

Strategy and Conscience: Subverting Elite Power So We End Human Violence

By [Robert J. Burrowes](#)
Global Research, July 25, 2018

Theme: [Global Economy](#), [Law and Justice](#),
[Poverty & Social Inequality](#)

Note to readers: please click the share buttons above

Given the overwhelming evidence that activist efforts are failing to halt the accelerating rush to extinction precipitated and maintained by dysfunctional human behavior, it is worth reflecting on why this is happening.

Of course, you might say that the rush to extinction is being slowed.

But is it? Even according to BP's chief economist: 'despite the extraordinary growth in renewables in recent years, and the huge policy efforts to encourage a shift away from coal into cleaner, lower carbon fuels, there has been almost no improvement in the power sector fuel mix over the past 20 years. The share of coal in the power sector in 1998 was 38% - exactly the same as in 2017.... this is one area where at the global level we haven't even taken one step forward, we have stood still: perfectly still for the past 20 years.' See ['Analysis - Spencer Dale, group chief economist'](#).

And, to choose another measure that highlights our lack of 'progress': species extinctions proceed at a rate of 200 each day, which is vastly greater than the long-term background rate, with another 26,000 species already identified as 'under threat'. See ['Red list research finds 26,000 global species under extinction threat'](#).

But it wouldn't matter what measure you analyzed - efforts to prevent cataclysmic nuclear war, to halt the many ongoing wars, to contain and reverse the prevalent and grotesque economic exploitation, to end slavery or the sex trafficking of women and children, to halt or even slow the rampant destruction of the biosphere, including the rainforests and oceans - *we are rapidly losing ground* (and often despite some apparent gains such as adoption of the ['Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons'](#) by many *non-nuclear* states on 7 July 2017).

Not only are we destroying the rainforests - currently at the rate of 80,000 acres each day: see ['Measuring the Daily Destruction of the World's Rainforests'](#) - and oceans - see ['The state of our oceans in 2018 \(It's not looking good!\)'](#) - as a fellow long-standing nonviolent activist, Kelvin Davies, recently observed to me: the oceans and remaining rainforests are 'being emptied of life' as impoverished people, forced to the economic margin, hunt remaining wildlife, including tropical fish, for food and/or trafficking.

Before we blame impoverished people for their destruction however, it is the consumption by those of us in industrialized countries that is generating the adverse circumstances in which they are forced to survive. For one simple example of this, related to our diet alone, see ['Emissions impossible: How big meat and dairy are heating up the planet'](#).

Of course, you might object that it is not activist efforts that are responsible for the failure to halt elite violence and our complicity in it. It is the failure of corporatized society to seriously consider and respond intelligently to the scientific and other evidence in relation to all of the violence in its many manifestations. However, any explanation of this nature fails to understand and appreciate why progressive change has always occurred in the past.

Social progress is the result of people of conscience strategically challenging elite power in such a way that new norms become so widely accepted that elites are compelled to work within them. This has always been essential for the simple reason that elites are insane and have never acted sensibly, whatever the issue. Elites have only ever orchestrated events to maximize their own power, profit and privilege whatever the cost to the rest of us and the Earth itself. Hence, violence, war, grotesque economic exploitation and ecological destruction are rampant across the planet; that is the way elites want it; that is what maximizes elite power, profit and privilege. See [‘The Global Elite is Insane Revisited’](#).



As an aside: if you aren't convinced that the global elite is insane, then perhaps you might ponder the possible implications of the recent call by US President Donald Trump, for the creation of a new Space Force as a sixth branch of the U.S. military – ‘We must have American dominance in space’ – in violation of the [Outer Space Treaty](#) of 1967. See [‘Trump Orders Establishment of Space Force as Sixth Military Branch’](#).

While this enterprise, if it gets Congressional approval, would be staggeringly profitable to the global elite while further gutting social and environmental programs to pay for it, the proposal also raises the possibility, as Professor Karl Grossman graphically expressed it (given that there is no way to have the envisaged weapons in space without nuclear power) that ‘the heavens are going to be littered with radioactive debris’ for millennia (but in substantially greater amounts than is already there). See [‘Trump’s Space Force: Military Profiteering’s Final Frontier’](#) and [‘Star Wars Redux: Trump’s Space Force’](#).

