

The West Is Using COP27 To Shift Blame To Poorer Nations—Private Greed Prevails Over Humanity's Survival



Prabir Purkayastha

[COP27](#) has begun in Sharm el-Sheikh. Although the Ukraine war and the U.S. midterm elections have shifted our immediate focus away from the battle against global warming, it still remains a central concern of our epoch. [Reports indicate](#) that not only are we failing to meet our climate change goals, but we are also falling short of the targets by a large margin. Worse, the potent [methane greenhouse gas emissions](#) have grown far more rapidly, posing as much of a climate change threat as carbon dioxide. Even though methane lasts for a shorter time in the atmosphere, [viewed over a period of 100 years](#), it is a more potent greenhouse gas than carbon dioxide.

The net result is that we are almost certain to fail in our target to limit global temperature rise to 1.5 degrees Celsius above preindustrial levels. And if we do not act soon, even a target of 2 degrees Celsius is hard to achieve. At this rate, we are looking at a temperature rise of 2.5-3 degrees Celsius and the devastation of our civilization. Worse, the impact will be [much higher](#) in the equatorial and tropical regions, where most of the world's poor live.

In this column, I will address two issues. One is the shift from coal to natural gas as a transitional fuel, and the other is the challenge of storing electricity, without which we cannot shift successfully to renewable energy.

The advanced countries—the U.S. and members of the European Union—bet big on natural gas, which is primarily methane, as the transition fuel from coal. In Glasgow during COP26, advanced countries even made coal the key issue, [shifting the focus](#) from their greenhouse emissions to that of China and India as big coal users. The assumption in using natural gas as a transitional fuel is that its greenhouse impact is only half that of coal. Methane emissions also last for a shorter time—about 12 years—in the atmosphere before converting to carbon dioxide and water. The flip side is that it is a far more potent greenhouse gas. Its effects are 30 times greater over a 100-year period than an equivalent amount of carbon dioxide. So even a much smaller amount of methane has a much more significant global warming impact than carbon dioxide.

The bad news on the methane front is that methane leakage from the natural gas infrastructure is much higher, possibly as much as [six times](#) more—according to a March 2022 [Stanford University study](#)—than the advanced countries have been telling us. The high methane leakage from natural gas extraction not only cancels out any benefits of switching to natural gas as an intermediary fuel but even worsens global warming.

There are two sets of data on methane now available. One measures [the actual leakage](#) of methane from the [natural gas infrastructure with satellites](#) and planes using infrared cameras. The technology of measuring methane leaks from natural gas infrastructure is easy and cheap. After all, we are able to detect methane in exoplanets far away from the solar system. Surely, saving this planet from heat death is a much higher priority! The other data is the measurement of atmospheric methane conducted by the [World Meteorological Organization](#) (WMO).

The Environment Protection Agency (EPA) in the U.S. estimates that [1.4 percent](#) of all natural gas produced in the U.S. leaks into the atmosphere. But the March 2022 [Stanford University](#) study using cameras and small planes that fly over natural gas infrastructure found that the figure is likely to be 9.4 percent—more than six times higher than the EPA's estimate. Even if methane leaks are only 2.5 percent of natural gas production, they will offset all the benefits of switching from coal to natural gas. “Clean” natural gas may be three to four times worse than even dirty coal. At least in the hands of capital!

The EPA does not conduct any physical measurements. All it uses to estimate

methane emissions is a formula that involves a number of subjective factors, along with the number of wells, length of pipelines, etc. Let us not forget that there are many people in the U.S. who either do not believe in or choose to ignore the fact of global warming. They would like to take a crowbar to even a weakened EPA, dismantling all measures to reduce global warming.

The impact of methane leaks can be seen in another set of figures. The World Meteorological Organization [reported the biggest jump in “methane concentrations](#) in 2021 since systematic measurements began nearly 40 years ago.” While WMO remains discreetly silent on why this jump has occurred, the relation between switching to natural gas and the consequent rise of methane emissions is hard to miss.

The tragedy of methane leaks is that they are easy to spot with today’s technology and not very expensive to fix. But companies have no incentive to take even these baby steps as it impacts their *current* bottom line. The *larger good*—even *bigger profits*, but *over a longer time frame*—does not interest them. They aren’t likely to change unless they are forced to by regulatory or direct state action.

The cynicism of the rich countries—the U.S. and members of the EU—on global warming can be seen in their conduct during the Ukraine war. The [European Union has restarted some of its coal plants](#), increasing coal’s share in the energy mix. Further, the EU has cynically argued that developing oil and gas infrastructure in Africa is all right as long as it is [solely for supply to Europe, not for use in Africa](#). African nations, according to the EU, must instead use only clean, renewable energy! And, of course, such energy infrastructure must be in the hands of European companies!

he key to a transition to renewable energy—the only long-term solution to global warming—is to find a way of storing energy. Renewables, unlike fossil fuels, cannot be used at will, as the wind, sun, and even water provide a continuous flow of energy. While water can be stored in large reservoirs, wind and sun cannot be, unless they are converted to chemical energy in batteries. Or unless they are converted to hydrogen and then stored in either tank or natural storage in geological formations, underground or in salt caverns.

There has been a lot of hype about batteries and electric cars. Missing here is that batteries with current technology have a much lower energy density than oil

or coal. The [energy from oil or natural gas is 20-40 times that of the most efficient battery](#) today. For an electric vehicle, that is not such a major issue. It simply determines how often the vehicle's batteries need to be charged and how long charging will take. It means developing a charging infrastructure with a quick turnaround time. The much bigger problem is how to store energy at the grid level.

