

The UN's Sustainable Development Goals: Global Schizophrenia

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The UN Sustainable Development Summit last week projected a new set of 17 sustainable development goals (SDGs) for the next 15 years to replace the 8 Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) that were in place from 2000 to 2015.

The U.N. website tells us that the SDGs address five critical areas of “people, planet, prosperity, peace, and partnership.” U.N. Development program administrator Helen Clark stated that “This agreement marks an important milestone in putting our world on an inclusive and sustainable course. If we all work together, we have a chance of meeting citizens’ aspirations for peace, prosperity, and wellbeing, and to preserve our planet.”

Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon stated that the adoption of the SDGs was “a defining moment in human history,” calling it a “universal, integrated and transformative vision for a better world.” President Obama pledged his support.

The Guardian reported that the general consensus of the conference was that the MDGs “failed to consider the root causes of poverty and overlooked gender inequality as well as the holistic nature of development. The goals made no mention of human rights and did not specifically address economic development. While the MDGs, in theory, applied to all countries, in reality they were considered targets for poor countries to achieve, with finance from wealthy states. Conversely, every country will be expected to work towards achieving the SDGs. The new agenda, with 17 sustainable development goals at its core, recognizes that ending poverty must go hand-in-hand with a plan that builds economic growth and addresses a range of social needs, while tackling climate change.” (See <http://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2015/jan/19/sustainable-development-goals-united-nations>.)

The U.N. website summarizes the SDGs, each of which has a set of sub-goals: 1. No poverty, 2. Zero hunger, 3. Good health and well-being, 4. Quality education, 5. Gender equity, 6. Clean water and sanitation, 7. Affordable and clean energy, 8. Decent work and economic growth, 9. Industry, innovation, and infrastructure, 10. Reduced inequalities, 11. Sustainable cities and communities, 12. Responsible consumption and production, 13. Climate action, 14. Life below water, 15. Life on land, 16. Peace, justice, and strong institutions, 17. Partnerships for the goals.

What is most striking in all of this is the total bracketing of reality; its nearly complete disjuncture from the world in which we actually live. Schizophrenia is commonly defined as a [psychological disorder](#) characterized by failure to recognize what is [real](#). Common symptoms include confused thinking and clinging to [false beliefs](#) in the face of clearly contradictory evidence. Rather than accuse those who developed these SDGs of conscious deceit and falsification, it seems more reasonable to diagnose them with schizophrenia.

The overwhelming reality of our planetary situation, obvious to anyone who is half awake, is that of progressively developing global military empire in the service of a tiny capitalist ruling class. This global empire is neo-colonial. It operates through proxies. It supports dictatorships (like Saudi Arabia), friendly lap-dogs and lackeys (like Great Britain), and tiny capitalist ruling classes in nations throughout the world that ally themselves with the global imperial center. As Michael Parenti describes our world system in *The Face of Imperialism*, any country in the world that shows signs of electing a genuinely left-oriented government becomes a possible target for regime-change.

Any country in the world, no matter how peaceful or prosperous internally, that is critical of the world system under the imperial dominator, is also a target for regime-change. A well-known 2007 Democracy Now interview quotes retired General Wesley Clark as stating “We’re going to take out 7 countries in 5 years: Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Libya, Somalia, Sudan and Iran.” Most persons in touch with reality understand that 9/11 was an inside job with the goal of actualizing the total military domination of “the New American Century.” World-systems scholars James Petras and Henry Veltmeyer write that “the power of the imperial state is extended to international financial institutions such as the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, the Asian Bank, the Inter-American Development Bank and the World Trade Organization. The imperial states provide most of their funds, appoint the leaders of the IFIs and hold them accountable for implementing policies that favor the multinational corporations for their respective countries” (2005: 35). The reality of our planet is the drive toward total military and economic domination by a tiny elite.

Former American diplomat and Far East scholar, Chalmers Johnson (hardly known as a “radical”), wrote a series of four books chronicling the destruction of “the republic” by the ever-growing “empire.” One of these volumes (2006) chronicled the U.S. drive for total control of space as “the ultimate high ground” from which to dominate and control the entire planet. Canadian scholar of global affairs, Michel Chossudovsky, has published a new comprehensive book entitled *The Globalization of War: America’s “Long War” against Humanity* (2015) documenting that the system of war and militarized domination has no intention of ever coming to an end. Global scholar F. William Engdahl describes our world system in detail in *Full Spectrum Dominance: Totalitarian Democracy in the New World Order* (2009) showing the totalized nature of the drive to control every aspect of the planet, including outer space. Naomi Klein in *The Shock Doctrine* (2007) shows how “disaster capitalism” promoted by the U.S. has devastated the well-being of country after country around the planet.

