

# Chomsky: To Tackle Climate, Our Morality Must Catch Up With Our Intelligence



*Noam Chomsky*

This week, the World Meteorological Organization warned that the world has a 50 percent chance of seeing warming of 1.5 degrees above preindustrial levels in the next five years. Even those who view the glass as half full tend to agree that efforts undertaken so far by the world's countries to combat the climate crisis, while significant in some respects, are not enough. Indeed, the global economy continues to rely extensively on fossil fuels, which still provide about 80 percent of the energy supply.

The warnings about an impending climate catastrophe included in the second and third segments of the United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) latest review of climate science, which were released on February 28 and April 4, 2022, respectively, went completely ignored amid the war in Ukraine and soaring energy costs.

In the United States, the Biden administration's response to soaring gas prices was to renew oil and gas drilling on federal lands and to announce "the largest-ever release of oil from the strategic petroleum reserves." The rest of the world has also responded with short-term thinking to the consequences of the war in Ukraine.

World-renowned scholar-activist Noam Chomsky grapples with the consequences of this short-term thinking amid escalating military tensions, in this exclusive interview for *Truthout*. Chomsky is the father of modern linguistics and one of the

most cited scholars in modern history, and has published some 150 books. He is institute professor and professor of linguistics emeritus at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and currently laureate professor at the University of Arizona.

The following transcript has been lightly edited for length and clarity.

*C.J. Polychroniou: Noam, the war in Ukraine is causing unimaginable human suffering, but it is also having global economic consequences and is terrible news for the fight against global warming. Indeed, as a result of rising energy costs and concerns about energy security, decarbonization efforts have taken a back seat. In the U.S., the Biden administration has embraced the Republican slogan “drill, baby, drill,” Europe is set on building new gas pipelines and import facilities, and China plans to boost coal production capacity. Can you comment on the implications of these unfortunate developments and explain why short-term thinking continues to prevail among world leaders even at a time when humanity could be on the brink of an existential threat?*

*Noam Chomsky: The last question is not new. In one or another form, it has arisen throughout history.*

Take one case that has been extensively studied: Why did political leaders go to war in 1914, supremely confident of their own righteousness? And why did the most prominent intellectuals in every warring country line up with passionate enthusiasm in support of their own state — apart from a handful of dissidents, the most prominent of whom were jailed (Bertrand Russell, Eugene Debs, Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht)? It wasn't a terminal crisis, but it was serious enough.

The pattern goes far back in history. And it continues with little change after August 6, 1945, when we learned that human intelligence had risen to the level where it soon would be able to exterminate everything.

Observing the pattern closely, over the years, a basic conclusion seems to me to emerge clearly: Whatever is driving policy, it is not security — at least, security of the population. That is at best a marginal concern. That holds for existential threats as well. We have to look elsewhere.

A good starting point, I think, is what seems to me to be the best-established

principle of international relations theory: Adam Smith's observation that the "Masters of Mankind" — in his day the merchants and manufacturers of England — are the "principal architects of [state] policy." They use their power to ensure that their own interests "are most peculiarly attended to" no matter how "grievous" the effects on others, including the people of England, but most brutally the victims of the "savage injustice of the Europeans." His particular target was British savagery in India, then in its early stages, already horrifying enough.

Nothing much changes when the crises become existential. Short-term interests prevail. The logic is clear in competitive systems, like unregulated markets. Those who do not play the game are soon out of it. Competition among the "principal architects of policy" in the state system has somewhat similar properties, but we should bear in mind that security of the population is far from a guiding principle, as the record shows all too clearly.

You are quite right about the horrific impact of the criminal Russian invasion of Ukraine. Discussion in the U.S. and Europe focuses on the suffering in Ukraine itself, quite reasonably, while also applauding our policy of accelerating the misery, not so reasonably. I'll return to that.

The policy of escalating the war in Ukraine, instead of trying to take steps to end it, has a horrific impact far beyond Ukraine. As widely reported, Ukraine and Russia are major food exporters. The war has cut off food supplies to populations in desperate need, particularly in Africa and Asia.

Take just one example, the world's worst humanitarian crisis according to the UN: Yemen. Over 2 million children face imminent starvation, the World Food Program reports. Almost 100 percent of cereal [is imported] "with Russia and Ukraine accounting for the largest share of wheat and wheat products (42%)," in addition to re-exported flour and processed wheat from the same region.

