

Nationalizing Fossil Fuel Industry Is A Practical Solution To Rising Inflation



Prof.dr. Robert Pollin

Since mid-2020, inflation has been rising, with the level of average prices going up at a faster rate than it has since the early 1980s.

In January 2022, prices had increased by 7.5 percent compared to prices in January 2021, and it now looks like the U.S. may be stuck with higher inflation in 2022 and even beyond.

Why are prices rising so dramatically? Are we heading toward double-digit inflation? Can anything be done to curb inflation? How does inflation impact growth and unemployment? Renowned progressive economist Robert Pollin provides comprehensive responses to these questions in the exclusive interview for *Truthout* that follows. Pollin is distinguished professor of economics and co-director of the Political Economy Research Institute at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst.

C.J. Polychroniou: Back in the 1970s, inflation was the word that was on everybody's lips. It was the longest stretch of inflation that the United States had experienced and seems to have been caused by a surge in oil prices. Since then, we've had a couple of other brief inflationary episodes, one in the late 1980s and another one in mid-2008, both of which were also caused by skyrocketing gas prices. Inflation returned with a vengeance in 2021, causing a lot of anxiety, and it's quite possible that we could be stuck with it throughout 2022. What's causing

this inflation surge, and how likely is it that we could see a return to 1970s levels of inflation?

Robert Pollin: For the 12-month period ending this past January, inflation in the U.S economy was at [7.5 percent](#). This is the highest U.S. rate since 1981, when inflation was at 10.3 percent. Over the 30-year period from 1991 to 2020, U.S. inflation averaged 2.2 percent. The inflation rate for 2020 itself was 1.2 percent. Obviously, some new forces have come into play over the past year as the U.S. economy has been emerging out of the COVID-induced recession.

To understand these new forces, let's first be clear on what exactly we mean by the term "inflation." The 7.5 percent increase in inflation is measuring the average rise in prices for a broad basket of goods and services that a typical household will purchase over the course of a year. At least in principle, this includes everything — food, rent, medical expenses, child care, auto purchases and upkeep, gasoline, home heating fuel, phone services, internet connections and Netflix subscriptions.

In fact, prices for the individual items within this overall basket of goods and services have not all been rising at this average 7.5 percent rate. Rather, the 7.5 percent average figure includes big differences in price movements among individual components in the overall basket.

The biggest single factor driving up overall inflation rate is energy prices. Energy prices rose by 27 percent over the past year, and within the overall energy category, gasoline rose by 40 percent and heating oil by 46 percent. This spike in gasoline and heating oil prices, in turn, has fed into the total operating costs faced by nearly all businesses, since these businesses need gasoline and heating oil to function. Businesses therefore try to cover their increased gasoline and heating oil costs by raising their prices.

The second big factor is automobile prices, used cars in particular. The average price of used cars rose by 41 percent over the past year. High auto prices do also feed into the costs of other businesses, though not to as large an extent as energy costs.

The third big factor has been wage increases. Average wages rose by 4.0 percent over the past year. Here again, businesses will try to cover these increased wage costs through passing the costs onto consumers through higher prices. That said,

we need to be clear on some details about the wage increases. First of all, for the average workers, their 4.0 percent wage increase is 3.5 percent below the 7.5 percent increase in prices for the average consumer basket. This tells us that, due to the 7.5 percent inflation rate, the workers' 4.0 percent wage increase ends up amounting to a 3.5 percent *pay cut* after we take account of what the workers can buy with their wages.

Second, not all workers have gotten this average 4.0 percent wage increase. Some have gotten more and others got less. In fact, some of the largest wage increases went to workers employed in hotels and restaurants (8.4 percent raises) and in nursing home facilities (6 percent raises). These workers were hard-hit by the COVID pandemic and recession, through the dangerous conditions in nursing homes and the full-scale lockdowns of restaurants and hotels. Finance industry employees also got big raises, at 8.1 percent, though in this case, hardly to compensate for hardships over the previous year. These raises rather reflect the dizzying rise of the U.S. stock market during COVID and after, all fueled by the Federal Reserve's \$4 trillion [bailout](#) of Wall Street over the crisis.

What then are the key specifics underlying the overall inflation rise?

Let's consider car prices, energy prices and wages in turn:

Cars: What is pushing up these prices is the widely discussed breakdown in global supply chains, and in particular, the sharp [fall in the supply of computer chips](#) that are needed for manufacturing new cars. The [supply chain breakdown](#) is far more widespread than just the computer chip industry. But auto manufacturing is where the impact on overall inflation has been most acute to date. This is because the demand for used car purchases spiked when the supply of new cars coming off of global assembly lines contracted.

Car prices will start falling when the computer chip supply becomes replenished. But this may not happen for [several more months](#). In any case, both for the short term and over the longer term as well, the demand for car ownership can and should be reduced, through increasing the availability and quality of public transportation, along with people carpooling to work, and biking or walking when that is a realistic option. All of these ways to reduce our dependency on private cars will also, of course, mean lowering the demand for gasoline. And let's not forget that when we burn less gasoline, we will then also reduce carbon dioxide

emissions that are the primary cause of climate change.

Energy: Precisely because burning gasoline, heating oil, and other fossil fuel energy sources is the primary cause of climate change, what we most need to accomplish is to dramatically lower demand for fossil fuels. In other words, pushing fossil fuel prices back down is not helpful in terms of addressing the climate crisis since it would encourage greater fossil fuel consumption.

As such, government policy now needs to commit to both keeping fossil fuel energy prices high, but then to protect energy consumers from the impact of these high fossil fuel prices. This will require large-scale investments in energy efficiency, in all areas of buildings, transportation and industrial activity. Greatly expanding public transportation offerings is one place to start. Providing large subsidies to retrofit residences with low-cost LED lights, improved insulation and high-efficiency electric heat pumps to replace inefficient boilers is another critical area. Government policy then needs to massively accelerate the production of clean renewable energy sources to supplant our existing fossil fuel energy infrastructure. It is already the case that the [costs](#) of [generating electricity](#) with solar and wind power are at parity or lower than with fossil fuels. Of course, not all of these investments in energy efficiency and renewable energy will have an immediate impact. Therefore, for the immediate term, the government should provide people with energy tax rebates to compensate them for the impacts of any temporary spikes in energy prices.

The more basic solution here would be for the government to take over the U.S. fossil fuel industry. Under a nationalized fossil fuel industry, the necessary phase-out of fossil fuels as an energy source can proceed in an orderly fashion. The government could then set fossil fuel energy prices to reflect the needs of both consumers and the imperatives of the clean energy transition. At present, the U.S. government could purchase controlling interest in the three dominant U.S. oil and gas companies — ExxonMobil, Chevron and Conoco — for about \$350 billion. This would be less than [10 percent](#) of the \$4 trillion that the Federal Reserve pumped into Wall Street during the COVID crisis. More generally, these costs should be understood as trivial because nationalization would end these corporations' relentless [campaign of sabotaging](#) the clean energy transition.

Wages: It is crucial to frame these current wage increases within the broader historical context. Over the past 50 years, the average wage for U.S. workers has

stagnated (after accounting for inflation). Thus, as of January 2021, the [average wage](#) for nonsupervisory workers was at \$25.18 an hour, while this figure for 1972, adjusted for inflation, was \$25.28 per hour. This is while average labor productivity — the average amount each worker produces over the course of a day — has [increased nearly 2.5-fold](#) between 1972 and 2021. Thus, if average wages had risen in step with productivity gains, and no more, between 1972 and today, the average worker's wage last year would have been \$61.94, not \$25.18.

Indeed, a major factor keeping inflation low for the previous 30 years was the fact that workers didn't have the clout to bargain up their wages. Alan Greenspan, the chair of the Federal Reserve from 1987 to 2006, explicitly acknowledged this fact. He [observed](#) in 1995 that, even at low unemployment rates, U.S. workers had become "traumatized" by the loss of bargaining strength, resulting primarily from global outsourcing that pitted U.S. workers against those in relatively low-wage economies, such as China and Mexico. Greenspan was effectively describing what Karl Marx termed the "reserve army of labor," in Volume 1 of *Capital*, except that the reserve army now operates on a global scale.

Within this perspective, we certainly do not want to keep inflation down through preventing workers from receiving the wage increases they more than deserve. But this is exactly the core idea undergirding the approach [advocated](#) by a large chorus of orthodox economists such as Lawrence Summers. Their proposals entail the Federal Reserve increasing interest rates significantly, with the aim of reducing spending in the economy since it will then become more expensive to borrow money. The spending cutbacks will then raise the unemployment rate. Higher unemployment, in turn, will inculcate workers with a necessary fresh dose of trauma. Wage demands will correspondingly fall.

In short, this is a program to accomplish exactly the opposite of what the Biden administration has promised in terms of delivering increased well-being to U.S. workers post-COVID.

Are there any feasible alternatives to the Fed raising interest rates as a means of controlling inflation?