Grid-level storage means supplying the grid with electricity from stored energy. Grid-level batteries are being suggested to meet this task. What the proponents of grid-level batteries neglect to inform us is that they may supply power for short-term fluctuations—night and day, windy and non-windy days—but they cannot meet the demand from long-term or seasonal fluctuations. This brings us to the question of the energy density of storage: How much energy does a kilogram of lithium battery hold as compared to a kilogram of oil, natural gas, or coal? The answer with current technology [is 20-40 times less](#). The cost of building such mammoth storage to meet seasonal fluctuations will simply [exhaust all our lithium](#) (or any other battery material) supplies.

I will not address the prohibitive energy cost—electric or fossil fuel—of private versus public or mass transportation, and why we should switch to the latter. I will instead focus on addressing the larger question of how to [store renewable energy](#) so that we can run our electricity infrastructure when wind or sun is not there.

Is it possible that a new technology will solve this problem? (Remember the dream of nuclear energy that will be not only clean but also so cheap that it will [not need to be metered](#)?) But do we bet our civilization's future on such a possibility?

If not, we have to look at existing solutions. They exist, but using them means seeking alternatives to batteries for addressing our grid-level problems of intermittent renewable energy. It means repurposing our *existing* hydro-projects to work as grid-level storage and [developing hydrogen storage](#) for use in fuel cells. No extra dams or reservoirs, as the opponents of hydroelectricity projects fear. And of course, it means more public transportation instead of private transportation.

All of these existing solutions mean making changes on a societal level that

corporate interests oppose—after all, doing so would require public investments for social benefits and not for private profits. Capital privileges short-term private profits over long-term social benefits. Remember how oil companies had the earliest research to show the impact of global warming due to carbon dioxide emissions? They not only hid these results for decades but also launched a campaign denying that global warming is linked to greenhouse gases. And they funded climate change deniers.

The contradiction at the heart of global warming is private greed over social needs. And who funds such a transition, the poor or the rich? This is also what COP27 is all about, not simply about how to stop global warming.

This article was produced in partnership by [Newsclick](#) and [Globetrotter](#).

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Source: Globetrotter

Chomsky: Options For Diplomacy Decline As Russia's War On Ukraine Escalates



Noam Chomsky – Photo: YouTube

Russia's war in Ukraine has gone on for nearly nine months, and it has now escalated to highly lethal levels. Putin is targeting Ukraine's energy infrastructure and has repeatedly raised the specter of nuclear weapons. The Ukrainians, on the other hand, continue to believe that they can defeat the Russians on the battlefield and even retake Crimea. Indeed, the war in Ukraine has no endgame in sight. As Noam Chomsky points out in the exclusive interview for *Truthout* that follows, the escalation of the conflict has pushed diplomatic options even further into the background.

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: Noam, the war in Ukraine nears its ninth month mark and, instead of de-escalation, it is heading toward "uncontrolled escalation." In fact, it's becoming a war without end as Russia has been targeting Ukraine's energy infrastructure over the last few weeks and stepping up its strikes in the eastern region of the country, while the Ukrainians keep asking for more and more weapons from the west as they believe that they have the potential to defeat Russia on the battlefield. As things stand at the present juncture, can diplomacy end the war? Indeed, how do you de-escalate a conflict when the escalation level is so high, and the warring sides seem to be unable to reach a joint decision about the issues of conflict between them? For example, Russia will never accept rolling back borders to the position they were before February 24, when the invasion was launched.

Noam Chomsky: Tragedy foretold. Let's briefly look back at what we've been discussing for months.

Prior to Putin's invasion there were options based generally on the Minsk agreements that might well have averted the crime. There is unresolved debate about whether Ukraine accepted these agreements. At least verbally, Russia appears to have done so up until not long before the invasion. The U.S. dismissed them in favor of integrating Ukraine into the NATO (that is, U.S.) military command, also refusing to take any Russian security concerns into consideration, as conceded. These moves were accelerated under Biden. Could diplomacy have succeeded in averting the tragedy? There was only one way to find out: Try. The option was ignored.

Putin rejected French president Macron's efforts, to almost the last minute, to offer a viable alternative to aggression. Rejected them at the end with contempt — also shooting himself and Russia in the foot by driving Europe deep into Washington's pocket, its fondest dream. The crime of aggression was compounded with the crime of foolishness, from his own point of view.

Ukraine-Russia negotiations took place under Turkish auspices as recently as March-April. They failed. The U.S. and U.K. opposed them. Due to lack of inquiry, part of the general disparagement of diplomacy in mainstream circles, we don't know to what extent that was a factor in their collapse.

Washington initially expected Russia to conquer Ukraine in a few days and was preparing a government-in-exile. Military analysts were surprised by Russian military incompetence, remarkable Ukrainian resistance, and the fact that Russia didn't follow the expected U.S.-U.K. model (also the model followed by Israel in defenseless Gaza) of war: go at once for the jugular, using conventional weapons to destroy communications, transportation, energy, whatever keeps the society functioning.

The U.S. then made a fateful decision: Continue the war to severely weaken Russia, hence avoiding negotiations and making a ghastly gamble: that Putin will pack up his bags and slink away in defeat to oblivion if not worse, and will not use the conventional weapons which, it was agreed, he had, to destroy Ukraine.

