

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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Urgent Need for Radical Change (an anthology of interviews with Noam Chomsky, 2021); and *Economics and the Left: Interviews with Progressive Economists* (2021).

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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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.

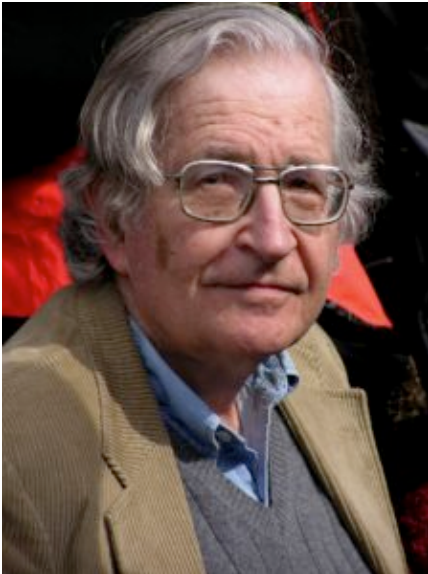
The issue of how scarce resources for adaptation will be allocated — and whatever happens, they will be scarce relative to needs — is a critical question that has yet to receive much serious attention. If allocation obeys the default setting prescribed by neoclassical economics, the lives and properties 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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Noam Chomsky: A No-Fly Zone Over Ukraine Could Unleash Untold Violence



Noam Chomsky ~ Photo:
en.wikipedia.org

As war rages on in Ukraine, diplomacy continues to take a back seat in spite of the heartbreaking devastation Russia's invasion has wrought. The post-World War II global architecture is simply incapable of regulating issues of war and peace, and the West continues to reject Russia's security concerns. Moreover, there are calls in some quarters for a declaration of a no-fly zone over Ukraine, although the actual enforcement of such a policy would quickly escalate violence, with potential consequences nearly too horrible to speak. The idea of a no-fly zone is profoundly dangerous, warns Noam Chomsky in this exclusive interview for *Truthout*.

C.J. Polychroniou: Noam, nearly two weeks into the Russian invasion of Ukraine, Russian forces continue to pummel cities and towns while more than 140 countries voted in favor of a UN nonbinding resolution condemning the invasion and calling for a withdrawal of Russian troops. In light of Russia's failure to comply with rules of international law, isn't there something to be said at the present juncture about the institutions and norms of the postwar international order? It's quite obvious that the Westphalian state-centric world order cannot regulate the geopolitical behavior of state actors with respect to issues of war/peace and even sustainability. Isn't it therefore a matter of survival that we develop a new global normative architecture?

Noam Chomsky: If it really is literally a matter of survival, then we are lost, because it cannot be achieved in any relevant time frame. The most we can hope

for now is strengthening what exists, which is very weak. And that will be hard enough.

The great powers constantly violate international law, as do smaller ones when they can get away with it, commonly under the umbrella of a great power protector, as when Israel illegally annexes the Syrian Golan Heights and Greater Jerusalem — tolerated by Washington, authorized by Donald Trump, who also authorized Morocco's illegal annexation of Western Sahara.

Under international law, it is the responsibility of the UN Security Council to keep the peace and, if deemed necessary, to authorize force. Superpower aggression doesn't reach the Security Council: U.S. wars in Indochina, the U.S.-U.K. invasion of Iraq, or Putin's invasion of Ukraine, to take three textbook examples of the "supreme international crime" for which Nazis were hanged at Nuremberg. More precisely, the U.S. is untouchable. Russian crimes at least receive some attention.

The Security Council may consider other atrocities, such as the French-British-Israeli invasion of Egypt and the Russian invasion of Hungary in 1956. But the veto blocks further action. The former was reversed by orders of a superpower (the U.S.), which opposed the timing and manner of the aggression. The latter crime, by a superpower, could only be protested.