The Federal Reserve has held the short-term interest rate that it controls at near-zero since the onset of the COVID pandemic in March 2020. The Fed also held this interest rate at near zero for six years in the aftermath of the 2007-2009 Wall

Street collapse and Great Recession. Generally speaking, it should be possible for interest rates to be higher than zero without causing the economy to collapse. Interest rates could therefore rise modestly and incrementally. But this is different than the Fed imposing large interest rate increases for the purpose of raising the unemployment rate and, thereby, decimating workers' bargaining strength.

An alternative program for addressing the current inflationary pressures should include:

- Responding to the full set of immediate supply-chain issues, starting with computer chip shortages. For example, expand public transportation and subsidize ride-sharing to dampen the demand for used cars while the computer chip bottlenecks are brought under control.

- Protect consumers from high energy prices through energy tax rebates and accelerating large-scale energy efficiency investments.

- Supporting ongoing wage increases. Businesses will have to absorb these increased labor costs to some extent, and thus, on average, see their profit margins decline modestly. U.S. businesses cannot expect that wage stagnation will remain a feature of U.S. capitalism for another 50 years, even while labor productivity continues to increase steadily. To the extent that big corporations, in particular, try to push their increased labor costs onto consumers through raising prices, the Biden administration should aggressively enforce existing antitrust (i.e., anti-monopoly) policies to control these price mark-ups over labor costs. They have [already begun](#) to do so.

Considering these measures as a whole, they are not likely to bring the inflation rate down into the 2 percent range that the U.S. experienced between 1990 and 2020. Keeping inflation that low will almost certainly require exactly more decades of traumatized workers and wage stagnation. But by itself, an average inflation rate in the range of 3-4 percent, as opposed to 1-2 percent, is not a serious problem, as long as that somewhat higher inflation rate results from increased wages and a more equal distribution of the economy's overall income pie.

What is the impact of persistent inflation on economic growth and unemployment?

In fact, there is no consistent relationship between inflation, economic growth and unemployment. Rather, focusing now just on the high-income economies (i.e., those that make up the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) since the 1960s, relatively high inflation, even in the range of 10 percent or higher, has been associated with periods of [both high growth and low growth](#), depending on the specific circumstances.

In the 1960s, higher inflation rates emerged because economic growth was strong, as supply bottlenecks, such as we are experiencing now, became more common. Workers were also generally more able to bargain up wages and gain an increased share of the economy's overall income pie. But facing such problems is certainly preferable to an economy operating at zero inflation that is also stuck in recession. As President Lyndon Johnson himself [noted](#) after U.S. inflation had arisen from 1.5 percent in 1965 to 3 percent in 1966, "If rising prices are a problem, they're a lot better than a stagnant economy and high unemployment." On the other hand, when high inflation resulted from the oil-producing countries (OPEC members) and the private oil corporations such as Exxon exercising monopoly power to quadruple oil prices in 1973, and then to double prices in 1979, the resulting overall inflation was associated with recession and high unemployment.

The 1970s inflation was also the precursor to the rise of neoliberalism at the end of the decade, with the election of Margaret Thatcher in the U.K. and then the 1980 election of Ronald Reagan in the U.S. As for the present, we absolutely cannot allow neoliberalism to bask in a new wave of legitimacy in the name of fighting inflation.

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Chomsky: US Push To “Reign Supreme” Stokes The Ukraine Conflict



Noam Chomsky

Irrational political panic is as American a phenomenon as apple pie. It often arises as a result of a potential inability on the part of the powers-that-be to control the outcome of developments that may pose challenges to the interests of the existing socioeconomic order or to the status quo of the geostrategic environment. The era of the Cold War speaks volumes about this phenomenon, but it's also evident in earlier periods — for example, the first Red Scare in the wake of World War I — and we can see clear parallels in the present-day situation with reactions to

Ukraine and the rise of China as a global power.

In the interview that follows, world-renowned public intellectual Noam Chomsky delves into the phenomenon of irrational political panics in the U.S., with an emphasis on current developments on the foreign policy front — and the dangers of seeking to maintain global hegemony in a multipolar world.

C.J. Polychroniou: The political culture in the United States seems to have a propensity toward alarmism when it comes to political developments that are not in tune with the economic interests, ideological mindset and strategic interests of the powers-that-be. Indeed, from the anti-Spanish panic of the late 1890s to today's rage about Russia's security concerns over Ukraine, and China's growing role in world affairs and everything in between, the political establishment and the media of this country tend to respond with full-blown alarm to developments that are not in alignment with U.S. interests, values and goals. Can you comment about this peculiar state of affairs, with particular emphasis on what's happening today in connection with Ukraine and China?

Noam Chomsky: Quite true. Sometimes it's hard to believe. One of the most significant and revealing examples is the rhetorical framework of the major internal planning document of the early Cold War years, [NSC-68 of 1950](#), shortly after "the loss of China," which set off a frenzy in the U.S. The document set the stage for huge expansion of the military budget. It's worth recalling today when strains of this madness are reverberating — not for the first time; it's perennial.

The policy recommendations of NSC-68 have been widely discussed in scholarship, though avoiding the hysterical rhetoric. It reads like a fairytale: ultimate evil confronted by absolute purity and noble idealism. On one side is the "slave state" with its "fundamental design" and inherent "compulsion" to gain "absolute authority over the rest of the world," destroying all governments and the "structure of society" everywhere. Its ultimate evil contrasts with our sheer perfection. The "fundamental purpose" of the United States is to assure "the dignity and worth of the individual" everywhere. Its leaders are animated by "generous and constructive impulses, and the absence of covetousness in our international relations," which is particularly evident in the traditional domains of U.S. influence, the Western hemisphere, long the beneficiary of Washington's tender solicitude as its inhabitants can testify.

Anyone familiar with history and the actual balance of global power at the time would have reacted to this performance with utter bewilderment. Its State Department authors couldn't have believed what they were writing. Some later gave an indication of what they were up to. Secretary of State Dean Acheson explained in his memoirs that in order to ram through the huge planned military expansion, it was necessary to "bludgeon the mass mind of 'top government'" in ways that were "clearer than truth." The highly influential Sen. Arthur Vandenberg surely understood this as well when advising [in 1947] that the government must "[scare the hell out of the American people](#)" to rouse them from their pacifist backwardness.

There are many precedents, and the drums are beating right now with warnings about American complacency and naivete about the intentions of the "mad dog" Putin to destroy democracy everywhere and subdue the world to his will, now in alliance with the other "Great Satan," Xi Jinping.

The February 4 Putin-Xi summit, timed with the opening of the Olympic games, was recognized to be a major event in world affairs. Its review in a major article in *The New York Times* is headlined "[A New Axis](#)," the allusion unconcealed. The review reported the intentions of the reincarnation of the Axis powers: "The message that China and Russia have sent to other countries is clear," David Leonhardt writes. "They will not pressure other governments to respect human rights or hold elections." And to Washington's dismay, the Axis is attracting two countries from "the American camp," Egypt and Saudi Arabia, stellar examples of how the U.S. respects human rights and elections in its camp — by providing a massive flow of weapons to these brutal dictatorships and directly participating in their crimes. The New Axis also maintains that "a powerful country should be able to impose its will within its declared sphere of influence. The country should even be able to topple a weaker nearby government without the world interfering" — an idea that the U.S. has always abhorred, as the historical record reveals.

Twenty-five hundred years ago, the Delphi Oracle issued a maxim: "Know Thyself." Worth remembering, perhaps.

As in the case of NSC-68, there is method in the madness. China and Russia do pose real threats. The global hegemon does not take them lightly. There are some striking common features in how U.S. opinion and policy are reacting to the

threats. They merit some thought.

The Atlantic Council [describes](#) the formation of the New Axis as a “tectonic shift in global relations” with plans that are truly “head spinning”: “The sides agreed to more closely link their economies through cooperation between China’s Belt and Road Initiative and Putin’s Eurasian Economic Union. They will work together to develop the Arctic. They’ll deepen coordination in multilateral institutions and to battle climate change.”

We should not underestimate the grand significance of the Ukraine crisis, [adds Damon Wilson](#), president of the National Endowment for Democracy. “The stakes of today’s crisis are not about Ukraine alone, but about the future of freedom,” no less.

Strong measures have to be taken right away, [says](#) Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell: “President Biden should use every tool in his tool box and impose tough sanctions ahead of any invasion and not after it happens.” There is no time to dilly-dally with Macron-style appeals to the raging bear to temper his violence.

Received doctrine is that we must confront the formidable threat of China and stand firm on Ukraine, while Europe wavers and Ukraine asks us to tone down the rhetoric and pursue diplomatic measures. Luckily for the world, Washington is unflinching in its dedication to what is right and just, even if it is almost alone, as when it righteously invades Iraq and strangles Cuba in defiance of virtually uniform international protest, to take just two from a plethora of examples.

To be fair, adherence to the doctrine is not uniform. There’s deviation, most forcefully on the far right: Tucker Carlson, probably the most influential TV voice. He’s said we shouldn’t be involved in defending Ukraine against Russia — because we should be devoting all our resources to confronting the far more awesome China threat. Have to get our priorities straight in combating the Axis.

