

There's a 'Tremendous Opportunity for Change'

John Perkins is the author of the overnight, underground bestseller Confessions of a Hit Man: How the U.S. Uses Globalization to Cheat Poor Countries Out of Trillions (see accompanying review). He was interviewed by Jeffrey Steinberg.



EIR: I want to start by asking you about the response to the book.

Perkins: The response has been incredible. It's been amazing to me, and also gratifying. The book hasn't received what we might call "mainstream" press coverage. In fact, I was supposed to be on one of the major networks a couple weeks ago, flew to New York to be on it: Two hours before I was supposed to be on, they pulled me, and said that one of the major producers had decided that the political ramifications were too dire, to have me on. So, they pulled me two hours before I was supposed to appear—which was rather shocking.

But, despite the fact that the mainstream press hasn't covered this book, the response has been overwhelming. It went to No. 1 on Amazon its first official week in publication. It's now in its fourth week of publication, and it's in its third printing, which I've been told is without precedent in the publishing world, especially for a book that hasn't received mainstream press coverage.

At my daughter's urging, I looked up *The Confessions of an Economic Hit Man* under Google, and there's 54 pages! Each one which a whole bunch of website connections.

So, there's a tremendous amount of discussion being generated, and I find that to be amazing, and very gratifying, because, what it tells me, is that people are deeply, deeply interested in this subject.

As I've criss-crossed the country in the past four weeks on a book tour, I keep finding people who call into radio shows, or who come up to me, and say how they've always felt this sort of thing was going on, that there were the equivalent of economic hit men out there. They didn't know the words. They just felt it in their hearts, but, how gratifying it is to have someone who actually experienced that and participated in the process, to come out and tell the story.



Ground Zero in New York, Sept. 17, 2001. Visiting the site shortly after the terrorist attacks, Perkins “realized that I had to take a lot of responsibility. That my years as an economic hit man had led to this, and that I had to come clean on that story.”

So, what I’m getting out of all this, is that it’s a story that must be told, which is why I told it after 9/11—I knew it had to be told. And it is relating to a lot of people on a very, very deep level. I think it strikes at the very chords of what it is to be an American. We grow up in this country, believing in ideals that are represented by our Declaration of Independence, believing that all people have the right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. I think the American people are a compassionate people who really believe in these principles. And yet, we know, at some level, that we’re not carrying out that role in the world; in fact, we’ve betrayed those very principles which are our foundation. We have betrayed them, and we continue to betray them. And, people are fed up with this. They really want change. But, they don’t know quite how to go about getting change.

So, the first step, is for people to really talk about it. You’ve been doing this for a long time. Your publications and your people have been spreading this word for a long time. And now, I think perhaps even more people are out there spreading it.

EIR: In the book, you discussed the fact that you’d been thinking about writing such a book for a long time, but that, after the attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, that sort of put you over the edge: that you had to do the book. Could you explain a bit about how that worked? What was going on in your mind, when you saw the planes attacking the World Trade Center and the Pentagon?

Perkins: Yes, it was a pivotal moment for me, as it was for many people. I never actually saw any of that, until a number of days later, because I was deep in the Amazon. I’d taken a

group of people, who went in to learn from the Shuar of the Amazon, people I’d worked with for years. During ‘90s, I’d devoted a great deal of my time, energy, and money to non-profit organizations, working with indigenous people, including ones in the Amazon, and taking Americans in to learn from these people.

And we happened to be there on 9/11. It’s an interesting story, because, on Sept. 10, we were getting in to be with the Shuar, who are amazing warriors—people I’d known since the late ‘60s. If you’ve ever seen a shrunken head, or a picture of one, they did it, because they’re the only people in the world that do. And they were the main line of the defense for the Ecuadorean Army against the Peruvian Army, in the war that was fought in 1995 between Ecuador and Peru, over oil rights. Most Americans aren’t even aware that that war was fought.

So, on Sept. 10, I’m in a dugout canoe, going down the river, talking to my blood brother, whose name is Shakaim, and he’s a co-author of another one of my books, called *Spirit of the Shuar*, which was published about three or four years ago, by Inner Traditions. And, as we’re going down the river in this dugout canoe, I’m saying to him, “Is the peace with Peru still holding?” And he said, “Oh yes, we’ve got no problem there. But now, brother, we’re planning on going to war with you.” And, of course, he didn’t mean me personally, or the group of people I was bringing in; he was referring to our oil companies, that are in a position to take over, basically, the Ecuadorean Amazon, for oil.