Superpower contempt for the international legal framework is so common as to pass almost unnoticed. In 1986, the International Court of Justice condemned Washington for its terrorist war (in legalistic jargon, "unlawful use of force") against Nicaragua, ordering it to desist and pay substantial reparations. The U.S. dismissed the judgment with contempt (with the support of the liberal press) and escalated the attack. The UN Security Council did try to react with a resolution calling on all nations to observe international law, mentioning no one, but everyone understood the intention. The U.S. vetoed it, proclaiming loud and clear that it is immune to international law. It has disappeared from history.

It is rarely recognized that contempt for international law also entails contempt for the U.S. Constitution, which we are supposed to treat with the reverence accorded to the Bible. Article VI of the Constitution establishes the UN Charter as "the supreme law of the land," binding on elected officials, including, for example, every president who resorts to the threat of force ("all options are open") — banned by the Charter. There are learned articles in the legal literature arguing

that the words don't mean what they say. They do.

It's all too easy to continue. One outcome, which we have discussed, is that in U.S. discourse, including scholarship, it is now *de rigueur* to reject the UN-based international order in favor of a "rule-based international order," with the tacit understanding that the U.S. effectively set the rules.

Even if international law (and the U.S. Constitution) were to be obeyed, its reach would be limited. It would not reach as far as Russia's horrendous Chechnya wars, levelling the capital city of Grozny, perhaps a hideous forecast for Kyiv unless a peace settlement is reached; or in the same years, Turkey's war against Kurds, killing tens of thousands, destroying thousands of towns and villages, driving hundreds of thousands to miserable slums in Istanbul, all strongly supported by the Clinton administration which escalated its huge flow of arms as the crimes increased. International law does not bar the U.S. specialty of murderous sanctions to punish "successful defiance," or stealing the funds of Afghans while they face mass starvation. Nor does it bar torturing a million children in Gaza or a million Uighurs sent to "re-education camps." And all too much more.

How can this be changed? Not much is likely to be achieved by establishing a new "parchment barrier," to borrow James Madison's phrase, referring to mere words on paper. A more adequate framework of international order may be useful for educational and organizing purposes — as indeed international law is. But it is not enough to protect the victims. That can only be achieved by compelling the powerful to cease their crimes — or in the longer run, undermining their power altogether. That's what many thousands of courageous Russians are doing right now in their remarkable efforts to impede Putin's war machine. It is what Americans have done in protesting the many crimes of their state, facing much less serious repression, with good effect even if insufficient.

Steps can be taken to construct a less dangerous and more humane world order. For all its flaws, the European Union is a step forward beyond what existed before. The same is true of the African Union, however limited it remains. And in the Western hemisphere, the same is true for such initiatives as UNASUR [the Union of South American Nations] and CELAC [the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States], the latter seeking Latin American-Caribbean integration separate from the U.S.-dominated Organization of American States.

The questions arise constantly in one or another form. Up to virtually the day of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the crime very possibly could have been averted by pursuing options that were well understood: Austrian-style neutrality for Ukraine, some version of Minsk II federalism reflecting the actual commitments of Ukrainians on the ground. There was little pressure to induce Washington to pursue peace. Nor did Americans join in the worldwide ridicule of the odes to sovereignty on the part of the superpower that is in a class by itself in its brutal disdain for the notion.

The options still remain, though narrowed after the criminal invasion.

Putin demonstrated the same reflexive resort to violence although peaceful options were available. It's true that the U.S. continued to dismiss what even high U.S. officials and top-ranking diplomats have long understood to be legitimate Russian security concerns, but options other than criminal violence remained open. Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe observers had been reporting sharply increased violence in the Donbas region, which many — not just Russia — charge was largely at Ukrainian initiative. Putin could have sought to establish that charge, if it is correct, and to bring it to international attention. That would have strengthened his position.