Warnings about Russia’s mobilization to invade Ukraine have been an annual media event since the crises of 2014, with regular reports of tens or hundreds of thousands of Russian troops preparing to attack. Today, however, the warnings are far more shrill, with a mixture of fear and ridicule for so-called Mad Vlad, whom the *New York Times*’s Thomas Friedman describes as a “[one-man psychodrama, with a giant inferiority complex toward America that leaves him always stalking the world with a chip on his shoulder so big it’s amazing he can fit](#)

[through any door](#),” or from another perspective, the Russian leader seeking in vain for some response to his repeated requests for some attention to Russia’s expressed concerns. An analysis by *MintPress* found that [90 percent](#) of the opinion pieces in the three major national newspapers have adopted a hawkish militant stance, with a bare scattering of questioning — a familiar phenomenon, as in the days before the Iraq invasion and, in fact, routinely when the state has delivered the word.

As in the case of the Sino-Soviet conspiracy to gain “absolute authority over the rest of the world” in 1950, the word now is that the U.S. must act decisively to counter the threat of the New Axis to the “rule-based global order” that is hailed by U.S. commentators, an interesting concept to which I’ll return briefly.

The “tectonic shift” is not a myth, and it does pose a threat to the U.S. It threatens U.S. primacy in shaping world order. That’s true of both of the crisis areas, on the borders of Russia and of China. In both cases, negotiated settlements are within reach: regional settlements. If they are achieved, the U.S. will only have an ancillary role, which it may not be willing to accept even at the cost of inflaming extremely hazardous confrontations.

In Ukraine, the basic outlines of a settlement are well-known on all sides; [we’ve discussed them before](#). To repeat, the optimal outcome for security of Ukraine (and the world) is the kind of Austrian/Nordic neutrality that prevailed through the Cold War years, offering the opportunity to be part of Western Europe to whatever extent they chose, in every respect apart from providing the U.S. with military bases, which would have been a threat to them as well as to Russia. For internal Ukrainian conflicts, Minsk II provides a general framework.

As many analysts observe, Ukraine is not going to join the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) in the foreseeable future. George W. Bush rashly issued an invitation to join, but it was immediately vetoed by France and Germany. Though it remains on the table under U.S. pressure, it is not an option. All sides recognize this. The astute and knowledgeable Central Asia scholar Anatol Lieven [comments](#) that “the whole issue of Ukraine’s NATO membership is in fact purely theoretical, so that, in some respects, this whole argument is an argument about nothing — on both sides, it must be said, Russian as well as the West.”

His comment brings to mind [Argentinian writer Jorge Luis] Borges’s description

of the Falkland/Malvinas war: two bald men fighting over a comb.

Russia pleads security concerns. For the U.S., it is a matter of high principle: We cannot infringe on the sacred right of sovereignty of nations, hence the right to join NATO, which Washington knows is not going to happen.

On the Russian side, a formal pledge of non-alignment hardly increases Russian security, any more than Russian security was enhanced when Washington [guaranteed](#) to Gorbachev that “not an inch of NATO’s present military jurisdiction will spread in an eastern direction,” soon abrogated by Clinton, then more radically by W. Bush. Nothing would have changed if the promise had risen from a gentlemen’s agreement to a signed document.

The U.S. plea hardly rises to the level of comedy. The U.S. has utter disdain for the principle it proudly proclaims, as recent history once again dramatically confirms.

For Washington, there is a deeper issue: A regional settlement would be a serious threat to the U.S. global role. That concern has been simmering right through the Cold War years. Will Europe assume an independent role in world affairs, as it surely can, perhaps along Gaullist lines: Europe from the Atlantic to the Urals, revived in Gorbachev’s 1989 advocacy of a “common European home,” a “vast economic space from the Atlantic to the Urals”? Even more unthinkable would be Gorbachev’s broader vision of a Eurasian security system from Lisbon to Vladivostok with no military blocs, shot down without discussion in the negotiations 30 years ago over a post-Cold War settlement.

The commitment to maintain the Atlanticist order in Europe, in which the U.S. reigns supreme, has had policy implications that reach beyond Europe itself. One crucial example was Chile in 1973, when the U.S. was working hard to overthrow the parliamentary government, finally succeeding with the installation of the murderous Pinochet dictatorship. A prime reason for destroying democracy in Chile was explained by its prime architect, Henry Kissinger. He warned that parliamentary social reforms in Chile might provide a model for similar efforts in Italy and Spain that might lead Europe on an independent path, away from subordination to U.S. control and the U.S. model of harsher capitalism. The domino theory, often derided, never abandoned, because it is an important instrument of statecraft. The issue arises again with regard to a regional

settlement of the Ukraine conflict.

Much the same is true in the confrontation with China. As we've [discussed earlier](#), there are serious issues concerning China's violation of international law in the neighboring seas — though as the one maritime country that refuses even to ratify the UN Law of the Sea, the U.S. is hardly in a strong position to object. Nor does the U.S. alleviate these problems by sending a naval armada through these waters or providing Australia with a fleet of nuclear submarines to enhance the already overwhelming military superiority of the U.S. off the coasts of China. The issues can and should be addressed by the regional powers.

As in the case of Ukraine, however, there is a downside: The U.S. will not be in charge.

Also as in the case of Ukraine, the U.S. professes its commitment to high principle in taking the lead to confront the threat of China: its horror at China's human rights abuses, which are doubtless severe. Again, it is easy enough to assess the sincerity of this stand. One revealing index is U.S. military aid. At the top, in a category by themselves, are Israel and Egypt. On the Israeli record on human rights, we can now refer to the [detailed reports](#) of Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, reviewing the crimes of what they describe as the world's second apartheid state. Egypt is suffering under the harshest dictatorship of its tortured history. More generally, for many years, there has been a striking correlation between U.S. military aid and torture, massacre, and other severe human rights abuses.

There is no more need to tarry on Washington's concern for human rights than on its dedication to the sacred principle of sovereignty. The fact that these absurdities can even be discussed illustrates how deeply the rhetorical flights of NSC-68 permeate the intellectual culture.

Hebrew University lecturer Guy Laron usefully [reminds us](#) of another facet of the Ukraine crisis: the long struggle between the U.S. and Russia over control of Europe's energy, again in the headlines today. Even before Russia was a player, the U.S. sought to shift Europe (and Japan) to an oil-based economy, where the U.S. would have the hand on the spigot. Much of Marshall Plan aid was directed to this end. From George Kennan to Zbigniew Brzezinski commenting on the invasion of Iraq (which he opposed, but felt might confer advantages to the U.S.

with the anticipated control over major oil resources), planners have recognized that control over energy resources could provide “critical leverage” over allies. Later years saw many struggles in the Cold War framework Laron describes, now very prominent. Ukraine has had a large part in these confrontations.

Throughout, the shape of world order has of course been a driving concern of policy makers. For post-World War II Washington, there is only one acceptable form: under its leadership. And it must be a particular form of world order: the “rule-based international order,” which has displaced an earlier commitment to the “UN-based international order” established under U.S. lead after World War II. It’s not hard to discern the reasons for the transition in policy and accompanying commentary. In the rule-based order, the U.S. sets the rules.

The same was true in the UN-based order in the early years after World War II. U.S. global dominance was so overwhelming that the UN served virtually as a tool of U.S. foreign policy and a weapon against its enemies. Not surprisingly, the UN was highly regarded in U.S. popular and intellectual culture, along with the UN-based international order, guided by Washington.

That turned out to be a passing phase. The UN began to fall out of favor in U.S. elite opinion as it lurched out of control with the recovery of other industrial societies but particularly with decolonization, which brought discordant voices into the UN and also in independent structures such as the Non-Aligned Movement and many others — all very vocal and active, though effectively barred from the international information order dominated by the traditional imperial societies.

Within the UN there were calls for a “New International Economic Order” that would offer the Global South something better than a continuation of the large-scale robbery, violent intervention and subversion that the colonized world had enjoyed during the long reign of Western imperialism. There were other threats, such as a call for a New International Information Order that would provide some opportunity for voices of the former colonies to enter the international information system, a near monopoly of the imperial powers.

The masters of the world undertook vigorous campaigns to beat back these efforts, a major though largely ignored chapter of modern history — though not completely; there is some [fine work](#) of [exposure and analysis](#).

One effect of the Global South's disruptive efforts was to turn U.S. practice and elite opinion against the UN, no longer a reliable agency of U.S. power as it had been in the early Cold War years. Furthermore, the foundations of modern international law in the few UN treaties that the U.S. ratified became completely unacceptable as the years passed, particularly the banning of "the threat or use of force" in international affairs, a practice in which the U.S. is far in the lead. It is conventional to say that the U.S. and Russia engaged in proxy wars during the Cold War years — omitting the fact that with rare exceptions, these were conflicts in which Russia provided some support to victims of U.S. attack. All topics that should have far more prominence.

In this context, the "rule-based international order" became the favored pillar of world order, and there is much annoyance when China calls instead for the UN-based international order as it did at the rancorous March 2021 China-U.S. summit in Alaska (putting aside the sincerity of these pronouncements).

