

# We've Never Been Closer To Nuclear Catastrophe—Who Gains By Ignoring It?



*Helen Caldicott - Photo:  
Heide Smith -  
helencaldicott.com*

*Antiwar and environmental activist Dr. Helen Caldicott warns that policymakers who understate the danger of nuclear weapons don't have the public's best interest at heart.*

*Editor's note: This interview has been edited for clarity and length. A video of the description of nuclear war from the interview can be [viewed on Vimeo](#). Listen to the entire interview, available for streaming on [Breaking Green's website](#) or wherever you get your podcasts. [Breaking Green](#) is produced by [Global Justice Ecology Project](#).*

This interview took place on January 25, 2023, one day after the Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists [advanced](#) the hands of the Doomsday Clock to 90 seconds before midnight—in large part due to developments in Ukraine. Dr. Helen Caldicott, an Australian peace activist and environmentalist, discussed the extreme and imminent threat of a nuclear holocaust due to a proxy war between

the U.S. and Russia in Ukraine. She also addressed the announcement by the U.S. Department of Energy of a controlled nuclear reaction and outlines the relationship between the nuclear power industry and nuclear weapons.

Caldicott is the author of numerous books and is a recipient of at least 12 honorary doctorates. She was nominated for the Nobel Prize by physicist Linus Pauling and named by the Smithsonian as one of the most influential women of the 20th century. Her public talks describing the horrors of nuclear war from a medical perspective raised the consciousness of a generation.

Caldicott believes that the reality of destroying all of life on the planet has receded from public consciousness, making doomsday more likely. As the title of her [recent book](#) states, we are “sleepwalking to Armageddon.”

*Steve Taylor:* The Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists recently [set](#) the Doomsday Clock to 90 seconds to midnight. What is the Doomsday Clock, and why is it now set to 90 seconds to midnight?

*Helen Caldicott:* For the last year, it’s been at 100 seconds to midnight, which is the closest it’s ever been. Each year they reset the clock according to international problems, nuclear problems. Ninety seconds to midnight—I don’t think that is close enough; it’s closer than that. I would put it at 20 seconds to midnight. I think we’re in an extremely invidious position where nuclear war could occur tonight, by accident or by design. It’s very clear to me, actually, that the United States is going to war with Russia. And that means, almost certainly, nuclear war—and that means the end of almost all life on Earth.

*ST:* Do you see similarities with the 1962 Cuban missile crisis?

*HC:* Yes. I got to know John F. Kennedy’s Secretary of Defense, Robert McNamara, [later in his life](#). He was in the Oval Office at the time of the Cuban missile crisis. He once told me, “Helen, we came so close to nuclear war—three minutes.” [Three minutes](#). We’re in a similar situation now.

*ST:* So back then, though, famously, the world held its breath during the missile crisis.

*HC:* Oh, we were terrified. Terrified, absolutely terrified.

*ST:* That doesn’t seem to be the case today.

*HC:* Today, the public and policymakers are not being informed adequately about what this really means—that the consequences would be so bizarre and so horrifying. It's very funny; [New York City](#) put out a [video](#) as a hypothetical PSA in July 2022 showing a woman in the street, and it says the bombs are coming, and it's going to be a nuclear war. It says that what you do is go inside, you don't stand by the windows, you stand in the center of the room, and you'll be alright. I mean, it's absolutely absurd.

*ST:* That is what you were fighting against back in the '70s and '80s—this notion that a nuclear war is survivable.

*HC:* Yes. There was a U.S. defense official called T.K. Jones who reportedly said, don't worry; "if there are enough shovels to go around," we'll make it. And his plan was if the bombs are coming and they take half an hour to come, you get out the trusty shovel. You dig a hole. You get in the hole. Someone puts two doors on top and then piles on dirt. I mean, they had plans. But the thing about it is that evolution will be destroyed. We may be the only life in the universe. And if you've ever looked at the structure of a single cell, or the beauty of the birds or a rose, I mean, what responsibility do we have?

*ST:* During the Cuban missile crisis, the U.S. did not want missiles pointed at it from Cuba, and the Soviet Union did not want missiles pointed at it from Turkey. Do you see any similarities with the conflict in Ukraine?

*HC:* Oh, sure. The United States has nuclear weapons in European countries, all ready to go and land on Russia. How do you think Russia feels—a little bit paranoid? Imagine if the Warsaw Pact moved into Canada, all along the northern border of the U.S., and put missiles all along the northern border. What would the U.S. do? She'd probably blow up the planet as she nearly did with the Cuban missile crisis. I mean, it's so extraordinarily unilateral in the thinking, not putting ourselves in the minds of the Russian people.

*ST:* Do you feel we're more at risk of nuclear war now than we were during the Cold War?

*HC:* Yes. We're closer to nuclear war than we've ever been. And that's what the Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists indicated by moving the clock to 90 seconds to midnight.

*ST:* Does it seem like political leaders are more cavalier about nuclear exchange now?

