

From Ungrieved Trauma to Globalized Insecurity

Secrecy, Finance, War, and the Autopoietic State

A Life-Coherent Diagnosis of Hidden Power,
Sacrificial Populations, and the Institutional
Reproduction of Violence



Dr. Bichara Sahely

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No people shall be scapegoated. No institution shall be exempt. No grief shall be denied. No hidden power shall be protected from life-coherent scrutiny. No living community shall be made disposable for the survival of any system.

Abstract

This white paper examines how modern war-systems persist by converting unresolved collective trauma into insecurity, and insecurity into institutions of secrecy, force, debt, narrative control, and sacrifice. Extending the framework of institutional autopoietization, it argues that the nation-state is central but not solitary: intelligence agencies, financial systems, arms industries, legal regimes, media ecologies, digital platforms, proxy actors, and cultural mythologies can become mutually reinforcing layers of life-blind power. When these systems align, suffering is separated from understanding and decisions are insulated from the lives that bear their consequences. Using the Middle East as a burning case study while drawing on broader histories of empire, covert intervention, structural violence, and ungrieved trauma, the paper proposes the Life-Coherence Criterion as a corrective standard for war and security. Its core claim is that no institution may claim legitimacy if its survival depends on making any living community disposable, ungrievable, occupied, displaced, indebted, silenced, or sacrificed.

Keywords

Institutional autopoietization; life-coherence; globalized insecurity; secrecy; war-system; nation-state; structural violence; cultural violence; covert power; debt; intelligence agencies; collective trauma; grief; Middle East; sovereignty; sacrificial populations; Life-Knowledge Commons.

Executive Overview

This paper is written for readers who sense that contemporary wars cannot be explained only by visible combatants, declared enemies, or the latest provocation. Its central concern is the deeper ecology through which fear becomes politically useful, secrecy becomes administratively normal, financial dependency becomes disciplinary, and civilian suffering becomes background noise. The argument is not that one hidden actor controls the world; it is that many institutions can converge around the same self-preserving logic when their survival depends on opacity, abstraction, and control.

The paper therefore moves from the prior diagnosis of institutional autopoietization to a wider diagnosis of globalized insecurity. It shows how ungrieved trauma can become political fuel when grief is not allowed to become truth, accountability, and repair. It then examines secrecy as the shield that blocks life-correction, structural violence as the hidden weakening of the life-ground before open conflict erupts, and cultural violence as the production of people whose deaths can be treated as less grievable.

The Middle East is treated as a burning case study rather than as the paper's only object. Israel-Palestine, Gaza, the West Bank, South Lebanon, Hezbollah, Hamas, Iran, the United States, Gulf interests, arms industries, intelligence agencies, energy corridors, colonial legacies, and international diplomatic structures form an escalation ecology in which each actor's security logic can confirm the fears of the others. The analysis preserves asymmetrical responsibility while refusing selective humanity: equal non-disposability does not mean equal responsibility, and asymmetrical responsibility does not permit any people to be made ungrievable.

The proposed corrective is a life-coherent peace architecture grounded in civilian non-disposability, equal grief recognition, accountable truth, the Minimum Harm Test, debt and sanctions life-tests, reciprocal security guarantees, repair before reconciliation, non-humiliating exits from escalation, media language accountability, and new indicators of security based on the real conditions of life. The Life-Knowledge Commons is presented as the counter-institutional practice that restores knowledge to life, decision to consequence, grief to truth, and power to accountability.

Ethical and Positional Note

This paper is written from a life-coherent standpoint. It does not indict peoples, religions, ethnicities, or civilizations. It rejects antisemitism, Islamophobia, anti-Arab racism, anti-Palestinian dehumanization, anti-Iranian demonization, anti-Jewish hatred, anti-Muslim hatred, and all forms of collective guilt.

The object of critique is not a people but a structure: the institutional systems that convert fear, secrecy, finance, law, militarism, trauma, and narrative control into self-preserving orders of harm. Jewish, Palestinian, Lebanese, Israeli,

Syrian, Iranian, Yemeni, Iraqi, Arab, Muslim, Christian, Druze, secular, refugee, hostage, prisoner, migrant, child, elder, and future life are all non-disposable.

Responsibility attaches to institutions, decisions, policies, doctrines, commands, contracts, operations, and acts, not to birth identity. The guiding moral principle of the paper is that all grief is real, no grief is sovereign, and no grief gives any institution the right to make another people disposable.

The author writes with personal concern for the peoples of the Middle East, including Lebanese family roots and living concern for South Lebanon. This positionality is not a license for partiality, but a summons to deeper impartiality before life. The purpose is not to defend one people against another, but to ask what kind of institutional world continues to make peoples afraid, disposable, and grievable only within tribal boundaries.

Table of Contents

Abstract.....3

Keywords3

Executive Overview3

Ethical and Positional Note3

List of Figures4

List of Tables5

1. Introduction: The Return of the Forbidden Question.....5

2. From Institutional Autopoietization to Globalized Insecurity6

3. Ungrieved Trauma as Political Fuel.....7

4. Secrecy as the Shield of Autopoietic Power.....9

5. Evidence, Conspiracy, and Disciplined Unveiling 11

6. Structural Violence: Debt, Development, Sanctions, and Dependency..... 11

7. Cultural Violence: The Production of Ungrievable People..... 14

8. The Nation-State as Sacrificial Machine..... 14

9. The Middle East War-System as Burning Case Study 15

10. The Life-Coherence Criterion for War and Security..... 17

11. Life-Coherent Correctives 18

12. The Life-Knowledge Commons as Counter-Institution 20

13. Conclusion: No More Sacrificial Worlds 21

AI Transparency Note..... 22

References 22

List of Figures

Figure 1. The Hidden Architecture of Life-Blind Power. 7

Figure 2. The Globalization of Ungrieved Insecurity.	8
Figure 3. The Secrecy Shield.....	10
Figure 4. Visible and Invisible Violence.....	13
Figure 5. The Sacrificial Conversion Chain.	15
Figure 6. The War-System Feedback Loop.....	17
Figure 7. The Life-Coherence Corrective.	19
Figure 8. From Security State to Life-Knowledge Commons.	21

List of Tables

Table 1. Evidence Ladder for Hidden Power	11
Table 2. Forms of Violence and Institutional Carriers.....	13
Table 3. Life-Coherence Tests for Security Decisions	18
Table 4. From Life-Blind Security to Life-Coherent Security	19

1. Introduction: The Return of the Forbidden Question

Why do wars persist when most people do not want war?

This question returns whenever the world witnesses the recurring spectacle of escalation: bombardments, rocket fire, hostage-taking, invasions, assassinations, siege, displacement, proxy conflict, military mobilization, emergency speeches, diplomatic paralysis, civilian grief, and the familiar promise that more force is necessary so that security may one day arrive. Yet the promised security does not arrive. The emergency becomes permanent. The enemy adapts. The population hardens. The dead accumulate. The institutions expand. The next war is prepared within the last one.

The official explanations are usually immediate and visible. This side attacked first. That leader refused compromise. This militia must be destroyed. That state must be deterred. This border must be secured. That population must be controlled. These explanations are not always false. Visible violence matters. Atrocities matter. Armed organizations matter. State decisions matter. Hostage-taking, occupation, blockade, bombardment, terrorism, assassination, ethnic cleansing, displacement, and civilian targeting all matter. But visible violence is not the whole system. It is often the eruption point of deeper invisible violence (Galtung, 1969, 1990).