The crisis extends far beyond. Let's try to be honest about it: Perpetuation of the war is, simply, a program of mass murder throughout much of the Global South.

That's the least of it. There are [discussions in purportedly serious journals](#) about how the U.S. can win a nuclear war with Russia. Such discussions verge on criminal insanity. And, unfortunately, US-NATO policies provide many possible scenarios for quick termination of human society. To take just one, Putin has so

far refrained from attacking the supply lines sending heavy weapons to Ukraine. It won't be a great surprise if that restraint ends, bringing Russia and NATO close to direct conflict, with an easy path to tit-for-tat escalation that could well lead to a quick goodbye.

More likely, in fact highly probable, is slower death through poisoning of the planet. The most recent IPCC report made it crystal clear that if there is to be any hope for a livable world, we must stop using fossil fuels right now, proceeding steadily until they are soon eliminated. As you point out, the effect of the ongoing war is to end the far-too-limited initiatives underway, indeed to reverse them and to accelerate the race to suicide.

There is, naturally, great joy in the executive offices of the corporations dedicated to destroying human life on Earth. Now they are not only freed from constraints and from the carping of annoying environmentalists, but they are lauded for saving the civilization that they are now encouraged to destroy even more expeditiously. Arms producers share their euphoria about the opportunities offered by the continuing conflict. They are now encouraged to waste scarce resources that are desperately needed for humane and constructive purposes. And like their partners in mass destruction, the fossil fuel corporations, they are raking in taxpayer dollars.

What could be better, or from a different perspective, more insane? We would do well to recall President Dwight D. Eisenhower's words in his "Cross of Iron" speech in 1953:

*Every gun that is made, every warship launched, every rocket fired signifies, in the final sense, a theft from those who hunger and are not fed, those who are cold and are not clothed. This world in arms is not spending money alone. It is spending the sweat of its laborers, the genius of its scientists, the hopes of its children. The [cost](#) of one modern heavy bomber is this: a modern brick school in more than 30 cities. It is two electric power plants, each serving a town of 60,000 population. It is two fine, fully equipped hospitals. It is some fifty miles of concrete pavement. We pay for a single fighter with a half-million bushels of wheat. We pay for a single [destroyer](#) with new homes that could have housed more than 8,000 people.... This is not a way of life at all, in any true sense. Under the cloud of threatening war, it is humanity hanging from a cross of iron.*

These words could hardly be more appropriate today.

Let's return to why "world leaders" pursue this mad course. First, let's see if we can find any who deserve the appellation, except in irony.

If there were any, they would be devoting themselves to bringing the conflict to an end in the only way possible: by diplomacy and statecraft. The general outlines of a political settlement have long been understood. We [have discussed them before](#) and have also documented the dedication of the U.S. (with NATO in tow) to undermine the possibility of a diplomatic settlement, quite openly, and with pride. There should be no need to review the dismal record again.

A common refrain is that "Mad Vlad" is so insane, and so immersed in wild dreams of reconstructing an empire and maybe conquering the world, that there's no point even listening to what Russians are saying — that is, if you can evade U.S. censorship and find some snippets on Indian state TV or Middle East media. And there is surely no need to contemplate diplomatic engagement with such a creature. Therefore, let's not even explore the only possibility for ending the horror and just continue to escalate it, no matter what the consequences for Ukrainians and the world.

Western leaders, and much of the political class, are now consumed with two major ideas: The first is that Russian military force is so overwhelming that it may soon seek to conquer Western Europe, or even beyond. Thus, we have to "fight Russia over there" (with Ukrainian bodies) so that "we don't have to fight Russia here" in Washington, D.C., or so we are warned by House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence Chair Adam Schiff, a Democrat.

The second is that Russian military force has been shown to be a paper tiger, so incompetent and frail, and so poorly led, that it can't conquer cities a few kilometers from its border defended largely by a citizens' army.

The latter thought is the object of much gloating. The former inspires terror in our hearts.

Orwell defined "doublethink" as the capacity to hold two contradictory ideas in mind and to believe them both, a malady only imaginable in ultra-totalitarian states.

