

# Political Fig Leaf After Las Vegas Slaughter

The Las Vegas massacre, like all the other massacres, won't change the easy accessibility of guns in America, but politicians are scrambling to enact a fig-leaf bill against a rapid-fire device used by this one shooter, JP Sottile explains.

By JP Sottile

Congress' forthcoming "bump stock" bill is the perfect political fig leaf. Cracking down on a simple device that turns deadly weapons even deadlier is an ideal political solve for lawmakers who desperately need to be seen taking some sort of action.

Republicans in particular can embrace this ultimately meaningless move under the guise of actually "doing something" about gun violence in America. And that's why they are embracing it ... it's gun control without controlling guns.

If passed, they can comfortably go into next year's elections inoculated against the charge that they are beholden to the National Rifle Association without actually transgressing the NRA or most gun-owners. In fact, the NRA just announced that *even they* are open to restrictions on bump stocks ... thus inoculating themselves from a potential backlash, too.

So it's a two-fer! But it is only a two-fer for the NRA and their "cash and carry" cadre in Congress. It is a big zero when it comes to the daily grind of American gun violence. It's pure political posturing that will not change anything.

That's because bump stocks have been flying off the shelves for three days ... often selling out in some locations. And bump stocks look like something that could be fashioned by a handy man in a well-stocked shop in a typical suburban garage. Even if someone doesn't have the skill to make one, they'll still be out there. Anyone who really wants one ... will get one ... particularly with millions of bump stocks already sold across America.

Given that stark reality, how will a new restriction functionally eliminate those privately owned bump stocks? And who will be tasked with stopping people from making one or buying one on the black market if they really want to get to the so-called "happy spot" where their already high-powered rifles spit out hundreds of rounds like an open garden hose? How will a new law put that genie back into the bottle?

It's really just an extension of the conundrum around the entire gun issue. It is estimated that Americans own 310 million guns. That's nearly a gun per person. America is locked and loaded. Simply put, this nation, which owns nearly half of the world's civilian-held guns, is a teeming mass of well-armed wannabe actions heroes who believe it is their birthright, and some even believe it's their God-given right, to bear arms.

### **No Gun Round-up**

There is no chance they'll let go of that Hollywood-primed fantasy or that intoxicating feeling of individual power. And there is no way this country will engage in an Australia-style round-up of guns ... at least, not for another two generations. And we ain't gonna amend the Second Amendment ... at least, not for another two to four generations ... if ever. Let's be honest, it's gonna take a lot of effort and a long time to stop handing down America's uniquely potent gun-loving gene.

So, it seems like we are stuck. And that's because we are stuck. We have a culture that is suspicious of society and a society that is suspicious of each other. And we are a people who are suspicious of our government, which, it must be pointed out, is really just made up of people. Government is referred to like it is a being ... or a monster ... but it's really just made up of other Americans. Which brings us back around to a growing dysfunction that causes us to fear our neighbors and loathe our fellow Americans. Our distrust of government is intertwined with our distrust of each other. And that's the real reason we like our guns.

Frankly, this Hobbesian dystopia has been the rule in American history. The one blip was the period from the Great Depression through World War II and, with notable exceptions (Jim Crow plus McCarthyism), into the Eisenhower Years. That was a faint glimpse of America as a "whole" people who might be willing to entertain the idea of living in a society.

It was catalyzed by widespread economic hardship, total war and fear of Commies raining down nuclear holocaust on mom, apple pie and Chevrolet. They were tribal reactions to existential fears. But there was also a widely held belief that most Americans were in it together and that government and being a part of society were not inherently bad things. And other Americans were not merely your competition.

Since then, it is has been one long back-slide into the bloody, anti-social norm of American history. This has been the American Way since America's inception. It's been that way since the Whiskey Rebellion and runaway slave patrols and the bugle-tootin' cavalry galloping in to wipe out nettlesome American Indians who

dared to get in the way of Manifest Destiny. It's been that way since the Black Wall Street Massacre of 1921. And it returned during the assassinations and chaos of 1968. The only real difference now is the turbo-charged nature of the weapons we wield thanks to the All-American ethos of bigger-faster-cheaper.