That night, this group of 16 people that I’d brought in, and I, sat around in a Shuar lodge, by a fire, and we talked about this. And we wondered out loud, how many people in the

world feel this way toward us? How many people fear us, and hate us? Not us, individually, but our policies.

So, the next morning, we got up, and we were having breakfast—we're way deep in the Amazon, but we have one means of communication with the outside world: It's a two-way radio, and every morning we try to talk with our pilots back in the Andes, because they're going to fly in in a few days, and some days you can't get in touch with them because of atmospheric conditions. So, every morning, we try to touch base with them.

On Sept. 11, I was on the radio with them; they were listening to a commercial station, that interrupted its music, and gave a blow-by-blow of what was going on in New York. So, I got it over this radio in Spanish, which I then translated for our group of people—and it was incredibly powerful for us, given the fact, that just the night before, we'd had this discussion. And three of the people thought they might have had relatives who were killed that day.

So, it was an amazing time. We all thought that this would be a shaking-awake for Americans. The Shuar also said this. And a couple of days later, we were up in the Andes with the Quechua, who told us about their prophecies, that this is a time when there is an opportunity for tremendous change: the story of the Eagle and the Condor, which is told in *Confessions of an Economic Hit Man* in detail. Basically, it prophesies that the people of the North and the people of the South will come together during these ten years before the year 2012, and form a whole new level of consciousness.

And so, what we were told by the Shuar and the Quechua was that this was the sign we'd entered this period: that the people of the North, whom they called the "Eagle People" were being tested by the people of the South, the "Condor People." They saw Osama bin Laden as a test for us.

I came back to the States, and very shortly after that, I went up to New York to visit Ground Zero. And as I sat there, and smelled the burning flesh, which you could still smell at that time, and saw the smoke rising from that pit, I realized that I had to take a lot of responsibility: that my years as an economic hit man had led to this, and that I had to come clean on that story. It wasn't enough simply to contribute my time and money to a non-profit, and try to assuage my guilt, and correct the wrongs that way. I had to tell the story. I have a 22-year-old daughter, and I owe it to her, and her generation; and I owe to all Americans and I owe it to myself. And I realized that, as I visited that site at Ground Zero, that this story *has* to be told, regardless of the consequences, regardless of the personal risk, regardless of what issues it may raise with many, many people. It's a story that the American people *must* know about.

EIR: You speak in the book, about both certain personalities—the name George Shultz comes to mind—and also certain institutions, like the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, which really are the architects of the policies

under which you functioned as an economic hit man. And you also, of course, discussed the role of the "jackals," the literal assassins who come in to deal with more extreme cases of resistance. You, in the book, talk at some length about the Torrijos and Roldos cases. I wonder if you've got any further thoughts on this "jackal" aspect, if there are other cases and other instances, where you were not necessarily so personally involved, but where you saw this economic hit man and jackal system playing out.

Perkins: Yes—you've covered a lot of territory there, from George Shultz to the jackals!

I do want to say—George Shultz, I do talk about, who was, of course, president of Bechtel Corp., and then Secretary of State under Reagan, and very much, deeply involved in attacking Panama in 1989. And that's described in detail in the book, how that all ties in with the whole Bechtel philosophy.

But, I want to emphasize, that this is not a partisan issue. These things happened under both the Democratic and Republican regimes. And George Shultz is a great example under the Republican, as are Dick Cheney and Condoleezza Rice, and the Bush family themselves. But, let's not forget that the Kennedy and Johnson Administrations had Robert McNamara, who'd been president of Ford and then was Secretary of Defense under Johnson and Kennedy, and then became president of the World Bank. And there were people like Brzezinski in the Carter Administration. And these things occurred also under Clinton. This is not a partisan issue.

The Bush family is particularly vulnerable these days, because of their very, very strong connections to the oil companies.

And yes, as you pointed out, when the economic hit men fail, which over the past four decades, we haven't failed very often: We've managed to create a world empire, the first truly global, world empire, essentially without the military. We've done it through economics, the economic hit men. But, when we fail, as we did in Panama and Ecuador—I failed, in those countries, to bring Omar Torrijos and Jaime Roldos around—then the jackals, who are CIA-sanctioned assassins, step in. And they did assassinate Omar Torrijos of Panama and Jaime Roldos of Ecuador, because I failed.

Now, if both the jackals and the economic hit men fail—which is not very usual these days, but we did both fail in Iraq—then the next step is, that we send in our young men and women, to kill and to be killed.