Adopting the first idea, we must arm ourselves to the teeth to protect ourselves from the demonic plans of the paper tiger, even though Russian military spending is a fraction of NATO's, even excluding the U.S. Those suffering memory loss will be delighted that Germany has finally gotten the word, and [may soon surpass](#) Russia in military spending. Now Putin will have to think twice before conquering western Europe.

To repeat the obvious, the war in Ukraine can end with a diplomatic settlement, or with the defeat of one side, either quickly or in prolonged agony. Diplomacy, by definition, is a give-and-take affair. Each side must accept it. It follows that in a diplomatic settlement, Putin must be offered some escape hatch.

We either accept the first option, or we reject it. That at least is not controversial. If we reject it, we are choosing the second option. Since that is the near-universal preference in Western discourse, and continues to be U.S. policy, let's consider what it entails.

The answer is straightforward: The decision to reject diplomacy means that we will engage in an experiment to see whether the irrational mad dog will slink away quietly in total defeat, or whether he will use the means that he certainly has to destroy Ukraine and set the stage for terminal war.

And while conducting this grotesque experiment with the lives of Ukrainians, we will ensure that millions starve from the food crisis, we will toy with the possibility of nuclear war, and we will race on enthusiastically to destroying the environment that sustains life.

It is of course conceivable that Putin will just surrender, and that he'll refrain from using the forces at his command. And perhaps we can simply laugh off the prospects of resort to nuclear weapons. Conceivable, but what kind of person would be willing to take that gamble?

The answer is: Western leaders, quite explicitly, along with the political class. That has been obvious for years, even stated officially. And to make sure that all understand, the position was forcefully reiterated in April at the first monthly meeting of the "Contact Group," which includes NATO and partner countries. The meeting was not held at NATO headquarters in Brussels, Belgium. Rather, all pretenses were dropped, and it was held at the U.S. Ramstein Air Base in Germany; technically German territory, but in the real world belonging to the U.S.

Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin opened the meeting by [declaring](#) that “Ukraine clearly believes it can win and so does everyone here.” Therefore, the assembled dignitaries should have no hesitation in pouring advanced weapons into Ukraine and persisting in the other programs, proudly announced, to bring Ukraine effectively within the NATO system. In their wisdom, the attending dignitaries and their leader guarantee that Putin will not react in ways they all know he can.

The record of military planning for many years, in fact centuries, indicates that “everyone here” may indeed hold these remarkable beliefs. Whether they do or not, they are, clearly, willing to carry out the experiment with the lives of Ukrainians and the future of life on Earth.

Since we are assured on this high authority that Russia will passively observe all of this with no reaction, we can take further steps to “integrate Ukraine into NATO de facto,” in accord with the goals of the Ukrainian defense ministry, [establishing](#) “full compatibility of the Ukrainian army with the armies of NATO countries” — thereby also guaranteeing that no diplomatic settlement can be reached with any Russian government, unless Russia is somehow turned into a U.S. satellite.

Current U.S. policy calls for a long war to “weaken Russia” and ensure its total defeat. The policy is very similar to the Afghan model of the 1980s, which is, in fact, now explicitly advocated in high places; [by former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton](#) for example.

Since that is close to current U.S. policy, even a working model, it is worthwhile to look at what actually happened in Afghanistan in the ‘80s when Russia invaded. Fortunately, we now have a [detailed and authoritative account](#) by Diego Cordovez, who directed the successful UN programs that ended the war, and the distinguished journalist and scholar Selig Harrison, who has extensive experience in the region.

The Cordovez-Harrison analysis completely overthrows the received version. They demonstrate that the war was ended by careful UN-run diplomacy, not by military force. Soviet military forces were fully capable of continuing the war. The U.S. policy of mobilizing and funding the most extremist radical Islamists to fight the Russians amounted to “fighting to the last Afghan,” they conclude, in a proxy war to weaken the Soviet Union. “The United States did its best to prevent the



emergence of a U.N. role,” that is, the careful diplomatic efforts that ended the war.

U.S. policy apparently delayed the Russian withdrawal that had been contemplated from shortly after the invasion — which, they show, had limited objectives, with no resemblance to the awesome goals of world conquest that were conjured up in U.S. propaganda. “The Soviet invasion was clearly not the first step in an expansionist master plan of a united leadership,” Harrison writes, confirming the [conclusions of historian David Gibbs](#) based on released Soviet archives.