Where does any of this reality appear in the pronouncements, analyses, or programs of the United Nations? Where does any of this reality appear in the new Sustainable Development Goals? Nowhere. The entire thought pattern of the U.N. system and its Sustainable Development Goals is in denial of our planetary reality. This is likely not an accident, since the U.S. has also worked to colonize the U.N. and bend its programs to its imperial propaganda and intentions. Global peace thinker Johan Galtung calls this: “Crippling the United Nations: controlling the Security Council through veto; controlling the UNGA against uniting for peace resolutions; controlling by spying on delegations and arm-twisting; controlling the budget through 25% clause, non-payment, and GAO, the General Accounting Office, an arm of the US Congress; controlling the U.N. civil servants through short-term contracts; showing who is in charge through material breach, illegality; and getting away with it all, because of all of the above” (2009: 38). No one dares mention the elephant in the room.

An examination of the 17 SDGs in the light of these facts, makes this very clear. Goal 8 is “decent work and economic growth,” an ideological ruse that associates economic well-being with “growth” in the face of the many economists of sustainable development, such as Herman E. Daly in his book *Beyond Growth* (1996), who proclaim rightly that you cannot have unlimited capitalist growth on a finite planet. Nor can you have the “free trade” of global capitalist exploitation if you want to achieve any of the first three goals: “no poverty, zero hunger, good health and well-being.” There is nothing in the 17 goals about the absolute need to transform the world economy into one that serves humanity rather than the rich, nor is there anything about finding ways to limit the population on our planet, something that is absolutely necessary if we are to achieve any of these goals. There is not one word in the SDGs about eliminating militarism and converting the planet to a world of common laws enforced by non-military civilian police. Yet without eliminating militarism, none of these goals can possibly be accomplished.

According to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, in 2014 the world spent 1.767 trillion U.S. dollars in military expenditures, more than half of this by the U.S. The empire is responsible for considerably more than half of this, however, since it encourages militarization in its numerous proxy and lackey countries around the planet (and is the major supplier of weapons). A number of the SDGs are about sustainability, but sustainability cannot possibly be achieved without converting this immense waste of our planet’s wealth to designing a sustainable global economy. Not only do the SDGs ignore this immense waste of money, they ignore the fact that this militarism is destroying nations and communities across the globe: Yugoslavia, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iraq, Sudan, Libya, Yemen, Syria, not to mention dozens of other secret operations in countries around the world (see Engelhardt: 2014).

In his book *The Green Zone: The Environmental Costs of Militarism*, Barry Sanders documents the immense environmental costs of all forms of military production, and the immense environmental destruction from all use of military weapons. The reality of our world is not only a devastating waste of the resources necessary to achieve the SDGs. And it is not only destruction of nations and cultures worldwide through endless wars, obstructing the possibility of realizing these goals. The reality is also that the very production and deployment of military systems blocks the possibility of dealing with climate collapse or achieving any of these SDGs. Is this not total schizophrenia? SDG number 16 gives us the goal of “peace, justice, and strong institutions.” Yet examination of its 10 itemized sub-goals makes it clear that these goals are formulated in complete denial of the empire, its planetary militarization, and its implacable resistance to peace. In fact, none of the SDGs can be achieved without a genuine transformation to planetary peace.

These SDGs serve as an ideological cover for the reality of empire and global domination. If we really want to achieve these worthy goals, we must transform the *structure* of the world system into one that makes their achievement possible. The *Constitution for the Federation of Earth* is structured directly for the achievement of all of these goals, the very first of which, as stated in Article 1, is to “end war, and secure disarmament” (www.earth-constitution.org). As I show in my new book, *One World Renaissance: Holistic Planetary Transformation through a Global Social Contract* (IED Press, 2015), this is the key and the linchpin to all other possibilities for creating a decent future for humanity. We can only achieve these SDGs if we transcend the fragmented system of militarized nation-states and unite together under the unity in diversity of a democratic world parliament and enforceable world law.

The world system itself, with a militarized imperial center promoting unrestrained global capitalism, is the one most fundamental impediment to peace, justice, freedom, and sustainability. We need to overcome our schizophrenia and wake up from our delusion that a decent future can be created through the present failed world system. Valuable agencies of the U.N. can easily be transferred to the Earth Federation. Our global problems are structural, and the solution to these problems is to transform the structural impediments to peace into *structures founded on a system of peace and sustainability*. The most available and practical model for this transformation is the *Earth Constitution*.

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