

# Stopping The War In Ukraine Now Is The Only Option



*Willem de Haan*

It might not be 'cool' to lay down weapons now, but it would mean the end of senseless violence and prevent the annihilation of Ukraine.

Reuters estimates that, after three weeks of war, 14,000 people have been killed, 2,7 million people have fled, 1,700 buildings have been destroyed and damages exceed 110 billion euro. The trauma that will result from what is happening in Ukraine will last decades.

Defense budgets all over Europe are being increased and relationships with Russia will be disrupted for years to come.

Whenever there is fighting, we seem to be grabbed by a hunger for war: Nuances disappear and a choice must be made between good and evil. The complex reality doesn't matter anymore, nor do the reasons for the conflict.

## *Language as a weapon*

Language also becomes a weapon in times of war: "Those who do not support us militarily, want us to slowly die", says Zelensky. It may sound logic, but it's not true - nobody wants the Ukrainian people to slowly die.

The appeal is clear, however. If you care about us, you support us with weapons, whatever it takes. The Netherlands is also understanding of Zelensky's call for Polish fighter jets and Finland's wish to become a member of NATO. Both would be an extremely dangerous escalation.

Ukraine did not start this war, but every day Zelensky chooses to continue this unequal battle, he also bears responsibility for the death toll, the refugees and the destruction of his country.

### *A high price to pay*

Continuing to fight maybe cool, but the people of Ukraine and soldiers on both sides are paying a terrible price. Putting weapons down might not be cool, but it would end the senseless violence and prevent the annihilation of Ukraine.

Even if it would cost him his life, ending the war would make Zelensky immortal, a true hero. Defending your country sounds noble, but what if the price is a completely destroyed country? With tens of thousands more dead and millions of refugees?

A report from the NOS Journaal (Dutch news report) sticks with me. A captured Russian soldier being interrogated somewhere in Ukraine. "How old are you?" Answer: 21 years old. "Where are you from?" From St Petersburg. "What are you doing here?" I was sent here. "What do you want?" I want to go home.

According to the voice-over the young man was later executed. Refusing to perform military service is incredibly difficult in both Russia and Ukraine. Soldiers do not have a choice, political leaders do. As Bob Dylan wrote in his song *Masters of War* in 1963: 'You put a gun in my hand / And you hide from my eyes.'

### *Peaceful protest*

War is terrible and the next violent outbursts are already announcing themselves: Moldavia, Georgia, the Baltic States, Taiwan. Will we push the world closer to the brink of war? I prefer to draw hope from the peaceful protest Gandhi used against the British rule in India, the kind that Martin Luther King used to end segregation in the United States, how mass protests around the world helped end the war in Vietnam and how peaceful protest from the East Germans brought down the Berlin Wall in 1989.

According to War Resisters' International (WRI), an organization founded in 1921 to promote peace and antimilitarism, over 1,1 million Russians have signed a petition against the war started by Russian human rights activist Lev Ponomarev. Yurii Sheliazhenko of the Ukrainian Pacifist Movement called for peaceful protest three days after the start of the war, where most people only see military solutions. He considers a neutral Ukraine the best option for the future.

### *The only option*

They know that violence only begets violence, history is full of it. Pacifism is not a popular concept in times of war, but among the people who believed in it and practiced it were Jesus of Nazareth and Albert Einstein, John Lennon and Mother Theresa. Call them idealists, but the world would be a far worse place without them.

Stopping the war now is the only option. Does that mean Putin gets his way? No. If he wants to occupy all of Ukraine and succeeds, he inherits a country of 44 million dissidents. Even for a dictator, that is a nightmare.

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## **Chomsky: Let's Focus On Preventing Nuclear War, Rather Than Debating "Just War"**



*Noam Chomsky*

NATO leaders announced Wednesday that the alliance plans to reinforce its

eastern front by deploying many more troops in countries like Bulgaria, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia — including [thousands of U.S. troops](#) — and sending “[equipment to help Ukraine defend itself against chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear threats](#).” And while the NATO alliance itself is not directly providing weapons to Ukraine, many of its member countries are [pouring weapons into Ukraine](#), including missiles, rockets, machine guns, and more.

In all likelihood, Russian President Vladimir Putin believed that his military would overrun Ukraine within a matter of a few days on February 24, when he ordered an invasion into the neighboring country after a long and massive military buildup on Ukraine’s border.

A month later, however, the war is still raging, and several Ukrainian cities have been devastated by Russian air attacks. Peace talks have stalled, and it is unclear whether Putin still wants to overthrow the government or is instead aiming now for a “neutral” Ukraine.

In the interview that follows, world-renowned scholar and leading dissident voice Noam Chomsky shares his thoughts and insights about the available options for an end to the war in Ukraine, and ponders the idea of “just” war and whether the war in Ukraine could potentially lead to the collapse of Putin’s regime.

Chomsky is internationally recognized as one of the most important intellectuals alive. His intellectual stature has been compared to that of Galileo, Newton and Descartes, as his work has had tremendous influence on a variety of areas of scholarly and scientific inquiry, including linguistics, logic and mathematics, computer science, psychology, media studies, philosophy, politics and international affairs. He is the author of some 150 books and the recipient of scores of highly prestigious awards, including the Sydney Peace Prize and the Kyoto Prize (Japan’s equivalent of the Nobel Prize), and of dozens of honorary doctorate degrees from the world’s most renowned universities. Chomsky is Institute Professor Emeritus at MIT and currently Laureate Professor at the University of Arizona.

*C.J. Polychroniou: Noam, we are already a month into the war in Ukraine and peace talks have stalled. In fact, Putin is turning up the volume on violence as the West increases military aid to Ukraine. In a [previous interview](#), you compared Russia’s invasion of Ukraine to the Nazi invasion of Poland. Is Putin’s strategy*

*then straight out of Hitler's playbook? Does he want to occupy all of Ukraine? Is he trying to rebuild the Russian empire? Is this why peace negotiations have stalled?*

Noam Chomsky: There is very little credible information about the negotiations. Some of the information leaking out sounds mildly optimistic. There is good reason to suppose that if the U.S. were to agree to participate seriously, with a constructive program, the possibilities for an end to the horror would be enhanced.

What a constructive program would be, at least in general outline, is no secret. The primary element is commitment to neutrality for Ukraine: no membership in a hostile military alliance, no hosting of weapons aimed at Russia (even those misleadingly called "defensive"), no military maneuvers with hostile military forces.

