

Friends, we wonder why mass starvation comes about. Tufts University has tried to figure that out with the help of the world's experts on this matter. The material was pulled together by Robert Naiman with the help of Tufts University and Heather Stevenson at Tufts. And there was input from Alex de Waal, one of the world's experts on this. He's the Executive Director of the World Peace Foundation and a research professor at Fletcher School. For this new book, he compiled the best available evidence of global famine deaths from 1870 - 2010 and used that data to analyze trends.

Tufts University sat down with him for some time to get this information. And they dealt first of all with the conventional wisdom of the "population bomb," which has been with us for so many years. We've been worried about over-population when we don't know what it is and we don't ask overpopulation "of what?" The presume it's people - well, they are entirely wrong. We have too many cars, cluster bombs, nuclear weapons, tanks, warplanes, too much fossil fuel and too much waste. We got it all wrong. We said we had *too many people*.

Alex de Waal questions that, and here's how it came down:

In the popular imagination, famine is often connected with too many people and too little food—that is, with overpopulation and low agricultural production due to natural disasters such as drought. How does that line up with reality?

Alex de Waal: That is nonsense. Famine is a very specific political product of the way in which societies are run, wars are fought, governments are managed. The single overwhelming element in causation—in three-quarters of the famines and three-quarters of the famine deaths—is political agency. Yet we still tend to be gripped by this idea that famine is a natural calamity.

You can actually show that the population theory of famine is wrong. Not just wrong at a global scale—because famine mortality has gone down precipitously while world population has gone up—but also at a country level. In the countries that have historically been very prone to famine, like Ethiopia or India, famine mortality has gone down and continues to do so even while population goes up. This is not to say that there isn't a problem of resource consumption in the world. It's just to say famine is not part of that.

You say that mass starvation was almost eliminated, with famines becoming less frequent and less lethal. How did that happen?

There are multiple reasons: the background economics, the improvements in transport systems, information systems, massive improvements in public health. The big historic killers in famines used to be infectious diseases. Those are now much less likely to kill large numbers of people.

One big factor is the international humanitarian industry. The humanitarians are much better at addressing the symptoms than the causes. But nonetheless if you can reduce the lethality of famines to a small fraction of what they used to be twenty, thirty, fifty years ago, even if you're not addressing the causes, you're still doing something substantially positive.

The last reason for the decline in famines is undoubtedly the decline in wars, the decline in totalitarian rule, and the spread of democracy and liberal values. There's something very tangibly precious to be held onto about democracy, liberalism, and humanitarianism. You can demonstrate that this has saved tens of millions of lives. It shouldn't be treated lightly.

In addition to sending humanitarian aid, outsiders have sometimes argued for intervening with military force to protect civilians who are suffering during famines in conflict zones. What do you think of that?

I think it's a terribly bad idea—it's very likely to go wrong. Twenty-five years ago, when President Bush the elder sent his troops to Somalia, I resigned from Human Rights Watch over it. I was asked to support it, and I refused. I still think it's a bad idea. Almost every instance where you see troops sent in, it has not worked out well. These are not problems that can be solved by the military.

Let me give a parallel, which is sexual and gender crimes. Rape has always been unlawful, but it was only relatively recently that the international community—global public opinion—cared enough about criminalizing rape to actually make it into an issue that could be stopped. In the same way, I think we need to care enough about starvation, in places like Yemen, Syria, Nigeria, and South Sudan, to make it an issue that is so toxic that it is stopped.

You mention Yemen, where an ongoing armed conflict and blockade imposed by a Saudi-led coalition have left millions in need of humanitarian assistance. What should be done about the people starving there?

Yemen is the greatest famine atrocity of our lifetimes. The Saudis are deliberately destroying the country's food-producing infrastructure.

The United States and the European countries, if they cared about it enough, have enough leverage to get the Saudis and the Emiratis to stop bombing agricultural, health, and market infrastructure, open the ports, and have a much less restrictive definition about what food is allowed in. They also need to start a peace process. This is not a war that is going to be won in any meaningful sense. It's a political, created famine and it will have to be solved by political, created means. One can ameliorate the impact by enabling a humanitarian response, which would save many lives, and allowing the economy to regenerate a bit, but a proper solution has to be a political one.

How hopeful are you about the possibility of ending famine?

At any time up to a couple of years ago, I would have been extremely hopeful. The default mode of the national and global governance systems was in favor of humanitarian systems and against faminogenic actions. That was the way history was going. That was the direction of global politics.

Now I'm much less certain about that, as we are seeing some of this introverted, xenophobic, transactional, zero-sum politics. It's not just here in the U.S. You also see it in Europe, with Britain as a particularly sad example.

Humanitarianism cannot cope with the political causes of famine. Humanitarians know that. But there's still an assumption by political leaders, who are somewhat culpable, that if we put the humanitarians on the case, we don't need to deal with the politics. That is wrong.

