

Chomsky: US Must Join Global Call For Negotiations As Russia Escalates Actions



Noam Chomsky

The war in Ukraine has taken a dramatic turn for the worse. Putting to rest his own ludicrous claim that the invasion of Ukraine constitutes a “special military operation,” Russian President Vladimir Putin has ordered a military call-up and staged “referendums” — votes to join Russia — have been conducted in the occupied territories. Meanwhile, there are calls for more weapons from Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy and even demands that Russia be removed from the United Nations Security Council. The political and military ramifications of these developments are profoundly disturbing, says Noam Chomsky in an exclusive interview for *Truthout*. They indicate “a plan for a long-drawn-out war of attrition.” Chomsky urges that the U.S. join the rest of the world in calling for negotiations, not because Putin can be trusted, but because negotiations are our best hope for averting disaster. There’s no certainty as to whether this process would result in peace, but as Chomsky says, “There is one and only one way to find out: Try.”

Chomsky is institute professor emeritus in the department of linguistics and philosophy at MIT and laureate professor of linguistics and Agnese Nelms Haury Chair in the Program in Environment and Social Justice at the University of Arizona. One of the world’s most-cited scholars and a public intellectual regarded by millions of people as a national and international treasure, Chomsky has published more than 150 books in linguistics, political and social thought, political economy, media studies, U.S. foreign policy and world affairs. His latest books are

The Secrets of Words (with Andrea Moro; MIT Press, 2022); *The Withdrawal: Iraq, Libya, Afghanistan, and the Fragility of U.S. Power* (with Vijay Prashad; The New Press, 2022); and *The Precipice: Neoliberalism, the Pandemic and the Urgent Need for Social Change* (with C.J. Polychroniou; Haymarket Books, 2021).

C.J. Polychroniou: Seven months after Putin's criminal invasion of Ukraine, the war has reached a turning point. It has come home to Russia with Putin's call for "partial mobilization," and annexation referendums have been staged. What does the bolstering of Russian forces in Ukraine mean for Russia and Ukraine? Are Putin's orders for military call-up an admission that Russia is no longer conducting a "special military operation" in Ukraine?

Noam Chomsky: What has come home to Russia is unclear. There are reports of protests and forced conscription, alongside of appeals to defend Mother Russia from yet another Western invasion, which, like those [going] back to Napoleon, will be crushed. Such appeals might have resonance. Historical memories may be deep. What the outcome will be we can only guess.

From the first day, it was a criminal invasion, never a "special military operation," but the pretense in the Kremlin is still maintained. The mobilization is unlikely to have much effect on the war for some time to come, and what kind of effect is unclear. The failures and incompetence of the Russian military have been a continuing surprise to most well-placed analysts. That may well extend to mobilization, training and supply of equipment. Any meaningful bolstering of Russian forces from these efforts is likely to be well ahead, probably after the winter months. I suppose Russia could move forces from other regions, but whether the leadership has the capability or will to do that, I don't know.

The mobilization and referenda seem to indicate a plan for a long, drawn-out war of attrition. If the mobilization does succeed in shifting the tide of the war, that increases the risks of inducing the West to up the ante with more advanced weapons, perhaps reaching to Russia itself as President Zelenskyy has requested, so far rebuffed. It's not hard to envision scenarios that lead on to catastrophic consequences.

That's just the beginning. The impact of the war goes far beyond: to the millions facing starvation with the curtailing of grain and fertilizer exports, now partially relieved though there is little information about how much; and most important of

all and least discussed, the sharp reversal of the limited international efforts to address the looming climate crisis, a colossal crime against humanity.

While huge resources are being wasted in destruction and the fossil fuel industries are gleefully celebrating the opening up of new fields for exploitation to poison the atmosphere even more, scientists are regularly informing us that their dire warnings have been far too conservative. Thus we have recently learned that the Middle East region, not far away from embattled Ukraine, is heating [almost twice as fast as the rest of the world](#), with an estimated 9°F rise by the end of the century, and that [sea levels](#) in the Eastern Mediterranean are expected to rise a meter by mid-century and up to 2.5 meters by 2100. Of course it doesn't stop there. The consequences are almost impossible to envision.

Meanwhile the region continues to be the global center for heating the world to the brink of survivability and soon beyond. And while Israel and Lebanon may soon be sinking into the sea, they are squabbling about which will have the honor of virtually destroying both of them by producing the fossil fuels at their maritime borders, acts of lunacy duplicated around the world. Escalating the war in Ukraine in the face of such realities reaches levels of imbecility that are hard to capture in words.

Russia hopes to annex four occupied regions of Ukraine with staged referendums. Russia used this tactic before, in 2014, with the Crimean status referendum, although the two situations may be quite different. The voting in the Russian-held Donetsk, Luhansk, Zaporizhzhia and Kherson regions of Ukraine is clearly illegal under international law, but I suppose this hardly matters to a power that has launched a criminal invasion against an independent country. What does Russia hope to achieve with the "referendums"? And what happens next, especially since Russia has had a difficult time so far establishing order in the occupied territories?

The referenda in this case lack any credibility. It was different in the case of the Crimea referendum in 2014. For one thing, the Russian takeover of Crimea didn't happen in a vacuum. For another, there's reason to suppose that Crimeans looked to Russia more than to Ukraine. Though the referenda were not internationally accepted, it was recognized by many that the results were not very surprising. That's not the case with the current referenda.

Like the mobilization, the staged referenda indicate Russian plans for long-time occupation and a war of attrition. Though they clearly pose another impediment for negotiations over the fate of the regions where they take place, they may not completely close the window, as Anatol Lieven [discusses](#).

It's true that international law means as little to Russia as to the other great powers that launch criminal invasions against independent countries, the U.S. well in the lead. With impunity, thanks to its power.

What does Russia hope to achieve? As we've discussed, there are two ways to approach this question.

One way is to explore the depths of Putin's mind, as George W. Bush did when he looked into Putin's eyes, saw his "soul," and pronounced it good. And as many amateur psychologists do today, with supreme confidence.

A second way is to look at what Putin and his associates are saying. As in the case of other leaders, this may or may not reflect their hidden intentions. What matters, however, is that what they say can be a basis for negotiations if there is any interest in bringing the horrors to an end before they get even worse. That's how diplomacy works.

The second way suggests that what Russia hopes to achieve is primarily neutralization of Ukraine and "demilitarization and denazification." The former means cancellation of the programs of the past years to integrate Ukraine de facto within NATO. That approaches President Zelenskyy's proposals as recently as last March for neutralization with security guarantees. The latter would be a topic for discussion in serious negotiations. It might be spelled out as an agreement to refrain from placing heavy weapons aimed at Russia in Ukraine, no further joint military maneuvers, etc. In short, a status rather like Mexico.

Those are topics for negotiations — if, of course, there is a serious interest in ending the conflict.

We might recall that most of the world, including a large majority of Germans and much of the rest of Europe, is calling for negotiations now, while the U.S. insists that priority must be to severely weaken Russia, hence no negotiations.

There are other issues to be settled, primarily Crimea and the Donbass region. An

optimal solution would be internationally sponsored referenda on the various options that have been proposed. That is presumably not possible now, but a serious effort on negotiations might improve the prospects. Recall that we have [good evidence](#) that as recently as last April there were serious Ukraine-Russia negotiations under Turkish auspices and that the U.S.-U.K. opposed them.

As to what happens next, that will depend on choices made by those involved, primarily Ukraine and Russia of course, but we can hardly pretend to be merely observers from afar. See again Lieven's commentary, just cited.

Lieven is not the only informed analyst who regards peaceful diplomatic settlement as a diminishing but still live option. Another is [John Quigley](#), who has been deeply involved in these issues since the early '90s, when he was the U.S. State Department representative in the OSCE [Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe] efforts to resolve contested issues in Ukraine after the collapse of the USSR, particularly the status of Crimea and Donbass, his special concern. We have [already discussed](#) some of his current thinking, as of June 2022.

Quigley recognizes that though negotiations are currently stalled, "At some point, however, hopefully sooner than later, there will be a negotiated settlement that will need to deal with the Donbas region in Eastern Ukraine" as well as Crimea. On Crimea, he recommends pursuing Zelenskyy's suggestion that perhaps "the two sides could arrange a process of discussion about Crimea, a process that he said could last 15 years." On Donbass, Quigley writes that "if Ukraine does anything even close to implementing the Minsk agreement [the 2015 Ukraine-Russia agreement under French-German sponsorship which called for a degree of autonomy for Donbass within a federal Ukraine], Russia could say that the aim of its invasion has been accomplished," and a settlement could be reached.

