

Chomsky: US Approach To Ukraine And Russia Has “Left The Domain Of Rational Discourse”



Noam Chomsky

The Russia-Ukraine crisis continues unabated as the United States ignores all of Russian President Vladimir Putin's security demands and spreads a frenzy of fear by claiming that a Russian invasion of Ukraine is imminent.

In a new exclusive interview for *Truthout* on the ongoing Russia-Ukraine crisis, world-renowned public intellectual Noam Chomsky outlines the deadly dangers of U.S. intransigence over Ukrainian membership in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) even when key Western allies have already vetoed earlier U.S. efforts in that direction. He also seeks to shed some light on the reasons why Republicans today seem to be divided on Russia.

Chomsky — whose intellectual contributions have been compared to those of Galileo, Newton and Descartes — has had tremendous influence on a variety of areas of scholarly and scientific inquiry, including linguistics, logic and mathematics, computer science, psychology, media studies, philosophy, politics and international affairs. He is the author of some 150 books and recipient of scores of highly prestigious awards including the Sydney Peace Prize and the Kyoto Prize (Japan's equivalent of the Nobel Prize), as well as dozens of honorary doctorate degrees from the world's most renowned universities. Chomsky is Institute Professor Emeritus at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and currently Laureate Professor at the University of Arizona.

The following transcript has been lightly edited for length and clarity.

C.J. Polychroniou: Tensions continue to escalate between Russia and Ukraine, and there is little room for optimism since the U.S. offer for de-escalation fails to meet any of Russia's security demands. As such, wouldn't it be more accurate to say that the Russia-Ukraine border crisis stems in reality from the U.S.'s intransigent position over Ukrainian membership in NATO? In the same context, is it hard to imagine what might have been Washington's response to the hypothetical event that Mexico wanted to join a Moscow-driven military alliance?

Noam Chomsky: We hardly need to linger on the latter question. No country would dare to make such a move in what former President Franklin Delano Roosevelt's Secretary of War Henry Stimson called "Our little region over here," when he was condemning all spheres of influence (except for our own — which in reality, is hardly limited to the Western hemisphere). Secretary of State Antony Blinken is no less adamant today in condemning Russia's claim to a "sphere of influence," a concept we firmly reject (with the same reservation).

There was of course one famous case when a country in our little region came close to a military alliance with Russia, the 1962 missile crisis. The circumstances, however, were quite unlike Ukraine. President John F. Kennedy was escalating his terrorist war against Cuba to a threat of invasion; Ukraine, in sharp contrast, faces threats as a result of its potentially joining a hostile military alliance. Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev's reckless decision to provide Cuba with missiles was also an effort to slightly rectify the enormous U.S. preponderance of military force after JFK had responded to Khrushchev's offer of mutual reduction of offensive weapons with the largest military buildup in peacetime history, though the U.S. was already far ahead. We know what that led to.

The tensions over Ukraine are extremely severe, with Russia's concentration of military forces at Ukraine's borders. The Russian position has been quite explicit for some time. It was [stated clearly](#) by Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov at his press conference at the United Nations: "The main issue is our clear position on the inadmissibility of further expansion of NATO to the East and the deployment of strike weapons that could threaten the territory of the Russian Federation." Much the same was reiterated shortly after by Putin, as he had often said before.

There is a simple way to deal with deployment of weapons: Don't deploy them.

There is no justification for doing so. The U.S. may claim that they are defensive, but Russia surely doesn't see it that way, and with reason.

The question of further expansion is more complex. The issue goes back over 30 years, to when the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics was collapsing. There were extensive negotiations among Russia, the U.S. and Germany. (The core issue was German unification.) Two visions were presented. Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev proposed a Eurasian security system from Lisbon to Vladivostok with no military blocs. The U.S. rejected it: NATO stays, Russia's Warsaw Pact disappears.

For obvious reasons, German reunification within a hostile military alliance is no small matter for Russia. Nevertheless, Gorbachev agreed to it, with a quid pro quo: No expansion to the East. President George H.W. Bush and Secretary of State James Baker agreed. [In their words](#) to Gorbachev: "Not only for the Soviet Union but for other European countries as well, it is important to have guarantees that if the United States keeps its presence in Germany within the framework of NATO, not an inch of NATO's present military jurisdiction will spread in an eastern direction."

"East" meant East Germany. No one had a thought about anything beyond, at least in public. That's agreed on all sides. German leaders were even more explicit about it. They were overjoyed just to have Russian agreement to unification, and the last thing they wanted was new problems.

There is extensive scholarship on the matter — Mary Sarotte, Joshua Shiffrin, and others, debating exactly who said what, what they meant, what's its status, and so on. It is interesting and illuminating work, but what it comes down to, when the dust settles, is what I quoted from the declassified record.

President H.W. Bush pretty much lived up to these commitments. So did President Bill Clinton at first, until 1999, the 50th anniversary of NATO; with an eye on the Polish vote in the upcoming election, some have speculated. He admitted Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic to NATO. President George W. Bush — the lovable goofy grandpa who was celebrated in the press on the 20th anniversary of his invasion of Afghanistan — let down all the bars. He brought in the Baltic states and others. In 2008, he invited Ukraine to join NATO, poking the bear in the eye. Ukraine is Russia's geostrategic heartland, apart from intimate

historic relations and a large Russia-oriented population. Germany and France vetoed Bush's reckless invitation, but it's still on the table. No Russian leader would accept that, surely not Gorbachev, as he made clear.

As in the case of deployment of offensive weapons on the Russian border, there is a straightforward answer. Ukraine can have the same status as Austria and two Nordic countries throughout the whole Cold War: neutral, but tightly linked to the West and quite secure, part of the European Union to the extent they chose to be.

The U.S. adamantly rejects this outcome, loftily proclaiming its passionate dedication to the sovereignty of nations, which cannot be infringed: Ukraine's right to join NATO must be honored. This principled stand may be lauded in the U.S., but it surely is eliciting loud guffaws in much of the world, including the Kremlin. The world is hardly unaware of our inspiring dedication to sovereignty, notably in the three cases that particularly enraged Russia: Iraq, Libya and Kosovo-Serbia.

Iraq need not be discussed: U.S. aggression enraged almost everyone. The NATO assaults on Libya and Serbia, both a slap in Russia's face during its sharp decline in the '90s, is clothed in righteous humanitarian terms in U.S. propaganda. It all quickly dissolves under scrutiny, as amply documented elsewhere. And the richer record of U.S. reverence for the sovereignty of nations needs no review.

It is sometimes claimed that NATO membership increases security for Poland and others. A much stronger case can be made that NATO membership threatens their security by heightening tensions. Historian Richard Sakwa, a specialist on East Europe, observed that "NATO's existence became justified by the need to manage threats provoked by its enlargement" — a plausible judgment.