It's intriguing to see how the conflict with China plays out in U.S. policy and discourse in other domains. A front-page story in *The New York Times* is [headlined](#): "House Passes Bill Adding Billions to Research to Compete With China; The vote sets up a fight with the Senate, which has different recommendations for how the United States should bolster its technology industry to take on China." The official name of the bill is "The America Competes Act of 2022" — meaning "compete" with China.

The passage of the bill was [hailed](#) in the left-liberal press: "The House gave President Joe Biden another reason to celebrate on Friday with the passage of a bill aimed at boosting competitiveness with China."

Could Congress support research and development because it would help American society, as this bill surely would? Apparently not; only because it would "take on China." Republicans reflexively opposed the bill as usual, in this case because it "[concedes too much to China](#)." Republicans also opposed what they called "far left" initiatives such as addressing climate change. The bill was derided by House Republican leader Kevin McCarthy as the "coral reefs bill." How does saving humanity from self-destruction help to compete with China?

A side comment: An amendment to the bill was introduced by Pramila Jayapal, chair of the Progressive Caucus, a call to release the near-\$10 billion of the

Afghan government held in New York banks, so as to help relieve the horrendous humanitarian crisis facing the population. It was voted down. Forty-four Democrats [joined](#) Republican brutality. It appears that the China-based Shanghai Cooperation Organization might be planning aid, more of the China threat.

There is no denying that China is a rising superpower confronting the U.S. Reporting a study of Harvard's Belfer Center of International Affairs, Graham Allison argued further that the so-called [Thucydides Trap](#) is likely to lead to a U.S.-China war.

That cannot happen. U.S.-China war means simply: game over. There are critical global issues on which the U.S. and China must cooperate. They will either work together, or collapse together, bringing the world down with them.

One of the most striking developments in the international arena today is that while the U.S. is pulling back from the Mideast, and elsewhere, China is moving in but with a different strategic approach and overall agenda. Instead of bombs, missiles and coercive diplomacy, China is expanding its influence with the use of "soft power." Indeed, U.S. overseas expansion was always overwhelmingly dependent on the use of hard power, and, as result, it would only leave black holes behind after its withdrawal. To what extent, as some might argue, is this the result of a young nation ignorant of history and with lack of experience in global affairs (although it would be hard to find any examples of benign imperialism)?

I don't think the U.S. has forged new paths in Western imperial brutality. Simply consider its immediate predecessors in world control. British wealth and global power derived from piracy (such heroic figures as Sir Francis Drake), despoiling India by guile and violence, hideous slavery, the world's greatest narcotrafficking enterprise, and other such gracious acts. France was no different. Belgium broke records in hideous crimes. Today's China is hardly benign within its much more limited reach. Exceptions would be hard to find.

The two cases you mention have highly instructive features, brought out clearly, if unintentionally, by how they are depicted. Take an article in *The New York Times* about the growing China threat. The [headline reads](#): "As the U.S. Pulls Back from the Mideast, China Leans in; expanding its ties to Middle Eastern states with vast infrastructure investments and cooperation on technology and security."

That's accurate; it's one example of what's happening all over the world. The U.S.

is withdrawing military forces that have battered the Mideast region for decades in traditional imperial style. The evil Chinese are exploiting the retreat by expanding China's influence with investment, loans, technology, development programs. What's called "soft power."

Not just in the Mideast. The most extensive Chinese project is the huge Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) that is taking shape within the framework of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, which incorporates the Central Asia states, India, Pakistan, Russia, now Iran, reaching to Turkey and with its eye on Central Europe. It may well include Afghanistan if it can survive its current catastrophe. Chinese aid and development might manage to shift the Afghan economy from heroin production for Europe, the core of the economy during the U.S. occupation, to exploitation of its rich mineral resources.

The BRI has offshoots in the Middle East, including Israel. There are accompanying programs in Africa, and now even Latin America, over strenuous U.S. objections. Recently, China announced that it's taking over the manufacturing facilities in São Paulo that Ford abandoned, and will initiate large-scale electric vehicles production, an area in which China is far ahead.

The U.S. has no way to counter these efforts. Bombs, missiles, special forces raids in rural communities just don't work.

It's an old dilemma. Sixty years ago in Vietnam, U.S. counterinsurgency efforts were stymied by a problem that was despairingly recognized by U.S. intelligence and by Province Advisers: the Vietnamese resistance — the Viet Cong (VC), in U.S. discourse — were fighting a political war, a domain in which the U.S. was weak. The U.S. was responding with a military war, the arena in which it is strong. But that couldn't overcome the appeal of VC programs to the peasant population.

The only way the Kennedy administration could react to the VC political war was by U.S. Air Force bombing of rural areas, authorizing napalm, large-scale crop and livestock destruction and other programs to drive the peasants to virtual concentration camps where they could be "protected" from the guerillas who the U.S. knew they were supporting. The consequences we know.

Earlier, the dilemma had been explained by Secretary of State John Foster Dulles, addressing the National Security Council about U.S. problems with Brazil, where

elites, he said, are “like children, with no capacity for self-government.” Worse still, in his words, the U.S. is “hopelessly far behind the Soviets in developing controls over the minds and emotions of unsophisticated peoples” of the Global South, even educated elites. Dulles lamented to the president about the Communist “ability to get control of mass movements, ... something we have no capacity to duplicate. The poor people are the ones they appeal to and they have always wanted to plunder the rich.”

Dulles left unsaid the obvious: The poor people somehow don’t respond well to our appeal of the rich to plunder the poor, so with great reluctance we have to turn to the arena of violence, where we dominate.

That’s not unlike the dilemma posed when China “leans in” to the Global South by “expanding its ties with vast infrastructure investments and cooperation on technology and security.” That is one central element of the China threat that is eliciting such fears and anguish.

The U.S. is reacting to this growing China threat in the arena where it is strong. The U.S. of course has overwhelming military dominance worldwide, even right off the coast of China. But it’s being enhanced. Last December, military analyst Michael Klare [reports](#), President Biden signed the National Defense Authorization Act. It 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.

Klare adds that, “Ominously enough Taiwan too is included in the chain of armed sentinel states.” The word “ominously” is well chosen. China of course regards Taiwan as part of China. So does the U.S., formally. The official U.S. one-China policy recognizes Taiwan as part of China, with a tacit agreement that no steps will be taken to forcefully change its status. Donald Trump and Secretary of State Mike Pompeo chipped away at this formula. It’s now being driven to the brink. China has the choice of either succumbing or resisting. It is not going to succumb.

This is only one component of the program to defend the U.S. from the China threat. A complementary element is to undermine China’s economy by means too well-known to review. In particular [in the U.S.’s eyes], China must be prevented from advancing in the technology of the future — actually extending its lead in

some areas, such as electrification and renewable energy, the technologies that might save us from our race to destroy the environment that sustains life.

One aspect of these efforts to undermine China's progress is to pressure other countries to reject superior Chinese technology. China has found a way to get around these efforts. They are planning to establish technical schools in countries of the Global South to teach advanced technology — Chinese technology, which graduates will then use. Again, the kind of aggression that is hard to confront.

U.S. influence is clearly declining across the international system, but one would not easily reach this conclusion by looking at the current U.S. National Security Strategy, which is still designed around the principle of the “two-war” doctrine even without expressly saying so. In this context, could it be argued that the U.S. empire is weakening in the 21st century, and that the end of the U.S. empire might not be a peaceful event?

It has been widely predicted in foreign policy circles for many years that China is poised to surpass the U.S. and to dominate world affairs, a dubious prospect, in my opinion, unless the U.S. continues on its current course of self-destruction, probably to be accelerated with the predicted congressional victory of the denialist party in November.

As we have [discussed before](#), for some years the former Republican Party has been more accurately described as a “radical insurgency” that has abandoned normal parliamentary politics, to borrow the terms of political analysts Thomas Mann and Norman Ornstein of the American Enterprise Institute a decade ago — when Trump's takeover of the insurgency was not yet a nightmare.

The Trump administration established a two-war doctrine in all but name. A war between two nuclear powers can quickly get out of control, meaning the end.

A step towards utter irrationality was taken last December 27, perhaps in celebration of Christmas, when President Biden signed the National Defense Authorization Act, discussed earlier, enhancing the policy of “encirclement” of China, “containment” being out of date. That includes formation of the Quad: U.S.-India-Japan-Australia, supplementing the AUKUS alliance (Australia, U.K., U.S.) and the Anglosphere's Five Eyes, all of them strategic-military alliances confronting China. China has only a troubled hinterland. As discussed earlier, the radical military imbalance in favor of the U.S. is being enhanced by other

provocative acts, carrying great risk. Apparently we cannot let down our guard with the Axis powers on the march once again.

It's all too easy to sketch a likely trajectory that is far from a pleasant prospect. But we should never forget the usual proviso. We do not have to be passive spectators, thereby contributing to potential disaster.

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CJ

Polychroniou

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“Politics as Usual” Will Never Be A Solution To The Current Climate Threat



Richard Falk

There is an ever-growing consensus that the climate crisis represents humanity's greatest problem. Indeed, global warming is more than an environmental crisis — there are social, political, ethical and economic dimensions to it. Even the role of science should be exposed to critical inquiry when discussing the dimensions of the climate crisis, considering that technology bears such responsibility for bringing us to the brink of global disaster. This is the theme of my interview with renowned scholar Richard Falk.

