

How Europe Has Navigated Its Energy Crises



A multifaceted response from Europe has so far prevented its energy woes from creating widespread social and economic destabilization. But with winter approaching, the crisis is far from over and risks are getting worse.

While European energy prices [have eased slightly in recent months](#), stress continues to build across a continent that has long been dependent on access to cheap Russian energy.

Protests related to high energy costs have been held from [Belgium](#) to the [Czech Republic](#) in Europe. Fuel shortages have led to long queues to buy petrol at gas stations [in France](#). The [Don't Pay UK](#) movement has urged British citizens to enter a “bill strike” by refusing to pay energy bills [until gas and electricity prices](#) are reduced to an “[affordable level](#).” Europe’s remarkably high energy prices have also [fueled](#) climate change protests across the continent.

European governments have resorted to diverse measures to manage the crisis. After the EU [banned](#) Russian coal imports, coal regulations [were reduced](#) in Poland, which has led to [illegal coal mines](#) being operated in the country. Aid packages, such as Austria’s [1.3 billion euro initiative](#), aim to help companies struggling with mounting energy costs. The [UK](#) “has capped the price of average household energy bills at 2,500 pounds (\$2,770) a year for two years from October” and also announced a cap on energy per unit for businesses, charities, and NGOs [in September](#).

Italy has shown considerable capability in [diversifying](#) its energy imports from Russia since the beginning of the year to reduce its dependence on the Kremlin. Under former Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi, [Italy began to increase its reliance on Russian energy](#), a process [that continued](#) even after his election defeat in 2011 and Russia’s annexation of Crimea in 2014.

This reliance came to an abrupt end after Russia’s invasion of Ukraine in

February 2022. Italy signed natural gas deals [with Egypt and Algeria in April](#) and held additional talks with the Republic of Congo and Angola regarding energy supplies as well. [In June](#), Italy also purchased two additional liquefied natural gas (LNG) vessels, adding to the [three](#) LNG terminals it already operates, to further diversify its natural gas (gas for short) supplies.

Not all countries, however, have matched Italy's success of diversifying their energy imports. France declared it would [cap power and gas price increases](#) for households at 15 percent in 2023. But since more than half of France's 56 nuclear reactors [have been shut down](#) for maintenance (Europe's summer drought also prevented the water-based cooling systems of the French nuclear plants [from functioning](#)), France will struggle with mounting energy costs as well as upholding its [traditional role as an electricity exporter to other European countries](#).

Like other European countries, Germany [chose to nationalize some of its major energy companies, such as Uniper](#) in September. In October, the German government proposed a [200 billion euro energy subsidies initiative](#). With gas storage [projected to reach 95 percent capacity](#) by November, Germany has also provided itself with significant protection.

But Germany [lacks](#) LNG infrastructure and remains [vulnerable](#) if Russia cuts off gas through pipelines completely. Currently, [Germany is at level two of the country's three-tier](#) emergency gas plan, with the last stage [introducing](#) direct government intervention in gas distribution and rationing.

Because Germany makes the largest [contributions](#) of funds to the EU, its economic vulnerability poses concerning implications for the rest of the bloc. And in addition to suffering from gas shortages, [Central European countries will](#) "also suffer from the effects of gas rationing in the German industrial sector, given their integration into German supply chains." Such uncertainty has blunted investment in the region, further compounding Europe's economic issues.

These issues have underlined the perception that while Russian coal has been relatively easy to ban in Europe and Russian oil is slowly being phased out, [Russian natural gas remains too important for much of the continent's energy mix](#) to be shunned completely.

[Dozens of ships carrying LNG have been stuck off Europe's coast](#), as the plants

“that convert the seaborne fuel back to gas are operating at maximum limit.” High gas prices [have meanwhile resulted in key industries across Europe that are reliant on the energy source](#) to shut down, sparking fears of “[uncontrolled deindustrialization](#).”

In addition to national strategies, European countries have pursued collective initiatives to confront the energy crisis. [On September 27](#), Norway, Denmark, and Poland officially opened the Baltic Pipe to supply Poland with natural gas. [On October 1](#), Greece and Bulgaria began commercial operation of the Interconnector Greece-Bulgaria (IGB) pipeline, which serves as another link in the Western-backed [Southern Gas Corridor](#) project to bring natural gas from Azerbaijan to Europe.

On October 13, [France began sending Germany natural gas for the first time](#), based on an agreement that “Germany would generate more electricity to supply France during times of peak consumption.” The European Council stated [on September 30](#) that EU states will implement “a voluntary overall reduction target of 10 percent of gross electricity consumption and a mandatory reduction target of 5 percent of the electricity consumption in peak hours.”

Additionally, the EU continues to [debate](#) imposing a price cap on Russian gas to the EU, and the G7 countries and its allies agreed on September 2 to implement a price cap on Russian crude oil and oil products [in December 2022](#) and February 2023, respectively.

[Germany, however, has led criticism over the “proposal to cap the price on all gas imports to the EU,”](#) stating that the EU lacks the authority to do so, alongside expressing concerns that gas providers will simply sell gas to other countries. Norway, traditionally Europe’s [second-largest gas provider](#) after Russia, also indicated it [would not accept a cap on gas](#), and Russia [stated it would not sell oil or gas](#) to countries doing so either. The resulting restrictions in energy supply [would likely further raise prices](#).

European countries also remain bound by their own interests, further undermining multilateral cooperation. Croatia, for example, [announced it would ban natural gas exports](#) in September. Many European countries have criticized Germany’s planned 200 billion euro subsidies plan for [fear](#) that it “could trigger economic imbalances in the bloc.” Germany, meanwhile, declared it would not

[support a joint EU debt issuance](#) on October 11, only later agreeing to the [measures out of pressure from its European allies](#).

In September, [the UK accused the EU](#) of pushing British energy prices higher by severing energy cooperation following Brexit. The U.S. and Norway [have also been singled out by EU members](#) for profiting off the current energy crisis.

Varying levels of vulnerability have resulted in some European countries breaking with the continental norm and negotiating with Russia. Serbia, which is not in NATO or part of the EU, signed its own [natural gas deal with Russia in May](#), while Hungary drew the ire of Western allies by signing its own gas deal with Russia [in August](#). Hungary was among the first European countries [to agree to purchase Russian natural gas in rubles](#), stabilizing the Russian currency as sanctions were placed on the Russian economy. If the crisis worsens considerably, other countries may follow suit.

As Europe's energy crisis has continued, many countries across the world have become increasingly wary. European demand for LNG and a willingness to pay premiums has meant suppliers are [increasingly rerouting gas to the continent](#).

Though rich competitors like South Korea and Japan [have been able to contend with European competition](#) for LNG, it has caused shortages elsewhere. Bangladesh and Pakistan, for example, have struggled to secure their traditional [LNG imports](#) since the beginning of the Russian invasion. Blackouts in these countries have increased, causing them to resort to [more carbon-intensive energy alternatives](#) and [prompting renewed talks with Russia](#) over LNG imports and developing pipeline networks to supply natural gas to Asia.

Europe's decades-long exposure to Russian energy means that its current energy crisis will persist for years. Even with predictions for a relatively mild upcoming winter, overcoming this energy crisis will require cooperation and sacrifice among European states—particularly if the war in Ukraine escalates further. While the West's solidarity will be put to the test, poorer, energy-vulnerable countries will continue to fall victim as a result of the fallout from the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

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Chomsky And Pollin: Pushing A Viable Climate Project Around COP27



Noam Chomsky

Since the mid-1990s, the United Nations has been launching global climate summits — called COPs — which stands for Conference of the Parties. Last year was the 26th annual summit and took place in Glasgow. COP26 was supposed to be “a pivotal moment for the planet,” but the outcomes fell way short of the action needed to stop the climate crisis from becoming utterly catastrophic. This year, COP27 will be held in Egypt in the midst of an energy crisis and a war that is reshaping the global order.