The chief CIA officer in Islamabad, who ran the operations directly, put the main point simply: The goal was to kill Russian soldiers — to give Russia their Vietnam, as proclaimed by high U.S. officials, revealing the colossal inability to understand anything about Indochina that was the hallmark of U.S. policy for decades of slaughter and destruction.

Cordovez-Harrison wrote that the U.S. government “was divided from the start between ‘bleeders,’ who wanted to keep Soviet forces pinned down in Afghanistan and thus to avenge Vietnam, and ‘dealers’, who wanted to compel their withdrawal through a combination of diplomacy and military pressure.” It’s a distinction that shows up very often. The bleeders usually win, causing immense damage. For “the decider,” to borrow W. Bush’s self-description, it is safer to look tough than to appear to be too soft.

Afghanistan is a case in point. In the Carter administration, Secretary of State Cyrus Vance was a dealer, who suggested far-reaching compromises that would have almost certainly prevented, or at least sharply curtailed, what was intended to be a limited intervention. National Security Adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski was the bleeder, intent on avenging Vietnam, whatever that meant in his confused world view, and killing Russians, something he understood very well, and relished.

Brzezinski prevailed. He convinced Carter to send arms to the opposition that was seeking to overthrow the pro-Russian government, anticipating that the Russians would be drawn into a Vietnam-style quagmire. When it happened, he could barely contain his delight. When asked later whether he had any regrets, he dismissed the question as ridiculous. His success in drawing Russia into the



Afghan trap, he claimed, was responsible for the collapse of the Soviet empire and ending the Cold War — mostly [nonsense](#). And who cares if it harmed “some agitated Muslims,” like the million cadavers, putting aside such incidentals as the devastation of Afghanistan, and the rise of radical Islam.

The Afghan analogy is being publicly advocated today, and more importantly, is being implemented in policy.

The dealer-bleeder distinction is nothing new in foreign policy circles. A famous example from the early days of the Cold War is the conflict between George Kennan (a dealer) and Paul Nitze (a bleeder), won by Nitze, laying the basis for many years of brutality and near destruction. Cordovez-Harrison explicitly endorse Kennan’s approach, with ample evidence.

An example close to Vance-Brzezinski is the conflict between Secretary of State William Rogers (a dealer) and National Security Adviser Henry Kissinger (a bleeder) over Middle East Policy in the Richard Nixon years. Rogers proposed reasonable diplomatic solutions to the Israel-Arab conflict. Kissinger, whose ignorance of the region was monumental, insisted on confrontation, [leading to the 1973 war](#), a close call for Israel with a serious threat of nuclear war.

These conflicts are perennial, almost. Today there are only bleeders in high places. They have gone as far as to [enact a huge Lend Lease Act](#) for Ukraine, passed almost unanimously. The terminology is designed to evoke the memory of the enormous Lend-Lease program that brought the U.S. into the European war (as intended) and linked the European and Asian conflicts into a World War (unintended). “Lend Lease tied together the separate struggles in Europe and Asia to create by the end of 1941 what we properly call World War II,” writes Adam Tooze. Is that what we want in today’s quite different circumstances?

If that is what we want, as seems to be the case, let us at least reflect on what it entails. That is important enough to repeat.

It entails that we reject out of hand the kind of diplomatic initiatives that in reality ended the Russian invasion of Afghanistan, despite U.S. efforts to impede them. We therefore undertake an experiment to see whether integration of Ukraine into NATO, total defeat of Russia in Ukraine, and further moves to “weaken Russia,” will be observed passively by the Russian leadership, or whether they will resort to the means of violence they unquestionably possess to devastate Ukraine and

set the stage for possible general war.

Meanwhile, by extending the conflict instead of seeking to end it, we impose severe costs on Ukrainians, drive millions of people to death by starvation, hurtle the burning planet even more rapidly to the sixth mass extinction, and — if we are lucky — escape terminal war.

No problem, the government and political class tell us. The experiment carries no risk because the Russian leadership is sure to accept all of this with equanimity, passing quietly into the ash heap of history. As for the “collateral damage,” they can join the ranks of Brzezinski’s “agitated Muslims.” To borrow the phrase made famous [by Madeleine](#) Albright: “This is a very hard choice, but the price — we think the price is worth it.”

Let’s at least have the honesty to recognize what we are doing, eyes open.