That would hardly be something new in world affairs, even where nothing formal exists. Everyone understands that Mexico cannot join a Chinese-run military alliance, emplace Chinese weapons aimed at the U.S. and carry out military maneuvers with the People's Liberation Army.

In brief, a constructive program would be about the opposite of the [Joint Statement on the U.S.-Ukraine Strategic Partnership](#) signed by the White House on September 1, 2021. This document, which received little notice, forcefully declared that the door for Ukraine to join NATO (the North Atlantic Treaty Organization) is wide open. It also "finalized a Strategic Defense Framework that creates a foundation for the enhancement of U.S.-Ukraine strategic defense and security cooperation" by providing Ukraine with advanced anti-tank and other weapons along with a "robust training and exercise program in keeping with Ukraine's status as a NATO Enhanced Opportunities Partner."

The statement was another purposeful exercise in poking the bear in the eye. It is another contribution to a process that NATO (meaning Washington) has been perfecting since Bill Clinton's 1998 violation of George H.W. Bush's firm pledge not to expand NATO to the East, a decision that elicited strong warnings from high-level diplomats from George Kennan, Henry Kissinger, Jack Matlock, (current CIA Director) William Burns, and many others, and led Defense Secretary William Perry to come close to resigning in protest, joined by a long list

of others with eyes open. That's of course in addition to the aggressive actions that struck directly at Russia's concerns (Serbia, Iraq, Libya, and lesser crimes), conducted in such a way as to maximize the humiliation.

It doesn't strain credulity to suspect that that the joint statement was a factor in inducing Putin and the narrowing circle of "hard men" around him to decide to step up their annual mobilization of forces on the Ukrainian border in an effort to gain some attention to their security concerns, in this case on to direct criminal aggression — which, indeed, we can compare with the Nazi invasion of Poland (in combination with Stalin).

Neutralization of Ukraine is the main element of a constructive program, but there is more. There should be moves towards some kind of federal arrangement for Ukraine involving a degree of autonomy for the Donbass region, along the general lines of what remains of Minsk II. Again, that would be nothing new in world affairs. No two cases are identical, and no real example is anywhere near perfect, but [federal structures exist in Switzerland and Belgium](#), among other cases — even the U.S. to an extent. Serious diplomatic efforts might find a solution to this problem, or at least contain the flames.

And the flames are real. Estimates are that some 15,000 people have been killed in conflict in this region since 2014.

That leaves Crimea. On Crimea, the West has two choices. One is to recognize that the Russian annexation is simply a fact of life for now, irreversible without actions that would destroy Ukraine and possibly far more. The other is to disregard the highly likely consequences and to strike heroic gestures about how the U.S. "will never recognize Russia's purported annexation of Crimea," as the joint statement proclaims, accompanied by many eloquent pronouncements by others who are willing to consign Ukraine to utter catastrophe while advertising their bravery.

Like it or not, those are the choices.

Does Putin want to "occupy all of Ukraine and rebuild the Russian empire?" His announced goals (mainly neutralization) are quite different, including his statement that it would be madness to try to reconstruct the old Soviet Union, but he might have had something like this in mind. If so, it's hard to imagine what he

and his circle still do. For Russia to occupy Ukraine would make its experience in Afghanistan look like a picnic in the park. By now that's abundantly clear.

Putin does have the military capacity — and judging by Chechnya and other escapades, the moral capacity — to leave Ukraine in smoldering ruins. That would mean no occupation, no Russian empire and no more Putin.

Our eyes are rightly focused on the mounting horrors of Putin's invasion of Ukraine. It would be a mistake, however, to forget that the joint statement is only one of the pleasures that the imperial mind is quietly conjuring up.

A few weeks ago, [we discussed](#) President Biden's National Defense Authorization Act, as little known as the joint statement. This brilliant document — again quoting Michael Klare — calls for “an unbroken chain of U.S.-armed sentinel states — stretching from Japan and South Korea in the northern Pacific to Australia, the Philippines, Thailand, and Singapore in the south and India on China's eastern flank” — meant to encircle China, including Taiwan, “ominously enough.”

We might ask how China feels about the fact that the U.S. Indo-Pacific command is now reported to be planning to enhance the encirclement, doubling its spending in fiscal year 2022, in part [to develop](#) “a network of precision-strike missiles along the so-called first island chain.”

For defense, of course, so the Chinese [government has] no reason for concern.

*There is little doubt that Putin's aggression against Ukraine fails [just war theory](#), and that NATO is also morally responsible for the crisis. But what about Ukraine arming civilians to fight against the invaders? Isn't this morally justified on the same grounds that resistance against the Nazis was morally justified?*

Just war theory, regrettably, has about as much relevance to the real world as “humanitarian intervention,” “responsibility to protect” or “defending democracy.”

On the surface, it seems a virtual truism that a people in arms have the right to defend themselves against a brutal aggressor. But as always in this sad world, questions arise when we think about it a little.

Take the resistance against the Nazis. There could hardly have been a more noble



cause.

One can certainly understand and sympathize with the motives of Herschel Grynszpan when he assassinated a German diplomat in 1938; or the British-trained partisans who assassinated the Nazi murderer Reinhard Heydrich in May 1942. And one can admire their courage and passion for justice, without qualification.

That's not the end, however. The first provided the Nazis with the pretext for the atrocities of Kristallnacht and impelled the Nazi program further toward its hideous outcomes. The second led to the shocking Lidice massacres.

Events have consequences. The innocent suffer, perhaps terribly. Such questions cannot be avoided by people with a moral bone in their bodies. The questions cannot fail to arise when we consider whether and how to arm those courageously resisting murderous aggression.

That's the least of it. In the present case, we also have to ask what risks we are willing to take of a nuclear war, which will not only spell the end of Ukraine but far beyond, to the truly unthinkable.

It is not encouraging that [over a third of Americans](#) favor "taking military action [in Ukraine] even if it risks a nuclear conflict with Russia," perhaps inspired by commentators and political leaders who should think twice before doing their Winston Churchill impersonations.

Perhaps ways can be found to provide needed arms to the defenders of Ukraine to repel the aggressors while avoiding dire consequences. But we should not delude ourselves into believing that it is a simple matter, to be settled by bold pronouncements.