Only a few days ago, French President Emmanuel Macron, who has been more closely involved in current negotiation efforts than any other figure, expressed somewhat similar views [on CNN](#). In his opinion, at the time of Zelenskyy's election in 2019, a settlement favorable to Ukraine could have been reached along the lines of the Minsk agreement. He also feels that options for diplomacy remain open.

Whether such assessments are accurate, we do not know. There is one and only one way to find out: Try. That won't happen, Quigley concludes, if "the U.S. goal

is less to force Russia out of Ukraine than to fight Russia to the last Ukrainian” — a “reasonable” assessment he reluctantly comments.

That is the one factor in the mix that we can hope to influence, something that cannot be emphasized too strongly.

President Zelenskyy urged the United Nations (UN) to punish Russia for its invasion of Ukraine by stripping it of its security council veto vote. Just a few days ago, the EU president [made similar calls](#). While, technically speaking, a country can be expelled from the UN for “persistent violation” of the principles of the Charter, isn’t this a misguided proposal? Isn’t it also true that the argument that Russia may not even be a member of the UN is invalid on account of the fact that the continuation of the USSR’s membership by the Russian Federation, which Ukraine itself accepted in 1991, is in line with long established procedures within the UN?

One can easily appreciate President Zelenskyy’s sentiments, but whatever the technicalities may be, the very fact that the proposal is being seriously considered is enlightening. Did anyone consider punishing the U.S. in this manner when it invaded Iraq, to take only one example of its “persistent violation” of the core principle of the Charter that bars “the threat or use of force” in international affairs (with exceptions irrelevant here)? These violations that are not just persistent but extremely serious, matters we need not review even though they are virtually unspeakable in the U.S. mainstream.

We should, I think, keep our minds focused on what should be the central issue for us: U.S. policy. Should we accept the official U.S. position of fighting the war to severely weaken Russia, precluding diplomatic settlement? Or should we press the U.S. government to join most of the world, including Germans and other Europeans, in seeking a way to end the horrors before they bring further tragedy, not only to Ukraine but also far beyond?

This interview has been lightly edited for clarity.

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Chomsky: The US And Israel Are Standing In The Way Of Iran Nuclear Agreement



Noam Chomsky

During the first few decades of the post-war era, the U.S. considered Iran one of its closest geostrategic allies, especially after the CIA overthrew Iran's democratically elected government in 1953 and restored Mohammad Reza Pahlavi as Iran's leader. However, since the 1979 revolution, which abolished the monarchy and established an Islamic republic, the U.S. and Iran have been mortal enemies, largely due to the role that Israel occupies in the region. In this context, during the last couple of decades, the thorniest issue in the U.S.-Iran relationship has been Tehran's nuclear program, which, Iran says, is focused on energy, not weapons. Israel has been adamantly opposed to the program, even though it is accepted beyond dispute that Israel itself is a nuclear power. In 2015, Iran and several other countries, including the United States, reached the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action agreement, according to which Iran was willing to dismantle much of its nuclear program and open its facilities to nuclear inspections in exchange for billions of dollars of relief support. However, the Trump administration withdrew U.S. support from the agreement — and Israel continued its policy of sabotage and assassination of scientists.

Current talks between Washington and Tehran's rulers to restore the 2015 nuclear agreement have been stalled, and there is little hope that progress will be made any time soon. Naturally, the U.S. places the blame on Tehran. However, U.S. propaganda grossly distorts the reality of the situation, Noam Chomsky points out in this exclusive interview for *Truthout*. The barriers to diplomacy are none other than Israel and the United States, says Chomsky.

C.J. Polychroniou: Noam, the U.S. and Iran are at odds with each other, having difficulty even talking to each other. Why do they hate each other so much, and how much of a role does Israel's shadow play in this continuous drama?

Noam Chomsky: At the risk of sounding like a broken record, I'd like to say a few words, once again, on why I feel that the entire framework in which this issue is discussed is seriously distorted — yet another tribute to the enormous power of the U.S. propaganda system.

The U.S. government has been telling us for years that Iranian nuclear programs are one of the gravest threats to world peace. Israeli authorities have made it clear that they will not tolerate this danger. The U.S. and Israel have acted violently to overcome this grave threat: cyberwar and sabotage (which the Pentagon regards as aggression that merits violence in self-defense), numerous

assassinations of Iranian scientists, constant threats of use of force (“all options are open”) in violation of international law (and if anyone were to care, the U.S. Constitution).

Evidently, it is regarded as a most serious issue. If so, we surely want to see whether there is some way to lay it to rest. There is: Establish a nuclear weapons-free zone (NWFZ) in the Middle East, with inspections — which, we know, can work very well. Even U.S. intelligence agrees that before the U.S. dismantled the joint agreement on nuclear weapons (JCPOA), international inspections of Iran’s nuclear program were successful.

That would solve the alleged problem of Iranian nuclear programs, ending the serious threat of war. What then is the barrier?

Not the Arab states, which have been actively demanding this for decades. Not Iran, which supports the measure. Not the Global South — G-77, 134 “developing nations,” most of the world — which strongly supports it. Not Europe, which has posed no objections.

The barrier is the usual two outliers: the U.S. and Israel.

There are various pretexts, which we may ignore. The reasons are known to all: The U.S. will not allow the enormous Israeli nuclear arsenal, the only one in the region, to be subject to international inspection.

In fact, the U.S. does not officially recognize that Israel has nuclear weapons, though of course it is not in doubt. The reason, presumably, is that to do so would invoke U.S. law, which, arguably, would render the massive U.S. aid flow to Israel illegal — a door that few want to open.

All of this is virtually undiscussable in the U.S., outside of arms control circles. On rare occasions, the major media have come close to bringing up the forbidden topic. A year ago, *New York Times* editors proposed [“One Way Forward on Iran: A Nuclear-Weapons-Free Persian Gulf.”](#)

Note: Persian Gulf, not Middle East. The reason, the editors explain, is that Israel’s nuclear weapons are “unacknowledged and nonnegotiable.” Filling in the gaps, they are unacknowledged by the U.S. and are nonnegotiable by U.S. fiat.

In brief, there is a straightforward approach to addressing this grave threat to

world peace, but it is blocked by the global hegemon, whose power is so enormous that the topic can barely even be discussed. Rather, we must adopt the framework imposed by U.S. power and keep to the deliberations over renewing some kind of agreement over Iranian nuclear weapons.

Another matter that must be sidelined, though it is so obvious that even the grandest propaganda system cannot entirely efface it, is that the current crisis arose when the U.S. unilaterally destroyed the JCPOA, over the strenuous objections of all other signers and the UN Security Council, which had endorsed it unanimously. The U.S. then imposed harsh sanctions on Iran to punish it for the U.S. dismantling of the agreement. Again, other signers strenuously objected, but they obeyed: The threat of U.S. retribution is too awesome, as in many other cases; notoriously the crushing Cuba sanctions, opposed by the whole world apart from the two usual outliers, but obediently observed.

Again, I apologize for continually reiterating all of this. It must, however, be understood. Having made that gesture, let's accept reality, subordinating ourselves to the mighty U.S. propaganda system, and keep to the permitted framework of discussion.

Turning finally to the question, first, Israel's role is more than shadow play. Israel is right at the center of the story, both in its constant violent attacks on Iran and in the "unacknowledged" nuclear arsenal that blocks the path to diplomatic settlement, thanks to its superpower protector.

On mutual hate, we should remember that we are talking about governments. The U.S. and Iranian governments were close allies from 1953, when the U.S. overthrew the parliamentary government of Iran and reinstalled the Shah's dictatorship, until 1979, when a popular uprising overthrew the Shah and Iran switched from favored friend to reviled enemy.

Iraq then invaded Iran and the incoming Reagan administration turned to lavish support for its friend Saddam. Iran suffered huge casualties, many from chemical weapons while the Reaganites looked away and even tried to shift responsibility to Iran for Saddam's murderous chemical war against Iraqi Kurds. Finally, direct U.S. intervention swung the war in Iraq's favor. After the war, President Bush Sr. invited Iraqi nuclear engineers to the U.S. for advanced training in weapons production, a serious threat to Iran of course. And the U.S. imposed harsh

sanctions on Iran. So, the story continues.

U.S. charges against Iran are too familiar to need reviewing.

Unsurprisingly, nuclear talks between the U.S. and Iran have stalled again and it is unlikely that there will be a deal any time soon — if at all — to restore their 2015 nuclear deal. First, what do you see as the stumbling blocks in these talks? And didn't Iran already make a huge concession when it agreed to the 2015 nuclear agreement without requiring that Israel does away with its own arsenal of nuclear weapons?

Negotiations, through European intermediaries, seem to have been put on hold until after the U.S. November elections, at least. There are outstanding disagreements on a number of issues. The most important, for now, are reported to be Iranian foot-dragging on inspection of traces of uranium that bear on whether Iran had an undeclared weapons program before 2003. In contrast, Israeli nuclear weapons programs are nonnegotiable by U.S. fiat, not even subject to inspection.