*Global emissions rose to record high in 2021, so the world went back to a “business-as-usual” approach once the worst of the COVID-19 pandemic subsided — for now. How hardwired is human behavior? Are we capable of having moral duties toward future people?*

It is a deep question, the most important question we can contemplate. The answer is unknown. It may be helpful to think about it in a broader context.

Consider Enrico Fermi’s famous paradox: In simple words, where are they? A distinguished astrophysicist, Fermi knew that there are a huge number of planets within the reach of potential contact that have the conditions to sustain life and higher intelligence. But with the most assiduous search, we can find no trace of their existence. So where are they?

One response that has been seriously proposed, and cannot be dismissed, is that higher intelligence has developed innumerable times, but has proven to be lethal: It discovered the means for self-annihilation but did not develop the moral capacity to prevent it. Perhaps that is even an inherent feature of what we call “higher intelligence.”

We are now engaged in an experiment to determine whether this grim principle holds of modern humans, a very recent arrival on Earth, some 200,000-300,000 years ago, a flick of an eye in evolutionary time. There is not much time to find

the answer — or more precisely, to determine the answer, as we will do, one way or the other. That is unavoidable. We will either act to show that our moral capacity reaches as far as to control our technical capacity to destroy, or that it does not.

An extraterrestrial observer, if there were one, would unfortunately conclude that the gap is too immense to prevent species suicide, and with it the sixth mass extinction. But it could be mistaken. That decision is in our hands.

There is a rough measure of the gap between capacity to destroy and capacity to contain that death wish: the Doomsday Clock of the Bulletin of Atomic Scientists. The distance of the hands from midnight can be regarded as an indication of the gap. In 1953, when the U.S. and Soviet Union exploded thermonuclear weapons, the minute-hand was set to two minutes to midnight. It did not reach that point again until Donald Trump's term in office. In his last year, the analysts abandoned minutes and switched to seconds: 100 seconds to midnight, where the clock now stands. Next January it will be set again. It's not hard to make a case that the second-hand should move closer to midnight.

The grim question arose with brilliant clarity on August 6, 1945. That day provided two lessons: 1.) human intelligence, in its glory, was approaching the capacity to destroy everything, an achievement reached in 1953; and 2.) human moral capacity lagged far behind. Few even cared, as people of my age will remember very well. Viewing the hideous experiment to which we are enthusiastically committed today, and what it entails, it is hard to see improvement, to put it mildly.

That doesn't answer the question. We know far too little to answer it. We can only observe closely the one case of "higher intelligence" that we know of, and ask what it suggests about the answer.

Far more importantly, we can act to determine the answer. It is within our power to bring about the answer that we all hope for, but there is no time to waste.

*Copyright © Truthout. May not be reprinted without [permission](#).*

*C.J. Polychroniou* is a political scientist/political economist, author, and journalist who has taught and worked in numerous universities and research centers in Europe and the United States. Currently, his main research interests are in U.S. politics and the political economy of the United States, European economic

integration, globalization, climate change and environmental economics, and the deconstruction of neoliberalism's politico-economic project. He is a regular contributor to *Truthout* as well as a member of *Truthout's* Public Intellectual Project. He has published scores of books and over 1,000 articles which have appeared in a variety of journals, magazines, newspapers and popular news websites. Many of his publications have been translated into a multitude of different languages, including Arabic, Chinese, Croatian, Dutch, French, German, Greek, Italian, Japanese, Portuguese, Russian, Spanish and Turkish. His latest books are *Optimism Over Despair: Noam Chomsky On Capitalism, Empire, and Social Change* (2017); *Climate Crisis and the Global Green New Deal: The Political Economy of Saving the Planet* (with Noam Chomsky and Robert Pollin as primary authors, 2020); *The Precipice: Neoliberalism, the Pandemic, and the Urgent Need for Radical Change* (an anthology of interviews with Noam Chomsky, 2021); and *Economics and the Left: Interviews with Progressive Economists* (2021).

---

## **Chomsky: US Is Prioritizing Its Jockeying With Russia, Not Ukrainians' Lives**



*Noam Chomsky*

Russian President Vladimir Putin's invasion of Ukraine is an utter disaster for Ukraine, and the war is not going well for the Russian forces who are experiencing heavy losses and may be running low on both supplies and morale. Perhaps this is the reason why Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, also

encouraged by the support that Ukraine has received from Western countries, claimed a few days ago on the Greek state-run broadcaster *ERT* that “the war will end when Ukraine wins.”