Beneath the battlefield are structures of secrecy, finance, intelligence, debt, arms production, media narration, legal exceptionalism, cultural dehumanization, historical trauma, and national insecurity. These structures often remain hidden, normalized, or treated as background conditions. Yet they shape the field in which visible violence becomes likely, justifiable, profitable, or politically useful.

This paper begins from the premise that war is not merely an event but a system of reproduction. It re-creates fear, enemy-images, arms budgets, intelligence authority, emergency politics, national myths, debt and reconstruction dependency, and new trauma in a cycle that allows the very institutions claiming to manage insecurity to expand through it.

The central question is therefore not only who fired or who benefits. It is: what institutional ecology turns grief into fear, fear into secrecy, secrecy into unaccountable power, and unaccountable power into new forms of life-destruction?

The answer requires moving beyond the visible faces of violence alone. Hamas, Hezbollah, state armies, the Israel Defense Forces, Iranian Revolutionary Guard networks, militias, and armed factions are visible agents in specific conflicts. But the deeper field also includes covert agencies, security doctrines, intelligence partnerships, arms manufacturers, diplomatic vetoes, sanctions regimes, development banks, debt structures, offshore finance, media systems, religious-nationalist mythologies, and the symbolic production of ungrievable people.

If we name only the visible actor, we risk reproducing the blindness of the system. If we name only the hidden actor, we risk collapsing into conspiratorial simplification. The task is more difficult: to show how visible and invisible violence interlock.

The Life-Coherence Criterion asks not first whether an action preserves the state, market, alliance, corporation, intelligence operation, party, ideology, or armed movement. It asks whether the action protects or disables the conditions of life: who becomes more vulnerable, whose grief is recognized, whose grief is denied, who decides, who benefits, who bears the harm, what remains hidden, and what future violence is being prepared by today's act of security (McMurtry, 2013; Sahely, 2026).

The central claim of this paper is simple but demanding: no institution may claim legitimacy if its survival requires making another people disposable.

2. From Institutional Autopoietization to Globalized Insecurity

Institutional autopoietization occurs when an institution shifts from serving life to preserving itself as a system. A hospital may begin as an instrument of healing yet become dominated by throughput, billing, liability, compliance, and administrative survival. A school may begin as a place of learning yet become dominated by testing, credentialing, ranking, and bureaucratic reproduction. A legal system may begin as a guardian of justice yet become preoccupied with procedure, precedent, professional closure, and institutional legitimacy. A state may begin as a civil commons for public order, rights, health, infrastructure, and collective flourishing yet become consumed by sovereignty, control, border discipline, security doctrine, fiscal extraction, and regime survival (Luhmann, 1995; Maturana & Varela, 1980; Sahely, 2026).

The prior framework of institutional autopoietization identified the core inversion: institutions created to serve life can become systems that consume life to preserve themselves. This paper extends that diagnosis from the institutional level to the inter-institutional level. The danger is not only that one institution becomes self-preserving. The deeper danger is that multiple self-preserving institutions become mutually reinforcing.

In this larger ecology, the state supplies legitimacy; intelligence systems conceal and operationalize hidden power; finance disciplines; law codifies; media narrates; arms industries supply; digital platforms amplify; universities and experts rationalize; and populations absorb the harm.

The outcome is globalized insecurity: not merely the spread of danger across borders, but the production of insecurity as a governing condition. Fear becomes politically useful. Emergency becomes administratively useful. Threat becomes economically useful. Enemy construction becomes culturally useful. Secrecy becomes operationally useful. Debt becomes disciplinarily useful. War becomes systemically useful.

This does not mean that threats are unreal. Civilian massacres, terrorism, invasion, occupation, hostage-taking, anti-Jewish hatred, anti-Muslim hatred, anti-Arab racism, anti-Palestinian dehumanization, imperial violence, and covert intervention are all real. The danger is that real threats can be captured by institutions that then reproduce the conditions for further threat.

Security is not life-coherent if it produces the insecurity that justifies its own continuation. This is the autopoietic trap of the security state: it expands surveillance because threats are increasing, but surveillance, repression, humiliation, dispossession, or collective punishment may deepen the grievances that generate future threats.

The modern state deserves central attention because it can define sacrifice as legitimate. It can conscript, tax, classify, police, surveil, imprison, occupy, deport, bomb, assassinate, and declare emergency in the name of public survival. It transforms moral horror into administrative category: killing becomes targeting, starvation becomes pressure, displacement becomes evacuation, occupation becomes security administration, civilian death becomes collateral damage, torture becomes enhanced interrogation, and assassination becomes counterterrorism.

The state's most dangerous power is not only its monopoly on violence, but its monopoly on legitimate sacrifice. When the state remains life-coherent, sacrifice is constrained by public reason, law, accountability, proportionality, necessity, and the protection of life. When the state becomes autopoietized, sacrifice becomes a sacrament of the state itself.

The Hidden Architecture of Life-Blind Power

A layered system diagram mapping visible, hidden, structural, narrative, and legitimating power over the life-world.



Figure 1. The Hidden Architecture of Life-Blind Power.

Visible power rests upon hidden, structural, narrative, and legitimating layers that act upon the life-world while mutually reinforcing one another.

3. Ungrieved Trauma as Political Fuel

Collective trauma does not disappear when it is denied. It becomes politically available. When grief cannot become truth, accountability, mourning, and repair, it often becomes fear. When fear is organized by institutions, it becomes projection, enemy construction, militarization, obedience, and revenge. When revenge produces new harm, the cycle begins again.

This paper calls this process the globalization of ungrieved insecurity. Ungrieved trauma is not merely psychological. It is political. It shapes national myths, security doctrines, school curricula, memorial practices, border anxieties, racial categories, religious identities, intelligence priorities, military budgets, and public tolerance for violence (Butler, 2009; Sahely, 2016b).

The pattern is tragically familiar: a people suffers, the suffering is not fully mourned or repaired, the trauma becomes a sacred wound, the wound becomes a security doctrine, the doctrine names an enemy, the enemy becomes less grievable, violence against that enemy becomes thinkable, and the resulting suffering produces the next round of trauma.

This pattern does not belong to one people. The Holocaust remains one of the most profound traumas in human history. Jewish fear of annihilation is not imaginary. It is rooted in historical catastrophe, centuries of persecution, and continuing antisemitism. The Nakba and the ongoing dispossession of Palestinians are also not imaginary. Palestinian grief is rooted in displacement, occupation, statelessness, siege, incarceration, land loss, and repeated military devastation.

Lebanon carries the wounds of civil war, Israeli invasion and occupation, Syrian domination, sectarian fragmentation, economic collapse, port catastrophe, and proxy capture. South Lebanon has repeatedly been made into a frontier, buffer zone, battlefield, bargaining chip, and sacrificial geography. The United States carries ungrieved histories of Indigenous genocide, slavery, racial terror, imperial expansion, covert intervention, Vietnam, Iraq, Afghanistan, and post-9/11 militarization. Iran carries memories of foreign intervention, oil politics, the 1953 coup, sanctions, war, encirclement, and isolation. None of these griefs cancels the others.

All grief is real. No grief is sovereign. The danger begins when grief is captured by institutional power and converted into an exemption from moral reciprocity. A state, militia, party, empire, or religious-political movement may say: because we have suffered, we may do what is necessary. Because we are threatened, the other must be controlled. Because our grief is sacred, their grief is secondary.

The deepest violence is not only that people are killed. It is that some people are made killable before the killing begins. They are made ungrievable through language, law, media, education, myth, and repetition. This is cultural violence: the symbolic order that makes direct and structural violence appear normal, necessary, deserved, or invisible (Galtung, 1990).