There is much more to say about Ukraine and how to deal with the very dangerous and mounting crisis there, but perhaps this is enough to suggest that there is no need to inflame the situation and to move on to what might well turn out to be a catastrophic war.

There is, in fact, a surreal quality to the U.S. rejection of Austrian-style neutrality for Ukraine. U.S. policy makers know perfectly well that admission of Ukraine to NATO is not an option for the foreseeable future. We can, of course, put aside the ridiculous posturing about the sanctity of sovereignty. So, for the sake of a principle in which they do not believe for a moment, and in pursuit of an objective

that they know is out of reach, the U.S. is risking what may turn into a shocking catastrophe. On the surface, it seems incomprehensible, but there are plausible imperial calculations.

We might ask why Putin has taken such a belligerent stance on the ground. There is a cottage industry seeking to solve this mystery: Is he a madman? Is he planning to force Europe to become a Russian satellite? What is he up to?

One way to find out is to listen to what he says: For years, Putin has tried to induce the U.S. to pay some attention to the requests that he and Foreign Minister Lavrov repeated, in vain. One possibility is that the show of force is a way to achieve this objective. That has been suggested [by well-informed analysts](#). If so, it seems to have succeeded, at least in a limited way.

Germany and France have already vetoed earlier U.S. efforts to offer membership to Ukraine. So why is the U.S. so keen on NATO expansion eastward to the point of treating a Russian invasion of Ukraine as imminent, even when Ukrainian leaders themselves don't seem to think so? And since when did Ukraine come to represent a beacon of democracy?

It is indeed curious to watch what is unfolding. The U.S. is vigorously fanning the flames while Ukraine is asking it to tone down the rhetoric. While there is much turmoil about why the demon Putin is acting as he is, U.S. motives are rarely subject to scrutiny. The reason is familiar: By definition, U.S. motives are noble, even if its efforts to implement them are perhaps misguided.

Nevertheless, the question might merit some thought, at least by “the wild men in the wings,” to borrow former National Security Advisor McGeorge Bundy’s phrase, referring to those incorrigible figures who dare to subject Washington to the standards applied elsewhere.

A possible answer is suggested by a famous slogan about the purpose of NATO: to keep Russia out, to keep Germany down and to keep the U.S. in. Russia is out, far out. Germany is down. What remains is the question whether the U.S. will be in Europe — more accurately, should be in charge. Not all have quietly accepted this principle of world affairs, among them: Charles de Gaulle, who advanced his concept of Europe from the Atlantic to the Ural’s; former German Chancellor Willy Brandt’s Ostpolitik; and French President Emmanuel Macron, with his

current diplomatic initiatives that are causing much displeasure in Washington.

If the Ukraine crisis is resolved peacefully, it will be a European affair, breaking from the post-World War II “Atlanticist” conception that places the U.S. firmly in the driver’s seat. It might even be a precedent for further moves toward European independence, maybe even moving toward Gorbachev’s vision. With China’s Belt-and-Road initiative encroaching from the East, much larger issues of global order arise.

As virtually always in the past when it comes to foreign affairs, we see a bipartisan frenzy over Ukraine. However, while Republicans in Congress are urging President Joe Biden to adopt a more aggressive stance toward Russia, the proto-fascist base is questioning the party line. Why, and what does the split among Republicans over Ukraine tell us about what is happening to the Republicans?

One cannot easily speak of today’s Republican Party as if it were a genuine political party participating in a functioning democracy. More apt is the description of the organization as “[a radical insurgency](#) — ideologically extreme, scornful of facts and compromise, and dismissive of the legitimacy of its political opposition.” This characterization by political analysts Thomas Mann and Norman Ornstein of the American Enterprise is from a decade ago, pre-Donald Trump. By now it’s far out of date. In the acronym “GOP,” what remains is “O.”

I don’t know whether the popular base that Trump has whipped up into a worshipful cult is questioning the aggressive stance of Republican leaders, or if they even care. Evidence is skimpy. Leading right-wing figures closely associated with the GOP are moving well to the right of European opinion, and of the stance of those who hope to retain some semblance of democracy in the U.S. They are going even beyond Trump in their enthusiastic support for Hungarian President Viktor Orban’s “illiberal democracy,” extolling it for saving Western civilization, no less.

This effusive welcome for Orban’s dismantling of democracy might bring to mind the praise for Italian fascist leader Benito Mussolini for having “saved European civilization [so that] the merit that Fascism has thereby won for itself will live on eternally in history”; the thoughts of the revered founder of the neoliberal movement that has reigned for the past 40 years, Ludwig von Mises, in his 1927

classic *Liberalism*.

Fox News commentator Tucker Carlson has been the most outspoken of the enthusiasts. Many Republican senators either go along with him or claim ignorance of what Orban is doing, a remarkable confession of illiteracy at the peak of global power. The highly regarded senior Sen. Charles Grassley reports that he knows about Hungary [only from Carlson's TV expositions](#), and approves. Such performances tell us a good deal about the radical insurgency. On Ukraine, breaking with the GOP leadership, [Carlson asks](#) why we should take any position on a quarrel between "foreign countries that don't care anything about the United States."

Whatever one's views on international affairs, it's clear that we've left the domain of rational discourse far behind, and are moving into territory with an unattractive history, to put it mildly.

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Organizers In Appalachia Are Building A Green New Deal Blueprint For Themselves



The Green New Deal proposal is one of the only effective, broadly recognized pathways to tackle the climate crisis and address its social and economic consequences. It is technologically possible and economically sustainable. Yet although the Green New Deal project is already under way in some shape or form in various states, it has yet to be scaled up to the national level. In fact, climate policy as a whole has been stalled in Congress, and the Biden administration has so far engaged more in symbolic gestures than in living policy processes.

With time quickly running out to prevent a greenhouse apocalypse, activists need to reorganize and unite efforts to build massive public support and political will for climate action. In this context, much is to be gained by looking at the work of ReImagine Appalachia, which is promoting a Green New Deal blueprint for the

Ohio Valley region. This is the focus of the following exclusive interview for *Truthout* with Amanda Woodrum, senior researcher at Policy Matters Ohio and co-director of project ReImagine Appalachia.

Woodrum works at the intersection of energy, equity and the environment with the aim of finding common ground among environmental, labor, racial justice and community leaders to create a powerful grassroots movement with the capacity to assist in the transition toward an ecologically sustainable and equitable future.

