



Article

The Future of War Is Civil War

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Abstract: This essay discusses the more potent forces driving the West toward a future of war which is civil war centred upon the destruction of 'global' cities through exploitation of their intrinsic instability. The first part of this essay will establish the plausibility of its main premise, namely the inevitability of outright, active, and wide-scale civil war in North America and Western Europe. I shall demonstrate that there are well-understood indicators showing that our current societal arrangements are failing at an accelerating rate. The second part will briefly address the strengths and weaknesses of the extant future war literature, focusing mainly upon influential works of fiction rather than the quasi-rigorous outpourings of the 'futurology' discipline. In the third part, I will describe the shape or character of the wars to come which, in short form, I expect to exhibit the following: a distinctive rural versus urban dimension; jarring societal splits along the fracture lines of multiculturalism; a 'hi-lo' mix of weapons featuring extensive innovative reuse of civil tech for military purpose, particularly attacks on infrastructure; and a 'shock of the old' reversion-mutation to savage tactics, notably the use of famine and destruction of shelter as tools of coercion. This last section of the paper is partly based on approximately ten years of examining the darker corners of the internet listening to what incipient revolutionaries, neo-anarchists, and want-to-be militiamen think and talk about.

Keywords: future war; civil war; strategy; critical infrastructure; terrorism

1. Introduction

'In shaping anticipations of the future of war there arises a certain difficulty about the point of departure' (Wells 1901).

The quote that begins this essay is from the chapter on 'War' in the 1902 book *Anticipations* by H.G. Wells, arguably the world's greatest futurist. In the book, Wells attempted to describe the world of 2000, which is not too far off from our own time. From the luxury of our perspective, we can see he got a few things right, a few things wrong, and many things which are best described as incorrect but still eerily relevant. For the time being, however, the important thing about the quote is the matter of the possible points of departure for any structured rumination on the future.

Wells says there are essentially two ways to do it. One may begin with 'broad issues' such as demography, geography, social structures, communications paradigms, and so on, and, having determined 'something of the nature' of the coming times, proceeded to speculate about war in that context. One may 'set all that matter aside for a space' and focus on the 'continually more potent appliances physical science offers the soldier' (Wells 1901, p. 177). In other words, start with society, broadly defined, or technology—specifically weapons technology.

When it came to war Wells elected to follow the latter path, which is ironic because his technological predictions were so off the mark as to be a little humorous, whereas his social predictions feel very uncomfortably on target even today. For instance, on the matter of aerial warfare he opined that it would be dominated by balloons attacking each other with aerial rams and suggested it was quite possible that heavier-than-air flight could be perfected long before 2000 and possibly 'as early as 1950' (Wells 1901, p. 192).



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As it happened, the Wright brothers first flight took place in 1903, a year after the publication of *Anticipations*, and Chuck Yeager had cracked the sound barrier in his X-1 rocket plane in 1947 already. By contrast, Wells concludes his chapter on 'War' with this warning:

'The war of the coming time will really be won in schools and colleges and universities, wherever men write and read and talk together. . . the nation, in a word, that turns the greatest proportion of its irresponsible adiposity into social muscle, will certainly be the nation that will be the most powerful in warfare as in peace, will certainly be the ascendant or dominant nation before the year 2000.' (Wells 1901, p. 212)

That, to my mind, is a very apposite and relevant statement today for the unfortunate truth is that our society, by which I mean Western society, has now a great abundance of irresponsible adiposity, a medical term for fatness, and severely atrophied social muscles. That is why in this paper I shall do the opposite of Wells. I will set weapons technology aside, for the most part, and focus on what seem to me to be the more potent forces driving us toward a future of war which is civil war centred upon the destruction of 'global' cities through exploitation of their intrinsic instability.

The first part of this paper will establish the plausibility of its main premise. I personally am convinced of the inevitability of outright, active, and wide-scale civil war in North America and Western Europe. The best that can be hoped for, I think, is to diminish the period of horror. Some readers may be more optimistic; none, though, can objectively deny that there are strong and well-understood indicators showing that our current societal arrangements are failing at an accelerating rate.

The second part will briefly address the strengths and weaknesses of the extant future war literature, focusing mainly upon influential works of fiction rather than the quasi-rigorous outpourings of the 'futurology' discipline. For the purposes of analysis, I divide these into three groups: military futurism, social futurism, and 'the unmentionables'. My argument, in a nutshell, is that we focus too much on the first, too little on the second, and especially not enough on the third, which is where most of the important contemporary ideas are to be found.

In the third part, I will attempt to describe the shape or character of the wars to come which, in short form, I expect to prominently exhibit the following: a distinctive rural verses urban dimension; jarring societal splits along the fracture lines of multiculturalism; a 'hi-lo' mix of weapons featuring extensive innovative reuse of civil tech for military purpose, particularly attacks on infrastructure; and a 'shock of the old' reversion-mutation to savage tactics, notably the use of famine and destruction of shelter as tools of coercion. This last section of the paper is based in part on approximately ten years of lurking on the darker corners of the internet listening to what incipient revolutionaries, neo-anarchists, and want-to-be militiamen think and talk about.

I shall not conclude with thoughts on what might be done to prevent the occurrence of the civil wars that are coming because there is nothing that can be done about it. The unfortunate reality is that society has already passed the tipping point after which prevention of the eruption of violent civil conflict is impossible. The best that can be hoped is that, equipped with the forewarning which follows, we can recognize what is occurring, why, and perhaps mitigate and shorten the period of societal pain that must be endured.

Before proceeding, a few words about methods and sources are in order. All data presented below are open source and verifiable, except in two categories. First, I refer to some examples of the guardedness of civil infrastructure which I have observed directly. Second, and somewhat more complicated, the way that I have attempted to assess the mood and amorphous 'plans' of incipient revolutionaries is through consistent lurking over a decade on the anonymous image boards 4Chan and 8Chan/pol, a range of Twitter and Telegram channels and websites, and (surprisingly usefully) the user review sections of controversial books on Amazon and Goodreads book sites. There are no archives of these sites, although links to Amazon reviews are relatively stable.¹ While admittedly

unsystematic, my impressions are broadly in accord with those of other researchers of extremist groups, notably the Southern Poverty Law Centre (SPLC) and the International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation (See, for instance, [Jackson 2004](#); [Rose and A. 2021](#)).

2. 'Things Fall Apart'

It might be said that the words that title this section of my paper are a truism. There is nothing more fundamental to the human perception of reality, i.e., the proverbial 'arrow of time', than that as we move 'forward' in time entropy increases. They are taken from the famous and overtly apocalyptic poem by the Irish poet W.B. Yeats, 'The Second Coming'. Written in 1919 in the shadow of the First World War, at the beginning of the Irish War of Independence (which led, in turn, to the Irish Civil War), and at the highpoint of the global influenza epidemic (which looked likely to kill his then-pregnant wife), it is unsurprisingly gloomy.

