

Chomsky: The US And Israel Are Standing In The Way Of Iran Nuclear Agreement



Noam Chomsky

During the first few decades of the post-war era, the U.S. considered Iran one of its closest geostrategic allies, especially after the CIA overthrew Iran's democratically elected government in 1953 and restored Mohammad Reza Pahlavi as Iran's leader. However, since the 1979 revolution, which abolished the monarchy and established an Islamic republic, the U.S. and Iran have been mortal enemies, largely due to the role that Israel occupies in the region. In this context, during the last couple of decades, the thorniest issue in the U.S.-Iran relationship has been Tehran's nuclear program, which, Iran says, is focused on energy, not weapons. Israel has been adamantly opposed to the program, even though it is accepted beyond dispute that Israel itself is a nuclear power. In 2015, Iran and several other countries, including the United States, reached the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action agreement, according to which Iran was willing to dismantle much of its nuclear program and open its facilities to nuclear inspections in exchange for billions of dollars of relief support. However, the Trump administration withdrew U.S. support from the agreement — and Israel continued its policy of sabotage and assassination of scientists.

Current talks between Washington and Tehran's rulers to restore the 2015 nuclear agreement have been stalled, and there is little hope that progress will be made any time soon. Naturally, the U.S. places the blame on Tehran. However, U.S. propaganda grossly distorts the reality of the situation, Noam Chomsky

points out in this exclusive interview for *Truthout*. The barriers to diplomacy are none other than Israel and the United States, says Chomsky.

C.J. Polychroniou: Noam, the U.S. and Iran are at odds with each other, having difficulty even talking to each other. Why do they hate each other so much, and how much of a role does Israel's shadow play in this continuous drama?

Noam Chomsky: At the risk of sounding like a broken record, I'd like to say a few words, once again, on why I feel that the entire framework in which this issue is discussed is seriously distorted — yet another tribute to the enormous power of the U.S. propaganda system.

The U.S. government has been telling us for years that Iranian nuclear programs are one of the gravest threats to world peace. Israeli authorities have made it clear that they will not tolerate this danger. The U.S. and Israel have acted violently to overcome this grave threat: cyberwar and sabotage (which the Pentagon regards as aggression that merits violence in self-defense), numerous assassinations of Iranian scientists, constant threats of use of force (“all options are open”) in violation of international law (and if anyone were to care, the U.S. Constitution).

Evidently, it is regarded as a most serious issue. If so, we surely want to see whether there is some way to lay it to rest. There is: Establish a nuclear weapons-free zone (NWFZ) in the Middle East, with inspections — which, we know, can work very well. Even U.S. intelligence agrees that before the U.S. dismantled the joint agreement on nuclear weapons (JCPOA), international inspections of Iran's nuclear program were successful.

That would solve the alleged problem of Iranian nuclear programs, ending the serious threat of war. What then is the barrier?

Not the Arab states, which have been actively demanding this for decades. Not Iran, which supports the measure. Not the Global South — G-77, 134 “developing nations,” most of the world — which strongly supports it. Not Europe, which has posed no objections.

The barrier is the usual two outliers: the U.S. and Israel.

There are various pretexts, which we may ignore. The reasons are known to all:

The U.S. will not allow the enormous Israeli nuclear arsenal, the only one in the region, to be subject to international inspection.

In fact, the U.S. does not officially recognize that Israel has nuclear weapons, though of course it is not in doubt. The reason, presumably, is that to do so would invoke U.S. law, which, arguably, would render the massive U.S. aid flow to Israel illegal — a door that few want to open.

All of this is virtually undiscussable in the U.S., outside of arms control circles. On rare occasions, the major media have come close to bringing up the forbidden topic. A year ago, *New York Times* editors proposed ["One Way Forward on Iran: A Nuclear-Weapons-Free Persian Gulf."](#)

Note: Persian Gulf, not Middle East. The reason, the editors explain, is that Israel's nuclear weapons are "unacknowledged and nonnegotiable." Filling in the gaps, they are unacknowledged by the U.S. and are nonnegotiable by U.S. fiat.

In brief, there is a straightforward approach to addressing this grave threat to world peace, but it is blocked by the global hegemon, whose power is so enormous that the topic can barely even be discussed. Rather, we must adopt the framework imposed by U.S. power and keep to the deliberations over renewing some kind of agreement over Iranian nuclear weapons.

Another matter that must be sidelined, though it is so obvious that even the grandest propaganda system cannot entirely efface it, is that the current crisis arose when the U.S. unilaterally destroyed the JCPOA, over the strenuous objections of all other signers and the UN Security Council, which had endorsed it unanimously. The U.S. then imposed harsh sanctions on Iran to punish it for the U.S. dismantling of the agreement. Again, other signers strenuously objected, but they obeyed: The threat of U.S. retribution is too awesome, as in many other cases; notoriously the crushing Cuba sanctions, opposed by the whole world apart from the two usual outliers, but obediently observed.

Again, I apologize for continually reiterating all of this. It must, however, be understood. Having made that gesture, let's accept reality, subordinating ourselves to the mighty U.S. propaganda system, and keep to the permitted framework of discussion.

Turning finally to the question, first, Israel's role is more than shadow play. Israel

is right at the center of the story, both in its constant violent attacks on Iran and in the “unacknowledged” nuclear arsenal that blocks to path to diplomatic settlement, thanks to its superpower protector.

On mutual hate, we should remember that we are talking about governments. The U.S. and Iranian governments were close allies from 1953, when the U.S. overthrew the parliamentary government of Iran and reinstalled the Shah’s dictatorship, until 1979, when a popular uprising overthrew the Shah and Iran switched from favored friend to reviled enemy.

Iraq then invaded Iran and the incoming Reagan administration turned to lavish support for its friend Saddam. Iran suffered huge casualties, many from chemical weapons while the Reaganites looked away and even tried to shift responsibility to Iran for Saddam’s murderous chemical war against Iraqi Kurds. Finally, direct U.S. intervention swung the war in Iraq’s favor. After the war, President Bush Sr. invited Iraqi nuclear engineers to the U.S. for advanced training in weapons production, a serious threat to Iran of course. And the U.S. imposed harsh sanctions on Iran. So, the story continues.

U.S. charges against Iran are too familiar to need reviewing.

Unsurprisingly, nuclear talks between the U.S. and Iran have stalled again and it is unlikely that there will be a deal any time soon — if at all — to restore their 2015 nuclear deal. First, what do you see as the stumbling blocks in these talks? And didn’t Iran already make a huge concession when it agreed to the 2015 nuclear agreement without requiring that Israel does away with its own arsenal of nuclear weapons?

Negotiations, through European intermediaries, seem to have been put on hold until after the U.S. November elections, at least. There are outstanding disagreements on a number of issues. The most important, for now, are reported to be Iranian foot-dragging on inspection of traces of uranium that bear on whether Iran had an undeclared weapons program before 2003. In contrast, Israeli nuclear weapons programs are nonnegotiable by U.S. fiat, not even subject to inspection.

Iran’s relationship with Russia has been further strengthened since the start of the Ukraine war. Do such moves on the part of Tehran’s rulers indicate the possibility of a complete break from the West?

It's hard to see how the break should go much farther. Iran's closer relations with Russia are part of a general global realignment, its contours unclear, involving the major Asian states and Russia-China links.

How likely is it that Israel will attack Iran's nuclear facilities?

Israel has repeatedly attacked these facilities with sabotage and assassination. It is likely to proceed with further efforts to prevent Iran from gaining the capability to produce nuclear weapons — which many countries have.

Iranian leaders have consistently claimed that they have no intention of producing nuclear weapons. I have no idea what their strategic thinking might be. Perhaps they are thinking along the lines of U.S. nuclear doctrine: that “nuclear weapons must always be available, at the ready, because they ‘cast a shadow over any crisis or conflict’” (*Essentials of Post-Cold War Deterrence*, STRATCOM 1995). As Daniel Ellsberg has emphasized, in that respect nuclear weapons are constantly used to enable other aggressive actions with impunity.