If Ukrainians want to risk the gamble, that's their business. The U.S. role is our business.

Now Putin has moved on to the anticipated escalation, "targeting Ukraine's energy infrastructure over the last few weeks and stepping up its strikes in the

eastern region of the country.” Putin’s escalation to the U.S.-U.K.-Israel model has been rightly condemned for its brutality — condemned by those who have accepted the original with little if any objection, and whose ghastly gamble laid the groundwork for the escalation, exactly as was warned throughout. There will be no accountability, though some lessons may have been learned.

While very mild liberal calls for considering a diplomatic option alongside of full support for Ukraine are at once subjected to a torrent of vilification, and sometimes [quickly withdrawn](#) in fear, voices calling for diplomacy from the mainstream establishment are [exempted from this treatment](#), including voices from the major establishment journal *Foreign Affairs*. It may be that such concerns over a destructive war, with increasingly ominous potential consequences, are reaching the neocon war hawks who seem to be driving Biden’s foreign policy. So [some of their recent statements](#) indicate.

Quite possibly they are hearing other voices too. While U.S. energy and military corporations are laughing all the way to the bank, Europe is being badly hit by the cutoff of Russian supplies and the U.S.-initiated sanctions. That’s particularly true for the German industrial complex that is the base of the European economy. It remains an open question whether European leaders will be willing to supervise Europe’s economic decline and increased subordination to the U.S., and whether their populations will tolerate these outcomes of adhering to U.S. demands.

The most dramatic hit to the European economy is the loss of cheap Russian gas, now partially replaced by far more expensive American supplies (also greatly increasing pollution in transit and distribution). That is, however, not all. Russian supplies of minerals play an essential role in Europe’s industrial economy, including efforts to move to renewable energy.

The future of gas supplies to Europe was severely undermined, perhaps permanently, with the sabotage of the Nord Stream pipelines linking Russia and Germany through the Baltic Sea. This is a major blow to both countries. It was enthusiastically welcomed by the U.S., which had been trying for years to prevent this project. Secretary of State [Antony] Blinken [described](#) the destruction of the pipelines as “a tremendous opportunity to once and for all remove the dependence on Russian energy and thus to take away from Vladimir Putin the weaponization of energy as a means of advancing his imperial designs.”

The strong U.S. efforts to block Nord Stream long preceded the Ukraine crisis and the current fevered constructions about Putin's long-term imperial designs. They go back to the days when Bush II was looking into Putin's eyes and perceiving that his soul was good.

President Biden informed Germany that if Russia were to invade Ukraine, "then there will be no longer a Nord Stream 2. We will bring an end to it."

One of the most important events of recent months, the sabotage was quickly dispatched to obscurity. Germany, Denmark and Sweden have conducted investigations of the sabotage in their nearby waters but are keeping silent about the results. There is one country that certainly had the capability and motive to destroy the pipelines. That is unmentionable in polite society. We can leave it at that.

Is there still an opportunity for the kind of diplomatic efforts that mainstream establishment voices are calling for? We cannot be sure. As the conflict has escalated, the options for diplomacy have declined. At the very least, the U.S. could withdraw its insistence on sustaining the war to weaken Russia, thus barring the way to diplomacy. A stronger position is that of the establishment voices cited: calls for diplomatic options to be explored before the horrors become even worse, not only for Ukraine but far beyond.

Ukrainian officials claim they have a strategy in place to take back Crimea because it was illegally annexed by Moscow in 2014. Similar announcements had been made even before Russia's invasion of Ukraine. While no military strategist believes that Ukraine is in a position to retake Crimea, isn't this further evidence that there is no endgame in sight for the Russia-Ukraine war? Isn't this indeed another reason why the long-range ATACMS weapons that Ukraine says it needs should not be delivered to them?

The Biden administration and the Pentagon have been careful to limit the massive flow of weapons to those that are not likely to lead to a NATO-Russian war, which would be effectively terminal for all. Whether these delicate matters can be kept under control, no one can be sure. All the more reason to try to bring the horrors to an end as soon as possible.

China has warned Russia against threats to use nuclear weapons in the war against Ukraine. Is this a sign that Beijing may be thinking of distancing itself

from Putin's military adventures in Ukraine? In either case, it indicates that there are limits to the friendship between China and Russia, doesn't it?

There is little evidence, to my knowledge, of China distancing itself from Russia. It seems, rather, that their relations are becoming closer in common opposition to the entrenchment of a U.S.-run unipolar world, sentiments shared in most of the world. China surely opposes the use of nuclear weapons, as does anyone with a shred of sanity remaining. And like almost all the world, it wants a quick settlement of the conflict.

Talk of nuclear weapons has been mostly in the West. Russia has reiterated the universal position of nuclear states: that they might resort to nuclear weapons in the event of a threat to survival. That stand became more dangerous when Putin annexed parts of Ukraine, extending the universal doctrine to a broader territory.

It's not quite true that the doctrine is universal. The U.S. has a far more extreme position, framed before the invasion of Ukraine but [announced only recently](#): a new nuclear strategy that the Arms Control Association [described](#) as "a significant expansion of the original mission of these weapons, namely deterring existential threats against the United States."

The significant expansion is spelled out by Admiral Charles Richard, head of the U.S. Strategic Command (STRATCOM). Under the newly announced Nuclear Posture Review, nuclear weapons provide the "maneuver space" necessary for the United States "to project conventional military power strategically." Nuclear deterrence is therefore a cover for conventional military operations around the globe, deterring others from interfering with U.S. conventional military operations. Nuclear weapons thus "deter all countries, all the time" from interfering with U.S. actions, Admiral Richard continued.

