

Global Peace Services USA

...an idea whose time has come

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Greetings from John Eriksson, President, GPS USA.

This issue of the GPS Newsletter includes a Memoriam in remembrance of GPS Board Member Dr. Robert Muscat, who passed away on January 10, 2024. The Board was shocked and deeply saddened by this news.

The Memoriam seeks to celebrate the life and work of Dr. Muscat by reviewing his rich legacy of contributions to the role of nonviolent approaches to conflict prevention and resolution in socioeconomic development. This legacy is reflected below in observations made by his professional peers and friends, as well as by his substantial record of publications in the GPS Newsletter and other sources. The Memoriam concludes with a moving personal tribute to Dr. Muscat by Dr. Mindy Reiser, the Vice President of GPS USA.

*This issue also includes a review by GPS Board Member, Dr. Ronald Ridker, of a recent book by Professor Michael Mann, *Our Fragile Moment: How Lessons of the Earth's Past can Help Us Survive the Climate Crisis (2023: Hachette Book Group, Inc.)*. Mann, a well-known climatologist, and prolific author, appears to have written this book to convince people that all is not lost, that climate change won't be as devastating and inevitable as many believe if we work hard and quickly at shifting from fossil fuels to renewables. In this book his way of demonstrating this is to compare past events in the earth's history with what is happening today.*

While helpful, this approach does not clear away all the massive uncertainties we face. Dr. Ridker concludes that we deal with these uncertainties the same way we deal with other potentially devastating events in our life, by taking out insurance against them. In this case, that means shifting from fossil fuels to renewables as fast as we can. The book review elaborates on this as well as other potentially contentious ideas.

The GPS Board is particularly grateful to our formatting editor, Bill Hurlbut, who volunteered considerable time and expertise for this Newsletter edition. We welcome your further engagement in Global Peace Services through suggestions regarding the issues and concerns we should address. We encourage your elaborating your ideas for publication in our GPS Newsletter, and working with us to develop and convene presentations, panel discussions, and roundtables –both “in person” and via Zoom – addressing approaches to peacebuilding and peacemaking of special interest and concern for you.

To continue and expand our current work, such as the GPS Newsletter, so that we can continue putting out our newsletter, with essays and articles readers are unlikely to find elsewhere and hold special events, such as GPS Forums, we do need greater resources. Please consider making as

generous a tax-deductible contribution as you can to GPS. This may be done through our website www.globalpeaceservices.org. or by mailing a check to the following postal address. (Please note that our postal address has changed.)

**Global Peace Services USA
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In Memoriam: Dr. Robert J. Muscat
1932-2024



Bob at his home in Sarasota, Florida in 2018

Robert Jaffe Muscat (Bob), 92, passed away on January 10, 2024 in Haymarket, Virginia. He is survived by his wife of 66 years, Juliette, two sons, David (wife Elena née Bose) and Joshua (wife Jill née Ottenberg), daughter Elysabeth (husband Rafik Hegab), and three grandsons, Neil, Jared, and Tim. Bob left a rich legacy of contributions to economic and social development, including violent conflict prevention and resolution.

Bob graduated from Columbia University with a Bachelor of Arts Degree in Philosophy and Bachelor of Science Degree in Economics, Masters' Degrees in Economics and Journalism and a PhD in Economics. He was a Foreign Service Reserve officer who served for 25 years, posted in Thailand, Brazil, Kenya, and Washington, DC. Bob was the first Chief Economist for the US Agency for International Development (USAID), held senior consulting and advisory positions within the governments of Thailand and Malaysia, and headed a policy development unit in the United Nations Development Program in New York City. He was a visiting scholar at the Columbia East Asian Institute and at the George Mason Center for Conflict Analysis and Resolution.