For decades, Richard Falk has made immense contributions in the areas of international affairs and international law from what may be loosely defined as the humanist perspective, which makes a break with political realism and its emphasis on the nation-state and military power. He is professor emeritus of international law and practice at Princeton University, where he taught for nearly half a century, and currently chair of Global Law at Queen Mary University London, which has launched a new center for climate crime and justice; Falk is also the Olaf Palme Visiting Professor in Stockholm and Visiting Distinguished Professor at the Mediterranean Academy of Diplomatic Studies, University of Malta. In 2008, Falk was appointed as a United Nations Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian territories occupied since 1967. He is the author of some 50 books, the most recent of which is a moving memoir, titled *Public Intellectual: The Life of a Citizen Pilgrim* (2021).

C.J. Polychroniou: The climate crisis is the greatest challenge of our time, but, so far, we seem to be losing the battle to avoid driving the planet to dangerous “tipping points.” Indeed, a climate apocalypse appears to be a rather distinct possibility given the current levels of climate inaction. Having said that, it is quite obvious that the climate crisis has more than one dimension. It is surely about the environment, but it is also about science, ethics, politics and economics. Let’s start with the relationship between science and the environment. Does science bear responsibility for global warming and the ensuing environmental breakdown, given the role that technologies have played in the modern age?

Richard Falk: I think science bears some responsibility for adopting the outlook that freedom of scientific inquiry takes precedence over considering the real-world consequences of scientific knowledge — the exemplary case being the process by which science and scientists contributed to the making of the nuclear bomb. In this instance, some of the most ethically inclined scientists and knowledge workers, above all, Albert Einstein, were contributors who later regretted their role. And, of course, the continuous post-Hiroshima developments of weaponry of mass destruction have enlisted leading biologists, chemists and physicists in their professional roles to produce ever more deadly weaponry, and there has been little scientific pushback.

With respect to the environmental breakdown that is highlighted by your question, the situation is more obscure. There were scientific warnings about a variety of potential catastrophic threats to ecological balance that go back to the early 1970s. These warnings were contested by reputable scientists until the end of the 20th century, but if the precautionary principle included in the [Stockholm Declaration on the Human Environment](#) (1972) would have been implemented, then certainly scientists bore some responsibility for continuing to work toward more capital-efficient means of finding technological applications for oil, gas and coal. As with adverse health effects, post-Enlightenment beliefs that human progress depended on scientific knowledge inhibited regulation for the benefit of the public good. Only when civil society began to sound the alarm were certain adjustments made, although often insufficient in substance, deferring to private interests in profitability, and public interests in the enhancement of military capabilities and governmental control.

Overall, despite the climate change crisis, there remains a reluctance to hamper scientific “progress” by an insistence on respecting the carrying capacity of the

Earth. Also, science and scientists have yet to relate the search for knowledge to the avoidance of ecologically dangerous technological applications, and even more so in relation to political and cultural activities. There is also the representational issue involving the selection of environmental guardians and their discretionary authority, if a more prudential approach were to be adopted.

The climate crisis also raises important ethical questions, although it is not clear from current efforts to tame global warming that many of the world's governments take them seriously. Be that as it may, how should ethics inform the debate about global warming and environmental breakdown?

The most obvious ethical issues arise when deciding how to spread the economic burdens of regulating greenhouse gas emissions in ways that ensure an equitable distribution of costs within and among countries. The relevance of "climate justice" to relations among social classes and between rich and poor countries is contested and controversial. As the world continues to be organized along state-centric axes of authority and responsibility, ethical metrics are so delimited. Given the global nature of the challenges associated with global warming, this way of calculating climate justice and ethical accountability in *political space* is significantly dysfunctional.

Similar observations are relevant with respect to *time*. Although the idea of "responsibility to future generations" [received some recognition at the UN](#), nothing tangible by way of implementation was done. Political elites, without exception, were fixed on short-term performance criteria, whether satisfying corporate shareholders or the voting public. The tyranny of the present in policy domains worked against implementing the laudatory ethical recognition of the claims of [future generations] to a healthy and materially sufficient future.

Taking account of the relevance of the past seems an ethical imperative that is neglected because it is seen as unfairly burdening the present for past injustices. For instance, reparations claims on behalf of victimized people, whether descendants of slavery or otherwise exploited peoples, rarely are satisfied, however ethically meritorious. There is one revealing exception: reparations imposed by the victorious powers in a war.

In the environmental domain, the past is very important to the allocation of responsibility for the atmospheric buildup of greenhouse gas emissions. Most

Western countries are more responsible for global warming than the vast majority of the Global South, and many parts of Africa and the Middle East face the dual facts of minimal responsibility for global warming yet maximal vulnerability to its harmful effects.

These various ethical concerns are being forced onto the agendas of global conferences. This was evident at the 2021 COP-26 Glasgow Climate Summit under UN auspices. The intergovernmental response was disappointing, and reflected capitalist and geopolitical disregard of the ethical dimensions of the climate change challenge.

Politics also figures prominently in the climate crisis, with questions being raised as to whether our current system of government, both at the national and international level, is adequate to meet the greatest challenge of our time. What are your thoughts on this matter?

As suggested, addressing the global challenge of climate change with the tools developed for problem-solving in a state-centric world possessing weak institutional mechanisms for the effective promotion of the global public good is the organizational root of the problem. The UN was established with the ahistorical hope that the great powers of international relations would cooperate for peace as successfully as they cooperated for war between 1939 to 1945. Despite lofty rhetoric, the UN was designed to be a weak global mechanism. Why else disempower the UN by giving the victors of World War II a right of veto, which in effect was a recognition of the primacy of geopolitics?

Besides geopolitics, there were other obstacles to global-oriented problem-solving as a result of the persistence and expansion of statism after the collapse of European colonialism. This dominance of statism was reinforced by rigid ideological adherence to nationalism on the part of political leaders, shaping relations with other countries even if disguised somewhat by alliance diplomacy, “special relationships” ([such as the U.S.’s relationship with] Israel) and neoliberal patterns of globalization.

The core political issue is upholding the indispensable need for unprecedented degrees of globally oriented cooperation to address effectively climate change challenges that were being stymied by the continuing dominance of statist and geopolitical tendencies in international relations. These tendencies favor the *part*

over the *whole* in multilateral forms of problem-solving. This structural reality has recently been accentuated by the rise of autocratic hyper-nationalist leaders in many important states, and by recent preoccupations with overcoming the COVID pandemic and containing its negative economic spillovers.

Until a robust mechanism for the promotion of global public goods is established, the political potential of present structures of world order do not seem capable of fashioning prudent and effective policies to cope with climate change. For such a mechanism to be established will require [either] the shock effect of future climate catastrophes, or a powerful, widely supported, militant transnational civil society movement dedicated to the protection of the Earth.

The climate crisis also reflects the failure of economics, with the argument being made that capitalism is actually the cause of the problem and climate change merely a symptom. Given where we are, and with the window of opportunity rapidly closing, should the fight against global warming be also a fight against capitalism?

David Whyte ends his book on ecocide with these stark words: “[W]e have to kill the corporation before it kills us.” The guiding idea of contemporary capitalism is to maximize short-term profitability, a posture that contradicts the kind of approach that would protect the natural habitat against the ravages wrought by contemporary capitalism.

However, the issue may be broader than capitalism. Actually existing socialist governments, exercising greater state control over the economy, have exhibited no better record when it comes to environmental protection or taking responsible account of longer-term threats to the natural habitat. State-dominated economies may be less concerned about profitability, but their preoccupation with maximizing economic growth and susceptibility to corruption is as dangerous and destructive.

Until economic and political policies grounded upon a new kind of citizenship [prioritizing] humanity gain political traction, it seems highly improbable that ecological threats will be addressed responsibly.

From your own perspective, how do we move forward in the fight against global warming? Indeed, what might be possible approaches to overcome climate inaction?

You saved the most difficult question for last! I do think education in the broad sense is key, including rethinking citizenship and activist civic participation. It is also essential that efforts be made to enable the UN to act more independently of geopolitical and nationalist manipulations, which have prevented the UN from playing an influential role throughout the COVID pandemic. This regressive interaction with states was highlighted by the hostility of Trump's presidency to any kind of meta-nationalist approach to the control of the virus, including his disgraceful decision to defund and disengage from the World Health Organization.

A more credible UN requires independent and increased funding by way of an international tax, as well as curtailing of the right of veto by the five permanent members of the Security Council. Such global reforms will not happen without substantial pressure from civil society mobilizations coupled with the emergence of more enlightened leadership in important countries.

As suggested above, a reconstituted world order responsive to the magnitude and character of climate change challenge would seem to require the radical transformation of economic activity. This seems as though it could happen only through a revolutionary process, either as something that took the unprecedented shape of a transnational movement or spread from state to state as did the Arab Spring of 2010-2011, but without sparking a counterrevolutionary backlash.