Iran's relationship with Russia has been further strengthened since the start of the Ukraine war. Do such moves on the part of Tehran's rulers indicate the possibility of a complete break from the West?

It's hard to see how the break should go much farther. Iran's closer relations with Russia are part of a general global realignment, its contours unclear, involving the major Asian states and Russia-China links.

How likely is it that Israel will attack Iran's nuclear facilities?

Israel has repeatedly attacked these facilities with sabotage and assassination. It is likely to proceed with further efforts to prevent Iran from gaining the capability to produce nuclear weapons — which many countries have.

Iranian leaders have consistently claimed that they have no intention of producing nuclear weapons. I have no idea what their strategic thinking might be. Perhaps they are thinking along the lines of U.S. nuclear doctrine: that “nuclear weapons must always be available, at the ready, because they ‘cast a shadow over any crisis or conflict’” (*Essentials of Post-Cold War Deterrence*, STRATCOM 1995). As Daniel Ellsberg has emphasized, in that respect nuclear weapons are constantly

used to enable other aggressive actions with impunity.

Whatever the motives, for Iran or any other state, these weapons must be eliminated from the Earth. NWFZs are a step in this direction. A more far-reaching step is the UN Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW), now in force though without the participation of the nuclear states. Iran was active in negotiation of the TPNW and was one of 122 states that voted in favor its adoption, though it has not yet signed it. These are concerns that should be uppermost in our minds, for all states, for the security of all of life on Earth.

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Noam Chomsky: The War In Ukraine Has Entered A New Phase



Noam Chomsky

Seven months on, the war in Ukraine has entered a new phase. Ukrainian forces are running a counteroffensive in the east and south regions of the country while Russia is still bent on annexation plans. Meanwhile, the West, with the U.S. at the forefront, continues with its [explicitly stated strategy](#) of weakening Russia to the point of regime collapse, thereby leaving no room for negotiations. All these developments indicate that peace remains distant in Ukraine and that the war may in fact be poised to become even more violent. Worse, argues Noam Chomsky below in an exclusive interview for *Truthout*, congressional hawks are increasing the risk of terminal war with the Taiwan Policy Act of 2022, which was just recently approved by the Senate Foreign Relations Committee and appears to be modeled on programs from prior to the Russian attack that were turning Ukraine into a de facto NATO member.

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Urgent Need for Social Change (with C. J. Polychroniou; Haymarket Books, 2021).

C.J. Polychroniou: Noam, after seven months of conflict, Russia and Ukraine find themselves in a situation that is hard to get out of. Russia is suffering great losses, and a recent Ukrainian counteroffensive has recaptured dozens of towns and villages in the northeast of the country. Under these circumstances, it seems that neither side is eager to pursue a peace settlement. Firstly, are you surprised by Russia's problems on the battlefield, and, secondly, do you agree with the statement made recently by the minister in charge of the Hungarian Prime Minister's Office that Moscow still has a major advantage over Kyiv and that it can declare victory whenever it wants?

Noam Chomsky: First, let me make it clear that I have nothing original to say about the military situation, and have no expert knowledge in this area. What I know is what's reported, almost entirely from Western sources.

The general picture is that Russia has suffered a devastating defeat, demonstrating the utter incompetence of the Russian military and the remarkable capacities of the Ukrainian army provided with advanced U.S. armaments and detailed intelligence information about the disposition of Russian forces, a tribute to the courage of the Ukrainian fighters and to the intensive U.S. training, organization and supply of the Ukrainian army for almost a decade.

There's plenty of evidence to support this interpretation, which is close to exceptionless apart from detail. A useful rule of thumb whenever there is virtual unanimity on complex and murky issues is to ask whether something is perhaps omitted. Keeping to mainstream Western sources, we can indeed find more that perhaps merits attention.

Reuters [reports](#) a "western official" whose assessment is that:

'There's an ongoing debate about the nature of the Russian drawdown, however it's likely that in strict military terms, this was a withdrawal, ordered and sanctioned by the general staff, rather than an outright collapse.... Obviously, it looks really dramatic. It's a vast area of land. But we have to factor in the Russians have made some good decisions in terms of shortening their lines and making them more defensible, and sacrificing territory in order to do so.'

There are varying interpretations of the equipment losses in the Russian flight/withdrawal. There is no need to review the familiar picture. A [more nuanced](#)

[version](#) is given by *Washington Post* journalists on the scene, who report scattered and ambiguous evidence. They also review online video and satellite imagery indicating that the destroyed and abandoned military vehicles may have been at an equipment hub. Examining the videos, Lt. Gen. Ben Hodges, former commander of U.S. Army Europe, concludes that the destruction was mostly at a staging area where “Russian forces stopped for fuel or were waiting for a mission when they fled,” the total amounting to a tank company that typically has about 10 or 11 tanks.

As one expects in a war zone, there is ample ambiguity, but little doubt that it was a major victory for Ukraine and its U.S.-NATO backers. I don’t think that Putin could simply “declare victory” after this humiliating setback, as the Hungarian prime minister suggests. On the prospects for a peace settlement, so little is reported or discussed that there is little to say.

Little, but not nothing. In the [current issue of *Foreign Affairs*](#), the major establishment journal, Fiona Hill and Angela Stent — highly regarded policy analysts with close government connections — report that:

‘According to multiple former senior US officials we spoke with, in April 2022, Russian and Ukrainian negotiators appeared to have tentatively agreed on the outlines of a negotiated interim settlement. The terms of that settlement would have been for Russia to withdraw to the positions it held before launching the invasion on February 24. In exchange, Ukraine would promise not to seek NATO membership and instead receive security guarantees from a number of countries.’

On dubious evidence, Hill and Stent blame the failure of these efforts on the Russians, but do not mention that British Prime Minister Boris Johnson at once flew to Kyiv with the message that Ukraine’s Western backers would not support the diplomatic initiative, followed by U.S. Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin, who [reiterated](#) the official U.S. position that Washington’s goal in the war is to “weaken” Russia, meaning that negotiations are off the table.

Whether such initiatives continue, we do not know. If they do, they would not lack popular support, not only in the Global South but even in Europe, where [“77 percent of Germans believe that the West should initiate negotiations to end the Ukraine war.”](#) Surprisingly, more than half of Slovaks are reported to [favor a Russian victory](#).

Suppose that negotiations fail or are not even contemplated. What then? The general expert consensus seems to be that there will be a protracted war, with all of its tragic consequences. General Austin and other U.S. officials have held that Ukraine can drive Russia out of all of Ukraine, presumably including Crimea. Suppose the prospect arises.

Then follows the crucial question: Will Putin pack up his bags and slink away silently to obscurity or worse? Or will he use the conventional weapons that all agree he has to escalate the attack on Ukraine? The U.S. is gambling on the former but is not unaware of the nature of this gamble with the lives of Ukrainians, and well beyond. The *New York Times* [reports](#) that:

‘Some American officials express concern that the most dangerous moments are yet to come, even as Mr. Putin has avoided escalating the war in ways that have, at times, baffled Western officials. He has made only limited attempts to destroy critical infrastructure or to target Ukrainian government buildings. He has not attacked the supply hubs outside Ukraine. While he has directed low-level cyberattacks against Ukrainian targets every week, they have been relatively unsophisticated, especially when compared to capabilities that Russia has shown it has, including in the SolarWinds attack on American government and commercial systems that was discovered just before Mr. Biden took office.’

The same report cites Putin’s warning that, “If the situation continues to develop in this way — referring to U.S. participation in the recent Ukrainian counter-offensive — the answer will be more serious.” To illustrate, Putin “described recent Russian cruise missile attacks against Ukrainian infrastructure as ‘warning strikes.’”

The Ukrainian military understands the warning very well. Ukrainian Commander-in-Chief Gen. Valery Zaluzhny had [written](#) that Russian cruise missiles “could strike across the country with ‘impunity,’” adding that “limited nuclear war cannot be ruled out.”

As we all know, the escalation ladder from limited to terminal nuclear war is all too easy to climb.

To put it simply, the U.S. position that the war must continue to severely weaken Russia, blocking negotiations, is based on a quite remarkable assumption: that facing defeat, Putin will pack his bags and slink away to a bitter fate. He will not

do what he easily can: strike across Ukraine with impunity using Russia's conventional weapons, destroying critical infrastructure and Ukrainian government buildings, attacking the supply hubs outside Ukraine, moving on to sophisticated cyberattacks against Ukrainian targets. All of this is easily within Russia's conventional capacity, as U.S. government and the Ukrainian military command acknowledge — with the possibility of escalation to nuclear war in the not remote background.