A hundred years later, however, in the wake of a series of seemingly epochal (albeit thus far less bloody) wars, another global pandemic, and on the precipice of an alarming economic downturn, the words also feel very current. We are surely 'turning and turning in the widening gyre' and there is, moreover, a widely articulated sense that 'the centre cannot hold'. In the past few years there have been at least two popular and well-reviewed works of fiction on the coming civil war in America ([Brown 2017](#); [Akkad 2018](#)). Scholars and pundits across a range of disciplines have also picked up on the civil war zeitgeist.

Barbara Walter's *How Civil Wars Start—and How to Stop Them*, meant as a warning to America in particular, has been particularly widely reviewed (See, for example, [Meek 2022](#)). While alarming, such claims ought not to be surprising, as for years scholars such as Peter Turchin have been tracking the West's civilisational decline generally and warning of its increasingly imminent demise ([Turchin 2016](#); [Schlesinger 1992](#)). On top of that, one must add the arguments of further scholars and pundits who have argued that the condition of life in several major Western states is already one of low-grade civil war (For example, see [Hussey 2014](#)). One ought to consider that what has rather metaphorically been called the culture 'war' is increasingly taking on the character of actual war in terms of its levels of mutual demonisation and loathing (See [Adams 2019](#)).

A YouGov poll of 1500 adult American citizens conducted 20–23 August 2022 found that 43% of all adults agreed with the statement that a civil war was likely in the United States within the next decade. Republicans, at 53%, were moderately more convinced than Democrats at 40%, despite which it seems fair to say that this is sign that the perception is significantly bipartisan ([Orth 2022](#)). Over the last year and a half, dozens of high-ranking government officials (notably in the Justice and Defence Departments) and politicians, including most recently the president himself, have spoken similarly of domestic extremism, political fragmentation, and potentially-nation-breaking conflict. In September 2022, Biden declared that 'MAGA Republicans represent an extremism that threatens the very foundations of our republic' (See [Remarks by President Biden on the Continued Battle for the Soul of the Nation 2022](#)).

Lest it seem from the above that this is a peculiarly American problem, a range of other examples might be given. Britain, which has been remarkably politically stable since the mid-17th century, was recently brought right to the brink of domestic rupture by parliamentary and government shenanigans to subvert the results of the 2016 Brexit referendum. Germany has grown increasingly concerned about the activities of 'far-Right' movements not just on the streets but within the ranks of the armed police and top-tier military units. In the autumn of 2023, protests by predominantly Muslim Britons in response to Israeli military operations in Gaza clashed with predominantly White British counter-protests professing to defend the sanctity of Remembrance Day ceremonies. The Home Office Minister, Suella Braverman, declared the former to be 'hate marches' and criticized the police for a lack of even-handedness in policing ([Braverman 2023](#)). She was sacked 5 days later.

The events of early December 2022 when 25 members of a German Far-Right group were arrested for attempting a coup suggests this is a valid concern (Kirby 2022). In France, most famously, in 2021, a thousand members of the armed forces, including 20 retired generals, signed an open letter warning of impending civil war (Anger as Ex-Generals Warn of 'Deadly Civil War' in France 2021). In late June and early July 2023, after a young man of North African descent was killed in an altercation with police in Nanterre, a wave of riots ensued. President Macron was forced to convene an emergency Cabinet, 40,000 extra police and soldiers were put on the streets, and 3000 arrests were made over five days (Surendran and Yadav 2023). The tensions that led to this latest outbreak were many and varied, ranging from protests against changes to retirement age and other economic matters, to Left- and Right-wing anger with Macron specifically, to longstanding grievances in the simmering suburban primarily Muslim enclaves known as 'banlieus'. None are resolved.

That the problem exists, in short, is widely recognised. Of course, many people deny the obvious, perhaps because they are frightened or, one might surmise, because they are already factionally invested in the conflict and are simply positioning over who will be judged by history to have fired the first shot in it. No one should be surprised at the levels of hatred, distrust, and calculated cynicism. All of this has been a long time coming.

For 20 years the *Edelman Trust Barometer*, amongst other such measures, has tracked a global collapse in levels of trust in society of a range of institutions. 'Distrust', it concludes, 'is now society's default emotion'. Related research by Pew has further shown that the drop in Western societies, particularly American, has been especially acute. As of 2019, before the contested Biden election and the Covid epidemic, 68 percent agreed that it was urgently necessary to repair public levels of confidence in government and in each other as citizens, with half holding that fading trust represented a 'cultural sickness' (Lee et al. 2019).

A generation of sociologists have documented and puzzled over the transition of Western countries from generally 'high trust' to notably 'low trust' societies, the landmark work being Robert Putnam's *Bowling Alone* which popularised the concept of social capital (Putnam 2001). Putnam's later work connecting the diminishment of social capital with multiculturalism has been much more controversial—indeed its conclusions have been played down by its own author (Putnam 2007). The reasons for this would seem to have little do with the quality of scholarship, which is exemplary; rather, the implications from a policy perspective are so sobering and so vindictive of 'far-Right' views that they are often politely ignored or vaguely explained away. The most common form of the latter tactic is to acknowledge that diversity does have a negative impact on social capital but to append the words 'short term' to the effect.

The trouble is that there is no good reason to believe that the effect *is* short term—quite the opposite, in fact. Putnam's findings were valid when the research was conducted well over 20 years ago. It has been more than a decade since Angela Merkel declared multiculturalism in Germany to have 'utterly failed', an idea echoed (literally with the same words) by then Prime Minister David Cameron in Britain who elaborated that 'It ghettoises people into minority and majority groups with no common identity' (See Weaver 2010; Doward 2011). Since this time, the situation has worsened. The problem is endemic and growing, not short-term and passing.

Additionally, the intercommunal antagonism normally referred to as 'political polarisation' has been powerfully enhanced, ironically, by the twin forces of social media and identity politics (Wanless and Buerk 2021). Digital connectivity tends to drive societies towards greater depth and frequency of feelings of isolation in more tightly drawn affinity groups, each guarded by carefully constructed membranes of ideological disbelief (often referred to as 'filter bubbles'), beyond which lies nought but an increasingly contemptible and alien other. Hillary Clinton's memorable description of Trump supporters, i.e., half of the American electorate, as 'deplorables' was something of an epitome of a general pattern of mutual demonisation. There is less of a meaningful centrist politics and more of a precarious balance of partisan camps that are openly hateful of each other.

Many years ago, back even before the infancy of the ‘information age’, the Canadian media guru Marshall McLuhan discerned the emergence of what he called a ‘global village’ because of an increasing ease of communications—a public sphere in which everyone would be connected to everyone else. Pondering the effect of this on warfare, he argued that it would henceforth take the form of a ‘war of icons’ in which the belligerents would seek victory over their rivals by eroding their ‘collective countenance’ with ‘electric persuasion. . . dunking entire populations in new imagery’ (McLuhan 2001).

