

By Mike Ferner

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A profusion of anonymous axioms and memes floods social media these days but one remains my very favorite: “It’s like we’ve all been sent to our room to think about what we did.” My friends, if there ever was a nation that needed a “time out” for that purpose, it’s ours.

With nearly every minute of round-the-clock news cycles dedicated to updates on the Covid-19 pandemic, one needn’t restate examples of the plague’s panic, suffering, fear or insecurity. It’s all right there, worsening with each iteration.

Fortunately, we’re also witnessing an abundance of human compassion that assuages some of the pain and fear. Every day people find creative ways to express their concern and confirm our common humanity.

In a [stellar essay](#), New York Times columnist David Brooks reflects, “Already there’s a shift of values coming to the world. We’re forced to be intentional about keeping up our human connections. There’s a new introspection coming into the world too. (People seem) eager to have deeper conversations and ask more fundamental questions...If your lungs filled with fluid a week from Tuesday would you be content with the life you’ve lived? What would you do if a loved one died?”

I’ve heard some of the same conversations and perceived some of the same transformations Brooks writes about. And it gives me hope that maybe...just maybe, this new-found compassion and introspection will continue and expand beyond our borders. Perhaps the hearts of Americans will feel just a portion of the suffering and grief our government has caused around the world – suffering for which we have each paid dearly in blood and treasure.

Certainly no one would minimize the traumas that have already and will yet hit the U.S. Millions

will be affected along a continuum ranging from sickness, death, unemployment and grief to where, spared by fate from the above, it will mostly be an inconvenience mixed with anxiety over the supply of toilet paper.

Will those on the lucky end of the spectrum have the further good fortune to take this once in a century opportunity to go to our room and think about what we did?

For those who do, here is some raw material for the imagination.

When the U.S. invasion of Iraq was in only its third year, a Johns Hopkins University study concluded that [655,000 people](#) had already been killed in that war.

Prior to that, the United Nations estimated that pre-war [sanctions](#) enforced on Iraq at the behest of the U.S. had killed over [500,000 children under the age of five](#).

Based on the Johns Hopkins estimate of Iraqis killed, a conservative estimate of the wounded from that same period was 2.6 million people. Additionally, the U.N. estimated between 1.5 million and 2 million Iraqis were “internally displaced” by the fighting and roughly the same number had fled their country, among them disproportionate numbers of doctors.

Take a moment to let that sink in...

Now, conjure your most empathetic vision and imagine what those numbers would look like if we applied them comparably to our own population. As hard as it is to believe, here's what our dear nation would look like.

+ In the former cities of Atlanta, Denver, Boston, Seattle, Milwaukee, Fort Worth, Baltimore,

San Francisco, Dallas and Philadelphia every single person is dead.

+ In Vermont, Delaware, Hawaii, Idaho, Nebraska, Nevada, Kansas, Mississippi, Iowa, Oregon, South Carolina and Colorado every single person is wounded.

+ The entire populations of Ohio and New Jersey are homeless, surviving with friends, relatives or under bridges as they can.

+ The entire populations of Michigan, Indiana and Kentucky have fled to Canada or Mexico.

+ One in four U.S. doctors has left the country. Last year, 3,000 doctors were kidnapped and 800 killed.

+ Only the well-off can afford bottled water. What comes out of the tap is guaranteed to at least make you sick and very frequently kill your children.

+ On a good day we have three or four hours of electricity to preserve food or cool the heat...all summer...in Arizona, Florida and the other 48 states.

+ Three times as many of our fellow citizens are out of work as during the Great Depression.

+ In every major city, hospitals are seriously degraded by years of sanctions or outright destroyed by bombing.

+ Roads are at best a time-consuming hazard.

+ Trying to care for the sick and wounded in these conditions consumes an ever-larger portion of our personal time and national resources, debilitating the economy even further.

+ Anxiety, depression and suicide rates increase dramatically.

+ It begins to sink in that nobody “out there” is coming to save us. We are in hell. Alone.

If you’ve not yet deleted this article in disgust or horror, open your heart further to understand that the above comparisons are based on one nation’s reality but our taxes have provided the Pentagon and CIA the wherewithal to make life equally damnable for our fellow humans in Iran, Libya, Guatemala, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Viet Nam, Cambodia, Thailand, Republic of the Congo and who knows how many places. Much of the world calls it war crimes. We passively accept it as foreign policy.

David Brooks observed, “We learn more about ourselves in these hard times. The differences between red and blue don’t seem as acute on the gurneys of the ER, but the inequality in the world seems more obscene when the difference between rich and poor is life or death.”

True indeed and worth taking to heart. Then, if we can expand our consciousness and compassion, we can begin to comprehend our government’s behavior in the world and come out of this pandemic demanding to be better members of the human family.

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