*HC:* Yes, because they haven't taken in what nuclear war would really mean. And the Pentagon is run by these cavalier folks who are making millions out of selling weapons. Almost the whole of the U.S. budget goes to killing and murder, rather than to health care and education and the children in Yemen, who are millions of them starving. I mean, we've got the money to fix everything on Earth, and also to power the world with renewable energy. The money is there. It's going into killing and murder instead of life.

*ST:* You mentioned energy. The Department of Energy has [announced](#) a so-called [fusion breakthrough](#). What do you think about the claims that fusion may be our energy future?

*HC:* The technology wasn't part of an energy experiment. It was part of a [nuclear weapons experiment](#) called the [Stockpile Stewardship Program](#). It is inappropriate; it produced an enormous amount of radioactive waste and very little energy. It will never be used to fuel global energy needs for humankind.

*ST:* Could you tell us a little bit about the history of Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory in California, where scientists developed this fusion technology?

*HC:* The Lawrence Livermore Laboratory was where the first hydrogen bombs were developed. It was set up in 1952, by Edward Teller, a wicked man.

*ST:* There is this promotion of nuclear energy as a green alternative. Is the nuclear energy industry tied to nuclear weapons?

*HC:* Of course. In the '60s, when people were scared stiff of nuclear weapons, there was a Pentagon psychologist who said, look, if we have peaceful nuclear energy, that will alleviate the people's fear.

*ST:* At the end of your 1992 book [If You Love This Planet](#), you wrote, "Hope for the Earth lies not with leaders, but in your own heart and soul. If you decide to save the Earth, it will be saved. Each person can be as powerful as the most powerful person who ever lived—and that is you, if you love this planet." Do you stand by that?

*HC:* If we acknowledge the horrifying reality that there is an extreme and

imminent threat of nuclear war, it's like being told that as a planet, we have a terminal disease. If we're scared enough, every one of us can save the planet. But we have to be very powerful and determined.

*Author Bio:*

*Steve Taylor* is the press secretary for [Global Justice Ecology Project](#) and the host of the podcast [Breaking Green](#). Beginning his environmental work in the 1990s opposing clearcutting in Shawnee National Forest, Taylor was awarded the Leo and Kay Drey Award for Leadership from the [Missouri Coalition for the Environment](#) for his work as co-founder of the [Times Beach Action Group](#).

*Source:* Independent Media Institute

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# How Complicit Governments Support The Drug Trade



*John P. Ruehl*

*Several governments or government entities play a double game of enforcing some drug laws while ignoring others. Their reasons vary, and history proves it will be difficult to stop.*

The modern globalized world has made it easier and far more lucrative to facilitate and enable [international drug networks](#), and several governments, or elements within them, actively work with criminal groups to support the flow of drugs around the world. This has led to a surge in drug usage among people worldwide, [according to the UN Office on Drugs and Crime's World Drug Report 2022](#), with 284 million people between the ages of 15 and 64 using drugs globally

in 2020, which amounts to “a 26 [percent] increase over the previous decade.”

State involvement in the drug trade occurs for a variety of reasons. The allure of profiteering can entice [state actors](#) to produce and transport drugs, particularly if their country is under financial duress. Producing drugs or merely taxing drug routes can bring in much-needed funds to balance budgets, create sources of “[black cash](#),” or enrich elites. Allowing the drug trade may also be deemed necessary to [ensure regional economic stability](#) and can prevent criminal groups from confronting the state.

In other instances, government agencies and institutions might be “[captured](#)” by criminal elements that have gained extreme influence over political, military, and judicial systems through corruption and violence. Government entities also often become too weak or compromised to stop criminal groups, which “[have never before managed to acquire the degree of political influence now enjoyed by criminals in a wide range of African, \[Eastern\] European, and Latin American countries.](#)”

Finally, some governments use the drug trade to promote foreign policy objectives as a form of [hybrid warfare](#). Supporting criminal groups in rival or hostile countries can help [challenge the authority of the governments](#) in these states, but it is also an effective way to promote social destabilization. Introducing drugs to other countries fuels local criminal activity, [plagues](#) their court and prison systems, induces treatment and rehabilitation costs, and causes immense psychological stress and societal breakdown through addiction.

### *The Complicity of State Actors in the Drug Trade*

The Russian government’s involvement in the international drug trade is due to several reasons. Russian state entities have sought to raise cash for their own benefit but have also historically [worked with powerful criminal groups](#) due to corruption and to avoid bloodshed (though the Kremlin has [steadily absorbed Russia’s criminal elements](#) under Russian President Vladimir Putin). Additionally, with the West imposing sanctions on the Kremlin after its invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, the Kremlin is seeking to punish some EU countries for supporting Kyiv by bringing drugs into the bloc, [leveraging its connections to the Eurasian underworld](#) to do so.

The Kremlin’s role in the drug trade has provided it with influence over former

Soviet states in Central Asia, which have also [facilitated](#) the drug trade from Afghanistan to Europe for decades. The criminal elements that control this [northern route have immense influence over the political and security elites of Central Asian states](#) and rely on cooperation with Russian intelligence services.

Much of the drug trade provides funding for Russian intelligence services, and [the Kremlin appears to have approved an increase in drug trafficking](#) in 2022 largely because of the financial difficulties stemming from its invasion of Ukraine.