Reading those words as an undergraduate thirty years ago it all sounded rather gnomic, intellectually obscure, and to my mind dubiously relevant to conventional interstate conflict, which is the paradigm with which we were all preoccupied at the time. Now, it seems more obvious what he might have been on about—at any rate the idea is easily applied in the context of the current culture war. It might be hoped that such a conflict could be confined to the new public sphere, the ‘virtual dimension’ of communications, where people will ‘flame’ and ‘troll’ each other. But it will not be because the culture war has spilled its banks. Already, in fact, the ‘war of icons’ is occurring in the real world—we are already into the phase of literally smashing each other’s totems, which I think is a valid other way of saying ‘collective countenance’, and people (albeit in small numbers still) have started to be killed and injured. And it will only become worse as we add to the mix two other aggravating factors.

The first of these is the already-started economic downturn, a long overdue recurrence of the 2008 financial crisis, combined with the fallout of the deindustrialisation of Western economies, a notable by-product of which is the progressive de-dollarisation of global trade, which has been turbocharged by sanctions on Russia, which has also induced a ballistic rise in energy costs in already inflationary economies. The fact is that in terms of economic financialization, further debt issuance, and consumption, the collective West has reached the end of the line, which means that a gigantic gap in expectation of well-being is opening. If there is one thing that the literature on revolution agrees upon it is that expectation gaps are very dangerous (See the exchange between (Davies 1974) and (Snyder and Tilly 1974)).

The second factor is the availability of arms. Normally, this is a thing remarked upon in the American context where for well-known constitutional reasons there is a high degree of availability of small arms. Europeans, however, have absolutely no reason to relax on this front, for while it is true that legal private ownership of weapons is less common, the difference is one of degree and not kind. Gun ownership is quite common in France and Germany, for instance. Moreover, in the last six months the West has injected tens of thousands of unaccountable high-grade military weapons, including man-portable air defence and anti-tank missiles, into Ukraine, which is amid its own civil war, and from which Europe is ‘separated’ by one of the world’s most-permeable-to-smuggling borders (Davis 2022).

In sum, civil war is imminently and eminently plausible because there is no shortage of dry tinder, either literally or metaphorically.

3. Three Futurisms

Dickens’ magnificent opening to *A Tale of Two Cities* is often regarded as the greatest of all literary openings.

It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of light, it was the season of darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair.

Having read the previous section it is likely to be obvious why the counter-position of wisdom and foolishness, hope and despair seems to me a fitting note on which to start this one. That is our situation also, poised on the brink between peace and war. I like it too, however, as a device to structure a short discussion on the future of war literature which I think is divided into distinctive parts, three rather than two, that often talk past or ignore each other.

If you search Amazon in English for the words ‘future war’ in the category of books the top hit at the present time is *DMZ: This is the Future of War*, book 7 in a series by F.X. Holden which, to judge from the extensive and enthusiastic reviews, is thrilling (Holden 2022). The setting is near-term, the focus is on military action and weapons—essentially 21st century Tom Clancy. Next on the list is *Future War and the Defence of Europe*, a non-fiction work by three well-known experts in the field, which carries on its cover ringing endorsements from a range of similarly reputable authorities (Allen et al. 2021). It is focused primarily on the near term and is technological in its focus, arguing the need for a ‘future hyper-electronic European force’.

I would describe both books as ‘military futurism’, a description with which the Amazon algorithm would appear to agree. The object of one is to entertain, another to inform. Each is very good, a solid addition to a genre with which readers of this essay will be very familiar. Name-checking personal favourites from the very long list of potential examples of it would be superfluous to the argument at hand. My point is simply that ‘military futurism’ tends to be narrowly military and near-term in its focus and often boils down to an argument for certain alterations in present military spending.

The problem is that books such as Yevgeny Zamyatin’s *We*, Jack London’s *The Iron Heel*, George Orwell’s *1984*, Ray Bradbury’s *Fahrenheit 451*, and so on, are also all about war in one or more centrally important aspects and ought to be a part of the discussion. ‘Social futurism’ is how I would describe these works. Again, it is a popular and active genre with noteworthy (to my mind) current authors such as Ken MacLeod, *The Execution Channel* and Neal Stephenson, *Snow Crash* and *The Diamond Age* standing out. They are not ignored but neither generally are they regarded as works on future war per se (Zamyatin 1993; London 1908; Orwell 2000; Bradbury 2008; MacLeod 2008; Stephenson 1992, 1996). Most of them fall under ‘dystopian fiction’ according to Amazon.

The problem which I am trying to highlight here is perhaps best encapsulated by one author. Robert Heinlein’s *Starship Troopers* is a staple of future war syllabi. The reasons why are obvious: on one level, it is spectacular military futurism. Combat in the book features soldiers equipped with high-tech armoured exoskeletons, operating in a distributed but highly connected manner, bounding across the battlefield while lacerating targets identified by their powerful digital sensorium with long range weapons. The fit with 1990s (and current, to be fair) preoccupations and aspirations to a digital Revolution in Military Affairs was perfect (See, for example, Cerasini 2003).

On the other hand, only a small fraction of *Starship Troopers* is about warfare; it is, rather, a political philosophical tract in the form of a science fiction novel with some cinematic battle scenes pasted in. One wonders how many staff college seminars meant to be about future command-and-control systems veered off into discussions of constitutionality and democratic franchise because Heinlein was the recommended reading of the day. Interestingly, another Heinlein work, *The Revolt in 2100*, the third book in his ‘future history’ series, which is an account of an American insurgency against a high-tech tyrannical theocracy, is not on anyone’s reading list though arguably it has distinctly more relevance to the world as it is than does *Starship Troopers* (Heinlein 1963, 1965).

There is a third genre, a part of which overlaps with ‘social futurism’ and might well be called that—it is certainly dystopic. What distinguishes it, in my view, is its central preoccupation with a vision of future war that is internal—a civil war which presupposes a breakdown in the existing political order—and in which the focus is on the new socio-politics rather more than weapons. In the last few years, Omar El Akkad’s *American War* and Christopher Brown’s *Tropic of Kansas* have been widely reviewed and discussed (Brown 2017; El Akkad 2017). Both are set in a near-future America. Combat features in them but it has a secondary quality to the narrative, which is not about tactics but politics.

Perhaps a more insightful work, therefore, for the purposes at hand, is Adam Roberts’ *New Model Army*, which is set in Britain and does have a lot to say on future military practice. The central character in the book is a soldier in an army called *Pantegral*, an army which is genuinely revolutionary in form, possessing no hierarchy whatsoever (Roberts 2011). It

also possesses no heavy equipment or organic logistics. Soldiers provide their own rations, arrange their own medical supplies, and supply their own kit using central funds that they may access as required. Highly connected, *Pantegral* soldiers operate as a collective with each soldier capable of presenting plans, contributing to the overall intelligence picture, discussing options, then voting on what the army should do in real-time.