More significantly, Putin could have pursued the opportunities, which were real, to appeal to Germany and France to carry forward the prospects for a “common European home” along the lines proposed by De Gaulle and Gorbachev, a European system with no military alliances from the Atlantic to the Urals, even beyond, replacing the Atlanticist NATO-based system of subordination to Washington. That has been the core background issue for a long time, heightened during the current crisis. A “common European home” offers many advantages to Europe. Intelligent diplomacy might have advanced the prospects.

Instead of pursuing diplomatic options, Putin reached for the revolver, an all-too-common reflex of power. The result is devastating for Ukraine, with the worst probably still to come. The outcome is also a very welcome gift to Washington, as Putin has succeeded in establishing the Atlanticist system even more solidly than before. The gift is so welcome that some sober and well-informed analysts have [speculated](#) that it was Washington's goal all along.

We should be thinking hard about these matters. One useful exercise is to

compare the rare appearance of “jaw-jaw” with the deluge on “war-war,” to borrow Churchill’s rhetoric.

Perhaps peacemakers are indeed the blessed. If so, the good Lord doesn’t have to put in overtime hours.

Speaking of the need for a new global architecture and diplomatic practice to adopt to the present-day global dynamic, Putin repeated, in a recent telephone conversation he had with French President Emmanuel Macron, the list of Russia’s grievances against the West, and hinted at a way out of the crisis. Yet, there was, again, rejection of Putin’s demands and, even more inexplicably, complete suppression of this ray of light offered by Putin. Do you wish to comment on this matter?

Regrettably, it is not inexplicable. Rather, it is entirely normal and predictable.

Buried in the press report of the Putin-Macron conversation, with the routine inflammatory headline about the goals of Putin, was [a brief report](#) of what Putin actually said: “In its own readout of the call, the Kremlin said that Mr. Putin had told his French counterpart that his main goal was ‘the demilitarization and neutral status of Ukraine.’ Those goals, the Kremlin said, ‘will be achieved no matter what.’”

In a rational world, this comment would be headlined, and commentators would be calling on Washington to seize what may be an opportunity to end the invasion before a major catastrophe that will devastate Ukraine and may even lead to terminal war if Putin is not offered an escape hatch from the disaster he has created. Instead, we’re hearing the usual “war-war” pronouncements, pretty much across the board, beginning with the renowned foreign policy analyst Thomas Friedman. Today *The New York Times* tough guy counsels, “[Vladimir, you haven’t felt the half of it yet.](#)”

Friedman’s essay is a celebration of the “cancellation of Mother Russia.” It may be usefully compared to his reaction to comparable or worse atrocities for which he shares responsibility. He is not alone.

That’s how things are in a very free but deeply conformist intellectual culture.

A rational response to Putin’s reiteration of his “main goal” would be to take him

up on it and to offer what has long been understood to be the basic framework for peaceful resolution: to repeat, “Austrian-style neutrality for Ukraine, some version of Minsk II federalism reflecting the actual commitments of Ukrainians on the ground.” Rationality would also entail doing this without the pathetic posturing about sovereign rights for which we have utter contempt — and which are not infringed any more than Mexico’s sovereignty is infringed by the fact that it cannot join a Chinese-based military alliance and host joint Mexico-China military maneuvers and Chinese offensive weapons aimed at the U.S.

All of this is feasible, but it assumes something remote, a rational world, and furthermore, a world in which Washington is not gloating about the marvelous gift that Putin has just presented to it: a fully subordinate Europe, with no nonsense about escaping the control of the Master.

The message for us is the same as always, and as always simple and crystal clear. We must bend every effort to create a survivable world.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky condemned NATO’s decision not to close the sky over Ukraine. An understandable reaction given the catastrophe inflicted on his homeland by Russian armed forces, but wouldn’t a declaration of a no-fly zone be a step closer to World War III?

As you say, Zelensky’s plea is understandable. Responding to it would very likely lead to the obliteration of Ukraine and well beyond. The fact that it is even discussed in the U.S. is astonishing. The idea is madness. A no-fly zone means that the U.S. Air Force would not only be attacking Russian planes but would also be bombing Russian ground installations that provide anti-aircraft support for Russian forces, with whatever “collateral damage” ensues. Is it really difficult to comprehend what follows?