In this exclusive interview, world-renowned scholar and leading dissident Noam Chomsky considers the implications of Ukraine’s heroic stance to fight the Russian invaders till the end, and why the U.S. is not eager to see an end to the conflict.

Chomsky, who is internationally recognized as one of the most important intellectuals alive, is the author of some 150 books and the recipient of scores of highly prestigious awards, including the Sydney Peace Prize and the Kyoto Prize (Japan’s equivalent of the Nobel Prize), and of dozens of honorary doctorate degrees from the world’s most renowned universities. Chomsky is Institute Professor Emeritus at MIT and currently Laureate Professor at the University of Arizona.

*C.J. Polychroniou: After months of fighting, it’s obvious that the invasion is not going according to the Kremlin’s plans, hopes and expectations. NATO figures have claimed that Russian forces have already suffered as many deaths as they did during the entire duration of the Afghan war, and the position of the Zelenskyy government now seems to be “peace with victory.” Obviously, the West’s support for Ukraine is key to what’s happening on the ground, both militarily and in terms of diplomatic solutions. Indeed, there is no clear path to peace, and the Kremlin has stated that it is not seeking to end the war by May 9 (known as Victory Day, which marks the Soviets’ role in defeating Nazi Germany). Don’t Ukrainians have the right to fight to death before surrendering any territory to Russia, if they choose to do so?*

*Noam Chomsky:* To my knowledge, no one has suggested that Ukrainians don’t have that right. Islamic Jihad also has the abstract right to fight to the death before surrendering any territory to Israel. I wouldn’t recommend it, but it’s their right.

Do Ukrainians want that? Perhaps now in the midst of a devastating war, but not in the recent past.

President Zelenskyy was elected in 2019 with an overwhelming mandate for peace. He immediately moved to carry it out, with great courage. He had to

confront violent right-wing militias who threatened to kill him if he tried to reach a peaceful settlement along the lines of the Minsk II formula. Historian of Russia Stephen Cohen points out that if Zelenskyy had been backed by the U.S., he could have persisted, perhaps solving the problem with no horrendous invasion. The U.S. refused, preferring its policy of integrating Ukraine within NATO. Washington continued to dismiss Russia's red lines and the warnings of a host of top-level U.S. diplomats and government advisers as it has been doing since Clinton's abrogation of Bush's firm and unambiguous promise to Gorbachev that in return for German reunification within NATO, NATO would not expand one inch beyond Germany.

Zelenskyy also sensibly proposed putting the very different Crimea issue on a back burner, to be addressed later, after the war ends.

Minsk II would have meant some kind of federal arrangement, with considerable autonomy for the Donbass region, optimally in a manner to be determined by an internationally supervised referendum. Prospects have of course diminished after the Russian invasion. How much we don't know. There is only one way to find out: to agree to facilitate diplomacy instead of undermining it, as the U.S. continues to do.

It's true that "the West's support for Ukraine is key into what's happening on the ground, both militarily and in terms of diplomatic solutions," though I would suggest a slight rephrasing: The West's support for Ukraine is key into what's happening on the ground, both militarily and in terms of *undermining instead of facilitating* diplomatic solutions that might end the horror.

Congress, including congressional Democrats, are acting as if they prefer the exhortation by Democratic Chair of the House Permanent Select Committee of Intelligence Adam Schiff that we have to aid Ukraine "so that we can fight Russia over there, and we don't have to fight Russia here."

Schiff's warning is nothing new. It is reminiscent of Reagan's calling a national emergency because the Nicaraguan army is only two days marching time from Harlingen, Texas, about to overwhelm us. Or LBJ's plaintive plea that we have to stop them in Vietnam or they will "[sweep over the United States and take what we have.](#)"

That's been the permanent plight of the U.S., constantly threatened with annihilation. Best to stop *them over there*.

*The U.S. has been a leading provider of security assistance to Ukraine since 2014. And last week, President Biden asked Congress to approve \$33 billion to Ukraine, which is more than double what Washington has already committed since the start of the war. Isn't it therefore safe to conclude that Washington has a lot riding on the way the war ends in Ukraine?*

Since the relevant facts are virtually unspeakable here, it's worth reviewing them.