Will COP27 end up as yet another failure on the part of world leaders to slow or stop global warming? Noam Chomsky and Robert Pollin share their thoughts and insights on the climate crisis conundrum by dissecting the current state of affairs and what ought to be done to stop humanity’s march to the climate precipice.

Noam 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 Environmental and Social Justice at the University of Arizona. One of the world's most cited scholars in modern history and a critical 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, and climate change.



Robert Pollin

Robert Pollin is distinguished professor of economics and co-director of the Political Economy Research Institute (PERI) at the University of Massachusetts-Amherst. One of the world's leading progressive economists, Pollin has published scores of books and academic articles on jobs and macroeconomics, labor markets, wages, and poverty, environmental and energy economics. He was selected by *Foreign Policy Magazine* as one of the "100 Leading Global Thinkers for 2013." Chomsky and Pollin are coauthors of *Climate Crisis and the Global Green New Deal: The Political Economy of Saving the Planet* (2020).

C.J. Polychroniou: The 27th session of the Conference of the Parties (COP27) to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) will take place in Egypt from November 6-18, 2022. Nearly 200 countries will come together in yet another attempt to tackle climate breakdown. COP26, held in Glasgow about the same time last year had been hailed as "our last best hope," but it did not achieve much as too many compromises were made. The hope for COP27 is that the world will set more stringent greenhouse gas emissions reduction requirements considering the ever-clearer consequences of global warming. Noam, is this a significant climate meeting? Can we expect a

breakthrough, or will it end up yet another futile international effort to reverse climate change? Indeed, what's standing in the way of governments' failure to slow or even reverse global warming? Isn't the evidence already overwhelming that the world stands on a climate precipice? What prevents us from stepping back from the abyss?

Noam Chomsky: Decisions by governments tend to reflect the distribution of power in the society. As Adam Smith phrased this virtual truism in his classic work, "the masters of mankind" — in his day, the merchants and manufacturers of England — are the "principal architects" of government policy and act to ensure that their own interests will be "most peculiarly attended to" no matter how "grievous" the effects on the general welfare. Insofar as governments have failed to act in the ways that will prevent catastrophe, it is because the principal architects of policy have higher priorities.

Let's take a look. The U.S. government has just passed a climate bill, a pale shadow of what was proposed by the Biden administration under the impact of popular climate activism, which in the end could not compete with the power of the true masters in the corporate sector. The final shadow is not meaningless. It is, however, radically insufficient in its reach, and also burdened with measures to ensure that the interests of the masters are "most peculiarly attended to."

The bill that the masters were willing to accept includes vast government subsidies that "are already [driving forward](#) large oil and gas projects that threaten a heavy carbon footprint, with companies including ExxonMobil, Sempra and Occidental Petroleum positioned for big payouts," the *Washington Post* [reports](#). One device to satisfy the needs of the masters is "a vast wad of money" for carbon capture — a phrase that means: "Let's keep poisoning the atmosphere freely and maybe someday someone will figure out a way to remove the poisons."

That's too kind. It's much worse. "The irony of carbon capture is that the place it has proven most successful is getting more oil out of the ground. All but one major project built in the United States to date is geared toward fossil fuel companies taking the trapped carbon and injecting it into underground wells to extract crude."

The actual cases would be comical if the consequences were not so grave. Thus "The subsidies give companies lucrative incentives to drill for gas in the most

climate-unfriendly sites, where the concentration of CO₂ in the fuel is especially high. The CO₂, a potent greenhouse gas, is useless for making fuel, but the tax credits are awarded based on how many tons of it companies trap.”

It's hard to believe that this is real. But it is. It's capitalism 101 when the masters are in charge.

Other cases illustrate the same priorities. Arctic permafrost contains huge amounts of carbon and is beginning to melt as the Arctic heats much faster than the rest of the world. Scientists of one oil major, ConocoPhillips, discovered a way to slow the thawing of the permafrost. To what end? [“To keep it solid enough to drill for oil, the burning of which will continue to worsen ice melt,”](#) according to the *New York Times*.

The exuberant race to destruction is far more general. New fields are being opened to exploration. There is a huge expansion of oil pipelines, with [“more than 24,000km of pipelines planned around world, showing ‘an almost deliberate failure to meet climate goals.’”](#)

Corporate lobbyists are even pressing states to punish corporations (by withdrawing pension funds etc.) that dare even to provide information on environmental impacts of their policies. No stone is left unturned. Every opportunity to destroy must be exploited, no matter how slight, following Marx's script of capitalism going berserk.

It is not really surprising that once Reagan and Thatcher launched the current era of savage class war, removing all constraints, the masters used the opportunity to pursue their “vile maxim, all for ourselves and nothing for anyone else,” as Smith advised us 250 years ago.

There is a certain logic behind it. The rules of the game are that you expand profit and market share, or you lose out. For self-delusion, it suffices to hold out the thin hope that maybe our technical culture will find some answers.

There is an alternative to the resolute march toward suicide. The distribution of power can be changed by an aroused public with its own very different priorities, such as surviving in a livable world. The current masters can be controlled on a path toward elimination of their illegitimate authority. The rules of the game can be changed, in the short term modified sufficiently to enable humankind to adopt

the means that have been spelled out in detail to “step back from the abyss.”

Polychroniou: Bob, can you give us an estimate of where we stand on climate change and what needs to be done for the world to become carbon neutral by 2050?

Robert Pollin: Where we stand with climate change is straightforward and was expressed clearly in the most recent two massive reports, of this past February and April 2022, from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), the most authoritative mainstream resource on climate change research. In summarizing its February report, the IPCC said that “Human-induced climate change is causing dangerous and widespread disruption in nature and affecting the lives of billions of people around the world, despite efforts to reduce the risks. People and ecosystems least able to cope are being hardest hit.” The [February report](#) describes how “Increased heatwaves, droughts and floods are already exceeding plants’ and animals’ tolerance thresholds, driving mass mortalities in species such as trees and corals. These weather extremes are occurring simultaneously, causing cascading impacts that are increasingly difficult to manage. They have exposed millions of people to acute food and water insecurity, especially in Africa, Asia, Central and South America, on Small Islands and in the Arctic.” I would note that reputable climate scientists [regularly criticize](#) the IPCC for understating our dire ecological condition.

What we need to do to have any chance of stabilizing the climate is also straightforward. By far, the biggest driver of climate change is burning oil, coal and natural gas to produce energy. This is because burning fossil fuels to produce energy generates CO₂ emissions. These emissions, in turn, are the main cause of heat being trapped in our atmosphere and warming the planet. This is why, in its landmark 2018 special report, “Global Warming of 1.5° Celsius,” the IPCC set out the overarching goals of cutting global CO₂ emissions by about 50 percent as of 2030 and for the globe to [reach net zero emissions by 2050](#). The IPCC concluded in the 2018 report, and emphasized even more emphatically in its 2022 studies, that stabilizing the global climate at 1.5 degrees Celsius (1.5°C) above pre-industrial average temperature levels is imperative for having any chance of reducing significantly, much less preventing the “dangerous and widespread disruption in nature affecting the lives of billions of people around the world.”