Because there is no currently visible transition strategy to move from where we are to where we need to be, indulging the utopian imagination is a political act, envisioning futures attuned to the climate change agenda.

I believe that our escape from present entrapment depends on "a politics of impossibility." Our leaders say, and the general consensus is, that politics should be conceived as "the art of the possible," which assesses the play of forces to discover what is feasible. My argument has been that what is understood by the political class as feasible is insufficient to produce satisfactory policies and practices with regard to climate menaces. That is, the politics we know lacks the capacity to generate a solution.

It is evident that the impossible happens. This was manifested in recent international experience by the victories of national resistance movements in several major 20th-century anti-colonial wars, the collapse of the Soviet Union,

the dismantling of apartheid in South Africa. In each instance, before the impossible happened, experts deemed the outcome utopian or impossible, not worthy of the attention of serious persons. What seems clear is that the impossible happens only when the mobilization of people is great enough to produce outcomes that defy the perceptions of those forces committed to the permanence of the status quo.

This leads me to view the future as uncertain and unknowable. For this reason, whatever future we believe necessary and desirable can unfold, defying current expectations. This makes it rational and justifiable for patriots of humanity to engage on behalf of this better future. There are many signs that a green vision of the future is gaining support throughout the planet, especially among youth who have most to lose, and hence to gain. Youth may be the vanguard among those demanding ecologically responsible patterns of humane governance for the planet.

This article 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).

Israeli Policies Satisfy The Definition Of Apartheid Under International Law



Richard Falk

A furor has enveloped Washington, D.C. as Democrats and Republicans alike scramble to denounce Amnesty International for [the report it released this month](#), which describes Israel as an “apartheid state” and alleges that the human rights abuses committed against Palestinians by the State of Israel constitute crimes against humanity under international law.

In many respects, there is nothing new in the report, as many other human rights organizations, including the UN, have long ago drawn the same conclusions. In fact, many Israelis themselves agree with the assessment of Israel as an apartheid state. Even the late Israeli politician Yossi Sarid, who served as minister of education and the environment back in the late 1990s and through the early 2000s, [said the following in 2008](#) for the Israeli newspaper *Haaretz*: “What acts like apartheid, is run like apartheid and harasses like apartheid, is not a duck — it is apartheid.”

Even so, the report provoked an explosion of rage in the United States — most likely among the same group of people who used to object to critiques of South Africa's system of apartheid and who viewed Nelson Mandela as a terrorist. The same frenzy of rage also surfaced in the U.S. back in 2017, when Richard Falk, the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian occupied territories, produced a United Nations report charging Israel with crimes against humanity and labelling it an apartheid state.

In light of Amnesty International's new report, we asked Richard Falk to share his thoughts on the latest findings about Israeli apartheid and crimes against humanity. Falk is professor emeritus of international law and practice at Princeton University, where he taught for nearly half a century, and chair of Global Law at Queen Mary University London, which has launched a new center for climate crime and justice. He is also the Olaf Palme Visiting Professor in Stockholm and Visiting Distinguished Professor at the Mediterranean Academy of Diplomatic Studies, University of Malta. In 2008, Falk was appointed as a United Nations Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian territories occupied since 1967. He is the author of some 50 books, the most recent of which is a memoir titled *Public Intellectual: The Life of a Citizen Pilgrim* (2021).

C.J. Polychroniou: Amnesty International's new report exposes Israeli abuses against Palestinians. The report shows that Israel imposes a form of domination and oppression against Palestinians under its control that qualifies as a system of apartheid under international law. In this context, it affirms the 2017 United Nations report that you had helped produce and for which you were personally attacked by Nikki Haley at the Security Council. But Israel is arguing that the report is full of lies, and some of its strongest allies (the U.S., the U.K. and Germany) are rejecting the description of Israel as an apartheid state. Let's start with the most basic question of all: Is there anything in the report that is not true? If not, why has it caused such a bipartisan fury in the U.S.?

Richard Falk: I think it is important to assess the Amnesty International report in the wider context of the perception of Israeli apartheid over the course of the last five years, since the issuance of the [United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia's \(ESCWA\) "Report on Israeli Practices Towards the Palestinian People and the Question of Apartheid"](#) in 2017.

In 2021, two comprehensive reports by widely respected human rights organizations added weight to the apartheid allegations. The first one — titled “[A Regime of Jewish Supremacy from the Jordan River to the Mediterranean Sea: This is Apartheid](#)” — was published in 2021 by the most established and internationally trusted Israeli NGO devoted to the protection of human rights, B’Tselem. It has developed an outstanding reputation for professionalism over the years. The second report — titled “[A Threshold Crossed: Israeli Authorities and the Crimes of Apartheid and Persecution](#)” — was issued in April 2021 by Human Rights Watch, the flagship human rights civil society organization in the United States with offices around the world.

The Amnesty International report released this February — titled “[Israel’s Apartheid Against the Palestinians: Cruel System of Domination and Crime Against Humanity](#)” — should be seen as the culmination of a trend validating allegations of Israeli apartheid, at least within international civil society.

To dismiss and denigrate these reports adhering to the highest human rights research standards — as Israeli and American leaders and spokespersons have attempted to do, calling the Amnesty International report full of “lies” and the work of “anti-Semites” — is a shameless slander. Such inflammatory language is designed to shift the conversation from the message to the messenger. This interpretation of the tactics of those rejecting the Amnesty International report is strengthened by the absence of any serious effort to refute the substantive charges. So far there has been a bipartisan angry rejection of the Amnesty International report in Congress, and virtual silence in the mainstream TV and print media. How different would be the U.S. reaction to an Amnesty report summarizing the breakup of Hong Kong demonstrations or damning the Chinese denial of human rights to the Uyghur minority. The inevitable conclusion reached is that international law and human rights function for the U.S. government as geopolitical tools rather than normative principles.

Another element of context seems highly relevant. This pushback against the Amnesty International report should be understood in light of a recent Israeli campaign to demonize the protection of human rights in Israel and Occupied Palestinian Territories. The most dramatic move of this character was the executive order issued on October 19, 2021, by the Israeli Defense Minister, Benny Gantz, declaring six of the most respected civil society organizations in the

West Bank to be “terrorist organizations” on the basis of secret and undisclosed evidence deemed “legally dubious” even in liberal Israeli media venues such as *Haaretz*.

A large sector of public opinion in North America and Europe, including in liberal Zionist circles, was shocked by Gantz’s crude move, which was followed by a milder declaration from Major General Yehuda Fuchs, the military commander in the West Bank, that five of the six organizations listed by Gantz were “unlawful associations” under his authority to issue Emergency Regulations. (The one organization exempted from the list had previously been earlier so designated). At least General Fuchs refrained from repeating the more severe condemnation of Gantz, but the intention was the same: to inhibit donors and to neutralize the efforts of civil society to cope with the hardships of prolonged Israeli occupation of the West Bank and attendant violations of international humanitarian law.

A final issue of context results from Israel’s Knesset in the form of the 2018 Basic Law proclaiming Israel as the Nation-State of the Jewish people, who alone have the right of self-determination within Israel’s still unspecified borders, with the settler communities on the West Bank clearly intended to be incorporated as part of Israel. The importance here is the extraordinary claim of Jewish exclusivity in what had been for centuries the homeland of a majority Palestinian population. When the colonialist Balfour Declaration was created in 1917, the Jewish minority in Palestine was less than 10 percent of the total population of Palestine, despite feverish efforts over 20 years of the Zionist Movement to settle Palestine with as many Jews as possible.

These issues of context are of help when assessing both the Amnesty International report and the criticisms directed at it. Responding directly to your inquiry about whether there is reason to accord credibility to the Israeli response: In long reports of this nature there are sure to be contradictory ways of interpreting the evidence. The legal profession depends upon the plausibility of such diverse readings of the evidence. Yet, having collaboratively written one report and carefully read the others, I can assure you that there is no “lie” or even irresponsible allegation in any of the four reports. Because of the sensitivity surrounding accusations of apartheid directed at Israel as well as the realistic apprehension that Israel and its most ardent supporters habitually resort to dirty tactics to discredit critics, I believe any objective reading of the reports would confirm their compliance with the highest standards of competence and canons of

responsible investigation. Unlike the apartheid leaders of South Africa, Israel's leaders deny the charges of apartheid altogether rather than defend their appropriateness given the nature of Israel as a state of the Jewish people, and instead irresponsibly attack the integrity of the report and the despicable motivations attributed to its sponsors.

You also understandably ask "why the fury?" If the reports themselves are not mendacious but are instead serious objective assessments of allegations, then why would Israel not respond in kind with contrary interpretations of the evidence or by a show that the Israeli system of control is consistent with a reasonable construction of Israeli security imperatives? After all, Israel has plenty of skilled jurists who go along with the prevailing Israeli policies based on Jewish supremacy. For instance, the Israeli Supreme Court upheld the legality of 2018 Basic Law, and its chief judge even had the temerity to assert that the law didn't alter the democratic character of the Israeli state.