The Balkans are also a key gateway for drugs entering Europe. [In Bulgaria](#), corruption has seen high-level politicians implicated in drug smuggling, in addition to officials in [Serbia, Montenegro, and Macedonia](#). The Council of Europe, meanwhile, accused Hashim Thaçi, the former prime minister and president of Kosovo, as well as his political allies, of exerting “[violent control over the trade in heroin and other narcotics](#)” “and [occupying] important positions in ‘Kosovo’s mafia-like structures of organized crime’” in 2010. Kosovan politicians [continue to face allegations](#) of corruption.

[Morocco’s government](#) has largely accepted drug networks to support national economic livelihood, which serves “as the basis of a parallel economy,” while this relationship is reinforced by corruption in the country. Libya had more of a [state-backed drug production and export apparatus](#) under former leader Muammar Gaddafi, though this mechanism broke down following the civil war in 2011. However, the [close relationship](#) between Guinea-Bissau’s “political-military elites” and drug smugglers has made it Africa’s greatest example of state complicity in aiding international drug networks. The country’s importance in the international drug trade stems from its proximity to Latin America and Guinea-Bissau’s geographic use as a transit stop for criminal groups seeking access to the European market.

In recent years, politicians from [Venezuela, Paraguay, Peru, Bolivia](#), and other Latin American countries have been accused or suspected of aiding and abetting criminals involved in the drug trade. United States officials have also accused former Honduran President Juan Orlando Hernández and his political allies of “[state-sponsored drug trafficking](#),” as he [awaits](#) trial in the United States.

But there has been a [decades-long involvement of the United States](#) in the drug trade. [In the 1950s](#), for example, the CIA gave significant support to anti-



communist rebel groups involved in the drug trade in the Golden Triangle, where the borders of Thailand, Laos, and Myanmar meet. [The cooperation lasted into the 1970s](#), and ongoing corruption in the region means [state authorities](#) continue to permit criminal groups a degree of operability.

The CIA also [admitted to ignoring reports about Nicaraguan Contra rebels](#) selling drugs in the United States to fund their anti-communist campaign in the 1980s. [The United States permitted Afghan farmers](#) to grow opium poppy during the Obama administration's handling of the War in Afghanistan in 2009 and has been suspected of cultivating Latin America's drug networks [to control the region](#).

Drug deaths in the United States have, meanwhile, been [rising significantly since 2000](#) and [hit record highs](#) during the pandemic, with fentanyl responsible for two-thirds of total deaths. China has [been accused by Washington](#) of allowing and enabling domestic criminal groups to import fentanyl into the United States.

While this trade partially diminished after pressure from Washington, fentanyl exports from China now often make their way to Mexico first [before crossing the U.S. border](#). China's willingness to cooperate with U.S. authorities, as well as authorities in Australia, where Chinese drugs are also imported, [has declined as relations between Beijing and Western states have worsened](#). China's government is also [mildly complicit](#) in the Myanmar government's [far more active and direct role](#) in facilitating the drug trade in Southeast Asia. This is due to Myanmar's need to both raise funds and control militant groups in the country.

### *Drug Trade Supporting Economies in Some Countries*

Drug production and exporting also give regimes an option for long-term survival. A 2014 report from the Committee for Human Rights in North Korea indicates that after North Korea defaulted on its international debts in 1976, [its embassies were encouraged](#) to "'self-finance' through 'drug smuggling.'" In the 1990s, this gave way to state-sponsored drug production to further increase access to foreign currency.

[Most of the suspected or arrested drug traffickers](#) from North Korea over the last three decades have been diplomats, military personnel, or business owners. [In 2003](#), Australian authorities busted a North Korean state-sponsored heroin smuggling operation while following Chinese suspects. [But by 2004](#), China was also admitting to problems with North Korean drugs crossing their mutual border.



And [in 2019](#), Chinese authorities arrested several people with connections to the North Korean government who were involved in a drug smuggling ring near the border.

The Syrian government has [produced and exported drugs for decades](#). But sanctions and civil war since 2011 have severely weakened Syria's leadership, [prompting it to drastically increase its drug operations](#) to raise funds and maintain power. Exports of Captagon and hashish now generate [billions of dollars a year](#) for the Syrian government and far [exceed the value of the country's legal exports](#).

In neighboring Iran, [government officials](#), as well as [state-affiliated groups like Hezbollah](#), are also complicit in profiting off the drug trade, which also [implicates Lebanese officials](#). Involvement in the drug trade by state-sponsored groups like Hezbollah or [Turkey's Grey Wolves](#) reveal attempts by Tehran and Ankara respectively to make these groups self-sustaining when state support withers.

Overt participation in the drug trade by certain states is likely to continue. Sanctions help fuel the drug trade by making states more inclined to resort to these networks to make up for lost economic opportunities. Additionally, most efforts to combat the drug trade are largely domestic initiatives. Less corrupt law enforcement agencies are often unwilling to work with their counterparts in other countries through forums like Interpol, [for fear of their complicity in illegal drug networks](#). The drug trade also remains a valuable geopolitical tool for states.