Roberts also has much to say about the essential causes of his fictional conflagration which, though drawing explicitly on Zamyatin, is a reaction to a belief that is often heard from today's post-political youth who increasingly do not choose to participate by voting in an increasingly diminished and meaningless performative display and see no reason why they ought to bother:

... a democracy can be gauged as successful insofar as it approaches the asymptote of complete Zamyatin transparency. You find that thought distasteful. You want to preserve your privacy. I understand, although it necessarily means that you are not properly committed to the ideal of democracy. It's hard for you, I appreciate; given that you have been conditioned from an early age to pay lip service to the idea of democracy. All I'm saying is that you don't accept the fullest consequences of that allegiance. I hardly need to add, besides, none of the so-called democracies in the world today are properly democratic. They are, rather, rigid hierarchies, whose oligarchs consent, every few years, to punctuate their routine with a single mass reality-TV-show-style plebiscite. (Roberts 2011, p. 7)

As a vision of the future of war, it has many similarities with the 'flash mob' rebels in Bruce Sterling's novel *Distraction*, as well as with Howard Rheingold's non-fiction speculation in *Smart Mobs* (Sterling 1999; Rheingold 2002). It is also close to the aspirations of some of the more biologically inspired models of military operations and organisation that have emerged from army staff colleges and think tanks with a strong focus on self-organisation, 'swarming', and 'flattened' hierarchies. *Pantegral* is described in the book as less an army than a 'Polis', a city-state of its own something like Athens of classical times. Likewise, its preferred terrain on which to operate is urban where it is supposed that its relative lack of heavy weapons is less of a factor against it.

In fairness, there are a lot of elements in *New Model Army* which are fairly time-worn. Carlos Marighela's famous *Minimanual of the Urban Guerrilla* was based on very similar ideas, minus much of the digital connectivity, and with a heftier dose of Marxist claptrap (Marighela 1969). Moreover, while the belief that urban environments suit modern guerrillas is practically a matter of Biblical faith nowadays, the fact of 150 years of history so far is that there is practically no *worse* place for irregulars to attempt to contest state power. These things aside, as a vision of future warfare which combines political elements such as the diminishment of the nation-state, with social developments such as the rise of 'digital nomadism', with the addition of demographic ones such as urbanisation, as well as fashionable ideas about military operations, it is coherent and plausible.

What is lacking from the picture so far is a sense of what the coming civil war will be fought over. The answer is obvious and yet generally unmentionable in polite company, probably because it is horrifying and there is nothing much that can be done about it. It is as Merkel, Cameron, and those twenty French generals pointed out: Western society, in which 'identity' is now the dominant frame of organisation in politics and life generally, has already fragmented into affinity groups whose pre-political loyalties are not to their titular nation.

Identity politics may be defined as politics in which people having a particular racial, religious, ethnic, social, or cultural identity tend to promote their own specific interests or concerns without regard to the interests or concerns of any larger political group. It might as well be described as 'post-national' politics for, in effect, the important thing about it is the way that national identity is superseded by other identities. For the time being, this is evident in voting patterns, studies of 'national feeling', and proxy measures such as willingness to fight for one's country, as well as social segregation, and so far, low-level (albeit widespread) intercommunal violence.²

The metaphorical pot is already near to the boiling point. What is likely to set it to boiling over are two things. The first is the aforementioned sharp economic decline which will curtail the ability of government to maintain domestic peace through subsidisation and wealth transfer via debt. Being unable to borrow, governments will have to negotiate the division of a diminished and insufficient-to-satisfy-everyone stock of public goods to increasingly fractious identity groups. The second is the acceptance of white populations that the precepts of identity politics as described above apply to them the same as they do other groups.

Critics of Huntington's now 30-year-old thesis of a coming 'clash of civilisations' turned out to have at least one excellent point (Huntington 1997). They often argued that it was practically impossible to draw a line around these civilisations on a map. Unfortunately, this does not mean no clash of civilisations will occur; it means, rather, that the coming clash represented on a 'national' map is going to look like a flaming and bloody jigsaw puzzle with the lines tearing through cities and towns and neighbourhoods.

The viewpoint which I am describing as inevitably becoming predominant is usually nowadays described as 'Alt Right', though 'cultural fascism' or 'native populism', would serve as well. In the United States recently, President Biden warned of the extremism of 'MAGA Republicans' threatening the 'soul of the nation' (Gambino 2022). In fact, it is extremely difficult to meaningfully define extremism objectively, and particularly practically difficult when the 'extreme' idea being labelled as such is one that is believed by a large fraction of the population.

However, we might label the viewpoint or ideology, at its centre according to the experts of the SPLC is the core belief that white identity is under attack by multiculturalism and other forces using political correctness, social justice, and immigration to undermine Western civilisation. The literature which inspires, or reflects is a better description in some cases, which the SPLC succinctly describes as 'racist fantasy', is surprisingly popular (Jackson 2004).

Some of it, such as Jean Raspail's *The Camp of the Saints* (1973), which depicts the destruction of Western civilisation through mass immigration, verges on respectability.³ At any rate, it is still in print and reviewed and talked about in mainstream media. Some of it, such as William Luther Pierce's *The Turner Diaries* (1978), which tells the story of an American white nationalist insurrection, is talked about but not easy to read (Pierce 1978). It was banned from Amazon in 2021.

The International Centre for Counterterrorism in The Hague describes the *Turner Diaries* as the most important single work of white nationalist propaganda (Berger 2016). It is, however, hardly singular in respect of a genre that includes several other significant works. Renaud Camus' *The Great Replacement* (Camus 2012) gave a name to the 'great replacement' theory, an idea that is central to Alt Right ideology. It is no longer available in French or English translation on Amazon. His 2018 book *You Will Not Replace Us!* (obviously a resonant phrase) provides an English language summary of Camus' political ideas (Camus 2018).

Beyond these books lies a series of related works, a mix of fiction and non-fiction (usually collections of essays), often self-published, that share a palpable and increasing anger with the status quo establishment. In the language of 'strategic communications' they reflect a straightforward narrative structure: statement of grievance/identification of enemy, a call for rectification/support, and sometimes an outline of a plan of action (on which more below). The manifestos of Anders Breivik, the 'lone wolf' who conducted the July 2011 attacks in Norway which killed 77 people, and Brenton Tarrant, who conducted the March 2019 Christchurch, New Zealand attacks in which 51 people were killed, both echoed these ideas (in Breivik's case at very great length).