*Do you anticipate dramatic political developments inside Russia if the war lasts much longer or if Ukrainians resist even after formal battles have ended? After all, Russia's economy is already under siege and could end up with an economic collapse unparalleled in recent history.*

I don't know enough about Russia even to hazard a guess. One person who does know enough at least to "speculate" — and only that, as he reminds us — is Anatol Lieven, whose insights have been a very useful guide all along. He regards



“dramatic political developments” as highly unlikely because of the nature of the harsh kleptocracy that Putin has carefully constructed. Among the more optimistic guesses, “the most likely scenario,” [Lieven writes](#), “is a sort of semi-coup, most of which will never become apparent in public, by which Putin and his immediate associates will step down ‘voluntarily’ in return for guarantees of their personal immunity from arrest and their family’s wealth. Who would succeed as president in these circumstances is a totally open question.”

And not necessarily a pleasant question to consider.

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# **We Need An Economy Without Bosses And Managers. Participatory Economics Is How.**



*Michael Albert – Photo: youtube.com*

Interest in worker cooperatives has been [spreading](#) lately across the U.S. This is largely due to growing insecurity in the face of structural changes in the workplace during the neoliberal era, which have intensified since the last financial crisis. In fact, worker cooperatives are well established in many countries of Europe, especially in France, Italy and Spain — countries with long anarchist and socialist traditions.

The movement for workers cooperatives goes beyond capitalism as it breaks down hierarchical structures and puts workers and community at the core of business operations. Yet critical questions remain about the function and impact of cooperative economics. For example, what would a post-capitalist economy where workers run productive facilities look like? How would decisions be made about production, distribution, and who earns what? And what would be the role of money under an economic system without owners or bosses? Is such an economic future even realistic, or a mere utopian dream?

Michael Albert has been advancing a vision of participatory economics for over 40 years now. In his view, “Participatory economics proposes a few key institutions that its advocates feel to be essential for an economy to fulfill quite widely held worthy aspirations including solidarity, diversity, equity, self management, and sustainability—classlessness—and to of course also be viable for producing and allocating to meet needs and develop potentials of everyone.”

Albert's latest book, [\*No Bosses: A New Economy for a Better World\*](#), presents a detailed pathway toward an economy based on genuine self-management and solidarity.

*C.J. Polychroniou: Your new book, No Bosses: A New Economy for a Better World, advances a vision for a new economy called participatory economics (parecon). A key idea behind your vision of an alternative economic system is worker self-management. Can you outline how such an economy would function with regard to decisions about production, allocation and rewards where workers run enterprises without bosses or owners?*

*Michael Albert: You ask a key question: With no owners, who will decide what? Participatory economics says we should all have a say in decisions that affect us in proportion to the degree to which we are affected. Workers' councils should therefore make workplace decisions.*

But beyond being made by their involved workers, workplace decisions need to be insightful and informed. What can facilitate that?

Look around now. About 20 percent of current employees do mainly empowering tasks. About 80 percent do mainly disempowering tasks. The empowering situations of the 20 percent convey to them information, skills, access to decisions, connections with others and confidence. The rote, repetitive and generally disempowering situations of the 80 percent diminish their information, skills, access, connections and confidence. Looking down at workers below, we have empowered managers, lawyers, engineers, financial officers, and other employees I call the *coordinator class*. Looking up at coordinators above, we have disempowered cleaners, short-order cooks, carriers, assemblers, and other employees I call the *working class*.

If we reject having owners but we retain this corporate division of labor, the empowered 20 percent will consider themselves special, responsible and important. They will set agendas and make decisions. They will pursue their own interests and defend their own dominance. The disempowered 80 percent will have to obey a new boss in place of the old boss. To eliminate this class hierarchy in which 20 percent decide and 80 percent obey, *all* workers will need to be comparably prepared to participate in informed decision-making. Thus, participatory economics apportions tasks into jobs so the particular mix of tasks

you do and the different mix I do, and indeed the mix every worker does provides to all a comparable level of empowerment.

*No Bosses* argues that “balanced job complexes” would not only end the coordinator/worker class division but also be productive, efficient and effective. But *No Bosses* also urges that we would still have a decision-related problem because beyond its workers, what occurs in a workplace also affects direct consumers of the workplace’s products as well as bystanders who may be inundated with pollutants. For self-management, direct consumers and also adjacent bystanders also need appropriate say. Moreover, if a workplace uses a particular quantity of some input to produce a desired amount of some output, other workers elsewhere can no longer use that same bit of input to produce a different output. Metals forged into bombs can’t be forged into bridges. So, everyone needs a say in what gets made, with what, by whom, for whom. A question arises: How will participatory workplaces and consumers together exercise self-managing say to arrive at properly accounted outcomes?

Nowadays, economists tell us we have no alternative. To allocate, we must use markets and/or central planning. But *No Bosses* reveals that while markets and central planning do a very credible job for dominant elites, for the rest of us, they diminish worker and consumer well-being, destroy ecological balance, demolish dignity, produce anti-sociality and enforce coordinator class rule.

To escape all that, participatory economics proposes that self-managing workers’ and consumers’ councils develop and refine their respective preferences through rounds of decentralized deliberation that bring production and consumption into accord.

*No Bosses* demonstrates how this “participatory planning” with no top and no bottom would settle on appropriate product amounts and valuations and deliver equitable incomes consistently with self-management and balanced jobs. It shows how “participatory planning” would efficiently utilize society’s productive assets to seek human fulfillment and development in light of ecological, social and personal implications. It shows how “participatory planning” would generate solidarity and not a rat race; diversity and not homogenization; dignity and not alienation; and ecological sustainability and not collective ecocide.

*What would be the role of money under this new economic system? And how*

*would a national-based “self-management” economy deal with the forces driving the global economy?*

In a participatory economy, money would account. It wouldn't accrue. People would receive income either for the duration, intensity and onerousness of their socially valued work, or because they can't work but get a full income nonetheless. Some goods would be free, like health care and much else, but on the consumer side, people would mostly choose from the social product the particular mix of goods and services they wish to enjoy up to their income/budget. On the producer side, workplaces would use diverse inputs to generate outputs. Participatory planning would mediate it all without competition or authoritarian command. Items would have prices to convey information that allows people to consume in accord with their income and to produce to meet needs and develop potentials without undue waste and while respecting the environment. Imagine a debit card to make purchases. Money just facilitates equitable allocation. There is no making money by having money.

If the global economy were composed of national participatory economies interacting by way of international participatory planning, the needs and desires of the populations of its many countries would drive it. But suppose some participatory economies operate in a world that is still market guided. The participatory economies would have their own domestic valuations that reflect true social costs and benefits. The rest of the world would have market valuations that reflect bargaining power. I would hope that a participatory economy would transact with other economies using whichever of the two prices would allocate the benefits of each trade in a way that would further equity rather than abet accumulation by the rich at the expense of the poor.

