Reclama: Thank you for the opportunity to interview you. We've found that many Peace Corps Volunteers have read your books. One told me that "Confessions of an Economic Hit Man" totally reshaped her view of our foreign policy. She just wishes she would have read it sooner. Another reconsidered a job proposal working on one of the large infrastructure projects you used to forecast after reading the book. So it's definitely had an impact on our community, which is why we wanted to interview you.

John Perkins: Well, I'm glad to hear that. Incidentally, when I'm on speaking tours at universities, I often have students come up to me and tell me they're considering Peace Corps. They ask what I recommend, and I always say, 'Go! Do it! It's an incredible experience.' That happens quite frequently; I promote Peace Corps.

How do you respond to people who read about your economic hit man work and say, 'This is just too fantastic to believe, it's just one man's story, and there is no way to independently verify the claims he makes?'

I almost never get that question because I think that most people who talk to me about these things say that they always figured that stuff like that was going on, but they'd never actually seen anyone write about it before. I will say that The New York Times did a major piece. It was the whole top fold of the front page of the business section in the Sunday edition back three years ago. They went in and looked at the details and it was thoroughly vetted. So the information is all there if they're willing to dig.

Everything that I talk about obviously happened - the assassination of Roldos of Ecuador and Torrijos of Panama is pretty well known throughout Latin America. You can ask people in the
Dominican Republic, I'm sure that most people who were alive at that time in Latin America realized that it was an assassination. And there's tremendous amounts of evidence. And there was no question that economic hit men were talking to those two people along with many others. Every incident I talk about in my books happened. You can verify it. The only question might be, was I actually one of the economic hit men there? And my passport proves that I was in those countries at the time. So, there's a lot of evidence.

Bechtel Corporation wrote a letter setting up a lawsuit against me, saying that they wanted us to remove their name and portions of the book that refer to Bechtel. Other organizations did something similar. We gave them the backup information that I had - my files are extensive. So we told them that if they continued to try to blackmail us, we would write an addendum to the next edition of the book exposing the fact that they were trying to get us to change things that are facts. They never filed a lawsuit, they never gave us more trouble. The evidence is all there; I have no problem at all substantiating it if people really want to dig, like Bechtel did and The New York Times did. But most people, I think, have a real sense that these things go on anyway, and so the book just confirms what they already suspected.

While discussing modern robber barons in "Hoodwinked," you write that "from a purely economic perspective, philanthropy is inefficient. A person who has accumulated billions of dollars and in doing so has caused others to lose their jobs, closed the doors of small businesses, or ravaged the environment, and then donates a small percentage of his fortune to correcting those problems or to the arts, would have served the world far better by making fewer profits while increasing employment, supporting small businesses, and insisting that his executives practice good environmental stewardship." This is such a critical point that even most educated people don't recognize. Why haven't universities made this point clear, and how can we ensure that the next generation will learn this obvious and important point? I do all I can do, which is when I'm at universities and this question comes up I say exactly that, and I talk to university professors and have told them they should point that out. So it seems to me that it's something that ought to be part of business school curricula, particularly, but of course I have no control over [laughs] what Wharton or Stanford or Cornell or any of the other business schools teach. All I can do is, every chance I get, I say these things. I also want to say that although I come down pretty hard on these kinds of philanthropists - people like Bill Gates today, and in the past, the Carnegies, and so on - I also recognize that once someone has done the things they've done and perhaps sees the light, has a change of heart, that I certainly honor the fact that they are trying to somehow redeem themselves by giving some of the money back, and so I certainly do encourage that, too. After all, I did some pretty bad things in my life as an economic hit man and now I'm working to turn things around, to try to change those very things. So I think it is important that if people have done things that are not the best for the world, that if they realize their mistakes, we do everything we can to encourage them to give back as much as they can. However, it would be far better if they had worked hard in the beginning to do the socially and environmentally responsible things, as I write in the book. So all I can do is encourage that in my writings and in my speeches and I hope more and more business schools will teach that, too.

