretary's separation from his 4-year-old twins was handled." [The Washington Post](#). July 27, 2026.
- "Food Just Became a Weapon: Three shocks are hitting harvests together" (...Odesa region prosecutors say Russia struck 28 civilian vessels and killed 21 people between June 20 and July 20.) [Geopolitical Alpha](#). By Gideon Ashwood.
- "The Fraud of 'Clean' Natural Gas July 2026 How Big Oil and Gas Created the Myth that Natural Gas is a Climate Solution." By Rebecca John, Rebecca Leber, and Davis Allen, PhD. A report from *The Center for Climate Integrity*. July 2026.

Are We Experiencing a Catastrophic Convergence of Crises?

I found most of the above articles during my usual scans of major news and opinion outlets over the past several days. Others resulted from a search on one of the topics above. I follow some important sources that are not major news outlets but have more direct connection to what is happening "on the ground" in a particular domain, or just consistently provide insightful analysis found nowhere else.

Timothy Snyder's *Substack* platform, [Thinking about...](#), is one such insightful source, though not represented in the above titles. Another is Malcolm Nance's [Black Man Spy](#), also on Substack. His "US Iran War Day....." series of conversations with Saudi American geopolitical analyst, Wajeeh Lion and Danish intelligence officer Jacob Kaarsbo, is the best source of military and political intelligence about the Middle East I know of. There are many others of course, some represented above. Different day, different story, different source. Of course, one must always "consider the source," when reading any news or analysis on anything.

The New York Times has its biases, of course, but some of their reporters do fine investigative journalism; so too the Washington Post, despite Jeff Bezos' ownership and his firing of some of its best journalists. Despite the autocratic attempts to influence major news outlets—in some cases successfully, such as the decimation of CBS's "60 Minutes," much of the most important news still gets out, but we must increasingly hunt it down. The firing of Steven Colbert was another failure of CBS to stand up for freedom of the press against the pressures of potential disapproval of its potential merger by the autocratic regime.

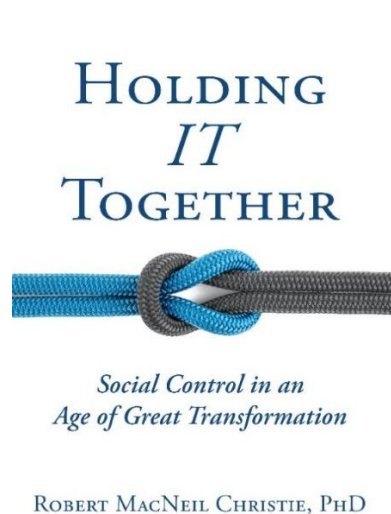
On the other hand, there is a great deal of "good news" out there too. It is, however, harder to find. Many good people are working hard to stave off the degradation of various sub-systems of our Earth System; others are fighting the battle to save democracy from the current autocratic attempt to install a MAGA dictatorship. Their stories are not quite so dramatic, with the exception of a few, such as the stalwart struggle of the people of Minneapolis to defend their neighbors from the brutality of ICE agents.

At the same time, diverse scientists and activists are working in diverse fields to undo or roll back the damage wrought by the global political economic elites on the only planet we will ever call home. Many programs of action to stave off ecological damage or constrain carbon

emissions, were slightly supported by government until the wannabe architects of authoritarian dictatorship canceled many grants and contracts as well as EPA regulations. It is not what news we want to see but isn't there, that matters; it is what we do to make such things happen so that they will become news..

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Here is a shorter promo for ***Holding IT Together*** which, in every issue of this newsletters may seem redundant, but, hey, it costs me nothing.



Can Modern Civilization Transform Itself in Order to Survive?

In *Holding IT Together*, Dr. Robert MacNeil Christie explains how we got into this mess and what it will take to come out alive. Despite its many benefits, industrial civilization has become an existential threat to itself and our Earth System. It may even threaten our survival, along with many other species. We must transform ourselves, our communities, and our societies into responsible members of the ecosystems of which we are a part. We must 'hold it together' to find a place of our own within the living Earth system, Gaia.

Libraries seeking treatises on the major dilemmas of modern society and living, who look for well-researched blends of and contrasts between different viewpoints...will find Holding IT Together especially relevant... ~ **Midwest Book Review**

Christie's writing is sharp and thought-provoking, making complex ideas accessible...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**

"Buy it!" says the author.

My eBook **HOPEFUL REALISM: A Climate Manifesto** is available on Amazon.com. Please give it a rating/review on [GoodReads.com](https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/42500000-Hopeful-Realism). Or, [review and rate](#) *Hopeful Realism* on its Amazon page.

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

Competence Matters, So Does Evil

For a very long time now, I have been ambivalent about experts. In grad school, I studied the sociology of knowledge, which made me aware of the influence of the effect of economics and politics on what people 'know.' In fact, many things affect personal knowledge as well as political and economic ideologies. Of course, ideologies are knowledge claims based on the interests people have in the outcomes of believing this or that. I also have had various experiences with people promoting some ideas that they claim are fact, when they are really the expression of an excuse for believing what would lead the rest of us to act in a way that enriches or empowers the promoter of the ideas.