*How would unemployment be dealt with under this new economic system, or with individuals in general who refuse to join a workers' enterprise or execute tasks assigned to them at workplace by the collective?*

In a participatory economy, the amount of available work reflects people's desires for the output of work. Divide all the sought work among all the potential workers and everyone is employed. If in sum people seek less output, it means everyone works less, not that some work while others don't. The planning process plus participatory economy's remunerative norm correlates people who seek work with workplaces who seek workers. And though I have barely mentioned it, that

remunerative norm — that income is for the duration, intensity and onerousness of your socially valued labor — is another defining feature critical to participatory economy being an equitable and viable vision.

As you note, work in a participatory economy would occur via workers councils. If I was to refuse to be part of any workers council, I wouldn't work so I also wouldn't get income for work. Similarly, if I were to violate collectively agreed, self-managed norms in my workplace — for example, if I didn't do my tasks, or if I did them really poorly — I could lose my job. In a participatory economy, we would get income for the duration and intensity of our socially valued work. Between jobs we would retain income. We would get income only for work that is socially valued. Someone unskilled in medicine or basketball wouldn't be able to do surgery or shoot hoops for income. No one would want such an inferior product. No associated workers council would employ someone incapable of doing worthy work. But how do workplace councils get allotted appropriate total income for their workers? In our councils, how do we each get our fair share? How do we opt to do one job and not another? How do we get items to consume? *No Bosses* addresses all that and much more. But for your immediate question, in a participatory economy, unemployment of people able to work would only occur temporarily when people transition from one job to another. And such unemployed workers would retain their incomes as well.

*I assume you are aware of the practical challenges facing the transition to a worker-self management economy. So, what practical advice do you offer as to how we can proceed with the type of reforms needed that would create the building blocks for an economic system without bosses?*

We want enlivening, equitable, self-managing participatory economics to replace moribund, impoverishing, class-ruled capitalism. This requires that we fundamentally revolutionize the defining features of a central sphere of social life. But, as you suggest, on the way to that result, we will have to win lesser changes both for their immediate benefits to deserving constituencies, and to create the conditions for ultimately winning and implementing our greater goals. Two issues centrally arise. First, what kinds of things should we seek to win as part of the process of winning a new economy? Second, how should we fight for such immediate reforms in ways that contribute to winning a new economy?

What we might win in current society is anything that betters the lot of people

suffering economic ills. For example: wage increases. Dignity. Free medical care. A degree of say over work. Free internet. Changes in investment patterns. Changes in national and local budgets. Free education. Protection against ecological violations. And so on.

And how do we win such changes in current society? We create a situation in which those who have power to implement the changes do so because the risk to their power and wealth of refusing to give in is greater than the losses they will incur due to giving in.

Next, *how* do we fight for such changes? What words should we use? What demands should we make? What organizations should we develop? Even more, what desires should we address and arouse? Answer: We should choose among possibilities based on whether our choice enables us to win a sought reform, but also based on whether it builds a desire to fight on for more, and based on whether it strengthens our means to win more due to how we have conducted our struggle.

We fight for a higher minimum wage, but we talk about equitable incomes. We fight for dignity and improved work conditions, but we talk about self-management and build worker and consumer councils. We fight for restraints on dumping and for reduced military expenditures, but we talk about escaping market absurdity and attaining participatory planning.

Moreover, we don't address economy alone. Entwined with the above economic path, and with equal commitment, creativity, inspiration, audacity and priority, we simultaneously develop and seek to win cultural/community, sex/gender, and political vision with all together composing a participatory society.

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## **After February's Dire IPCC Report, The Green New Deal Is More Urgent Than Ever**

The ongoing war in Ukraine does not bode well for the future of peace and sustainability on planet Earth. As Noam Chomsky [said](#) in a recent interview for *Truthout*, “We are at a crucial point in human history. It cannot be denied. It cannot be ignored.” The latest report by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), released on February 28, spells out the dire consequences of inaction to human-induced climate change. So, where do we stand in the fight against global warming? Is the Green New Deal project making inroads?

In the interview that follows, two leading climate activists — Margaret Kwateng, a national Green New Deal organizer at [Grassroots Global Justice Alliance](#), and Ebony Twilley Martin, co-executive director of [Greenpeace USA](#) — discuss the significance of the Green New Deal project and its potential power as a transformative policy for saving the planet and creating a more fair and just social order.

*C.J. Polychroniou: What would achieving the Green New Deal look like, and can it be accomplished in the next decade given the current political climate in the U.S.?*



*Margaret Kwateng - Photo:  
Grassroots Global Justice Alliance*

*Margaret Kwateng:* We are living in a moment where nearly all of our lives are being deeply impacted by the climate crisis — especially frontline communities around the world. From extreme droughts to floods, hurricanes, tornadoes and [wildfires](#), whole communities are being devastated. The IPCC just released its latest global assessment of climate impacts that proclaimed the climate crisis is happening now, faster and more intensely than we expected. People are more aware than ever of the urgent need to stop the burning of the planet. The colliding crisis of climate change and the global pandemic has demonstrated that tragedies do not happen in a vacuum; rather, a crisis in one sector has ripple effects throughout our economy and touches on numerous parts of people's lives. The real solutions to the climate crisis require a transformation of the extractive economy (away from fossil fuel and other resource extraction, labor exploitation and corporate profiteering) that has brought us to this breaking point.

We envision a decade of the Green New Deal because we know this scale of global crisis will require more profound change than we have seen in years. Our movements are stepping forward with a vision and a demand focused on the reorganizing of our economy to center life and well-being.

In this way, the Green New Deal is not one law or policy. The Green New Deal is a whole set of transformative policies that are able to address multiple crises at once. The [THRIVE Act](#), which the [Green New Deal Network](#) (GNDN) worked with congressmembers to introduce in 2021, called for a \$10 trillion investment to mobilize our economy and confront climate chaos, racial injustice and economic inequality. This is the floor of what is required to confront these crises, not the ceiling.

A realized Green New Deal would grow union jobs in renewables; build affordable housing and expand clean accessible public transportation; divest from brutal systems like prisons and the military; and invest in community infrastructure. The goal is not to simply regenerate the fabric of our society but to also create a national community that values the essential labor of care workers like domestic workers, home care workers and teachers; actualizes justice for communities that have long been left behind; and reduces the ripple effect when global, local or personal crises strike.