Examples would include *Dark Albion: A Requiem for the English*, a collection of essays railing against the prevailing social climate which currently has 147 reviews on Amazon, generally lengthy and discursive, 71% of them 5 stars (Abbott 2013). Jim Goad's *Whiteness: The Original Sin*, a self-explanatory title, has 332 reviews of which 78% are 5 stars (Goad

2018). For point of comparison, Douglas Murray's *The War on the West*, which makes a very similar argument, has 2256 ratings, of which 81% are 5 stars—but that is with the backing of a very large mainstream press and dozens of reviews in many major newspapers and other media outlets (Murray 2022).

The reviews themselves are an interesting source of both sentiment and market analysis. For the most part they are thoughtfully written, though extremely bitter, and yet also pragmatic. This one from Goad's *Whiteness* is a nice example:

Goad as a modern author, has captured the mood of this unsettled, racially unbalanced world perfectly. He addresses deep seated fears from both sides, tackles the subject of tribalism in an open, honest, and unflinching manner, discusses the largely destructive and failed experiment of mass immigration, all whilst never pinning the blame on one group of people. . . if there is one thing this book said to me, it's that you can't run away from something that literally screams in your face. At some point you will be forced to admit that there is a problem, but that requires honesty and even being brave sometimes, something that is severely lacking and discouraged in modern society.

When you consider how monitored, censored, and regulated our lives have become, and even though the Kindle edition works perfectly, I would suggest purchasing titles such as this in physical form. Build yourself a physical library—they are more difficult to delete and less likely to suddenly disappear if someone decides they are inappropriate, offensive, or even just troublesome (Bigbushybeard 2021).

For better evidence of the existence of a coherent anti-establishment narrative, which is landing home with its supposed 'conscience community', this is hard to beat. Clearly, the existence of the 'cause' is fully accepted, as is the call to action against 'modern society' implied in the statement that running away from the problem is not possible. Equally relevant is the final injunction to obtain a physical rather than an electronic copy, which is in essence a clear illustration of lack of trust in extant authority.

When apparently significant numbers of 'normal' (i.e., able to provide a 'verified purchase' review on Amazon) people who are reasonably educated (to judge from the way that they write) accept what are labelled as 'extremist' narratives and have already begun to arrange their lives to hide their views from the sight of the authorities for fear of censure, it would seem fair to say that is a picture of a critically ill society that eerily recalls that of *Fahrenheit 451*.

At this point we ought perhaps to leave the theoretical, hypothetical, and fictional behind and look at what practically budding revolutionaries are saying about tactics, techniques, and strategies for the coming conflict.

4. Urbicide: A How to Guide

The strategy which anti-status quo groups would seem generally to comprehend is simple, direct, and by no means a secret: they intend to collapse the major cities causing cascading crises leading to systemic failure and a period of mass chaos which they will wait out from the relative security of the rural provinces. It would be a mistake to dismiss this idea as ill-founded or unlikely. Given the 'yellow vest' riots in France in recent years, as well as the more recent Dutch farmers' revolts, the rural versus urban dimension of this ought to be no surprise.

Consider this passage from a 1974 booklet by Murray Bookchin on *The Limits of the City*:

Just as there is a point beyond which a village becomes a city, so there is a point beyond which a city negates itself, churning up a human condition that is more atomizing—and culturally or socially more desiccated—than anything attributed to rural life. . . Either the limits imposed on the city by modern social life will be overcome, or forms of city life may arise that are congruent with the barbarism in store for humanity if people of this age should fail to resolve their social problems. The evidence for this tendency can be seen not only in the metropolis, choking

with an alienated and atomized aggregate of human beings, but in the ‘well-policed’ totalitarian city composed of starved black ghettos and privileged white enclaves—a city that would be a cemetery of freedom, culture, and the human spirit. (Bookchin 1974)

Bookchin, an American Jewish social theorist, Trotskyist, influential urbanist, and ecologist, is hardly a man of the Alt Right—though his identification of the problems of society as being atomization and degeneracy (a fair way to describe ‘cultural desiccation’) are both Alt Right tropes. That is why it is interesting where I came across this quote, which was at the beginning of a post on 4Chan’s infamous/pol discussion group which comprised a short essay on coming civil war tactics. I will get to those in a moment, but for now consider that the essential premise of the strategy is based on a thesis promulgated by a man of the Left nearly fifty years ago in an obscure academic text which states that there is an intrinsic wrongness of the ‘human condition’ that is centred upon the configuration of the modern city.

The most important thing we might conclude from this should also be the most obvious. Do not underestimate the opposite argument of one’s own. The author of the comment in which this passage was quoted might well be a bible-thumping, gun-toting ‘redneck’ but they are clearly not stupid or ill-informed. Quite the contrary, I have seen as much or more insightful discussion of classic anti-status-quo texts on Alt-Right forums as I have in graduate seminars.

Moreover, consider the merit of the contrary thesis which, at the present time, has two primary propositions. The first is that heterogeneity is an unalloyed good which leads to greater social stability, ingenuity, quality of well-being, and so on. The second is that the contemporary megalopolis can detach from and survive without the support of its local environs—this being the essential idea of the ‘global’ city. The latter view was perhaps epitomised by the responses of some Londoners, including the current London mayor, to the results of the Brexit referendum which suggested that the city, which voted to remain in the European Union, ought to secede from Britain, which voted to leave.

Social science is clear on the invalidity of the first and common sense is suggestive of the falsity of the second (See, for instance, (Laurence and Bentley 2016; Ziller 2015)). Ultimately, both are about to be tested by reality. Here it would be useful to define the term that exists in the title of this subsection. I might have done it earlier but its pertinence to the argument at hand merits locating it closer to the section that follows. The term is a relative neologism and an obvious portmanteau of ‘urban’, ‘urbanism’, or ‘urbanity’ with ‘homicide’ or indeed ‘genocide’.

‘Urbicide’ may be defined as ‘killing a city’ and is often used in that manner; for example, a few years ago by David Kilcullen in his description of American urban counterinsurgency operations in Baghdad (Kilcullen 2013). At best, in this use it is a loose definition—more of a metaphor or simply an arresting turn of phrase; the truth is that it is enormously difficult to kill cities because they have massive powers of regeneration. Warsaw, Moscow, Tokyo, Hiroshima. . . Carthage even—and Rome too: that is a very incomplete list of currently ‘living’ cities which have had 80% or more of their structures destroyed and a similar per cent of inhabitants killed or displaced at one time or another (As explained in (Vale and Campanella 2005)).

A more frequently cited definition of ‘urbicide’ describes it as the destruction of the possibility of a particular condition of urban life, or ‘urbanity’ in the jargon, through the targeting of structures. As a result of such attacks, a condition of urban ‘agonistic heterogeneity’ is transformed into one of ‘antagonistic enclaves of homogeneity’ (Coward 2007). In layman’s terms, that means destroying the condition of intercommunal comity in ethnically or otherwise mixed urban environments, separating them into warring neighbourhoods.