The life-coherent corrective begins with a simple but revolutionary premise: every child is equally grievable. This includes Israeli, Palestinian, Lebanese, Syrian, Iranian, Yemeni, Jewish, Muslim, Christian, Druze, secular, refugee, hostage, prisoner, and future children. A world that cannot say this without qualification is not yet civilized.

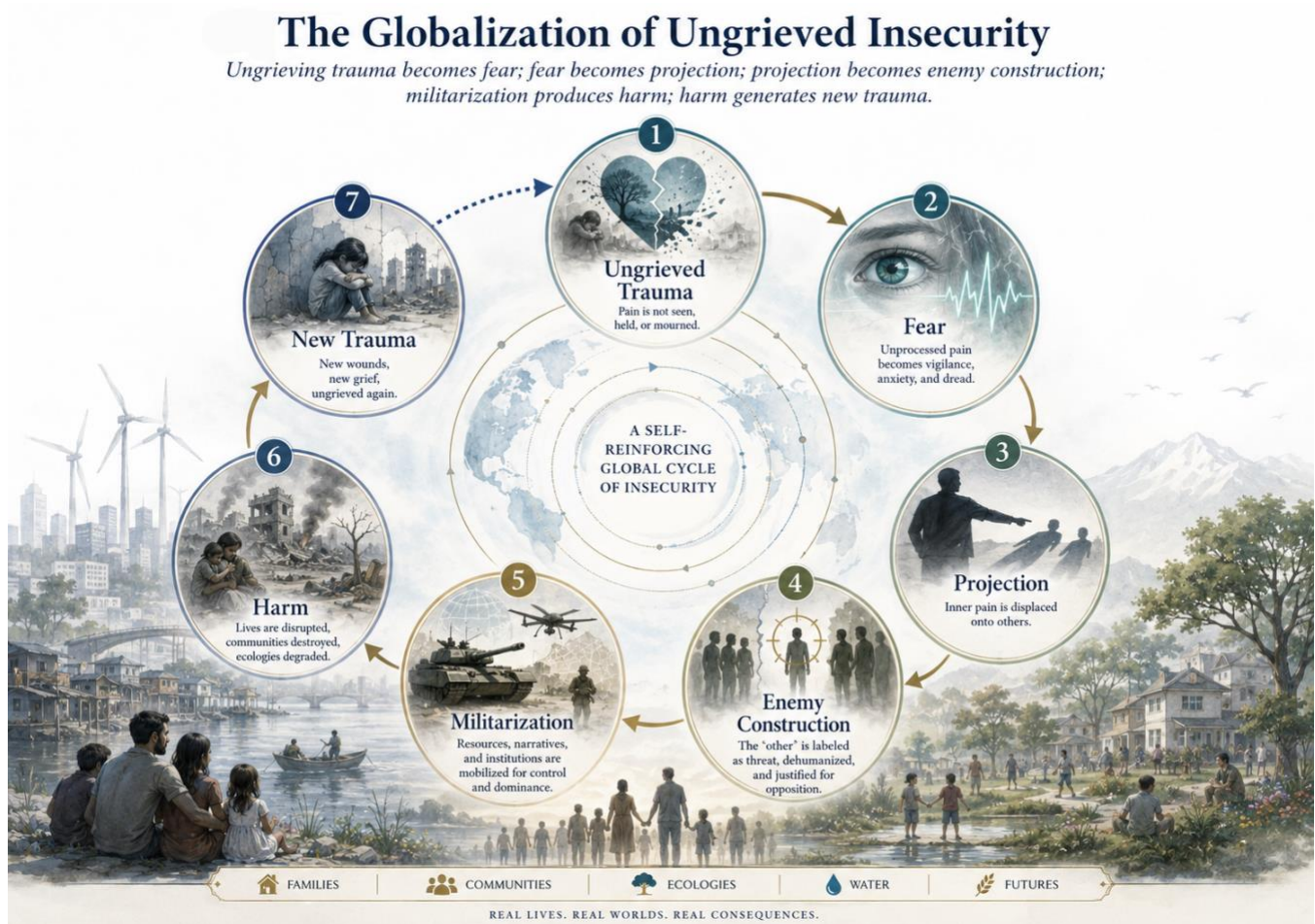


Figure 2. The Globalization of Ungrieved Insecurity.

Collective trauma that is not fully grieved or repaired can become fear, projection, enemy construction, militarization, harm, and new trauma, thereby reproducing insecurity across generations and institutions.

4. Secrecy as the Shield of Autopoietic Power

Secrecy is often defended as a necessity of statecraft. Every state claims that some knowledge must be withheld for the protection of the public: intelligence sources, military plans, diplomatic negotiations, security vulnerabilities, covert operations, strategic assessments, and methods of surveillance. Some secrecy may be necessary in limited, accountable, and time-bound circumstances. But secrecy becomes life-dangerous when it ceases to protect the public and begins to protect power from the public.

The modern security state stands inside a contradiction. It claims to defend freedom by restricting knowledge, preserve democracy by hiding decisions, protect life by authorizing violence that the public cannot fully see, and uphold law while operating through classified interpretations, covert exceptions, and deniable partnerships. Kennedy's 1961 warning that excessive and unwarranted concealment of pertinent facts is dangerous remains a doorway into this contradiction (Kennedy, 1961).

This paper calls secrecy the shield of autopoietic power because it allows institutions to survive consequences that would otherwise delegitimize them. It blocks feedback from victims to decision-makers, disperses responsibility across classified chains of command, separates the policy author from the harmed body, and enables states and agencies to act through proxies while maintaining official deniability.

Secrecy is therefore not merely the hiding of information. It is the interruption of life-correction. In a life-coherent order, suffering must be able to speak back to power. A bombed family, displaced village, tortured prisoner, indebted country, sanctioned patient, surveilled citizen, poisoned river, or traumatized veteran must be able to enter the field of public knowledge. The decision-maker must be made answerable to the consequence.

The historical record makes clear that covert power is not imaginary. The Church Committee documented a wide range of U.S. intelligence abuses and the failure of adequate checks and balances (U.S. Senate Select Committee, 1976). Declassified records and archival research have documented U.S. and British roles in the 1953 overthrow of Iranian Prime Minister Mohammad Mosaddeq (National Security Archive, 2017, 2018). The point is not that every suspicion is true. It is that hidden power has a documented history and therefore requires disciplined scrutiny.

Visible violence shocks the conscience, but invisible violence often disables the conscience before it can act. The missile is visible while the intelligence assessment remains hidden; the refugee is visible while the policy architecture is hidden; the civilian dead are visible for a moment while the classified rationale remains sealed. In this way the system survives by separating suffering from understanding.

The life-coherent alternative is not naive transparency but accountable intelligibility. Power must become understandable to the lives it affects; decisions must be traceable to consequences; harm must be nameable; responsibility must be locatable; grief must be allowed to become knowledge; and knowledge must be allowed to become repair.

The Secrecy Shield

A visual representation of how secrecy separates decisions from consequences.



Figure 3. The Secrecy Shield.

Secrecy separates decisions from consequences by blocking feedback between classified power and the lives that bear its costs.

5. Evidence, Conspiracy, and Disciplined Unveiling

Hidden power must be named, but it must not be invented. This distinction is essential for any life-coherent analysis of war, empire, intelligence, finance, and institutional self-preservation. Modern societies are not wrong to suspect that official explanations are often incomplete. The historical record contains ample evidence of covert intervention, intelligence abuse, regime-change operations, surveillance overreach, propaganda, economic coercion, arms-market influence, and legal rationalization of violence. To deny this record is to protect power from accountability.