Whatever the motives, for Iran or any other state, these weapons must be eliminated from the Earth. NWFZs are a step in this direction. A more far-reaching step is the UN Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW), now in force though without the participation of the nuclear states. Iran was active in negotiation of the TPNW and was one of 122 states that voted in favor its adoption, though it has not yet signed it. These are concerns that should be uppermost in our minds, for all states, for the security of all of life on Earth.

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Noam Chomsky: The War In Ukraine Has Entered A New Phase



Noam Chomsky

Seven months on, the war in Ukraine has entered a new phase. Ukrainian forces are running a counteroffensive in the east and south regions of the country while Russia is still bent on annexation plans. Meanwhile, the West, with the U.S. at the forefront, continues with its [explicitly stated strategy](#) of weakening Russia to the point of regime collapse, thereby leaving no room for negotiations. All these developments indicate that peace remains distant in Ukraine and that the war may in fact be poised to become even more violent. Worse, argues Noam Chomsky below in an exclusive interview for *Truthout*, congressional hawks are increasing the risk of terminal war with the Taiwan Policy Act of 2022, which was just recently approved by the Senate Foreign Relations Committee and appears to

be modeled on programs from prior to the Russian attack that were turning Ukraine into a de facto NATO member.

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, after seven months of conflict, Russia and Ukraine find themselves in a situation that is hard to get out of. Russia is suffering great losses, and a recent Ukrainian counteroffensive has recaptured dozens of towns and villages in the northeast of the country. Under these circumstances, it seems that neither side is eager to pursue a peace settlement. Firstly, are you surprised by Russia's problems on the battlefield, and, secondly, do you agree with the statement made recently by the minister in charge of the Hungarian Prime Minister's Office that Moscow still has a major advantage over Kyiv and that it can declare victory whenever it wants?

Noam Chomsky: First, let me make it clear that I have nothing original to say about the military situation, and have no expert knowledge in this area. What I know is what's reported, almost entirely from Western sources.

The general picture is that Russia has suffered a devastating defeat, demonstrating the utter incompetence of the Russian military and the remarkable capacities of the Ukrainian army provided with advanced U.S. armaments and detailed intelligence information about the disposition of Russian forces, a tribute to the courage of the Ukrainian fighters and to the intensive U.S. training, organization and supply of the Ukrainian army for almost a decade.

There's plenty of evidence to support this interpretation, which is close to exceptionless apart from detail. A useful rule of thumb whenever there is virtual

unanimity on complex and murky issues is to ask whether something is perhaps omitted. Keeping to mainstream Western sources, we can indeed find more that perhaps merits attention.

Reuters [reports](#) a “western official” whose assessment is that:

‘There’s an ongoing debate about the nature of the Russian drawdown, however it’s likely that in strict military terms, this was a withdrawal, ordered and sanctioned by the general staff, rather than an outright collapse.... Obviously, it looks really dramatic. It’s a vast area of land. But we have to factor in the Russians have made some good decisions in terms of shortening their lines and making them more defensible, and sacrificing territory in order to do so.’

There are varying interpretations of the equipment losses in the Russian flight/withdrawal. There is no need to review the familiar picture. A [more nuanced version](#) is given by *Washington Post* journalists on the scene, who report scattered and ambiguous evidence. They also review online video and satellite imagery indicating that the destroyed and abandoned military vehicles may have been at an equipment hub. Examining the videos, Lt. Gen. Ben Hodges, former commander of U.S. Army Europe, concludes that the destruction was mostly at a staging area where “Russian forces stopped for fuel or were waiting for a mission when they fled,” the total amounting to a tank company that typically has about 10 or 11 tanks.

As one expects in a war zone, there is ample ambiguity, but little doubt that it was a major victory for Ukraine and its U.S.-NATO backers. I don’t think that Putin could simply “declare victory” after this humiliating setback, as the Hungarian prime minister suggests. On the prospects for a peace settlement, so little is reported or discussed that there is little to say.

Little, but not nothing. In the [current issue of *Foreign Affairs*](#), the major establishment journal, Fiona Hill and Angela Stent — highly regarded policy analysts with close government connections — report that:

‘According to multiple former senior US officials we spoke with, in April 2022, Russian and Ukrainian negotiators appeared to have tentatively agreed on the outlines of a negotiated interim settlement. The terms of that settlement would have been for Russia to withdraw to the positions it held before launching the invasion on February 24. In exchange, Ukraine would promise not to seek NATO membership and instead receive security guarantees from a number of countries.’

On dubious evidence, Hill and Stent blame the failure of these efforts on the Russians, but do not mention that British Prime Minister Boris Johnson at once flew to Kyiv with the message that Ukraine's Western backers would not support the diplomatic initiative, followed by U.S. Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin, who [reiterated](#) the official U.S. position that Washington's goal in the war is to "weaken" Russia, meaning that negotiations are off the table.

Whether such initiatives continue, we do not know. If they do, they would not lack popular support, not only in the Global South but even in Europe, where "[77 percent of Germans believe that the West should initiate negotiations to end the Ukraine war.](#)" Surprisingly, more than half of Slovaks are reported to [favor a Russian victory](#).

Suppose that negotiations fail or are not even contemplated. What then? The general expert consensus seems to be that there will be a protracted war, with all of its tragic consequences. General Austin and other U.S. officials have held that Ukraine can drive Russia out of all of Ukraine, presumably including Crimea. Suppose the prospect arises.

Then follows the crucial question: Will Putin pack up his bags and slink away silently to obscurity or worse? Or will he use the conventional weapons that all agree he has to escalate the attack on Ukraine? The U.S. is gambling on the former but is not unaware of the nature of this gamble with the lives of Ukrainians, and well beyond. The *New York Times* [reports](#) that:

'Some American officials express concern that the most dangerous moments are yet to come, even as Mr. Putin has avoided escalating the war in ways that have, at times, baffled Western officials. He has made only limited attempts to destroy critical infrastructure or to target Ukrainian government buildings. He has not attacked the supply hubs outside Ukraine. While he has directed low-level cyberattacks against Ukrainian targets every week, they have been relatively unsophisticated, especially when compared to capabilities that Russia has shown it has, including in the SolarWinds attack on American government and commercial systems that was discovered just before Mr. Biden took office.'

The same report cites Putin's warning that, "If the situation continues to develop in this way — referring to U.S. participation in the recent Ukrainian counter-offensive — the answer will be more serious." To illustrate, Putin "described recent Russian cruise missile attacks against Ukrainian infrastructure as 'warning

strikes.’”

The Ukrainian military understands the warning very well. Ukrainian Commander-in-Chief Gen. Valery Zaluzhny had [written](#) that Russian cruise missiles “could strike across the country with ‘impunity,’” adding that “limited nuclear war cannot be ruled out.”

As we all know, the escalation ladder from limited to terminal nuclear war is all too easy to climb.

To put it simply, the U.S. position that the war must continue to severely weaken Russia, blocking negotiations, is based on a quite remarkable assumption: that facing defeat, Putin will pack his bags and slink away to a bitter fate. He will not do what he easily can: strike across Ukraine with impunity using Russia’s conventional weapons, destroying critical infrastructure and Ukrainian government buildings, attacking the supply hubs outside Ukraine, moving on to sophisticated cyberattacks against Ukrainian targets. All of this is easily within Russia’s conventional capacity, as U.S. government and the Ukrainian military command acknowledge — with the possibility of escalation to nuclear war in the not remote background.

The assumption is worth contemplating. It is too quickly evaded.

Also worth contemplating is the fact that “Mr. Putin has avoided escalating the war in ways that have, at times, baffled Western officials.” The same puzzlement has been expressed before. The U.S. and U.K. were baffled by the Russian offensive, severely underestimating its scale from the start. “We assumed they would invade a country the way we would have invaded a country,” [as one British official put it](#).