Of course, if you want even more evidence of elite insanity, then look no further than the current hysteria generated by Donald Trump’s supposed ‘treason’ for having a meeting with Russian president Vladimir Putin in Helsinki with the intention of improving mutual understanding and the prospects of peace between the two countries. For a sample of the literature that discusses this summit intelligently, which you won’t find in the corporate media, see [‘US Media is Losing Its Mind Over Trump-Putin Press Conference’](#), [‘Is President Trump A Traitor Because He Wants Peace With Russia?’](#), [‘Helsinki Talks – How Trump Tries To Rebalance The Global Triangle’](#) and [‘Trump, The Manchurian Candidate: “Conspiracy” to Destabilize the Trump Presidency’](#).

Some informed and thoughtful analysts believe this could lead to an elite coup to remove Trump from the US presidency. See [‘Coming Coup Against Trump’](#) and [‘The Coming Coup to Overthrow President Trump: Sedition at the Highest Levels’](#).

So, to consolidate the information presented above, let me encapsulate the nature of geopolitics in one paragraph:

The military forces of the United States are not intended to defend the United States against military attack. The military forces of the countries in NATO are not intended to defend the respective member countries against military attack. The military forces of the United States and NATO are controlled by the global elite and used by the global elite to aggressively attack, in violation of all relevant national and international laws, any country that seeks independent control and development of its resources, particularly fossil fuels, strategic minerals and water. The global elite, which is in total control of the global economy and world affairs generally, does this in order to expand its own power, profit and privilege. It does this no matter what the cost to any individual (outside the elite), people, country and the biosphere. Why does the global elite do all of this? The global elite does this because it is completely insane.

Hence, to return to my point about the driver of social progress historically: Did the trans-Atlantic slave trade end because elites decided to halt the practice? Did gains for some women during the 21st century occur because elites committed themselves to ending patriarchal privilege? Did the British walk out of their colony in India because the British elite suddenly perceived the injustice of their violence and exploitation?

Despite the successes of activists of earlier generations, however, those of us who identify as activists of this generation are failing, quite comprehensively, to respond intelligently, powerfully and strategically to the vast challenges posed by an elite that has expanded its capacity to intimidate, outflank and overwhelm us (which is why, incidentally, slavery is now far more widespread than during any earlier period in human history, violence against women still manifests in a grotesque variety of forms all over the planet and even India has strayed monstrously from Gandhi's vision).

In essence, strategic lessons learned by earlier generations of activists are forgotten or ignored as we stumble powerlessly to the extinction that is shortly to claim us all.

While I could write at some length about our shortcomings as activists in the era of perpetual violence and war, grotesque economic exploitation and pervasive climate and environmental destruction, I would like to focus on what I regard as the two key issues: strategy and conscience.

The global elite is deeply entrenched and manages world affairs, particularly through its capitalist economy. The global elite has developed over hundreds of years during which time it has fully and deeply penetrated all of the major power structures in world society, most of which it created (or moulded during their creation), so that the primary levers of power in the modern world – key financial institutions such as central banks, the major asset management corporations and the giant corporations in key industries (such as, but not limited to, the banking and weapons industries) – as well as the instruments through which its policies are implemented – including governments, military forces (both national and as 'military contractors' or mercenaries), key 'intelligence' agencies, legal systems and police forces, key nongovernment organizations such as the Vatican, and the academic, educational, media, medical, psychiatric and pharmaceutical industries – are all fully responsive to elite control.

More precisely than this, as explained in his forthcoming book [‘Giants: The Global Power Elite’](#), Professor Peter Phillips identifies the world’s top seventeen asset management firms, each with more than one trillion dollars of investment capital under management, as the giants of world capitalism. The total capital under management on behalf of all seventeen corporations is in excess of \$US41.1 trillion; it represents the wealth invested for profit by thousands of millionaires, billionaires and corporations. These seventeen giants operate in nearly every country in the world and are ‘the central institutions of the financial capital that powers the global economic system’. They invest in anything considered profitable, ranging from ‘agricultural lands on which indigenous farmers are replaced by power elite investors’ to public assets to war.

Phillips goes on to note that the global elite develops and coordinates its policies through a variety of private planning fora such as the [Group of Thirty](#), the [Trilateral Commission](#) and the [Atlantic Council](#) which determine the policies and issue the instructions for their implementation by transnational governmental institutions like the G7, G20, International Monetary Fund, World Trade Organization and the World Bank. Elite policies are also implemented following instruction of the relevant agent, including governments, in the context. These agents then do as they are instructed.

