

## WAR ON TERRA

The Long War it is now called. Reporters and commentators call it the War on Terrorists, which of course is a little more reasonable than making war on a concept like terror. It seems that the president still calls it War on Terror. When I hear him say that in Texan, I hear War on Terra.

Even a war on terrorists is something that the rich and powerful cannot win, or even wage. Our war machine is based on destroying a visible enemy, a country. We're very good at making and delivering bombs and missiles that do what they are designed to do: destroy. Terrorists are people who, for one reason or another, are mad at people who have powerful guns and armies. If you don't have a war machine, what can you do but strike out at a ship, a building? We are indignant when a terrorist attack kills innocent women and children. Many people are equally indignant about the "collateral damage" our war machine makes. It is not all that difficult to understand why some people in the world are mad at us. Not because they envy our freedom. They probably object to our pushy arrogance and our overbearing, overwhelming export (culture, movies, ideas, in addition of course to our economic power).

It might have made more sense if our reaction to the horror of 9/11 had been considered, if we had tried to find the reason(s) why people were mad at us, and then figure out a way to deal with that. What they were mad at was no secret. "The West won the world not by the superiority of its ideas or values or religion but rather by its superiority in applying organized violence. Westerners often forget this fact, non-Westerners never do." Samuel P. Huntington

But it is too late to go back to sanity; the Long War is on.

The War on Terror is now presented as a war of generations, but while we are busy fighting terror (anywhere? or only in the Middle East?) the War on Terra is only too real. Strangely, we don't talk about it much. The Media—the few huge corporations that entertain us with news—have not discovered it apparently. This other, bigger war is our continuing—accelerating with the globalization of our western economy and culture—push to change Nature, erase forests that have existed for thousands of years, and so destroying habitats (human and non-human); continuing, even accelerating polluting the air, water and soil of the planet. One of the consequences of this silent war has been the extinction of species: thousands, perhaps millions of species that are gone from this earth. Another consequence, it is now recognized, is what we used to call Global Warming and now is called Climate Change.

Terra, of course, is planet Earth, the place we think of as just a rock, a thing wrapped in an envelope of breathable air. But Terra, the planet, is "everything there is."

I make a distinction between "terra" and "the world". Terra is the planet, its biosphere within which all Life is. The World is the artificial (meaning man-made)

world of our civilization. We think of the world as a creation we placed on top of Terra, using the planet as a place to live on, a resource. We think of our man-made world as a creation separate from Terra. It is plunked on top of the Earth, but we forget that we (and our creations) are part of the planet, inseparable from All That is. Our world is made to satisfy all needs we can think of, and we dream up new needs daily. As a result, our man-made world is expanding like a cancer, and like a cancer it is eating its host: the planet. The stresses in our artificial world are more evident every day. They are the consequence of our hubris, thinking we can create our own world, thank you. As if we know better how this planet should be. I know some people who think it is our job to subdue the planet and all there is on and in it, for the use of... who? Probably the elite, the super rich in today's world.

We've had many empires before; "empire" not only as a political entity, but a culture, a way of being as well as a way of seeing reality. Our western culture differs perhaps from previous empires because it is world-wide, and our technology is more effective in subduing and controlling. That means, the collapse of this empire will also be world-wide.

It seems to me that the world (our man-made world) is seriously out of touch with the reality of the planet. A planet is not a "thing," a lifeless rock on which we can design a reality we prefer. The planet is an immense and complex ecology, where everything is related to everything else. The planet has a biosphere, a thin layer of soil, water (in many forms) and air, in which all Life takes place. Today we think of ourselves as at the top of a pyramid of life forms. On top, the best, the smartest. And we forget that we are still part of that pyramid. Perhaps even the most vulnerable part. We think so highly of ourselves that we imagine we are worthy to own the planet, own everything and every life on it. We think we know best.

When I look around me I see what we, humans, are making, with almost total disregard of the reality of this land. The land here is subdivided in acre plots, rectangular, facing an unpaved road, connected to an asphalted (not really paved) road that leads to the only highway to "town." Most of the land recently sold, seems to have been sold to speculators. The cheapest way to build evidently is to bulldoze the whole acre (sometimes the half facing the street), which means destroying what trees and shrubs finally grew on land that is lava rock. Then you build a generic house, with specifications that are not very different from a house one would build in a cold climate. This is the tropics, but these "spec houses" are not built for the tropics. The destruction of all green makes the lots look desert-like, of course. If it were sand, we could plant trees on it, but on lava rock trees must find their own crack to put a root in. All this development is noisy, and dusty. The unpaved roads have become almost

impassible because of the heavy trucks that go back and forth. The clearings are effecting the water flow. The two-lane highway to town is so crowded that it is hard to get on and off. People buy large, heavy trucks and vans, because it is "safer." People who sit high above cars and have a few hundred horsepower to move their vehicle, drive faster and less cautiously.

Everything is related to everything else—and it isn't working.

We like to think that we lifted ourselves up by our bootstraps. But in reality, of course, we grabbed what we wanted by stepping on the backs of others. We have a myth that we conquered an empty land, but it was not empty. Abusing slaves and other humans by force of gunpowder is bad, but the consequences of abusing the land we stole will turn out to be catastrophe.

Has it sunk in what Climate Change means to us, humans? I read recently that scientists now think the level of the ocean may rise perhaps as much as one meter (three feet) in this century. The rise may not be gradual, but sudden. Most of the biggest cities of our world are at current ocean level; sea transport is still the cheapest way to move stuff from one end of the globe to another. Stuff like oil, for instance, the substance we are addicted to, our president said. What do addicts do to get rid of their addiction? We are not doing that.