So we're dealing here with the whole question of the "population bomb." And what have we found out? We found out that countries that have social services have an immediate drop in population. Stereotypically we picture Italy as having large families. They don't. They're worried about reproducing themselves. Stereotypically we picture Spain as having large families. They don't. They're worried about reproducing themselves. What about Russia? The same problem on steroids. Where there are social services, population goes down, as we see the decline in reproduction in European countries, Japan and a few other places as well.

What happens when there are no social services? People will have as many children as they possible because children are an asset and their only security. In the third world, if a couple has eight children, maybe three or four will live to take

care of them in old age. We miss that whole point in our arithmetic and geometrical views of population. The population theories we've operated under are neo-Malthusian. Malthus was a monk; he knew something about mass, but very little about demographics. What we found out - much of the hysteria of the population bomb has been a complete waste of time.

Now our media doesn't deal with this famine reality. You wouldn't know from watching the news that a Yemeni child dies every ten minutes from famine or epidemic. We are complicit in their suffering and death. You wouldn't know that the second half of 2017, MSNBC did not focus at all on the humanitarian catastrophe of Yemen. As a television network dependent on ratings, you can be sure that they want to keep their public image spotless. That means activists like you and me have real leverage on a public platform like Twitter.

One of the experts on the matter of nuclear war is Dr. Joseph Gerson, the director of the American Friends Service Committee's security program and president of the Campaign for Peace, Disarmament and Common Security. He has some thoughts of us on the question of the doomsday and the apocalyptic nature of Trump's nuclear war fighting doctrine. He is, you might say, extremely concerned about what's going on. He writes for Truthout:

Exposing the wrongdoing of those in power has never been more important. Warning that the danger of nuclear war has become more "dire" than at any time since the Cold War, the Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists **just moved** the hands of its iconic Doomsday Clock to two minutes before midnight. This is the closest the hands have been to an apocalyptic assault on human survival and civilization in the clock's 71-year history.

Since 1947, the clock has sought to awaken humanity to the imminent danger of catastrophic nuclear war. The additional existential dangers of climate change, new developments in the life sciences and technology were more recently added to their calculus.

Explaining their decision, the Bulletin's scientists, who had moved the clock hands to two-and-a-half minutes to midnight shortly after President Trump assumed office, concentrated on the rising danger of nuclear war. With frequent references to the Trump administration's Nuclear Posture Review, they decried: the United States' increased reliance on nuclear weapons; its staggering investments in new

nuclear weapons which are driving the "modernization" of the world's eight other nuclear arsenals; the return to Cold War rhetoric and total absence of US-Russian arms control negotiations; the lack of coherent US foreign and military policies which undermines global security and increase the risk of nuclear war; North Korea's nuclear weapons program; South Asian rivalries; and Trump's threat to the nuclear deal with Iran.

Secondarily, the scientists also heightened the alarm over the existential dangers of climate change and the political and media-driven loss of trust in institutions, which in turn further undermines the ability to address the dangers of nuclear war and climate change.

The scientists' action comes as CIA Director **Mike Pompeo** has hinted that the US is preparing a military attack against North Korea, possibly with nuclear weapons. And the scientists' warning comes on the heels of two critically important Trump administration reports this winter: the **National Security Strategy** and the Nuclear Posture Review, whose contents have been leaked in recent weeks. Even as there are vast chasms between what the Trump administration says and does, each report and the decision about diplomacy or **war with North Korea** will impact who on our planet lives or dies and how.

In his recent book *The Doomsday Machine*, Daniel Ellsberg reports that the basic elements of US preparations for nuclear war have been little changed over the past three generations: "Thousands of nuclear weapons remain on hair-trigger alert, aimed mainly at Russian military targets, including command and control, many in or near cities. ... [P]reemptive 'launch on warning' ... has always been at the heart of our strategy."

Ellsberg's warning needs to be taken seriously. He served as a senior US nuclear weapons adviser to Presidents Kennedy, Johnson and Nixon, and drafted the United States' nuclear war fighting plan.

As has been the case since President Truman inflicted Hell on Earth with the atomic bombings of **Hiroshima** and Nagasaki, nuclear weapons and the threat of first-strike nuclear attacks remain the ultimate enforcer for US global dominance. On 30 or more occasions during international crises and wars, every US president since Truman has prepared for and/or threatened to initiate nuclear war. Even President Obama had "all options on the table" to reinforce his negotiations with Iran. President Trump has done more than boast that his nuclear button is bigger

than Kim Jong-un's. He has activated nuclear capable B-2 and B-52 bombers to Guam, within striking distance of North Korea, and the US Air Force has conducted repeated simulated nuclear attacks against North Korea.