C.J. Polychroniou: It has been three years since Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (D-New York) and Sen. Edward Markey (D-Massachusetts) introduced a Green New Deal resolution. Progressive Democrats in Congress also introduced the THRIVE Act in April 2021, which is in line with the vision of the Green New Deal. Yet, very little progress has been made so far toward decarbonizing the economy and moving in the direction of a sustainable and equitable future. Is this an accurate assessment of where we are? If so, what are the main obstacles that need to be overcome so we can keep moving forward in the hope of avoiding a greenhouse apocalypse?

Amanda Woodrum: Let my answer be a big verbal hug to you and others who feel like you do. We have made progress, big progress, it just hasn't fully materialized into actual infrastructure quite yet (at least not at the scale we need).

First, I think of [the bipartisan infrastructure package] as a down payment on our climate infrastructure needs. It contains hundreds of billions of dollars for modernizing our electric grid, electrifying our transportation system, including public transportation, upgrading the nation's rail infrastructure, and starting to repair the damage from the last century of extraction industry practices — reclaiming abandoned mine lands, capping orphaned oil and gas wells that spew methane, and remediating brownfields at shuttered coal plants and former steel facilities. The Biden administration is currently working to develop federal policy guidance on these resources designed to ensure the jobs created from these investments are good union jobs and pathways into those union jobs are built for Black workers and other people of color, as well as women and the many other people currently working in low-wage jobs.

Second, we are at a tipping point. Much work needs to be done to make sure the resources from bipartisan infrastructure package are spent the right way. If we

are successful in this, it will change the landscape, both physically and mentally.

Even in Appalachia, if these resources are spent wisely, we will see that national climate solutions, if done right, can be good for the economy and the working people it serves. More and more people already understand this, or we wouldn't have gotten this far.

As you know, the Ohio River Valley of Appalachia, also known as coal country, has long been a political stumbling block to national climate and clean energy solutions. No longer. Appalachia is now at the table of the national conversation. We know what we want and need.

ReImagine Appalachia is advancing the vision of a 21st century economy for the Ohio Valley. Can you talk about the principles and aims guiding this vision?

[ReImagine Appalachia](#) is a collection of hundreds of stakeholder groups working across the Ohio River Valley states of Appalachia — Ohio, Pennsylvania, West Virginia and Kentucky. We came together to create a collective vision of what a 21st century sustainable Appalachia looks like, and to build out the roadmap for how we get from where we are to where we need to go.

It is important to understand that Appalachia is essentially an area of concentrated poverty. The region has been exploited for more than a century by absentee corporations in the extractive industries — exploiting our workers, damaging our lands, and leaving our workers and neighbors sick. With the abundance of natural resources in the lands of coal country, one would think we would be the richest region in the nation. But we are not. We are the poorest. [Too many of the region's counties rank in the bottom 10 percent nationally](#) for their high level of unemployment and poverty, and low family incomes. The region is poor, and it isn't going to lift itself up by its collective bootstrings.

National climate solutions, if Appalachia is at the table, can be an opportunity to secure much needed and deserved resources for the region. Appalachia literally powered the prosperity of the rest of the nation, while the region itself was left in poverty. We believe the region is owed its due share of climate infrastructure resources.

The people of Appalachia want everything everyone else wants — a modern electric grid in Appalachia that doesn't lose power every time it rains hard;

[universal, quality broadband affordable to everyone](#) so the kids can use computers without going to the library and parents can work remotely; to [grow clean and efficient manufacturing in the region](#) with equivalent jobs to those found in the coal industry; and, to build out a sustainable transportation network that includes an Appalachian rail corridor. Perhaps more importantly, we want the good union jobs that can come with these investments. These infrastructure investments can put the region's residents to work building the future they want to live in while also laying the foundation for a much more prosperous economy over the long haul.

We must also invest to [repair the damage from the last century of extractive industry practices](#) — reclaiming abandoned mine lands; remediating brownfields, including coal ash ponds and coal slurries; reforesting the region; restoring the wetlands; and supporting sustainable agricultural practices among local farmers rather than Big Ag. This is why the coalition to ReImagine Appalachia is calling to [revive the Civilian Conservation Corps](#), as a carbon farming strategy that involves absorbing excess carbon with natural greenery. One can easily see how many people we could put to work just planting trees. We also think a revived Civilian Conservation Corps, as a public jobs program paying living wages, could be used to create second-chance opportunities for our many residents that were caught up in the “war on drugs” and opioid[crisis], something that hit Appalachia hard.

We call it [a new deal that works for us](#).

Who are ReImagine Appalachia's partners, and what is being done to reduce greenhouse gas emissions in the Ohio Valley?

[ReImagine Appalachia](#) is a diverse group of stakeholders — organized labor, racial justice leaders, faith groups, local government officials and environmental organizations, among many others. Folks based in the region working to find common ground and to re-find our common humanity. The last decade or so has been incredibly divisive. Absentee corporations in the extractive industries have helped foment that divide. But the reality is that there is a win-win solution for the 99 percent of us. To find it we must stop to listen to each other. All sides must do this. Environmental leaders must realize that no one will replace their job for an idea. People must be able to put food on the table for their families. And they shouldn't have to choose between a job and the environment.

But if we work together, we can make sure the climate-friendly jobs of the future are good for workers, communities and the environment. That means making sure most of the jobs we create are good union jobs, we are prioritizing coal industry workers for new opportunities; we are including on-the-job training opportunities on publicly funded infrastructure projects for union apprentice; and we are targeting Black workers, women, other people of color and low-wage workers for these apprenticeships. We can learn a lot about how to do this from [best practices in the national movement to ensure community benefits from big development projects](#). Essentially, public infrastructure resources should come with community and labor standards, or “strings attached.”

What strategies have you discovered that work best for securing broad consensus around ReImagine Appalachia’s policy blueprint for a sustainable future?

ReImagine Appalachia’s success is in part due to the creation of an inspiring, collective vision in the context of the very real possibility of securing federal resources that can actually turn that vision into reality. That vision is a collective vision created by people with deep roots in the states of the Ohio River Valley of Appalachia. Many people in the region have been waiting a long time for something like this to come along.

Nothing we do is done in a vacuum. Every year, we start the year off with a strategy summit that hundreds of stakeholders participate in to help develop our vision and our workplan. Our [initial vision and blueprint](#) was written after culling through 50 pages of notes from a virtual convening of stakeholders. Even then, the draft document was shared widely for even broader input and additional listening sessions were held to secure reactions to the draft.

We continue to dig deeper into every piece of our vision, collectively, with listening sessions and input into various drafts. When many people with different backgrounds, experiences and areas of expertise help to craft a vision, those diverse stakeholders not only help make it better, they learn from each other and ultimately become more dedicated to helping make that vision a reality. To promote wide dialogue, across stakeholder groups, we hold many public events (virtually), and share almost all of them [live on Facebook](#). So, even if you cannot attend the actual event, you can see and learn what happened later and weigh in.