Nonetheless, state involvement in the drug trade is a risky venture. It emboldens criminal actors, often involves inviting drugs into national territory, and can result in enormous public backlash. While preventing the involvement of state actors in these practices will be a difficult task, the most overt instances should be scrutinized more thoroughly to ensure these policies are given greater attention.

#### *Author Bio:*

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

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# How To Support Black-Owned Businesses In The Solar Industry



We'll admit it — the [solar energy](#) industry is an imperfect one. Though it has enjoyed [considerable expansion](#) as we transition into the era of clean energy, challenges and growing pains will persist as solar matures. For an industry that champions equity, independence and social and environmental responsibility, solar still has room to improve — especially in the areas of inclusion and the effort to elevate minorities in a field made up mostly of white men.

According to Abigail Ross Hopper, president and CEO of the Solar Energy Industries Association, “the \$30 billion solar and storage industry is filled with tremendous opportunities, but our future success depends on our ability to expand our reach and welcome more diverse businesses to the industry.” The SEIA backed this statement with a 2019 study, showing that only [7.6% of the solar workforce is Black or African American](#).

As we enter Black History Month — a time dedicated to honoring the triumphs, struggles and contributions of Black people throughout U.S. history — we're reflecting on ways that we can enrich our industry by elevating and empowering Black-owned businesses in our communities.

Supporting Black-owned businesses in solar is not only a means of combating racial injustice, but environmental injustices as well. As we all know, [environmental injustice has a greater impact](#) on low-income communities and communities of color. Let's take a look at some of the leading Black-owned solar companies you can support:

Read more: <https://www.ecowatch.com/black-owned-businesses-solar.html>

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# Noam Chomsky: Right-Wing Insurrection in Brazil Held Strong Echoes of January 6



*Noam Chomsky*

*Both cases reveal how fragile representative democracies have become — and we may not have seen the last of such events.*

The right-wing riot and insurrection led on January 8 by followers of Brazil's incumbent president Jair Bolsonaro had strong echoes of the January 6 attack on the U.S. Capitol by Trump's supporters. Like Trump supporters' mob attack on January 6, 2021, in Washington, D.C., the January 8, 2023, insurrection in the capital city of Brasília grew out of weeks of protests by supporters of an incumbent president who refused to accept electoral defeat in a fall election. Both cases reveal how fragile liberal representative democracies have become in the neoliberal era, argues Noam Chomsky in the exclusive interview for *Truthout* that follows, adding that we may not have seen the last of such events either in the U.S. or in Latin America.

Chomsky is institute professor emeritus in the Department of Linguistics and Philosophy at MIT and laureate professor of linguistics and Agnese Nelms Haury Chair in the Program in Environment and Social Justice at the University of

Arizona. One of the world's most-cited scholars and a public intellectual regarded by millions of people as a national and international treasure, Chomsky has published more than 150 books in linguistics, political and social thought, political economy, media studies, U.S. foreign policy and world affairs. His latest books are *Illegitimate Authority: Facing the Challenges of Our Time* (forthcoming; with C.J. Polychroniou); *The Secrets of Words* (with Andrea Moro; MIT Press, 2022); *The Withdrawal: Iraq, Libya, Afghanistan, and the Fragility of U.S. Power* (with Vijay Prashad; The New Press, 2022); and *The Precipice: Neoliberalism, the Pandemic and the Urgent Need for Social Change* (with C.J. Polychroniou; Haymarket Books, 2021).

*C. J. Polychroniou: Noam, on January 8, 2023, supporters of former President Jair Bolsonaro stormed government buildings because they wouldn't accept the defeat of their fascist leader — an event, incidentally, that you strongly feared might take place almost from the moment that Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva won the presidential election. The insurrection of course has raised a lot of questions inside Brazil, as well as abroad, about the role of the Brazilian police, the failure of the intelligence services to warn Lula about what was going to happen and who orchestrated the riots. This was undoubtedly an attempted coup, just like the January 6 insurrection at the U.S. Capitol, and should serve as yet another reminder of how fragile liberal democracies have become in the neoliberal era. Can you comment on these matters?*

*Noam Chomsky:* Fragile indeed. The January 6 attempted coup could have succeeded if a few people had made different decisions and if Trump had succeeded in replacing the top military command, as he was apparently trying to do in his last days in office.

January 6 was unplanned, and the leader was so consumed by narcissistic rage that he couldn't direct what was happening. January 8, clearly modelled on its predecessor, was well-planned and financed. Early inquiries suggest that it may have been financed by small businesses and perhaps by agricultural interests concerned that their free rein to destroy the Amazon would be infringed. It was well-advertised in advance. It's impossible that the security services were not aware of the plans. In Brasília itself — pro-Bolsonaro territory — they pretty much cooperated with the marauders. The army watched the coup being well organized and supplied in encampments outside military installations nearby.

With impressive unity that was lacking in the U.S., Brazilian officials and elites condemned the Bolsonarist uprising and supported newly elected president Lula's decisive actions to suppress it. There is nothing like the U.S. denialist movement in high places. The uprising itself was savage and indiscriminate, as amply portrayed in the extensive TV coverage. The apparent intention was to create sufficient chaos so that the military would have a pretext for taking over and reestablishing the brutal dictatorship that Bolsonaro greatly admired.