And, as Ellsberg warns, "The strategic nuclear system is more prone to false alarms, accidents, and unauthorized launches than the public (and even most high officials) has ever been aware."

Adding to these dangers are the Trump administration's new National Strategy Statement and its Nuclear Posture Review. The former is a return to the Cold War-era preparations for wars against Russia and China, replacing the post 9/11 mis-named "war on terror" as the military's priority. And as the moving hands of the Doomsday Clock tells us, the Nuclear Posture Review -- compounded by the president's instability and his brutal need to dominate -- greatly increase the existential threat to species survival.

Trump's Pentagon and the military-industrial complex are building on the Obama administration's commitment to a **\$1.2 trillion** upgrade of the US nuclear arsenal and its delivery systems. With the new nuclear weapons systems that Secretary of War James Mattis and the military-industrial complex envision, the price tag will soon be climbing toward \$2 trillion, a number and scope of activity that are almost impossible to comprehend.

Still on track are Obama-era commitments to transform the B61-12 warhead into a more usable genocidal weapon, and to arm the Navy's sea-launched ballistic missiles with still more devastating first-strike W76-1 warheads. Similarly, the mandate to replace the nuclear triad of missiles, bombers and the armada of nuclear war fighting submarines continues apace.

If this wasn't already dangerous enough, we have Trump's Nuclear Posture Review.

Perhaps most dangerous is the blurring of the distinction between conventional and nuclear war. The Nuclear Posture Review commits the United States to construct and deploy "more usable" tactical nuclear weapons, **some of which will have the explosive power of the Hiroshima bomb**. These weapons and the scenarios which have placed them on the military-industrial complex's drawing boards are a return to the dangerous Cold War illusions that a nuclear war can be fought and won, that nations whose forces and people are devastated by nuclear weapons will not respond in kind or move up the ladder of escalation.

Also hair-raising is the reversal of President Obama's reduction of the role that nuclear weapons play in US war planning policies. Trump's Nuclear Posture Review increases it, releasing previous constraints on what will trigger nuclear war. When the Nuclear Posture Review goes into effect, the US will be threatening genocidal first-strike nuclear attacks **in response to cyber-attacks** that substantially degrade our national infrastructure, as well as in response to any chemical or biological weapons attacks. To understand what this means, recall the United States' devastation of Iraq's electrical system during the Gulf War and the 1991 and 2003 chemical weapons-related nuclear threats by the Bush administrations on the eves of their Iraq Wars.

Among the new weapons systems will be a new sea-launched cruise missile and the arming of Trident submarines' ballistic missiles with Hiroshima-like A-bombs. And as China increases its capacity to deny access to US warships and aircraft from the Western Pacific, the Nuclear Posture Review provides for a new standoff, air-launched, nuclear armed cruise missile that can be fired against Chinese military and civilian targets from thousands of miles away.

All of this leaves us with the urgent imperative of preventing nuclear war and joining the majority of the world's nations in their campaigning for a nuclear weapons-free world. Our future won't take care of itself. As with the civil rights movement, the nuclear weapons freeze campaign and women's movements, preventing nuclear war and abolishing nuclear weapons requires dedicated and passionate action. High on our to-do list are:

- Demanding diplomacy not war, pressing for the extension of the Olympic Truce with North Korea and supporting the Markey-Rohana legislation to prevent an unconstitutional war against Korea.
- Building on Daniel Ellsberg's call for congressional hearings about the urgent need for negotiations with Russia to dismantle their omnicidal hair-trigger launch-on warning Doomsday machines.
- Demanding that progressive Democrats go beyond economic populism and challenging the \$1.2-\$2 trillion nuclear weapons upgrade.
- Engaging with environmental, racial justice and youth activists to find ways to work in common cause.

Nuclear weapons are already poisoning this and future generations. As Martin Luther King Jr. reminded us, we can't enjoy justice if humanity ceases to exist. This will be a longer struggle for survival than any of us want. Of necessity, it requires the creative energies and commitments of rising generations

Well, we're very grateful to people like Ellsberg and Gerson who have put together these ideas and helped us to see them clearly. Dr. Gerson is the director of the American Friends Service Committee's Peace and Economic Security Program.

Now what are we going to do with all these funds that will not be used for nuclear war? We will support a new poor people's campaign. It is so disgusting to drive around a city with the greatest number of billionaires on earth and to see people living under freeways, many of them dying from the cold in Los Angeles. Yes, if you are sick, and the temperature goes down into the 50s and 40s, you can easily die. So the response to the insanity - and actually what's going on here and what I've just read to you is a form of societal insanity. That happens to be part of my field, which is social science. We deal with cults, with people who are socially insane because of their relationship to their country.

These are principles in the new poor people's campaign:

1. We are rooted in a moral analysis based on our deepest religious and constitutional values that demand justice for all. Moral revival is necessary to save the heart and soul of our democracy.