But suspicion alone is not knowledge. A wounded public can become vulnerable to myth if its distrust is not disciplined by evidence. Where secrecy has concealed real harm, people understandably search for hidden causes. Yet the search for hidden causes can itself become dangerous if it turns structural analysis into scapegoating or replaces documented inquiry with totalizing accusation.

The life-coherent path is neither naïve trust nor paranoid certainty. It is disciplined unveiling. Disciplined unveiling begins with the recognition that secrecy, classification, corporate confidentiality, diplomatic opacity, financial complexity, and intelligence deniability are real features of modern power. These features do not prove every allegation, but they do establish a duty of inquiry.

A conspiracy theory says that a few hidden people control everything, whereas a life-coherent systems analysis shows how many institutions, each pursuing its own survival through secrecy, abstraction, profit, security, and legitimacy, can converge into a world-system that protects itself from democratic, moral, ecological, and spiritual correction. The first seeks a scapegoat; the second seeks a structure.

This paper therefore uses an evidence ladder. The first level is the documented record: declassified documents, official admissions, court findings, parliamentary and congressional inquiries, UN investigations, treaty bodies, archival records, verified investigative journalism, and material evidence. The second level is the credibly alleged record: claims supported by multiple serious sources, consistent patterns, credible witnesses, partial documentation, or independent investigations that converge around a plausible account. The third level is analytical inference: structural patterns visible through outcomes, incentives, institutional design, repeated historical parallels, or system behavior, even where direct command evidence is unavailable.

This ladder protects the integrity of the paper. It allows us to say that covert power is real without claiming omniscience. It allows us to examine the CIA, MI6, Mossad, Iranian intelligence, military intelligence agencies, corporate-security systems, and other covert actors as institutional formations rather than mythic villains. The purpose is not to replace visible scapegoats with invisible scapegoats. The purpose is to make power answerable to life.

Table 1. Evidence Ladder for Hidden Power

Evidence Level	Definition	Examples	Permitted Language
Documented	Supported by public records, official findings, court rulings, declassified documents, or verified investigations.	Declassified covert operations; official inquiries; court findings.	Documented; established; officially recorded.
Credibly alleged	Supported by multiple serious sources, partial evidence, credible witnesses, or convergent investigations.	Plausible covert funding; proxy coordination; hidden lobbying.	Credibly alleged; reported; supported but not fully established.
Analytical inference	Structural pattern inferred from outcomes, incentives, or repeated institutional behavior.	Institutional convergence; profit incentives; narrative alignment.	Suggests; is consistent with; may indicate; requires investigation.

6. Structural Violence: Debt, Development, Sanctions, and Dependency

Visible violence often arrives after invisible violence has already weakened the field of life. A bomb destroys a hospital in an instant, but health systems may have been weakened long before by debt burdens, austerity, sanctions, corruption, donor dependency, procurement restrictions, supply-chain fragility, professional migration, infrastructure neglect, or

blockade. Structural violence is the violence built into the way systems are organized. It may not explode. It may not appear on camera. It may not have a single identifiable perpetrator. Yet it shortens lives, disables communities, and makes populations vulnerable to direct violence (Galtung, 1969).

Debt is one of the central mechanisms of structural violence. Debt can be life-serving when it enables genuine public investment, infrastructure, education, health, ecological restoration, and shared prosperity. But debt becomes life-disabling when it subordinates a country's living economy to external repayment demands, creditor confidence, austerity, currency vulnerability, or strategic dependency. UNCTAD reports that developing countries' net interest payments on public debt reached \$921 billion in 2024, with a record number of countries devoting 10% or more of government revenues to interest payments (UNCTAD, 2025).

John Perkins' economic hit man framework belongs here, but it must be used carefully. Perkins describes a pattern in which strategically important countries are induced to accept large infrastructure loans, with projects contracted to external corporations, creating debt burdens that later enable political leverage (Perkins, 2004). The value of this framework is not that every claim should be accepted without independent evidence. Its value is that it names a recognizable grammar of structural capture: development as dependency, infrastructure as leverage, debt as discipline, and modernization as a corridor for external control.

Sanctions must be examined under the same criterion. Sanctions are often presented as a nonviolent alternative to war. In some cases, targeted sanctions may restrain specific actors while avoiding direct military conflict. But broad sanctions can also disable civilian life by restricting access to medicine, food systems, energy, banking, spare parts, public finance, and basic infrastructure. A sanction that weakens the powerful without disabling civilian life may be defensible. A sanction that predictably damages the health, nutrition, medicine, water, or social reproduction of ordinary people fails the Life-Coherence Criterion.

The same applies to blockade, occupation, and siege. These are not merely military or legal categories. They are life-support interventions in reverse. They act on water, electricity, movement, food, medicine, construction materials, education, work, worship, family life, and hope. They compress a population's future until resistance, despair, dependency, or migration become more likely. They then allow the controlling institution to cite the resulting instability as proof that control must continue.

By the time bombs fall, the field of life may already have been weakened by debt, dependency, secrecy, extraction, sanctions, occupation, and imposed insecurity. A life-coherent peace cannot therefore be limited to ceasefire. Ceasefire stops immediate killing. It does not automatically repair debt dependency, sanctions harm, destroyed infrastructure, poisoned environments, trauma, occupation, dispossession, or externally controlled futures. Peace requires restoring the life-ground.



Figure 4. Visible and Invisible Violence.

Direct violence appears above the surface, while covert, structural, cultural, legal-diplomatic, financial, ecological, and digital forms of violence remain submerged and normalized.

Table 2. Forms of Violence and Institutional Carriers

Form of Violence	Description	Institutional Carriers	Life-Coherent Test
Direct violence	Physical harm, killing, bombing, torture, hostage-taking.	Armies, militias, police, security forces.	Are civilians protected?
Covert violence	Hidden or deniable harm.	Intelligence agencies, proxies, covert contractors.	Is power accountable?
Structural violence	Harm built into systems.	Debt, sanctions, occupation, blockade, austerity.	Are life-capacities strengthened or weakened?
Cultural violence	Narratives that legitimize harm.	Media, education, ideology, religious-nationalist myth.	Are all people grievable?
Legal-diplomatic violence	Selective law, vetoes, impunity, emergency exceptions.	Courts, states, international bodies, diplomatic powers.	Is law protecting life or laundering power?
Ecological violence	Destruction of life-support systems.	Extractive industries, war economies, development projects.	Are land, water, air, and future life protected?
Digital violence	Algorithmic amplification of fear, surveillance, targeting.	Platforms, surveillance firms, data brokers.	Does technology widen or narrow human concern?

7. Cultural Violence: The Production of Ungrievable People

War requires more than weapons. It requires a way of seeing. Before a population can be bombed, starved, occupied, expelled, imprisoned, surveilled, or abandoned without unbearable moral injury to the harming society, it must first be placed outside the ordinary circle of concern. Its suffering must become less real. Its grief must become less audible. Its children must become less recognizable as children. Its dead must become less individually mournable (Butler, 2009; Galtung, 1990).

Cultural violence works through language: collateral damage, human shields, security zone, buffer area, strategic depth, demographic threat, terrorist nest, enemy population, precision strike, acceptable losses, military-age male, illegal infiltrator, hostile entity, neutralization, pacification, stabilization, civilizational struggle, necessary sacrifice. Such phrases can contain partial truths in specific contexts. But the danger lies in the way such language can become a moral solvent. It dissolves the concrete person into a strategic category.