Stephen Young, senior Washington representative at the Union of Concerned Scientists, [described](#) the new Nuclear Posture Review as "a terrifying document [that] not only keeps the world on a path of increasing nuclear risk, in many ways it increases that risk," already intolerably high.

A fair assessment.

The press scarcely reported on the Nuclear Posture Review, describing it as not much of a change. They happen to be right, but for reasons of which they are

evidently unaware. As STRATCOM commander Richard could doubtless inform them, that has been U.S. policy since 1995, when it was elaborated in a STRATCOM document titled “Essentials of Post-Cold War Deterrence”. Under Clinton, nuclear weapons must be constantly available because they “cast a shadow” over conventional use of force, deterring others from interfering. As Daniel Ellsberg put it, nuclear weapons are constantly used, just as a gun is used in a robbery even if it is not fired.

The 1995 STRATCOM document goes on to call for the U.S. to project a “national persona” of “irrationality and vindictiveness,” with some elements “out of control.” That will frighten those who might have thoughts of interfering. It is the “madman doctrine” attributed to Nixon on thin evidence, but now in an official document.

All of this is within the framework of the overarching Clinton doctrine that the U.S. must be ready to resort to force multilaterally if we can, unilaterally if we must, to ensure “uninhibited access to key markets, energy supplies and strategic resources.”

It is, then, true that the new doctrine is not very new, though Americans are unaware of the facts — not because of censorship. The documents have been public for decades and quoted in critical literature that is kept to the margins.

It should be of great concern that talk of nuclear war is being bandied about casually as a possibility to be considered. It is not. It is most definitely not.

Source:

<https://truthout.org/articles/chomsky-options-for-diplomacy-decline-as-russias-war-on-ukraine-escalates/>

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Africa's Forgotten Colony In The Sahara



*Paweł Wargan -
Photo: Twitter*

Since [1975](#), thousands of Sahrawi people have lived in five refugee camps in the Algerian Sahara. They named these camps after [cities](#) in Western Sahara: Ausserd, Boujdour, Dakhla, Laayoune, and Smara. In a straight line, Smara the camp is some 400 kilometers from Smara the city. But a sand berm, [built](#) in the 1980s by Morocco, makes the distance unassailable. At 2,700 kilometers, the

[berm](#) is the second-longest military fortification in the world, after the Great Wall of China. Reinforced with ditches and barbed wire fences, artillery and tanks, guarded outposts, and [millions](#) of land mines, the sand berm [partitions](#) Western Sahara—separating 80 percent of Western Sahara controlled by Morocco from the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic—which is [recognized](#) by the United Nations as the last “non-self-governing territory” in Africa. In 1991, MINURSO, the UN Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara, [announced](#) a plebiscite that would give the Sahrawi people a choice: independence or integration with Morocco. In April 1991, the Sahrawi people packed their belongings in boxes, choosing the former.

Seeking access to Western Sahara’s rich coastline, Spain first [seized](#) the territory after European colonizers [partitioned](#) Africa at the West African Conference of Berlin that took place from November 1884 to February 1885. By the 1970s, facing resistance from the Sahrawi people and increasing internal pressures, the regime of Francisco Franco in Spain [agreed](#) to hold a referendum on independence, which [never took place](#). Spain eventually pulled out from Western Sahara. Meanwhile, to the south and the north, Mauritania and Morocco had set their sights on Western Sahara’s resources. In November 1975, despite a judgment from the International Court of Justice [that](#) neither Mauritania nor Morocco had territorial sovereignty over the land, Morocco [sent](#) 25,000 troops and 350,000 settlers to Western Sahara. On November 14, Spain signed the tripartite [Madrid Accords](#) with Morocco and Mauritania, effectively ceding Western Sahara to its invaders.

The Polisario Front, a national liberation movement formed in [1973](#) to oppose Spanish colonialism, now fought on two fronts. Supported by Algeria, it [defeated](#) the Mauritians in 1978. But Morocco retained its control over Western Sahara—with significant [backing](#) from Western powers, including the United States and members of NATO. At the Museum of Resistance in the camps, the Polisario [keeps](#) weapons of war captured during its struggle—tanks, airplanes, artillery, and armored vehicles from Austria, Germany, France, Spain, the U.S., Belgium, and apartheid South Africa.

Morocco controls 80 percent of Western Sahara. In the other 20 percent, the Polisario Front governs the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic, a state battling for recognition. Armed conflict continued until Morocco and the Polisario agreed to a [ceasefire](#) in September 1991 overseen by MINURSO. “I was just coming back

from Syria, a young graduate, having lived my entire life within this liberation process,” Oubi Bachir, a diplomat for the Polisario Front, told me. “I discovered not just hope, but jubilation. Finally, we were going home.” The Sahrawi people packed boxes to take their belongings back to Western Sahara. But as the boxes gathered dust, jubilation turned to frustration. The independence referendum has [failed](#) to take place—and the possibilities for armed struggle only reemerged when Morocco [broke](#) the ceasefire in 2020. The Sahrawi liberation movement, Bachir said, was “built on the armed struggle as the dominating pillar of action. That was taken away with no practical process in its place.”