Our current conjuncture of overlapping crises — continued pandemic, climate chaos, chronic racial injustice, democracy under attack and escalating militarization — poses both turbulent terrain to pass bold visionary policies and also the ripe opportunity for intersectional solutions that address these crises together. We need to divest from the billions of dollars going to war and violent policing of our communities, and redirect investment to renewable energy, clean transportation, affordable housing and the care sector.

Our work is not to accept the intransigence of our governments and obstructionist politicians, but to shift the political landscape entirely by demanding the full scale of what we need to survive and to offer an irresistible vision of a future in which we all thrive. That is the power and potential of our movements mobilized together behind a truly transformative Green New Deal.

*What was the impetus for diverse sectors of the climate justice movement, including labor, care workers, racial justice groups and Indigenous groups to come together to form the Green New Deal Network, and what role is the GNDN playing in achieving a Green New Deal?*

*Kwateng:* While the demand for a Green New Deal and Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez's Green New Deal resolution have dramatically shifted the national debate

on climate change policy since 2018, the vision at the heart of a Green New Deal has been around for much longer.

Many communities have been working to make Green New Deal-like shifts a reality for decades, under other banners like climate justice and a just transition. For example, when miners realized coal jobs were leaving Kentucky and community members were fed up with the contaminated water resulting from those same mines, they decided to launch [Appalachia's Bright Future](#), creating plans for how to move away from disease-causing, environment-degrading fossil fuel extraction to an alternative future together.

Despite this level of on-the-ground expertise, many communities on the front lines of the climate crisis have been left out of larger conversations on how to address it. The vision for the Green New Deal Network is to be an intersectional coalition that brings together workers, community groups, activists, and Black and Indigenous organizations, particularly those on the front lines of crises, in the fight for visionary climate, care, jobs and justice policies.

The work of organizations like the [Indigenous Environmental Network](#) (IEN) has pushed the scope of the Green New Deal vision beyond just switching out gas cars for electric ones and, instead, toward centering racial justice and social, economic and ecological transformation. Just last October, IEN and allies [descended on the capital](#) to say that real climate justice means both respecting Indigenous sovereignty and stopping fossil fuel extraction.

In addition, groups like the Grassroots Global Justice Alliance and Service Employees International Union are at the table to advocate for a robust and dignified care economy as a critical component of a Green New Deal. Care workers are on the front lines of the climate crisis, and they are the backbone of a sector that will need to expand as climate crises intensify.

Because there are groups ranging from the Movement for Black Lives, to the Center for Popular Democracy, to the Working Families Party at the Green New Deal Network, we are building a united front capable of creating a Green New Deal that doesn't replicate historically exclusive policies — in leaving out communities like women and Black folks — and instead is able to tackle the multiple crises we are facing. We are generating shared policy, electing progressives and holding them accountable, and organizing to change the social

and political landscape to make the kind of change where communities across the country can thrive.

*What are the barriers to bring about a Green New Deal this decade, and how do we break them down?*



*Ebony Twilley Martin - Photo: Greenpeace*

*Ebony Twilley Martin:* The Green New Deal is built on the vision of a world in which all people have what they need to thrive and the boundaries of the planet are respected. One of the biggest barriers to realizing this future is the profit-driven economic system in which massive corporations and a few wealthy elites control and exploit land, communities and legislation. This system prioritizes profits over the well-being of families while also driving the continued extraction from and commodification of the Earth. As you can see in the latest [IPCC report](#), this is drastically upsetting the balance of life on the planet.

Unity is key in breaking down this barrier. But unity is not always easy. As we look to recover from COVID-19, address the climate crisis, advance racial justice and build an economy that puts people first, corporate overlords and those who do their bidding in Congress continually try to pit these priorities against each other in an attempt to divide us. We saw this play out last year when corporations lobbied against the Build Back Better Act attempting to put climate action, health care, workers' rights and child care on the chopping block, despite all being overwhelmingly popular with the majority of Americans. The Green New Deal

Network provides a space where organizations and communities can work together across priorities to establish a unified front. We know these crises are interconnected, and to solve one, we must address them all.

Disinformation is also a huge barrier that needs to be addressed. For years, corporations have offered us a false choice between a healthy economy or a healthy planet and communities. Oil and gas companies, in particular, like to hide behind the prospect of jobs and stability to justify their destructive “business as usual.” The truth is, we have a better chance at creating millions of good-paying, stable, union jobs with renewable energy than we do with fossil fuels. Just before the pandemic struck, [clean energy jobs outnumbered fossil fuel jobs](#) nearly three to one, totaling about 3.3 million jobs and growing [70 percent faster](#) than the economy overall. And the clean energy industry proved resilient through 2020, too: Despite the pandemic and resulting economic crisis, [2020 was a record year](#) for [solar](#) and [wind](#) installations, as the industry continued to attract [investor interest](#).

Another piece of disinformation is that the current system is somehow safer. The Departments of Homeland Security and Defense, as well as the National Security Council and director of national intelligence, have all issued reports stating that [climate change poses a threat to national security](#). Financial regulators are also calling it [an emerging threat to the stability of the U.S. financial system](#). Most alarmingly, climate change threatens the health and safety of our families. [Air pollution from fossil fuels killed 8.7 million people](#) globally in 2018 alone. Pollution from fracked-gas infrastructure has [increased the risk of cancer for 1 million Black Americans](#). It has also contributed to 138,000 asthma attacks and 101,000 lost school days for Black children like my sons.

Making this the decade of the Green New Deal will address these threats to our health and safety by transitioning off of fossil fuels and toward renewable energy. The House Committee on Oversight and Reform recently held hearings on the fossil fuel industry’s role in spreading disinformation, and at Greenpeace USA, [we filed a complaint](#) with the Federal Trade Commission against Chevron for greenwashing. People are starting to wise up to these tactics, but both government and private companies need to take measures to stop the spread of disinformation, and those who spread it need to be held accountable.



*Why should people care about the work of the Green New Deal Network? How will this work benefit everyday people?*

*Martin:* This question cuts to one area where we can certainly improve, and that's how we communicate the goals and ambitions of a Green New Deal to our communities, families and friends. I know when a lot of my friends and family hear "Green New Deal," they recognize the term, but don't know what it includes or what it would do for them personally. Most of what is contained in the Green New Deal is extremely popular and would improve the livelihoods of everyday people. Things like clean energy and job investments, affordable housing, paid family and medical leave, and reducing child poverty — all regularly see support of around 60 percent and above in [polls](#). It is our job as the Green New Deal Network to better help people to understand that the Green New Deal is the pathway to securing a better future.