International opposition to the insurrection was also immediate and forceful, most importantly of course, that of Washington. According to the well-informed Brazilian political analyst Liszt Vieira, who shared his thoughts with [Fórum 21](#) on January 16, President Biden, while no admirer of Lula, "sent 4 diplomats to defend the Brazilian electoral system and send a message to the military: No coup!" His report is confirmed by John Lee Anderson in a [judicious account](#) of the unfolding events.

If the January 6 coup attempt had succeeded, or if its copy had taken place during a Republican administration, Brazil might have returned to the grim years of military dictatorship.

I doubt that we've seen the end of this in the U.S. or in "our little region over here" as Latin America was called by Secretary of War Henry Stimson when explaining why all regional systems should be dismantled in the new era of post-war U.S. hegemony, except our own.

The fragility of democracies through the neoliberal era is apparent enough, beginning with the oldest and best-established of them, England and the U.S. It is also no surprise. Neoliberalism, pretensions and rhetoric aside, is basically class war. That goes back to the roots of neoliberalism and its close cousin austerity after World War I, a topic discussed in [very illuminating recent work](#) by Clara Mattei.

As such, a core principle is to insulate economic policy from public influence and pressure, either by placing it in the hands of professional experts (as in the liberal democracies) or by violence (as under fascism). The modalities are not sharply distinguished. Organized labor must be eliminated because it interferes with the "sound economics" that transfers wealth to the very rich and corporate sector. Investor rights agreements masked as "free trade" made their own contribution.

A range of policies, legislative and judicial, left the political systems even more in the hands of concentrated private capital than the norm, while wages stagnated, benefits declined and much of the workforce drifted to precarity, living from paycheck to paycheck with little in reserve.

Of course, respect for institutions declines — rightly — and formal democracy erodes, exactly as neoliberal class war dictates.

*Brazil, just like the U.S., is a deeply divided nation, virtually on the verge of a civil war. Having said that, I believe Lula has a very difficult task ahead of him in terms of uniting the nation and pushing forth a new policy agenda based on progressive values. Should we be surprised therefore if his government falls short of carrying out radical reforms, as many seem to expect a leftist president to do?*

I don't see any prospect of radical reforms, either in Brazil or in the neighboring countries where there has recently been a new "pink tide" of left political victories. The elected leadership is not committed to radical institutional change, and if they were, they would face the powerful opposition of internal concentrations of economic power and conservative cultural forces, often shaped by the evangelical churches, along with hostile international power — economic, subversive, military — that has not abandoned its traditional vocation of maintaining order and subordination in "our little region over here."

What can realistically be hoped for in Brazil is carrying forward the projects of President Lula's first terms, which the World Bank in a study of Brazil called its "golden decade," with sharp reduction in poverty and significant expansion of inclusiveness in a dramatically unequal society. Lula's Brazil may also recover the international standing it achieved during his first terms, when Brazil became one of the most respected countries in the world and an effective voice for the Global South, all lost during the Bolsonaro regression.

Some knowledgeable analysts are still more optimistic. Jeffrey Sachs, after intense discussions with the new government, concluded that growth and development prospects are favorable and that Brazil's development and international role could "help reform the global architecture — including finance and foreign policy — for the benefit of sustainable development."

Of paramount importance, not just for Brazil but for the whole world, would be resuming and extending the protection of the Amazon that was a highlight of



Lula's first terms, and that was reversed by Bolsonaro's lethal policies of enabling mining and agribusiness destruction that were already beginning to turn parts of the forest to savannah, an irreversible process that will turn one of the world's greatest carbon sinks into a carbon producer. With the dedicated environmentalist Marina Silva now in charge of environmental issues, there is some hope of saving this precious resource from destruction, with awesome global consequences.

There is also some hope of rescuing the Indigenous inhabitants of the forests. Some of Lula's first actions on regaining the presidency were to visit Indigenous communities that had been subjected to the terror unleashed by Bolsonaro's assault on the Amazon and its inhabitants. The scenes of misery, of children reduced to virtual skeletons, of disease and destruction, are beyond words to describe, at least mine. Perhaps these hideous crimes will come to an end.

These would be no slight achievements. They might help lay a firmer basis for the more radical institutional change that Brazilians need and deserve — and not Brazil alone. A basis is already there. Brazil is the home of the world's largest left popular movement, the Landless Workers Movement (MST), which takes over unused lands to form productive communities, often with flourishing cooperatives — to be sure, not without bitter struggle. The MST is establishing links with a major urban left popular movement, the Landless Worker's Movement. Its most prominent figure, Guilherme Boulos, is close to Lula, representing tendencies that might be able to forge a path beyond the incremental improvements that are desperately needed in themselves.