We also have several teams that get together regularly to discuss issues — a labor

team, a racial and community justice team (that helped launch the [Black Appalachian Coalition, or BLAC](#)), and a research team. Our 2022 strategy summit led us to believe we need to create a faith table, one dedicated to promoting community dialogue at the local level and visioning sessions, and a manufacturing team.

We are particularly excited about the idea [of redeveloping shuttered coal plants and former steel facilities into environmentally friendly industrial parks, or eco-industrial parks](#). The basic idea of an eco-industrial park is that one company's waste is another company's useful input. Shuttered coal plants have incredible electric grid and transportation infrastructure that can be harnessed to make the sustainable products of the future. For various reasons, we believe Appalachia could become a hub for battery technology, alternatives to single-use plastics, steel bars for rail, and electric buses and vehicles.

We have so much work to do and so little time! But rest assured, the proverbial train has left the station and we are chugging forward into the new energy economy. We just need to keep hammering away at it, beating the same drum, and singing from the same hymnal. All the metaphors will be needed to keep this train on track.

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Inflation Policies Must Deal With Impact Of Rising Food Prices On The Poor



*Alastair Smith - Photo:
University of Warwick*

Consumer prices in 2021 rose 7 percent over the past year, making this the largest rise in consumer prices over a 12-month period since 1982. Why are prices rising, especially global food prices? Is the current inflationary episode related to the pandemic? Is aggressive monetary policy the main inflation culprit? And how does inflation affect the world, and the poor in particular? Can it be controlled?

Alastair Smith, an international expert on issues of global sustainable development, seeks to offer answers to these questions in this exclusive interview for *Truthout*. Smith is a senior teaching fellow at the University of Warwick in England and a research associate of the Global Drugs Policy Observatory at

Swansea University, Wales.

C.J. Polychroniou: Inflation has increased to surprising levels in 2021, with the U.S. experiencing one of the biggest increases, and looks like it will continue to climb in 2022. Why is inflation happening now, and to what extent is it affected by the pandemic?

Alastair Smith: Inflation seems to have been driven through trade openness and a growing trade deficit in recent decades; with a specific increase from 2020, despite [a limited contraction of imports](#) during the COVID pandemic. Primary drivers of this deficit include an increase in industrial supplies and materials, mainly petroleum, products and metals. An underlying cause of growing expense has been the increased cost of international shipping and domestic transport: the Baltic Dry Index (a measure of shipping costs) has increased significantly, while higher gasoline prices and truck driver shortages in some regions are pushing up the cost of road transport services. Therefore, the legacy of the pandemic — currently elongated by sluggish vaccination in countries without a critical mass of immunity — has and is [predicted to continue driving inflation into 2022](#).

Global food prices have risen significantly over the last year or so. What is driving the increase in overall food prices in particular?

It's important to select our dataset for analysis critically and I don't believe we currently have the right balance.

The dominant narrative from the UN Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) and Governments, and therefore the media and wider public understanding, is that nominal prices have increased significantly recently. Headlines highlight that "Global food prices rose 'sharply' during 2021," on the basis that the FAO's "Food Price Index, which tracks monthly changes in international prices, averaged 125.7 points — [a 28.1 percent increase over 2020](#)."

However, the FAO also maintain a separate price index, where "nominal" prices are converted into "real" prices. This index shows the relative cost of food over time, and in the context of wider inflationary pressures. In contrast to the nominal price index, the real price index shows that international food prices declined between the 1960s and the turn of the millennium, but then started to rise again from the year 2000. They have been increasing, more or less, ever since. This means that in *real terms*, food has not just gotten more expensive over the last

year or so, but that [food is less accessible in 2022](#) than it has been for most of modern history.

Focusing on the drivers of international real price increase, we need to look at inflationary pressures of the food sector but also the wider costs of life. We know that despite all our socio-technical development, food production is still victim to unpredicted and unpredictable weather. This is exacerbated by the recent La Niña episode driving dryer weather in most food exporting countries. There has also been a steady pressure on land use created by demand for biofuels — an indirect consequence of the climate emergency. Another pre-COVID shock was the African Swine Fever outbreak, which created price rises in various protein markets. A further significant, more recent pressure has been rising costs of international shipping — something that has increased the costs of all imports.

How do rising prices impact the world and the poor in particular?

We know that poorer individuals and households generally spend [a greater proportion of their income on food](#) than more financially wealthy households. This illustrates the evident truth that food is a staple consumable understandably prioritized even by those with less economic capacity. However, in the context of generalized inflation, in the costs of food and other essentials, more of the poor in countries such as the U.S. are increasingly required to choose between even the basic level of nutrient and other essentials, such as heating (context depending). For this reason, we have seen greater reliance on emergency food provision in countries, such as the U.S. and the U.K.

In other geographies, we might accept that malnutrition has been growing since 2014 as this is largely [driven by conflict, climate extremes, economic downturns and reductions](#) in purchasing power for the poorest. The current famine in Madagascar has drawn speculation that it will be the first globally recognized example of a [climate-driven emergency](#). Other analysis has critiqued this. However, given the low level of economic capacity in the country, rising prices, particularly in rice markets, only reduces the option to mitigate local pressures through imports.

Is there any evidence to suggest that government spending has an effect on inflation?

The impact of government spending on inflation would be highly contextually

dependent. We'd need to consider both the magnitude and specifics of such spending, the degree of openness for any specific economy, as well as other economic variables. Government expense will contribute to inflation when other forces create such potential. In other situations, where spending is depressed due to wider factors, well calibrated increases in government expenditure can be used to create a more desirable situation. The COVID pandemic has been a very clear example of this, where even highly politically conservative governments have used public funds to support the economy through restriction essential to saving valued human life years disrupted. As ever with these things, the devil is in the details.

What specific policies can be used to contain inflation? Is there any room for strategic price controls in today's economy?

Again, containing inflation is complex, and the appropriate measures will be highly contextually dependent. Interest rates are a widely used strategic price control intimately related to suppressing inflation and it's widely anticipated these will soon begin to rise.

More broadly, it has been interesting in the U.K. We have a Tory government ideologically committed to minimizing income support for the poorest. Ironical that such elitist government has been responsible for bankrolling [the largest public borrow-and-spend initiative in decades](#). Sadly, an immediate action after the pandemic has been to [cut income support and add further conditions for continued eligibility](#) — that create further structural barriers to self-sufficiency for many of the poorest.