The narrowing often follows a predictable pattern: our dead are named; theirs are counted. Our children are innocent; theirs are embedded. Our grief is sacred; theirs is staged. Our fear is existential; theirs is strategic. Our violence is defense; theirs is barbarism. Our history explains; theirs excuses. Our mistakes are tragic; theirs reveal their nature.

This asymmetry of grief is one of the deepest engines of war. A population that cannot grieve the other's dead becomes vulnerable to authorizing more death. A state that cannot recognize the fear it produces becomes trapped in its own security myth. A movement that cannot recognize the fear it inflicts becomes trapped in its own righteousness. A media system that cannot show every child as a child becomes an instrument of cultural violence (Herman & Chomsky, 1988).

The life-coherent corrective to cultural violence is equal grievability joined to accountable truth. Equal grievability alone is not enough; it can become sentimentality if it refuses to name injustice. Accountable truth alone is not enough; it can become brittle if it does not make room for grief. The minimum cultural test is simple: can this society grieve the child of the other without feeling that its own child has been betrayed? If the answer is no, the war-system still governs perception.

8. The Nation-State as Sacrificial Machine

The nation-state is one of the most powerful institutions ever created. At its best, it can protect public health, uphold law, coordinate infrastructure, regulate markets, provide education, defend rights, steward ecosystems, redistribute resources, respond to disasters, and sustain the civil commons. But when autopoietized, the nation-state becomes one of the most dangerous forms of institutional life-blindness.

Its founding purpose is to protect the people. Its pathological form asks the people to be sacrificed so that the state may continue. This reversal is the heart of the sacrificial state. The state does not usually name itself this way. It speaks in elevated language: security, sovereignty, deterrence, public order, territorial integrity, national survival, emergency necessity, strategic interest, constitutional duty, homeland protection.

The danger arises when terms such as sovereignty, security, emergency, national survival, and law become shields against life. Sovereignty becomes life-blind when it conceals atrocity; security becomes life-blind when it justifies permanent domination; emergency becomes life-blind when it becomes normal governance; national survival becomes life-blind when it requires another people's disposability; and law becomes life-blind when it protects the institution more effectively than it protects the living.

The autopoietic state converts life into state-material: people into citizens, citizens into soldiers, soldiers into units, civilians into populations, villages into fronts, children into demographic futures, land into territory, homes into strategic depth, borders into sacred lines, trauma into legitimacy, fear into obedience, dissent into betrayal, and death into national myth. In Weber's classic formulation, the modern state claims a monopoly of legitimate force within a territory; the life-coherent concern is what happens when the legitimacy of force becomes a legitimacy of sacrifice (Weber, 1919/1946).

This is why the phrase cannon fodder remains morally explosive. It tears away the official language. Academic language may call this the conversion of living populations into expendable substrates of institutional survival.

Ordinary language calls it cannon fodder. Soldiers can become cannon fodder when they are sent into wars whose necessity is hidden, false, avoidable, or driven by institutional ambition. Civilians can become cannon fodder when their homes, bodies, and grief are treated as acceptable costs of deterrence, resistance, sovereignty, revenge, or geopolitical signaling.

The state's most dangerous power is not only its monopoly on violence but its monopoly on legitimate sacrifice. A life-coherent state would honor the dead not by multiplying death, but by ending the conditions that made the death possible. It would protect dissent as life-feedback, make secrecy reviewable, test security decisions against civilian life, require leaders to answer publicly for consequences, and refuse to convert grief into obedience.

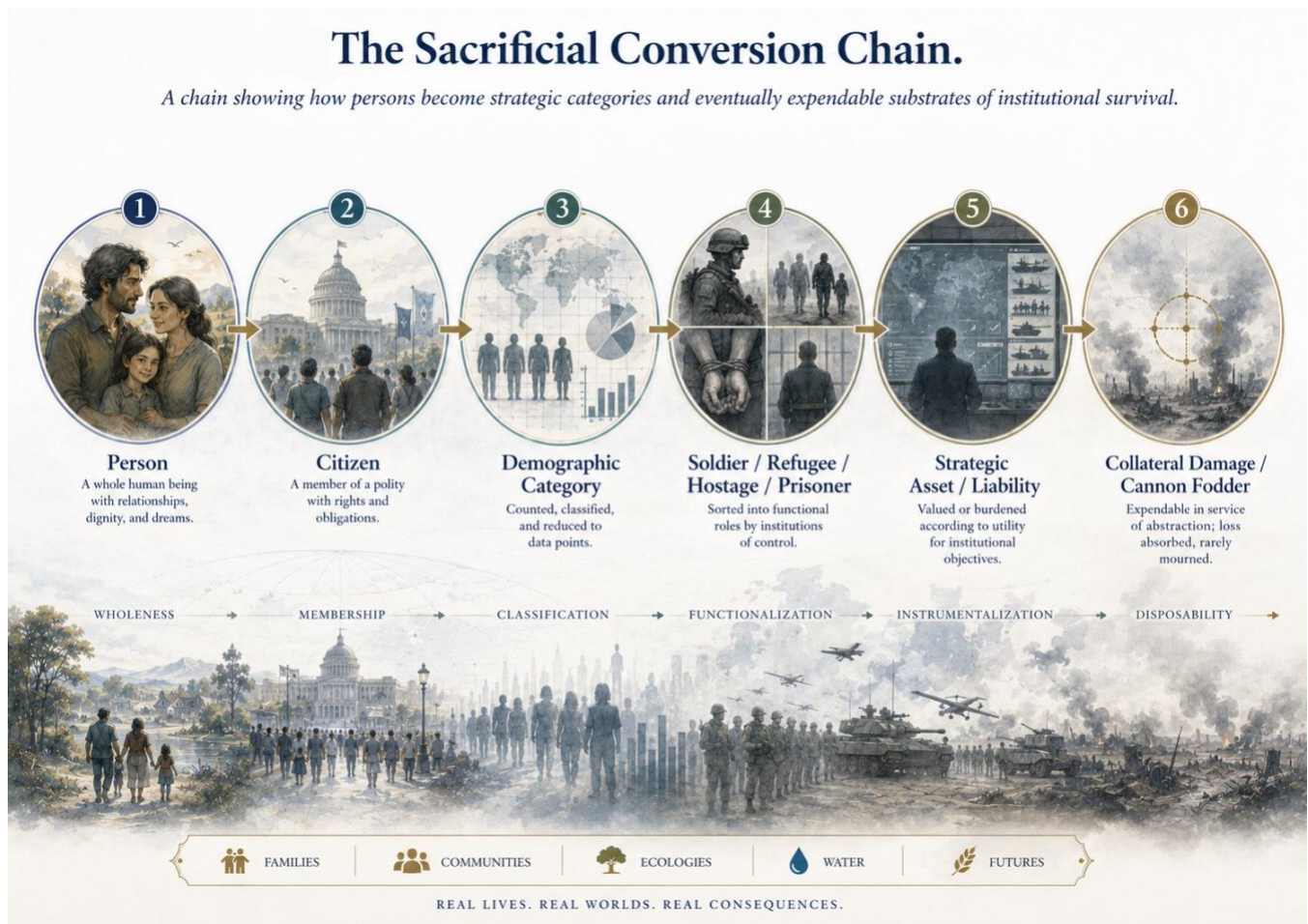


Figure 5. The Sacrificial Conversion Chain.

Institutional systems can convert persons into citizens, categories, roles, assets or liabilities, and finally into disposable substrates of institutional survival.