Of course we want more firepower with more bullets delivered in less time. That's not just an integral part of America's insatiable consumerism ... it's just common sense when everyone is armed and everyone is a potential enemy in a nation that looks and feels like one giant O.K. Corral. It's the ultimate self-fulfilling prophecy and it ultimately ends up filling morgues with the collateral damage of our damaged culture.

And all the politically easy bump stock bans in the world will not fix that core issue. We are going to keep paying this price until there is a real and lasting change in the way we see each other. Until we are willing to be a part of society ... we will not be able to give up our gun-based culture.

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## The Spiraling Crisis of Puerto Rico

Puerto Rico's infrastructure, which already faced severe pressures because of the U.S. territory's huge debt and demands from its creditor, has now been devastated by Hurricane Maria, as Dennis J Bernstein reports.

By Dennis J Bernstein

Though President Trump bragged about the relatively low death toll from Hurricane Maria – 16 at the time of his visit on Tuesday – the number soon jumped to 34 and was expected to rise much more when isolated hospitals could finally report in.

Many of the island's 59 hospitals were cut off from power and half the island's 3.4 million inhabitants lacked safe drinking water. The continuing crisis reflected a slow response from the federal government.

Puerto Rican Jewish feminist writer, poet, and activist Aurora Levins Morales is a nationally known Puerto activist. In the following interview, Morales expressed her outrage at Trump's racist response to the Puerto Rican hurricane

disaster.

Morales is the author of *Medicine Stories*, *Remedios: Stories of Earth and Iron from the History of Puertorriqueñas*, and *Kindling: Writings On the Body*, and co-authored two books with her mother, Rosario Morales.

She created the Vehicle for Change project to research, design, fund and build her chemically accessible mobile home, and is currently traveling around the United States writing about the confluence of ecology, health and social justice struggles for her radio blog Letters from Earth, broadcast on Flashpoints on Pacifica Radio. She writes and performs with Sins Invalid, a Bay Area disability justice performance project. I spoke to Morales on October 2.

Dennis Bernstein: Aurora Levins Morales has been watching the situation very closely. This is your homeland and you must be heartbroken.

Aurora Levins Morales: I am devastated. All of us are desperate for information and there is very little to be had. Most of the island is still out of communication. My home is in a remote mountainous area in the west of the island that has received no help yet at all. Today I wrote a poem, which for me is the clearest way to express what is going on right now. It is called *Rumors*:

#### Rumors

Someone posted a message about the bees, how they search, frantically, everywhere, for the flowers that are gone. They said to put out bowls of sugar water for them, so the bees don't all die, but no one has sugar, and no one has water.

Someone posted a message from Carrizales, which is just ten buried curves from my home. It said, "The roads into town are broken. We can't get to the stores. We have no food." That was days ago.

There are seven springs on my family's land. I am hoping a few people with machetes can open a path so everyone can drink. I hope there are still springs.

Someone posted an article that said that the morgues are so full, that there isn't room for one more body, that people are burying their dead themselves, and the governor is still saying that there are only seventeen dead.

Someone posted about the father of a former mayor who died because not all his connections could get him the oxygen he needed.

Someone said people were eating the spoiled food from their dead refrigerators because there was nothing else, and I thought about the smell, of having to hold their noses to swallow it, and about having food poisoning, having diarrhea and

vomiting, without water to drink or wash in.

I remember what don Luis heard from his father after San Ciriaco, 1899, how the people dug up the roots of banana plants because there was nothing else to eat, that they must taste of nothing but water and dirt. I remember fifty years ago, how the poorest people crept onto other people's land to dig up malanga. I whisper: Dig. Don't give up. Keep digging.

Someone posted pictures, ten buried curves in the other direction from my home, and it looked like November in New England, bare branches, wind burnt brown leaves. It looked like a war zone, with huge bomb sized holes in concrete buildings, and the walls missing. The people who took the pictures could only get so far along that road. They didn't make it to where my people are.

Someone said the warehouses are full and our hands are empty. Someone posted that they're dividing each minimal packet of FEMA food into four. A packet of apple sauce. A cracker. A sip of water. Soon they'll just hand out pictures of food. Let them eat labels.

Whenever they can, the people post picture after picture of themselves hauling broken trees, clearing rubble, carrying each other on their backs, floating each other through contaminated flood waters to dry land, sharing the last of the food.