You criticize what you call "trinket capitalism," an economic system that produces junk that people don't really need. However, our current model is also heavily financialized, producing speculation no one really needs; indeed, much of the blame of the financial crisis rests on highly
leveraged, little-understood financial "trinkets" based on a housing bubble, not real production. One of the best examples of the uselessness of this financial speculation is the commodities market, where many of the goods produced by poor farmers are gambled on by traders and manipulated by huge agribusiness conglomerates. As you know, this price volatility wreaks havoc on the Third World, which is ironic since futures contracts were designed to provide stability. Are these financial instruments causing more harm than good? Should they be eliminated?

Yeah! Absolutely. I think they should be eliminated for the most part or at least we should have very strong laws regulating them so that they do more good than harm. The system that we've experienced, which has brought us into this global recession that we're in today, has virtually let these people - hedge funds and other investment types - get away with what I consider to be criminal activity. Legally speaking, it's not criminal because we've passed laws to decriminalize it, but it should be criminal. In other words, investments, business in general, should be there to support the public good. I think the guideline is that the first 100 years of the United States, no company, including investment companies, could get charters unless they could prove that they were serving the public interest. On average, the charter lasted ten years. Then the company had to go back in and demonstrate that it had served the public interest and would continue to do so. I think that's a very reasonable thing to expect of corporations. There's absolutely no reason why they should not be serving a public interest as well as making profits and serving their investors. Investors need to get a fair rate of return. But that should not be at the expense of everyone else. And we need regulations to support that, or, if there's vehicles out there such as certain hedge funds that can't possibly serve a public interest, we ought to get rid of them.

Do you think the forces behind "trinket capitalism" - cultivating a demand and hyping selling points of essentially useless items - has been applied to the realm of politics, like in elections? No question. The politicians are controlled by big money - what I call the corporatocracy. Nobody gets elected in this country - or almost nobody - without the support of the corporatocracy. Nobody gets elected to a major national office without that support. We saw that with Obama. He went in saying he was not going to accept money from big corporations; by the end he accepted a lot of money from big corporations. And we're now seeing the results. His financial policy is essentially run by Wall Street, particularly Goldman Sachs, and his agricultural policy is run by the big agribusinesses, especially Monsanto, because they provided so much money in his campaign. So politicians are very, very much tied in with these corporations.

But we the people ought to recognize that ultimately, we're the ones with the control. Because these big corporations only benefit, only survive, when we support them, by buying their goods and services or allowing our tax dollars to buy their goods and services. So the marketplace is democratic if we choose to make it democratic, if we choose to shop consciously, invest consciously, and let them know. Send emails. Let Nike know that we're not going to buy from them anymore because they've got sweatshops. Send them an email and if enough of us do that, they'll have to turn their sweatshops into legitimate factories that pay real wages and have working conditions that are supportive of life rather than making life miserable for the workers. We have the control. And I say in "Hoodwinked" that the way we vote when we shop is just as important as - and perhaps more important than - the votes we give in polls on election day. We need to recognize that every time we buy something or choose not to, we're casting a vote, but
it's important to communicate that and email makes it very easy to communicate to these corporate executives why we're buying their goods and services or why we're not buying them.

_Do you believe there are enough affordable options to really provide a choice - a democratic marketplace, as you say?_

I do. And it's increasing all the time. Within the last month I've spoken at the Chicago Green Festival and the Seattle Green Festival. And there's another one coming up in DC and then one in San Francisco. And they have a marketplace of these many, many vendors that have been vetted for their environmental and social responsibility. They offer a lot of options, from tennis shoes to toilets, food and clothes. We need to support those people. Now, I don't think there's anybody out there that's one hundred percent perfect, and I'm not sure anybody ever will be one hundred percent perfect; who amongst us is? But what we need to do is encourage those companies and the entrepreneurs and the small companies even, like in the green marketplace, that are trying, that are making headway, and if we continue to do that then we'll find that, ultimately everybody will have to go along with it. We have a lot of choices. You can go to dreamchange.org; there's links there to various places if you're looking to buy tennis shoes, shirts, food, there's links that will help you to know which companies are trying to do their best job. We need to keep pushing harder and harder for that, letting people know that we absolutely refuse to buy things that are not socially and environmentally green, and we will buy things that are done that way. And I think it's also important while saying this to say that we all need to cut back. We don't need so many pairs of shoes and t-shirts and blue jeans, most of us don't anyway - and we don't need to use as much energy. We need to be much more conservative in the way we approach life.