At its core, the Green New Deal is about caring and uplifting one another. As we talked about earlier, we can overcome these challenges through unity. The Green New Deal Network is envisioned as a coalition that embodies this unity. Since the Green New Deal Network has both national and state-based priorities, our work covers everything from large federal legislation in Washington, D.C., to local fights in our communities. Whether your passion is preventing pollution, improving workers' rights, building a fairer economy or improving the health care system, there is a space for people to get involved with the state coalitions and the organizations that are part of the Green New Deal Network.

If all of us in the Green New Deal Network can succeed in enacting the vision of a Green New Deal into federal, state, tribal and local governments across the country, then people throughout the U.S. will feel some relief from the oppressive, exploitative and downright violent forces that exist in everyday life. For some folks, these forces are outside their direct lived experience and exist only on the edges. For others, these are examples happening every day.

The Green New Deal will not solve all our problems — but it will show us that solutions are possible and that a transformation toward a more just, fair, green and equitable society is within our power to make a reality.

*This interview has been lightly edited for clarity.*

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## **Chomsky: Peace Talks In Ukraine “Will Get Nowhere” If US Keeps Refusing To Join**



*Noam Chomsky*

As Russia steps up its assault on Ukraine and its forces advance on Kyiv, peace talks between the two sides were scheduled to resume today for the fourth time, but have now been postponed until tomorrow. Unfortunately, some opportunities for a peace agreement have already been squandered, so it's hard to be optimistic about when the war will end. Regardless of when or how the war ends, though, its impact is already being felt across the international security system, as the rearmament of Europe shows. The Russian invasion of Ukraine also complicates the urgent fight against the climate crisis. The war takes a heavy toll on Ukraine and on the environment, but it also gives the fossil fuel industry extra leverage among governments.

In the interview that follows, world-renowned scholar and dissident Noam Chomsky shares his insights about the prospects for peace in Ukraine and how this war may impact our efforts to combat global warming.

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

*C.J. Polychroniou: Noam, while a fourth round of negotiations was scheduled to take place today between Russian and Ukrainian representatives, it is now postponed until tomorrow, and it still seems unlikely that peace will be reached in Ukraine any time soon. Ukrainians don't appear likely to surrender, and Putin seems determined to continue his invasion. In that context, what do you think of Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky's response to Vladimir Putin's four core*

*demands, which were (a) cease military action, (b) acknowledge Crimea as Russian territory, (c) amend the Ukrainian constitution to enshrine neutrality, and (d) recognize the separatist republics in eastern Ukraine?*

Noam Chomsky: Before responding, I would like to stress the crucial issue that must be in the forefront of all discussions of this terrible tragedy: We must find a way to bring this war to an end before it escalates, possibly to utter devastation of Ukraine and unimaginable catastrophe beyond. The only way is a negotiated settlement. Like it or not, this must provide some kind of escape hatch for Putin, or the worst will happen. Not victory, but an escape hatch. These concerns must be uppermost in our minds.

I don't think that Zelensky should have simply accepted Putin's demands. I think his [public response on March 7](#) was judicious and appropriate.

In these remarks, Zelensky [recognized that joining NATO is not an option for Ukraine](#). He also insisted, rightly, that the opinions of people in the Donbas region, now occupied by Russia, should be a critical factor in determining some form of settlement. He is, in short, reiterating what would very likely have been a path for preventing this tragedy — though we cannot know, because the U.S. refused to try.

As has been understood for a long time, decades in fact, for Ukraine to join NATO would be rather like Mexico joining a China-run military alliance, hosting joint maneuvers with the Chinese army and maintaining weapons aimed at Washington. To insist on Mexico's sovereign right to do so would surpass idiocy (and, fortunately, no one brings this up). Washington's insistence on Ukraine's sovereign right to join NATO is even worse, since it sets up an insurmountable barrier to a peaceful resolution of a crisis that is already a shocking crime and will soon become much worse unless resolved — by the negotiations that Washington refuses to join.

That's quite apart from the comical spectacle of the posturing about sovereignty by the world's leader in brazen contempt for the doctrine, ridiculed all over the Global South though the U.S. and the West in general maintain their impressive discipline and take the posturing seriously, or at least pretend to do so.

Zelensky's proposals considerably narrow the gap with Putin's demands and provide an opportunity to carry forward the diplomatic initiatives that have been

undertaken by France and Germany, with limited Chinese support. Negotiations might succeed or might fail. The only way to find out is to try. Of course, negotiations will get nowhere if the U.S. persists in its adamant refusal to join, backed by the virtually united commissariat, and if the press continues to insist that the public remain in the dark by refusing even to report Zelensky's proposals.

In fairness, I should add that on March 13, the *New York Times* [did publish a call for diplomacy](#) that would carry forward the "virtual summit" of France-Germany-China, while offering Putin an "offramp," distasteful as that is. The article was written by Wang Huiyao, president of a Beijing nongovernmental think tank.

*It also seems to me that, in some quarters, peace in Ukraine is hardly on top of the agenda. For example, there are plenty of voices both in the U.S. and in U.K. urging Ukraine to keep on fighting (although western governments have ruled out sending troops to defend Ukraine), probably in the hopes that the continuation of the war, in conjunction with the economic sanctions, may lead to regime change in Moscow. Yet, isn't it the case that even if Putin actually falls from power, it would still be necessary to negotiate a peace treaty with whatever Russia government comes next, and that compromises would have to be made for the withdrawal of Russian forces from Ukraine?*

We can only speculate about the reasons for U.S.-U.K. total concentration on warlike and punitive measures, and refusal to join in the one sensible approach to ending the tragedy. Perhaps it is based on hope for regime change. If so, it is both criminal and foolish. Criminal because it perpetuates the vicious war and cuts off hope for ending the horrors, foolish because it is quite likely that if Putin is overthrown someone even worse will take over. That has been a consistent pattern in elimination of leadership in criminal organizations for many years, matters [discussed very convincingly by Andrew Cockburn](#).

And at best, as you say, it would leave the problem of settlement where it stands.