And so, this huge empire has been created largely through economic hit men, with the backup being the jackals, and the step of last resort, being to bring in the military. It's been a very effective and a very subtle system, and it basically puts all the other empire-builders of history—the Romans, the Persians, and Spanish *conquistadores*, the British, the Germans, the Dutch—it puts them all to shame. We've done a much better job of it, in a much more subtle way—in such a way that many of our own citizens don't realize that we've become an empire!

EIR: Perhaps you could give a bit of a description . . . of what the methodology is, of the economic hit men. Because, clearly there is a phenomenon, a desirable phenomenon, of actual economic development, that promotes national sovereignty, rather than stealing it. You describe the idea of debt-slavery. I wonder if you could elaborate on, what does an economic hit man do, under this more sophisticated imperial system?

Perkins: Right—and let me start by saying, I’m all for foreign aid, real foreign aid. Billions of people are destitute in this world: 24,000 people die every day of starvation; 30,000 children die *every single day* of curable diseases. On Sept. 11, we lost 3,000 people in a very tragic event, terrible event. But, on that same day, over 50,000 people died of starvation and curable diseases, needlessly. We need to correct that, and we can.

And the book, ultimately, *Confessions of an Economic Hit Man*, is a very hopeful one, that presents alternatives; that shows how we can be the first empire in the history of the world, not to collapse, not to fall, as all empires eventually do, but to turn around and offer the world a truly different system, something that’s never been done before.

And so, this is where we stand today, I think, poised at the verge of doing that. . . .

Typically, there are many different things that we do, but I’d say the most typical one, is that we identify a country that has resources that we covet. And these days, that tends to be oil, although in the case of Panama, it was the canal. It could be many different things. And the economic hit men then work out a deal, whereby the World Bank or the IMF, or a combination of big banking institutions, offers that country a huge loan—let’s say, \$1 billion. And, one condition of the loan, is that a large percentage of it—let’s say, 90% of it—has to come back to U.S. corporations: the ones that we’ve all heard of, the Bechtels, the Halliburtons, the General Electrics, etc. And these companies, then, get paid to build infrastructure in the Third World country, like huge power plants, ports, highways, industrial parks, that primarily serve the very wealthy people in that Third World country. And the poor people get very few benefits, if any, from this. In fact, often, they’re worse off after the infrastructure has been built. But their country is left holding a huge debt. Which means, in the process of paying off that debt, the poor people don’t get their health care, and food, and other social services that they should be getting.

In addition, the country’s in such a position, and owes so much money, it can’t possibly pay off the debt. And so, when we want those resources from that country—it could be a UN vote, or it could be we want that country to send troops in support of us to Iraq—but primarily, it’s resources, like oil. So, when we want that country to sell us oil, we say, “Look: You owe us all this money. You can’t pay your debts. So, as an alternative, sell your oil; sell your Amazon rain forest; sell your environment with all its oil, off to our

oil companies at a cheap price.”

And that’s really the way the economic hit men have built up this global empire. And we’ve done it very successfully all over the world. But, mostly in countries that have resources that we covet.

EIR: Back around 1974-75, there was actually a formal doctrine that was promulgated—Henry Kissinger, and I presume, Shultz, were key players in this. It was called National Security Study Memorandum 200. And, in that document, using the Cold War as the pretext, Kissinger said that the strategic raw material wealth of the Third World is so vital to the United States’ and the Western alliance’s war against Communism, that it was a national security matter for the United States to assure population reduction in these countries, because if these countries developed, and prospered, and had expanding populations and modern economies, they’d deplete these raw materials which were urgently needed to fight Communism.

It was many, many years before this document was released publicly. Now, it’s declassified and not exactly widely known, but known among a certain group of people. And I think that you’ll probably find that there’s a certain receptivity and response to what you present in the book, because documents like this have been now percolating around, and there is a sense of exactly what you’re describing in this economic hit man system.

Perkins: Yes, it’s amazing what goes on, at the highest levels of the “corporatocracy”—government, big business, and big banking—that we Americans are blind to.

I’m struck as I travel around the world—I just came back from India and Tibet a couple of months ago, and I travel to South America, I travel around quite a lot, and I’m always struck by, how, in so many other countries, even relatively illiterate people are suspicious of their governments. They believe that corruption occurs at the highest levels, and they believe that our government is corrupt. And that’s one of the reasons that they overthrow governments frequently. We call these “banana republics,” but in fact, some of it is done very democratically.

In our country, we tend to accept things at face value, what our leaders say. And I think it’s very important that we stop doing that. I think it’s very important that we question.

That is really the basis of a democracy, when people question their rulers. And it doesn’t have to be done in a negative way. It’s terrible when people who question their government are called “traitors.” Because that’s what the democratic system is all about: We need to constantly question these people. We need to constantly question the heads of the corporations, the heads of the banks—all of these people. We need to look beneath the surface.