Here in the far away, we are all tilted, off balance, leaning with our whole selves toward what we love. We post picture after picture of all the boxes we have packed for them, all the money we sent, all the clothes, diapers, medicine, food that went to sit in the warehouses. We keep posting the names of our silences, all the places we have left our unanswered messages.

Without electricity, maybe they don't know that the man who calls himself president thinks Puerto Ricans sit around waiting, want everything done for us, that he thinks we're lazy. If they did, maybe their anger would light up the night and start the generators.

It was announced that satellite phones would be airdropped to all the mayors, but they weren't. Nobody knows what's going on. Journalists arrive in mud soaked towns and they are the first to get there. The people gather around them asking, Are you FEMA? Eleven days and nobody else has come. No helicopters. No trucks. Only wind.

There was a rumor that the National Guard had just left for Maricao that afternoon, to open the roads, and carry in supplies, but it kept being posted on different days, and there is not a single picture of a national guard giving a bottle of water or a sandwich to anyone in Maricao, so I don't believe it.

There are people peering over the horizon into next week or the week after and saying the words famine and epidemic. An expert said that the water through which people wade, where children without houses play, is full of sewage. I think cholera and try not to inhale.

The mayor of San Juan, who has waded chest deep through her flooded streets, waded through the official sewage pouring from the presidential mouth says this amounts to genocide.

Someone said, we are no longer dying of hurricane. We are dying of colony.

There was a rumor that no one can sleep anymore, that we are all awake, finally awake. There was a rumor that it was about to be over. There was a rumor that all that raging brown water filled the bank vaults and turned their contracts into pulp, that resignation was disintegrating everywhere. I heard that floods of chemically contaminated runoff erased their hard drives and made the ink run on the articles of subjugation. There was a rumor that people are refusing to put one single cinder block onto another to rebuild our misery. There was a rumor, I just heard it, that enough is finally enough. I heard that people are peering over the horizon into next week, or the week after, and saying the words libre, libre, libre y soberana.

Dennis Bernstein: Puerto Rico is the quintessential case of environmental racism. For half a century it was used as a bombing target of the US military. Now we have the military saying this is a difficult task and we don't know what to do on this island that we have been occupying forever. Talk about the military response and also about the mayor versus Trump.

Aurora Levins Morales: How can the US military, the largest and most powerful in the world, have the gall to say that they face a challenge in airlifting diesel fuel for hospital generators, where people are dying because they cannot refrigerate insulin, they cannot run dialysis machines, they cannot run respirators?

Carmen Yulin is absolutely right that this is genocidal. A few days after the hurricane she was saying that we may not be able to get to everyone, and now she is saying we don't even know how to begin counting the dead. The inability of aid to reach people is so cynical.

And then to have the so-called creditors of this entirely fraudulent debt saying, "Well, they have some bills to pay before we can help them." Put aside all of the colonial pillage of our country over 119 years by the United States and just look at the Jones Act, which restricts Puerto Rico to receiving goods only on ships flying a US flag, and at double the cost. That is millions and

millions of dollars that we have been overcharged since 1920, which would easily pay off the so-called debt in a minute.

It is so cynical to describe this situation as Puerto Rico being in debt to Wall Street. They have been extracting and extracting with no pretense of putting anything back in. Everywhere you go there are signs of coffee farms up for sale. People cannot make a living from the agriculture. They are pressured economically and politically to grow cash crops. We import 80% of what we eat and there is only about two weeks of reserves ever on the island. So the island is always hovering on the brink of famine.

Dennis Bernstein: This is what Trump said about the mayor of Puerto Rico: "Such poor leadership ability by the mayor of San Juan and others in Puerto Rico who are not able to get their workers to help and want everything to be done for them, where it should be a community effort. 10,000 federal workers are now on the island doing a fantastic job. The mayor of San Juan, who was very complimentary only a few days ago, has been told by the Democrats that you must be nasty to Trump."

Aurora Levins Morales: This is the story that gets told about colonized and oppressed people across time. This is what slaveholders said about the enslaved: lazy, ungrateful, can't get it together, that's why they're slaves. People are doing an amazing job in Puerto Rico of organizing at the community level.