Bob was an active Board member of the nongovernmental organization, Global Peace Services USA (GPS), for 18 years, from 2005 to 2024. He was attracted to the GPS objective of identifying and promulgating nonviolent approaches to conflict prevention and resolution in economic and social development. The following comments made by participants at a GPS-sponsored event on March 23rd, "A Celebration of the Life and Work of Dr. Robert Muscat," encapsulate how he is and was viewed by his peers:

- Brilliant and lucid as writer and speaker
- Voracious reader and prolific writer
- Superb mentoring – empowered those who worked for him
- Insisting on high standards
- Taking ideas and applying them (including through relevant case studies)
- High personal and professional integrity
- Remarkable ability to get others to do the right thing
- Charming, quick witted; delightful sense of humor

- Wide circle of admiring in-country counterparts
- A gifted classical pianist

Bob authored three books dealing with socio-economic development:

Thailand and the United States: Development, Security, and Foreign Aid (Studies of the East Asian Institute) First Edition 1990 NY, Columbia University Press, by Robert J. Muscat

The Fifth Tiger: A Study of Thai Development Policy 1st Edition; by Robert J. Muscat, 1994 M.E. Sharpe Routledge 2015 Abingdon UK, NY. (The “Four Tigers” have been identified in development literature as – South Korea, Taiwan, Singapore, and Hong Kong.)

Investing in Peace: How Development Aid Can Prevent or Promote Conflict; by Robert J. Muscat; M.E. Sharpe 2002; Routledge 2015 Abingdon UK, NY

Bob was a main contributor to the GPS Newsletter, author of 26 articles, book reviews and interviews over 18 years, encompassing a wide range of relevant subjects, A selective sample follows. A complete list, including links to the full text of most entries is available at the GPS website: <globalpeaceservices.org>.

- “Mental Health Disabilities and Post-Conflict Economic and Social Recovery” March 2006
- “Challenges of Nursing in Third World Conflicts and Disasters” October 2007
- “Music and Peace” June 2008
- “Identity and Conflict” November 2009
- “Rwanda: Muslim Compassion in the Midst of Genocide” December 2010
- “Peace and Conflict: Engineering Responsibilities and Opportunities” in International Journal of Engineering, Peace and Social Justice, May 2013
- “The Better Angels of our Nature: Why Violence has Declined” (review: Steven Pinkert book) July 2015
- “Child Soldiers: An International Challenge” January 2018 (interview: Dr. Michael Wessells)
- “Curbing Cultural Destruction” September 2019
- “The Mekong: Development, Destruction and Risk of Conflict” February 2020
- “Water and Peace” October 2020
- “The Sunflower: On the Possibilities of Forgiveness” (review: Simon Wiesenthal book) May 2021
- “Apology and Amends: Climate and the Ultimate Responsibility” December 2021
- “Multicultural Peaceful Societies” May 2022 (an analysis over seven centuries)
- “Official Apology: Cementing Peace, Disavowing Injustice” Policy Brief 136, Toda Peace Institute (Japan & New Zealand) August 2022 (post-WWII growth of official apology; a step to cementing peace)
- “Universal Peace: Progress and Retrogression” November 2022
- “Putin Attacks Ukraine’s Culture” June 2023
- “The Struggle for Truth: The Rise of Thinking and the Persistence of Absurdity”
(draft posthumous book-length manuscript: 2023-2024; not available on GPS website)

“Bob Muscat – Visionary and Catalyst”

I never did hear Bob play the piano, but I was very much a witness to his virtuosity in so much else.

It still seems strange to talk of Bob in the past tense. There he was, so engaged with life, still eager, still looking to play an active role in influencing and shaping decisions to be made, policy choices to be made, policy steps to be taken.

His intellectual curiosity knew no bounds, nor did his incisive questioning of assumptions and the conventional wisdom in all so much. His interrogation of the world was transmitted to – and deeply affected—all those around him.

He was truly an agent provocateur, bringing to life new perspectives and creative approaches to the most essential, fundamental questions concerning peacemaking, peacebuilding and the necessary building blocks for creating and sustaining a more just social order.

Bob sought to identify the steps needed to enable people of all backgrounds and geographies to reach their full potentials. His passion and his vision will continue to inspire us.

In the Hebrew words of his own Jewish tradition:

Yehei Zichrono L’Bracha – May his memory be for a blessing.

