

# ‘Is That All There Is?’

by Geopolitical Futures - August 6, 2021

There are times in our lives when we are tired – tired in an existential sense, a sense of having seen everything there is to see, having seen the shallow truth behind supposedly great events and craving something different. The great 20th-century singer and philosopher Peggy Lee summed this up in her song “Is That All There Is?” You can find it online, but part of it goes:

And when I was twelve years old  
My daddy took me to the circus, the greatest show on Earth  
There were clowns and elephants and dancing bears  
And a beautiful lady in pink tights flew high above our heads  
And as I sat there watching  
I had the feeling that something was missing  
I don't know what, but when it was over I said to myself  
Is that all there is to the circus?  
Is that all there is, is that all there is?  
If that's all there is my friends, then let's keep dancing  
Let's break out the booze and have a ball  
If that's all there is

She continues in the same vein, explaining why she doesn't commit suicide: Death might be a disappointment too.

The United States and China are engaged in great power competition. Russia is being sneaky and ineffective, as usual. The European Union is facing the fact that Italy is not Germany, and they are certainly going to call a meeting to discuss it. Kim Jong Un appears to have a bandage on his head in his latest photographs. Israel's enemies fire rockets at it; Israel retaliates. The United States has a three-step program to eliminate all problems.

And there is COVID-19. It has killed a lot of people around the world and will continue to do so. It has been here for almost two years, and it is both terrible and boring. If we all wear masks, it will mutate, and masks will be useless. The experts and amateurs say the same things over and over until we all know what they will say next.

It is extraordinary that even amid these turpitudes we can reach a state of towering boredom. There comes a moment where many things are happening and nothing is changing. The things that are happening therefore become boring, and life along with it.

Will a great war break out? Will Kim Jong Un show up in a disco in New York? That would be interesting. For Peggy Lee, Kim on the dance floor might be a disappointment, but for me, it would at least break up the terrible sameness that has gripped the world. It's telling that even living on the edge of destruction (a reference to another old song) can inspire indifference when it just hangs there.

Has this happened before? This is one of those things you had to experience to know. I recall seven years of Vietnam, filled with horrors and mistakes, but it turned into a boring and endless repetition whereby horror was routinized, and the routine became uninteresting to someone not there or not involved. So I don't think that the feeling I have is unique. Nor am I sure that others share it. Plenty of sane people retain the ability to feel shock and awe by the pandemic. Deep down I am shocked, but what is there left to say? Maybe a lot. Yet like Peggy Lee, I keep asking if that is all there is.

Perhaps the world isn't caught in Peggy Lee's existential nightmare, but I live watching the world, and I want to see something new. Instead, I feel like I am watching Nietzsche's eternal return of the same. I understand that readers may accuse me of being blind or indifferent to the fear and suffering now afflicting the world. I do see it, and I do care. But I can't stop it, and I can't help but feel I am living "Groundhog Day," waking up every day to the same thing.

But I sense that this is simply the way the world is now and that we must live through many, if not endless, repetitions of the same day. The world does crave something different, even if it isn't better. Even truths become tedious when endlessly repeated.

Of course, the world will eventually encounter something dramatically new and even more frightening and move happily along. As for me, Prof. Peggy Lee's solution seems reasonable. Let's go dancing, break out the booze and have a ball – so long as it follows CDC guidelines, the booze is not imported from sanctioned countries, and the ball is inclusive.

**Author: Geopolitical Futures**

[Read more from this author on geopoliticalfutures.com](https://geopoliticalfutures.com)