Since the Maidan uprising in 2014, NATO (meaning basically the U.S.) has "provided significant support with equipment, with training, 10s of 1000s of Ukrainian soldiers have been trained, and then when we saw the intelligence indicating a highly likely invasion Allies stepped up last autumn and this winter," before the invasion, [according to](#) NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg).

I've already mentioned Washington's refusal to back newly elected President Zelenskyy when his courageous effort to implement his mandate to pursue peace was blocked by right-wing militias, and the U.S. refused to back him, preferring to continue its policy of integrating Ukraine into NATO, dismissing Russia's red lines.

As we've discussed earlier, that commitment was stepped up with the official U.S. policy statement of September 2021 calling for sending more advanced military equipment to Ukraine while continuing "our robust training and exercise program in keeping with Ukraine's status as a NATO Enhanced Opportunities Partner." The policy was given further formal status in the November 10 U.S.-Ukraine Charter on Strategic Partnership signed by Secretary of State Antony Blinken.

The State Department has [acknowledged](#) that "prior to the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the United States made no effort to address one of Vladimir Putin's most often stated top security concerns — the possibility of Ukraine's membership into NATO."

So matters continued after Putin's criminal aggression. Once again, what happened has been reviewed accurately by Anatol Lieven:

*A U.S. strategy of using the war in Ukraine to weaken Russia is also of course*



*completely incompatible with the search for a ceasefire and even a provisional peace settlement. It would require Washington to oppose any such settlement and to keep the war going. And indeed, when in late March the Ukrainian government put forward a very reasonable set of [peace proposals](#), the lack of public U.S. support for them was extremely striking.*

*Apart from anything else, a Ukrainian treaty of neutrality (as proposed by President Zelensky) is an absolutely inescapable part of any settlement — but weakening Russia involves maintaining Ukraine as a de facto U.S. ally. U.S. strategy as indicated by [Defense Secretary] Lloyd Austin would risk Washington becoming involved in backing Ukrainian nationalist hardliners against President Zelensky himself.*

With this in mind, we can turn to the question. The answer seems plain: judging by U.S. actions and formal pronouncements, it is “safe to conclude that Washington has a lot riding on the way the war ends in Ukraine.” More specifically, it is fair to conclude that in order to “weaken Russia,” the U.S. is dedicated to the grotesque experiment that we have discussed earlier; avoid any way of ending the conflict through diplomacy and see whether Putin will slink away quietly in defeat or will use the capacity, which of course he has, to destroy Ukraine and set the stage for terminal war.

We learn a lot about the reigning culture from the fact that the grotesque experiment is considered highly praiseworthy, and that any effort to question it is either relegated to the margins or bitterly castigated with an impressive flow of lies and deceit.

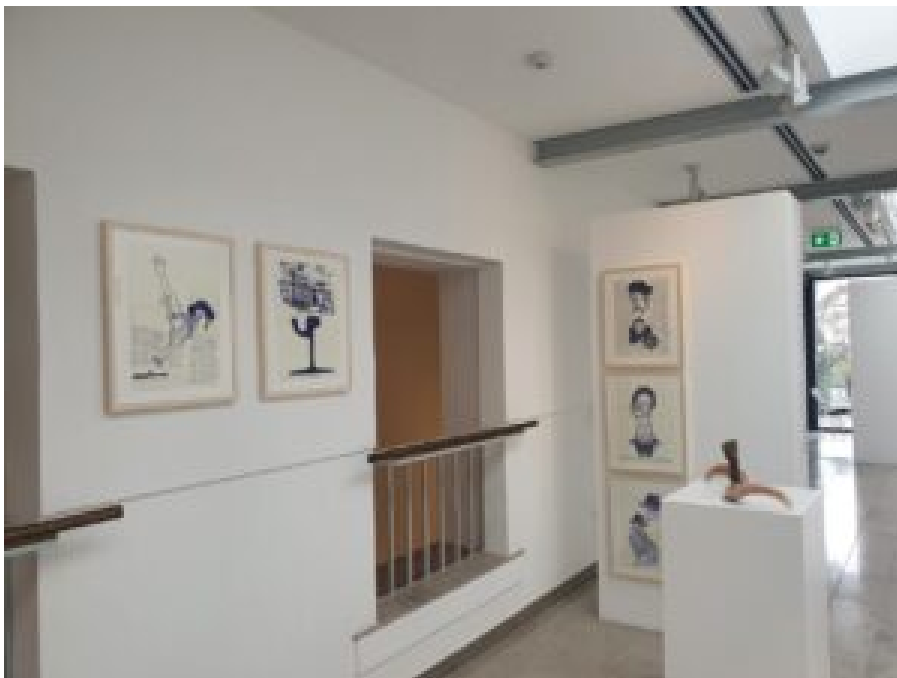
*Copyright © Truthout. May not be reprinted without [permission](#).*