It is clear then that the single most important project for advancing a viable

climate stabilization program is to phase out the consumption of oil, coal and natural gas for energy production. As the fossil fuel energy infrastructure phases out to zero by 2050, we concurrently have to build an entirely new global energy infrastructure whose centerpieces will be high efficiency and clean renewable energy sources — primarily solar and wind power. People are obviously still going to need to consume energy, from any available source, to light, heat and cool buildings, to power cars, buses, trains and airplanes, and to operate computers and industrial machinery, among other uses. Moreover, any minimally decent egalitarian program climate stabilization program — what we may call a Global Green New Deal — will entail a significant increase in energy consumption for lower-income people throughout the world.

The other major driver of climate change is corporate industrial agriculture in its multiple manifestations. This includes the heavy reliance on natural gas-based fertilizers along with synthetic pesticides and herbicides to increase land productivity. It also includes deforestation, whose main purpose is to increase available land for cattle grazing and still more industrial farming. Addressing these causes of climate change is, at least in principle, also straightforward. It requires replacing industrial agriculture with organic farming practices that rely on crop rotation, animal manures and composting for fertilizer and biological pest control. It means humans eating less beef, and thereby freeing up the cattle-grazing land to be used for organic crop cultivation. It then also means stopping deforestation, most especially in the Amazon rainforest i.e., “the Earth’s lungs.” This is why, as Noam emphasized in a previous recent interview, it is absolutely imperative, just on the climate issue alone, that Lula defeats Jair Bolsonaro in [Brazil’s presidential election](#) on October 30. Bolsonaro has no compunctions about obliterating the Amazon rainforest if there is money to be made, while Lula is committed to rainforest preservation and reforestation.

So, in response to both of your questions — where we stand today on climate change and what needs to be done — we will have a clearer picture after Brazil’s October 30 election. We can also generalize from Brazil’s situation. That is, everywhere in the world, we need to elect people like Lula and to defeat all climate deniers and apologists for the fossil fuel industry, that is, all the Bolsonaros in all regions of the world.

At the same time, electoral politics by itself is never going to be a sufficient action program. Even principled political leaders like Lula can become susceptible to

backsliding from a robust Green New Deal program in the face of the enormous pressures from fossil fuel corporations who continue to cash in on destroying the planet. The only solution here is mass organizing that is capable of holding all politicians accountable. There has been tremendous climate activism throughout the world in recent years, led by young people. This activism simply needs to intensify and continue to become increasingly impactful.

In terms of some specifics, the investments required to dramatically increase energy efficiency standards and equally dramatically expand the global supply of clean energy sources will be a major source of new job creation, in all regions of the world. This is excellent news, as far as it goes. But there is no guarantee that these new jobs will be good jobs. After all, we are still operating within capitalism. Climate activists therefore need to join forces with unions and other labor organizers to fight for good wages, benefits and working conditions for these millions of new clean energy jobs. At the same time, the phasing out of the global fossil fuel industry will mean large-scale losses for workers and communities that are presently dependent on the fossil fuel industry. Providing a just transition for these workers and communities also needs to be at the center of the Global Green New Deal.

There have been some recent positive developments with respect to the energy transition. Clean renewable energy investments have increased for the past two years, at a rate of about 12 percent per year. This contrasts sharply with the five years immediately after the major COP21 conference in Paris in 2015, during which global clean energy investments rose by a paltry 2 percent annual rate.

This recent spike in clean energy investments is being fueled by the fact that the costs of solar and wind power are falling dramatically and are now [lower](#) than those for fossil fuels and nuclear. Thus, as of 2020, the average cost for fossil fuel-generated electricity ranged between 5.5-14.8 cents per kilowatt hour in the high-income economies. These cost figures then rose sharply in 2021, due to the post COVID lockdown supply-chain breakdowns in the fossil fuel industry and Russia's invasion of Ukraine. By contrast, as of 2021, solar photovoltaic installations generate electricity at 4.8 cents per kilowatt hour and onshore wind is at 3.3 cents. Moreover, average solar costs fell by roughly 90 percent between 2010-2021. The average cost figures for solar and wind should continue to decline still further as advances in technology proceed as long as the rapid global expansion of these sectors continues.

At the same time, these positive developments must be weighed against the grim bottom-line reality that, to date, there is still no evidence that global CO2 emissions have begun falling. A modest reduction did occur in 2020 due to the global COVID lockdown. But as of 2019, global [CO2 emissions](#) stood at 37 billion tons. This is a 50 percent increase relative to 2000 and a 12 percent increase relative to just 2010. Overall, the transition from a fossil fuel dominant to a high-efficiency and renewables dominant global energy infrastructure, to rainforest preservation and an organic farming dominant agricultural infrastructure needs to be dramatically accelerated for there to be any chance of hitting the IPCC's climate stabilization targets.

We also need to recognize that this transition needs to occur everywhere, in all countries, regardless of their current emissions or income levels. This becomes clear through some simple global emissions accounting. As of now, China and the U.S. are by far most responsible for current total emissions. China's emissions represent 31 percent of the current global total and the United States accounts for another 14 percent. So, adding emissions from China and the U.S. alone gets us to 45 percent of the global total. But we can look at this same statistic from the opposite direction: Even after combining the emissions levels for China and the U.S., we still haven't accounted for fully 55 percent of total global emissions. We can then include the emissions totals for the 27 countries of the European Union along with China and the U.S. This adds another 8 percent to current total emissions, getting us to [53 percent in total](#). This means that if we only pay attention to China, the U.S. and the European Union countries, we still are neglecting the countries responsible for generating nearly half of current total global emissions. The point is that every place does matter if we really are going to hit the target of net zero global emissions by no later than 2050. Zero emissions has to really mean *zero*, everywhere.

Polychroniou: COP27 has been called Africa's COP. Indeed, Africa contributes only 3 percent to greenhouse gas emissions but suffers disproportionately from its negative effects. To be sure, the issue of who should pay for "loss and damages" from the climate crisis will occupy center stage at COP27. What are your thoughts on this matter? We already know, for instance, that the EU won't back climate damage funds talks at COP, and I don't think we should expect a different attitude from the United States. Is there a case to be made for climate reparations? Is there a better alternative?

Pollin: From an historical perspective, the high-income countries, starting with the U.S. but also including Canada, Western Europe, Europe and Australia are almost entirely responsible for loading up the atmosphere with greenhouse gas emissions and causing climate change. They therefore should be primarily responsible for financing the Global Green New Deal. But more recently, as I noted above, China is producing much larger emissions than any other country. China can therefore not be let off the hook as a source of climate financing.

But we also need to recognize that high-income people in all countries and regions have massively larger carbon footprints than everyone else. The average carbon footprint of someone in the richest 10 percent of the global population is 60 times greater than of someone in the poorest 10 percent. From this perspective, the [financing of a Global Green New Deal](#) must fall disproportionately on the rich in all countries.

However, more generally, it is not accurate or constructive to consider the issue of financing the energy system transformation as simply a question of who bears how much of the overall burden. We also need to recognize that the overall burden is actually not excessively large and that building a global green economy will also generate huge benefits and opportunities. Consider, for example, just the following:

1. According to my own research and that of others, a global climate stabilization program capable of achieving the zero emissions goal by 2050 will entail clean energy investment spending of roughly \$4.5 trillion per year through 2050. This totals to about \$120 trillion over the full period. These are eye-popping numbers from one angle. Yet they amount to an average of only about [2.5 percent](#) of total global income (GDP) between now and 2050. In other words, we can transform the global energy system and save the planet while still spending something like 97 percent of total global income on everything besides clean energy investments. This is also while average incomes are rising over time.