Imperialism in Western Sahara

Western Sahara is a rich land. It [has](#) some 72 percent of the world’s phosphate deposits, which are used to manufacture fertilizers. By the end of November 2021, Morocco [reported](#) revenues of \$6.45 billion from phosphates, an amount that increases each year. Western Sahara’s fishing grounds [accounted](#) for 77.65 percent of Moroccan catches in 2018, representing the majority of its income from fishing that year. The European Union, too, operates a fleet in these waters. In 2018, a [judgment](#) of the Court of Justice of the EU struck down the 2000 Euro-Mediterranean Agreement between Morocco and the EU as “incompatible with the principles of self-determination.” But the EU [continues](#) to act in violation of the judgment, funding highly destructive fishing practices in the occupied territory. Scientists warn that overfishing in Western Sahara is rapidly [destroying](#) a critical biodiversity hotspot.

Morocco and its international backers have their sights on two other resources abundant in the territory: wind and sunlight. In 2018, using German technology, the UK firm Windhoist [built](#) the 200 MW Aftissat wind farm in Western Sahara. Vigeo Eiris, a UK-French company that has been “investigating companies operating in occupied Palestine,” [certified](#) Moroccan energy investments on Sahrawi land. General Electric [signed](#) a contract to build a 200 MW wind farm in Western Sahara. [Greenwashing](#) its occupation in Western Sahara, Morocco uses the infrastructure in reporting toward its climate targets. Western Sahara Resource Watch [estimates](#) that the wind power plants in the territory could account for 47.2 percent of Morocco’s wind capacity and up to 32.64 percent of its solar capacity by 2030.

The People Bloom

“We call this the desert within the desert,” Mohamed El Mamun, a Polisario Front representative, told me on a drive between two camps. The sand is so salty, the water so scarce, that few things can grow. Yet in the five decades since the five camps have existed, the Sahrawi people have made great strides toward building a dignified society in them. They eliminated illiteracy. They built universal education and the infrastructure to extract and distribute water to the people. Mass movements ensure the participation of women, workers, and the youth in the project of liberation. Health care is free, and a small experiment in aquaponic farming promises to grow food in one of the most arid places on Earth.

The camps depend [almost entirely](#) on foreign aid, a resource that is rapidly depleting. As of November 10, 2022, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees’ Algeria mission, a key source of humanitarian assistance to the Sahrawis, was only [39 percent funded](#). The UN has [warned](#) that the Russian-Ukrainian conflict risks further eroding that support. Here, socialist internationalism plays an important role. In the Smara camp, Venezuela and Cuba [built](#) a school. The Simón Bolívar School is staffed by Cuban teachers. More than 100 Sahrawis have graduated from the school since it opened in 2011. Some of the alumni went on to study in Cuba, returning as doctors, engineers, and teachers. Nearby, a man who calls himself Castro established the Center for Education and Integration, which prepares children with severe disabilities to live a dignified life. Above its entrance, a sign reads: “Neither plants nor trees grow here, but people bloom.”

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This article was produced by [Globetrotter](#).

Source: Globetrotter

Freedom Of Press Is Dealt Deadly Blows By Modi's Proto-Fascist Regime In India



CJ

Polychroniou

The Wire case is yet one more example of Modi's regime trying to undermine the media landscape and, indeed, destroy dissenting media.

Since the end of the Cold War, hybrid political regimes have been steadily gaining ground across the world. Hybrid regimes rest on a form of governance which, as Steven Levitsky and Lucan Way pointed out in a 2002 [essay](#) in the *Journal of Democracy*, is essentially authoritarian in nature while “using formal democratic institutions” for “obtaining and exercising political authority.” The term used for this type of political regime is competitive authoritarianism. In popular literature, the term “illiberal democracy” is encountered more frequently for the hybrid regimes that have emerged in the post-Cold War period, but an argument can be made against the use of such term as it weakens and stretches the definition of democracy.

In competitive authoritarian regimes, elections are held, but the electoral process is characterized by large-scale abuses of power, harassment and intimidation of opposition candidates and activists, and pro-government bias in public media. With regard to the latter aspect, comparative authoritarian regimes systematically dismantle media independence, freedom, and pluralism.

Narendra Modi's India is a classic example of a comparative authoritarian regime, though it tends to receive far less attention in western media than Hungary under Viktor Orban's rule. Modi, who has been the head of an elected government for over 20 years, has in fact turned India into an autocracy under the aegis of an extremist nationalist/racist/fascist ideology, Hindutva, which seeks to transform a secular state into an ethno-religious state. Modi's government has centralized

power to an extraordinary degree, practices systematic discrimination against Muslims, stigmatizes critics of the government, and engages in constant [press freedom violations](#). Arrests and physical attacks on journalists have increased over the last few years, while several journalists were [assassinated](#) in 2021 alone for their work.

Unsurprisingly, in the 2022 edition of the Press Freedom Index, India [ranked](#) at the 150th position, its lowest ever, out of 180 countries. So much for the world's largest democracy being actually democratic!

The latest independent media venue in India to be under government attack is *The Wire*, an independent media outlet [“committed to the public interest and democratic values.”](#) Its office and the homes of several editors were [raided](#) by police late last month on account of a criminal complaint filed by Amit Malviya, a political figure of the ruling party. Based on an internal Instagram document, the publication had recently run a story—which later retracted—that the political figure in question “wielded special privilege to censor social media posts.” The publication retracted the story, and a few follows ups, after it established that its coverage had been based on falsified documents and issued an [official statement](#) announcing that “lapses in editorial oversight” are under review. Moreover, the publication has filed a complaint against a freelance researcher, Devesh Kumar, for allegedly fabricating the details of the story with intent to harm *The Wire*.