There is a saying, referring to Caesar, emperor of a crumbling Roman Empire: fiddling while Rome burns. We are fiddling while our earth is burning. We are fiddling by elbowing our way into what everyone knew to be the tinderbox of the world. We are even fiddling when talking about and developing alternative fuels to power our economy and our cars. Oil is not the problem, or not the only problem.

The War on Terra is the problem: our arrogance, thinking that we are the owners of this planet, and that as owners we can damn well do what we please.

We have that wrong. We are *not* the owners, not even the managers of this planet. We are part of it, no better than any other life form (or rock, for that matter). We are made by earth stuff, as every other thing or life form is made of earth stuff. Sure, homo sapiens is different from all other animals, but our DNA and that of the apes is 99.9% the same. The riches we so greedily accumulate never belonged to us. Even if we were superior to all other beings on this planet, it seems the utmost folly to destroy, or even disturb, the planet which after all is our only home.

One group of people making war (which means killing) on another group of people has gone on for a long time. But we have improved our weapons to the point where we can eradicate much of Life, including ourselves. Does that speak of superiority? What rational reasoning can explain invading a country that was no threat to us with Shock and Awe? The country was never a country to begin

with, it was held together by a dictator we "removed." We are threatening another country, in between the two that we now occupy, with nuclear weapons, I have read. We accuse that country of wanting to make nuclear weapons, so we have to destroy their nuclear facilities with nuclear bombs? Sound funny, but of course it isn't funny. It may trigger far worse effects than we anticipate, as the present war resulted in situations we apparently did not anticipate either.

Obviously, we in this country, and humans in general, are not very good at anticipating the consequences of our actions. We don't think very far ahead. And yet we pretend we know better than Nature.

People tell me I must have hope. What should I hope? Another election to make a difference? Scientists finding a way to...? Beings from the Pleiades rescuing us from our own follies?

The buzz word is sustainable. A sustainable society. When half the world's population now lives in cities, so the other half has to grow twice the food they need for themselves? The corporations that grow our food only know monoculture which requires enormous quantities of fertilizer (made from oil) and pesticides (that pollute the earth, water and air). How can that be sustainable? We (humans, homo sapiens) had a sustainable life style for at least a hundred thousand years (some scientists now think almost a million). Of course there were fewer people, probably no more than a million spread very thinly over the planet. We took responsibility for our own well being, and that of our family or tribe. We lived off the land, which usually meant we moved around in order not to deplete or burden the land. We did not have much, and we threw away nothing that was usable, what we discarded was biodegradable. We ate well enough to survive. We made shelter from what we found where we were. We made clothes, if we needed, from materials we found where we were. We had nothing but leisure time.

Now almost half a century ago I knew people like that. Aboriginal people, living in the deep jungles of Southeast Asia. (The jungles of course have mostly been leveled today). True, they looked poor, dressed in rags (or nothing at all). But they had joie de vivre, they were joyfully alive; one of the things modern man has forgotten. They made huts on stilts from bamboo that grows everywhere. They gathered fruit, edible leaves, roots, and hunted very occasionally (of course never more than they could eat). They lived in small groups, rarely more than a dozen. They sang, told stories around tiny little fires in the evening. True, they probably did not live as long as we do, although at the time I knew them, their most serious illness was a disease we had brought, to which they had no immunity. Food was never hard to find for they knew their environment intimately because they knew themselves part of the environment, not different from the animals and plant life around them. They smiled the most wonderful open smiles.

We have come a long way from those primitives! Today a family of mother, father, and 2.1 children, lives in a 2300 square foot house (the average today, I read), with four or more bedrooms and two or three bathrooms, a kitchen with all the gimmicks and gadgets that are current. And probably a mortgage that they pay a few thousand dollars a month to amortize. They have three TVs in this house, at least two cars, probably two or three computers, five telephones. You know the rest. Their leisure time is spent in a gym to stay in shape because they don't work with their body any more. Both parents work in order to be able to pay for their "standard of living." According to what I read recently they have no savings, but many credit cards, some of them maxed out. I cannot even imagine how much electricity they use, how much gasoline to run their SUVs and vans. How much energy (oil) they use to make trips, either by car or by plane. They probably buy only food that is wrapped in plastic (made from oil), stored in an enormous refrigerator/freezer, food that contains too much salt, fat and sugar.

It seems only too obvious that such a life style is not sustainable.

But, you say, every toddler needs his own computer! Every teenager needs a cell phone and an iPod. Remember, there are six and a half billion of us! My pre-teen grandchildren all have their own web site (and my family is not rich, not even middle class any more). Remember the president telling us shortly after 9/11 to buy more things to keep the economy growing? We do our patriotic duty, we consume, making WalMart the richest company in the world. Our culture's motto is MORE. More things, more money, more power. An ever growing economy. For all six and a half billion humans, or just the few?

Isn't it obvious that More is unsustainable? In an ecology where everything is connected to everything else, if one being, or one species, accumulates "more" (of anything), other beings or species must get less. The total of what there is (whatever "it" is) is finite on this planet. More for some, means less for everyone else. That has never worked on this planet. When everything is related to everything else, there is a balance, a harmony. And shifting the balance all to one side, simply cannot be done. Oh, sure, in the short run. But inevitably there has to be a redress of the balance.

Making war on Terra is even more short-sighted than meeting terror with more terror, violence with more violence. This planet does not work that way.

"In fighting nature, Man can win every battle except the last." Thor Heyerdahl.