When the U.S.-U.K. invade a country, they go for the jugular, destroying communications, transportation, energy systems, anything needed to keep the country going. To the surprise of the U.S.-U.K. planners, Putin didn’t do that. The press [reports](#) that, “In Kyiv and much of the western part of the country, prewar life has largely returned for civilians. People eat in restaurants, drink in bars, dance and enjoy lazy summer days in parks.”

Far from the U.S.-U.K. style of war.

Western military analysts offer reasons why "[Putin's Bombers Could Devastate Ukraine But He's Holding Back](#)." Whatever the reasons, the fact remains.

The gamble with the lives of Ukrainians, and far beyond, remains as well, eliciting little attention. Something else that merits contemplation.

It's also useful finally to reiterate a familiar word of warning. Propaganda never ceases and rises to peaks of intensity at moments of crisis. Triumphant claims are always worth inspection. To take one example, much has been made of India's alleged break with Russia over the war, based on a few words by Prime Minister Modi at a Samarkand meeting with Putin. The [quoted words](#) are "I know that today's era is not of war." Omitted is that Modi went on to stress that, "The relationship between India and Russia has deepened manifold. We also value this relationship because we have been such friends who have been with each other every moment for the last several decades and the whole world also knows how Russia's relationship with India has been and how India's relationship with Russia has been and therefore the world also knows that it is an unbreakable friendship."

The Ukrainian government is pursuing backroom negotiations for the delivery of advanced American-made weapons, according to some reports. In addition, President Zelenskyy and his government have put forward a document of long-term security guarantees from the West which would link Ukraine's future security directly to the presence of NATO forces in the country. Unexpectedly enough, Moscow immediately shut down the proposal and the vice president of the Russian Security Council called it "a prologue to the third world war." Is the so-called Kyiv Security Treaty a path toward a peace settlement or a sure way not only to keep the conflict going on indefinitely but also to escalate it to a higher level?

It is hard to imagine that any Russian government would tolerate NATO forces in Ukraine. That has been understood for 30 years by high-level U.S. officials who have any knowledge of the region, and it's even more unlikely now. What Russia might tolerate is a weakened version of this demand: long-term security guarantees with what's called in diplomacy "strategic ambiguity," coupled with termination of the plans for NATO membership for Ukraine. In the past, Zelenskyy has suggested something like that. Whether that remains an option, we of course cannot know until an effort is undertaken to reach a diplomatic settlement, as apparently it was by Ukraine and Russia as recently as last April.

The Biden administration, the Pentagon particularly, has been careful not to escalate its participation in the war so rapidly as to elicit the Russian reaction that hasn't occurred, baffling Washington and London. Congress is another matter. It seems hell-bent on hurtling to disaster. Calls for no-fly zones and other very dangerous initiatives have been blocked by the Pentagon, but plenty of saber-rattling continues. That extends to China, or to keep to the rules, what we should call the "Indo-Pacific area of the North Atlantic" in the light of the decisions at the recent NATO summit.

Nancy Pelosi's visit to Taiwan was reckless enough, but congressional hawks, a bipartisan collective, are determined to raise the possibility of terminal nuclear war even higher.

A major [step in this direction](#) was taken on September 14, when the Senate Foreign Relations Committee approved the [Taiwan Policy Act of 2022](#), cosponsored by Committee Chairman Robert Menendez (D-NJ) and Lindsey Graham (R-SC).

The act calls for Taiwan to be designated as a "major non-NATO ally." Taiwan is to be provided with \$4.5 billion in security assistance over the next four years, part of establishing "a comprehensive training program with the Government of Taiwan." The act also seeks "more interoperability between the US and Taiwanese militaries [along with] joint US-Taiwan contingency tabletop exercises, war games and what the bill calls 'robust, operationally relevant, or full-scale' military exercises," *Asia Times* reports.

Furthermore, the act declares U.S. government policy to be "to provide the people of Taiwan with de facto diplomatic treatment equivalent to foreign countries, nations, states, governments, or similar entities" and to remove "any undue restrictions" on the ability of U.S. officials at any level "to interact directly and routinely with their counterparts in the Government of Taiwan."

Former Australian defense official Mike Scrafton [observes](#) that "The Chinese cannot but regard this as a provocative de facto recognition of Taiwan's independence." Under international law, which regards Taiwan as part of China, it is "a patent infringement of China's sovereignty and a fundamental weakening of the one-China policy." Once again, the U.S. "rules-based order," in defiance of international law, is seen to be nothing other "than preservation of US

hegemony.” If passed, “The Act would be a game-changer and reflects the American preparedness to engage in a war that would be disastrous for the region and the world.” It should lead Australia to rethink its commitment to the U.S.-dominated regional system.

The wording of the act seems to be modelled on the programs prior to the Russian invasion that were turning Ukraine into a “de facto NATO member,” in the words of the U.S. military, matters we have discussed elsewhere.

The Biden administration opposes the measure, as it did Pelosi’s action. Even more than that exercise in self-promotion, the Menendez-Graham measure would be a serious blow to the “strategic ambiguity” of the One-China policy that has kept the peace in a volatile region for half a century.

The European Union is pressuring China and India to support the idea of a price cap on Russian oil. Russia, of course, has said that it will not sell oil to countries that impose a price limit, so the question here is twofold: first, how likely is it that China and India will go along with the EU’s suggestion, especially since both countries have not only increased their Russian oil purchases since Moscow’s invasion of Ukraine but are buying at discounted prices, and, second, what would be the political ramifications in the event that they succumbed to pressure and did go along?

All of this is part of the reconfiguration of global order that has been going on for some time and was spurred onward by Putin’s criminal aggression. A side consequence was to deliver Europe into Washington’s hands. This most welcome gift was provided free of charge by Vladimir Putin when he [rejected French President Macron’s last-minute efforts](#) to avert an invasion, at the end with undisguised contempt, a major contribution to Washington’s Atlanticist project of global hegemony.

The core issue at stake, I think, is unipolarity-multipolarity. Since the U.S. took over the reins from Britain 80 years ago, reaching far beyond Britain’s dreams, it has sought a unipolar world, and to a substantial extent it has realized that goal, in ways we need not review. There has always been resistance.

In many ways the most significant, and least discussed, form of resistance has been the effort of former colonies to find a place in the international order: UNCTAD, the New International Economic Order, the New International

Information Order, and many other initiatives. These were crushed by imperial power, sometimes reaching the level of assassination (the very important case of Patrice Lumumba) if other means did not suffice. Some elements survive, like BRICS [the economic alliance of Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa]. Most significantly in the modern global scene, rising China leads the effort to develop a multipolar order.

Right now, the long-term conflict is manifested in many concrete ways. One is the intense U.S. effort to impede China's technological development and to "encircle" it with a ring of heavily armed U.S. satellites. Another is the NATO-based U.S.-run Atlanticist project, now given a shot in the arm by Putin's criminality, and recently extended formally to the Indo-Pacific region. The major competing element is China's huge development and investment project, the Belt and Road initiative backed by the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, encompassing Central Asia and by now reaching well beyond. At an ideological level, the confrontation sets the UN-based international order against the rules-based international order (with the U.S. setting the rules). The latter is adopted with little controversy or even notice in the U.S.

The important specific issues raised in the question find their place within this broader framework. Their resolution depends on how the broad process of reorganization of the international order develops. A highly uncertain matter, one of great portent.

Not in the distant background is a more fundamental matter, which cannot be put aside. Unless the great powers find ways to accommodate to confront the most important threats that have arisen in human history — environmental destruction and nuclear war — nothing else will matter.

And time is short.

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Renske Visser - En zijn ogen kan ik lezen. Veertien negentiende-eeuwse brieven uit Parijs, Den Haag en Domburg 1891-1894

Hôtel du Louvre - Parijs



Donderdag, 17 ix 1891

Lieve tante Martha,

Omdat u mij vroeg u in kennis te stellen van onze wederwaardigheden in Parijs, schrijf ik u deze brief. Thomas is na onze aankomst in het hotel gaan rusten. Ik kan de rust niet vinden, het lukt me zelfs niet een boek ter hand te nemen. Daarom heb ik besloten u te schrijven.