The raids have been criticized by journalists and opposition politicians in India as a form of “veiled intimidation.” However, the deeper concern is that the publication's editors may face long-term prison sentences by being charged with forgery and criminal conspiracy. Note that Amit Malviya has filed not a civil suit but a criminal complaint against the editors of *The Wire*.

The Wire case is yet one more example of Modi's regime trying to undermine the media landscape and, indeed, destroy dissenting media. The international community must pay attention to the crackdown on free press in India. A global outcry at Modi's autocratic/ proto-fascist state is long overdue.

Source:

<https://www.commondreams.org/views/2022/11/13/freedom-press-dealt-deadly-blows-modis-proto-fascist-regime-india>

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Democrats Didn't Win - They Simply Held The Line



Sonali Kolhatkar

Americans invested in the idea of living in a democracy heaved a collective sigh of relief the day after the 2022 midterm elections when it became clear that the dire [predictions](#) of a Republican sweep were overblown. Democrats made greater gains than expected, winning races in both the [Senate](#) and the [House](#) that they didn't expect to.

It happened because masses of people cast ballots, defying long-standing historical trends of low midterm turnout. Voters [almost matched](#) the high turnout of the [2018 elections](#) when outrage over Donald Trump's first two years in office

pushed Congress into the hands of Democrats. Stung by their opposition's showing and by Trump's reelection loss two years later, Republicans [ramped up](#) voter suppression efforts, hoping to blunt the impact of an increasingly young, diverse, and enthusiastic electorate.

Liberal-leaning voters showed up to the polls during this latest midterm election largely in response to the overturning of [abortion rights](#), but also to stave off right-wing extremism.

Although the worst did not come to pass during the midterms, simply holding the line against a descent into [fascism](#) is not enough. Republicans are wresting control of the nation's steering wheel as hard as they can and forcing it as far right as possible. Their party has divested itself from democratic norms and thrown its weight behind Trump and his lies. They have invested in stripping people of their bodily autonomy and fashioning a dangerous world ruled by force and a riotous mob mentality. Much more is needed in the face of such hubris: Fascists need to be placed on the defensive, and a split Congress is not enough to do so.

Three major factors explain why Democrats didn't win outright control of both congressional chambers: First, Republicans have aggressively reduced the impact of Democratic votes; second, Democrats were unable or unwilling to articulate a clear message of why their agenda is better than that of the Republicans; and third, the corporate media refused to center people's well-being in their framing of election-related issues.

Republicans have [played the long game](#) on suppressing democracy, redrawing district maps for years in order to favor their candidates and appointing [conservative, partisan judges](#) into federal courts to affirm those maps. They have done so in tandem with a slew of [voter suppression laws](#) in states they control—which is the [majority](#). Analilia Mejia, co-executive director of the [Center for Popular Democracy Action](#), says in an [interview](#) that such efforts are “a strategy utilized to negate the power of a rising Black and Brown electorate.”

The GOP is also terrified (or should be) of young people voting. Recall in the 2016 presidential race when Hillary Clinton's loss to Donald Trump was [blamed, in part, on younger voters](#) who weren't motivated to show up to the polls. Two years later, that trend was [reversed](#) in the first midterms of Trump's presidency. Now,

four years after that, [young voters](#) have realized the dangers of apathy and showed up to the polls in force, casting a majority of their ballots for Democrats.

Mejia [says](#) “the policies that really motivate people” to vote are “the policies that we know will essentially save humanity and the planet and stop climate change; the policies that we know will ensure that our children, that our elders, that those most vulnerable in our communities have the resources that they need to not only survive but thrive—[these] are policies that are supported by the vast majority of people.”

This—including the overturning of [abortion rights](#) at the Supreme Court—was precisely what motivated so many young people and people of color to vote in the 2022 midterms. Varshini Prakash, executive director and co-founder of the Sunrise Movement, a youth climate justice organization, [told Common Dreams](#), “For us, it’s never been just about defeating Donald Trump... We turn out to fight for the issues our generation faces every day, like the impending climate crisis, protecting our reproductive freedoms, and ending gun violence in our schools.”

And yet, climate justice, economic justice, and racial justice were largely missing from the story that Democrats told in order to motivate people to go to the polls.

Rather than tout how his administration and his party would ensure a just transition to renewable fuels, President Joe Biden was [fixated on gas prices](#) and how to lower them. Instead of showcasing how the [2021 American Rescue Plan](#) was a good example of federal government action on inequality, candidates running for office were on the defensive against Republicans’ and the media’s hammering of [inflation](#) as a central election issue. In contrast to [their 2020 promises](#) to tackle racist police brutality and mass incarceration, Democrats decided to pass a [bill to increase police funding](#) and stave off GOP accusations of being “soft on crime.”

Voters showed up in spite of this. But they may have shown up to elect Democrats in even higher numbers had climate, economic, and racial justice been front and center ahead of the midterms. “These are popular ideas,” [says](#) Mejia.

Not only did Democrats refuse to fully articulate these popular ideas, but the corporate media also shaped its coverage to suit the GOP’s agenda. Outlets aggressively played up the Republican Party’s line that inflation was the central issue of the election—one for which, they alleged, Democrats bore sole blame.