The assumption is worth contemplating. It is too quickly evaded.

Also worth contemplating is the fact that "Mr. Putin has avoided escalating the war in ways that have, at times, baffled Western officials." The same puzzlement has been expressed before. The U.S. and U.K. were baffled by the Russian offensive, severely underestimating its scale from the start. "We assumed they would invade a country the way we would have invaded a country," [as one British official put it](#).

When the U.S.-U.K. invade a country, they go for the jugular, destroying communications, transportation, energy systems, anything needed to keep the country going. To the surprise of the U.S.-U.K. planners, Putin didn't do that. The press [reports](#) that, "In Kyiv and much of the western part of the country, prewar life has largely returned for civilians. People eat in restaurants, drink in bars, dance and enjoy lazy summer days in parks."

Far from the U.S.-U.K. style of war.

Western military analysts offer reasons why "[Putin's Bombers Could Devastate Ukraine But He's Holding Back](#)." Whatever the reasons, the fact remains.

The gamble with the lives of Ukrainians, and far beyond, remains as well, eliciting little attention. Something else that merits contemplation.

It's also useful finally to reiterate a familiar word of warning. Propaganda never ceases and rises to peaks of intensity at moments of crisis. Triumphant claims are always worth inspection. To take one example, much has been made of India's alleged break with Russia over the war, based on a few words by Prime Minister Modi at a Samarkand meeting with Putin. The [quoted words](#) are "I know that today's era is not of war." Omitted is that Modi went on to stress that, "The relationship between India and Russia has deepened manifold. We also value this

relationship because we have been such friends who have been with each other every moment for the last several decades and the whole world also knows how Russia's relationship with India has been and how India's relationship with Russia has been and therefore the world also knows that it is an unbreakable friendship."

The Ukrainian government is pursuing backroom negotiations for the delivery of advanced American-made weapons, according to some reports. In addition, President Zelenskyy and his government have put forward a document of long-term security guarantees from the West which would link Ukraine's future security directly to the presence of NATO forces in the country. Unexpectedly enough, Moscow immediately shut down the proposal and the vice president of the Russian Security Council called it "a prologue to the third world war." Is the so-called Kyiv Security Treaty a path toward a peace settlement or a sure way not only to keep the conflict going on indefinitely but also to escalate it to a higher level?

It is hard to imagine that any Russian government would tolerate NATO forces in Ukraine. That has been understood for 30 years by high-level U.S. officials who have any knowledge of the region, and it's even more unlikely now. What Russia might tolerate is a weakened version of this demand: long-term security guarantees with what's called in diplomacy "strategic ambiguity," coupled with termination of the plans for NATO membership for Ukraine. In the past, Zelenskyy has suggested something like that. Whether that remains an option, we of course cannot know until an effort is undertaken to reach a diplomatic settlement, as apparently it was by Ukraine and Russia as recently as last April.

The Biden administration, the Pentagon particularly, has been careful not to escalate its participation in the war so rapidly as to elicit the Russian reaction that hasn't occurred, baffling Washington and London. Congress is another matter. It seems hell-bent on hurtling to disaster. Calls for no-fly zones and other very dangerous initiatives have been blocked by the Pentagon, but plenty of saber-rattling continues. That extends to China, or to keep to the rules, what we should call the "Indo-Pacific area of the North Atlantic" in the light of the decisions at the recent NATO summit.

Nancy Pelosi's visit to Taiwan was reckless enough, but congressional hawks, a bipartisan collective, are determined to raise the possibility of terminal nuclear war even higher.

A major [step in this direction](#) was taken on September 14, when the Senate Foreign Relations Committee approved the [Taiwan Policy Act of 2022](#), cosponsored by Committee Chairman Robert Menendez (D-NJ) and Lindsey Graham (R-SC).

The act calls for Taiwan to be designated as a “major non-NATO ally.” Taiwan is to be provided with \$4.5 billion in security assistance over the next four years, part of establishing “a comprehensive training program with the Government of Taiwan.” The act also seeks “more interoperability between the US and Taiwanese militaries [along with] joint US-Taiwan contingency tabletop exercises, war games and what the bill calls ‘robust, operationally relevant, or full-scale’ military exercises,” *Asia Times* reports.

Furthermore, the act declares U.S. government policy to be “to provide the people of Taiwan with de facto diplomatic treatment equivalent to foreign countries, nations, states, governments, or similar entities” and to remove “any undue restrictions” on the ability of U.S. officials at any level “to interact directly and routinely with their counterparts in the Government of Taiwan.”

Former Australian defense official Mike Scrafton [observes](#) that “The Chinese cannot but regard this as a provocative de facto recognition of Taiwan’s independence.” Under international law, which regards Taiwan as part of China, it is “a patent infringement of China’s sovereignty and a fundamental weakening of the one-China policy.” Once again, the U.S. “rules-based order,” in defiance of international law, is seen to be nothing other “than preservation of US hegemony.” If passed, “The Act would be a game-changer and reflects the American preparedness to engage in a war that would be disastrous for the region and the world.” It should lead Australia to rethink its commitment to the U.S.-dominated regional system.

The wording of the act seems to be modelled on the programs prior to the Russian invasion that were turning Ukraine into a “de facto NATO member,” in the words of the U.S. military, matters we have discussed elsewhere.

The Biden administration opposes the measure, as it did Pelosi’s action. Even more than that exercise in self-promotion, the Menendez-Graham measure would be a serious blow to the “strategic ambiguity” of the One-China policy that has kept the peace in a volatile region for half a century.

The European Union is pressuring China and India to support the idea of a price cap on Russian oil. Russia, of course, has said that it will not sell oil to countries that impose a price limit, so the question here is twofold: first, how likely is it that China and India will go along with the EU's suggestion, especially since both countries have not only increased their Russian oil purchases since Moscow's invasion of Ukraine but are buying at discounted prices, and, second, what would be the political ramifications in the event that they succumbed to pressure and did go along?

All of this is part of the reconfiguration of global order that has been going on for some time and was spurred onward by Putin's criminal aggression. A side consequence was to deliver Europe into Washington's hands. This most welcome gift was provided free of charge by Vladimir Putin when he [rejected French President Macron's last-minute efforts](#) to avert an invasion, at the end with undisguised contempt, a major contribution to Washington's Atlanticist project of global hegemony.

The core issue at stake, I think, is unipolarity-multipolarity. Since the U.S. took over the reins from Britain 80 years ago, reaching far beyond Britain's dreams, it has sought a unipolar world, and to a substantial extent it has realized that goal, in ways we need not review. There has always been resistance.

In many ways the most significant, and least discussed, form of resistance has been the effort of former colonies to find a place in the international order: UNCTAD, the New International Economic Order, the New International Information Order, and many other initiatives. These were crushed by imperial power, sometimes reaching the level of assassination (the very important case of Patrice Lumumba) if other means did not suffice. Some elements survive, like BRICS [the economic alliance of Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa]. Most significantly in the modern global scene, rising China leads the effort to develop a multipolar order.

Right now, the long-term conflict is manifested in many concrete ways. One is the intense U.S. effort to impede China's technological development and to "encircle" it with a ring of heavily armed U.S. satellites. Another is the NATO-based U.S.-run Atlanticist project, now given a shot in the arm by Putin's criminality, and recently extended formally to the Indo-Pacific region. The major competing element is China's huge development and investment project, the Belt and Road

initiative backed by the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, encompassing Central Asia and by now reaching well beyond. At an ideological level, the confrontation sets the UN-based international order against the rules-based international order (with the U.S. setting the rules). The latter is adopted with little controversy or even notice in the U.S.

The important specific issues raised in the question find their place within this broader framework. Their resolution depends on how the broad process of reorganization of the international order develops. A highly uncertain matter, one of great portent.

Not in the distant background is a more fundamental matter, which cannot be put aside. Unless the great powers find ways to accommodate to confront the most important threats that have arisen in human history — environmental destruction and nuclear war — nothing else will matter.

And time is short.

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Renske Visser - En zijn ogen kan ik lezen. Veertien negentiende-eeuwse brieven uit Parijs, Den Haag en Domburg 1891-1894



Hôtel du Louvre - Parijs

Donderdag, 17 ix 1891

Lieve tante Martha,

Omdat u mij vroeg u in kennis te stellen van onze wederwaardigheden in Parijs, schrijf ik u deze brief. Thomas is na onze aankomst in het hotel gaan rusten. Ik kan de rust niet vinden, het lukt me zelfs niet een boek ter hand te nemen. Daarom heb ik besloten u te schrijven.