Mindy Reiser



**Earth’s Western Hemisphere.
Photographed by
the Apollo 8 crew,
December 22,
1968.**

Source: NASA Earth

Our Fragile Moment: How Lessons of the Earth’s Past can Help Us Survive the Climate Crisis by Michael E. Mann, published in 2023 by Hachette Book Group, Inc. A Book Review¹

Most of Mann’s prolific writings on climate change have had a motivating trigger behind them. *Our Fragile Moment* is no exception. It was written just prior to the 28th United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP28), a time when many people, including some scientists, believed global warming and its devastating consequences were inevitable, that nothing could be done in the short time humanity had left. Mann feels that this defeatist attitude is not only wrong, but plays into the hands of fossil fuel executives who would like to see the whole climate change movement disappear. One of the people contesting Mann’s activist approach to climate change is James E. Hansen, a well-respected climatologist who, before retirement, headed NASA’s Goddard Institute for Space Studies. Hansen had an ongoing verbal clash with Mann, holding that getting to zero emissions, the goal of the US government, will not stop global warming; all it might do is slow it down a little. Mann thinks it will stop the increase. A key point in his argument is that global warming can be stopped, maybe even reversed, if only we muster the political will to do so. This is just one of the conflicts between them.

Mann’s approach in the reviewed book is to outline what is known about past events in earth’s history and consider what is and is not applicable today. For example, we now have evidence that most life on earth died after a series of huge volcanic eruptions. One theory is that this occurred because of a massive emission of greenhouse gasses, especially carbon dioxide and methane, that raised global temperature to the boiling point. But a subsequent theory, which seems to explain more of what happened, is that there were two other events involved: a reduction in oxygen due to chemical reactions associated with the volcanic eruptions and movements in tectonic plates and huge amounts of soot and smoke from these eruptions that blotted out the sun and caused an ice age that froze most of the plants and animals that survived the eruptions. Mann explains this all in detail and then concludes that the circumstances are sufficiently different today that this will not happen.

Mann’s point, which he makes repeatedly at the end of each story of this kind, is that what is likely to happen is bad enough. It doesn’t help to make it worse by exaggerating the damages and shortness of time we have left. Here is how he says it at the end of his book. “Even if...we fail to build on climate policies already in place, the warming of the planet is unlikely to exceed 3 degrees C (5.4 degrees F). No ‘methane bombs’, no runaway warming no Hothouse Earth. But at that level of warming, we can expect a lot of suffering, species extinction, loss of life, destabilization of societal infrastructure, chaos, and conflict. That’s not a world in which we want to live...[or] leave behind for our children and grandchildren. Though it is a possible future, it’s not a preordained future. If we build upon the actions that have already been taken [to] decarbonize the machinery of our civilization..., we can preserve our fragile moment.”

This book provides a great deal of information about what is known and suspected by various scientists about the ancient history of the earth and how it might apply to us. It also firmed up my conviction that the best approach to dealing with the massive uncertainties involved is to act on the precautionary principal, to take out as much insurance as society can afford against the worst that can happen. In this case, that means substituting renewable fuels for fossil fuels without further delay. Fortunately, that is not very costly: the “leveled cost” (the cost that includes everything in current dollars except taxes and subsidies) of solar and wind are less than that of gasoline and diesel fuels; and the same will be true for all-electric and internal combustion vehicles once economies of scale kicks in.

Ronald G. Ridker

¹ **Michael E. Mann** is a professor in the Departments of Meteorology and Geosciences at the Pennsylvania State University, holding joint positions in the Departments of Meteorology and Geosciences. He is also the director of the Penn State Earth System Institute. He received a PhD from Yale University and has authored more than 100 peer-reviewed publications, many in the field of climate change.



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Global Peace Services USA

The newsletter of Global Peace Services USA is published regularly. GPS USA is incorporated in the State of Maryland and is tax-exempt. Current board members are: Anna Amato, Aline Dukuze, John Eriksson, Mindy Reiser, and Ronald Ridker. We welcome contributions and comments. To contact us:

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