_You seem to be very positive about the corporate social responsibility (CSR) movement. In fact, that seems to be your cure for the mutant form of capitalism you describe. You say that today every major company pays "at least lip service to the idea of the 'triple bottom line, " that is, financial, social, and ecological costs and benefits. Many would argue that most of it remains just that - lip service. Can we reasonably expect a company not to focus on short-term profit maximization given that, generally speaking, within the current system of state capitalism, it will be driven out of business by competitors if it focuses on anything but?_

I don't think it will be driven out of business by competitors if we the people insist that we will only buy from socially and environmentally responsible sources. Those that are not will be driven out of business. We have sent the message that we want cheap t-shirts and tennis shoes even if they're made in sweatshops by slaves in Indonesia or Honduras. And we want cheap oil even if that means destroying the Amazon. That's the message we the consumers have sent these corporations, and they maximize their profits based on that message. We need to send an entirely different message. It's not acceptable; we won't buy anything that's made in sweatshops. It's not that we're trying to put Indonesians out of work, but we want the sweatshops to pay life-supporting wages and provide decent working conditions. Or we won't buy from them. That's the message we want to send, and that's the only way these corporations are going to make profits, is if they do these things. We the people have to send that message, and that's why I'm encouraged, because I think we are getting the word out there. I've been lecturing in universities since "Confessions of an Economic Hit Man" came out, so it's
been a little over five years, and I've seen a tremendous change in attitude among students, especially in MBA programs, across the United States and China, Iceland and in Latin America. Five years ago, all these students were telling me they wanted to make more money, wanted to have more power. Now, most of them - the ones I talk to anyway [laughs] - are saying that they want to do the right thing. They want to create businesses, they want to support businesses that are responsible, they want to create a world that they can be proud to bring children up in. I'm seeing a change in attitude. I am encouraged by that. I am hopeful that we can turn things around.

When I was in the Peace Corps in the Amazon, I was near death at one point, and I was cured by a shaman. Shamans teach us that we can change things - I wrote about this in a book called "Shapeshifting" that talks about this - by applying energy and intent to the things we want to create in the future. We can turn things around, as they put it. We change the dream by giving energy into a new dream. And it can happen very quickly. We've seen it happen. We got out of Vietnam because people changed their energy. We got corporations to clean up terribly polluted rivers in the United States because people put new energy into it. We got rid of apartheid in South Africa because of it. Recently, we got trans fats out of foods, for the most part, because people gave that energy. Now we need to give energy to a whole new scenario, which is to say, we'll only support corporations that make profits within the context of creating a sustainable, just and peaceful world for everybody on this planet.

Do you think international agreements that regulate production and pricing of commodities should take the place of "free trade" agreements, which you recognize as heavily biased to favor wealthy countries? The International Coffee Agreement which Reagan torpedoed in 1989 comes to mind.

I'm all for real free trade and agreements that will support real free trade. But most of the 'free trade' agreements - in quotations - these days are just the opposite. They work in the benefit of the corporatocracy, the big international corporations, and, as you know and as every Peace Corps Volunteer probably knows, they generally work against the campesinos, the farmers in these other countries. I think that there's a movement in Latin America today to support that. We've seen a number of presidents recently elected democratically who are really trying to establish true free markets, at least amongst their countries. I'm particularly thinking of Rafael Correa of Ecuador, Evo Morales, and I think Hugo Chavez of Venezuela, despite all the controversy that always swirls around him, is trying to promote some of these things. So I think that we can see agreements amongst countries in South America and I'd like to see that happen more in Africa, Asia and elsewhere. The idea of true free trade is excellent, but the idea of the kind of free trade that's promoted by the United States and the G8 countries is a horrible form of exploitation - a subtle and yet very effective type of exploitation.