As things stand, China may be the only great power out there with the ability to stop the war in Ukraine. In fact, Washington itself seems to be eager to get the Chinese involved, as Xi Jinping could be the only leader to force Putin to reconsider his actions in Ukraine. Do you see China playing the role of a peace mediator between Russia and Ukraine, and perhaps even emerge soon as a global peace mediator?

China could try to assume this role, but it doesn’t seem likely. Chinese analysts can see as easily as we can that there had always been a way to avert

catastrophe, along lines that we've discussed repeatedly in earlier interviews, briefly reiterated here. They can also see that while the options are diminished, it would still be possible to satisfy Putin's "main goal" in ways that would be beneficial to all, infringing on no basic rights. And they can see that the U.S. government is not interested, nor the commentariat. They may see little inducement to plunge in.

It's not clear that they would even want to. They're doing well enough by keeping out of the conflict. They are continuing to integrate much of the world within the China-based investment and development system, with Turkey — a NATO member — very possible next in line.

China also knows that the Global South has little taste for "canceling Mother Russia" but would prefer to maintain relations. The South may well share the horror at the cruelty of the invasion, but their experiences are not those of Europe and the U.S. They are, after all, the traditional targets of European-U.S. brutality, alongside of which the suffering of Ukraine hardly stands out. The experiences and memories are shared by China from its "century of humiliation" and far more.

While the West may choose not to perceive this, China can certainly understand. I presume that they'll keep their distance and proceed on their current path.

Assuming that all diplomatic undertakings fail, is Russia really in a position to occupy an entire country the size of Ukraine? Couldn't Ukraine become Putin's Afghanistan? Indeed, back in December 2021, the head of the Russian Academy of Science's Center for Ukrainian Research, Viktor Mironenko, warned that Ukraine could become another Afghanistan. What are your thoughts on this matter? Hasn't Putin learned any lessons from Afghanistan?

If Russia does occupy Ukraine, its miserable experience in Afghanistan will resemble a picnic in the park.

We should bear in mind that the cases are quite different. The documentary record reveals that Russia invaded Afghanistan very reluctantly, several months after President Carter authorized the CIA to "provide ... support to the Afghan insurgents" who were opposing a Russian-backed government — with the strong support if not initiative of National Security Adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski, as he later proudly declared. There was never any basis for the frenzied pronouncements about Russian plans to take over the Middle East and beyond.

Again, George Kennan's quite isolated rejection of these claims was [astute and accurate](#).

he U.S. provided strong support for the Mujahideen who were resisting the Russian invasion, not in order to help liberate Afghanistan but rather to "[kill Soviet Soldiers](#)," as explained by the CIA station chief in Islamabad who was running the operation.

For Russia, the cost was terrible, though of course, hardly a fraction of what Afghanistan suffered — continuing when the U.S.-backed Islamic fundamentalists ravaged the country after the Russians withdrew.

One hesitates even to imagine what occupying Ukraine would bring to its people, if not to the world.

It can be averted. That is the crucial point.

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Noam Chomsky: US Military Escalation Against Russia Would Have No Victors



Noam Chomsky

Russia's invasion of Ukraine took much of the world by surprise. It is an unprovoked and unjustified attack that will go down in history as one of the major war crimes of the 21st century, argues Noam Chomsky in the exclusive interview for *Truthout* that follows. Political considerations, such as those cited by Russian President Vladimir Putin, cannot be used as arguments to justify the launching of an invasion against a sovereign nation. In the face of this horrific invasion, though, the U.S. must choose urgent diplomacy over military escalation, as the latter could constitute a "death warrant for the species, with no victors," Chomsky says.

Noam 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, Russia's invasion of Ukraine has taken most people by surprise, sending shockwaves throughout the world, although there were plenty of indications that Putin had become quite agitated by NATO's expansion eastward and Washington's refusal to take seriously his "red line" security demands regarding Ukraine. Why do you think he decided to launch an invasion at this point in time?