*The left, no matter where it comes to power, seems to fall short of expectations. In fact, often enough, it ends up carrying out the very neoliberal policy agenda that it challenges while in opposition. Is it because neoliberalism is such a formidable foe, or because today's left lacks both a strategy and a vision beyond capitalism?*

There has long been a lively left culture in Latin America, which the northern colossus can learn from. The internal and external barriers, which are formidable quite beyond their neoliberal incarnation, have sufficed to constrain hopes and expectations. Latin America has often seemed on the verge of breaking free from these constraints. It might do so now. That could help propel the developments towards multipolarity that are apparent today and that might, just might, open the

way to a much better world. Entrenched power, however, does not just melt away.

*We speak of political crises, economic crises and an ecological and climate crisis, among others, but it seems to me that we should also be talking of a humanity crisis. By that, I mean we may be on the verge of the dawn of an anti-Enlightenment era, with capitalism and irrationality having gone berserk and being at the root of a widespread ontological transition. Do you have any thoughts to share on this matter? Are we confronted with the possibility of the rise of an anti-Enlightenment era?*

We should bear in mind that the Enlightenment was not exactly a bed of roses for most of the world. It was accompanied by the unleashing of what Adam Smith called “the savage injustice of the Europeans,” a horrific onslaught against most the world. The most advanced societies, India and China, were devastated by European savagery, in its latter stages the world’s most awesome narco-trafficking racket, which ravaged India to raise the opium that was rammed down the throats of China by barbarians led by England, with its North American offshoot not far behind, and other imperial powers joining in what China calls the century of humiliation. In the Americas and Africa, the criminal destruction was far worse, in ways too well-known to recount.

There were lofty ideals, with limited though significant reach. And it is true that they have been under severe attack.

The fact that unrestrained capitalism is a death sentence for humanity can no longer be concealed with soothing words. Imperial violence, religious nationalism and accompanying pathologies are running rampant. What is evolving before our eyes raises in ever starker form the question that should have struck all of us with blinding fury 77 years ago: Can humans close the gap between their technological capacity to destroy and their moral capacity to control this impulse?

It is not just a question, but the ultimate question, in that if it does not receive a positive answer, and soon, no one will long care about any others.

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

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## **The U.S. Foreign Policy Establishment Proves In Ukraine That It Forgot The Lessons of Vietnam**



*James W. Carden -*

*Photo:*  
*Independent*  
*Media Institute*

Friday, January 27th, marks 50 years since the signing of the Paris Peace Accords by representatives from the United States, North and South Vietnam effectively ending American participation in the Vietnamese civil conflict. What the Georgetown University international relations scholar Charles Kuphan calls an “isolationist impulse” made a “significant comeback in response to the Vietnam War, which severely strained the liberal internationalist consensus.”

As the Cold War historian John Lamberton Harper points out, President Jimmy Carter’s hawkish Polish-born national security adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski scorned his intra-administration rival, the cautious, gentlemanly secretary of state Cyrus Vance as “a nice man but burned by Vietnam.” Indeed, Vance and a number of his generation carried with them a profound disillusionment in the aftermath of Vietnam which shaped their approach to the world. And for a short time, the “Vietnam Syndrome,” (shorthand for a wariness and suspicion of unnecessary and unsupportable foreign interventions) occasionally informed policy at the highest levels and manifested itself in the promulgations of the [Wienberger and Powell Doctrines](#) which, in theory anyway, were set up as a kind of break on unnecessary military adventures.

But only hours after the successful conclusion of the First Gulf War, President George H.W. Bush declared, “By God, we’ve kicked the Vietnam Syndrome once and for all.”

And kick it Bush did: In the decades following his 1991 pronouncement, the United States has been at war in one form or another (either as a belligerent or unofficial co-belligerent as is the case with our involvement in Saudi Arabia’s war on Yemen and in Ukraine) for all [but 2 of the 32 years](#) that have followed.

The political-media atmosphere that now prevails in Washington makes it exceedingly difficult to believe such a thing as a ‘Vietnam Syndrome’ ever existed. Indeed, President Joe Biden’s handling of the war in Ukraine has been met with rapturous approval from the Washington media establishment, winning plaudits from all the [usual suspects](#).

But what kind of success is it really, when the entire thing might have been avoided by judicious diplomatic engagement? Are we really to believe that a war resulting, so far, in 200,000 dead and 8 million displaced, has been worth an empty promise of NATO membership?

While the war has currently ground to a stalemate, the legacy media and various and sundry think-tank-talking-heads issue regular assurances of steady progress in the field and victory soon to come.

- Writing in the *Journal of Democracy* this past [September](#), political scientist and author of *The End of History and The Last Man* Francis Fukuyama exulted: "Ukraine will win. Slava Ukraini!"

- *Washington Post* reporter Liz Sly [told readers](#) in early January 2023 that "If 2023 continues as it began, there is a good chance Ukraine will be able to fulfill President Volodymyr Zelensky's New Year's pledge to retake all of Ukraine by the end of the year — or at least enough territory to definitively end Russia's threat, Western officials and analysts say."

- *Newsweek*, [reporting](#) in October 2022, informed readers by way of activist Ilya Ponomarev, a former member of the Russian parliament, that "Russia is not yet on the brink of revolution...but is not far off."