A more logical response for those apparently concerned with “leveling up” would have been to recognize the possibility to set a strategic price control for society to pay its constituent citizens — through the possibilities of Universal Basic Income (UBI). This would facilitate a more flexible labor market and allow individuals to invest in personal development for new and emerging opportunities. Flexibility would genuinely underpin and support economic restructuring and offer a long-term dampening mechanism on inflation driven by external costs. Such investments wouldn't need to be funded through further debt: what we need in post pandemic 2022 is 100 percent smooth, progressive taxation, not administratively burdensome staged tax bands. (Under a true progressive taxation, the percentage rate increases as income increases, possibly as high as

60 or even 80 percent tax for incomes over, say, 1 million dollars.) In this scenario, contemporary data processing power could set a continually adjusting strategic control on the price of citizenship for each member of our society. Only this sort of qualitative visioning for the future can deliver transformation of national and global economies to the more stable, steady state economics essential to the sustainability of human development on this planet.

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Ending The Fossil Fuel Era Is The

Only Way To Halt Global Warming And Stop Environmental Injustice



CJ

Polychroniou

The decarbonization ideals underlying the Green New Deal provide the only realistic way to halt global warming and build a sustainable, resilient, and equitable future.

Environmental justice is a crucial component of the broader struggle for a sustainable, resilient, and equitable future. So is the end of the fossil fuel era; in fact, decarbonization and environmental justice go hand in hand.

The environmental justice movement traces its origins to the [Civil Rights Movement](#) of the 1960s. As such, it is deeply rooted in black history.

The Memphis Sanitation Strike in 1968, which drew [Martin Luther King Jr.](#), is regarded as the first nationally mobilized protest against environmental injustice.

In 1982, African Americans organized a mass protest against a polychlorinated biphenyl (PCB) landfill in [Warren County](#), North Carolina, an event that served as the catalyst for the birth of a political movement dedicated to fighting environmental injustice and environment racism.

Of course, other communities of color had also mobilized against potential environmental threats, even before Warren County. In the 1960s, [Cesar Chavez](#) led a fight to organize migrant farmworkers. He founded the National Farm Workers Association in 1962 with the aim of overthrowing a farm labor system in the US that treated farm workers as slaves. Chavez had also recognized early on the dangers of exposing farm workers to pesticides in the fields, and in the early 1970s campaigned successfully to have [DDT](#) banned on account of its adverse environmental effects.

There can be no denying that minority and low-income communities have

historically borne a disproportionate burden of environmental risks. Poor and racial-ethnic minority populations are far more likely to live near polluters and breathe polluted air. [Robert Bullard's](#) studies showed that hazardous waste, garbage dumps and polluting industries almost always end up in poor and predominantly black communities rather than white, affluent suburbs.

Indeed, a [2017 report](#) from the NAACP, the Clean Air Task Force, and the National Medical Association affirmed that African Americans are 75 percent more likely than other Americans to live near industrial plants that pollute water and air and erode the quality of life. In turn, a [2018 study](#) by Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) scientists found that African Americans faced a 54 percent higher health burden compared to the general population. Non-white communities had a 28 percent higher health burden and those in poverty had a 35 percent higher burden.

Environmental racism is undoubtedly very real, and the federal government has known about it for many decades. Yet, “there is [no federal law](#) governing environmental injustice,” although environmental justice was institutionalized as a priority of the federal government in 1994 with the signing of [Executive Order 12898](#) by Bill Clinton. Whatever progress has been made in the fight against environmental injustice and environmental racism has been due to community organizing and activism.

One of the earliest organizations dedicated to fighting environmental injustice is Communities for a Better Environment. It was founded in [1978](#) with a mission to empower people in California’s poor communities and communities of color to take action in order “to achieve environmental health and justice by preventing and reducing pollution and building green, healthy and sustainable communities and environments.”

A decade later, the fight against environmental injustice and environmental racism picked up considerable steam with the formation of multiple of organizations in the US. Included in this group are WE ACT for Environmental Justice (1988), the Center for Race, Poverty & the Environment (1989), the Indigenous Environmental Network (1990), the Southwest Network for Environmental and Economic Justice (1990), the Deep South Center for Environmental Justice (1992), and the National Black Environmental Justice Network (1999). Earth Rights International, the first organization founded on the

belief that US corporations could be held accountable for environmental crimes and human rights abuses committed abroad, came into being in 1995 and has evolved into a global movement dedicated to the fight for climate justice.

More grassroots environmental justice organizations surfaced in the years ahead not only because of increasing public awareness of climate change but also because environmental injustice remained widespread in the US. There are currently more than 140 major cases monitored by [Environmental Justice Atlas](#). And virtually all of them are in communities where economically disadvantaged and racial-ethnic minority populations reside.

Over the years, Louisiana's "[Cancer Alley](#)" has come to be seen as one of the most blatant examples of "environmental racism." "Cancer Alley" is an 85-mile long stretch of the Mississippi river overrun with petrochemical facilities. It is one of the most polluted places in the US, and the [cancer risk](#) for the predominantly African American residents in the communities closest to the plants is 50 times the national average.

Louisiana's "Cancer Alley" is also a blatant example of [government failure](#). But this shouldn't come as a surprise given the political influence of the oil, gas, and chemical industries. Moreover, [ProPublica's](#) investigation of cancer-causing pollution from industrial facilities also exposed flaws in the pollution prevention and enforcement policies of EPA.

On the positive side, environmental organizations have scored some impressive victories over the years, especially lately. Biden cancelled the [Keystone X Pipeline](#) after a 10-year campaign against it by organizations such as the Sierra Club. The [PennEast Pipeline](#) was also cancelled, and California has taken action to phase out [fracking](#) by 2024.

However, many activists stress the point that environmental justice cannot be disassociated from [racial justice](#). This is an issue that has caused long-standing [friction](#) between traditional environmental groups and environmental justice organizations. Nonetheless, the evolution of the environmental justice movement has led to growing collaborations and networks and continuous advancement of the environmental justice agenda. In talking to various environmental activists, a consensus seems to be emerging on the need to strengthen efforts to limit global warming.

This is absolutely essential for combatting effectively environmental injustice and environmental racism. Decarbonization is the key to tackling global warming and environmental injustice. Fossil fuels lie at the heart of the climate crisis facing the world at large and of the health and environmental injustices facing poor and minority communities.

Fossil fuels are responsible for the climate crisis, generate air and water pollution, cause millions of deaths each year, carry a price tag for the world economy which runs into hundreds of billions of dollars annually, and perpetuate environmental injustice and [environmental racism](#).

In this context, true leadership in the fight against global warming and environmental injustice necessitates being involved in the fight to end global fossil fuel use. The decarbonization ideals underlying the Green New Deal provide the only realistic way to halt global warming and build a sustainable, resilient, and equitable future.