The author of this conception of ‘urbicide’ developed it as a way of analysing the tactics of the Yugoslav Civil Wars of the 1990s, notably the destruction of the famous mediaeval bridge in Mostar, as well as other structures. A main criticism aimed at it is that it is hard to apply the concept outside of that context, an argument admitted by its author.

We ought not, though, to abandon the concept hastily because it would seem to be a good approximation of the intent and techniques talked about by those thinking about how to conduct an incipient civil war.

At the time of writing, for example, the city of Leicester in Britain, the 11th largest in the country (roughly in the same position in order of size of cities as Austin, Texas for American readers), is witnessing serious intercommunal violence between the local Hindu and Muslim populations. A Hindu mob marched through the Muslim part of town chanting 'Death to Pakistan' (bear in mind that both populations are nominally British) (Murray et al. 2022). That would seem to be a reasonable example of agonistic heterogeneity transforming into antagonism, not to mention a clear comment on the nature of pre-political loyalty and conception of national identity amongst a significant fraction of the residents of Britain.

The most frequently talked about tactics amongst anti-status quo groups are quintessentially asymmetric. They do not rely upon main force; rather they work on a kind of Judo logic of finding points of extreme unbalance in a system and striking there with the intent of causing it to collapse under its own weight. Thus far I have been talking about imbalances, vulnerabilities essentially, in social organisation, specifically the configuration of identities that are increasingly antagonistic, and a parallel now many-decades-long draining of reserves of social capital. These are intangible, somewhat abstract targets, though they are targetable, nonetheless.

They also intend, however, to hit physical targets according to the same kind of thinking, in particular the electrical energy grid as well as gas networks. The reasons for this are generally straightforward. A great deal of critical infrastructure is practically unguarded (likely un-guardable), its location is perfectly obvious public information, it is relatively easy to damage, and the knock-on effects are potentially very severe. Electrical pylons for long-distance high voltage transmission, for example, can be brought down with small amounts of simple explosives, transformer stations can be shot up or just as easily set alight.

Likewise, gas facilities are vulnerable. It is a matter of a few minutes on the Internet, for example, to find high-quality maps of the UK's National Transmission System, the network of gas pipelines and pumping facilities supplying 40 power stations, big industrial users, and LNG terminals located on the coast. The pipes conveying dangerous substances such as gas are commonly referred to as Major Accident Hazard Pipelines (MAHP), and the clue as to their vulnerability is in the name (See Shea n.d.).

The giant frothing bubble of gas seen on the surface of the Baltic Sea after the sabotage of the *Nordstream 2*, which is a large submarine MAHP that gives a sense of the volume and potential volatility latent in this kind of infrastructure. In that case, given the depth of the pipeline at about 90 metres under the sea it is a relatively challenging target requiring the resources of a major state to attack it. The typical MAHP, however, up to a metre in diameter, i.e., roughly the same size, is usually buried at a depth of 1 to 1.5 metres. The locations of these pipelines are widely known to a high degree of granularity and that must be the case because of the obvious potential for accidents caused by normal digging for construction. In July 2004 in Ghislengien, Belgium, for example, 25 people were killed and 150 were seriously injured when one was damaged by construction work (See Ghislengien Pipeline Explosion 2004).

The pressure in a large gas system is maintained by a network of compression stations, also known as transmission relay stations, of which there are 24 in the UK (two main ones serving London) and are all in semi-rural environments. Interestingly, none are labelled on Google Maps, but they are trivially easily discovered by a postcode search. One of the largest and most important, located near Cambridge just south of the RAF Museum at Duxford, is no more guarded than any of the nearby light industrial facilities.

In April 1992 the IRA exploded a huge truck bomb outside the Baltic Exchange Building in London. A year later in April 1993 it struck again with a truck bomb at Bishopsgate near the financial district. The economic damage entailed exceeded £1 billion (Legg n.d.).

As a result of these, and other terror attacks, the London landscape is densely fortified with hostile-vehicle mitigation barriers and highly monitored by a range of sophisticated and expensive surveillance measures. It would be hard to conduct such attacks now.

Attacking the average gas compression station, by contrast, requires no more than being able to plough through a chain link fence. Moreover, if (as is reasonable to assume) some fraction of those people attacking the system will be the same as those people who designed, built, or were charged with maintaining it then the difficulty of disrupting it would drop by another order of magnitude.

The secondary effect on a large urban centre of a sustained lack of electricity and/or gas for heating and cooking would be very large, particularly in very cold or very hot climates. Take, for example, the city of Toronto, Canada, which has a greater metropolitan population of over 6 million. In the winter months heating is a matter of life and death in that climate (likewise in the summer months air conditioning is arguably necessary to life in very hot places such as Phoenix, Arizona). Currently, 44% of the population of Toronto are apartment dwellers. When the power goes out, how long will it take people in electrically heated apartment buildings to start trying to heat their frigid homes and cook with jury-rigged fires? How long after that will it take for apartment buildings to start going up in flames? Answer: not long.

Transportation infrastructure is also a likely target. It is well known that American infrastructure is already severely run down, even without active efforts to disrupt it. Hundreds of road and rail bridges, overpasses, logistical nodes, and transportation hubs are held together with jury-rigged repairs (See (McBride and Siripurapu 2021)). Moreover, many major cities—New York being a prime example—are accessed via bridge or tunnel, which are natural bottlenecks and are easily attacked. If nothing else, the recent COVID-lockdown made obvious the precarious dependence of social order on the smooth running of civil logistics. The fact is that the average modern urbanite has on hand no more than a few days of food and the cities they live in possess typically no more than a few days more food supply in warehouses and on store shelves. Britain's food supply chain, for instance, is described as resilient and complex but is also dependent on just-in-time networks that are highly vulnerable to disruption (UK Food Security Report 2021 2021).

In the event of serious efforts to attack transportation and logistics infrastructure, the authorities would be rapidly faced by a gigantic challenge on two fronts. First, they would need to guard a vast and distributed system which is generally unguarded and extremely open against native attackers who know perfectly well what the vulnerable chokepoints are. Second, they would have to do so while at the same trying to maintain social control of cities full of hungry, cold, angry, frightened, and socially atomised people who have literally and metaphorically suddenly been thrust into the dark.

In other words, urban riots are practically inevitable, likely to be compounded by simultaneous outflows of people from the cities to perceived safety outside. To obtain a sense of the potential danger, we might consider that for a week in August 2011, London and subsequently other British cities were wracked by widespread rioting. Nationally, just over 3000 arrests were made (Baudains et al. 2013). It has been estimated, however, that on any given day in London during the crisis there were not more than a couple of thousand rioters, and perhaps only a couple of hundred of those being seriously violent, out of a metropolitan population of almost ten million (Baudains et al. 2013). Even so, the police struggled massively to restore order. How would they have fared if 100,000 people, just 1% of that population, revolted? What about 10% or 25%? Answer: badly. The security services would be overwhelmed.