Or, if they do not, they are overthrown. Just ask any independently-minded government over the past century. For a list of governments overthrown by the global elite using its military and ‘intelligence’ agencies since World War II, see William Blum’s book [‘Killing Hope: U.S. Military and CIA Interventions Since World War II’](#) or, for just the list, see [‘Overthrowing other people’s governments: The Master List’](#).

As a result of coordination through the above elite fora, for example, gigantic media, public relations and entertainment corporations are used to reinforce elite dogma promulgated through national educational institutions so that most western humans become powerless consumers of elite product, informational and material, as the elite pursues ever-increasing profit, power and privilege. Oblivious to the way in which they are caught up in the elite drive to make us consume, even most western activists are major consumers, failing to limit their consumption in line with some appreciation of the per capita ecological carrying capacity of the Earth.

Hence, as should be obvious by now, with a deeply entrenched global elite in total control of major economic/financial, political, military, legal and social (including educational and media) power structures, only a comprehensive and sophisticated strategy has any prospect of succeeding, whatever the issue, and certainly the fundamental one: elite power.

In other words, if we want to end war (or even just one war), halt exacerbation of the climate catastrophe (in a region, country or the world), end environmental destruction on a vast range of fronts, terminate economic exploitation including (modern) slavery, end the sex trafficking of women and children, end the military occupation of Palestine, Tibet, West Papua... then we are going to have to think, plan and act strategically, which includes engaging and mobilizing, in a focused way, a significant proportion of the human population. Simply ‘campaigning’ on the basis of a few ideas and tactics that we think worked in the past, is not enough. Campaigning without strategy – and all that strategic thinking, including a penetrating analysis of the very nature of society and its power structure, entails – is a waste of time.

This is why most work of virtually all ‘activist’ NGOs is useless. They work within the elite-

designed and managed global power structure, fearfully self-limiting their actions in accordance with elite-approved processes, such as those 'within the law' and lobbying elite-controlled governments and institutions, as well as international organizations such as the UN. By participating in elite-controlled processes, our dissent is absorbed and dissipated, as the elite intend.

This is the great achievement, from an elite perspective, of 'democracy': to the extent that people can be persuaded to participate in the delusion that democracy exists (anywhere on Earth) and that voting and lobbying changes anything important, they are unwitting victims of elite-manipulated processes and propaganda.

This also explains why virtually all NGOs invariably end up promoting elite-sponsored delusions such as, for example, those in relation to the climate catastrophe which talk of an 'end of century' timeframe (about 70 years more than we actually have), staying within 2 (or 3 or 1.5) degrees Celsius above the pre-industrial level (rather than the .5 degrees that is actually necessary) and, *the most fundamental delusion of all, that we must substitute renewable energy for fossil fuels (which is certainly necessary), rather than (in addition) profoundly reduce - by at least 80% - consumption generally, involving both energy and resources of every kind - water, household energy, transport fuels, metals, meat, paper and plastic - while dramatically expanding our individual and community self-reliance if all environmental concerns are to be effectively addressed.*

But elite-sponsored delusions are widely promulgated by its corporate media on a vast range of issues with only the rarest 'activist' NGO, concerned to focus on what it defines as its primary mission, taking a stand on these apparently 'separate' issues. So, for example, elite-sponsored delusions that are widely promulgated by its corporate media convince huge numbers of people that US-NATO wars against impoverished and militarily-primitive countries are in 'self defense' and that terrorists are a genuine threat to 'national security'. At a more mundane level, elite-sponsored delusions propagated through its corporate media promote everything from genetically-mutilated, poisoned and junk food to psychiatric drugs. See ['Defeating the Violence of Psychiatry'](#). These products are also highly profitable but because their insanity includes lacking any sense of morality, elites are unconcerned about the damage they inflict on us in these regards just as in all others.

Some grassroots activist groups are more politically savvy than NGOs but usually still lack comprehensive and sophisticated strategies. On rare occasions, it should be noted, one of these campaigns or national liberation struggles succeeds, because of such factors as the raw power of nonviolent action (even without strategy) or because they could rely on the NIMBY (Not In My Back Yard) effect to facilitate mobilization of significant numbers of people in a local area.

However, the global elite is unconcerned about the occasional local 'setback' which does not adversely impact its global agenda and where minor gains by grassroots activists can, if necessary, be subsequently reversed (including by simply violating the law, as the elite routinely does with impunity). Consider again, the above example of Trump's call to violate the 1967 Outer Space Treaty or routine violation of legally-declared (and sometimes World Heritage-listed) national parks in Africa, Asia and Central/South America as major corporations seek to exploit oil and mineral wealth. The law is designed to intimidate and impede us; it is rarely used in an attempt to hold elites accountable and has little, if any, impact when it does: a corporation may, occasionally, be fined (an expense against generating monstrous profit). Fundamentally, elites are above the law: they draft it to

defend their interests against the rest of us.