U weet hoe zeer ik aarzelde om samen met Thomas deze treinreis te maken. Omdat hij op zijn standpunt bleef staan, heb ik mijn twijfel laten varen. Na vandaag nemen mijn zorgen om zijn gezondheid toe. Toch wil ik met hem blijven

hopen dat het een goed besluit is geweest van de geneesheer van het Johannes de Deo om voor Thomas een afspraak te maken met die Franse neuroanatom. Thomas vestigt al zijn hoop op professor Charcot. Morgen bezoeken we het Hôpital de la Salpêtrière. Ik hoop dat deze voor hem zo afmattende reis niet vergeefs is geweest.

Toen de trein hedenmiddag het Gare du Nord binnenreed, zag ik hoe moeizaam Thomas zich oprichtte na de langdurige zit. Zijn ledematen waren zo verstijfd dat het leek of hij het dubbele aantal jaren van zijn leeftijd telde. Zijn stem klonk dof van vermoeidheid toen hij een kruier wenkte. Ondanks de wandelstok die hij onlangs op het Noordeinde gekocht heeft, liep hij alsof hij te veel alcohol had genuttigd.

Het was een voorrecht dat het rijtuig van het Hôtel du Louvre voor het station op ons wachtte. Echter, bij het instappen deed er zich een incident voor waardoor ik hevig ontsteld raakte. De koetsier vroeg mij of hij mijn vader kon assisteren. Om te voorkomen dat Thomas dit hoorde, siste ik de man toe: 'Mon mari!' Vanzelfsprekend verontschuldigde hij zich, maar het leed was reeds geschied. Of Thomas het verstaan heeft? Hij was zwijgzaam gedurende de rit. Al duurde het geruime tijd voor ik kalmeerde, ik hield mijn mond om hem niet nodeloos te kwetsen. Op de hotelkamer ging hij zonder zich uit te kleden op bed liggen, terstond viel hij in een diepe slaap. Nadat ik hem toegedekt had, heb ik zo geruisloos mogelijk de koffers uitgepakt.

Nu zit ik bij het venster met uitzicht op de Rue Saint-Honoré en de Comédie Française. Als ik naar rechts kijk, zie ik de Place Royal waar het een komen en gaan is van mensen tussen het Palais en het Louvre. Deze avond zullen we ons tussen hen voegen als we naar de Opéra gaan. De Opéra zal voor mij de beste afleiding zijn om de zorgen om Thomas te vergeten. Ik hoop maar dat hij niet te laat wakker wordt.

Lieve tante, het hotel en onze ruime hoekkamer op de eerste etage zijn werkelijk magnifiek. Voor Thomas is het ideaal dat er een lift aanwezig is. Ik dank u en oom George dat u ons dit hotel heeft aanbevolen. Ik kan hier beslist een paar maanden verblijven. Als Thomas in het hospitaal verpleegd wordt, hoop ik Parijs te bezoeken. Het is alweer zo lang geleden dat wij hier geweest zijn. Het is werkelijk fameus dat het Louvre op kuieraafstand ligt. Weet u dat de Jardin du Luxembourg opengesteld is voor publiek? Ik verheug me erop daarheen te gaan. Terwijl ik dit

neerschrijf, voel ik me beschaamd dat ik me zo uitdruk, maar zegt oom George niet altijd dat wij het aangename met het nuttige moeten verenigen?

Thomas zal aanstonds wakker worden. Daarom groet ik u. Adieu, lieve tante, ik hoop dat het u en oom George zeer goed mag blijven gaan, evenals onze geliefde dochter Isabelle. Kust u ons kleine meisje van ons?

Uw liefhebbende nicht,
Laura

—
Renske Visser - En zijn ogen kan ik lezen. Veertien negentiende-eeuwse brieven uit Parijs, Den Haag en Domburg 1891-1894

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Door het kopen van *En zijn ogen kan ik lezen* draagt u bij aan de voortgang van RespijtHuis HouseMartin, een kleinschalig logeerhuis dat met inzet van vrijwilligers uit verschillende culturen een warm nest wil bieden aan de meest kwetsbaren in onze samenleving die geen plek hebben om het hoofd neer te leggen bij ziekte.

Website: <https://respijthuishousemartin.com>



Jean-Martin Charcot

Jean-Martin Charcot (Parijs, 29 november 1825 – Morvan, 16 augustus 1893) was een Franse arts die wordt beschouwd als een van de grondleggers van de neurologie.

Na aan de Sorbonne gepromoveerd te zijn met als specialisme gewrichtsreuma, ging hij werken als ziekenhuisarts. Na enige jaren keerde hij terug naar Parijs, waar hij werd benoemd tot hoogleraar in de pathologische anatomie. Hij verrichtte zeer veel onderzoek naar anatomie en de pathologie van het zenuwstelsel en ontdekte de ziekte amyotrofe laterale sclerose (ALS). Ook toonde hij aan dat multiple sclerose en de ziekte van Parkinson twee verschillende ziekten waren. De ziekte van Charcot-Marie-Tooth, een perifere zenuwziekte is naar hem genoemd samen met Pierre Marie (1853-1940) en Howard H. Tooth (1856-1926). In 1882 werd speciaal voor Charcot de eerste leerstoel voor ziekten aan het zenuwstelsel ingesteld aan het Hôpital de la Salpêtrière (Parijs).

Als dank en erkenning voor zijn werk werd hij in 1883 benoemd tot lid van de *Académie de médecine* en de *Académie des sciences*.

In de latere jaren van zijn carrière deed hij ook onderzoek naar de verschijnselen van histerie, waarvoor hij onder andere hypnose gebruikte. Ook na zijn overlijden was Charcot van invloed op de psychiatrie en psychoanalyse. Veel van Charcots kennis werd namelijk overgenomen door zijn leerling/student Sigmund Freud. Ook Alfred Binet en Georges Gilles de la Tourette studeerden onder Charcot.

Bron: nl.wikipedia.org

Foto

Ze aarzelt. Tussen droef en oneindig is haar blik.

‘U mag wel even bij me komen zitten’, zeg ik.

De overige tafeltjes op het terras zijn bezet. Deels met mensen, deels met bordjes ‘gereserveerd’.

Haar nagels zijn keurig zwart gelakt. Het haar zwart geverfd.

Ze bestelt een rosé.

‘Mijn zusje wil nog een hondje nemen. Ik heb gezegd dat moet je maar niet meer doen. Je bent nu 83.’

Ze knikt vriendelijk naar het meisje dat de rosé brengt.

‘We waren met z’n drieën. Maar mijn broertje is 63 jaar geleden verongelukt. Had net een nieuwe fiets.’

Ze staart naar nergens.

‘Zijn foto staat nog altijd bij mij op het dressoir. Het was een lieve, mooie jongen.’

Noam Chomsky & Robert Pollin: Humanity’s Fate Isn’t Sealed — If We Act Now



Noam Chomsky

We live in extraordinarily dangerous times. Climate breakdown is upon us, yet nation-states and their leaders continue to pursue policies based on “national security” and the pursuit of geopolitical objectives. The transition to a clean and sustainable global energy landscape is hampered both by powerful interests linked to the fossil fuel economy and lack of international cooperation. In fact, the war in Ukraine, which runs on fossil fuels, is not only delaying climate action but has increased reliance on the very energy sources that drive global warming and poison the planet. Indeed, the war has been a godsend to the fossil fuel industry. “Drill, baby, drill” is back with a vengeance, and oil and gas companies are reaping unprecedented profits as families everywhere are struggling with skyrocketing energy costs.

To be sure, “savage capitalism,” as Noam Chomsky powerfully remarks in this exclusive joint interview with economist Robert Pollin, is unleashed today even more destructively than it has in the past. Yet, as Pollin so astutely points out, there are ways to tame global warming and make a successful transition to a sustainable future based on clean energy systems (which do not include nuclear power plants or so-called negative emission technologies). In fact, Chomsky and Pollin agree that, in large part, it is political will that stands in the way of securing the future of humanity and the planet. As Chomsky notes, the task of political education in the age of global warming is analogous to the task of philosophy as described by Ludwig Wittgenstein: “to show the fly the way out of the fly-bottle.”



Robert Pollin

Noam Chomsky is institute professor emeritus in the department of linguistics

and philosophy at MIT and laureate professor of linguistics and Agnese Nelms Haury Chair in the Program in Environmental and Social Justice at the University of Arizona. One of the world's most cited scholars in modern history and a critical public intellectual regarded by millions of people as a national and international treasure, Chomsky has published more than 150 books in linguistics, political and social thought, political economy, media studies, U.S. foreign policy and world affairs, and climate change.

Robert Pollin is distinguished professor of economics and co-director of the Political Economy Research Institute (PERI) at the University of Massachusetts-Amherst. One of the world's leading progressive economists, Pollin has published scores of books and academic articles on jobs and macroeconomics, labor markets, wages, and poverty, environmental and energy economics. He was selected by *Foreign Policy Magazine* as one of the "100 Leading Global Thinkers for 2013." Chomsky and Pollin are co-authors of *Climate Crisis and the Global Green New Deal: The Political Economy of Saving the Planet* (2020).