2. Creating a clean global energy infrastructure will pay for itself over time and save money for all energy consumers. This is because energy efficiency investments, by definition, mean spending less money to get the same amount of energy services — like keeping one's home well-lit and warm in the winter. Moreover, as I noted above, the costs of delivering a kilowatt of electricity from renewable energy sources is already lower, on average, than getting the same kilowatt from fossil fuels or nuclear power sources, and the costs of renewable

energy are falling.

3. Building the clean energy infrastructure will be more decentralized than the current highly capital-intensive and big corporate dominated fossil fuel infrastructure. Solar energy systems can be installed on rooftops and parking lots and in one's neighborhood. Wind turbines can be located on farmland without sacrificing productivity in crop or livestock cultivation. This, in turn, will create opportunities to expand access to energy into low-income communities throughout the world, including in the rural regions of low-income countries. Roughly half the people living in these regions do not currently have access to electricity at all.

Overall then, building the global clean energy economy should be understood as a great opportunity for investors and consumers, including especially small-scale investors such as both public and private cooperative enterprises.

That said, it will of course still be necessary to deliver the up-front money to pay for the initial investments. There is no shortage of big pots money that can be tapped in equitable ways for this purpose. We can start with transferring funds out of military budgets for all countries. Since the U.S. military budget amounts to 40 percent of global military spending, transferring, say, 5 percent of all military spending into global climate investments will mean that the U.S. share of the funds will also amount to about 40 percent of the global total. We can also eliminate existing fossil fuel subsidies in all countries and convert them into clean energy subsidies. The central banks of rich countries can purchase green bonds to support investments both within their own countries as well as globally. They then will receive the revenues that will be generated by these investments. The central banks of rich countries did not hesitate to provide massive bailout funding to financial markets during the COVID lockdown, at [levels of 10 percent or more](#) of their countries' respective GDPs. The global green bond fund could amount to perhaps one-tenth the size of these bailout programs. Finally, carbon taxes can be a viable source of funds as long as the tax burden falls mostly on high-income consumers and most of the revenue generated by the tax is rebated back to middle and low-income energy consumers.

The global financing project will then also need to be supported by private investors, at a level at least equal to that of government funds. Yet we know that private investors will never deliver sufficient funds without public policies in place that enforce hard limits on profit opportunities through fossil fuel investments, if

not eliminating such profit opportunities altogether. The [windfall tax on oil company profits](#) proposed in the U.S. Congress by Sen. Sheldon Whitehouse and Rep. Ro Khanna is one good place to start.

The need for such measures has become ever clearer since the fiasco surrounding the pledges made by major private financial institutions coming out of last year's COP26 climate conference in Glasgow. Perhaps the biggest single story coming out of the Glasgow conference was the formation of the Glasgow Financial Alliance for Net Zero (GFANZ), a group of roughly 500 financial sector firms holding \$130 trillion in overall assets — i.e., something like one-third of total global private financial assets. At the conference, GFANZ members committed their institutions to supporting investments that will deliver a zero-emissions global economy by 2050. But now many of the biggest players in the coalition are abandoning their pledges. The explanation is simple, as reported in [Bloomberg Green](#): “The revived fortunes of fossil fuels, especially coal, may explain some of the weakened resolve for decarbonization. Global bank lending to fossil fuel companies is up 15 percent to over \$300 billion in the first nine months of this year from the same period in 2021.” Justin Guay, director of climate finance strategy at the Sunrise Project summed up the matter perfectly in [commenting](#): “Banks were happy to sign up to a big pageantry contest at COP26 and get a bunch of applause. But when they realized the world expected them to make good on what they said they would do, they have looked for convenient excuses to wiggle out of that responsibility.”

Polychroniou: Noam, what do you think about this matter? The so-called “triple crisis” — i.e., responsibility, mitigation and adaptation — need to be addressed by the countries most responsible for climate breakdown, according to both climate activists and various governments of the Global South, including Egypt, the host of COP27.

Chomsky: We can refine the question. More accurately it is the rich in the rich countries who are most responsible for climate breakdown, and much more. Right now, working people in the super-rich United States are suffering from severe inflation, much of which is caused by the sharp rise in oil prices triggered by the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Meanwhile the profits of the fossil fuel industrial complex are booming. One short-term remedy would be a tax on their rapacious pursuit of the vile exam, proposed in [legislation aimed at oil price gouging](#) introduced by Senators Sherrod Brown and Sheldon Whitehouse, with receipts

going directly to consumers. Much more far-reaching steps can easily be envisioned.

These questions should be considered against the background of the neoliberal class war of the past 40 years, which has transferred some \$50 trillion to the pockets of the super-rich 1 percent. Bob Pollin [reminds us](#) that the steady rise in real wages ended in the '70s as the business campaign against working people and the poor was taking shape, with the floodgates opened by Reagan and Thatcher. If real wages had continued to track productivity gains, "the average worker's hourly wage in 2021 would have been \$61.94, not \$25.18." And if the assault on the public had been curbed, big corporate CEO pay would not have risen "from being 33 times higher than the average worker in 1978 to 366 times higher in 2019—i.e., a more than [tenfold increase](#) in relative pay." That's only one part of the serious blows against working people and the poor that we expect, on institutional grounds, once the reins are cast off.

All of this is background for considering the "triple crisis." The Global Green New Deal should confront these issues directly and forcefully, not just by proper concern for the countries that have been victimized by global warming but also by dismantling the class basis of the depredations of past centuries, sometimes taking truly savage forms as in the recent neoliberal years.

The immediate crisis is too urgent for the radical social change that we should seek, but efforts to carry it forward should proceed in tandem with addressing urgent demands. If basic capitalist institutions remain in place, the Global Green New Deal will not proceed as far as it must if we are to have a livable world that values freedom and justice.

Polychroniou: The Global Green New Deal may represent our only hope for an effective opportunity to address the challenge of global warming while also setting the world economy on a new course of sustainable development. Yet, it wasn't part of COP26's decarbonization concerns and it doesn't figure in the agenda of COP27. Why?

Chomsky: Who meets in the stately halls where agendas are devised?

Let's return to our discussion of the achievements of COP26. The most exciting, eliciting much euphoria, was the commitment of the great private financial institutions to devote up to \$130 trillion to such noble projects as wiring Africa for

solar power. The market to the rescue! — with a small footnote, as political economist Adam Tooze was unkind enough to add. The giants of finance will gladly make their lavish contribution to the Global Green New Deal if the International Monetary Fund and World Bank “derisk” the loans by absorbing losses and “there is a carbon price that gives clean energy a competitive advantage.”

As long as the vile maxim is firmly in place, their munificence has no bounds.

We return to the same conclusions. The Global Green New Deal cannot be delayed, but it must go hand in hand with raising consciousness and implementing measures to constrain and ultimately dismantle the institutional structures of capitalist autocracy.

Polychroniou: Bob, you are one of the leading advocates of global Green New Deal. Why isn't this project gaining traction? Too idealistic for the taste of the real world where national interests still reign supreme? If so, what needs to be done?

Pollin: As I have tried to convey in my responses above, I don't see the Global Green New Deal as idealistic. I rather see it as the only viable program that can achieve the IPCC's climate stabilization goals in a way that also expands decent job opportunities and raises mass living standards in all regions of the world, at all levels of development. That includes increasing peoples' access to low-cost energy throughout the world. As such, the Global Green New Deal should attract overwhelming support, both among people who are committed around climate issues as well as those whose primary focus may be paying rent and keeping food on the table.