I suppose that at some point an attempt will be made to put forward an argument, differing in nature from South Africa's overt legal, moral and political defense of apartheid. Israel would not venture an admission of apartheid but would deny its applicability through a reasoned denial of the basic charges. Such an approach by way of legalism will be quite a stretch given the essentially uncontested evidence that Israel's policies and practices do satisfy the definition of apartheid as accepted in international law circles, which rests on systematic and specific intent to impose a racially coded system of domination on a subjugated ethnicity.

I would contend that from the time of the 1948 War, during which more than 700,000 Palestinians were uprooted from their homeland, mostly becoming refugees in neighboring Arab countries, Israel was administering race relations according to an apartheid ethos. The destruction of several hundred Palestinian villages was a complement to the wartime mass departure. Israeli intentions became clear by an official blanket denial to Palestinians of the international law of right of return. These features accompanying the establishment of Israel lend credence to the view that apartheid was integral to Israel's state-building project all along.

Israel is understandably distressed by this growing civil society consensus that its treatment of the Palestinians amounts to apartheid. To begin with, apartheid is listed as one of the crimes against humanity in Article 7 of the Rome Statute

governing the operations of the International Criminal Court. As the Amnesty International report contends, if apartheid exists, then there is present an international responsibility to take steps to bring it to an end. Although Israel has refused to govern its behavior by international law standards, it nevertheless deeply resents being so charged. It is especially reactive to critics and organizations that have a positive and generally apolitical reputation, which includes Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch and B'Tselem.

There is still the puzzle posed by Israel's long record of defying international law without suffering adverse consequences, a position made possible by the unconditional geopolitical support provided by the United States, which is also often reinforced by its European allies. It is notable that despite the civil society consensus, few governments other than that of post-apartheid South Africa have been prepared to go along with the apartheid allegation in intergovernmental contexts, presumably fearing a backlash.

Yet, it is admittedly not foolish for Israeli officials and think tank policy experts to be worried. Even though Israel will not waver in its rejection of the apartheid allegation at this time or alter its policies of domination and victimization, it has suffered a serious setback. Symbolic politics have an underappreciated relevance to the resolution of internal and international conflicts ever since 1945. This relevance runs counter to the lingering, anachronistic belief of political realists that the flow of world history reflects relative military capabilities. It should be illuminating to realize that the anti-colonial wars were eventually won by the nationalist side that prevailed on the symbolic battlefields of Legitimacy Wars, rather than by the side that controlled the combat zones.

The U.S. experiences in Vietnam, Iraq and Afghanistan illuminate various facets of this shift in the post-World War II balances of power that derive from the resolute pursuit of legitimate grievances, and the weakening of capabilities that arise from losing the Legitimacy War. Beyond this, Israel has learned from the South African experience that anti-racism and anti-colonialism have strong mobilizing appeals in contemporary world society that can give rise to powerful global solidarity campaigns that encourage national resistance, and eventually influence the calculations of political leaders. Such concerns help explain Israel's excessively punitive reaction to the nonviolent Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) campaign.

Let's talk about the concept of apartheid. There is clearly severe discrimination inside Israel against Palestinians, but one could argue that there are many analogues elsewhere, including in the U.S. What are the similarities between apartheid South Africa and contemporary Israel (a comparison, by the way, which Amnesty International's report shies away from) in terms of the latter's treatment of Palestinians living inside Israel?

The criminal internationalization of the South African regime of racial supremacy gradually occurred during the aftermath of World War II. It featured the role of the United Nations in a campaign of delegitimation of South Africa's form of racism, first concentrating on the former German colony that came under the control of Pretoria after World War I, and later reaching to the internal approach taken by the Afrikaner leadership in South Africa. This latter development was the most direct encroachment on territorial sovereignty in the early experience of the UN. It resulted in declaring apartheid to be an international crime, initially in the 1973 International Convention on the Suppression and Punishment of Apartheid, and more recently enumerated in Article 7 of the Rome Statute governing the International Criminal Court. It is important to understand that the origins of this crime are entirely bound up with the experience of South Africa, and its internationalization from the outset was intended to reach any system of overt domination and victimization based on race, without any requirement that a racist regime resemble what prevailed in South Africa.

The most widely accepted definition of apartheid is contained in Article 2 of the 1973 International Convention on the Suppression and Punishment of Apartheid. Racism, understood as discrimination based on ideas of ethnic superiority and inferiority, does not necessarily imply apartheid. For instance, the Nazi genocidal approach was unconcerned with using the state and its administrative apparatus to keep the races apart, as its genocidal intention was to exterminate races deemed inferior, especially Jews and Roma.

Separation and racial discriminatory policies and practices are crucial components of apartheid forms of control, but by themselves they lack the element of specific intent (as evidenced and sustained by cruel acts) to form a system of domination with the purpose of keeping the subjugated race under the explicit control of the dominant race. In Israel and Occupied Palestine, this has meant domination by Jews as implemented by an array of administrative decrees and nationality laws restricting immigration of non-Jews, and denying Palestinian

refugees the right of return, which is an international legal entitlement.

Even the sort of systemic racism that exists in the United States is embedded in the socio-economic-culture of the society rather than functioning as an expression of the overt ideology and practices of the state. To be sure, sub-national political entities are complicit to varying degrees in carrying out racist policies, which is often exhibited by allowing racist civil society sentiments to shape the behavior of public institutions. The United States continues to be shaped by impacts from its notorious past, which featured the application of a genocidal approach toward the Indigenous community and a labor system in agriculture based on generations of slavery. This dubious legacy is illustrated by the disposition in the South of trial juries to acquit white defendants accused of murdering Black people, while rushing to guilty verdicts — however scant the evidence — if it is a matter of a Black defendant accused of murdering a white woman. Also, double standards in policing expose the deep roots of anti-Black racism in the U.S. as corroborated by the Black Lives Matter movement and the complex, contradictory societal reactions to the police homicide of George Floyd in May of 2020 in the northern U.S. city of Minneapolis.

The similarities between Israeli and South African apartheid relate to the historical and ideological narratives of both countries in which European settlers displaced, subjugated and exploited the resources of the Indigenous population, and claimed rights of ethnic supremacy based on race. In both South Africa and Israel, native claims to homeland were denied, and the settlers took over control of all aspects of governance with the intention of keeping the natives permanently under strict control, using law and lawmaking as a principal tool of control by the state.

The dissimilarities between Israel and South Africa derive from fundamental demographic, economic and ideological considerations. The fact that the white minority was never more than 25 percent of the South African population meant that inclusive democracy was never entertained as a legitimating option, while for Israel it was fundamental to the Zionist Project of establishing and legitimating a Jewish homeland in Palestine, which invoked biblical and historical connections to the land that went back for hundreds of years. Israel's first and most illustrious president, David Ben Gurion, despite his secularized Judaism, famously declared "the Bible shall be our weapon."

A further fundamental dissimilarity relates to the economic role of Blacks in South Africa and Palestinians in Israel. South African wealth was derived mainly from extractive activities involving mining, which depended on a large source of cheap labor. In contrast, Palestinian cheap labor was seen as undercutting a well-organized labor movement at the core of the Zionist movement, and was considered inessential to the growth and development of Israel. The Israeli economy came to increasingly emphasize high technologies, including armaments, in part to avoid any future dependence on Palestinian labor. In this regard, many on the Israeli right, even now, favor “ethnic cleansing” of Palestinians to achieve racial purity in Israel and to complete the work of de facto annexation of the West Bank. These concerns reference the so-called “demographic bomb” that is seen as posing a future threat to the presently solid Jewish majority in Israel. This threat arises from the higher Palestinian fertility rate, which if Israeli annexation plans become fully realized would lead to a 50:50 division of the combined population of 14 million living in Israel plus the Occupied Palestine, which is seen by most Israelis as intolerable with even worse to come.

I raised the previous question about the relevance of the comparison between apartheid South Africa and contemporary Israel because when it comes to the occupied territories, the situation is actually far worse than apartheid. Noam Chomsky once remarked to me that “South Africa needed its Black population, and catered to them at least to a limited extent. Israel had no need of the Palestinians in the occupied territories and is making life unlivable for them.” I think this raises some crucial questions about the broader use of the term “apartheid” when it comes to describing the Israeli treatment of Palestinians in the occupied territories.

In my understanding, Chomsky’s essential insight is correct and significant, but I do not agree that South Africa catered to the Black population more than Israel caters to Palestinians. Because Israel rests its claims on being “democratic,” it caters to the Palestinian minority of 20 percent in a variety of ways to sustain its international image of political legitimacy. The South Africans drew strict color lines that deprived Blacks of any civil or political rights, while Palestinians in Israel can vote and even form their own political parties and serve in the government.

The greater harshness of Israeli apartheid arises from the Israeli ambition to control a relatively limited territory as compared to the South African ability to

rely on African townships and Bantustans for purposes of segregation, security and control in a rather sparsely populated country. In effect, the proximity and demographic vitality of the Palestinians, “the dangerous neighborhood” of hostile Arab countries, and the character of Palestinian armed resistance led Israel to be more engaged in violent repressive activities than were the South Africans, especially in Gaza. Also, Israeli concerns with demographic implications of a diminished Jewish majority led to its adoption of a politics of fragmentation involving the dispersal of Palestinians beyond Israel’s borders. South Africa, as devising apartheid from the perspective of a racial minority, never had to cope with these Israeli concerns.