U weet hoe zeer ik aarzelde om samen met Thomas deze treinreis te maken. Omdat hij op zijn standpunt bleef staan, heb ik mijn twijfel laten varen. Na vandaag nemen mijn zorgen om zijn gezondheid toe. Toch wil ik met hem blijven hopen dat het een goed besluit is geweest van de geneesheer van het Johannes de Deo om voor Thomas een afspraak te maken met die Franse neuroanatom. Thomas vestigt al zijn hoop op professor Charcot. Morgen bezoeken we het Hôpital de la Salpêtrière. Ik hoop dat deze voor hem zo afmattende reis niet vergeefs is geweest.

Toen de trein hedenmiddag het Gare du Nord binnenreed, zag ik hoe moeizaam Thomas zich oprichtte na de langdurige zit. Zijn ledematen waren zo verstijfd dat het leek of hij het dubbele aantal jaren van zijn leeftijd telde. Zijn stem klonk dof van vermoeidheid toen hij een kruier wenkte. Ondanks de wandelstok die hij onlangs op het Noordeinde gekocht heeft, liep hij alsof hij te veel alcohol had genuttigd.

Het was een voorrecht dat het rijtuig van het Hôtel du Louvre voor het station op

ons wachtte. Echter, bij het instappen deed er zich een incident voor waardoor ik hevig ontsteld raakte. De koetsier vroeg mij of hij mijn vader kon assisteren. Om te voorkomen dat Thomas dit hoorde, siste ik de man toe: 'Mon mari!' Vanzelfsprekend verontschuldigde hij zich, maar het leed was reeds geschied. Of Thomas het verstaan heeft? Hij was zwijgzaam gedurende de rit. Al duurde het geruime tijd voor ik kalmeerde, ik hield mijn mond om hem niet nodeloos te kwetsen. Op de hotelkamer ging hij zonder zich uit te kleden op bed liggen, terstond viel hij in een diepe slaap. Nadat ik hem toegedekt had, heb ik zo geruisloos mogelijk de koffers uitgepakt.

Nu zit ik bij het venster met uitzicht op de Rue Saint-Honoré en de Comédie Française. Als ik naar rechts kijk, zie ik de Place Royal waar het een komen en gaan is van mensen tussen het Palais en het Louvre. Deze avond zullen we ons tussen hen voegen als we naar de Opéra gaan. De Opéra zal voor mij de beste afleiding zijn om de zorgen om Thomas te vergeten. Ik hoop maar dat hij niet te laat wakker wordt.

Lieve tante, het hotel en onze ruime hoekkamer op de eerste etage zijn werkelijk magnifiek. Voor Thomas is het ideaal dat er een lift aanwezig is. Ik dank u en oom George dat u ons dit hotel heeft aanbevolen. Ik kan hier beslist een paar maanden verblijven. Als Thomas in het hospitaal verpleegd wordt, hoop ik Parijs te bezoeken. Het is alweer zo lang geleden dat wij hier geweest zijn. Het is werkelijk fameus dat het Louvre op kuierafstand ligt. Weet u dat de Jardin du Luxembourg opengesteld is voor publiek? Ik verheug me erop daarheen te gaan. Terwijl ik dit neerschrijf, voel ik me beschaamd dat ik me zo uitdruk, maar zegt oom George niet altijd dat wij het aangename met het nuttige moeten verenigen?

Thomas zal aanstonds wakker worden. Daarom groet ik u. Adieu, lieve tante, ik hoop dat het u en oom George zeer goed mag blijven gaan, evenals onze geliefde dochter Isabelle. Kust u ons kleine meisje van ons?

Uw liefhebbende nicht,

Laura

—

Renske Visser - En zijn ogen kan ik lezen. Veertien negentiende-eeuwse brieven uit Parijs, Den Haag en Domburg 1891-1894

Rozenberg Publishers, Amsterdam, 2021. ISBN 978 90 361 0658 0 - 92 pagina's -

Euro 12,50

Omslag & DTP: BuroBouws, Amsterdam

Verschenen 17 september 2022

Stichting HouseMartin

Dankzij donaties van fondsen en particulieren opent Stichting HouseMartin in het najaar van 2022 aan de Hooftskade in Den Haag de deuren van *RespijtHuis HouseMartin* waar daklozen kunnen herstellen van een griep, revalideren na een operatie of waar zij in een enkel geval de laatste levensdagen kunnen doorbrengen.

Door het kopen van *En zijn ogen kan ik lezen* draagt u bij aan de voortgang van RespijtHuis HouseMartin, een kleinschalig logeershuis dat met inzet van vrijwilligers uit verschillende culturen een warm nest wil bieden aan de meest kwetsbaren in onze samenleving die geen plek hebben om het hoofd neer te leggen bij ziekte.

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Jean-Martin Charcot

Jean-Martin Charcot (Parijs, 29 november 1825 - Morvan, 16 augustus 1893) was een Franse arts die wordt beschouwd als een van de grondleggers van de neurologie.

Na aan de Sorbonne gepromoveerd te zijn met als specialisme gewrichtsreuma, ging hij werken als ziekenhuisarts. Na enige jaren keerde hij terug naar Parijs,

waar hij werd benoemd tot hoogleraar in de pathologische anatomie. Hij verrichtte zeer veel onderzoek naar anatomie en de pathologie van het zenuwstelsel en ontdekte de ziekte amyotrofe laterale sclerose (ALS). Ook toonde hij aan dat multiple sclerose en de ziekte van Parkinson twee verschillende ziekten waren. De ziekte van Charcot-Marie-Tooth, een perifere zenuwziekte is naar hem genoemd samen met Pierre Marie (1853-1940) en Howard H. Tooth (1856-1926). In 1882 werd speciaal voor Charcot de eerste leerstoel voor ziekten aan het zenuwstelsel ingesteld aan het Hôpital de la Salpêtrière (Parijs).

Als dank en erkenning voor zijn werk werd hij in 1883 benoemd tot lid van de *Académie de médecine* en de *Académie des sciences*.

In de latere jaren van zijn carrière deed hij ook onderzoek naar de verschijnselen van histerie, waarvoor hij onder andere hypnose gebruikte. Ook na zijn overlijden was Charcot van invloed op de psychiatrie en psychoanalyse. Veel van Charcots kennis werd namelijk overgenomen door zijn leerling/student Sigmund Freud. Ook Alfred Binet en Georges Gilles de la Tourette studeerden onder Charcot.

Bron: nl.wikipedia.org

Noam Chomsky & Robert Pollin: Humanity's Fate Isn't Sealed — If We Act Now



Noam Chomsky

We live in extraordinarily dangerous times. Climate breakdown is upon us, yet nation-states and their leaders continue to pursue policies based on “national security” and the pursuit of geopolitical objectives. The transition to a clean and sustainable global energy landscape is hampered both by powerful interests linked to the fossil fuel economy and lack of international cooperation. In fact, the war in Ukraine, which runs on fossil fuels, is not only delaying climate action but has increased reliance on the very energy sources that drive global warming and poison the planet. Indeed, the war has been a godsend to the fossil fuel industry. “Drill, baby, drill” is back with a vengeance, and oil and gas companies are reaping unprecedented profits as families everywhere are struggling with skyrocketing energy costs.

To be sure, “savage capitalism,” as Noam Chomsky powerfully remarks in this exclusive joint interview with economist Robert Pollin, is unleashed today even more destructively than it has in the past. Yet, as Pollin so astutely points out, there are ways to tame global warming and make a successful transition to a sustainable future based on clean energy systems (which do not include nuclear power plants or so-called negative emission technologies). In fact, Chomsky and Pollin agree that, in large part, it is political will that stands in the way of securing the future of humanity and the planet. As Chomsky notes, the task of political education in the age of global warming is analogous to the task of philosophy as described by Ludwig Wittgenstein: “to show the fly the way out of the fly-bottle.”



Robert Pollin

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 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 co-authors of *Climate Crisis and the Global Green New Deal: The Political Economy of Saving the Planet* (2020).