Achieving this level of support can only be achieved through organizing and educating. To take one example, for over a decade, labor and environment activists, such as those associated with the Labor Network for Sustainability and the BlueGreen Alliance in the U.S., have been working to build strong coalitions. Against steep odds, they have started to win some significant victories. This includes the [endorsement of a robust green investment and just transition program in California](#) by the union representing the state's oil refinery workers.

Of course, these and similar initiatives face relentless opposition from fossil fuel corporations and the full spectrum of interests aligned with them. A clear and coherent global Green New Deal program will serve as one useful tool in the

ongoing struggle to save the planet.

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What The Failure Of Liz Truss's Economic Agenda In The UK Can Teach The U.S.



*Sonali Kolhatkar - Photo:
sonalokolhatkar.com*

Americans, relieved that they were rid of Donald Trump and his incessant scandals, looked gleefully to their neighbors across the Atlantic as British Prime Minister Liz Truss resigned after a mere [45 days in office](#). Truss had the shortest term of any British prime minister in history, disgraced by the consequences of her own economic prescriptions. There is a lesson to be learned from Truss's rise and rapid downfall that applies to the United States, a nation beset by similar economic troubles but with a very different governmental structure.

The main takeaway from Truss's downfall is that tackling inflation by rewarding the rich is a fool's errand. Fashioning herself after [Margaret Thatcher](#), the godmother of conservative capitalism, Truss had hoped to join the ranks of former prime ministers [Tony Blair](#) and [David Cameron](#) as a champion of "trickle-down" policies.

A central idea favored by Thatcherites—one that may sound familiar to Americans—is that when ordinary people are struggling, leaders must ensure the rich get richer so that the crumbs of their excesses will trickle down to the poor. Going hand in hand with this is the aggressive deregulation of industries to free them from the fetters of any protective measures that could impact profit margins.

Here in the U.S., President Ronald Reagan promoted this ludicrous concept in the 1980s as perhaps the grandest gift of all time, overseeing massive tax cuts for the wealthiest Americans and an [aggressive deregulatory agenda](#). According to the [Center for American Progress](#), when "Reagan took office in 1981, the marginal tax rate for the highest income bracket was 70 percent, but that fell to

just 28 percent by the time he left office.”

In spite of [decades of evidence](#) that trickle-down economics doesn't work, Republicans, when in control of the U.S. Congress and the presidency, have aggressively pushed through the same policies. Recall the [2017 tax reform bill](#) forced through the legislative process by then-Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell and signed into law by Trump. That bill continued what Reagan started by infusing cash at the very top in the form of tax cuts. It too, like its predecessors, [failed](#).

Truss repackaged this same grift in the UK, with critics coining a new moniker for it: [Trussonomics](#). Influenced by [right-wing think tanks](#) such as the Adam Smith Institute and the Institute of Economic Affairs, she pushed a “[mini-budget](#)” centered on major tax cuts for the wealthiest in Britain with no plan on how to compensate for the loss in revenues.

The Guardian's economics correspondent Richard Partington [explained](#) that this triggered “a run on sterling, gilt market freefall and spooked global investors. Even the International Monetary Fund (IMF) intervened with a stunning public rebuke.” The British pound plummeted in value, and the Bank of England was forced to intervene by buying up bonds and raising interest rates. Eventually, members of Parliament began expressing enough loss of confidence in the new prime minister that Truss was forced to resign just over six weeks into her tenure.

Since the 1980s, both Republican and Democratic presidents in the U.S. embraced “Reaganomics,” in spite of critics repeatedly calling out the lunacy of enriching the wealthy to address poverty. By the time Joe Biden took office in January 2021, there was so much damage done that the new president felt moved to [articulate](#) that trickle-down economics doesn't work. Biden repeated his criticisms as Truss took office, saying on [Twitter](#) in September 2022, “I am sick and tired of trickle-down economics. It has never worked.”

But talk is cheap, and another major lesson for Americans is that while it's easy to find relief in our more stable system of government in which presidential elections are prescribed every four years, Britain's less stable parliamentary system is far more responsive to popular will.

The best example of this—one that stands in stark contrast to the U.S.—is Britain's [National Health Service](#) (NHS), a free, government-funded universal

health care system that is the envy of Americans. In 1948, [Aneurin Bevan](#), Britain's then-health secretary, promoted the idea of a health care system that would serve all people. According to historian [Anthony Broxton](#), Bevan pushed a parliamentary vote on the bill that would create the NHS, asking, "Why should the people wait any longer?"

Americans have waited and waited for a similar health care system. We are still waiting. A [New York Times analysis](#) explained how health care spending in the U.S. began getting out of control at the precise time when Reagan-era deregulation began. Decades of attempts to install a universal, government-funded free health care system in the U.S. have [failed](#).

In an MSNBC op-ed, [Nayyera Haq](#) wrote, "in the nearly 250 years since the founding of the United States, American government has not followed Britain's path of providing a universal health care system or welfare programs for the majority of the population." Haq concluded, "The elevation of status quo over popular will has all but frozen the ability to respond to that will, weakening the American system far more than Truss' tenure will destabilize Britain."

While Americans can't very well switch our government system into a parliamentary one, we do have midterm elections in just a few weeks. It turns out trickle-down economics is indeed on the ballot, and Republicans are using every means at their disposal to ensure its win.

The GOP has rigged elections in its favor via a [cunning combination](#) of gerrymandered districts, voting laws that thwart likely Democratic voters, and legislative control at the state level where electoral rules are decided. In Florida, Republican governor Ron DeSantis has embraced antidemocratic tactics to such an extent that he created a [police force to arrest](#) largely Black (and therefore likely-to-be-Democratic) voters who he claims are casting ballots illegally. In other words, Republicans have engineered a system of minority rule bordering on fascism.

Blowing wind into their sails is the corporate media, [insisting](#) that worries over inflation could help Republicans win majorities in both houses of Congress—in spite of decades of evidence that the GOP has a [record of economic failures](#). It has become a central Republican talking point to inflate—pun intended—worries about rising prices, [blame Democrats for inflation](#), and make the case for their

own electoral victories. Economist [Dean Baker](#) criticized the media for “hyping inflation pretty much non-stop for the last year and a half.”

While [polls](#) show that relentless coverage of inflation has moved voters toward Republican candidates, few outlets are asking questions about the GOP’s plan to tackle inflation. House Republican leader Kevin McCarthy has [published a rosy plan](#), very thin on specifics, to fix the nation’s economic woes if his party wins majorities. A [one-page description](#) of his plan includes a vague prescription to “bring stability to the economy through pro-growth tax and deregulatory policies.”

In other words, Republicans are yet again promising to deliver a wolf in sheep’s clothing. Call it Reaganomics, Thatcherism, or Trussonomics, trickle-down economics is the great lie that has failed time and again. If Truss’s spectacular fall should teach Americans anything, it is that it will fail again. Unlike the Brits, we’re likely to be stuck with the ill effects of such failure for a lot longer.

Source: Independent Media Institute

This article was produced by [Economy for All](#), a project of the Independent Media Institute.

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Environmental Racism Is Poisoning America's Waters



Natalia Marques -
Photo: commondream
s.org

Thousands of people in U.S. cities have been left without access to clean water. Communities say institutional racism is to blame.