On that note, in an interview with Malibu Magazine you defended Chavez against the false portrayals of him as a dictator in the corporate media. You stated that while you didn't appreciate his rhetorical approach, "He is a wild man, but one needs to be a wild man to do what he did." What has he done for Venezuela?

Well, I don't know if I can speak for the Venezuelans; I can't. I'm not Venezuelan, so to say what he's done for Venezuela - I'm not in a position to do that. I'm a United States citizen. I'm much
more comfortable speaking about my country. And what I will say is that Hugo Chavez made the United States back down. He's made history in a big way; people will remember Hugo Chavez for hundreds of years because he stood up to the United States. The coup launched against him in 2002 was successful for, I think about 40 hours. But he overcame it; he was very smart, and he knew what he was up against. And by doing that, he set a new precedent. The other countries in Latin America after that, many of them voted in presidents that probably would not have run for office had Chavez not been successful in putting down that coup. But it gave a tremendous impetus to people throughout Latin America, and I think in other parts of the world, too. So by showing the United States to be a paper tiger in 2002, I think he sent a very strong message out to the world. I think he's played a major role in world politics, and when I talked to a lot of poor Venezuelans, they love many of the things that he's done in terms of education and healthcare and setting up clinics for poor people, etcetera. Talk to wealthy Venezuelans, they're unhappy with what he did, so, personally, I'd rather not comment on what he's done or not done for Venezuela. That's simply to say that he has done something to the United States and he has encouraged a spirit of liberty and optimism throughout South America. As I travel in places like the Dominican Republic, Panama, and Costa Rica, and Nicaragua and Ecuador, I hear young people being very, very inspired by the fact that a president successfully stood up to a CIA-orchestrated coup in 2002 and survived and is now trying to establish various alliances throughout Latin America.

This information seems to be lost on most progressives. How do we bridge the gap that allows so many well intentioned people to be misled about the great progress being made in Latin American countries that have rejected the neoliberal approach to development? I think we all have to keep talking about it a lot more [laughs]. We have to understand that the mainstream press is aligned against the progressive movement in Latin America primarily because it is either owned outright by the corporatocracy or supported through advertising budgets, and, therefore, the mainstream press does not want to talk about the tremendous revolution that's taking place in Latin America. So the rest of us have to do it a lot more. And however we can, using whatever media that's available to us. And it's so important to spread this word, but I totally agree with you, it's just not said very much in the United States. It is throughout Latin America, but not in the United States.

One of my favorite presidents is Rafael Correa, who has a PhD in economics from the University of Illinois and recently pushed through a new constitution which was supported in a referendum by roughly 75 percent of the population of Ecuador - the first constitution in the history of the world that gives unalienable rights to nature. And now Correa is looking to introduce a new currency in his country that will reflect the value of people who normally are outside the market economy - housewives, people taking care of children, subsistence farmers - so amazing things are happening there. And yet we don't get information in the United States.

It's very significant that today in the United States, every time you turn on the radio you hear about the BP oil spill in the Gulf, and yet you still don't hear about the biggest environmental lawsuit in the history of the world: $27 billion dollars on behalf of 30,000 Ecuadorians against Chevron. This is what Texaco, which Chevron now owns, did in Ecuador in the '60s and '70s, spilling, the last time I heard, roughly 400 times more toxic waste in the Amazon than BP has spilled into the Gulf of Mexico at this point. We don't hear about that. We just don't hear about these things and I think it's a terrible travesty that we don't. For The New York Times to claim that it has "All the News That’s Fit to Print," is very ironic in this case, because they don't print
these kinds of things very much. So you and I have to keep pushing to get this information out there.