But to reiterate the main point: given the sheer number of (sometimes even large-scale) mobilizations on one issue after another around the world that achieve nothing of substance in relation to the issue itself (consider the demonstrations against the imminent war on Iraq, held in over 600 cities around the world and involving as many as 30 million people, on 15 February 2003), it is painfully clear that *most grassroots activists have no conception of strategy either, including the appropriate strategic focus for their tactics.*

And this applies equally to those national liberation activists in occupied countries such as Palestine, Tibet and West Papua, as well as those activists living in the many countries, such as Cambodia and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, run by dictatorships or where the elected government, such as that of Brazil, has been removed in a coup.

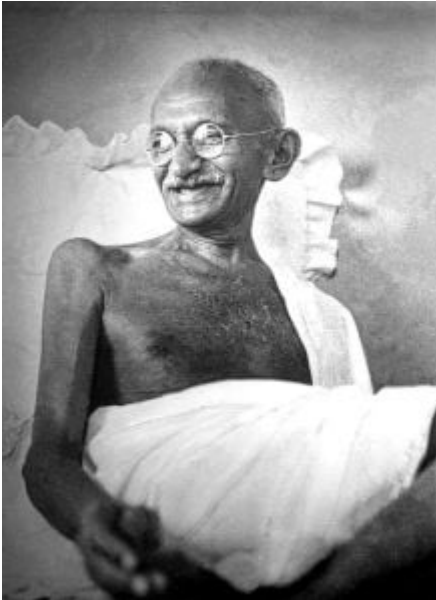
As touched on above, however, lack of sound strategy (including the structural analysis on which it must be based) is not the only shortcoming in our efforts to halt elite (or even our own) violence.

In the past, a primary motivator of activists, and particularly the great ones such as Mohandas K. Gandhi, was their conscience: The 'inner voice' that called them to action on both the personal and political levels.

But there is more to conscience than being called to action. So what is so important about conscience? Conscience is the mind function that asks the deeper questions such as 'What is the *right* way to go about this?', 'How must I behave if I am to model what I ask of others?' and 'How will we design this campaign so that its conduct helps to create the world we envision?' (rather than the simpler question 'How will we win this campaign?').

Moreover, living by one's conscience requires courage: This includes making strategic choices to take significant or, occasionally, even great risks when elite violence threatens to intimidate a struggle into submission and silence.

It was his unyielding conscience, deeply guiding his personal and political behaviour (including his commitment to nonviolence and his extraordinarily austere lifestyle), and his superlative understanding of strategy that made Gandhi the great activist that he was. Why?



Because Gandhi's nonviolence was based on certain premises derived from his conscience – including the importance of the truth, the sanctity and unity of all life, and the unity of means and end – his strategy was always conducted within the framework of his desired political, social, economic and ecological vision for society as a whole and not limited to the purpose of any immediate campaign.

It is for this reason that Gandhi's approach to strategy is so important. He is always taking into account the ultimate end of all nonviolent struggle – a just, peaceful and ecologically sustainable society of self-realized human beings – not just the outcome of this campaign. He wants each campaign to contribute to the ultimate aim, not undermine vital elements of the long-term and overarching struggle to create a world without violence.

So what do we do?

If you would like to better understand why so many human beings, including those within the elite, are devoid of anything resembling a conscience, you can do so by reading what happened to them as a child in [‘Why Violence?’](#) and [‘Fearless Psychology and Fearful Psychology: Principles and Practice’](#).

If you are interested in acting in ways that maximize the chance that elite opponents and their agents will reflect, deeply, on what they are doing, while fundamentally changing the power relationship between you and your opponents, then you are welcome to consider acting strategically in the way that Gandhi did. Whether you are engaged in a peace, climate, environment or social justice campaign or a national liberation struggle, the 12-point strategic framework and principles are the same. See [Nonviolent Campaign Strategy](#) and [Nonviolent Defense/Liberation Strategy](#).

The strategic aims and a core list of strategic goals to end war and to end the climate catastrophe, for example, are identified in [‘Campaign Strategic Aims’](#) and the strategic aims and a core list of strategic goals to defeat a political or military coup, remove a military occupation, remove a dictatorship or defeat a genocidal assault are identified here: [‘Liberation Strategic Aims’](#).