Activists all over the island are out there making sure people are okay. Yes, we have a flaming racist in the White House, but remember that the PROMESA Act came into being under Obama. That was a great big present to Wall Street. This was the so-called "rescue" of Puerto Rico which took over our economy entirely and put it in the hands of an appointed board of fiscal control that can override any decision of our elected government.

They are basically selling off all of our public assets and gutting all of our government services in order to pay a fraudulent debt to predatory lenders on Wall Street. It is a massive armed robbery of our people. Now the indignation of the Puerto Rican people has reached a fever pitch. People are demanding that the PROMESA Act as well as the Jones Act be revoked right now, that the debt be cancelled and that we be given a whole lot of money to rebuild, or our country is dead. There is no way to recover without that.

The way in which the story is told determines how people respond. This is being portrayed as a natural disaster when it is really a result of climate violence. Our country is being portrayed as incompetent when in reality we are actively being denied help.

It reminds me of the differences in how the Haitian earthquake was covered in the US media and in the Latin American leftist media. The American media made it sound like those Haitians died because they just don't know how to build good houses. Not that Haiti has been under economic attack in revenge for the slave uprising two hundred years ago. The left Latin American countries are saying, we have a debt to Haiti because of what they did for all of us.

It is the same narrative with Puerto Rico, that people are just sitting around waiting to be rescued. Nobody is sitting and waiting for anything.

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## America's Hypocrisy on Democracy

U.S. politicians often lecture other nations about their flawed governance as if American democracy is the gold standard, but anti-democratic measures like gerrymandering belie that self-image, says ex-CIA analyst Paul R. Pillar.

By Paul R. Pillar

An old fear about Islamist political parties entering government is that once in power, even if they had gained their position through democratic means, they would subvert democracy for the sake of maintaining power.

The U.S. government explicitly mentioned the specter of "one man, one vote, one time" in condoning in 1992 the Algerian military's cancellation of the second round of a legislative election that the Islamic Salvation Front, which had won a plurality in the first round, was poised to win. The military's intervention touched off a vicious civil war in which hundreds of thousands of Algerians died.

History has indeed offered examples of rulers coming to power through democratic means and then clinging to power through undemocratic means. Adolf Hitler became chancellor of Germany only after his Nazi Party had won pluralities in two successive free elections in 1932. But there is no reason to associate such scenarios with Islamists more so than with parties of other ideological persuasions.

A relevant modern data point is Tunisia, the one Arab country in which democracy



took hold as a result of the Arab Spring. The Islamist Ennahdha Party won a free election in 2011 and formed a government but willingly stepped down in 2014 after it lost much of its public support, very much in the mold of how governments in parliamentary democracies in the West vacate office after losing the public's confidence.

The more common recent pattern regarding Islamists in office has been for their opponents to cut their tenures short through undemocratic means. This has included, besides Algeria in 1992, the Turkish military's "coup by memorandum" to oust a mildly Islamist civilian government in 1997, and the Egyptian military's coup in 2013 that toppled President Mohamed Morsi, a member of the Muslim Brotherhood.

Democracy in Turkey today is being rapidly eroded, but this involves not the ideological coloration of the Justice and Development Party but instead the megalomania of President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, who has been using Turkish nationalist themes more than Islamist ones in cementing his hold on power.

### **Anti-Democratic Gerrymandering**

All this, important though it is, ought to be less important to Americans who are concerned about preserving democracy than what has been happening in their own country. The gerrymandering case that is before the Supreme Court this week is especially important in that respect, because it gets directly to the phenomenon of one person, one vote, one time.

That phenomenon is what has occurred in Wisconsin, where the case now before the court originated. Republican legislators, once in power, secretly and aggressively devised new legislative boundaries that have enabled them to retain their grip on power even after, in subsequent elections, losing majority support among the citizens of Wisconsin.

Given the power of those same legislators to draw Congressional districts as well as their own districts, the disconnect between the will of the people and the ideology of representatives extends to the federal as well as the state level.

The methods used may be different from those used by some of the foreign rulers who have transitioned from democratically elected leaders to autocrats using nondemocratic means. The prime method used in gerrymandering in the United States is not brown shirts in the streets but rather computing power used to crunch demographic data and to try out endless variations of how lines might be drawn to gain maximum partisan advantage. But the result is the same: rulers stay in power even after most citizens no longer want them there.