Noam Chomsky: Before turning to the question, we should settle a few facts that are uncontestable. The most crucial one is that the Russian invasion of Ukraine is a major war crime, ranking alongside the U.S. invasion of Iraq and the Hitler-Stalin invasion of Poland in September 1939, to take only two salient examples. It always makes sense to seek explanations, but there is no justification, no extenuation.

Turning now to the question, there are plenty of supremely confident outpourings about Putin's mind. The usual story is that he is caught up in paranoid fantasies, acting alone, surrounded by groveling courtiers of the kind familiar here in what's left of the Republican Party traipsing to Mar-a-Lago for the Leader's blessing.

The flood of invective might be accurate, but perhaps other possibilities might be considered. Perhaps Putin meant what he and his associates have been saying loud and clear for years. [It might be](#), for example, that, "Since Putin's major demand is an assurance that NATO will take no further members, and specifically not Ukraine or Georgia, obviously there would have been no basis for the present crisis if there had been no expansion of the alliance following the end of the Cold War, or if the expansion had occurred in harmony with building a security structure in Europe that included Russia." The author of these words is former U.S. ambassador to Russia, Jack Matlock, one of the few serious Russia specialists in the U.S. diplomatic corps, writing shortly before the invasion. He goes on to

conclude that the crisis “can be easily resolved by the application of common sense.... By any common-sense standard it is in the interest of the United States to promote peace, not conflict. To try to detach Ukraine from Russian influence — the avowed aim of those who agitated for the ‘color revolutions’ — was a fool’s errand, and a dangerous one. Have we so soon forgotten the lesson of the Cuban Missile Crisis?”

Matlock is hardly alone. Much the [same conclusions](#) about the underlying issues are reached in the memoirs of CIA head William Burns, another of the few authentic Russia specialists. [Diplomat] George Kennan’s even stronger stand has belatedly been widely quoted, backed as well by former Defense Secretary William Perry, and outside the diplomatic ranks by the noted international relations scholar [John Mearsheimer](#) and numerous other figures who could hardly be more mainstream.

None of this is obscure. [U.S. internal documents](#), released by *WikiLeaks*, reveal that Bush II’s reckless offer to Ukraine to join NATO at once elicited sharp warnings from Russia that the expanding military threat could not be tolerated. Understandably.

We might incidentally take note of the strange concept of “the left” that appears regularly in excoriation of “the left” for insufficient skepticism about the “Kremlin’s line.”

The fact is, to be honest, that we do not know why the decision was made, even whether it was made by Putin alone or by the Russian Security Council in which he plays the leading role. There are, however, some things we do know with fair confidence, including the record reviewed in some detail by those just cited, who have been in high places on the inside of the planning system. In brief, the crisis has been brewing for 25 years as the U.S. contemptuously rejected Russian security concerns, in particular their clear red lines: Georgia and especially Ukraine.

There is good reason to believe that this tragedy could have been avoided, until the last minute. We’ve discussed it before, repeatedly. As to why Putin launched the criminal aggression right now, we can speculate as we like. But the immediate background is not obscure — evaded but not contested.

It's easy to understand why those suffering from the crime may regard it as an unacceptable indulgence to inquire into why it happened and whether it could have been avoided. Understandable, but mistaken. If we want to respond to the tragedy in ways that will help the victims, and avert still worse catastrophes that loom ahead, it is wise, and necessary, to learn as much as we can about what went wrong and how the course could have been corrected. Heroic gestures may be satisfying. They are not helpful.