Another possibility is that Washington is satisfied with how the conflict is proceeding. As we have discussed, in his criminal foolishness, Putin provided Washington with an enormous gift: firmly establishing the U.S.-run Atlanticist framework for Europe and cutting off the option of an independent "European common home," a long-standing issue in world affairs as far back as the origin of the Cold War. I personally am reluctant to go as far as the highly knowledgeable

sources we discussed earlier who conclude that Washington planned this outcome, but it's clear enough that it has eventuated. And, possibly, Washington planners see no reason to act to change what is underway.

It is worth noticing that most of the world is keeping apart from the awful spectacle underway in Europe. One telling illustration is sanctions. Political analyst John Whitbeck has produced a map of sanctions against Russia: the U.S. and the rest of the Anglosphere, Europe and some of East Asia. None in the Global South, which is watching, bemused, as Europe reverts to its traditional pastime of mutual slaughter while relentlessly pursuing its vocation of destroying whatever else it chooses to within its reach: Yemen, Palestine, and far more. Voices in the Global South condemn Putin's brutal crime, but do not conceal the supreme hypocrisy of western posturing about crimes that are a bare fraction of their own regular practices, right to the present.

*Russia's invasion of Ukraine may very well change the global order, especially with the likely emergence of the militarization of the European Union. What does the change in Germany's Russia strategy — i.e., its rearmament and the apparent end of [Ostpolitik](#) — mean for Europe and global diplomacy?*

The major effect, I suspect, will be what I mentioned: more firm imposition of the U.S.-run, NATO-based Atlanticist model and curtailing once again the repeated efforts to create a European system independent of the U.S., a "third force" in world affairs, as it was sometimes called. That has been a fundamental issue since the end of World War II. Putin has settled it for the time being by providing Washington with its fondest wish: a Europe so subservient that an Italian university tried to ban a series of lectures on Dostoyevsky, to take just one of many egregious examples of how Europeans are making fools of themselves.

Meanwhile, it seems likely that Russia will drift further into China's orbit, becoming even more of a declining kleptocratic raw materials producer than it is now. China is likely to persist in its programs of incorporating more and more of the world into the development-and-investment system based on the Belt-and-Road initiative, the "maritime silk road" that passes through the UAE into the Middle East, and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization. The U.S. seems intent on responding with its comparative advantage: force. Right now, that includes Biden's programs of "encirclement" of China by military bases and alliances, while perhaps even seeking to improve the U.S. economy as long as it is framed

as competing with China. Just what we are observing now.

There is a brief period in which course corrections remain possible. It may soon come to an end as U.S. democracy, such as it still is, continues on its self-destructive course.

*Russia's invasion of Ukraine may also have dealt a severe blow to our hopes of tackling the climate crisis, at least in this decade. Do you have any comments to make on this rather bleak observation of mine?*

Appropriate comments surpass my limited literary skills. The blow is not only severe, but it may also be terminal for organized human life on earth, and for the innumerable other species that we are in the process of destroying with abandon.

In the midst of the Ukraine crisis, the IPCC released its 2022 report, by far the most dire warning it has yet produced. The report made it very clear that we must take firm measures now, with no delay, to cut back the use of fossil fuels and to move toward renewable energy. The warnings received brief notice, and then our strange species returned to devoting scarce resources to destruction and rapidly increasing its poisoning of the atmosphere, while blocking efforts for extricating itself from its suicidal path.

The fossil fuel industry can scarcely suppress its joy in the new opportunities the invasion has provided to accelerate its destruction of life on earth. In the U.S., the denialist party, which has successfully blocked Biden's limited efforts to deal with the existential crisis, is likely to be back in power soon, so that it can resume the dedication of the Trump administration to destroy everything as quickly and effectively as possible.

These words might sound harsh. They are not harsh enough.

The game is not over. There still is time for radical course correction. The means are understood. If the will is there, it is possible to avert catastrophe and to move on to a much better world. The invasion of Ukraine has indeed been a severe blow to these prospects. Whether it constitutes a terminal blow or not is for us to decide.

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

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## **Climate Mitigation Isn't Just A Matter Of Ethics; It's Life And Death**





*James K. Boyce* -  
*umass.edu*

The climate crisis worsens with each passing year — and even the current levels of warming are disastrous, affecting ecosystems as well as social and environmental conditions of health. People in the world's poorest countries remain most vulnerable to the crisis. The world's governments are slow to react to the greatest challenge facing humanity today, even though potential solutions are not in short supply, with the transition to a green economy offering the most effective pathway to tackling the problem of global warming at its roots.

There are, in addition, intermediate steps that can be taken toward climate stabilization, such as carbon pricing and even the adoption of a universal basic income scheme as a means to counter the effects of global warming. Meanwhile, policy frameworks for climate adaptation are urgently needed, as renowned economist James K. Boyce points out in this interview. Boyce is professor emeritus of economics and senior fellow at the Political Economy Research Institute of the University of Massachusetts at Amherst. He received his PhD in economics from Oxford University and is the author of scores of books, including, most recently, *The Case for Carbon Dividends* (2019) and *Economics for People and the Planet* (2021). He received the 2017 Leontief Prize for Advancing the Frontiers of Economic Thought.

*C.J. Polychroniou: The climate crisis is the biggest problem facing humanity in the 21st century. In the effort to avoid a greenhouse apocalypse, competing approaches to climate action have been advanced, ranging from outright*

*technological solutions to an economic and social revolution as envisioned in the Green New Deal project and everything in between. Two of those “in between” approaches for cutting carbon emissions are cap-and-trade, a system already implemented in the state of California, and carbon pricing and carbon dividends, which is the approach you are advocating. Why do we need to put a price on carbon? How does carbon pricing work, and what are its benefits?*

*James K. Boyce:* First, let me say that I do not think it is useful to invoke the language of a coming “apocalypse.” It’s a vision with a lot of historical baggage, much of it downright reactionary, as my partner Betsy Hartmann explains in her book, [\*The America Syndrome: War, Apocalypse, and Our Call to Greatness\*](#) (Seven Stories Press, 2019). It misrepresents the climate crisis as a cliff edge, an all-or-nothing question akin to nuclear war, as opposed to an unfolding process that has ever-worsening consequences for humans and other living things. And it can instill a sense of despair and hopelessness that is deeply counterproductive. I agree with the late Raymond Williams that the task of the true radical is “to make hope possible, not despair convincing.”