9. The Middle East War-System as Burning Case Study

The Middle East is not the only site of globalized insecurity, but it is one of its clearest burning mirrors. The region reveals how history, trauma, empire, religion, oil, arms, intelligence, settlement, occupation, resistance, proxy war, state survival, and civilian grief can become fused into a self-reproducing war-system.

Israel-Palestine is central because it combines the unresolved trauma of Jewish persecution and the Holocaust with the unresolved dispossession, occupation, statelessness, and fragmentation of Palestinian life. Israel's state identity has been shaped by refuge, survival, sovereignty, military deterrence, regional hostility, and recurring fear of annihilation. Palestinian political life has been shaped by Nakba, exile, military occupation, settlement expansion, blockade, imprisonment, fragmentation, and repeated failure of international protection.

The West Bank and East Jerusalem reveal the structural dimension of the conflict. Settlement expansion, land appropriation, movement restrictions, home demolitions, military law, settler violence, and unequal legal regimes convert occupation from a temporary military condition into a territorial and demographic project. The International Court of Justice concluded in its 2024 advisory opinion that Israel's continued presence in the occupied Palestinian territory is unlawful, while Security Council Resolution 2334 demands that Israel immediately and completely cease all settlement activity in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem (International Court of Justice, 2024; United Nations Security Council, 2016).

Gaza reveals the catastrophic compression of life. Blockade, bombardment, internal Palestinian governance failures, Hamas militarization, Israeli military operations, repeated displacement, infrastructure collapse, restricted movement, humanitarian dependency, and mass trauma combine to create a place where life is repeatedly pushed below viability. Gaza is not merely a battlefield. It is a life-support crisis. Any security doctrine that treats Gaza primarily as a threat-container rather than a society of human beings reproduces the conditions of future violence.

South Lebanon reveals another layer of the regional war-system. Lebanon is not merely a front in Israel-Hezbollah conflict. It is a living country whose sovereignty has repeatedly been compromised by invasion, occupation, civil war, external patronage, sectarian politics, economic collapse, and the armed autonomy of non-state forces. Resolution 1701 and UNIFIL's mandate point toward a life-coherent security compact in which the area between the Blue Line and the Litani River is free of unauthorized armed personnel and Lebanese state authority is strengthened (United Nations Security Council, 2006; UNIFIL, 2026).

Hamas, Hezbollah, Iran, Israel, the United States, Gulf states, arms industries, intelligence agencies, energy corridors, colonial legacies, and international diplomatic structures all interact in the region's escalation ecology. This does not mean all actors are equally responsible. They are not. Occupation is not the same as resistance. State bombardment is not the same as rocket fire. Hostage-taking is not the same as imprisonment. A nuclear-armed state is not the same as a stateless people. Yet none of these distinctions permits any actor to make civilians disposable.

The life-coherent analysis therefore refuses two temptations: false equivalence, which flattens power and erases responsibility; and selective humanity, which recognizes the victims of one side while rendering the victims of another side invisible, suspicious, or deserved. A life-coherent framework must hold both asymmetrical responsibility and equal non-disposability.

The War-System Feedback Loop.

A self-reinforcing cycle in which threat perception, force, civilian harm, grievance, recruitment, and expanded security reproduce one another.

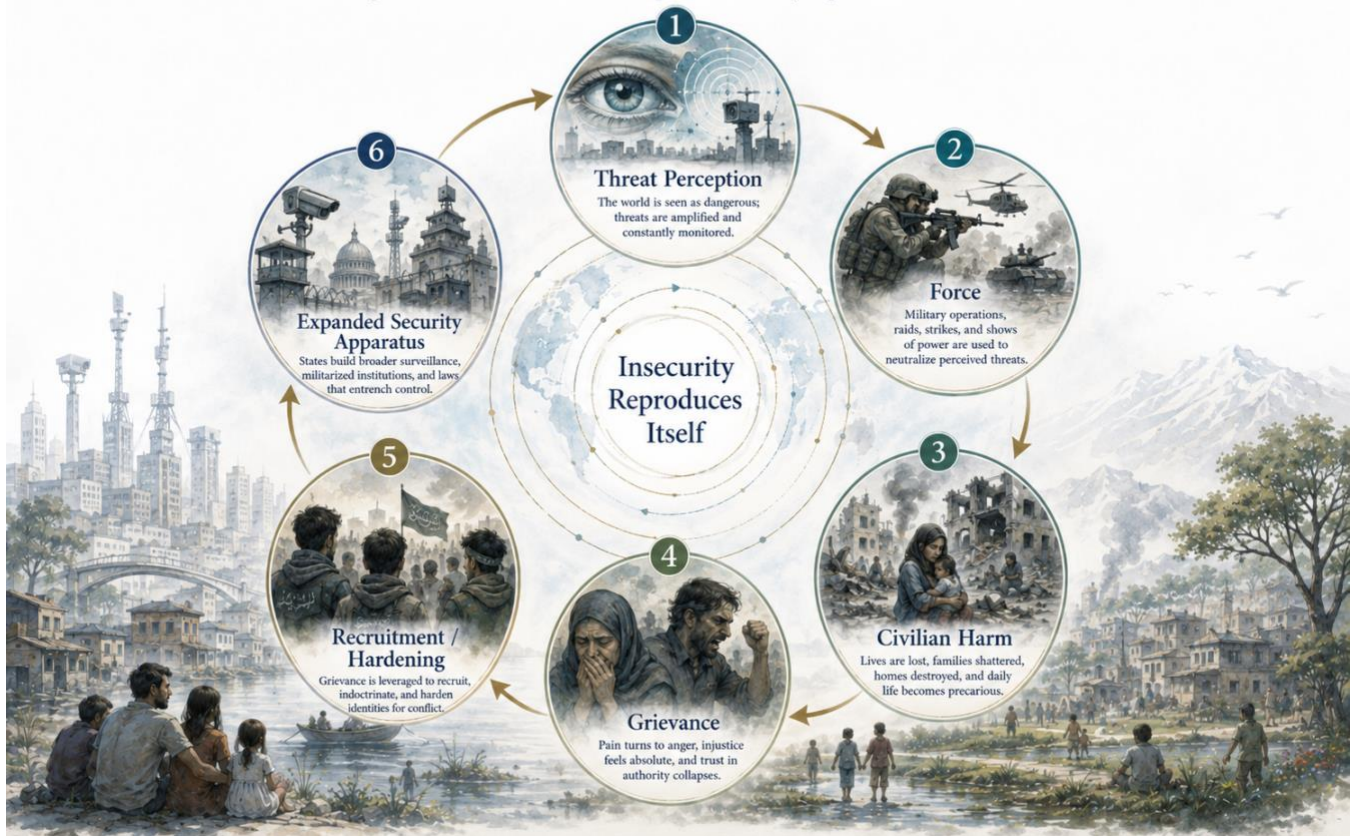


Figure 6. The War-System Feedback Loop.

Threat perception, force, civilian harm, grievance, recruitment, and expanded security apparatuses form a cycle through which insecurity reproduces itself.

10. The Life-Coherence Criterion for War and Security

War and security must be judged by a standard deeper than victory, deterrence, legality, sovereignty, strategic advantage, or national survival narrowly defined. These may matter, but none is ultimate. The ultimate criterion is life.

The Life-Coherence Criterion asks whether a decision, institution, policy, doctrine, operation, economy, or legal order protects and regenerates the conditions of life, or disables and destroys them. In the context of war and security, the criterion can be stated simply: no institution may claim legitimacy if its survival depends on making living communities disposable.