The document you’re referring to, the Henry Kissinger document, is a very good case in point. And what’s going on, at the highest levels of government, that we are so unaware of—and need to be more aware of: We need to demand that

these things are brought out into the open sooner.

It's our country and our tax dollars, you know! It's our right to make those demands, and now we need to start exercising that right.

EIR: We were speaking, before we began this interview, of the antecedents of this system, that you've described so eloquently in your book. I mentioned, for example, the historical roots of some of these principles of this new imperialism and the efforts of the British East India Company and some of the agencies that we actually fought the American Revolution against, but which now, unfortunately, seem to have "morphed" into the American System, as a kind of takeover by its opposite. I wonder if you had some thoughts about that.

Clearly the United States has become chief enforcer, but many of these ideas are in fact very alien to the tradition on which this country was founded, which means that perhaps we've got some deeper roots we can reach back to, to defeat this enemy.

Perkins: Yes. Our roots, definitely, defeat this enemy. We have become what we fought against in the American Revolution. We have become that, to much of the world. And a lot of people living in England in the 1770s probably would talk very much like we are, or a majority of our people are today—they weren't aware of what the British Empire was doing overseas. They were simply aware that they were living relatively comfortably, compared to most other people in the world at that time. And so, they carried out their jobs. We're doing the thing. We're blind.

It took people who were willing to stick their necks in the noose: the George Washingtons, the Thomas Paines and Thomas Jeffersons, John Hancocks, and the signers of the Declaration of Independence, to show the world what the British Empire really was like, and what imperialism and colonialism truly was about. Now, these people who we now look at—George Washington, you know we see pictures of him all over the place, and he looks quite stately, and he looks like he's living a comfortable life and all (which he was, after the Revolution). But we have to remember that those men who signed the Declaration of Independence were terrorists! They were traitors! They were performing treason. They would have been hanged, had they lost the Revolution, because they were defying their government.

And now, we've basically turned our own country into something not unlike the British Empire, but a lot subtler—and, perhaps, in that respect, maybe even more dangerous, because it isn't our armies that have created this empire, for the most part. It's this very subtle form—it's our taxes, it's our economic hit men.

And we need to reverse that process. My book is ultimately an extremely positive book. It tells the shadow side of foreign policy, but it leads up to the current time, when I truly feel that this prophesy that I mentioned before, of the indigenous people: We are in this time now, of tremendous

opportunity for change. And, all empires collapse. This one will collapse, too, if we continue on this path.

The alternative is for all of us to rise up in arms—and I don't necessarily mean it has to be done violently, physically violently—but we really need to express ourselves. We really need to bring these "corporatocracy" people to task. We really need to make sure they don't get away with this any more.

You know, we've done it before. In the late 1800s, there were the Robber Barons. The Democratic Party brought William Jennings Bryant to power as their nominee for President, and he ran on a ticket opposing the Robber Barons. He lost the election. But when Teddy Roosevelt became President, about a decade later, he implemented many of those policies, including the Sherman Anti-Trust Laws. And the corporate barons were basically put aside. It happened again, in the 1920s—the corporations came to power again, and actually that resulted in the crash of '29. And then the New Deal came along, another Roosevelt came along, and once again, the corporations were put back under, to a certain agree.

They've risen up again. It's time, now, that we bring them to task once again, that we take responsibility, each of us. It has to come from the grassroots, and that we take this country back. And that we spread this message throughout the world: That we are, who we say we are. That we believe in the American dream, and we believe in it for all of the world. And I'm not talking about one-world government, I don't believe in that. But I am talking about creating a world, where *everybody* has the "right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness."

EIR: . . . Is there any plan for the book to be published overseas, in other languages? I think this is a universal story that must be told, and particularly that must get out in some of the very countries that have been the worst victims of this system.

Perkins: I understand that my publisher has recently sold the rights to a big German company that publishes in German, and I expect that it'll be published in other languages, and my publisher has the right to the other languages, and I know is actively pursuing that. So, I have every reason to believe it will be. My other books have been published in about 14 languages, and they're on indigenous people—you know, a much less appealing subject to such a large group of people; the indigenous people are more appealing to a smaller reading audience. So, I think this one will probably get out there, too. I certainly hope so.

EIR: I want to thank you again for your time and for your efforts. We look forward to seeing a lot more feathers flying around as the result of your book being published and circulated widely.

Perkins: Well, I hope they're not my feathers! But, thank you very much. I very much appreciate all that you guys are doing, and keep doing it.