Something similar can be said about the contrast between technological fixes and revolutionary transformations. Economic and social revolution is a process, too, not a one-off affair. Technological change can help to propel institutional change, and vice versa, and often there is an intimate connection between the two. I do not think we will solve the climate crisis with new technologies alone. The transition to a clean energy economy will require profound changes not only in how we relate to the natural world but also in how we relate to each other. I have argued that it will require a narrowing of inequalities and a deepening of democracy. But it would be folly to sit aside, waiting for social and economic revolution, before tackling the climate problem.

Cap-and-trade and carbon dividend policies both put a price on carbon. Instead of being able to dump carbon into the atmosphere free of charge (more precisely, free of monetary charge, since nature is charging us big time), pollution would carry a price tag. But there are crucial differences between these two policies. Cap-and-trade gives free pollution permits to corporations, up to the limit set by the cap. Consumers feel the bite in higher prices for transportation fuels, heating and electricity, just as they do when the oil cartel restricts supplies. The extra money they pay goes as windfall profits into the coffers of the corporations that received free permits. This may blunt political opposition to a carbon price from

fossil fuel lobbyists, but their first preference remains no cap at all, as was shown in the repeat debacles of efforts to pass cap-and-trade bills in Washington, D.C. in the first decade of the century.

Carbon dividend policies put a price on carbon, too, either via a cap with auctioned (not free) permits or by means of a tax. But instead of fueling windfall profits, the money from higher prices goes directly back to the public in equal per-person payments, consistent with the principle that we all own the gifts of nature — in this case, the limited capacity of the biosphere to absorb carbon emissions — in common and equal measure. As I discuss in my book, [\*The Case for Carbon Dividends\*](#) (Polity Press, 2019), this is an example of universal property. The right to receive carbon dividends cannot be bought or sold, or accumulated in a few hands, or owned by corporations. Universal property is individual, inalienable and perfectly egalitarian. This new kind of property, which is more akin to traditional common property than to private property or state property, could be a cornerstone for what is sometimes called “libertarian socialism.”

It's not that we simply need to put a price — any price — on carbon, although anything is better than the prevailing *de facto* price of zero. What we need to do is to keep the fossil fuels in the ground, to curtail their extraction at a pace and scale ambitious enough to stabilize the Earth's climate by the middle of the century. This is the goal of the Paris Agreement. In practice, it means that high-consuming countries, like the United States, must cut their use of fossil fuels by about 8 or 9 percent per year, year after year, between now and 2050. The easiest way to arrive at the “right” price on carbon is to cap the amount of fossil fuels we allow to enter our economy to meet this trajectory. For each ton of carbon they sell, fossil fuel firms would have to surrender a permit. They would buy permits (up to the limit set by the cap that tightens over time) at auctions. This is not rocket science. Quarterly auctions have been held since 2009 under the Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative for power plants in the northeastern states of the U.S. The carbon price comes about as a side effect of keeping fossil fuels in the ground, not as an end in itself.

In addition to climate stabilization, a side benefit of carbon dividends is that they would take a modest step toward reducing economic inequality, which has reached obscene levels in the U.S. and many other countries. Most households would come out ahead financially with carbon dividends, receiving more in dividends than they pay in higher fuel prices, for the simple reason that their

carbon footprints are smaller than average. High-income households with their outsized consumption of carbon, and everything else, would pay more than they get back, but they can afford it.

*You have also argued for a universal basic income as a solution to inequality and the effects of global warming. How would a universal income be funded, and would it be an addition to existing welfare programs or a replacement for them?*

Correction: Universal basic income can be *part of* the solution. Guaranteed employment can also be part of the solution, and as my colleagues Bob Pollin and his coauthors have shown, the clean energy transition will generate [millions of jobs](#). The extent to which existing welfare programs become redundant would depend on how much money we're talking about. A big advantage of universal income, compared to means-tested welfare payments, is that it unites society rather than dividing it between the welfare-eligible poor and everyone else. Universality helps to ensure political durability, as we've seen with Social Security and Medicare here in the U.S.

For universal basic income, a key question is how to pay for it. Most proposals rely on government funding. But redistributive taxation can be a heavy lift, and its durability is never certain since it depends on the vagaries of party politics. This is one reason I favor universal property as a source of universal basic income [universal property refers to the idea of a universal birthright to an equal share of co-inherited wealth]. Carbon dividends are one example. In his new book, [Ours: The Case for Universal Property](#) (Polity Press, 2021), Peter Barnes discusses a number of other possibilities.

*We now know that dramatic mass climate catastrophe is inevitable, especially for mega-cities and coastal populations. What are the sorts of changes (involving migration, changes in how cities are structured, changes in how nations relate to each other, technologies, etc.) that could help humans as a global community weather these catastrophes without massive human deaths? And what are the sorts of pressures and dynamics (protests, legislation, international cooperation) that would actually make these changes imaginable to implement in time?*

Every year that passes without serious policies to keep fossil carbon in the ground, where it belongs, increases the suffering that climate change will inflict. Coastal populations will be among the most seriously affected, but they will not be

alone. Drought-prone regions in Africa, for example, are at grave risk, too.

Not long ago, proponents of action to halt climate change (“mitigation” in the official lingo), including many governments in the Global South, were averse to discussing adaptation, fearing that it would let the big polluters off the mitigation hook. Times have changed. Today, the need for adaptation is urgent and undeniable. The key questions are how adaptation resources will be allocated across and within countries, and who will foot the bill.

In principle, the 1992 Framework Convention on Climate Change, an international treaty which today has near-universal membership, addresses the “who will pay” question by saying that countries will contribute “in accordance with their common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities.” The advanced industrialized countries bear greater responsibility and have greater capabilities, so they should pay for adjustment costs accordingly. Whether and to what extent this principle will be translated into concrete action remains an open question. So far, the results have not been encouraging.

The issue of how scarce resources for adaptation will be allocated — and whatever happens, they will be scarce relative to needs — is a critical question that has yet to receive much serious attention. If allocation obeys the default setting prescribed by neoclassical economics, the lives and properties of richer people will get priority over those of the poor because that the rich have greater ability (and hence willingness) to pay. Sea walls will be constructed to protect the “most valuable” real estate in Manhattan and Mumbai, for example, diverting flood waters to the locales where poor people live. In my view, this would be a travesty, adding injury to insult. If we believe that a clean and safe environment is a human right, not a commodity that should be allocated on the basis of purchasing power, then adaptation policies ought to prioritize those at greatest risk regardless of their ability to pay. Protests, legislation, international cooperation — all of these will be needed to make this happen. This is not just a matter of economics and ethics; it’s a matter of life and death.

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