As often before, I'm reminded of a lesson I learned long ago. In the late 1960s, I took part in a meeting in Europe with a few representatives of the National Liberation Front of South Vietnam ("Viet Cong," in U.S. parlance). It was during the brief period of intense opposition to the horrendous U.S. crimes in Indochina. Some young people were so infuriated that they felt that only a violent reaction would be an appropriate response to the unfolding monstrosities: breaking windows on Main Street, bombing an ROTC center. Anything less amounted to complicity in terrible crimes. The Vietnamese saw things very differently. They strongly opposed all such measures. They presented their model of an effective protest: a few women standing in silent prayer at the graves of U.S. soldiers killed in Vietnam. They were not interested in what made American opponents of the war feel righteous and honorable. They wanted to survive.

It's a lesson I've often heard in one or another form from victims of hideous suffering in the Global South, the prime target of imperial violence. One we should take to heart, adapted to circumstances. Today that means an effort to understand why this tragedy occurred and what could have been done to avert it, and to apply these lessons to what comes next.

The question cuts deep. There is no time to review this critically important matter here, but repeatedly the reaction to real or imagined crisis has been to reach for the six-gun rather than the olive branch. It's almost a reflex, and the consequences have generally been awful — for the traditional victims. It's always worthwhile to try to understand, to think a step or two ahead about the likely consequences of action or inaction. Truisms of course, but worth reiterating, because they are so easily dismissed in times of justified passion.

The options that remain after the invasion are grim. The least bad is support for the diplomatic options that still exist, in the hope of reaching an outcome not too far from what was very likely achievable a few days ago: Austrian-style

neutralization of Ukraine, some version of Minsk II federalism within. Much harder to reach now. And — necessarily — with an escape hatch for Putin, or outcomes will be still more dire for Ukraine and everyone else, perhaps almost unimaginably so.

Very remote from justice. But when has justice prevailed in international affairs? Is it necessary to review the appalling record once again?

Like it or not, the choices are now reduced to an ugly outcome that rewards rather than punishes Putin for the act of aggression — or the strong possibility of terminal war. It may feel satisfying to drive the bear into a corner from which it will lash out in desperation — as it can. Hardly wise.

Meanwhile, we should do anything we can to provide meaningful support for those valiantly defending their homeland against cruel aggressors, for those escaping the horrors, and for the thousands of courageous Russians publicly opposing the crime of their state at great personal risk, a lesson to all of us.

And we should also try to find ways to help a much broader class of victims: all life on Earth. This catastrophe took place at a moment where all of the great powers, indeed all of us, must be working together to control the great scourge of environmental destruction that is already exacting a grim toll, with much worse soon to come unless major efforts are undertaken quickly. To drive home the obvious, the IPCC just [released](#) the latest and by far most ominous of its regular assessments of how we are careening to catastrophe.

Meanwhile, the necessary actions are stalled, even driven into reverse, as badly needed resources are devoted to destruction and the world is now on a course to expand the use of fossil fuels, including the most dangerous and conveniently abundant of them, coal.

A more grotesque conjuncture could hardly be devised by a malevolent demon. It can't be ignored. Every moment counts.

The Russian invasion is in clear violation of Article 2(4) of the UN Charter, which prohibits the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity of another state. Yet Putin sought to offer legal justifications for the invasion during his speech on February 24, and Russia cites Kosovo, Iraq, Libya and Syria as evidence that the United States and its allies violate international law repeatedly.

Can you comment on Putin's legal justifications for the invasion of Ukraine and on the status of international law in the post-Cold War era?

There is nothing to say about Putin's attempt to offer legal justification for his aggression. Its merit is zero.

Of course, it is true that the U.S. and its allies violate international law without a blink of an eye, but that provides no extenuation for Putin's crimes. Kosovo, Iraq and Libya did, however, have direct implications for the conflict over Ukraine.

The Iraq invasion was a textbook example of the crimes for which Nazis were hanged at Nuremberg, pure unprovoked aggression. And a punch in Russia's face.

In the case of Kosovo, NATO aggression (meaning U.S. aggression) was claimed to be "illegal but justified" (for example, by the International Commission on Kosovo chaired by Richard Goldstone) on grounds that the bombing was undertaken to terminate ongoing atrocities. That judgment required reversal of the chronology. The evidence is overwhelming that the flood of atrocities was the consequence of the invasion: predictable, predicted, anticipated. Furthermore, [diplomatic options were available](#), [but] as usual, ignored in favor of violence.