*One last question on that thread: The transformation occurring in Latin America that you speak of with such respect and hope is founded on participatory democracy with some socialist economic features, or at least some steps in that direction. Chavez, in a recent interview with the BBC, said: "I ... believed in a 'third way,' but it was all a farce. I thought it was possible to articulate ... a capitalism with a human face, but I realized I was wrong. Democracy is impossible in a capitalist system ... it's the tyranny of the richest against the poorest. That's why the only way to save the world is through a democratic socialism." How do you compare this approach with your own? Your stance, if I portray it accurately, is that capitalism is not inherently the problem, but it must be fixed.*

I think we're playing with words, to a certain degree. What is capitalism? Capitalism has been around for about 400 years and it's taken many different forms. Most recently, for most of my lifetime, as for most of Chavez's lifetime, it's taken the form of what I call predatory capitalism, which is based on some very faulty assumptions, the first assumption being that the only responsibility of business is to maximize profits, regardless of the social and environmental costs; and, number two, that they shouldn't be regulated – that you should minimize all the rules and regulations around business because that gets in the way of making profit; and, number three, everything should be run by private business - let's privatize everything, including the military, the schools, the jails, everything. Those three premises were really promoted by Milton Friedman, the economist from the Chicago School of Economics. They were embraced by Ronald Reagan, Margaret Thatcher, and just about every major president since then, Democratic and Republican alike in the United States, and presidents throughout the world. And they brought us to a terrible situation where all we can say is that this is a failure.

Less than 5 percent of the world's population lives in the United States and consumes almost 30 percent of the world's resources, while roughly half of the world lives in dire poverty, many people starving or on the verge of starving. That's a failed system, it's not a model; it can't be replicated in Latin America or Africa or anywhere else. It's a failure. But that doesn't mean that capitalism in and of itself is a failure. It is, however, a question of definitions. I would rather define capitalism as being the use of capital, and capital includes mental capital; it includes creativity; it includes poetry and writing. Those are forms of capital. So in a way we're playing with words here.

The fact of the matter is, we need to come up with a new system that takes care of the poorest of the poor. We are a species in evolution and I think nature is quite perfect in that nature puts species on this planet and throws tests in front of them and if they fail, they go extinct. And I think you can say that at this point, with our current predatory capitalistic system, we're on the verge of extinction. We're on the verge of failing. We've created a system that simply does not work. It's not sustainable. By definition, if you're a species that's doing practices that are non-sustainable, you're not going to survive. So we need to turn it around. And I don't really care if we call it capitalism or xyz-ism. It doesn't matter what we call it, but we need a system that will allocate the use of our resources in ways that help everybody, every living human being and, in fact, every sentient being.

We need to come up with a system that creates a just and peaceful world for all life on this planet. We simply must do that. And I think that some of the leaders in Latin America are headed in that direction and I don't really care whether you call it democracy or capitalism, or social
democracy or social capitalism, or whatever you call it; we just need to come up with a system, like the one I outlined in "Hoodwinked," that will allow us to move forward into a world that my grandson will be happy to inherit and every child on this planet will be happy to inherit.

With regard to your account of the last military coup in Honduras, raising the minimum wage may have been the last straw for the internal elite, but you've also recognized the use of what happened to President Zelaya as a signal. Was the Obama administration showing that it is not afraid to get its hands dirty to "maintain credibility," or was this a pet project of other actors at the State Department and the Pentagon acting on behalf of companies like Dole and Chiquita? The coup was definitely acting on behalf of companies like Dole and Chiquita, Kraft, Russell Athletics, and all the other multinational corporations that are exploiting the people and resources of Honduras, no question. I think Obama's in a very difficult situation, where Eric Holder, his attorney general, had been the chief attorney for Chiquita in Colombia and had very close ties, as did many other people in the Obama administration - very close ties to these companies. That's part of the problem with the system; it's this revolving door where people at the top of the government come out of these corporations and know that they'll go back into the corporations later on. It's a tremendous conflict of interest there.

And the other thing that we all need to be aware of is that any United States president - whether his name is Obama or Bush - whatever his name is, is in a very vulnerable position. These presidents know that they can be brought down very quickly if they do things that are not liked by the corporatocracy. Today there's many ways to destroy a person. You don't necessarily have to physically assassinate him - there's character assassination. Bill Clinton experienced character assassination with the Monica Lewinsky deal. A guy like Obama has got to know the first day he's in the White House that he's in a very vulnerable position and his ability to do things that the corporatocracy doesn't like is extremely limited. So regarding his position in Honduras, I don't know what he personally would have liked to have done, but I suspect that if he had wanted to support Zelaya, he would've been in a very vulnerable and difficult situation.