We are committed to lifting up and deepening the leadership of those most affected by systemic racism, poverty, the war economy, and ecological devastation and to building unity across lines of division.

We believe in the dismantling of unjust criminalization systems that exploit poor communities and communities of color and the transformation of the "War Economy" into a "Peace Economy" that values all humanity.

We believe that equal protection under the law is non-negotiable.

We believe that people should not live in or die from poverty in the richest nation ever to exist. Blaming the poor and claiming that the United States does not have an abundance of resources to overcome poverty are false narratives used to perpetuate economic exploitation, exclusion, and deep inequality.

We recognize the centrality of systemic racism in maintaining economic oppression must be named, detailed and exposed empirically, morally and spiritually. Poverty and economic inequality cannot be understood apart from a society built on white supremacy.

We aim to shift the distorted moral narrative often promoted by religious extremists in the nation from personal issues like prayer in school, abortion, sexuality, gun rights, property rights to systemic injustices like how our society treats the poor, those on the margins, the least of these, women, children, workers, immigrants and the sick; equality and representation

under the law; and the desire for peace, love and harmony within and among nations.

We will build up the power of people and state-based movements to serve as a vehicle for a powerful moral movement in the country and to transform the political, economic and moral structures of our society.

We recognize the need to organize at the state and local level—many of the most regressive policies are being passed at the state level, and these policies will have long and lasting effect, past even executive orders. The movement is not from above but below.

We will do our work in a non-partisan way—no elected officials or candidates get the stage or serve on the State Organizing Committee of the Campaign. This is not about left and right, Democrat or Republican but about right and wrong.

We uphold the need to do a season of sustained nonviolent civil disobedience as a way to break through the tweets and shift the moral narrative. We are demonstrating the power of people coming together across issues and geography and putting our bodies on the line to the issues that are affecting us all.

The Campaign and all its Participants and Endorsers embrace nonviolence. Violent tactics or actions will not be tolerated.

This excellent set of principles debunks the notion that the poor are too busy struggling for food and shelter to care about something as abstract as foreign policy. These principles recognize that the war economy requires those impacted by it to care. Yet, it's not just selfish caring. What is to be valued, it says above, is all humanity. Peace activists sometimes ask to "bring our war dollars home." Not only is that a selfish idea. It's also an idea that depends on one's not really grasping how much money war dollars is. Over \$1 trillion in the U.S. alone every year for militarism is enough to transform this country AND all the other countries. We do not have to choose.

The [new poor people's campaign](#) should get every ounce of support we can find and generate. I say that without the qualifications and caveats I would usually include, because the Poor People's Campaign is doing something that may not be strictly unprecedented in U.S. history but is certainly extremely rare in recent decades. It's pursuing a worthy noble goal, that of ending poverty, while making ending war a central part of its vision, and doing so voluntarily.

Of course this makes sense given the heritage of Martin Luther King Jr.'s vision for the world.

Of course it makes sense given the major economic drain that military spending is, the preying of recruiters on the poor, the environmental injustice of military base pollution in poor neighborhoods, the militarization of police by the military in poor neighborhoods, the culture of violence that the military promotes, the culture of racism that war propaganda fuels and feeds off, and the incredible wonders that could be done if military money was diverted toward good ends.

Friends, all of this is entirely possible. We don't need to continue the insanity. We don't have to continue wars of aggression made by a small and venal faction for money and self-aggrandizement. People who have power and the poor to die as their slaves at their service. This has to stop. It's gone on too long. We have so many scholars who have seen this. I'd highly recommend the great work of profession Alfred McCoy, author of *IN the Shadows of the American Century: The Rise and Decline of US Global Power*. We seem to have reached the paper tiger stage of American imperial history. After all, we have a president who just screened *The Greatest Showman*, the new movie about PT Barnum and the founding of the PT Barnum Circus, at Camp David and is himself, tweet by tweet and statement by statement, turning the empire into a failing sideshow in the ever more riveting three ring circus of Trump. Perhaps it's fitting that 2017 was the year Barnum's circus had its final **performance**.

Friends, this is from Tom Englehardt at Tom Dispatch. He and McCoy have give us so much good material, including *The World According to Donald Trump: How to Gain a Wall and Lose an Empire*, written by Alfred McCoy and introduced by Tom Englehardt. It's great reading and great direction for the country.

All of these things can be done. The unrealistic are those who believe that nuclear power and nuclear bombs can play a role. They are living in denial. They don't know what they're talking about, they're living in fantasy. The realists are those speaking on behalf of peace and justice internationally. These are the realists, not the fatancists who think that two trillion dollars for nuclear suicide is going to help us. It's not. It's going to destroy us.

Thank you for tuning in to World Focus.