Gerrymandering is not the only such undemocratic tool being used to the same effect. There also are the Republican-sponsored voter suppression laws designed to impede people's ability to exercise the right to vote, and to do so in ways that fall most heavily on those presumed to be more likely to support the opposition party. These methods are rationalized through unsupported assertions about widespread voter identification fraud. President Trump has even established a commission founded on such a lie, to provide momentum for still more voter suppression measures.

### **Excuses Not to Act**

When any case such as the Wisconsin case comes before the Supreme Court, there always are voices calling for the court to defer to elected branches of the government on what is a "political" question. But such a position is groundless when gerrymandering is involved. The problem at the very heart of the case concerns the composition of the political branch that has been drawing district lines. For the court to defer to that political branch would mean not that it is avoiding a decision but rather that it is deciding in favor of the pro-gerrymandering side.

Of course, the politicization of the U.S. Supreme Court is a long-established feature of American government and politics. The effects of gerrymandering and the voter suppression laws have been amplified by supposed "strict constructionists" construing the First Amendment guarantee of free speech so loosely as to strike down laws governing campaign financing. Moreover, the composition of the court that is now deliberating on the gerrymandering case is itself the product of an extra-constitutional exercise of power by a Senate majority that refused to perform its constitutional duty of considering a nomination by the then-incumbent president.

The health or sickness of democracy overseas has been a major focus of U.S. foreign policy debate and much policymaking. Some strains of policy thinking have even led to costly overseas military expeditions rationalized as efforts to install democracy in lands overseas. Any Americans thinking along such lines should stop and think first about how democracy in the United States appears to observers overseas. It is not an especially pretty sight.

The United States today is a less healthy democracy than what prevails in many other advanced industrial countries of the West. There is a foreign policy equity involved – in terms of the soft power that comes from being a conspicuously healthy democracy– but what is most important is what kind of political system Americans themselves can enjoy.

Of all the advantages of democracy that democratic theorists have posited,

surely the most important is the ability of citizens to remove leaders whom they no longer support. There is no better guarantee that government will be run in the interests of the governed.

The case now before the Supreme Court will go a long way toward determining whether U.S. democracy will exhibit this principle or instead will be a case of one person, one vote, one time.

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## Ignoring Today's 'Great Hungers'

The U.S. government presents itself as the beneficent superpower, but the reality of Washington's endless wars and lavish spending on bombs – while millions face starvation and disease – suggest a different reality, as Kathy Kelly notes.

By Kathy Kelly

Earlier this year, the Sisters of St. Brigid invited me to speak at their Feile Bride celebration in Kildare, Ireland. The theme of the gathering was: "Allow the Voice of the Suffering to Speak."

The Sisters have embraced numerous projects to protect the environment, welcome refugees, and nonviolently resist wars. I felt grateful to reconnect with people who so vigorously opposed any Irish support for U.S. military wars in Iraq. They had also campaigned to end the economic sanctions against Iraq, knowing that hundreds of thousands of Iraqi children suffered and died for lack of food, medicine and clean water.

This year, the Sisters asked me to first meet with local teenagers who would commemorate another time of starvation imposed by an imperial power. Joe Murray, who heads Action from Ireland (Afri), arranged for a class from Dublin's Beneavin De La Salle College to join an Irish historian in a field adjacent to the Dunshaughlin work house on the outskirts of Dublin.

Such workhouses dot the landscape of Ireland and England. In the mid-Nineteenth Century, during the famine years, they were dreaded places. People who went

there knew they were near the brink of death due to hunger, disease, and dire poverty. Ominously, behind the workhouse lay the graveyard.

The young men couldn't help poking a bit of fun, at first; what in the world were they doing out in a field next to an imposing building, their feet already soaked in the wet grass as a light rain fell? They soon became quite attentive.

We learned that the Dunshaughlin workhouse had opened in May of 1841. It could accommodate 400 inmates. During the famine years, many hundreds of people were crowded in the stone building in dreadful conditions.