But it's not just the ideas that count; it is also the ability of some promoters to influence others however false the claims to knowledge may be. An extreme case of this is the audacious claim that the January 6 insurrectionists were merely patriots visiting the nation's capitol, despite the video evidence from numerous cameras and phones that documented the beatings of capitol police and the destruction of property as the rioters forced their way into the building. So, one might conclude that anyone who believed such blatant untruths was simply a liar or unbelievably gullible. Well, yes, but its more complicated than that.

There is a certain cultural sector for which facts are not as important as belief. If you accept the framing of reality that the extreme believers in 'conspiracy theories' hold, for example, any rational person might consider you to be intellectually incompetent. However, we must distinguish such things from intelligence in the conventional sense. One might be a highly trained lawyer or economist, yet subscribe to one or more conspiracy theories. But we must remember that humans have the capability to shape a 'framing' of the world that fits their emotional condition or political ambition irrespective of any contrary facts. Todd Blanche is all about framing the world to fit his evil intentions; he's not about investigating the world to discover the facts.

Ambition is a very important factor in all this. Some folks simply have no scrupled when it comes to lying in order to promote their own interests or those of their leader. That is why Todd Blanche, the acting Attorney General of the US, comes to mind, as does his employer. When loyalty to a person overrides loyalty to the Constitution, an employee's competence is not relevant to 'job performance,' since it is not the job that is being performed; rather, the incumbent is performing personal service in the guise of 'doing the job.' In this case, the service is institutional destruction in support of political autocracy.

As in the case of the current MAGA federal regime, when the hiring of officials is executed on the basis of fealty to 'the boss' *only*, then competence would seem not to matter, since job performance is not the point. Loyally executing the commands of the 'commander in chief' is the only criterion. But while competence is irrelevant to the regime's destructive purposes, and there is no interest in fulfilling the mandates of the various offices, *incompetence* can add to the destruction. After all, it takes far less competence to destroy than to create.

It is much easier and quicker to destroy something than to build or maintain it. That is certainly demonstrated in the current damage to or elimination of many federal programs and projects.

However, in the military context, eliminating the most competent generals and admirals who are 'of color' or female, not only damages the potential intelligence that could be applied to combat strategy. The blind incompetence of the highest office, occupied by the so called 'secretary of war,' results in the failure to even achieve the evil intentions he harbors and desires to express by indiscriminate bombing. In the process, the nation is put in an increasingly weakened position in strictly military terms. The Iranians are playing into the incompetence to further weaken the US and its erstwhile allies, and they are succeeding because of the incompetence of the president and secretary of the Defense Department.

Even more important, the incompetent evil actions of the political sociopaths in power disrupt numerous international commitments on which many economies depend, including our own, while setting the whole Middle East region on fire with geopolitical chaos and increased danger for all.

Today's Featured Image:

Politics is too often war by other means. Today it is played out in a very kinetic way in and around the narrow "choke point" called the Strait of Hormuz, which suddenly everyone has now heard of. Every day, over twenty percent of the world's petroleum, from crude oil, to natural gas, to diesel fuel was transported to nations all over the world. Now, almost none.



Satellite image with shipping tracks

The personal war mongering of Netanyahu, Trump, and Hegseth have set the global economy on a path of destruction that they had not contemplated in their hubris. Soon, the global supply chains will experience losses that might make the COVID pandemic disruption look mild. Diesel in particular, fuels most transportation of goods and fuel, which make it especially vulnerable to disruption of the flow of economic value..

Books and other Sources Related to the New Great Transformation

It seems impossible to understand the complexities of modernity, industrial civilization, and the rapid social change we experience today without some framework involving economic history, sociology, and ecology, as well as other factors causing the converging crises and chaos that confront us. Nat Hagens provides great fact-based insights in his highly informed podcast.

Nate Hagens *The Great Simplification*. Podcast.

<https://www.thegreatsimplification.com/>

The Great Simplification faces the world's rapidly changing complexities with the curiosity of science and the humanity of insights needed to understand the systems at play in the New Great Transformation of humanity's role in the world today in in the future. Listen and learn from an expert with a human face.

Quotable Quotes

False conceptions seem more prevalent today than ever. Or, maybe it is just that the consequences of conceptions that do not resonate with reality have become so important for humanity now that the impact of complex systems driven by fossil fuel power on our very survival, are so grave.

“To the Stoics, oiêsis (false conceptions) are responsible not just for disturbances in the soul, but for chaotic and dysfunctional lives and operations.”

~ Ryan Holiday, *The Daily Stoic*.

It is no longer merely a matter of theoretical disagreements about economics, politics, or personal behavior. Now, we are beginning to see that the turning point will be toward either catastrophic collapse or a New Great Transformation of human societies into ecological communities. We have a great deal of false conceptions to overcome.

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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 recent book, [Holding It Together: Social Control in an Age of Great Transformation](#).