The United Nations General Assembly [recognized](#) “the right to safe and clean drinking water and sanitation as a human right that is essential for the full enjoyment of life and all human rights” on July 28, 2010. Yet, 12 years later, this human right is still out of reach for millions across the globe, [particularly](#) in the Global South. Even in the United States, which has the [largest](#) gross domestic product globally, poor and working-class people, and in particular Black and Brown people, are denied this fundamental right. In several cities across the United States, residents [struggle](#) with system-wide neglect of water systems and the failure of the government to provide access to what is arguably the most essential resource.

The Struggle for Water Is a Struggle Against Racism

Dennis Diaz, a resident of the public housing project Jacob Riis Houses in the East Village, New York City, said that after he experienced nausea, diarrhea, dizziness, and migraine headaches around late August and early September, he took preliminary tests that revealed he had been exposed to arsenic.

As early as August 4, the New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA) was [alerted](#)

[about cloudy water conditions](#) at the Jacob Riis public housing complex. After apparently testing the water for E. coli and chlorine more than a week later, on August 16, NYCHA announced that the water was safe to drink. But after 11 p.m. on September 2, NYCHA revealed that there was arsenic in the water supply. According to an [article](#) in City and State, the city said that officials had known about the arsenic two weeks prior.

Diaz called New York “the greatest city in the world” and explained his frustration with the double standard that he feels local politicians allow to persist when it comes to quality-of-life issues between majority-minority neighborhoods like his own and wealthier, predominantly white residential areas. “Imagine if,” he said, arsenic was found in the water by residents in Manhattan’s “Fifth Avenue or Soho, or Williamsburg,” Brooklyn. “Maybe the outcomes would have been different for them. But for minorities in my community, we’re next to nothing to the politicians.” [According to the 2016 data provided by NYCHA](#), 40 percent of the heads of the households living in public housing under the Housing Choice Voucher Program were Black, while 48 percent had Latin American ancestry.

The city of New York is now [denying](#) that there ever was arsenic in the water at Jacob Riis, claiming that the testing method “introduced trace levels of arsenic” to the sample they collected. But Dennis Diaz, who recently received his bloodwork results showing low levels of arsenic, is not convinced. “They’re lying,” he said while referring to the latest statement by the city officials. “They did it in Flint, Michigan, where they lied to them [the residents] for years. You can’t believe these people.”

Since NYCHA’s inception in 1934, New York City’s public housing has fallen into disrepair as the federal government [drastically reduced funding](#) for public housing in the 2000s. In 2018, 400,000 tenants [sued NYCHA](#) for squalid conditions. Also in 2018, then-U.S. Federal Attorney for the Southern District of New York Geoffrey Berman [sued](#) NYCHA for [health and safety violations](#), exposing children to lead paint, and training NYCHA workers to “[deceive](#)” federal inspectors.

In Baltimore, water in the western part of the city [tested positive](#) for E. coli on September 5. Affected neighborhoods included the area of Harlem Park/Sandtown-Winchester. Authorities advised residents in these areas to boil water before use due to the contamination.

By September 6, the “boil water advisory” [stretched](#) across West Baltimore and into the surrounding southwestern Baltimore County. The neighborhood of Sandtown-Winchester/Harlem Park is [96.7 percent Black](#), within the 62.8 percent Black city of Baltimore. This neighborhood also has a history of police brutality. In 2015, Freddie Gray died due to injuries sustained while in police custody after he was [arrested](#) in the area. A medical examiner ruled that his death was a [homicide](#) “[because officers failed to follow safety guidelines](#).” In 2017, Harlem Park was [locked down](#) by police for nearly a week after a detective was murdered before testifying at a trial against other police officers. Some organizations questioned whether this action by the police was lawful.

Baltimore resident Rachel Viqueira was located in the boil water advisory zone. “While facing decades of underinvestment and neglect, these neighborhoods have simultaneously faced increasing racist police violence and surveillance,” she said. In 2020, Baltimore responded to the massive public protests surrounding George Floyd’s death by [defunding](#) the police budget by \$22 million. But [in 2021](#), Baltimore City increased police funding by \$28 million. This not only canceled out the 2020 decrease but also tacked on an additional \$8 million to the police budget.

“In Baltimore, and many other cities, the police budgets have ballooned at the expense of public investment in infrastructure, health, jobs, housing, and education,” Viqueira said.

Jackson, Mississippi, was [under a boil water notice](#) from [July 29 to September 15](#). And from [August 30](#) to [September 5](#), the water stopped running for many of Jackson’s more than 150,000 residents, leaving public spaces like schools without running sinks or working toilets. Although water pressure has now been restored, the water [remains](#) contaminated.

Derykah Watts, who distributed water to Jackson residents as part of her student group Jackson Water Crisis Advocacy Team, said, “This is a reality that Jackson has faced for a very long time. I know growing up, I remember always hearing my mother say, ‘Oh, we’re on boil water notice this week, don’t use the water [straight from the tap].’”

Jackson is [82.5 percent](#) Black, and this water crisis is [only the latest](#) in a chain of failures in the city’s underfunded water system. The roots of the water crisis

originate in the era immediately following the racial [desegregation](#) of schools in Jackson in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Following [desegregation](#), white residents left the city en masse. From 1960 to 1990, the white population residing in Jackson [shrank by 6,000](#). White departure meant that white residents, historically [more well-off](#) than descendants of Black people who were enslaved, would no longer constitute a large portion of the tax base for city funding.

Instead of finding concrete solutions to address the water crisis resulting from systemic racism, both the [city of Jackson](#) and the [state of Mississippi](#) have been considering privatizing the city's water supply following the crisis. "We've already seen how privatization of Texas' electrical grid meant [massive shut-offs](#) of heat in the middle of a winter storm," said local activist Bezal Jupiter. "People lost their power, people froze, and some people even died [[as many as 246](#)]. Do we want the same future for Jackson's water system?"

A Water Crisis That Never Ended

The [majority-Black](#) city of Flint, Michigan, made [headlines](#) in 2016 when it was revealed that for two years, the state government had been covering up the fact that residents were actively being poisoned by lead in their water supply. Six years later, the Michigan Department of Environment, Great Lakes, and Energy said that the amount of lead in the water [complies with state and federal standards](#), yet scientists insist that [no amount of lead in water is safe](#). And as of April of 2022, the government was yet to replace [1,800 lead pipes](#).

"[Governments] will fund rich white communities for infrastructure upgrades, but they absolutely won't do it for cities like Flint, Baltimore, and Jackson," said Mitchell Bonga, a law clerk at [Goodman, Hurwitz and James](#), a law firm that [filed](#) a class action lawsuit against former Michigan Governor Rick Snyder for his role in the Flint crisis.

'They Could Have Done It All Along'

In the neighboring city of Detroit, which also has a [majority-Black](#), low-income population, residents who cannot pay their water bills have been struggling against water shut-offs. "People can't afford the water bill [in Detroit]," said local activist and Detroit resident Tharron Combs. "People sometimes owe hundreds of dollars in debt to the city for their water bill and when it gets shut off, obviously it's a public health crisis."

The city imposed a moratorium on water shut-offs for the pandemic, [extending it through 2022](#). But although the mayor announced his intention to end water shutoffs “once and for all,” the moratorium will expire at the end of the year. “They actually put [shut-offs] on pause for the pandemic, which kind of exposed one of the contradictions of capitalism,” said Combs. “They could have done it all along, and just let people have access to clean water.

“[People] can’t afford their water, or their water is unclean when they can afford it. They don’t have access to food. And this is not a condition that’s really unique to Detroit. This is the case in really any major Black city in the country... Clearly, it’s environmental racism all the way down,” said Combs.