In "Hoodwinked," you state that the corporatocracy's candidate did not win the 2008 presidential elections. Given what you've just said, and that Obama received more money from Wall Street than McCain, do you still agree with that statement? Doesn't it just illustrate that both parties are equally indebted to different factions within the same corporatocracy?

I think the corporatocracy has a lot of control all along the line and although they might've preferred to see McCain win, when Obama began to establish himself as a popular candidate, they immediately stepped in and supported his campaign financially. So they were supporting both. Big money - Wall Street, big agribusinesses, many of the other big corporations - were supporting both candidates. So by the time Obama got elected, he may not have been the corporatocracy's first choice, but they had a lot of leverage over him by then, through campaign financing, and, also, as soon as he gets into office, as I just said earlier, he was read the riot act, and he knows that they can take him down very easily. We've all got skeletons in our closet, of course Obama has skeletons in his closet; I don't know what they are, but I'm sure he's got them [laughs]. Who knows what's there? [laughs] And actually, even if you don't have skeletons in your closet, just rumors can bring a person down - whether they're true or not, if they're placed in the right places and repeated often enough. So by the time Obama became president, the corporatocracy was pretty comfortable that they would get their way with him on most cases.

*Is Peace Corps as an institution still serving as a gateway for more economic hit men? What would you suggest for a volunteer approaching close of service who doesn't want to serve the*
corporatocracy? Any career paths that you recommend, where one can earn a living wage while doing good, and also express her or his creativity?

Well, I was screened by the NSA [the National Security Agency] even before taking on the Peace Corps position. I learned a lot from Peace Corps, and that helped me see past the lies as an economic hit man because I had that experience of living and working with the people impacted by these programs, although it took a full ten years to manifest itself. I was lured in by an interest in seeing and living in Asia and Indonesia; my weaknesses and proclivity as a very young man for sex and wealth were exploited. I think my Peace Corps experience is probably what distinguished me from the rest of my economic hit man peers and provided the grounding to expose this system. I was in Ecuador when Texaco first began operations.

One of the benefits of becoming a Peace Corps volunteer is learning the language, and language influences, in a subtle way, how you think. I think somewhat differently in Spanish than I do in English, which expands my capacity to understand. I would tell volunteers to follow your heart. Follow your passion - it's the only way you're really going to be successful. Don't sell out to the big corporations; money doesn't buy happiness. If you do work for a big multinational, make a commitment to using your position as a platform to help that corporation become dedicated to serving the public interest, to creating a sustainable, just and peaceful world. Life experience and the gratification of doing good work are what's important. Do what you love. If you want to write books, write books. If you like to paint, paint. If you become a lawyer, commit to using the law to protect the environment and downtrodden people. Or if journalism calls you, be a journalist who exposes the truth and strives to inspire others to fashion a compassionate world.

One of my concerns has been that many people take away the wrong lessons from Peace Corps - that development simply doesn't work or that campesinos are just lazy. The Progressive Circle, which publishes Reclama is trying to open volunteers' eyes to the structural and historical causes for the decisions and attitudes which prevail among the poor with whom we work. Do you have any suggestions for accomplishing this?

Wow. I'm not sure about this one. This is an issue that I'm devoting my life's work to at this point. Talking with you, doing this interview, dedicating time to magazines like this, spreading the word and not blaming the victims of the system. I can't imagine anyone spending two years in the Peace Corps, nearly three years in my case, coming away thinking that these people are lazy; these people are hungry, they have parasites, no good medical care, and yet they're the hardest-working people I've ever seen in my life. It reminds me of the whole immigration issue - immigrants are the hardest working people in our society. I speak Spanish, and I talk with so many of them and I find that many of them don't want to be here, they would rather be back in Guatemala or wherever with their families. They're here because we destroyed their livelihoods with free trade agreements - NAFTA and CAFTA, for example.

For those of us living on the Dominican side of Hispaniola, the case of Haiti is never far from our minds. Even before the earthquake, that country probably had more development workers per capita than anywhere else in the world. Why has development work there and elsewhere been such a failure?