C. J. Polychroniou: Noam, the systemic impacts of the war in Ukraine are enormous and they include economic shocks, food and energy security, geopolitical dimensions, and climate change. With regard to the latter, while it is difficult to make an accurate estimate of the climate impact of the war in Ukraine, it is crystal clear that it hinders current efforts to curb global warming and may even alter long-term strategy on climate action and action plan. How exactly are the war in Ukraine and the climate crisis connected, and why are governments doubling down on coal, oil and gas instead of doubling down on the clean energy transition?

Noam Chomsky: An independent observer looking at the world today might well conclude that it is being run by the fossil fuel and military industries, or by lunatics. Or both.

The scientific literature is harrowing, regularly showing that earlier dire warnings were too conservative and that we are careening towards disaster at a frightening pace. Even without reading the literature, anyone with eyes open can see that nature is saying "enough": extreme heat, huge floods, devastating drought and severe water crises, large regions of the earth approaching the point where they will soon be uninhabitable.

How are we reacting? The basic character is captured by a clip from the

marvelous satirical journal *Onion* — except that it is perhaps even beyond their imagination. It is real. And reported, with disbelief, in the mainstream:

‘In a paradox worthy of Kafka, ConocoPhillips plans to install “chillers” into the permafrost — which is thawing fast because of climate change — to keep it solid enough to drill for oil, the burning of which will continue to worsen ice melt.’

In his bitter antiwar essays, Mark Twain wielded his formidable weapon of satire against the perpetrators. But when he reached the renowned General Funston, he threw up his hands in despair: “No satire of Funston could reach perfection,” Twain lamented, “because Funston occupies that summit himself.... [He is] satire incarnated.”

What is happening before our eyes is unleashed savage capitalism as satire incarnated. Even Twain would be silenced.

To see what is at stake, consider some basic facts. “[Arctic permafrost stores nearly 1,700 billion metric tons](#) of frozen and thawing carbon. Anthropogenic warming threatens to release an unknown quantity of this carbon to the atmosphere.... Carbon dioxide emissions are proportionally larger than other greenhouse gas emissions in the Arctic, but expansion of anoxic conditions within thawed permafrost and soils stands to increase the proportion of future methane emissions. Increasingly frequent wildfires in the Arctic will also lead to a notable but unpredictable carbon flux.”

The carbon flux may be unpredictable in detail, but the resulting devastation is all too predictable in its general outline. How then does unleashed savage capitalism respond? Simple. Let’s employ our best brains to find ways to slow the melting down a little so that we can pour more poisons into the atmosphere for profit, and as a side effect, release those Arctic permafrost stores into the atmosphere more rapidly so as to make life unlivable.

Unfortunately, the observation generalizes. We find satire incarnate wherever we turn, even in marginal corners. Thus, one argument against solar energy is land use. A real problem, especially in the U.K., where golf courses take up over four times as much space as solar power, so we learn from political economist Adam Tooze’s invaluable *Chartbook*.

Satire incarnate is just the cutting edge. It brings out dramatically the elements of dominant economic institutions that are lethal if unleashed. It would be hard to

conjure up a more fitting epitaph for the species — or more accurately, for the institutions that have become dominant as what we call civilization marches forward.

The Ukraine war finds its natural place in this collective madness. One outcome of Putin's criminal aggression and the consequent sanctions regime is to restrict the fossil fuel flow from Russia on which Europe relies, particularly the German-based system that is its economic powerhouse. Economic consequences for Europe are severe, though not for the U.S., which is largely immune; or for that matter for Russia, which at least for now is profiting handsomely from rising oil prices and has [many eager customers outside of Europe](#).

Europe is seeking alternative sources of oil and gas, a bonanza for the U.S. fossil fuel industry, rewarded with new markets and expansive drilling opportunities to enable it to destroy life on Earth more effectively. And the military industry could hardly be more ecstatic as the killing and destruction mount.

People seem to have a different view. In Germany for example, where 77 percent of the population "[believe that the West should initiate negotiations](#) to end the Ukraine war."

One can think of other reasons to bring the horrors to a quick end, but the fate of organized human society is surely one. The Ukraine war has reversed the limited efforts to address the mounting crisis of environmental destruction. While it should have accelerated efforts to move rapidly towards sustainable energy, that was not the path chosen by the political leadership. Rather, the choice has been to accelerate the race to the abyss.

What should be done at this critical moment is outlined perceptively by economist and political analyst Thomas Palley: "The European Union must build trade and commerce with Russia. That is an economic marriage made in heaven. Russia has resources and needs technology and capital goods. Europe has technology and capital goods and needs resources."

And more generally, "[What should be done is a profound recalibration](#) that diminishes the influence of the US in Europe, strengthens the European Union, and aims for inclusion of Russia in the European family as envisaged by President Mikhail Gorbachev in 1990," in his call for a "common European home" from Lisbon to Vladivostok with no military alliances, no victors or defeated, and a

common effort to move towards a more just social democratic future — if not beyond.

“Getting there is beginning to look impossible,” Palley adds. But accommodation among the great powers must be achieved, and soon, if there is to be any hope for decent survival. The madness of devoting scarce resources to slaughter and destruction when cooperation to meet major crises is an absolute necessity simply cannot be tolerated.

Unleashed savage capitalism is a death sentence for the species. That has long been obvious, even before it reached the level of satire incarnated. The crucial word is “unleashed.” The leash should be, and can be, in the hands of those who have higher aims in life than enriching private power and enhancing the political forces that prefer global dominance to the Gorbachev vision.

We should not underestimate the barriers in economic and political realms, and also in the doctrinal systems that articulate and protect the structures of power. The matter is of particular importance in the U.S., for reasons too obvious to elaborate.

The barriers within the reigning doctrinal system are illustrated in a very revealing current essay in the major establishment journal. The authors are two well-informed foreign policy analysts at the more liberal end of received opinion, Fiona Hill and Angela Stent.

Their article illustrates graphically the extraordinary subordination to official doctrine that confines U.S. elites to an “alternative reality” that has little resemblance to the world. Confined within their self-reinforcing cocoon, they are simply incapable of comprehending the global reaction to their vocation of endless criminality.

Hill-Stent harshly condemn the Global South — most of the world — for its failure to join the U.S. in its profound distress “that Russia has violated the UN Charter and international law by unleashing an unprovoked [attack](#) on a neighbor’s territory.” The Global South even sinks so low as to “argue that what Russia is doing in Ukraine is no different from what the United States did in Iraq or Vietnam.”

Hill-Stent attribute this failure to rise to our level of nobility and understanding of

global reality to Putin's machinations. What else could account for such blindness?

Could there be a different reason, for example, the fact that outside the cocoon people actually look at the world and quickly discover that the U.S. is far and away the world leader in violating the charter and international law by unleashing unprovoked attacks — worldwide, even thousands of miles away? And could it be that they see that U.S. aggression in Iraq and Vietnam is an incomparably graver crime even than Putin's aggression in Ukraine?

And as a minor footnote, perhaps these "backward" peoples are well aware that the Russian aggression, which they in fact harshly condemn, was in fact extensively provoked — as Western commentators tacitly acknowledge in their own curious way by conjuring up for this case alone the novel phrase "unprovoked attack," which has become *de rigeur* in polite circles for the plainly provoked Russian aggression.

Given the climate of irrationality and subordination to doctrine that reigns in the U.S. it is necessary to reiterate, once again, that extensive provocation does not provide any justification for criminal aggression.

The Hill-Stent exercise in obfuscation is, regrettably, an instructive example of prevailing mentality among the more liberal sectors of doctrinal orthodoxy, amplified by conformist media and journals of opinion. These sectors of course play a prominent role in shaping the climate in which policy is designed and implemented, a matter of overwhelming significance in the most powerful state in world history, with no close competitor.

The realities of the modern world impose unique responsibility on Americans. Ludwig Wittgenstein described the task of philosophy as "to show the fly the way out of the fly-bottle," the flies being philosophers who buzz about in conventional confusions. Analogously, one task for those concerned about the future is to try to help educated elites find their way out of the doctrinal cocoon in which they have confined themselves, and to liberate the general public from the "alternative reality" that elite circles have constructed.