If you would like a straightforward explanation of [‘Nonviolent Action: Why and How it Works’](#) and an introduction to what it means to think strategically, try reading about the difference

between [‘The Political Objective and Strategic Goal of Nonviolent Actions’](#).

If you anticipate violent repression by a ruthless opponent, make sure that you plan and implement any nonviolent action as history has taught us: [‘Nonviolent Action: Minimizing the Risk of Violent Repression’](#).

If you are interested in nurturing children to live by their conscience and to gain the courage necessary to resist elite violence fearlessly, while living sustainably despite the entreaties of capitalism to over-consume, then you are welcome to make [‘My Promise to Children’](#). After all, capitalism and other dysfunctional political, economic and social structures only thrive because of our dysfunctional parenting which robs children of their conscience and courage, among many other qualities, while actively teaching them to over-consume as compensation for having vital emotional needs denied. See [‘Love Denied: The Psychology of Materialism, Violence and War’](#).

Why this emphasis on children you might ask? For good reason. It is dysfunctional human behavior that got us into this civilizational mess and allowed the emergence of exploitative social, political and economic structures. So if we do not emphasize the importance of profoundly changing the way in which we nurture children so that they behave functionally in context, everything else we do to preserve humanity and the biosphere must ultimately fail. The onslaught of our dysfunctional species will simply overwhelm the biosphere, sooner or later, whether it is this generation or the next.

But we don’t have to settle for improving our parenting. We can improve our own functionality and access our conscience and courage too. How? See [‘Putting Feelings First’](#).

If you are already guided by your conscience to act powerfully in response to elite violence, you might also consider joining those participating in [‘The Flame Tree Project to Save Life on Earth’](#), which outlines a simple plan for people to systematically reduce their consumption while progressively increasing their self-reliance, and consider signing the online pledge of [‘The People’s Charter to Create a Nonviolent World’](#).

You may believe that you can halt elite violence without engaging your conscience (and the deep internal search that this requires) and without using Gandhian nonviolent strategy. Even if you are right, the key question is then this: Is the world you will get any better than this one?

And don’t forget the timeframe. Major historical struggles, including those noted above, took decades (whatever the merits and shortcomings of their strategies) or, as in most cases, are ongoing. How long do you want to wait before you invest time in learning how to think, plan and act strategically when the future of humanity and the biosphere is now at stake?

So, to conclude: The global elite controls all significant human affairs and even exercises almost total control over the individual lives of human beings. Because the global elite is insane and its psychological (and hence behavioral) dysfunctionality is of a particular kind, it cannot pull back from its existing regime of violence and exploitation, even in response to imperatives from the biosphere.

In this circumstance our choice is simple: near-term human extinction based on our unwitting complicity in elite violence or a conscientious, courageous and strategic response that fundamentally undermines elite power.

This will require a significant number of interrelated nonviolent strategies that each tackle elite violence in one context or another.

You are welcome to consider the options presented just above for your own involvement.

*

Robert J. Burrowes has a lifetime commitment to understanding and ending human violence. He has done extensive research since 1966 in an effort to understand why human beings are violent and has been a nonviolent activist since 1981. He is the author of 'Why Violence?' <http://tinyurl.com/whyviolence> His email address is flametree@riseup.net and his website is here. <http://robertjburrowes.wordpress.com>. He is a frequent contributor to Global Research.

The original source of this article is Global Research
Copyright © [Robert J. Burrowes](#), Global Research, 2018

[Comment on Global Research Articles on our Facebook page](#)

[Become a Member of Global Research](#)

Articles by: [Robert J. Burrowes](#)

Disclaimer: The contents of this article are of sole responsibility of the author(s). The Centre for Research on Globalization will not be responsible for any inaccurate or incorrect statement in this article. The Centre of Research on Globalization grants permission to cross-post Global Research articles on community internet sites as long the source and copyright are acknowledged together with a hyperlink to the original Global Research article. For publication of Global Research articles in print or other forms including commercial internet sites, contact: publications@globalresearch.ca
www.globalresearch.ca contains copyrighted material the use of which has not always been specifically authorized by the copyright owner. We are making such material available to our readers under the provisions of "fair use" in an effort to advance a better understanding of political, economic and social issues. The material on this site is distributed without profit to those who have expressed a prior interest in receiving it for research and educational purposes. If you wish to use copyrighted material for purposes other than "fair use" you must request permission from the copyright owner.

For media inquiries: publications@globalresearch.ca