- Rutgers University professor Alexander J. Motyl agrees. In a January 2023 [article](#) for *Foreign Policy* magazine titled 'It's High Time to Prepare for Russia's Collapse' Motyl decried as "stunning" what he believes is a "near-total absence of any discussion among politicians, policymakers, analysts, and journalists of the consequences of defeat for Russia. ... considering the potential for Russia's collapse and disintegration."

- Also in early January, the former head of the U.S. Army in Europe, Lt. General Ben Hodges told the [Euromaidan Press](#) that, "The decisive phase of the campaign...will be the liberation of Crimea. Ukrainian forces are going to spend a lot of time knocking out or disrupting the logistical networks that are important for Crimea...That is going to be a critical part that leads or sets the conditions for the liberation of Crimea, which I expect will be finished by the end of August."

As Gore Vidal once quipped, "There is little respite for a people so routinely—so fiercely—disinformed."

Conspicuous by its absence in what passes for foreign policy discourse in the American capital is the question of *American* interests: How does the allocation of vast sums to a wondrously corrupt regime in Kiev in any way materially benefit everyday Americans? Is the imposition of a narrow, sectarian Galician nationalism over the whole of Ukraine truly a core American interest? Does the prolongation of a proxy war between NATO and Russia further European and American security interests?

In truth, the lessons of Vietnam were forgotten long ago. The generation that now largely populates the ranks of the Washington media and political establishment came of age when Vietnam was already in the rearview. Today, the unabashed liberal interventionists who staff the Biden administration came up in the 1990s when it was commonly thought the United States didn't do *enough*, notably in Bosnia and in Rwanda. As such, and almost without exception, [they have supported](#) every American mis-adventure abroad since 9/11.

The caution which, albeit all-too-temporarily, stemmed from the "Vietnam Syndrome" is today utterly absent in the corridors of power in Joe Biden's Washington. The Vietnam Syndrome is indeed kicked: Dead and buried.

But we may soon regret its passing.

*Author Bio:*

This article is distributed by [Globetrotter](#) in partnership with the [American Committee for U.S.-Russia Accord](#).

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*Source:* Globetrotter

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# Why A Small City In Ukraine Is A Focal Point In The War



John P. Ruehl

*The small Ukrainian city of Bakhmut has seemingly limited strategic significance. But coupled with its growing psychological value, Russia will continue attempting to take the city, despite high casualties, by whatever means necessary.*

Since the Ukrainian army's counteroffensive started [gaining momentum in September 2022](#), the Russian army has largely been on the defensive. Russian [drone and missile strikes](#) continue to target Ukraine's major cities, but its military forces have retreated from attempts to take [Kherson](#), [Kharkiv](#), or any other major Ukrainian settlement. Strong defensive fortifications built by Russian and Ukrainian armed forces across the frontline have stalled major advances as troops from both sides have mostly opted to dig in.

But the Kremlin has [directed thousands of its forces since August 2022](#) to attack the small Donetsk city of Bakhmut. The war has in [several ways been an](#) "old-fashioned conflict, based on attrition, on devastating artillery strikes, and on dug-in positions reminiscent of the trenches of World War I," as opposed to some of the quick offensives and counteroffensives that were seen during the first part of the current conflict.

According to a January 10, 2023, [article](#) in PBS NewsHour, the Ukrainian-backed governor of the Donetsk region, Pavlo Kyrylenko, "estimated more than two months ago that 90 percent of Bakhmut's prewar population of over 70,000 had fled since Moscow focused on seizing the entire Donbas." The fighting and destruction have only intensified since Kyrylenko made this statement, but the Kremlin appears intent on capturing Bakhmut for propaganda purposes and to tout a tactical victory after months of retreats. According to a Ukrainian analyst, "Bakhmut is mostly a political goal for Russia—it's being done mostly for the sake of propaganda reasons to show everybody that after so many months and utter failures in Kherson and Kharkiv, it still can capture a more or less significant

city,” [stated](#) a TRT World article.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy has sought to prove that Ukrainian forces still have the capability to hold back the Russian advance, and made a [surprise visit to Bakhmut on December 20](#). On January 9, 2023, Zelenskyy declared that the defense of the nearby city of Soledar had led to the gain of [“additional time and power for Ukraine.”](#) But the Ukrainian armed forces have had to divert [“significant reinforcements”](#) to the battle from other parts of the country since January, according to Britain’s Ministry of Defense. And despite [heavy Russian casualties](#), high Ukrainian casualties [have also become a concern](#) for Kyiv.

[Western](#) and [Ukrainian](#) officials have often downplayed the strategic importance of Bakhmut, depicting it as a sinkhole for Russian forces that may result in a [“Pyrrhic victory.”](#) Nonetheless, the phrase [“hold Bakhmut”](#) has become a Ukrainian rallying cry, and Zelenskyy’s visit demonstrated the growing symbolic importance of controlling the city.

Bakhmut, however, does possess some strategic value. Few major settlements exist to its west until the Dnieper River, and the [flatter and open terrain](#) would make Ukrainian attempts to reinforce from this direction vulnerable to Russian surveillance and firepower. Ukraine also has [relatively poor road infrastructure](#), and [Bakhmut serves as a critical juncture of transport and communication lines for Ukrainian forces in the region](#), including [strategic supply lines](#) to the Ukrainian-controlled settlements of Siversk, Lyman, Slovyansk, and [Kramatorsk](#).