We must assume, moreover, that some fraction of the security services—possibly a large fraction given our understanding of the tenor of political conviction (generally more Right-leaning) in the police and military—would support or remain neutral towards an uprising. In fact, there is probably no more important factor in the outcome of revolution than the response to it of the regime army.

Would Western armed forces and police react to domestic revolution in the way that Iran's has to domestic upheaval, China's did during the Tiananmen revolt in China, or Arab armies towards the 2010–2011 Arab Spring? The question is not easily answered; in fact, it has hardly been asked openly, though one might surmise that the oft-stated apprehension of the Pentagon over the last two years about political 'extremism' in the ranks is good sign that at some level it is seen as a relevant concern (Posard et al. 2021).

The fiery Black Lives Matter protests, particularly in the United States, present another sobering data point when thinking about the challenge of maintaining civil peace in the context of social breakdown. Those events, however, as widespread, and violent as they were, still took place in an environment in which 1. overall national order had not broken down, and 2. in the absence of major attempts of other actors to escalate the situation through counterattack and provocation. What might happen if neither of these things were the case?

Before contemplating an answer to that question, it is necessary to add another element to the mix, which is the certainty of information attacks, perhaps better described as attacks intended to shape the information environment. It is well understood that in any war the primary objective is to defeat the enemy's will to resist. The intimacy of civil war, its political intensity, and its fundamentally social quality, with the addition of the acute accessibility to attack on all sides of everyone's weak points, can make them particularly savage and miasmatic.

The Russian Civil War is a particularly good example. The historian W. Bruce Lincoln described that conflict in a way that truly ought to frighten people at the possibility that similar passions are being unleashed in societies today:

Raw cruelty and fanaticism unlike anywhere seen in those gigantic battles of the Great War became a part of Russia's civil war from the beginning. On one occasion, Whites filled three freight cars with the bodies of Red Guards, their frozen corpses 'placed in obscene positions', according to one observer, and returned them to their starving enemies marked 'Fresh Meat, Destination Petrograd'... All over Russia it was the same, as Red and White terror condemned men and women to suffer for what they were, not for what they had done. (Lincoln 1999)

Getting back to informational attacks, we should assume that they will have at least three interconnected aspects or levels.

Firstly, there will be attacks on the information infrastructure directly with the intent of blacking out communications through the normal media, enhancing the apprehension of disconnectedness, confusion, and fear in the population, as well as hampering government efforts to coordinate responses to multiple and cascading crises. As with transportation and energy, the difficulty of doing this is not great because the infrastructure is lightly guarded, widespread, and well understood.

A few examples suffice to illustrate: one of the main UK transatlantic fibreoptic cables carrying a significant bulk of data traffic with North America and beyond lands today near a popular beach in Cornwall. The cable cuts its way beneath the nearby carpark where it can readily be accessed simply by lifting an unlocked manhole cover. This is widely known because there was a story about it in the *Daily Mail* complete with photographs of the infrastructure in question (Henderson and Livingstone 2022).

Likewise, the handful of routing stations and data exchanges that underpin Britain's telephone network are basically unguarded (in fact, they are often now unmanned). The facilities are usually discreet, indeed deliberately seriously non-descript, but neither are they secret. In my hometown, for instance, a bedroom community about 25 miles from the centre of London, there is located a BT telephone exchange that runs a large fraction of the network of southern England. A few years ago, I was advised jokingly (I thought at the time) by one of its managers that if the whole town and everyone in it were wiped out by a meteor and only the exchange survived the damage to the national economy would be less than if only the exchange were destroyed. It is currently secured by a padlocked chain-link fence.

It is not commonly known that the core of Britain's government communication system known as 'Backbone' was designed in the 1950s and 1960s to survive a nuclear attack, which is the reason that all its most critical nodes are located outside of the major urban areas (See [Campbell 1983](#)). At its core is a series of about 20 'radio relay stations', now in use also as microwave and cellular phone towers, located at key points across the country. People who drive into London from the direction of Oxford will be very familiar with an example of it because it is one of the most visible—if prosaic—landmarks in all southern England.

Rising 90 metres atop a ridge near Stokenchurch on a ridge overlooking the M40 motorway on the edge of the picturesque Chilterns is a very strong concrete tower topped by a Perspex aerial gallery festooned with telecommunications gear. It is meant to be able to resist a megaton blast on London, about 30 miles away, in order that during a nuclear war government communication could continue and, after the war, to provide the basis of an improvised civil communications network. Ironically, it too is guarded by a rusty fence and would probably not survive an assault by a handful of men equipped with bolt cutters, sledgehammers, and a few jerrycans of petrol.

Britain is not untypical in respect of the configuration of its infrastructure—quite the contrary, such is the norm. The fact is that for all the talk and effort over 'critical infrastructure protection' in recent decades, it is nearly always predicated on the idea of external (often cyber) attack, against which there are possibly adequate defences, but not on the possibility of local, domestic, and insider attack, against which there is essentially no credible defence. In a normally functioning society where the default condition of civil life is a widespread consent to be governed there is no need to heavily defend these public goods. There would be no point. Doing so, moreover, would come at great expense.

Finally, there will be deliberate attacks designed to take existing social divisions and fractures in society and tear them into wide unbridgeable chasms. At this point in the history of conflict, it hardly seems necessary to explain the technique of propaganda by deed. How to employ terrorism, assassination, kidnapping, and torture of both selected symbolic and/or otherwise 'important' figures as well as random collections of individuals in targeted groups is simply open knowledge.

The fact is, as superbly exemplified by post-Saddam Iraq and post-Qaddafi Libya, that it is practically impossible to maintain a peaceful integrated multi-valent society once neighbours start kidnapping each other's children and murdering them with hand drills, blowing up each other's festivals, slaying each other's teachers and religious leaders, and tearing down their cultural symbols. It is soberingly worth noting, moreover, that instances of some of those things have occurred already in many Western countries, and *all* of them have occurred in France in the last five years.

If there is a notably different aspect of this with respect to the specifically native, 'far-Right', groups at the centre of analysis here it would be the relative indifference and ambivalence directed towards targeted attacks on politicians as opposed to seemingly more important social influencers. I would take from this the likelihood that at the top of any current revolutionary targeting matrix will be found media, particularly social media, figures who are regarded as both more important and less well-guarded.

To be honest, this apprehension is probably well-founded; at any rate it is in line with the attitude evinced in the long quote above from *New Model Army*. If 'democratic' politics are essentially performative and meaningless then it follows that the people put forward as leaders in such a system are also essentially performers and equally meaningless in terms of actual power structures.