C. J. Polychroniou: Noam, the systemic impacts of the war in Ukraine are enormous and they include economic shocks, food and energy security, geopolitical dimensions, and climate change. With regard to the latter, while it is difficult to make an accurate estimate of the climate impact of the war in Ukraine, it is crystal clear that it hinders current efforts to curb global warming and may even alter long-term strategy on climate action and action plan. How exactly are the war in Ukraine and the climate crisis connected, and why are governments doubling down on coal, oil and gas instead of doubling down on the clean energy transition?

Noam Chomsky: An independent observer looking at the world today might well conclude that it is being run by the fossil fuel and military industries, or by lunatics. Or both.

The scientific literature is harrowing, regularly showing that earlier dire warnings were too conservative and that we are careening towards disaster at a frightening pace. Even without reading the literature, anyone with eyes open can see that nature is saying "enough": extreme heat, huge floods, devastating drought and severe water crises, large regions of the earth approaching the point where they will soon be uninhabitable.

How are we reacting? The basic character is captured by a clip from the

marvelous satirical journal *Onion* — except that it is perhaps even beyond their imagination. It is real. And reported, with disbelief, in the mainstream:

‘In a paradox worthy of Kafka, ConocoPhillips plans to install “chillers” into the permafrost — which is thawing fast because of climate change — to keep it solid enough to drill for oil, the burning of which will continue to worsen ice melt.’

In his bitter antiwar essays, Mark Twain wielded his formidable weapon of satire against the perpetrators. But when he reached the renowned General Funston, he threw up his hands in despair: “No satire of Funston could reach perfection,” Twain lamented, “because Funston occupies that summit himself.... [He is] satire incarnated.”

What is happening before our eyes is unleashed savage capitalism as satire incarnated. Even Twain would be silenced.

To see what is at stake, consider some basic facts. “[Arctic permafrost stores nearly 1,700 billion metric tons](#) of frozen and thawing carbon. Anthropogenic warming threatens to release an unknown quantity of this carbon to the atmosphere.... Carbon dioxide emissions are proportionally larger than other greenhouse gas emissions in the Arctic, but expansion of anoxic conditions within thawed permafrost and soils stands to increase the proportion of future methane emissions. Increasingly frequent wildfires in the Arctic will also lead to a notable but unpredictable carbon flux.”

The carbon flux may be unpredictable in detail, but the resulting devastation is all too predictable in its general outline. How then does unleashed savage capitalism respond? Simple. Let’s employ our best brains to find ways to slow the melting down a little so that we can pour more poisons into the atmosphere for profit, and as a side effect, release those Arctic permafrost stores into the atmosphere more rapidly so as to make life unlivable.

Unfortunately, the observation generalizes. We find satire incarnate wherever we turn, even in marginal corners. Thus, one argument against solar energy is land use. A real problem, especially in the U.K., where golf courses take up over four times as much space as solar power, so we learn from political economist Adam Tooze’s invaluable *Chartbook*.

Satire incarnate is just the cutting edge. It brings out dramatically the elements of dominant economic institutions that are lethal if unleashed. It would be hard to

conjure up a more fitting epitaph for the species — or more accurately, for the institutions that have become dominant as what we call civilization marches forward.

The Ukraine war finds its natural place in this collective madness. One outcome of Putin's criminal aggression and the consequent sanctions regime is to restrict the fossil fuel flow from Russia on which Europe relies, particularly the German-based system that is its economic powerhouse. Economic consequences for Europe are severe, though not for the U.S., which is largely immune; or for that matter for Russia, which at least for now is profiting handsomely from rising oil prices and has [many eager customers outside of Europe](#).

Europe is seeking alternative sources of oil and gas, a bonanza for the U.S. fossil fuel industry, rewarded with new markets and expansive drilling opportunities to enable it to destroy life on Earth more effectively. And the military industry could hardly be more ecstatic as the killing and destruction mount.

People seem to have a different view. In Germany for example, where 77 percent of the population "[believe that the West should initiate negotiations](#) to end the Ukraine war."

One can think of other reasons to bring the horrors to a quick end, but the fate of organized human society is surely one. The Ukraine war has reversed the limited efforts to address the mounting crisis of environmental destruction. While it should have accelerated efforts to move rapidly towards sustainable energy, that was not the path chosen by the political leadership. Rather, the choice has been to accelerate the race to the abyss.

What should be done at this critical moment is outlined perceptively by economist and political analyst Thomas Palley: "The European Union must build trade and commerce with Russia. That is an economic marriage made in heaven. Russia has resources and needs technology and capital goods. Europe has technology and capital goods and needs resources."

And more generally, "[What should be done is a profound recalibration](#) that diminishes the influence of the US in Europe, strengthens the European Union, and aims for inclusion of Russia in the European family as envisaged by President Mikhail Gorbachev in 1990," in his call for a "common European home" from Lisbon to Vladivostok with no military alliances, no victors or defeated, and a

common effort to move towards a more just social democratic future — if not beyond.

“Getting there is beginning to look impossible,” Palley adds. But accommodation among the great powers must be achieved, and soon, if there is to be any hope for decent survival. The madness of devoting scarce resources to slaughter and destruction when cooperation to meet major crises is an absolute necessity simply cannot be tolerated.

Unleashed savage capitalism is a death sentence for the species. That has long been obvious, even before it reached the level of satire incarnated. The crucial word is “unleashed.” The leash should be, and can be, in the hands of those who have higher aims in life than enriching private power and enhancing the political forces that prefer global dominance to the Gorbachev vision.

We should not underestimate the barriers in economic and political realms, and also in the doctrinal systems that articulate and protect the structures of power. The matter is of particular importance in the U.S., for reasons too obvious to elaborate.

The barriers within the reigning doctrinal system are illustrated in a very revealing current essay in the major establishment journal. The authors are two well-informed foreign policy analysts at the more liberal end of received opinion, Fiona Hill and Angela Stent.

Their article illustrates graphically the extraordinary subordination to official doctrine that confines U.S. elites to an “alternative reality” that has little resemblance to the world. Confined within their self-reinforcing cocoon, they are simply incapable of comprehending the global reaction to their vocation of endless criminality.

Hill-Stent harshly condemn the Global South — most of the world — for its failure to join the U.S. in its profound distress “that Russia has violated the UN Charter and international law by unleashing an unprovoked [attack](#) on a neighbor’s territory.” The Global South even sinks so low as to “argue that what Russia is doing in Ukraine is no different from what the United States did in Iraq or Vietnam.”

Hill-Stent attribute this failure to rise to our level of nobility and understanding of

global reality to Putin's machinations. What else could account for such blindness?

Could there be a different reason, for example, the fact that outside the cocoon people actually look at the world and quickly discover that the U.S. is far and away the world leader in violating the charter and international law by unleashing unprovoked attacks — worldwide, even thousands of miles away? And could it be that they see that U.S. aggression in Iraq and Vietnam is an incomparably graver crime even than Putin's aggression in Ukraine?

And as a minor footnote, perhaps these "backward" peoples are well aware that the Russian aggression, which they in fact harshly condemn, was in fact extensively provoked — as Western commentators tacitly acknowledge in their own curious way by conjuring up for this case alone the novel phrase "unprovoked attack," which has become *de rigeur* in polite circles for the plainly provoked Russian aggression.

Given the climate of irrationality and subordination to doctrine that reigns in the U.S. it is necessary to reiterate, once again, that extensive provocation does not provide any justification for criminal aggression.

The Hill-Stent exercise in obfuscation is, regrettably, an instructive example of prevailing mentality among the more liberal sectors of doctrinal orthodoxy, amplified by conformist media and journals of opinion. These sectors of course play a prominent role in shaping the climate in which policy is designed and implemented, a matter of overwhelming significance in the most powerful state in world history, with no close competitor.

The realities of the modern world impose unique responsibility on Americans. Ludwig Wittgenstein described the task of philosophy as "to show the fly the way out of the fly-bottle," the flies being philosophers who buzz about in conventional confusions. Analogously, one task for those concerned about the future is to try to help educated elites find their way out of the doctrinal cocoon in which they have confined themselves, and to liberate the general public from the "alternative reality" that elite circles have constructed.

No small task, but an essential one.

Military operations produce enormous amounts of greenhouse gas emissions as

capacity for and use of military force depend on energy that comes in the form of fossil fuels. In fact, the U.S. military emits more carbon into the atmosphere than some countries do and has a long history of fighting wars for oil. Is it realistic therefore to expect serious climate action on the part of the world's major powers if they continue to ignore how militarism fuels the climate crisis?