An estimated one million people died during a famine that began because of blighted potato crops but became an "artificial famine" because Ireland's British occupiers lacked the political will to justly distribute resources and food. Approximately one million Irish people who could no longer feed themselves and subsist on the land emigrated to places like the U.S. But seeking refuge wasn't an option for those who couldn't afford the passage.

Evicted by landowners, desperate people arrived at workhouses like the one we were visiting. Our guide read us the names of people from the surrounding area who had been buried in a mass grave behind the workhouse, their bodies unidentified. They were victims of what the Irish call "Greta Mor"—"The Great Hunger." It was recently, as I tried to better understand the migration of desperate and starving people now crossing from East Africa into Yemen, that I began to realize how great the hunger was.

## **A Global Holocaust**

During that same period as the Irish famine – in the latter half of the Nineteenth Century – there were 30 million people, possibly 50 million, dying of famine in northern China, India, Brazil and the Maghreb. The terrible suffering of these unknown people, whose plight never made it into the history books, was a sharp reminder to me of Western exceptionalism.

As researched and described in Mike Davis's book, *The Late Victorian Holocaust*, El Nino and La Nina climate changes caused massive crop failures. What food could be harvested was often sent abroad. Railroad infrastructure could have been used to send food to people dying of hunger, but wealthier people chose to ignore the plight of the starving. The Great Hunger, fueled by bigotry and greed, had been greater than any of its victims knew.

And now, few in the prosperous West are aware of the terror faced by people in South Sudan, Somalia, northeast Nigeria, northern Kenya and Yemen. Millions of people cannot feed themselves or find potable water.

Countries in Africa, which the U.S. has helped destabilize such as Somalia, are convulsed in fighting which exacerbates effects of drought and drives helpless civilians toward points of hoped-for refuge. Many have chosen a path of escape through the famine-torn country of Yemen.

But the U.S. has been helping a Saudi-led coalition to blockade and bomb Yemen since March of 2015. Sudanese fighters aligned with Saudi Arabia have been taking over cities along the Yemeni coast, heading northward. People trying to escape famine find themselves trapped amid vicious air and ground attacks.

In March 2017, Stephen O'Brien, head of the United Nation's Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, traveled to Yemen, Somalia, South Sudan and Northern Kenya. Since that trip, he has repeatedly begged the U.N. Security Council to help end the fighting and prevent conflict-driven famine conditions.

Regarding Yemen, he wrote, in a July 12, 2017 statement to the U.N. Security Council that: "Seven million people, including 2.3 million malnourished (500,000 severely malnourished) children under the age of five, are on the cusp of famine, vulnerable to disease and ultimately at risk of a slow and painful death. Nearly 16 million people do not have access to adequate water, sanitation and hygiene, and more than 320,000 suspected cholera cases have been reported in all of the country's governorates bar one." This number has since risen to 850,000.

## **Spreading Famine**

Ben Ehrenreich describes famine conditions along what the Israeli theorist Eyal Weizman calls the "conflict shoreline," an expanding band of climate change-induced desertification that stretches through the Sahel and across the African continent before leaping the Gulf of Aden to Yemen. He notes that this vast territory, once the site of fierce resistance to colonial incursions, is now paying the heaviest price, in disastrous climate conditions, for the wealth of the industrialized north. As the deserts spread south, ever more dire conflicts can be expected to erupt, causing more people to flee.

Of a drought-stricken area of Somaliland, Ehrenreich writes: "People were calling this drought *sima*, 'the leveller,' because it affected all of the clans stretching across Somaliland and into Ethiopia to the west and Kenya to the south."

"The women's stories were almost all the same," writes Ehrenreich, "differing only in the age and number of children sick, the number of animals they had lost and the number that survived. Hodan Ismail had lost everything. She left her husband's village to bring her children here, where her mother lived, 'to save

them,' she said. 'When I got there, I saw that she had nothing either.' The river and streams, their usual source of drinking water, had gone dry and they had no option but to drink from a shallow well at the edge of town. The water was making all the children sick."

In 1993, at the Rio de Janeiro "Earth Summit," delegates conveying the views of then-President George H.W. Bush, voiced a refrain of the statement, "the American lifestyle is not up for negotiation." U.S. demands of the summit incalculably restricted the changes to which it might have led.