Take one New York Times article published on Election Day. “Inflation is almost certainly the issue pushing the economy to its current prominence,” wrote the Times’ economic reporter Jeanna Smialek in a story headlined, “[Inflation Plagues Democrats in Polling. Will It Crush Them at the Ballot Box?](#)” Just hours after it was published, such a confident claim fell apart as the Democrats were most certainly not “crushed” at the ballot box.

Mainstream U.S. corporate news media outlets could have taken a page out of their British counterpart’s book, the [Guardian](#), which publishes analyses like that of former U.S. labor secretary Robert Reich. “Corporations are using rising costs as an excuse to increase their prices even higher, resulting in record profits,” wrote Reich, offering an explanation for inflation largely missing from U.S. outlets.

One Wall Street Journal [article](#) went as far as explaining quite convincingly that rather than being sparked by Democrats’ policies, inflation was triggered by the COVID-19 pandemic, and that the U.S. was in line with other nations and with historical trends. Yet the Journal couldn’t resist framing the piece with the misleading headline: “Midterm Election Could Make Democrats Latest Governing Party to Pay Price for Inflation.”

Most U.S. newspapers have spent the past year [banging the drum of inflation](#) and exaggerating its impact. They have [accepted the dogma](#) that higher wages, lower unemployment, and government assistance are the source of rising prices rather than corporate greed.

Mejia is aghast at the consensus that is emerging to tackle inflation through increasing interest rates and slashing benefits. She [finds it](#) “unbelievable that the way we dig ourselves... out of an economic crisis is by inflicting strategic targeted and sustained pain to those who are most vulnerable.”

She says that “the only way out of here, out of this moment, is through investment in people, in civic participation, and increasing our political power and voice.”

Perhaps if the Democratic Party had centered its midterm platform on such an approach, and perhaps if the corporate media had not distorted the truth, victory would not have been defined by simply holding the line against a fascist GOP; it would have been—and could have been—an outright defeat of authoritarianism and injustice. Too much is at stake, and our standards of success cannot be low.

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Source: Independent Media Institute

Credit Line: This article was produced by [Economy for All](#), a project of the Independent Media Institute.

What Was Humanity’s First Cultural Revolution?



Deborah Barsky - Photo:
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We live in a fast-moving, technology-dominated era. Happiness is fleeting, and everything is replaceable or disposable. It is understandable that people are drawn to a utopian vision. Many find refuge in the concept of a “return” to an idealized past—one in which humans were not so numerous, and animals abounded; when the Earth was still clean and pure, and when our ties to nature were unviolated.

But this raises the question: Is this nothing more than a utopian vision? Can we pinpoint a time in our evolutionary trajectory when we wandered from the path of empathy, of compassion and respect for one another and for all forms of life? Or are we nihilistically the victims of our own natural tendencies, and must we continue to live reckless lifestyles, no matter the outcome?

Studying [human prehistory](#) enables people to see the world through a long-term lens—across which we can discern tendencies and patterns that can only be identified over time. By adopting an evolutionary outlook, it becomes possible to explain when, how, and why specific human traits and behaviors emerged.

The particularity of human prehistory is that there are no written records, and so we must try to answer our questions using the scant information provided for us by the archeological record.

The [Oldowan era](#) that began in East Africa can be seen as the start of a process that would eventually lead to the massive technosocial database that humanity now embraces and that continues to expand ever further in each successive generation, in a spiral of exponential technological and social creativity. The first recognizable Oldowan tool kits start appearing 2.6 million years ago; they contain large pounding implements, alongside small sharp-edged flakes that were certainly useful for, among other things, obtaining viscera and meat resources from animals that were scavenged as hominins (humans and their close extinct ancestors) competed with other large carnivores present in their environments. As hominins began to expand their technological know-how, successful resourcing of such protein-rich food was ideal for feeding the developing and energy-expensive brain.

Stone tool production—and its associated behaviors—grew ever more complex, eventually requiring relatively heavy investments into teaching these technologies to successfully pass them onward into each successive generation. This, in turn,

established the foundations for the highly beneficial process of cumulative learning that became coupled with symbolic thought processes such as language, ultimately favoring our capacity for exponential development.

This had huge implications, for example, in terms of the first inklings of what we call “tradition”—ways to make and do things—that are indeed the very building blocks of culture. Underpinning this process, neuroscientific experiments carried out to study the brain synapses and areas involved during toolmaking processes show that at least some basic forms of language were likely needed in order to communicate the technologies required to manufacture the more complex tools of the [Acheulian](#) age that commenced in Africa about 1.75 million years ago. Researchers have demonstrated that the areas of the brain activated during toolmaking are the same as those employed for abstract thought processes, including language and volumetric planning.

When we talk about the Acheulian, we are referring to a hugely dense cultural phenomenon occurring in Africa and Eurasia that lasted some 1.4 million years. While it cannot be considered a homogenous occurrence, it does entail a number of behavioral and technosocial elements that prehistorians agree tie it together as a sort of unit.

Globally, the Acheulian technocomplex coincides generally with the appearance of the relatively large-brained hominins attributed to *Homo erectus* and the African *Homo ergaster*, as well as *Homo heidelbergensis*, a wide-ranging hominin identified in Eurasia and known to have successfully adapted to relatively colder climatic conditions. Indeed, it was during the Acheulian that hominins developed fire-making technologies and that the first hearths appear in some sites (especially caves) that also show indications of seasonal or cyclical patterns of use.