No small task, but an essential one.

Military operations produce enormous amounts of greenhouse gas emissions as

capacity for and use of military force depend on energy that comes in the form of fossil fuels. In fact, the U.S. military emits more carbon into the atmosphere than some countries do and has a long history of fighting wars for oil. Is it realistic therefore to expect serious climate action on the part of the world's major powers if they continue to ignore how militarism fuels the climate crisis?

Chomsky: And, we may add, if they continue to ignore how the climate crisis fuels militarism. The climate crisis engenders conflicts. We've already witnessed that in Syria and Darfur, where migrations caused by unprecedented droughts provided a large part of the background for the horrors that ensued. There are looming crises that may put even these awful events in the shade.

India and Pakistan are at sword's point, engaged in constant armed confrontations. Both are suffering severely from global warming. One-third of Pakistan is under water, sometimes many feet deep, following an intense heatwave and a long monsoon that has dumped a record amount of rain. In neighboring India, poor peasants in mud huts are trying to survive drought and heat reaching 50 degrees Celsius (50°C), virtually unlivable, of course without air conditioning. Meanwhile the governing authorities race to produce more and better means of destruction. Another grim case of satire incarnates, perhaps. The sources of their water supplies are shared and diminishing. The rest can be left to the imagination.

What isn't left to the imagination is that both are armed to the teeth, including huge nuclear arsenals, an unsustainable arms race for much smaller Pakistan. For both, it is an unconscionable waste of resources that are desperately needed to face their shared and devastating problems of global warming and other forms of destruction of the environment.

India-Pakistan is only one of many such examples of impending disaster. The U.S., though unusually privileged, is not immune, as we have seen in the past months.

As usual, the crises are not just human destruction of the environment. Scandals proliferate. The city that has been worst hit is Jackson, Mississippi, the state capital. The water system has been failing for years, and now its residents are literally without potable water — in a country with unparalleled wealth and natural advantages.

“Experts say this crisis was years in the making, a result of inadequate funding

for essential infrastructure upgrades. For the past year, leaders of this majority-Black, Democrat-led city have pushed for additional funding from the White Republicans who run the state. [Little has come of those appeals.](#)”

Deeply rooted social pathologies make their own contributions to human misery, exacerbating those produced by destroying the environment and radical misuse of resources. The U.S. is, furthermore, far in the lead in accelerating the militarization of the world.

More tasks for Americans, and not them alone.

Bob, the world was falling short of meeting its climate goals even before the outbreak of the Ukraine war. Indeed, it's obvious by now that climate goals cannot be reached without fast and radical action. In that context, can you talk a bit about the role that carbon tax and cap-and-trade play as strategies for reducing carbon emissions?

Robert Pollin: Let's first be clear on what we mean by the world's "climate goals." The most basic goals were set out in 2018 by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), the leading global organization that brings together and synthesizes climate change research. In its landmark 2018 special report "[Global Warming of 1.50C](#)," the IPCC established two primary goals: to reduce global carbon dioxide (CO₂) emissions by about 45 percent in 2030 relative to the 2010 level and to achieve net zero emissions by around 2050. The IPCC argued that these goals must be achieved to have a reasonable chance of limiting global warming to 1.50C above pre-industrial levels. The IPCC had concluded that limiting global warming to 1.50C above pre-industrial levels is needed to dramatically lower the likely negative consequence of climate change.

Just since the IPCC's 2018 report came out, we have been seen much more severe impacts of climate change than what the IPCC had anticipated in terms of heat extremes, heavy rains and flooding, droughts, sea level rise and biodiversity losses. To take just one recent example, average daily temperatures were sustained at over 110°F during the heat wave in India this past May. The intensifying climate crisis is making such episodes increasingly frequent. As Noam discusses, the war in Ukraine is only worsening the situation. It is therefore fair to conclude that the IPCC's 2018 targets should be understood as what is minimally necessary to move onto a viable global climate stabilization path. This

conclusion has been affirmed by the IPCC itself in its [even more extensive 2022 follow-up studies](#).

Where does the world stand today in terms of achieving the IPCC's emission reduction targets? As of the most recent data from the International Energy Agency (IEA) — the best-known and thoroughly mainstream organization that develops global energy models — global CO₂ emissions were at around 36 billion tons in 2019. This represents a roughly 70 percent emissions increase since 1990 and a 14 percent increase just since 2010. More to the point, according to the IEA's projections for future emissions under alternative realistic scenarios, emissions will fall barely at all by 2030 and [will not come close to achieving the zero emissions target by 2050](#).

Specifically, in its 2021 "World Energy Outlook" report, the IEA developed two scenarios for future CO₂ emissions levels based on what it considers to be realistic assessments of the current global policy environment. One is what the IEA terms a "Stated Policies Scenario." This scenario "explores where the energy system might go without additional policy implementation." It is based on taking "a granular, sector-by-sector look at existing policies and measures and those under development." In short, this scenario aims to project what CO₂ emissions will be through 2050 if global policies remain basically fixed along their current trajectory. In this scenario, global CO₂ emissions will not fall *at all* by 2030 and will decline by only 6 percent, to 33.9 billion tons, by 2050. In short, assuming we take climate science seriously, this is nothing less than a doomsday scenario.

Under a second "Announced Pledges Scenario," the IEA "takes account of all of the climate commitments made by governments around the world, including Nationally Determined Contributions as well as longer term net zero targets, and assumes that they will be met in full and on time." Under this more aggressive scenario, the IEA projects that emissions will still fall by only 7 percent as of 2030, and that by 2050, the emissions level will be at 20.7 billion tons — i.e. well less than halfway to achieving the zero emissions goal by 2050. In other words, even this more aggressive IEA scenario also is not too far from a doomsday scenario, assuming we take climate science seriously.

The IEA does also develop a scenario through which the world can reach zero emissions by 2050. The difference between the IEA's stated policies and announced pledges scenarios relative to their net zero emissions by 2050 scenario

is what the IEA terms an “ambition gap.” The question for getting to zero emissions is therefore to figure out how to close this “ambition gap,” i.e., how to avoid, somehow, a full-scale global climate catastrophe.

How much can carbon tax or carbon cap policies contribute here? Both of these measures aim to directly reduce the consumption of oil, coal and natural gas. This is critical since CO₂ emissions from burning coal, oil, and natural gas to produce energy is, by far, the largest source of overall CO₂ emissions, and thus, the major cause of climate change.

In principle at least, a carbon cap establishes a firm limit on the allowable level of emissions for major polluting entities, such as utilities. Such measures will also raise the prices of oil, coal and natural gas by limiting their supply. A carbon tax, on the other hand, will directly raise fossil fuel prices to consumers, and aim to reduce fossil fuel consumption through the high prices. Either approach can be effective as long as the cap is strict enough, or tax rate high enough, to significantly reduce fossil fuel consumption and as long exemptions are minimal to none. Raising the prices for fossil fuels will also create increased incentives for both energy efficiency and clean renewable investments, as well as a source of revenue to help finance these investments.

However, significant problems are also associated with both approaches. The first is their impact on the budgets of middle- and lower-income people. All else equal, increasing the price of fossil fuels would affect middle- and lower-income households more than affluent households, since gasoline, home-heating fuels and electricity absorb a higher share of lower-income households’ consumption. There is an effective solution here, developed initially by my PERI coworker Jim Boyce. That is to rebate to lower-income households a large share, if not most, of the revenues generated either by the cap or tax to offset the increased costs of fossil-fuel energy. Boyce [termed this](#) a “cap-and-dividend” program.

Another major problem with carbon caps is with enforcement. In particular, when these cap programs are combined with a carbon permit option — as in “cap-and-trade” policies — the enforcement of a hard cap becomes difficult to sustain or even monitor. So instead of measures that could be major contributors to fighting climate change, we end up with a mess of accounting tricks and exceptions. For the most part, [this has been the experience thus far](#) with cap-and-trade policies, both in the U.S. and Europe.