Ultimately, everything important comes down to those words 'normally functioning society' and 'consent to be governed', a phrase reasonable encapsulated by the concept of 'legitimacy'. The thing is that 'legitimacy' is incredibly difficult to pin down practically or definitionally. For my part, I think that is basically a sort of magic in that it is demonstratively a kind of power which we can see clearly when it works but that becomes hugely mysterious when it stops, which it is about to do.

What, then, is the answer to what future civil war might look like in the case of a very serious breakdown of government and in a context where all belligerents were of a mind to escalate punishment and provocation of their domestic opponents to the maximum of their capability and ingenuity? The simple answer is awful. More specifically, with history as a guide, we can look forward to compelled population movements on the scale of the partition of the Raj after Britain's departure from India, combined with highly urbanised intercommunal violence rather like the Yugoslav civil wars but on a continental scale, and likely something of the genocidal horridness of the Congolese civil war.

5. 'The Centre Cannot Hold'

Civil war is 'political war' *par excellence*. John Paul Vann famously observed that the best weapons in a political war were the gun and the knife, not the airplanes and massed artillery of a conventional war (As recounted in Prochnau 1996). Admittedly, Vann was a counterinsurgent, not a revolutionary, but it seems to me that the logic holds from either perspective. The coming civil war will combine the knife and the gun, the bolt-cutter, the sledgehammer, the IED, and every other means available applied with the 'utmost discretion' not to limit casualties but in a manner aimed precisely at well-known and widespread points of vulnerability that will lead to mass effect.

In the future of war which I have described nearly all of what the armed forces are doing to prepare for 'war' is going to be *irrelevant* except as assets to be divided, violently, and flung at each other until all are destroyed or worn out by use as sophisticated maintenance regimes and integrated logistical systems fracture and fail.

The tactics likely to be employed are not especially complex or difficult to perform. The means are widely available as the important ones are essentially the tools of civilian life that are just lying around at hand. To riff on the words of H.G. Wells quoted at the beginning of this essay, they are merely the continually more potent appliances physical science offers the *citizen in revolt*. There is nothing important about the tactics that has not already been worked out in dozens of examples of civil wars outside the Western world.

Similarly, the strategy that is likely to be employed is based upon observations made by completely mainstream social scientists—generally Left-leaning, as are most scholars—going back more than half a century. Every strategy is a gamble against chance because that is war's nature; the one at hand here, in my opinion, looks like a safe bet.

It might be said, then, that the essence of my point is that it is all coming home: here, to your city, your neighbourhood, your friends, and your family. One might question, therefore, the reasonability of my assessment of the pregnancy of our society with latent conflict. Yeats' poem ends with the line 'And what rough beast, its hour come round at last, Slouches towards Bethlehem to be born?' I say civil war and a beastly rough version of it at that. Perhaps I am too pessimistic? To that, aside from the case which I have already made, I would add two points.

Firstly, there is the matter of money—to be specific, the growing lack of it. Since the 2008 financial crisis the global economy has been in constant peril of structural recession as a result primarily of central bank monetary policies and government deficit spending. As it was put in a 2015 report, well before the COVID-19 outbreak and the Russo-Ukraine war, the global economy has been a 'dud' with sluggish growth due to persistent structural causes (Richter 2015).

The situation is recognisably akin to one in medicine where a typical end-of-life scenario involves multiple organ failure in which the treatment of one ailment contradicts measures to fix another. The well-regarded macro-investor Ray Dalio has written convincingly that the global economic status quo is nearing implosion. 'The times ahead', he argues, 'will be radically different from those we've experienced in our lifetimes, though similar to many times in history' (Dalio 2021).

For two, my assessment—which I admit is subjective—is not just that there are several obviously serious 'catalysts' that will propel Western societies into civil conflict, not least frankly unavoidable economic pain causing a massive expectation gap, but that at

a surprisingly general level people really want to fight. This is individually and collectively foolish. Unfortunately, the history of the madness of crowds and popular delusions is quite clear on the capacity of people individually and en masse to do things that are foolishly self-destructive.

In the pages above I have focused quite a lot on the attitudes evinced in Right-wing ‘extremism’, which I have done because I agree partially with the recent identification by leaders in the security services in Britain, the United States, and elsewhere in Europe that it is there where the greatest threat to the status quo exists. I might as well, however, have drawn on Left-wing extremism, which is no less eager for the fight. Indeed, if Left and Right agree on anything it is that the existing system is beyond saving. Neither believe that ‘democracy’ as currently constituted means much more than cynically managed oligarchism. It has been twenty years since Sheldon Wolin characterised the American political system as ‘inverted totalitarianism’ and forty years since Noam Chomsky discerned the intent of the global establishment was the reinvention of serfdom (Wolin 2004; Chomsky 1981). Are these ideas extreme or obvious? They are obviously challenging.

The Coming Insurrection is the title of a 2007 tract originally published in French by an anonymous group of anarchist radicals. Its first line reads ‘Everyone agrees. It’s about to explode. . . We can discern more clearly every day, beneath the reassuring drone, the noise of preparations for open war’ (The Invisible Committee 2009). In other words, the warning mentioned above issued by retired French generals, supposedly of the nationalist Right, about the impending civil war is a matter of bipartisan consensus.

Moreover, the means and strategies envisaged by Left radicals are also essentially the same as those on the Right:

It’s well known that the streets teem with incivilities. Between what they are and what they should be stands the centripetal force of the police, doing their best to restore order to them; and on the other side there’s us, the opposite centrifugal movement. . . All the incivilities of the street should become methodical and systematic, converging in a diffuse, effective guerrilla war that restores us to our ungovernability, our primordial unruliness... The technical infrastructure of the metropolis is vulnerable. Its flows amount to more than the transportation of people and commodities. Information and energy circulate via wire networks, fibres and channels, and these can be attacked. In our time of utter decadence, the only thing imposing about temples is the dismal truth that *they are already ruins*. (The Invisible Committee 2009, pp. 11–112)

It is past time to take such statements very seriously. Over the last thirty years the West has preoccupied itself thanklessly in an expeditionary capacity in the invertebrate civil wars of others—generally counterproductively but sometimes just fruitlessly. During that time, it has developed not just in the military but also in the quasi-NGO sector a certain capacity for thinking about ‘root causes’ of conflict as well some fluency with operations in seriously divided societies that have been deranged by endemic internal war. It is past time to turn the mirror on ourselves.

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Notes

¹ For more on the method and difficulty of such studies see, (Nagle 2017; Colley and Moore 2022). I participated in and helped to organise the 2019 workshop on which the latter work is based.

² For further on the role of identity in the network society, see (Castells 2010, chap. 1).

- ³ Raspail (1994). The SPLC describes the Social Contract Press as a nativist hate-group, see ‘The Social Contract Press’, SPLC (undated), <https://www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/extremist-files/group/social-contract-press> (21 June 2023).

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