In terms of stone tool technologies, Acheulian hominins moved from the nonstandardized tool kits of the Oldowan to innovate new ways to shape stone tools that involved comparatively complex volumetric concepts. This allowed them to produce a wide variety of preconceived flake formats that they proceeded to modify into a range of standardized tool types. Conceptually, this is very significant because it implies that for the first time, stone was being modeled to fit with a predetermined mental image. The bifacial and bilateral symmetry of the emblematic Acheulian tear-shaped handaxes is especially exemplary of this

particular hallmark.

The Acheulian archeological record also bears witness to a whole new range of artifacts that were manufactured according to a fixed set of technological notions and newly acquired abilities. To endure, this toolmaking know-how needed to be shared by way of ever more composite and communicative modes of teaching.

We also know that Acheulian hominins were highly mobile since we often find rocks in their tool kits that were imported from considerable distances away. Importantly, as we move through time and space, we observe that some of the tool making techniques actually show special features that can be linked to specific regional contexts. Furthermore, population densities increased significantly throughout the period associated with the later Acheulian phenomenon—roughly from around 1 million to 350,000 years ago—likely as a result of these technological achievements.

Beyond toolmaking, other social and behavioral revolutions are attributed to Acheulian hominins. Fire-making, whose significance as a transformative technosocial tool cannot be overstated, as well as other accomplishments, signal the attainment of new thresholds that were to hugely transform the lives of Acheulian peoples and their descendants. For example, Acheulian sites with evidence of species-specific hunting expeditions and systematized butchery indicate sophisticated organizational capacities and certainly also suggest that these hominins mastered at least some form of gestural—and probably also linguistic—communication.

All of these abilities acquired over thousands of years by Acheulian peoples enabled them not only to settle into new lands situated, for example, in higher latitudes, but also to overcome seasonal climatic stresses and so to thrive within a relatively restricted geographical range. While they were certainly nomadic, they established home-base type living areas to which they returned on a cyclical basis. Thus, the combined phenomena of more standardized and complex culture and regional lifeways led these ancient populations to carve out identities even as they developed idiosyncratic technosocial behaviors that gave them a sense of “belonging” to a particular social unit—living within a definable geographical area. This was the land in which they ranged and into which they deposited their dead (intentional human burials are presently only recognized to have occurred onward from the Middle Paleolithic). To me, the Acheulian represents the first

major cultural revolution known to humankind.

So I suggest that it was during the Acheulian era that increased cultural complexity led the peoples of the world to see each other as somehow different, based on variances in their material culture. In the later Acheulian especially, as nomadic groups began to return cyclically to the same dwelling areas, land-linked identities formed that I propose were foundational to the first culturally based geographical borders. Through time, humanity gave more and more credence to such constructs, deepening their significance. This would eventually lead to the founding of modern nationalistic sentiments that presently consolidate identity-based disparity, finally contributing to justifying geographic inequality of wealth and power.

Many of the tough questions about human nature are more easily understood through the prism of prehistory, even as we make new discoveries. Take, for instance, the question of where the modern practice of organized violence emerged from.

Human prehistory, as backed by science, has now clearly demonstrated that there is [no basis](#) for dividing peoples based on biological or anatomical aspects and that [warlike behaviors](#) involving large numbers of peoples, today having virtually global effects on all human lives, are based on constructed imaginary ideologies. Geographical boundaries, identity-based beliefs, and religion are some of the conceptual constructs commonly used in our world to justify such behaviors. In addition, competition buttressed by concepts of identity is now being accentuated due to the potential and real scarcity of resources resulting from population density, consumptive lifestyles, and now also accelerated climate change.

On the question of whether or not the emergence of warlike behavior was an inevitable outcome, we must observe such tendencies from an evolutionary standpoint. Like other genetic and even technological traits, the human capacity for massive violence exists as a potential response that remains latent within our species until triggered by particular exterior factors. Of course, this species-specific response mode also corresponds with our degree of technological readiness that has enabled us to create the tools of massive destruction that we so aptly manipulate today.

Hierarchized societies formed and evolved throughout the Middle and Late

Pleistocene when a range of hominins coevolved with anatomically modern humans that we now know appeared in Africa as early as 300,000 years ago. During the Holocene Epoch, human links to specific regional areas were strengthened even further by the sedentary lifestyles that developed into the Neolithic period, as did the inclination to protect the resources amassed in this context. We can conjecture the emergence of a wide range of sociocultural situations that would have arisen once increasing numbers of individuals were arranged into the larger social units permitted by the capacity to produce, store, and save sizable quantities of foodstuffs and other kinds of goods.

Even among other animals, including primates, increased population densities result in competitive behaviors. In this scenario, that disposition would have been intensified by the idea of accumulated goods belonging, as it were, to the social unit that produced them.

Bringing technology into play, we can clearly see how humans began to transform their know-how into ingenious tools for performing different acts of warfare. In the oldest tool kits known to humankind going back millions of years, we cannot clearly identify any artifacts that appear adequate to be used for large-scale violence. We don't have evidence of organized violence until millions of years after we started developing tools and intensively modifying the environments around us. As we amplified the land-linked identity-based facet of our social lives, so did we continue to develop ever more efficient technological and social solutions that would increase our capacity for large-scale warfare.

If we can understand how these behaviors emerged, then we can also use our technological skills to get to the root of these problems and employ all we have learned to finally take a better hold of the reins of our future.

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Source: Independent Media Institute

Credit Line: This article was produced by [Local Peace Economy](#), a project of the

Independent Media Institute.