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

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Unions Have The Potential And

The Responsibility To Advance A “Just Transition”



Norman Rogers - United Steelworkers (USW) Local 675 Photo: LinkedIn

The idea of a “just transition” has emerged as an absolute requirement for any progress toward a clean energy future. An energy transformation will impact workers in the fossil fuel industry but will also affect regions and communities differently. A just transition must be designed to ensure that the benefits of greening the economy are shared widely and that no worker is left behind.

Norman Rogers, a 20-plus-years employee of a southern California refinery and second vice president of United Steelworkers (USW) Local 675, also serves on the Joint Health and Safety Committee and Negotiating Committee at the refinery. In this interview, Rogers shares his insights on the principles and aims of a just transition and how we could get there.

C.J. Polychroniou: “Just transition” is associated with the environmental transition, in sectors such as chemicals and energy, although it is now moving into other areas such as health care and even development. Can you talk, from your experience as a refinery worker and labor organizer, about what the notion of just transition entails and how it is being used in connection with workers in the fossil fuel industry?

Norman Rogers: The term “just transition” is very much linked with the labor

movement. Tony Mazzocchi, a trade unionist with the Oil Chemical and Atomic Workers union (OCAW), coined the term as it related to the dangerous, toxic, life-threatening chemicals to which his members were exposed. The idea then, as it is now, is to find other ways to meet the needs for the products being made and the health and welfare of the workforce he represented.

Today, the move to renewables, the increase in the use of electric vehicles and even steel being made without the petroleum coke (petcoke) from the refining process is set to have a profound impact on the number of fossil fuel industry jobs. Knowing what the future holds and the serious repercussions set to take place, and planning for that outcome, that is what the call for a just transition is all about.

As a labor organizer representing fossil fuel workers in the current atmosphere, the philosophy behind a just transition is ensuring that no worker is left behind when transitioning to a clean energy economy. Everyone must be accounted for, whether they are toward the end of their career, just starting out, or any point in between. This fight must be won if the transition to a sustainable future is to be realized. To the extent that we do not do this, we will not be successful in building the community of allies needed for the task at hand.

It's been said that a just transition is absolutely essential for effective climate action. Why is this so, and what role can trade unions play in facing the challenges of global warming?

A just transition is essential because, at the end of the day, the decisions to be made to address climate concerns are ultimately going to take place in the ballot booth, and to the extent people see their jobs going away, without alternatives, their vote [will] be to maintain the status quo. There has to be a pathway for those folks set to lose their jobs to move into other careers. And this reaches beyond people working in oilfields and refineries to people building mufflers, engine blocks and transmission housings.

As we transition toward the new economy and the attention we give to it being “just,” we must ensure there is justice as well. The new jobs that come online and the allocation of resources must be made available to all; the sustainable future being touted must include all stakeholders: fossil fuel workers, fence-line communities, Indigenous people, the underemployed — they all must be

accounted for as we move forward. The benefits of a decarbonized future must be shared by all and the framework we build to make that happen is an integral part of any success we hope to achieve. A just path to a decarbonized future is absolutely critical to an ecologically sustainable economy. The costs of achieving a green economy should not be borne by those who have suffered and been excluded by the injustices associated with industrialization. I quote my father when I say, "Failing to plan is planning to fail."

A successful transition can only be achieved through social dialogue, consultation with those most directly affected by a decarbonized future and recognition there may be more than one path forward. Unions have a key role to play given the move to a green economy so fundamentally impacts the lives of workers. Unions have the potential, the responsibility, to advance the cause of a transition that is just. They must help ensure that workers, and the communities in which they live, receive a fair deal. Organized labor has a long, rich history of fighting for an equitable future for workers; the same must hold true now as we move to a decarbonized future.

Labor unions are divided over the Green New Deal. Some trade unions support a transition away from fossil fuels, while others seem to express apprehension, anxiety and fear over the prospect of a transition to clean, renewable energy sources. However, the prevailing view seems to be that "jobs vs. the environment" is a false dichotomy, a false choice. How do you and the union you represent look at the issue of "jobs vs. the environment"?

Without a doubt, there is a great deal of division in regards to climate concerns but, to a certain extent, one's view of climate concerns are almost a moot point given the changes taking place. If one keeps track of the number of television ads for electric cars over the course of a weekend, it becomes obvious the landscape is changing, and these are changes that mean a drop in demand for fossil-fuel-powered vehicles. Add to that, in California, new fossil-fuel-powered passenger cars will no longer be sold after 2035. It should be noted there are numerous other states making similar moves. With that, the debate over jobs vs. the environment becomes unproductive given that the focus should be how we make the jobs to come good-paying union jobs.

New work is coming and with it, a new workforce is needed. The number of jobs associated with the clean energy economy already surpass those in the fossil fuel

industry, and with the predictions these jobs are set to further increase in number, we can help bury the “jobs vs. environment” debate by ensuring these new jobs are quality jobs that support families and communities in ways that the current fossil fuel jobs have for close to a century.

From a practical standpoint, what would a just transition model actually look like?

Speaking only for myself, a just transition model must include income support for workers during the transition. Also, solid, well-financed training and re-training programs with a clear path to access the new jobs generated is necessary. With the jobs to come, strong collective bargaining must be a part of the picture. Similarly, as we start from scratch, sustainable development tools for economically disadvantaged communities must be incorporated so everyone benefits from what’s to come. The list of course should be expanded to include specific government policies aiming to integrate strong social protection measures for those at risk of losing their jobs and those unemployed workers in communities harmed by the challenges and threats of global warming.

What are the best strategies for creating enduring labor-environmental alliances?

The chief strategy I can suggest is that we need allies everywhere we can find them, and there is a language and a type of discussion that exists when we are speaking to allies. There has been a great deal of demonization that has taken place in reference to the fossil fuel industry and those who work there. An understanding is needed that those folks working these jobs are people doing the right thing; they have put roofs over their family’s heads, food on the table and supported the communities in which they live. And everyone, *everyone* has benefited from the fruits of their labors, whether it be hopping a flight for an overseas vacation or a road trip or the syringes that deliver the vaccinations to help fend off the coronavirus.

We are now being told that the right thing to do is for us to lose our jobs, jobs which in many cases have been multigenerational and, after decades of collective bargaining, have become good-paying jobs. If we can move to a place where there is recognition of these concerns, it creates a space where the discussions that need to take place about a path forward can happen. The goals of meeting climate challenges and the realities of people being able to support their families and communities need not be the “us or them,” either/or proposition it is being made

out to be. It is a chance for us to see how well we can listen and then how clever we can be with what we've heard.

Source:

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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).

Noam Chomsky: GOP's Soft Coup Is Still Underway One Year After

Capitol Assault



Noam Chomsky

In the third and final presidential debate of 2016, Donald Trump had signaled that he might not concede the election should he lose to Hillary Clinton. However, he did say to his supporters a day later that he would definitely accept the results of the election if he won.