Source: Globetrotter

This article was produced in partnership by [Peoples Dispatch](#) and [Globetrotter](#).

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Charting The Rise Of Anti-French Sentiment Across Northern Africa



Vijay Prashad - Photo:
en.wikipedia.org

In November 2021, a French military convoy was making its way to Mali while passing through Burkina Faso and Niger. It did not get very far. It was [stopped](#) in Téra, Niger, and before that at several points in Burkina Faso (in Bobo-Dioulasso and Kaya as well as in Ouagadougou, the country’s capital). Two civilians were killed as a result of clashes between the French convoy and protestors who [were](#) “angry at the failure of French forces to reign in terrorism in the region.” When

the convoy crossed into Mali, it was [attacked](#) near the city of Gao.

Colonel Pascal Ianni, French Chief of Defense Staff spokesperson, [told](#) Julien Fanciulli of France 24 that there was a lot of “false information circulating” about the French convoy. Blame for the attacks was placed on “terrorists,” namely Islamic groups that continue to hold large parts of Mali and Burkina Faso. These groups have been emboldened and hardened by the 2011 war on Libya, prosecuted by the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and egged on by France. What Colonel Ianni would not admit is that the protests that followed the convoy revealed the depth of anti-French sentiment across North Africa and the Sahel region.

Coups d'états in the region have been taking place for more than two years—from the [coup](#) in Mali in August 2020 to the [coup](#) in Burkina Faso in September 2022. The coups in the region, including the [coup](#) in Guinea in September 2021 as well and the two other coups in Mali (August 2020 and [May 2021](#)), and another coup in Burkina Faso ([January 2022](#)), were driven in large part due to the anti-French sentiment in the Sahel. In May 2022, the military leaders in Mali [ejected](#) the French military bases set up in 2014, while France's political project—G5 Sahel—[flounders](#) in this atmosphere of animosity. Protests against the French in [Morocco](#) and [Algeria](#) have only added weight to the anti-French sentiment spreading across the African continent, with French President Emmanuel Macron [showered](#) with insults as he tried to walk the streets of Oran in Algeria in August 2022.

Animosities

“The situation in the former French colonies (Burkina Faso, Chad, Côte d'Ivoire, Niger, and Mali) is different from the situation in northern Africa,” Abdallah El Harif of the Workers' Democratic Way Party of Morocco told me. “The bad relations between the regime in Morocco and France is due to the fact that the Moroccan regime has developed important economic, political, and security relations with the regimes of West Africa at the expense of the French,” he said. About the former French colonies along the Sahel in particular, El Harif said that “many popular insurrections” had taken place against the continued French colonial presence in these countries. With Morocco distancing itself from France, Paris is angered by its growing ties with the United States, while in the Sahel region people want to eject France from their lives.

Morocco's monarchy has [reacted](#) quietly to the coups in the Sahel, not willing to associate itself with the kind of anti-French sentiment in the region. Such an association would call attention to Morocco's close relationship with the United States. This U.S.-Morocco relationship has provided the monarchy with [dividends](#): military equipment from the United States and permission for Morocco to continue with its occupation of Western Sahara, including the mining of the region's precious phosphates (in exchange for Morocco opening ties with Israel). Each year, since 2004, Morocco has [hosted](#) a U.S. military exercise, the African Lion. In June 2022, 10 African countries [participated](#) in the African Lion 2022, with [observers](#) from Israel (for the first time) and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. Morocco, El Harif told me, "has enormously developed its military relations with the United States." France has been sidelined by these maneuvers, which has [annoyed](#) Paris. As he left behind the jeering crowds in Oran, Algeria, President Macron [said](#) that he would visit Morocco in late October.

In the Sahel region, unlike in Morocco, there is a growing popular sentiment against the French colonial interference (called [Françafrique](#)). Chad's former President Idriss Déby Itno, who died in 2021, [told](#) Jeune Afrique in 2019 that "[Françafrique](#) is over. Sovereignty is indisputable, we must stop sticking this label of French backyard to our countries." "The French control the currency of these states," El Harif told me. "They have many military bases [in the Sahel region], and their corporations plunder the natural resources of these countries, while pretending to combat terrorism." When political challenges arise, the French have colluded in assassinating leaders who challenge their authority (such as Burkina Faso's [Thomas Sankara](#) in 1987) or have had them arrested and jailed (such as Côte d'Ivoire's [Laurent Gbagbo](#) in 2011).

Why Is Françafrique Over?

In a recent [interview](#) with Atalayar, France's former ambassador to Mali Nicolas Normand blamed the rising anti-French sentiment on "the repeated anti-French accusations of Mali's prime minister and the virulent media campaign carried out by Russia on social media, accusing France of looting Mali and actually supporting the jihadists by pretending to fight them, with fake videos." Indeed, Mali's prime minister [before](#) August 22, 2022, Choguel Maïga, made strong statements against French military intervention in his country. In February 2022, Maïga [told](#) France 24 that the French government "have tried to divide his country by fueling autonomy claims in the north." Malian singer Salif Keïta posted

a [video](#) in which he said, “Aren’t you aware that France is financing our enemies against our children?” accusing France of collaborating with the jihadis.

Meanwhile, about the accusation that the Russian Wagner Group was operating in Mali, Maïga responded in his interview with France 24 and [said](#) that “The word Wagner. It’s the French who say that. We don’t know any Wagner.” However, Mali, he said in February, is working “with Russia cooperators.” Following an [investigation](#) by Facebook in 2020, it removed several social media accounts that were traced back to France and Russia and [were](#) “going head to head in the Central African Republic.”

In an important [article](#) in Le Monde in December 2021, senior researcher at Leiden University’s African Studies Center Rahmane Idrissa pointed out three reasons for the rise in anti-French sentiment in the Sahel. First, France, he said, “is paying the bill in the Sahel for half a century of military interventions in sub-Saharan Africa,” including France’s protection of regimes “generally odious to the population.” Second, the failure of the war against the jihadists has disillusioned the public regarding the utility of the French project. Third, and this is key, Idrissa [argued](#) that the inability of the military rulers in the region “to mobilize the population against an enemy (jihadist),” against whom they have no real strategy, has led to this anger being turned toward the French. The departure of the French, welcome as it is, “will certainly not resolve the jihadist crisis,” Idrissa [noted](#). The people will feel “sovereign,” he wrote, “even if part of the territory remains in the hands of terrorist gangs.”

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

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Chomsky: 20 Years After Iraq War Vote, US Continues To Flout International Law



Noam Chomsky

This week marks the 20th anniversary of the U.S. congressional vote to authorize the deadly war on Iraq, which according to some estimates, killed between [800,000 and 1.3 million](#) people. In the exclusive interview for *Truthout* that follows, Noam Chomsky shares his thoughts on the causes and ramifications of this appalling crime against humanity.

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 *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, 20 years ago, the U.S. Congress authorized the invasion

of Iraq despite massive opposition to such an undertaking. Several leading Democratic senators ended up supporting the war authorization, including Joe Biden. For both historical and future purposes, what were the causes and ramifications of the Iraq war?

Noam Chomsky: There are many kinds of support, ranging from outright to tacit. The latter includes those who regard it as a mistake but no more than that — a “strategic blunder,” as in Obama’s retrospective judgment. There were Nazi generals who opposed Hitler’s major decisions as strategic blunders. We don’t regard them as opponents of Nazi aggression. The same with regard to Russian generals who opposed the invasion of Afghanistan as a mistake, as many did.