Chomsky: And, we may add, if they continue to ignore how the climate crisis fuels militarism. The climate crisis engenders conflicts. We've already witnessed that in Syria and Darfur, where migrations caused by unprecedented droughts provided a large part of the background for the horrors that ensued. There are looming crises that may put even these awful events in the shade.

India and Pakistan are at sword's point, engaged in constant armed confrontations. Both are suffering severely from global warming. One-third of Pakistan is under water, sometimes many feet deep, following an intense heatwave and a long monsoon that has dumped a record amount of rain. In neighboring India, poor peasants in mud huts are trying to survive drought and heat reaching 50 degrees Celsius (50°C), virtually unlivable, of course without air conditioning. Meanwhile the governing authorities race to produce more and better means of destruction. Another grim case of satire incarnates, perhaps. The sources of their water supplies are shared and diminishing. The rest can be left to the imagination.

What isn't left to the imagination is that both are armed to the teeth, including huge nuclear arsenals, an unsustainable arms race for much smaller Pakistan. For both, it is an unconscionable waste of resources that are desperately needed to face their shared and devastating problems of global warming and other forms of destruction of the environment.

India-Pakistan is only one of many such examples of impending disaster. The U.S., though unusually privileged, is not immune, as we have seen in the past months.

As usual, the crises are not just human destruction of the environment. Scandals proliferate. The city that has been worst hit is Jackson, Mississippi, the state capital. The water system has been failing for years, and now its residents are literally without potable water — in a country with unparalleled wealth and natural advantages.

"Experts say this crisis was years in the making, a result of inadequate funding

for essential infrastructure upgrades. For the past year, leaders of this majority-Black, Democrat-led city have pushed for additional funding from the White Republicans who run the state. [Little has come of those appeals.](#)”

Deeply rooted social pathologies make their own contributions to human misery, exacerbating those produced by destroying the environment and radical misuse of resources. The U.S. is, furthermore, far in the lead in accelerating the militarization of the world.

More tasks for Americans, and not them alone.

Bob, the world was falling short of meeting its climate goals even before the outbreak of the Ukraine war. Indeed, it's obvious by now that climate goals cannot be reached without fast and radical action. In that context, can you talk a bit about the role that carbon tax and cap-and-trade play as strategies for reducing carbon emissions?

Robert Pollin: Let's first be clear on what we mean by the world's "climate goals." The most basic goals were set out in 2018 by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), the leading global organization that brings together and synthesizes climate change research. In its landmark 2018 special report "[Global Warming of 1.50C](#)," the IPCC established two primary goals: to reduce global carbon dioxide (CO₂) emissions by about 45 percent in 2030 relative to the 2010 level and to achieve net zero emissions by around 2050. The IPCC argued that these goals must be achieved to have a reasonable chance of limiting global warming to 1.50C above pre-industrial levels. The IPCC had concluded that limiting global warming to 1.50C above pre-industrial levels is needed to dramatically lower the likely negative consequence of climate change.

Just since the IPCC's 2018 report came out, we have been seen much more severe impacts of climate change than what the IPCC had anticipated in terms of heat extremes, heavy rains and flooding, droughts, sea level rise and biodiversity losses. To take just one recent example, average daily temperatures were sustained at over 110°F during the heat wave in India this past May. The intensifying climate crisis is making such episodes increasingly frequent. As Noam discusses, the war in Ukraine is only worsening the situation. It is therefore fair to conclude that the IPCC's 2018 targets should be understood as what is minimally necessary to move onto a viable global climate stabilization path. This

conclusion has been affirmed by the IPCC itself in its [even more extensive 2022 follow-up studies](#).

Where does the world stand today in terms of achieving the IPCC's emission reduction targets? As of the most recent data from the International Energy Agency (IEA) — the best-known and thoroughly mainstream organization that develops global energy models — global CO₂ emissions were at around 36 billion tons in 2019. This represents a roughly 70 percent emissions increase since 1990 and a 14 percent increase just since 2010. More to the point, according to the IEA's projections for future emissions under alternative realistic scenarios, emissions will fall barely at all by 2030 and [will not come close to achieving the zero emissions target by 2050](#).

Specifically, in its 2021 “World Energy Outlook” report, the IEA developed two scenarios for future CO₂ emissions levels based on what it considers to be realistic assessments of the current global policy environment. One is what the IEA terms a “Stated Policies Scenario.” This scenario “explores where the energy system might go without additional policy implementation.” It is based on taking “a granular, sector-by-sector look at existing policies and measures and those under development.” In short, this scenario aims to project what CO₂ emissions will be through 2050 if global policies remain basically fixed along their current trajectory. In this scenario, global CO₂ emissions will not fall *at all* by 2030 and will decline by only 6 percent, to 33.9 billion tons, by 2050. In short, assuming we take climate science seriously, this is nothing less than a doomsday scenario.

Under a second “Announced Pledges Scenario,” the IEA “takes account of all of the climate commitments made by governments around the world, including Nationally Determined Contributions as well as longer term net zero targets, and assumes that they will be met in full and on time.” Under this more aggressive scenario, the IEA projects that emissions will still fall by only 7 percent as of 2030, and that by 2050, the emissions level will be at 20.7 billion tons — i.e. well less than halfway to achieving the zero emissions goal by 2050. In other words, even this more aggressive IEA scenario also is not too far from a doomsday scenario, assuming we take climate science seriously.

The IEA does also develop a scenario through which the world can reach zero emissions by 2050. The difference between the IEA's stated policies and announced pledges scenarios relative to their net zero emissions by 2050 scenario

is what the IEA terms an “ambition gap.” The question for getting to zero emissions is therefore to figure out how to close this “ambition gap,” i.e., how to avoid, somehow, a full-scale global climate catastrophe.

How much can carbon tax or carbon cap policies contribute here? Both of these measures aim to directly reduce the consumption of oil, coal and natural gas. This is critical since CO₂ emissions from burning coal, oil, and natural gas to produce energy is, by far, the largest source of overall CO₂ emissions, and thus, the major cause of climate change.

In principle at least, a carbon cap establishes a firm limit on the allowable level of emissions for major polluting entities, such as utilities. Such measures will also raise the prices of oil, coal and natural gas by limiting their supply. A carbon tax, on the other hand, will directly raise fossil fuel prices to consumers, and aim to reduce fossil fuel consumption through the high prices. Either approach can be effective as long as the cap is strict enough, or tax rate high enough, to significantly reduce fossil fuel consumption and as long exemptions are minimal to none. Raising the prices for fossil fuels will also create increased incentives for both energy efficiency and clean renewable investments, as well as a source of revenue to help finance these investments.

However, significant problems are also associated with both approaches. The first is their impact on the budgets of middle- and lower-income people. All else equal, increasing the price of fossil fuels would affect middle- and lower-income households more than affluent households, since gasoline, home-heating fuels and electricity absorb a higher share of lower-income households’ consumption. There is an effective solution here, developed initially by my PERI coworker Jim Boyce. That is to rebate to lower-income households a large share, if not most, of the revenues generated either by the cap or tax to offset the increased costs of fossil-fuel energy. Boyce [termed this](#) a “cap-and-dividend” program.

Another major problem with carbon caps is with enforcement. In particular, when these cap programs are combined with a carbon permit option — as in “cap-and-trade” policies — the enforcement of a hard cap becomes difficult to sustain or even monitor. So instead of measures that could be major contributors to fighting climate change, we end up with a mess of accounting tricks and exceptions. For the most part, [this has been the experience thus far](#) with cap-and-trade policies, both in the U.S. and Europe.

There are some easy fixes for this problem, as we have discussed in previous interviews. The most straightforward is to establish hard caps, such as utilities being required to reduce their fossil fuel consumption by, say, 5 percent per year, every year, with no exceptions and no cap-and-trade escape hatches. The CEOs of corporations who fail to hit these hard caps would face serious criminal liability.

Arguments in favor of the deployment of negative emission technologies, such as direct air capture and bioenergy with carbon capture and storage, are gaining ground these days in spite of their technological immaturity. Same goes for nuclear power plants and even geo-engineering in spite of the inherent risks that they entail. What role can such strategies play in the effort to make a complete break from reliance on fossil fuels?

Pollin: Neither negative emissions technologies nor nuclear power can likely contribute significantly to building an alternative global clean energy infrastructure. Indeed, it is more likely that they will create still more severe problems.