Well, Haiti is a country that we've exploited forever. I mean, [laughs] since Columbus arrived. The French exploited it, and it was one of the first countries to declare independence and the first
to get rid of slavery in the hemisphere. The French then sued Haiti, saying that by getting rid of slaves, that it hurt the French economy. When the United States Marines went in there in the early 1900s, the cry was, "You gotta pay back the French for the money you owe them." It goes way back in time, including money that's owed them because you got rid of slavery. I mean, how awful is that?!

And there's no question at this point in time - for anybody who seriously looks at this issue - that Jean-Bertrand Aristide was taken out by the CIA, and probably for the same reasons that Zelaya was taken out of Honduras, and that is because he was increasing the minimum wage. Haiti and Honduras set the bottom line for the minimum wage in this hemisphere, especially Haiti. No country in the Americas will allow itself to have a minimum wage below that of Haiti. And so, when the president of Haiti decides to increase the minimum wage, it doesn't just impact Disney and the other companies that have sweatshops in Haiti. It potentially impacts every company that's working in Latin America, because if Haiti actually increases its minimum wage, then it probably means that everybody else is going to have to increase their minimum wage just to stay that much more above Haiti. That's the way it works.

So, Aristide was taken down because he strongly opposed the corporatocracy; he was trying to create something more egalitarian for his people. And there's this long history. Sadly, I think a lot of the nonprofits - certainly not all of them, by any means - but a number of nonprofits working in Haiti are basically serving the interests of the corporatocracy, rather than the people of Haiti. Haiti is an example of a country that we know has a huge, long history of terrible corruption, but we have to take responsibility for being the people that have corrupted it and kept corrupt leaders in power. And when leaders try to step up to the plate to do something different, we in the United States take them down, and take them out one way or another. It has been consistent and consistent and consistent.

What are your thoughts about what happened to the humanitarian aid flotilla that Israel attacked in international waters, killing nine people?

Well, I can't speak from any personal experience; having never been there, having never worked in Israel, I don't know the circumstances. But I think it's very much to the detriment of Israel, and everyone else, that Israel is taking such a hard stance against the Palestinians and other people. Certainly, what's happened with this flotilla has created extremely bad press for Israel. Again, I don't know the truth behind it or the circumstances, but it's put Israel in a terrible, terrible light and I think Israel needs to try very hard to turn the situation around, to show much more compassion for the Palestinians, and other Arab people. Not just because it's the morally and ethically correct thing to do, but because ultimately it will serve Israel's future best. Israel right now is in a very, very vulnerable position and the world is outraged by what happened there. Again, I don't know what happened there, but reading the press from around the world, there's an outpouring of outrage against Israel which certainly can't serve Israel's long-term interests, or anyone else's.

On that note, despite being out of the economic hit man game, you remain well informed. In the past you've criticized the corporate media, which includes almost everything the average person sees. Aside from Democracy Now!, which you have recommended before, what other sources do you suggest?

There's tremendous sources. There's the Internet. It's hard to be terribly specific because, for example, I go onto a lot of Latin American media because I can read Spanish. Other people don't
have that option, but you can go to other English-speaking countries and look at what they're doing online. There are so many sources available that I don't like to promote any particular one very much. People have a tremendous number of options, I just think that we don't need to rely on The New York Times and Fox [laughs] or The Washington Post anymore. All of those are very biased in favor of the corporatocracy. There's so many alternatives and I think the Internet provides a great equalizer.