If we can ever rise to the level of applying to ourselves the standards we rightly apply to others, then we will recognize that there has been little principled opposition to the Iraq War in high places, including the government and the political class. Much as in the case of the Vietnam War and other major crimes.

There was, of course, strong popular opposition. Characteristic was my own experience at MIT. Students demanded that we suspend classes so that they could participate in the huge public protests *before* the war was officially launched — something new in the history of imperialism — later meeting in a downtown church to discuss the impending crime and what it portended.

Much the same was true worldwide, so much so that Donald Rumsfeld came out with his famous distinction between Old and New Europe. Old Europe are the traditional democracies, old-fashioned fuddy-duddies who we Americans can disregard because they are mired in boring concepts like international law, sovereign rights, and other outdated nonsense.

New Europe in contrast are the good guys: a few former Russian satellites who toe Washington’s line, and one western democracy, Spain, where Prime Minister Aznar went along with Washington, disregarding close to 100 percent of public opinion. He was rewarded by being invited to join Bush and Blair as they announced the invasion.

The distinction reflects our traditional deep concern for democracy.

It will be interesting to see if Bush and Blair are interviewed on this auspicious occasion. Bush was interviewed on the 20th anniversary of his invasion of

Afghanistan, another act of criminal aggression that was overwhelmingly opposed by international opinion contrary to many claims, matters we have discussed before. He was interviewed by the *Washington Post* — in the Style section, where he was portrayed as a lovable goofy grandpa playing with his grandchildren and showing off his portraits of famous people he had met.

There was an official reason for the U.S.-U.K. invasion of Iraq, the “single question,” as it was called from on high: Will Iraq terminate its nuclear weapons programs?

International inspectors had questioned whether there were such programs and asked for more time to investigate, but were dismissed. The U.S. and its U.K. lackey were aiming for blood. A few months later the “single question” was answered, the wrong way. We may recall the amusing skit that Bush performed, looking under the table, “No not there,” maybe in the closet, etc. All to hilarious laughter, though not in the streets of Baghdad.

The wrong answer required a change of course. It was suddenly discovered that the reason for the invasion was not the “single question,” but rather our fervent wish to bring the blessings of democracy to Iraq. One leading Middle East scholar broke ranks and described what took place, Augustus Richard Norton, who wrote that “As fantasies about Iraq’s weapons of mass destruction were unmasked, the Bush administration increasingly stressed the democratic transformation of Iraq, and scholars jumped on the democratization bandwagon.” As did the loyal media and commentariat, as usual.

They did have some support in Iraq. A Gallup poll found that some Iraqis also leaped on the bandwagon: One percent felt that the goal of the invasion was to bring democracy to Iraq, 5 percent thought the goal was “to assist the Iraqi people.” Most of the rest assumed that the goal was to take control of Iraq’s resources and to reorganize the Middle East in U.S. and Israeli interests — the “conspiracy theory” derided by rational Westerners, who understand that Washington and London would have been just as dedicated to the “liberation of Iraq” if its resources happened to be lettuce and pickles and the center of fossil fuel production was in the South Pacific.

By November 2007, when the U.S. sought a Status of Forces Agreement, the Bush administration came clean and stated the obvious: It demanded privileged access

for Western energy companies to Iraqi fossil fuel resources and the right to establish U.S. military bases in Iraq. The demands were endorsed by Bush in a “signing statement” the following January. The Iraqi parliament refused.

The ramifications of the invasion were multiple. Iraq has been devastated. What had been in many ways the most advanced country in the Arab world is a miserable wreck. The invasion incited ethnic (Shia-Sunni) conflict that had not existed before, now tearing not only the country but the whole region apart. ISIS emerged from the wreckage, almost taking over the country when the army trained and armed by the U.S. fled at the sight of jihadis in pickup trucks waving rifles. They were stopped just short of Baghdad by Iranian-backed militias. And on, and on.

But none of this is a problem for the lovable goofy grandpa or the educated classes in the U.S. who now admire him as a serious statesman, called upon to orate about world affairs.

The reaction is much like that of Zbigniew Brzezinski, when [asked about his boast to have drawn the Russians into Afghanistan](#) and his support for the U.S. effort to prolong the war and to block UN efforts to negotiate Russian withdrawal. It was a wonderful success, Brzezinski explained to the naïve questioners. It achieved the goal of severely harming the U.S.S.R. he (dubiously) claimed, while conceding that it left a few “agitated Muslims,” not to speak of a million cadavers and a ruined country.

Or like Jimmy Carter, who [assured us](#) that we owe “no debt” to the Vietnamese because “the destruction was mutual.”

It is all too easy to continue. From a position of supreme power, with a loyal intellectual community, little is beyond reach.

The 2003 Iraq invasion was as criminal an act as Russia’s invasion of Ukraine. But the reaction on the part of the Western community was very different than it has been in connection with the Russian invasion of Ukraine. No sanctions were imposed against the U.S., no freezing of the assets of U.S. oligarchs, no demands that the U.S. be suspended from the UN Security Council. Your comments on this matter?

Comment is hardly needed. The worst crime since World War II was the long U.S.

war against Indochina. No censure of the U.S. could be contemplated. It was well understood at the UN that if the horrendous crimes were so much as discussed, the U.S. would simply dismantle the offending institution. The West righteously condemns Putin's annexations and calls for punishment of this reincarnation of Hitler, but scarcely dares to utter a chirp of protest when the U.S. authorizes Israel's illegal annexation of the Syrian Golan Heights and Greater Jerusalem, and Morocco's illegal annexation of Western Sahara. The list is long. The reasons are clear.

When the operative rules of world order are violated, reaction is swift. A clear illustration was when the World Court condemned the Holy State [the U.S.] for international terrorism (in legalese, "unlawful use of force") in 1986, ordered it to terminate the crimes and pay substantial reparations to the [victim](#) (Nicaragua). Washington reacted by escalating the crimes. The press dismissed the judgment as worthless because the court is a "hostile forum" (according to the *New York Times*), as proven by its judgment against the U.S. The whole matter has been effectively wiped out of history, including the fact that the U.S. is now the only state to have rejected a World Court decision — of course with total impunity.

It's an old story that "Laws are spider webs through which the big flies pass and the little ones get caught." The maxim holds with particular force in the international domain, where the Godfather rules supreme.

By now the contempt for international law — except as a weapon against enemies — is barely concealed. It is reframed as the demand for a "rules-based international order" (where the Godfather sets the rules) to supersede the [archaic UN-based international order](#), which bars U.S. foreign policy.

What would have happened if Congress had refused to go along with the Bush administration's plan to invade Iraq?

One Republican voted against the war resolution (Chafee). Democrats were split (29-21). If Congress had refused to go along, the Bush administration would have had to find other means to achieve the goals that Cheney-Rumsfeld-Wolfowitz and other hawks had laid out fairly clearly.

Many such means are available: sabotage, subversion, provoking (or manufacturing) some incident that could be used as a pretext for "retaliation." Or simply extending the brutal sanctions regime that was devastating the population.

We may recall that both of the distinguished international diplomats who administered Clinton's program (via the UN) resigned in protest, condemning it as "genocidal." The second, Hans von Sponeck, wrote an extremely illuminating book spelling out the impact in detail, *A Different Kind of War*. There was no need for an official ban of what is arguably the most important book on the build-up to the criminal invasion, and on the U.S. sanctions weapon generally. Silent conformity sufficed. That might have crushed the population sufficiently as to call for "humanitarian intervention."

It is well to remember that there are no limits to cynicism if conformity and obedience prevail.

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