Let's start with nuclear. It does have the important benefit that it generates electricity without producing CO₂ emissions. But nuclear also creates major environmental and public safety concerns, which only intensified after the March 2011 meltdown at the Fukushima Daiichi power plant in Japan and still more, after Russia seized control of the Chernobyl and Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plants in the early stages of its invasion of Ukraine six months ago. Nuclear disasters at both Chernobyl and Zaporizhzhia became active threats immediately. Just over the past month, the Zaporizhzhia plant has come under intense siege. Thus, as of August 3, the Director General of the International Atomic Energy Agency Rafael Grossi stated that conditions at Zaporizhzhia are "completely out of control" underlying "the very real risk of a nuclear disaster." By mid-August, the *BBC* described "the growing concern over safety at the site...as both sides accuse each other of shelling the area." The *BBC* article quotes U.N. Secretary General António Guterres's [warning](#) that "any potential damage to Zaporizhzhia is suicide."

Negative emissions technologies include a range of measures whose purpose is either to remove existing CO₂ or to inject cooling forces into the atmosphere to counteract the warming effects of CO₂ and other greenhouse gases. One category of removal technologies is carbon capture and sequestration. A category of

cooling technologies is stratospheric aerosol injections.

Carbon capture technologies aim to remove emitted carbon from the atmosphere and transport it, usually through pipelines, to subsurface geological formations, where it would be stored permanently. The general class of carbon capture technologies have not been proven at a commercial scale, despite decades of efforts to accomplish this. After all, as we have discussed in previous interviews, carbon capture would be the savior for the oil, coal and natural gas industries if the technology could be made to work commercially at scale. However, even if carbon could be successfully captured at reasonable costs, the technology would still face the threat of carbon leakages that would result under flawed transportation and storage systems. These dangers will only increase to the extent that carbon capture becomes commercialized and operates under an incentive structure in which maintaining safety standards cuts into corporate profits.

The idea of stratospheric aerosol injections builds from the results that followed from the volcanic eruption of Mount Pinatubo in the Philippines in 1991. The eruption led to a massive injection of ash and gas, which produced sulfate particles, or aerosols, which then rose into the stratosphere. The impact was to cool the Earth's average temperature [by about 0.60C for 15 months](#). The technologies being researched now aim to artificially replicate the impact of the Mount Pinatubo eruption through deliberately injecting sulfate particles into the stratosphere. Some researchers contend that doing so would be a cost-effective method of counteracting the warming effects of CO₂ and other greenhouse gases.

However, the viability of stratospheric aerosol injections as a major climate solution has been refuted repeatedly by leading researchers in the field. For example, the Oxford University climate scientist Raymond Pierrehumbert, a major contributor to various IPCC studies, is emphatic in his 2019 paper, "There is No Plan B for Dealing with the Climate Crisis," that this type of geo-engineering — what he refers to "albedo hacking" — does not offer a viable solution to the climate crisis. Pierrehumbert writes:

"The excess carbon dioxide that human activities inject into the atmosphere has a warming effect that extends essentially forever, whereas the stratospheric aerosols meant to offset that warming fall out of the atmosphere in about a year. It's just a matter of gravity -stuff denser than its surroundings falls — aided a bit by atmospheric circulations that enhance the removal. This is why the cooling

effects of even a major volcanic eruption like Pinatubo dissipate after two years or so. Hence, whatever level of albedo hacking is needed to avoid a dangerous level of warming must be continued essentially forever.'

Pierrehumbert further [writes](#) that "We simply do not know the way the climate will respond to these novel forcings, or how our social and political systems will respond to these disruptive and possibly ungovernable technologies."

Renewable energy critics argue that wind and solar are not reliable sources because of their variability. Others argue that wind farms encroach on pristine environment and destroy a country's natural habitat, as is the case with the installation of thousands of wind turbines on scores of Greek islands in the Aegean Sea. How would you respond to such concerns, and are there ways around them?

Pollin: Three major sets of challenges arise in building a high-efficiency/renewable-energy dominant global energy infrastructure. They include the two you mentioned, i.e., 1) intermittency with solar and wind energy; and 2) the land use requirements for renewables, especially solar and wind. The third major challenge is the heavy mineral requirements as inputs for the clean energy infrastructure. In the interests of space, I will focus on just the first two.

Intermittency refers to the fact that the sun does not shine, and the wind does not blow, 24-hours a day. Moreover, on average, different geographical areas receive significantly different levels of sunshine and wind. As such, the solar and wind power that are generated in the sunnier and windier areas of the globe will need to be stored and transmitted at reasonable costs to the less sunny and windy areas. In fact, these issues around transmission and storage of wind and solar power will not become pressing for many years into the clean energy transition, probably for at least a decade. This is because fossil fuels, along with nuclear energy will continue to provide a baseload of non-intermittent energy supply as these energy sectors proceed toward their phaseout while the clean energy industry rapidly expands. Fossil fuels and nuclear energy now provide roughly 85 percent of all global energy supplies. Even with a phase out to zero by 2050 trajectory, fossil fuels will continue to provide most of the overall energy demand through about 2035. Meanwhile, fully viable solutions to the technical challenges with transmission and storage of solar and wind power — including around affordability — should not be more than a decade away, certainly as long as the

market for clean energy grows at the rapid rate that is necessary. For example, the International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA) [estimates](#) that global battery storage capacity could expand between 17 — 38-fold as of 2030.

The issue of land use requirements is frequently cited to demonstrate that building a 100 percent renewable energy global economy is unrealistic. But these claims are not supported by evidence. Thus, the Harvard University physicist Mara Prentiss shows, in her 2015 book *Energy Revolution: The Physics and the Promise of Efficient Technology*, as well as in her more recent follow-up discussions, that well below 1 percent of the total U.S. land area would be needed through solar and wind power to [meet 100 percent of U.S. energy needs](#).

Most of this land use requirement could be met, for example, by placing solar panels on rooftops and parking lots, then operating wind turbines on about 7 percent of current agricultural land. Moreover, the wind turbines can be sited on existing operating farmland with only minor losses of agricultural productivity. Farmers should mostly welcome this dual use of their land, since it provides them with a major additional income source. At present, the U.S. states of Iowa, Kansas, Oklahoma and South Dakota all generate more than 30 percent of their electricity supply through wind turbines. The remaining supplemental energy needs could then be supplied by geothermal, hydro and low-emissions bioenergy, which are all non-intermittent renewable sources. This particular scenario includes no further contributions from solar farms in desert areas, solar panels mounted on highways or offshore wind projects, among other supplemental renewable energy sources. However, if handled responsibly, all of these options are also viable possibilities.

It is true that conditions for renewable energy production in the United States are more favorable than those in some other countries. Germany and the U.K., for example, have population densities seven to eight times greater than the U.S. and also receive less sunlight over the course of a year. As such, these countries, operating at high efficiency levels, would need to use about 3 percent of their total land area to generate 100 percent of their energy demand through domestically produced solar energy. But using cost-effective storage and transmission technologies, the U.K. and Germany can also import energy generated by solar and wind power in other countries, just as, in the United States, wind power generated in Iowa could be transmitted to New York City. Any such import requirements are likely to be modest.

What about Greece? With co-authors, I am currently working on a study that considers the land use issues in Greece within the framework of achieving a zero-emissions economy there by 2050. I hope to be able to give more details on our results soon. For now, suffice it to say that there is no need for Greece to be installing wind farms on pristine sites. As with the U.S., there is more than sufficient land area in Greece to meet 100 percent of the country's energy demand through investments in high efficiency and building a renewable infrastructure situated on artificial surfaces like rooftops, parking lots, highways and commercial locations, as well as, to a relatively modest extent, agricultural lands.

Noam, we are the only species to evolve a higher intelligence, but we are not making the right decisions over climate and the environment. Is it because of politics and the way the world economy functions, or perhaps because of fears that the challenge of global warming is too overwhelming so we might as well go on with business as usual, make some alterations along the way and just hope for the best?

Chomsky: Evolution of higher intelligence is an intriguing scientific problem. It is even possible that we are the only species in the accessible universe to have evolved what we call higher intelligence, or at least to have sustained it without self-destruction. Yet.

As for why the existential crises that may soon end sustainable life on Earth receive far too little attention, one can think of many possible reasons. There is also a deeper question lingering in the not too remote background. The question burst into consciousness with dramatic intensity 77 years ago, on August 6, 1945. Or should have.

On that fateful day we learned that human intelligence had registered a grand achievement. It had devised the means to destroy everything. Not quite yet, in fact, though it was clear that further technological progress would soon reach that point. It did, in 1952, when the U.S. exploded the first thermonuclear weapon, and the Doomsday Clock advanced to two minutes to midnight. It did not become that close to terminal disaster again until Trump's term, then moving on to seconds as analysts abandoned minutes.

The question that arose with stark clarity 77 years ago was whether human moral

intelligence could rise to the level where it could control the impulse to destruction. Can the gap be overcome? The record so far is not promising.

The game is not over unless we choose to end it. The choice is unavoidable. How humans will decide is by far the most important question that has arisen in the brief sojourn of humans on Earth. We will soon provide the answer.

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