Source: <https://truthout.org/>



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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).

Is California Backsliding On Its Plan To Reach Zero Carbon Emissions By Mid-Century?



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In reality, California does not actually have a detailed roadmap for slashing greenhouse gas emissions in order to fulfill the Paris Agreement goal of limiting global warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius above preindustrial levels.

California is one of the world's largest economies. It is also a liberal state that acts as a leader in efforts to combat the climate crisis. Indeed, California is said to have revolutionized climate policy, advancing many key pieces of climate legislation that seek to combat global warming and its catastrophic effects. Among them is a plan to ban the sale of new gasoline-powered vehicles statewide by 2035. California leaders also pride themselves in seeking to meet climate goals while maximizing jobs and [economic growth](#).

The passage of climate bill AB 32, the Global Warming Solutions Act of 2006, set the stage for the state's transition to an ecologically sustainable future. It was a bipartisan clean energy action requiring the Air Resources Board to develop regulations and market mechanisms to reduce the state's greenhouse gas emissions to their 1990 levels by 2020. The state met the [goal of AB-32](#) four years ahead of schedule. In 2016, California's legislature voted to extend the state's climate change targets. [SB-32](#) set a goal of reducing greenhouse gas emission levels by 2030 to 40 percent of 1990 levels, while in [2018](#) an Executive Order was signed requiring state agencies to reach carbon neutrality by 2045.

California's emissions reduction program has a number of key features, which include the development of [California's Climate Scoping Plan](#) and a [cap-and-trade](#)

[program](#).

Pursuant to AB 32 and SB 32, a number of other key climate policies were introduced as part of an apparently overall roadmap in the state's efforts to achieve its emission reduction goals and become ultimately a clean energy economy. They include the [Green Building Standards Code](#), which requires commercial and residential buildings to meet minimum energy efficiency standards, the [Low Carbon Fuel Standard](#), a program designed to decrease the carbon intensity of fuels used within the state, and the [Advanced Clean Cars Program](#), which seeks to limit vehicle emissions.

Nonetheless, California's valiant effort to confront the climate crisis is encountering increasing difficulties. California is not on pace to meet the 2030 goal of a 40 percent reduction of greenhouse gas emissions from 1990 levels, according to a recent report by [California State Auditor Elaine Howle](#). The problem seems to be that while California, as Mary Creasman of [California Environmental Voters](#) put it, has passed a number of good environmental laws, most of them are incremental.

In reality, California does not actually have a detailed roadmap for slashing greenhouse gas emissions in order to fulfill the Paris Agreement goal of limiting global warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius above preindustrial levels. For instance, while transportation is the largest source of greenhouse gas emissions in California, the state lacks an identifiable path to decarbonize the sector. Worse still, the state's legally mandated emissions goals do not go beyond 2030. And when a new bill, the [Climate Crisis Act \(AB 1395\)](#), co-authored by Assembly members Al Muratsuchi and Cristina Garcia, was introduced on the last day of last year's legislative session, it was soundly defeated.

If passed, AB 1395 would have codified into law the climate goals set by former Governor Brown in 2018 and [backed up](#) by Governor Newsom. In fact, Governor Newsom has expressed the hope that a pathway can be identified by the Air Resources Board to achieve carbon neutrality even a full decade earlier than the existing target of 2045 set in Executive Order 2018.

AB 1395 went down in defeat at the hands of various organized interest groups, ranging from the oil industry, labor, California Chamber Commerce, and agricultural groups. This was a devastating blow to progressive lawmakers and climate activists who had hoped for the passing of a bill that would ensure the

attainment of a carbon-neutral future for the state of California by mid-century.

Among labor groups that strongly opposed AB 1395 was the State Building and Construction Trades Council, AFL-CIO, which represents nearly half a million workers. The organization opposed the bill on the basis of the argument that a reduction target of 90 percent of carbon emissions would cripple investment and innovation. In the same context, in a letter to the Chair of the Senate Appropriations Committee, the Deputy Legislative Director of State Building and Construction Trade Council urged California lawmakers to embrace carbon capture and storage (CCS) technologies as a strategy to mitigating climate change.

Unions representing fossil fuel workers also opposed AB 1395, but it is uncertain whether this was simply due to the fact that the bill did not include a just transition program. Unions representing fossil fuel workers also happen to be in support of CCS strategies as well as expanding oil and gas infrastructure. Assembly member Muratsuchi had another bill on just transition for fossil fuel industry employees last year, AB 1453, but it was held in Assembly Appropriations Committee.

AB 1395 may not, however, be entirely dead. It is still eligible to move and Assembly member Muratsuchi and some of his associates will be talking with stakeholders later this year, according to Ashley Labar, Chief of Staff at California State Assembly. But judging from the way organized interests mobilized in opposition to AB 1395, it is highly doubtful that the bill's fate will be reversed.

The irony behind California's efforts to tackle the climate crisis by reducing carbon emissions and eventually attain carbon neutrality by mid-century is that there is a detailed pathway available for the state and for immediate implementation. It was produced in the summer of [2021](#) by a group of researchers headed by Robert Pollin at the renowned Political Economy Research Institute (PERI) at the University of Massachusetts-Amherst, and has already received the endorsement of over 20 unions, including three fossil fuel unions. It is a study that demonstrates that California can reach zero emissions by 2045 while also experiencing economic growth, including the creation of over 1 million new jobs statewide through investment programs in energy efficiency, public infrastructure, land restoration and agriculture. The study also includes a robust just transition program, which is absolutely essential since [fossil fuel workers](#) will

not give up easily what they have managed to secure for themselves (relatively high-paying union jobs with benefits) after many years of hard work.

In sum, it might be time that California lawmakers took a close look at the PERI Program for Economic Recovery and Clean Energy Transition in California. It seems to be an ultimate win-win situation for all.

Source: <https://www.commondreams.org/>

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The Problem Of Fortress Europe And Russia



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Joseph Sassoon Semah

Imagine that the US was surrounded by missiles in all its borders, both in Mexico and Cuba, in both Canada and South America. Would it allow countries to receive missiles from Russia or China and continue to behave as usual? Of course not. We have already seen the missile crisis in Cuba.

The threat that Russian armies (on the border with Ukraine) posed to the United States and the North Atlantic Treaty falls into the long history of the Cold War.

Commentators explaining Putin's move in response to a US weakness that has emanated from Afghanistan and Iraq. But behind all the Western propaganda and hysteria of the media lies a remarkably simple narrative. The NATO alliance as a continuation of the US seeks to expand its borders and surround Russia with missiles, troops, and weapons. Putin seeks to return to the agreement that NATO will not expand to all countries surrounding Russia, as well as Georgia and more.

The countries of the world that see the situation in black and white, immediately mobilized to help Ukraine as well as the Baltic states. How? Send more weapons, ships and announce military collaborations. They are doing so without thinking about deepening the conflict, and how to really get the cat (Putin) off the tree.

But what if there is an effortless way? Why did European countries establish a military alliance and a supranational army after World War II? All European countries have armies, and some also have nuclear weapons. What is NATO's goal? Well on paper, NATO will always say that its goal is to preserve and protect democracy. But we know the laundering of the words of democracy. The United States conquered Afghanistan (with the help of European countries) and Iraq (with the help of Britain and some European countries) to establish democracy. And we saw that this was not the goal.

The other way around, we saw the economic interests as well as the deep collaboration with weapons industry.

Now, instead of the diplomats convincing NATO, which is the cat that climbed the tree, to get off it and assure the Russians that Ukraine will not join their alliance, they are sending increased weapons to Ukraine and other countries. The only sane country in this story is Germany that refuses to send weapons to the

developing conflict and arm Ukraine (Thanks to the SPD leader that understand well, what would happen to Europe without the Russian Gas, as well as, have a great fear to go to another war with Russia after WW2). Now, because of that, Germany is facing the hawkish side of NATO.

In other words, this whole war, if it breaks out, is not really a war for the protection of Ukraine's borders, or a bending of the hand of the terrible dictator Putin who threatens the democratic fabric of Europe. This war if it breaks out is for the benefit of the military industries, NATO's vast forces and to provide more resources to European countries. One of the nicknames of the European Union today is 'Fortress of Europe' and it was granted to it, after the fortress was closed to refugees from other countries (except as mentioned Germany which took in about a million refugees). But this fortress of Europe today takes on a contrasting character, which is the one behind a war that is brewing and is not willing to compromise. And ask yourself again, would you be willing to sit in a country surrounded by missiles and armies?

Putin is terrified of the revolutions in Ukraine and in Belarus and Kazakhstan. He feels his power is waning. An economic crisis is gripping Russia, and the corona is also biting into the shortened lives of Russia's residents. It is said that all this operation is to wag his tail, to gain more power within Russia.

This is because it also falls in the polls. NATO should not grant him this rope. It will be for the better interest of the people of Russia, Ukraine, and Europe.

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