*C.J. Polychroniou is a political scientist/political economist, author, and journalist who has taught and worked in numerous universities and research centers in Europe and the United States. Currently, his main research interests are in U.S. politics and the political economy of the United States, European economic integration, globalization, climate change and environmental economics, and the deconstruction of neoliberalism’s politico-economic project. He is a regular contributor to *Truthout* as well as a member of *Truthout’s* Public Intellectual Project. He has published scores of books and over 1,000 articles which have appeared in a variety of journals, magazines, newspapers and popular news*

websites. Many of his publications have been translated into a multitude of different languages, including Arabic, Chinese, Croatian, Dutch, French, German, Greek, Italian, Japanese, Portuguese, Russian, Spanish and Turkish. His latest books are *Optimism Over Despair: Noam Chomsky On Capitalism, Empire, and Social Change* (2017); *Climate Crisis and the Global Green New Deal: The Political Economy of Saving the Planet* (with Noam Chomsky and Robert Pollin as primary authors, 2020); *The Precipice: Neoliberalism, the Pandemic, and the Urgent Need for Radical Change* (an anthology of interviews with Noam Chomsky, 2021); and *Economics and the Left: Interviews with Progressive Economists* (2021).

---

**Gerhard-Marcks-Haus, Bremen.  
April 2022 - February 2023. Joseph  
Sassoon Semah: How to Explain  
Hare Hunting to a Dead German  
Artist. 4 interventions by the  
artist**



*Gerhard-Marcks-Haus,  
Am Wall 208, Bremen  
April 2022 - February  
2023*

*Joseph Sassoon Semah:  
How to Explain Hare  
Hunting to a Dead  
German Artist  
4 interventions by the  
artist*

*[The usefulness of continuous measurement of the distance between Nostalgia and Melancholia] (September 2021 - June 2022)*

*A critical project concerning post-war artist Joseph Beuys  
Created by Joseph Sassoon Semah, curator Linda Bouws  
© Stichting Metropool Internationale Kunstprojecten*

Joseph Sassoon Semah (b. 1948) has been a regular guest at the Gerhard-Marcks-Haus since 1997. "Guest" is a central term to his art. He is a descendant of the last Chief Rabbi of Baghdad and now lives in Amsterdam. As an Arab Jew, he presents a perspective on the history of modern art that is shaped by his origins. In doing so, he both critiques and complements our thinking. In 2022 and the beginning of 2023 we will present four interventions by this artist.

When Sassoon Semah lived in Berlin in the late 1970s, he became interested in how German artists processed the subject of the Holocaust. This led to research into the work of Joseph Beuys (1921-1986) and Wolf Vostell (1932-1998). Vostell was one of the first artists in Germany to integrate photos of the mass murder into their artworks, while with Beuys it was primarily the "interpreters" who discovered references to it in his works with fat and felt.

Sassoon Semah is also interested in the role-playing of the two artists, for example when Vostell dressed as an Orthodox Jew in order to refer to a culture that had been destroyed in Germany and Europe, or when Beuys showed a Hitler salute, that was then reinterpreted as art. In the group of works shown in the

Gerhard-Marcks-Haus Sassoon Semah refers to famous works of these artists and interprets them through this.

The drawings and sculpture demonstrate how Sassoon Semah reads and develops images.

The cross-section of the railroad track (the logistics of mass murder) can also be interpreted as a Hebrew letter, literally transgressing the common reading. In Jewish iconography, the horns recall Abraham's rejection of human sacrifice. As musical instruments played at important ceremonies in the synagogue, they refer to the deeds of man and sometimes to the redemption of the people of Israel. Sassoon Semah invites museum visitors - most of whom have some Christian background - to immerse themselves in a world of imagery that is unfamiliar to them. By radically reinterpreting European artworks, he turns them into places of exile for a vanished culture.