This criterion does not deny the need for security. It deepens the meaning of security. A people is not secure merely because its state is armed, enemies are afraid, borders are controlled, markets are functioning, or leaders declare victory. A people is secure when the conditions that allow life to flourish are protected: food, water, shelter, health, ecological stability, family, mobility, dignity, memory, truth, law, participation, and freedom from domination.

International humanitarian law already requires parties to distinguish civilians from combatants and attacks from civilian objects from military objectives (International Committee of the Red Cross, n.d.-a, n.d.-b). The Life-Coherence Criterion complements these rules by asking not only whether a given act fits within legal categories, but whether the entire pattern of action protects or disables the field of life.

The Minimum Harm Test asks: who will be made more vulnerable by this decision? What less harmful alternative has been exhausted? Who has the authority to say the harm is acceptable? Are those who bear the risk represented in the

decision? Is the harm reversible? What repair will be provided? How will future repetition be prevented? No security decision should be considered legitimate until these questions are answered.

The Mutual Survivability Test asks: can the security of one people be achieved without permanent domination, humiliation, displacement, disposability, or fear of another people? If not, the policy is not security. It is deferred war.

Table 3. Life-Coherence Tests for Security Decisions

Test	Core Question
Civilian Protection Test	Does this decision protect civilian life and infrastructure?
Minimum Harm Test	What less harmful alternatives have been exhausted?
Grief Recognition Test	Whose suffering is recognized, and whose is denied?
Collective Guilt Test	Does the decision punish a population for the acts of some?
Secrecy Test	Does secrecy protect life or protect power from accountability?
Future Violence Test	Will this action reduce or reproduce future violence?
Repair Test	What material, legal, and symbolic repair is guaranteed?
Accountability Test	Who can be held responsible if harm occurs?
Ecological Test	Does this decision protect life-support systems?
Mutual Survivability Test	Can one people be secure without making another people unlivable?

11. Life-Coherent Correctives

A diagnosis is not enough. The purpose of life-coherent analysis is repair. The Middle East and the wider world do not need another abstract call for peace that leaves the machinery of insecurity intact. They need a corrective architecture capable of interrupting the feedback loops that convert fear into force, force into civilian harm, civilian harm into grievance, and grievance back into fear.

The first corrective is equal non-disposability of civilian life. No civilian population may be made expendable for state survival, militia survival, imperial order, religious destiny, market confidence, demographic strategy, deterrence, revenge, or ideological victory. Equal non-disposability is not the same as false equivalence. It does not erase differences in power, legal status, responsibility, or context. It declares that no distinction justifies the conversion of a living community into acceptable waste.

The second corrective is the right to grieve all dead. Peace is impossible where grief is segregated. Shared grief is not a substitute for justice. It is the condition that prevents justice from becoming revenge.

The third corrective is secrecy-to-accountability conversion. Intelligence agencies, military commands, covert programs, private contractors, arms deals, sanctions decisions, classified legal opinions, diplomatic bargains, and financial arrangements must be reviewable by institutions capable of protecting life rather than merely protecting state or corporate power.

The fourth corrective is the Minimum Harm Test, applied before military operations, sanctions, blockades, arms transfers, surveillance expansion, emergency decrees, border closures, and reconstruction plans. A decision that cannot answer who will be made more vulnerable, what alternatives were exhausted, and what repair is guaranteed should not be called security.

The fifth corrective is a debt, sanctions, and development life-test. Any debt agreement, sanction regime, or development project that disables health, food, water, education, housing, ecological resilience, or democratic self-determination fails the Life-Coherence Criterion (UNCTAD, 2025).

The sixth corrective is demilitarized and reciprocal security guarantees. Disarmament cannot be demanded from one side while domination continues. A life-coherent security architecture must be reciprocal, phased, monitored, and non-humiliating.

The seventh corrective is repair before reconciliation. Reconciliation without repair is often domination with softer language. Repair must include housing, water systems, hospitals, schools, livelihoods, ecological restoration, trauma care, family reunification, compensation, truth-telling, archives, memorialization, legal accountability, and guarantees of non-repetition.

The eighth corrective is non-humiliating exits from escalation. War persists when actors believe that exiting will mean annihilation, humiliation, prosecution by enemies, loss of identity, regime collapse, or betrayal of the dead. A life-coherent peace process must create pathways away from violence without requiring total surrender of dignity or identity.

The ninth corrective is media and language accountability. Public language should be tested by one question: would this language make it easier to harm a child of the other? If yes, it belongs to the machinery of cultural violence.

The tenth corrective is life-coherent indicators of security: civilian safety, child survival, access to water, food security, public health, mental health, housing stability, ecological viability, freedom of movement, trust, minority protection, accountability for violence, reduction in arms dependence, and the ability to grieve without incitement.

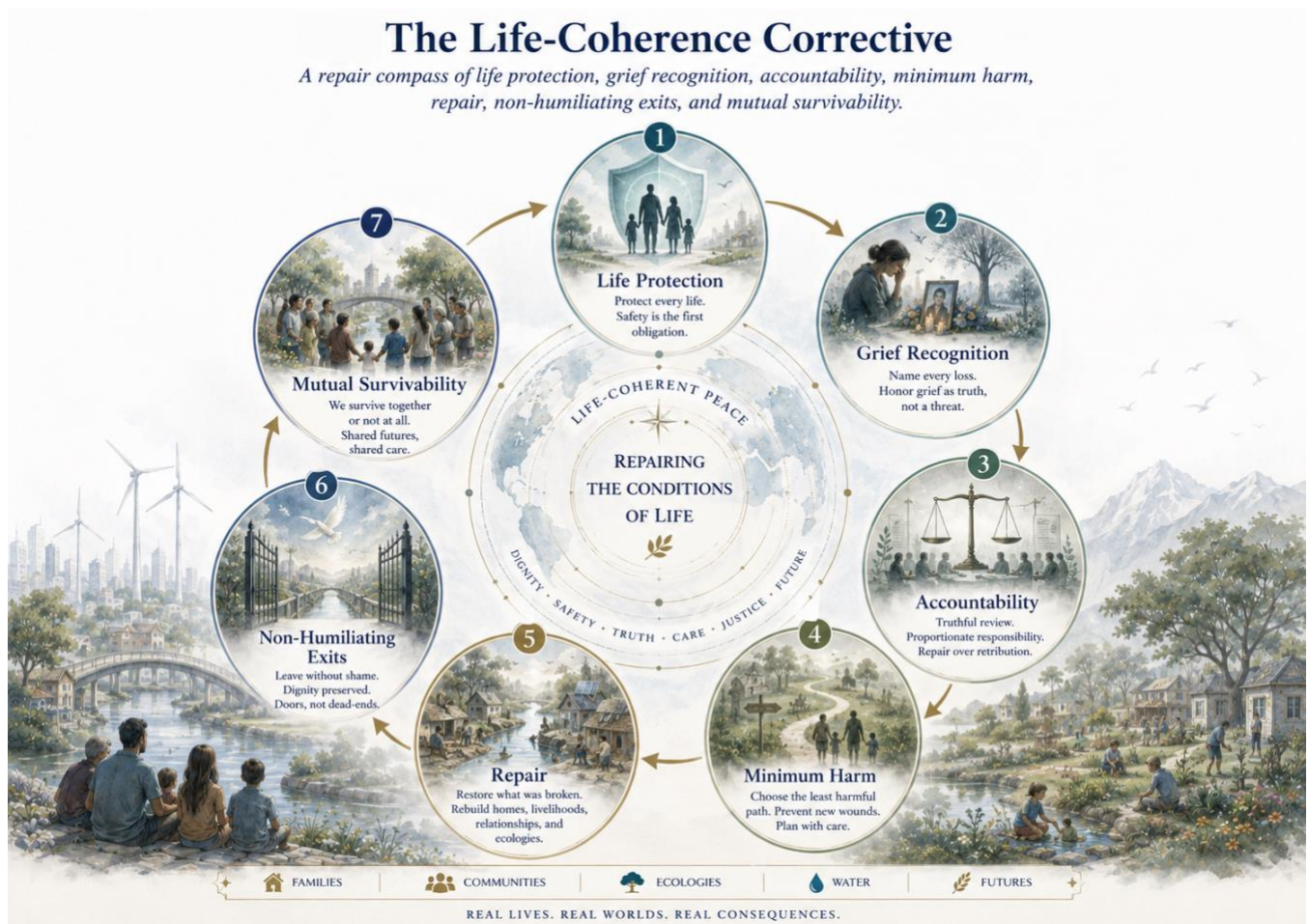


Figure 7. The Life-Coherence Corrective.