Trump's threat to reject democratically run election results should have disqualified him from running for the highest office in the land.

But instead he went on to win the 2016 election and then divide the country like no other incoming president. And when he lost the 2020 election to Joe Biden, he not only refused to concede defeat, but he also sought to block the certification of the electoral vote by urging his fanatical supporters gathered at the U.S. Capitol on January 6, 2021, to "stop the steal" of the election. Months earlier, he had already put his base on high alert by saying, "The only way we're going to lose this election is if the election is rigged."

Under a less incompetent wannabe strongman, the assault on the Capitol could have led to the actual overthrow of the U.S. system of representative democracy. But the January 6 attack instead featured Trump's hallmark disorganization and lack of a coherent plan.

A day after the attempted coup, Trump announced that there would be an "orderly transition" of power on January 20, but that did not mean that he had plans to "go gentle into that good night." On the contrary, he continued to spread lies about the 2020 election, which he himself called the "Big Lie," even after he had failed to convince officials in Georgia and Arizona to overturn those states'

results. Trump's personal lawyer, Rudy Giuliani, also tried to convince a federal judge in Williamsport, Pennsylvania, to overturn hundreds of thousands of votes in the state.

Trump's position was quite simple: *If democracy fails to give me the desired election results, damn democracy!*

Trump's "Big Lie" continues to hold sway over the overwhelming majority of Republicans voters, and the Republican Party itself is increasingly unwilling to accept defeat. Subsequently, states with Republican legislatures have passed waves of new laws restricting voting and are taking over local and state election boards. These developments speak volumes of the anti-democratic mindset that has become the trademark of the GOP in the Trump era.

In the interview that follows, Noam Chomsky reflects on the anniversary of the January 6 insurrection and offers us his own insights on what may lie ahead in a country where a very sizable segment of the population still believes in Trump's lies.

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

C.J. Polychroniou: A year ago, on January 6, 2021, a mob of Donald Trump's supporters broke into the U.S. Capitol in an attempt to block certification of the electoral votes — a routine procedure following a presidential election — that would have formalized Joe Biden's victory. The Capitol building had been breached on a few occasions in the past, but this was the first time in the history of the country that an assault on democracy was actually incited by an outgoing president. In fact, months later, former President Trump would go so far as to

condemn the criminal prosecution of those who took part in the Capitol attack that day even though he had denounced the insurrection after he had been impeached over it. From your perspective, Noam, how should we understand what happened on January 6, 2021?

Noam Chomsky: Participants in the assault on the Capitol doubtless had varying perceptions and motives, but were united in the effort to overthrow an elected government; in short, an attempted coup, by definition. It was furthermore an attempt that could have succeeded if a few prominent Republican figures had changed their stance and gone along with the coup attempt, and if the military command had made different decisions. Trump was making every effort to facilitate the coup, which would surely have been applauded by a large majority of Republican voters and by the Republican political leadership, which, with a few exceptions, grovels at his feet in a shameful display of cowardice.

Implications for the future are all too clear. The Republican organization — it's hard to regard them any longer as an authentic political party — is now carefully laying the groundwork for success next time, whatever the electoral outcome may be. It's all completely in the open, not only *not* concealed but in fact heralded with pride by its leaders. And regularly reported, so that no one who is interested enough to pay attention to the American political scene can miss it. To mention just the most recent discussion I've seen, the *Associated Press* describes how the GOP is carrying out a "[slow-motion insurrection](#)" and has become "an anti-democratic force," something that has not happened before in American politics. A few weeks earlier, Barton Gellman [outlined](#) the plans in detail in *The Atlantic*.

There is no need to review the many well-known flaws of the formal democratic system: the radically undemocratic Senate, the enormous role of concentrated wealth and private power in determining electoral outcomes and legislation, the structural advantages provided to a traditionalist rural minority, and much else. But there are also broader issues.

What was progressive in the 18th century is by now so antiquated that if the U.S. were to apply for membership in the European Union, it would probably be rejected as not satisfying democratic norms. That raises questions that merit more attention than they receive.

With all due respect for the Founders, one question — raised by Thomas Jefferson

in his own terms — is why we should revere the sentiments of a group of wealthy white male 18th-century slaveowners, particularly now that the amendment system has succumbed to the deep flaws of the formal political system. No less curious are the legal doctrines of originalism/textualism that call on us to decipher their pronouncements with little regard to social and economic conditions as a decisive guide to judicial action. Looking at our political culture from a distance, there is a lot that would seem passing strange.

But even the tattered system that still survives is intolerable to GOP wreckers. Nothing is overlooked in their systematic assault on the fragile structure. Methods extend from “[taking hold of the once-overlooked machinery of elections](#)” at the ground level, to passing laws to bar the “wrong people” from voting, to devising a legal framework to establish the principle that Republican legislatures can “legally” determine choice of electors, whatever the irrelevant public many choose.

In the not-too-distant background are calls to “save our country” by force if necessary, where “our country” is a white supremacist Christian nationalist patriarchal society in which non-white folk can take part as long as they “know their place”; not at the table.

[White people’s] fear of “losing our country” is [in part a response to] demographic tendencies that are eroding white majorities, resisting even the radical gerrymandering that is imposed to amplify the structural advantages of the scattered conservative rural vote. Another threat to “our country” is that white supremacy is increasingly rejected, particularly by younger people, [as is devotion to religious authority](#), even church membership.

So while the charges of right-wing propagandists are largely fantasy and delusion, they have enough of a basis in reality to enflame those who see their familiar world of dominance disappearing before their eyes. And with the social order crumbling under the neoliberal assault, these fears can easily be manipulated by demagogues and opportunists — while their masters in the executive suites and mansions relish the opportunity to carry forward the highway robbery that they have engaged in for 40 years if future challenges can be beaten down, by state and private violence if necessary.

That’s a world that may not be remote, though it won’t last long with the supreme

climate denialists in charge. When Hungary, the current darling of the right, descends towards fascism, it's bad enough. If the U.S. does, long-term survival of human society is a dim prospect.

What does the January 6 Capitol attack tell us about the state of U.S. democracy in the 21st century? And do you agree with the view that Trump was the product of bad political institutions?

It tells us that the limited political democracy that still exists is hanging by a delicate thread.

If political institutions — more generally, intertwined socioeconomic-political institutions — can yield a President Trump, they are infected with profound malignancies. A moment's reflection shows that the malignancies are so profound that they are driving organized human society to suicide, and not in the distant future, with Trump and his acolytes and apologists enthusiastically in the lead. By now it takes real literary talent to exaggerate.

What are these institutions? That's much too far-reaching an inquiry to undertake here, but there are some instructive highlights.