Representing President Bill Clinton six years later, Secretary of State Madeleine Albright defended planned bombardment of Iraq, saying "If we have to use force, it is because we are America; we are the indispensable nation. We stand tall and we see further than other countries into the future, and we see the danger here to all of us."

### **A Downward Spiral**

There is danger that must be recognized. The danger is real and the danger is spreading. Violence spreads the famine, and the famine will spread violence.

I find myself repulsed by assertions voicing U.S. exceptionalism, yet my own study and focus often omits histories and present realities which simply must be understood if we are to recognize the traumas our world faces.

In relation to conflict-driven famines, it becomes even more imperative to resist the U.S. government's allocation of \$700 billion to the Department of Defense. In the U.S., our violence, and our delusions of being indispensable stem from accepting a belief that our "way of life" is non-negotiable.

Growing inequality, protected by menacing arsenals, paves a path to the graveyard: It is not a "way of life." We still could acquire a great hunger: a transforming hunger to share justice with our planetary neighbors. We could shed familiar privileges and search for communal tools to preserve us from indifferent wealth and voracious imperial power.

We could embrace the theme of the Irish sisters at their Feile Bride gathering: "Allow the Voice of the Suffering to Speak" and then choose action-based initiatives to share our abundance and lay aside, forever, the futility of war.

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# Shielding Saudis on Yemen Atrocities

The Saudi-led war on Yemen is inflicting a slaughter by bombs, famine and disease, yet both Presidents Obama and Trump have insisted on supporting the Saudi “allies” in their war crimes, warns Shireen Al-Adeimi.

By Shireen Al-Adeimi

Yemen continues to suffer in silence as the world turns away from its ongoing misery. Despite 2½ years of brutal war, the average American remains oblivious to the inconvenient truth that the United States has been helping Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates destroy a sovereign country that posed a threat to no one.

While rich Arab states bombard the Middle East’s poorest country, creating the world’s largest humanitarian crisis and an unprecedented cholera outbreak, the U.S. government (starting with the Obama administration and continuing with Trump’s) has continued to support them not only through the sale of weapons, but also through mid-air refueling, targeting intelligence, and other logistical support.

The international community has betrayed Yemenis over and over again – examples include the United Nation’s capitulation to Saudi pressure by removing it from the list of child killers and allowing the Saudi-led Coalition to investigate (and clear) itself from any wrongdoing. Even as an inquiry into Yemen war crimes was finally agreed recently, the word “investigation” was dropped, and it remains to be seen which “regional experts” will comprise the committee.

But have we, the American people, turned our backs to our government’s involvement in Yemen’s destruction? Yemenis are not seeking refuge in Europe or America because of a land, air, and sea blockade that has kept food and medicines out, while trapping people in. Unlike those fleeing the war in Syria, Yemenis may be “out of sight, of mind.” But those of us who do know about the plight of Yemenis may feel helpless or unclear about what can be done to help. The truth is, we have to act, and we have to act fast.

We can no longer stand by and watch as Yemeni children die of curable diseases like cholera (with 750,000 cases and counting) because they can’t access clean water. Nor can we stand by and watch them die of hunger in a time of immense global wealth because their parents can’t afford what little food is available.

We can no longer watch as Yemeni children, women, and men are killed by U.S.-supported, Saudi and Emirati airstrikes that target homes, schools, funeral

gatherings, and hospitals alike. We must face the U.S. government's role in creating this "man-made catastrophe" that has pushed this already-impooverished nation to its utmost limit.

Now, 30 months into this aimless war, there's an opportunity for the United States to finally withdraw from Yemen. Congress will soon debate and vote on House Concurrent Resolution 81 – a bipartisan bill introduced by Representatives Ro Khanna, D-California; Thomas Massie, R-Kentucky; Mark Pocan, D-Wisconsin; and Walter Jones, R-North Carolina – that aims to end the United States' support for the Saudi-led Coalition in Yemen.

The legislation could spare Americans from looking back and wondering what could have been done to save millions of people from certain death. It offers an opportunity to end this destructive war by urging U.S. political leaders to stop supporting the Saudi-led Coalition, an ally that has worked with terrorists to achieve its goals, and has continued to commit what may amount to several and ongoing war crimes in Yemen.

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