*The hot spot in the so-called War on Drugs seems to have been transferred from Colombia to Mexico. This has made it easier to blame someone else for the problems our drug-user demand and prohibition program create since that country is our neighbor. A leaked report from the Mexican government identified 23,000 deaths in that country related to the narcotrafficking problem since the start of the crackdown in 2006 (no doubt initiated as a bargaining chip for immigration reform that Bush had promised Mexican President Vicente Fox). The powerful military-industrial complex obviously has a big stake in maintaining and expanding the drug war, but how can the American people put an end to this nightmare?*

We have to put our foot down about this whole military-industrial-complex, the corporatocracy. We have to realize that we have to create a new economy in this country. And you're absolutely right, I mean, so many of the drug wars around the world, whether it's Colombia, Mexico or wherever, are driven by the fact that the corporatocracy makes a huge amount of money in sales of equipment. Colombia has been the number four recipient of US military aid in the world, following behind Egypt, Israel and Iraq. And I suspect that Afghanistan may have surpassed Colombia, but the drug war in Colombia has provided a tremendous source of revenue for big US corporations that are providing helicopters, planes and other military equipment. And now we're doing it in Mexico.

In my opinion - and it's just my opinion - the CIA is very, very deeply involved in drug trafficking. We know about the Iran-Contra deal, where very mysterious things were going on; we know about the Opium Wars that were started under the British Empire, in India and China. These countries have a history of using drugs as a way to finance clandestine activities. And for a long time, in Vietnam and throughout the Golden Triangle of Asia, the CIA was funneling funds from drug use into its own clandestine operations. We know this goes on. I'm sure it's part of what's happening in Colombia and Mexico now. Again, it's a tremendous impetus for weapons suppliers and industries that support that. We have to remember that every time a missile is sold, or an AK-47 that's made in the U.S. or any other military equipment made in the United States or sold by a multinational corporation, it isn't just the manufacturer and distributor that make money, it's insurance companies that support these corporations, healthcare service companies, it's the banks, every one of these major military suppliers has a huge ripple effect on many other industries. And we, the people of the United States, must insist that we get out of this terrible dependency that we have on the military. In the last budget that the Obama administration presented, 25 percent of it was allocated to direct military expenditures. That doesn't include Iraq or Afghanistan. It's amazing that this is outside the budget. And it also doesn't show these ancillary businesses that are supported by the military establishment. As I mentioned, the banks, the insurance companies, health servers, the pensions funds and so forth.

*How were you able to morally justify the work you performed as an economic hit man to yourself?*
I didn't try to justify it morally at the time. At the time I thought it was the right thing because business school had taught me - as all business schools, the World Bank and everybody in the business promoted in those days - that by investing lots of money into infrastructure projects in developing countries, you could increase their economies - and in fact, the statistics showed that you did. You increased gross domestic product. But what the statistics didn't show was that only a few people - a few wealthy families - really benefited. And the poor got poorer, and the gap between rich and poor got wider. And as I saw that over time, I kept thinking, well, I can be the exception. I'll go in and do this and then I'll expose the system and turn it around. Which in a way is what I've done. It took me a long time to get here. So at the time I kept convincing myself I was doing the right thing. In the process I was getting to see countries around the world, I was flying first-class, I was staying in the best hotels and eating at the best restaurants. I can't justify what I did, but I can say that now, what I'm trying to do is everything I possibly can to turn it around.

I have a two-and-a-half-year-old grandson and I realize that he can't inherit a sustainable, just, and peaceful world, unless every child - growing up in Botswana, Bolivia, Indonesia, every country on the planet - has that same opportunity. We live in a very tiny, interwoven global society today, and in order for any of our grandchildren to inherit a world that they will want to live in, we have to understand that every child has to inherit that world. We must understand that for us to have homeland security in the U.S. means that we must see that the planet is our homeland. This is not about protecting the U.S., it's about protecting the planet. We're all citizens of this planet and we must simply devote ourselves to doing that. I think my experiences in the Peace Corps and then later as an economic hit man helped me to really be clear on this and now I have to do everything I can for the rest of my life to promote that.

It's been a tremendous pleasure. Thank you very much. My pleasure. Keep up your great work. I really appreciate what you're doing and my final comment to Peace Corps volunteers out there is: see the opportunities. We're in revolutionary times. This is a time that's more important than the American Revolution of the 1700s. This is a global revolution and it's fun to be a part of it. The most gratifying, rewarding thing you can do is to create a better world for ourselves and future generations. Nothing is more fun, more rewarding, more satisfying than doing that, and I think the Peace Corps provides a tremendous launching pad for that kind of career.