The so-called Founders outlined clearly enough the kind of society they envisioned: "those who own the country ought to govern it" and ensure that "the minority of the opulent are protected from the majority" (John Jay, James Madison, respectively). Their model was England, where the reigning institutions had been described accurately a few years earlier by Adam Smith in words that bear repetition: The "masters of mankind," the merchants and manufacturers of England, are the "principal architects" of government policy and ensure that their own interests are "most peculiarly attended to" no matter how "grievous" the impact on others, including the people of England but also, much more severely, the victims of "the savage injustice of the Europeans," notably the people of India, then the richest country in the world, which England was robbing and despoiling for the benefit of the masters. Under the protection of the state they control, the masters can pursue their "vile maxim": "All for ourselves and nothing for other people," the maxim of the feudal lords adopted by the masters of mankind who had been replacing them since the "glorious revolution" of the preceding century.

The masters of mankind have always understood that free-market capitalism would destroy them and the societies they owned. Accordingly, they have always

called for a powerful state to protect them from the ravages of the market, leaving the less fortunate exposed. That has been dramatically plain in the course of the “bailout economy” of the past 40 years of class war, masked under “free market” rhetoric.

These core features of the reigning state capitalist institutions have been exacerbated by the rot spreading from interwar Vienna, adopting the term “neoliberalism” in the international Walter Lippmann symposium in Paris in 1938, then in the Mont Pelerin Society. The ideas were implemented under almost perfect experimental conditions during Augusto Pinochet’s murderous dictatorship in Chile, crashing the economy in half a dozen years, but no matter. By then, they had bigger game in sight: the global economy in the era of vigorous class war launched by Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher and carried forward by Bill Clinton and other successors, establishing more firmly the vile maxim and dismantling such troublesome impediments as a limited welfare system and labor unions.

That’s the kind of terrain in which a Trump can appear, though there are of course multiple factors of varied nature that interact.

It seems that political violence has become an accepted norm among many Americans today. Firstly, what do you think are Trump’s motives for continuing to spin the “Big Lie”? Secondly, do you share the view that neo-fascism is gaining ground and that election subversion remains a real threat?

Trump’s motives are clear enough. We don’t need a degree in advanced psychiatry to know that a sociopathic megalomaniac must always win; nothing else can be contemplated. Furthermore, he’s a canny politician who understands that his worshippers will easily accept the “Big Lie.”

Many have wondered at the willingness of two-thirds of Republicans to believe the ludicrous pretense that the election was stolen. Should we really be surprised? Have a look at the views of Republicans on other matters. For example, on whether humans were *created* as they are today: [about half of Republicans](#). Or on whether Muslims are seeking to impose Sharia law on the U.S.: [60 percent of Republicans who trust Fox News](#). Or on a host of other pre-modern beliefs in which the U.S. (mostly Republicans) stands virtually alone among comparable societies.

So why not a stolen election?

Election subversion is not merely a threat. It's happening in the "soft coup" that is underway right now. As is the drift toward a form of fascism. There is [evidence](#) that general attitudes of Trump voters on a range of issues are similar to those of European voters for far right parties with fascist origins. And these sectors are now a driving force in the GOP.

There's also substantial evidence that this drift to the far right may be driven in part by blind loyalty to Trump. That seems to be the case on the most critical issue that humans have ever faced: environmental destruction. During Trump's years in office, Republican recognition of climate change as a "serious issue," already shockingly low, [declined by 20 percent](#), even as nature has been issuing dramatic warnings, loud and clear, that we are racing toward disaster.

The phenomenon is deeply disturbing, and not without grim precedent. A century ago, Germany was at the peak of Western civilization, producing great contributions to the sciences and the arts. The Weimar Republic was regarded by political scientists as a model democracy. A few years later, Germans were worshipping Der Führer and accepting the vilest lies, and acting on them. That included some of the most respected figures, like Martin Heidegger; I recall very well my shock when I started to read his 1935 *Introduction to Metaphysics* when it appeared in English 60 years ago. And I'm old enough to remember hearing similar atrocious thoughts as a child in the '30s, close to home. Sinclair Lewis's 1935 classic on how fascism might be implanted in America by Christian nationalists (*It Can't Happen Here*) was not mere fantasy when it appeared, and it's no surprise that it has been returning to the best-seller lists in the Trump era.

State-level contests have moved to the very center of U.S. politics, but the Democrats are failing to catch up with this new reality. What's going on? Why do state politics matter more these days, and why do the Democrats seem to have embarked on a suicide mission as far as political strategy is concerned?

The neglect of state politics by Democrats seems to have taken off under Barack Obama. That critical area of American politics was handed over to Republicans who, by that time, were already moving toward their current stance of rejecting democratic politics as an impediment to their task of "saving the country" (the version for the voting base) and maintaining power so as to serve the rich and the

corporate sector (the understanding of the leadership).

So far, there have been, surprisingly enough, no breakthroughs in the House committee investigation of the January 6 attack. Do you think that the congressional select committee involved in this task will establish accountability for what happened on that infamous day? And if it does, what could be the political implications of such an outcome?

The Republican leadership has already neutralized the select committee by refusal to participate on acceptable terms, then by rejecting subpoenas — a sensible strategy to delay the proceedings by court proceedings until they can simply disband the committee, or even better, reshape it to pursuing their political enemies. That's the kind of tactic that Trump has used successfully throughout his career as a failed businessman, and it is second nature to corrupt politicians.

That aside, the events of January 6 have been investigated so fully, and even visually presented so vividly, that nothing much of substance is likely to be revealed. Republican elites who want to portray the insurrection as an innocent picnic in the park, with some staged violence by antifa to make decent law-abiding citizens look bad, will persist no matter what is revealed. And though there is more to learn about the background, it is not likely to have much effect on what seems now a reasonably plausible picture.

Suppose that the select committee were to come up with new and truly damning evidence about Trump's role or other high-level connivance in the coup attempt. The Rupert Murdoch-controlled mainstream media would have little difficulty in reshaping that as further proof that the "Deep State," along with the "Commie rats" and "sadistic pedophiles" who supposedly run the Democratic Party, have conspired to vilify the "Great Man." His adoring worshippers would probably be emboldened by this additional proof of the iniquity of the evil forces conniving at the "Great Replacement." Or whatever fabrication is contrived by those capable of converting critical race theory into an instrument for destroying the "embattled white race," among other propaganda triumphs.

My guess is that the committee's work will end up being a gift to the proto-fascist forces that are chipping away at what remains of formal democracy, much as the impeachment proceedings turned out to be.

It's worth proceeding for the sake of history — assuming that there will be any history that will even care if the plan to establish lasting Republican rule succeeds.

No exaggeration.

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