For Russia, seizing Bakhmut would allow it to disrupt these supply lines, as well as take pressure off [the battle over Russia-controlled Kremmina](#), which Ukrainian forces have been fighting to recover. Bakhmut is therefore key to Russian attempts to consolidate and stabilize the Donbas, where Russia has fought since [2014](#) and initially made gains in 2022, before the Ukrainian counteroffensive in September.

Taking or destroying key industrial centers in the Donbas region will also reduce [Ukraine’s industrial output, leading to its economy suffering further](#).

Bakhmut stands out as the only major area where Russian forces are on the offensive, but the frontline has been relatively stable up until recently. Yet throughout January 2023, Russian forces have moved to the city’s flank and made

increasing gains in the nearby town of Soledar. After weeks of fighting, the Kremlin stated that [Soledar had been captured on January 13](#), this was later confirmed by the Institute for the Study of War and [Ukrainian armed forces](#).

Russian forces have enjoyed an [advantage over Ukrainian forces in artillery numbers](#), and an [early transition to a wartime economy](#) by the Kremlin has further helped sustain months of [relentless artillery](#) strikes by it. Nonetheless, Russia has [turned to countries like North Korea](#) in recent months to obtain more artillery, and its artillery fire has decreased in recent days, [according to U.S. and Ukrainian officials](#).

But Ukraine's more limited artillery capabilities [have also recently been threatened](#). Despite pleas for more 155-millimeter artillery rounds, [Western manufacturers have struggled](#) to supply an adequate quantity and ramp up production. This has forced the U.S. to [ask South Korea for artillery](#) and [Washington also secured hundreds of thousands of 155mm artillery shells](#) for Ukraine from its stockpiles in Israel. Meanwhile, according to [U.S. defense officials](#), "A third of the roughly 350 Western-made howitzers donated to Kyiv are out of action at any given time."

Western countries have now been focusing on delivering more advanced weapons to Ukraine, such as [missile defense systems, tanks, and armored vehicles](#). Recent pledges by the [UK](#) and [Canada](#) to supply Ukraine with heavy vehicles ([as well as pressure on Germany and the U.S. to do so as well](#)) will no doubt help Ukrainian forces on the frontline. But with Russia currently dictating where the fiercest fighting will take place, Bakhmut's vulnerability to artillery has made holding it a significant challenge.

Local militia groups and the Russian military have naturally played essential roles in the ongoing battle for Bakhmut and its surrounding regions. But perhaps most notable is that [much of Russia's recent progress](#) has been made by the Russian private military company, Wagner.

Wagner has [operated](#) in Ukraine since 2014 and has expanded its reach to countries [across Africa and the Middle East](#), while the company's owner, Yevgeny Prigozhin, has been keen to [demonstrate](#) his private army can accomplish major military objectives. Additionally, the [deaths](#) of Wagner mercenaries are not counted as official Russian casualties, making the costly effort to take Bakhmut

easier for the Russian public to stomach. In early January 2023, the first Wagner fighters, who were “secretly pardoned convicts” recruited by the company returned home after completing their contracts, [causing controversy in Russia](#) and highlighting the role of the non-state actor in the conflict.

Western and Ukrainian observers believe that Wagner troops [have suffered casualties in the thousands](#). Prigozhin, meanwhile, stated [on a telegram channel](#) in November 2022 that “Our goal is not Bakhmut... [itself] but the destruction of the Ukrainian army and the reduction of its combat potential, which has an extremely positive effect on other areas, which is why this operation was dubbed the ‘Bakhmut meat grinder.’”

It is also suspected that Prigozhin [aims to seize the salt and gypsum mines in the region](#), similar to other Wagner efforts to gain [access to resources across conflict zones](#) in Africa and the Middle East.

The outsized role of Wagner in the battle, as well as [Prigozhin’s growing profile in Russia](#), has led to significant [tension between the oligarch and the Russian military](#). After the capture of Soledar, Prigozhin claimed this was solely due to Wagner, while the Russian Defense Ministry [claimed](#) a few days later that victory was thanks to the Russian armed forces without mentioning the Wagner mercenaries.

The dispute between the Russian military and Wagner has come [amid a leadership shakeup](#) among the top brass of the Russian military. Valery Gerasimov, chief of the Russian general staff, replaced Sergei Surovikin as the Ukraine campaign’s overall commander on January 11. The change indicates the Kremlin’s frustration with the fledgling promises of the Russian armed forces. Nonetheless, the slow success of Russian artillery strikes in Soledar combined with Wagner troops shows that the two can work together.

But Bakhmut, so far, remains elusive for the Kremlin. Whichever side controls the city will have an advantage over any potential offensives later in 2023 and will have more say over where the next major battles take place. While Ukraine’s armed forces remain united under a more centralized command, the Kremlin will have to be careful of the growing tension between its armed forces, local militia groups, and private military companies.

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