There are some easy fixes for this problem, as we have discussed in previous interviews. The most straightforward is to establish hard caps, such as utilities being required to reduce their fossil fuel consumption by, say, 5 percent per year, every year, with no exceptions and no cap-and-trade escape hatches. The CEOs of corporations who fail to hit these hard caps would face serious criminal liability.

Arguments in favor of the deployment of negative emission technologies, such as direct air capture and bioenergy with carbon capture and storage, are gaining ground these days in spite of their technological immaturity. Same goes for nuclear power plants and even geo-engineering in spite of the inherent risks that they entail. What role can such strategies play in the effort to make a complete break from reliance on fossil fuels?

Pollin: Neither negative emissions technologies nor nuclear power can likely contribute significantly to building an alternative global clean energy infrastructure. Indeed, it is more likely that they will create still more severe problems.

Let's start with nuclear. It does have the important benefit that it generates electricity without producing CO₂ emissions. But nuclear also creates major environmental and public safety concerns, which only intensified after the March 2011 meltdown at the Fukushima Daiichi power plant in Japan and still more, after Russia seized control of the Chernobyl and Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plants in the early stages of its invasion of Ukraine six months ago. Nuclear disasters at both Chernobyl and Zaporizhzhia became active threats immediately. Just over the past month, the Zaporizhzhia plant has come under intense siege. Thus, as of August 3, the Director General of the International Atomic Energy Agency Rafael Grossi stated that conditions at Zaporizhzhia are "completely out of control" underlying "the very real risk of a nuclear disaster." By mid-August, the *BBC* described "the growing concern over safety at the site...as both sides accuse each other of shelling the area." The *BBC* article quotes U.N. Secretary General António Guterres's [warning](#) that "any potential damage to Zaporizhzhia is suicide."

Negative emissions technologies include a range of measures whose purpose is either to remove existing CO₂ or to inject cooling forces into the atmosphere to counteract the warming effects of CO₂ and other greenhouse gases. One category of removal technologies is carbon capture and sequestration. A category of

cooling technologies is stratospheric aerosol injections.

Carbon capture technologies aim to remove emitted carbon from the atmosphere and transport it, usually through pipelines, to subsurface geological formations, where it would be stored permanently. The general class of carbon capture technologies have not been proven at a commercial scale, despite decades of efforts to accomplish this. After all, as we have discussed in previous interviews, carbon capture would be the savior for the oil, coal and natural gas industries if the technology could be made to work commercially at scale. However, even if carbon could be successfully captured at reasonable costs, the technology would still face the threat of carbon leakages that would result under flawed transportation and storage systems. These dangers will only increase to the extent that carbon capture becomes commercialized and operates under an incentive structure in which maintaining safety standards cuts into corporate profits.

The idea of stratospheric aerosol injections builds from the results that followed from the volcanic eruption of Mount Pinatubo in the Philippines in 1991. The eruption led to a massive injection of ash and gas, which produced sulfate particles, or aerosols, which then rose into the stratosphere. The impact was to cool the Earth's average temperature [by about 0.60C for 15 months](#). The technologies being researched now aim to artificially replicate the impact of the Mount Pinatubo eruption through deliberately injecting sulfate particles into the stratosphere. Some researchers contend that doing so would be a cost-effective method of counteracting the warming effects of CO₂ and other greenhouse gases.

However, the viability of stratospheric aerosol injections as a major climate solution has been refuted repeatedly by leading researchers in the field. For example, the Oxford University climate scientist Raymond Pierrehumbert, a major contributor to various IPCC studies, is emphatic in his 2019 paper, "There is No Plan B for Dealing with the Climate Crisis," that this type of geo-engineering — what he refers to "albedo hacking" — does not offer a viable solution to the climate crisis. Pierrehumbert writes:

"The excess carbon dioxide that human activities inject into the atmosphere has a warming effect that extends essentially forever, whereas the stratospheric aerosols meant to offset that warming fall out of the atmosphere in about a year. It's just a matter of gravity -stuff denser than its surroundings falls — aided a bit by atmospheric circulations that enhance the removal. This is why the cooling

effects of even a major volcanic eruption like Pinatubo dissipate after two years or so. Hence, whatever level of albedo hacking is needed to avoid a dangerous level of warming must be continued essentially forever.'

Pierrehumbert further [writes](#) that "We simply do not know the way the climate will respond to these novel forcings, or how our social and political systems will respond to these disruptive and possibly ungovernable technologies."

Renewable energy critics argue that wind and solar are not reliable sources because of their variability. Others argue that wind farms encroach on pristine environment and destroy a country's natural habitat, as is the case with the installation of thousands of wind turbines on scores of Greek islands in the Aegean Sea. How would you respond to such concerns, and are there ways around them?

Pollin: Three major sets of challenges arise in building a high-efficiency/renewable-energy dominant global energy infrastructure. They include the two you mentioned, i.e., 1) intermittency with solar and wind energy; and 2) the land use requirements for renewables, especially solar and wind. The third major challenge is the heavy mineral requirements as inputs for the clean energy infrastructure. In the interests of space, I will focus on just the first two.

Intermittency refers to the fact that the sun does not shine, and the wind does not blow, 24-hours a day. Moreover, on average, different geographical areas receive significantly different levels of sunshine and wind. As such, the solar and wind power that are generated in the sunnier and windier areas of the globe will need to be stored and transmitted at reasonable costs to the less sunny and windy areas. In fact, these issues around transmission and storage of wind and solar power will not become pressing for many years into the clean energy transition, probably for at least a decade. This is because fossil fuels, along with nuclear energy will continue to provide a baseload of non-intermittent energy supply as these energy sectors proceed toward their phaseout while the clean energy industry rapidly expands. Fossil fuels and nuclear energy now provide roughly 85 percent of all global energy supplies. Even with a phase out to zero by 2050 trajectory, fossil fuels will continue to provide most of the overall energy demand through about 2035. Meanwhile, fully viable solutions to the technical challenges with transmission and storage of solar and wind power — including around affordability — should not be more than a decade away, certainly as long as the

market for clean energy grows at the rapid rate that is necessary. For example, the International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA) [estimates](#) that global battery storage capacity could expand between 17 — 38-fold as of 2030.

The issue of land use requirements is frequently cited to demonstrate that building a 100 percent renewable energy global economy is unrealistic. But these claims are not supported by evidence. Thus, the Harvard University physicist Mara Prentiss shows, in her 2015 book *Energy Revolution: The Physics and the Promise of Efficient Technology*, as well as in her more recent follow-up discussions, that well below 1 percent of the total U.S. land area would be needed through solar and wind power to [meet 100 percent of U.S. energy needs](#).

Most of this land use requirement could be met, for example, by placing solar panels on rooftops and parking lots, then operating wind turbines on about 7 percent of current agricultural land. Moreover, the wind turbines can be sited on existing operating farmland with only minor losses of agricultural productivity. Farmers should mostly welcome this dual use of their land, since it provides them with a major additional income source. At present, the U.S. states of Iowa, Kansas, Oklahoma and South Dakota all generate more than 30 percent of their electricity supply through wind turbines. The remaining supplemental energy needs could then be supplied by geothermal, hydro and low-emissions bioenergy, which are all non-intermittent renewable sources. This particular scenario includes no further contributions from solar farms in desert areas, solar panels mounted on highways or offshore wind projects, among other supplemental renewable energy sources. However, if handled responsibly, all of these options are also viable possibilities.

It is true that conditions for renewable energy production in the United States are more favorable than those in some other countries. Germany and the U.K., for example, have population densities seven to eight times greater than the U.S. and also receive less sunlight over the course of a year. As such, these countries, operating at high efficiency levels, would need to use about 3 percent of their total land area to generate 100 percent of their energy demand through domestically produced solar energy. But using cost-effective storage and transmission technologies, the U.K. and Germany can also import energy generated by solar and wind power in other countries, just as, in the United States, wind power generated in Iowa could be transmitted to New York City. Any such import requirements are likely to be modest.