Life protection, grief recognition, accountability, minimum harm, repair, non-humiliating exits, and mutual survivability form a practical compass for life-coherent peace.

Table 4. From Life-Blind Security to Life-Coherent Security

Life-Blind Security	Life-Coherent Security
Security through domination	Security through mutual survivability

Secrecy as impunity	Secrecy under accountable review
Civilian harm as collateral damage	Civilian protection as central test
Grief as recruitment fuel	Grief as truth and repair
Debt as discipline	Finance as life-capacity
Development as dependency	Development as local sovereignty
Law as cover	Law as life-protection
Media as enemy production	Media as grief-widening truth
Victory as institutional survival	Peace as restored life-conditions
Sacrifice for the state	State service to life

12. The Life-Knowledge Commons as Counter-Institution

If secrecy, abstraction, fear, and institutional self-preservation are central to globalized insecurity, then the corrective must include a new way of knowing. The Life-Knowledge Commons is that counter-institution. It is not a party, ideology, state, sect, or doctrine of neutrality. It is a shared civilizational practice for returning knowledge to life.

The Commons begins from the premise that knowledge has been captured by systems that abstract from life. A child becomes a demographic indicator. A patient becomes a billing code. A forest becomes carbon value. A refugee becomes migration pressure. A civilian casualty becomes collateral damage. A community becomes a security zone. The Commons reverses this abstraction by restoring the child as child, the patient as person, the forest as living system, the refugee as bearer of memory and rights, the civilian as non-disposable, and the enemy as human (McMurtry, 2013; Sahely, 2026).

The Commons counters secrecy by restoring accountable intelligibility. It counters structural violence by restoring life-grounded evaluation. It counters cultural violence by restoring equal grievability. It counters institutional autopoietization by restoring external life-correction. In this sense, the Life-Knowledge Commons is a discipline of non-disposability.

It insists on five simultaneous commitments: protect all civilian life; name specific responsibility; reject collective guilt; expose hidden power; and repair life-support systems. These commitments make it difficult for any institution to capture the framework for its own self-preservation.

Neutrality can become complicity when it refuses to name harm. Partisanship can become violence when it protects one group's harm because it identifies with that group. Life-coherence refuses both. It names harm wherever it occurs, but it refuses to convert peoples into enemies.

At its deepest level, the Life-Knowledge Commons rejoins what modern systems have separated: knowledge from life, decision from consequence, security from care, economy from sufficiency, law from justice, memory from repair, power from accountability, and grief from the universal human circle. It is the practice of making life visible again where systems have rendered it invisible.

From Security State to Life-Knowledge Commons

A transition from sovereignty-through-control to security-through-mutual-survivability.



Figure 8. From Security State to Life-Knowledge Commons.

The transition from sovereignty-through-control to security-through-mutual-survivability requires moving from secrecy, fear, militarization, debt, and sacrifice toward transparency, accountability, repair, sufficiency, civil commons, and shared life protection.

13. Conclusion: No More Sacrificial Worlds

The task before humanity is not merely to stop one war, punish one leader, expose one agency, defeat one militia, reform one state, or negotiate one ceasefire. These may be necessary, but they are not enough. The deeper task is to end the institutional permission structure by which any people may be made disposable for the survival of a system.

This permission structure is older than the present war and wider than the Middle East. It appears wherever states ask citizens to die for avoidable wars, empires destabilize countries in the name of order, militias use civilians as shields or symbols, banks subordinate life to repayment, sanctions disable medicine and food, intelligence agencies hide harm behind classification, media systems make some children visible and others invisible, development converts land and people into external value, and grief is turned into fuel for domination.

The names change, but the structure repeats. A people suffers; the suffering is not fully grieved or repaired; fear becomes identity; identity becomes doctrine; doctrine names an enemy; the enemy becomes ungrievable; institutions claim necessity; secrecy blocks correction; finance disciplines alternatives; weapons provide means; media provides meaning; law provides cover; and the dead are made to prove that the system must continue.

This is how ungrieved trauma becomes globalized insecurity. The nation-state is central because it gives sacrifice its highest legitimacy, but it is embedded in a wider architecture of secrecy, finance, intelligence, arms production, media narration, legal exceptionalism, cultural violence, and global dependency. Together these systems can separate suffering from understanding and decision from consequence.

Ceasefires, humanitarian aid, legal rulings, diplomacy, elections, security guarantees, and reconstruction are all necessary, but none is sufficient if the deeper machinery remains intact. Without truth, grief, accountability, repair, and institutional redesign, the war-system pauses only long enough to reorganize.

The life-coherent alternative begins with a covenant: no people shall be scapegoated; no institution shall be exempt; no grief shall be denied; no hidden power shall be protected from life-coherent scrutiny; no living community shall be made disposable for the survival of any system.

No one's security can depend on another people's unlivability. Israelis cannot be made safe by making Palestinians disposable. Palestinians cannot be made free by making Israeli civilians disposable. Lebanon cannot be sovereign while its territory is treated as proxy terrain. Iran cannot be secure by making other peoples instruments of strategic depth. The United States cannot produce order by arming, vetoing, sanctioning, and managing the consequences of the violence it helps structure. Armed movements cannot liberate people by binding them indefinitely to military logic.

The world that must now be brought forth is not a world without conflict. Conflict is part of life. It is a world in which conflict is no longer organized by systems that require disposability. It is a world where security means mutual survivability, grief becomes truth rather than hatred, trauma becomes repair rather than permanent innocence, institutions become corrigible by life, hidden power becomes answerable, finance serves life-capacity, law protects the vulnerable before it protects the powerful, media widens the circle of concern, development strengthens local sovereignty, memory prevents repetition rather than preparing revenge, and every child is grievable.

The age of sacrificial worlds must end. No flag, faith, market, nation, security doctrine, intelligence operation, development plan, debt contract, historical wound, or geopolitical strategy can justify the conversion of living beings into cannon fodder, collateral damage, occupied populations, refugee flows, proxy terrain, debt-bearing societies, or ungrievable life. A life-coherent civilization begins where every institution is answerable to the lives it affects. The state exists for life. The market exists for life. Law exists for life. Security exists for life. Knowledge exists for life. The Commons exists for life. Life does not exist for the survival of systems.

AI Transparency Note

This white paper was authored by Dr. Bichara Sahely and developed in dialogue with GPT-5.5 Thinking / ChatGPT as a research, synthesis, structuring, and editorial assistant. All final interpretations, judgments, ethical framing, and publication responsibility remain with the human author.

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