High U.S. officials confirm that it was primarily the bombing of Russian ally Serbia — without even informing them in advance — that reversed Russian efforts to work together with the U.S. somehow to construct a post-Cold War European security order, a reversal accelerated with the invasion of Iraq and the bombing of Libya after Russia agreed not to veto a UN Security Council Resolution that NATO at once violated.

Events have consequences; however, the facts may be concealed within the doctrinal system.

The status of international law did not change in the post-Cold War period, even in words, let alone actions. President Clinton made it clear that the U.S. had no intention of abiding by it. The Clinton Doctrine declared that the U.S. reserves the right to act "unilaterally when necessary," including "unilateral use of military power" to defend such vital interests as "ensuring uninhibited access to key markets, energy supplies and strategic resources." His successors as well, and anyone else who can violate the law with impunity.

That's not to say that international law is of no value. It has a range of applicability, and it is a useful standard in some respects.

The aim of the Russian invasion seems to be to take down the Zelensky government and install in its place a pro-Russian one. However, no matter what happens, Ukraine is facing a daunting future for its decision to become a pawn in Washington's geostrategic games. In that context, how likely is it that economic sanctions will cause Russia to change its stance toward Ukraine — or do the economic sanctions aim at something bigger, such as undermining Putin's control inside Russia and ties with countries such as Cuba, Venezuela and possibly even China itself?

Ukraine may not have made the most judicious choices, but it had nothing like the options available to the imperial states. I suspect that the sanctions will drive Russia to even greater dependency on China. Barring a serious change of course, Russia is a kleptocratic petrostate relying on a resource that must decline sharply or we are all finished. It's not clear whether its [financial system](#) can weather a sharp attack, through sanctions or other means. All the more reason to offer an escape hatch with a grimace.

Western governments, mainstream opposition parties, including the Labour Party in U.K., and corporate media alike have embarked on a chauvinistic anti-Russian campaign. The targets include not only Russia's oligarchs but musicians, conductors and singers, and even football owners such as Roman Abramovich of Chelsea FC. Russia has even been banned from Eurovision in 2022 following the invasion. This is the same reaction that the corporate media and the international community in general exhibited towards the U.S. following its invasion and subsequent destruction of Iraq, wasn't it?

Your wry comment is quite appropriate. And we can go on in ways that are all too familiar.

Do you think the invasion will initiate a new era of sustained contestation between Russia (and possibly in alliance with China) and the West?

It's hard to tell where the ashes will fall — and that might turn out not to be a metaphor. So far, China is playing it cool, and is likely to try to carry forward its extensive program of economic integration of much of the world within its expanding global system, a few weeks ago [incorporating Argentina](#) within the Belt

and Road initiative, while watching rivals destroy themselves.

As we've discussed before, contestation is a death warrant for the species, with no victors. We are at a crucial point in human history. It cannot be denied. It cannot be ignored.

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CJ

Polychroniou

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

Bruce Springsteen - Chimes Of Freedom (East Berlin 1988)

July 1988. One year before the fall of the Berlin wall, between 200.000 and 300.000 east-berliners witnessed this historical concert. In his speech, they recommended him not to say the word “wall” so he changed it for “barriers”. Epic historical moment.

GERMAN: Es ist schön in Ost-Berlin zu sein. Ich möchte euch sagen ich bin nicht hier für oder gegen eine Regierung, ich bin gekommen um rock'n'roll zu spielen für Ost-Berlinern, in der Hofnung dass eines Tages alle Barrieren obgeriesen werden.

ENGLISH: It's nice to be in East Berlin. I want to tell you that I'm not here for or against any government, I have come to play rock'n'roll for the East-Berliners, in the hope that one day all barriers will be torn down.