What about Greece? With co-authors, I am currently working on a study that considers the land use issues in Greece within the framework of achieving a zero-emissions economy there by 2050. I hope to be able to give more details on our results soon. For now, suffice it to say that there is no need for Greece to be installing wind farms on pristine sites. As with the U.S., there is more than sufficient land area in Greece to meet 100 percent of the country's energy demand through investments in high efficiency and building a renewable infrastructure situated on artificial surfaces like rooftops, parking lots, highways and commercial locations, as well as, to a relatively modest extent, agricultural lands.

Noam, we are the only species to evolve a higher intelligence, but we are not making the right decisions over climate and the environment. Is it because of politics and the way the world economy functions, or perhaps because of fears that the challenge of global warming is too overwhelming so we might as well go on with business as usual, make some alterations along the way and just hope for the best?

Chomsky: Evolution of higher intelligence is an intriguing scientific problem. It is even possible that we are the only species in the accessible universe to have evolved what we call higher intelligence, or at least to have sustained it without self-destruction. Yet.

As for why the existential crises that may soon end sustainable life on Earth receive far too little attention, one can think of many possible reasons. There is also a deeper question lingering in the not too remote background. The question burst into consciousness with dramatic intensity 77 years ago, on August 6, 1945. Or should have.

On that fateful day we learned that human intelligence had registered a grand achievement. It had devised the means to destroy everything. Not quite yet, in fact, though it was clear that further technological progress would soon reach that point. It did, in 1952, when the U.S. exploded the first thermonuclear weapon, and the Doomsday Clock advanced to two minutes to midnight. It did not become that close to terminal disaster again until Trump's term, then moving on to seconds as analysts abandoned minutes.

The question that arose with stark clarity 77 years ago was whether human moral

intelligence could rise to the level where it could control the impulse to destruction. Can the gap be overcome? The record so far is not promising.

The game is not over unless we choose to end it. The choice is unavoidable. How humans will decide is by far the most important question that has arisen in the brief sojourn of humans on Earth. We will soon provide the answer.

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

We Need A World Without Borders

On Our Increasingly Warming Planet



Harsha Walia - Photo: twitter.com

As we witness an increase in global migration amid a growing anti-immigrant sentiment, it is vital to remember that migration is mainly an outcome of political and economic processes associated with imperial conquest and capitalist globalization. Yet both liberal and conservative media exhibit similar bias toward migrations by treating them as problems that stem “from over there,” Harsha Walia points out in an exclusive interview for *Truthout*. Instead of accepting these false terms, Walia argues, we must recognize “there is no crisis at the border and there is no crisis of migration,” but instead a crisis of global apartheid.

Walia makes a case for a world without borders.

Harsha Walia, born in Bahrain and living in Vancouver, British Columbia, is a leading Canadian organizer and writer. In 2001, she co-founded the Vancouver chapter of No One Is Illegal, an anti-colonial, anti-racist and anti-capitalist migrant justice movement, and has been active in various migrant justice, Indigenous solidarity, feminist, anti-racist and anti-capitalist movements over the past two decades. She is the author of several books, including *Undoing Border Imperialism* and *Border and Rule: Global Migration, Capitalism and the Rise of Racist Nationalism*.

C.J. Polychroniou: Europe and the United States are major destinations for people trying to escape war, political turmoil and poverty. In both places, the influx of “uninvited” people from foreign lands and cultures has generated an anti-immigration backlash and has led to increasingly harsh and even malicious policies in an attempt to deal with what is often referred to in the media and by experts alike as a “global migration and refugee crisis.” You have written extensively on the global migration crisis, so let me start by asking you to share with readers the way you understand and explain the factors behind this mass migration of people in the first part of the 21st century.

*Harsha Walia: Conservatives and liberals alike conceive of immigration policy as an issue of domestic reform to be managed by the state. Language such as “migrant crisis,” and the often-corresponding “migrant invasion,” is a pretext to shore up further border securitization and repressive practices of detention and deportation. Such representations depict migrants and refugees as the cause of an imagined crisis at the border, when, in fact, mass migration is the outcome of the *actual crises* of capitalism, conquest and climate change.*

In the U.S. context and the panic about the southern border, a long arc of dirty colonial coups, capitalist trade agreements extracting land and labor, climate change, and enforced oppression is the primary driver of displacement from Mexico and Central America. Hondurans, El Salvadorans and Guatemalans make up the fastest-growing proportion of people crossing into the U.S. Over the past decade, migration from these countries has increased fivefold. These perilous migrations are portrayed by liberal media as “not our problem” and stemming from “over there.” However, these migrations are “our problem” because they are inextricable from displacements created by U.S. dirty wars backing death squads across Central America and the counterinsurgency terror of the neoliberal “war on drugs.” From the war against the FMLN [Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front] in El Salvador to the coup to oust Honduran President Manuel Zelaya, there is an unbroken line of U.S. interventions in Central America. Migration is a predictable consequence of these continuous displacements, yet today the U.S. is fortifying its border against the very people impacted by its own policies.

As of 2016, new displacements caused by climate disasters are outnumbering new displacements as a result of persecution by a ratio of three to one. By 2050, an estimated 143 million people will be displaced in just three regions: Africa, South Asia and Latin America. El Salvador and Guatemala are among the 15 countries

most at risk from environmental disaster, despite contributing the least to climate change. Rural and Indigenous farmers growing coffee, sugarcane, rice, beans and maize are facing crop losses, and successive droughts between 2014 and 2018 impacted over 2.5 million people in Central America.

Yet, displaced refugees — least responsible for and with the fewest resources to adapt to climate variations — face militarized borders in our warming world. A Pentagon-commissioned [report](#) from 2003 encapsulates this hostility to climate refugees: “Borders will be strengthened around the country to hold back unwanted starving immigrants from the Caribbean islands (an especially severe problem), Mexico, and South America.”

The U.S. is also funding immigration enforcement deep in El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras and Mexico to prevent people from even reaching the U.S.-Mexico border. Meanwhile, U.S.-based industries have polluted our world with [700 times more emissions](#) than the entire Northern Triangle of Central America, and the overall ecological debt owed to poor countries by rich ones is estimated at \$47 trillion. [Rich countries grow at the ecological expense of poor countries.](#)

The backlash against global migration has fueled the rise of far right movements throughout the Western world, though hostile views toward immigrants and refugees vary from country to country. Do you see migration as a crisis in itself, or a crisis of political opportunism? And how do you propose that governments deal with anti-immigration backlash?

While far right movements are immigration exclusionists — driven by a xenophobic and restrictionist ideology — the reality is that anti-immigration backlash is not intended to exclude *all migrants*, but, rather, to make the condition of migration, including the condition of migrant labor, more precarious. Border controls manufacture spatialized differences not to completely exclude all people but to capitalize on them. Neoliberal U.S. commentator Thomas Friedman says candidly, “We have a real immigration crisis and ... the solution is a high wall with a big gate — but a smart gate.” Immigration enforcement is not only about the racial terror of outright exclusion but also about producing pliable labor — what Friedman is calling the “smart gate.”

Capitalism requires labor to be constantly segmented and differentiated — whether across race, gender, ability, caste, citizenship, etc. — and the border acts

as a spatial fix for capitalism. Borders are not intended to exclude all people or to deport all people, but to create conditions of *deportability*, which in turn increases social and labor precarity. Workers' labor power is captured by the border and this cheapened labor is exploited by the employer. The lack of full immigration status and the tying of visa status to an employer are key to creating pools of cheapened, indentured laborers. Workers are then kept compliant through threats of termination and deportation. According to one study, [52 percent](#) of companies in the U.S. threaten to call immigration authorities on workers during union drives. The production of "migrant labor," a group of workers *in* the nation-state but differentiated *as* non-citizen labor, demonstrates the centrality of bordering regimes to both coerce labor under racial capitalism and to restrict citizenship through anti-migrant xenophobia.

Around the world, contemporary [bracero](#) programs represent an extreme neoliberalization of both immigration and labor policies. The distinct ordering of legal-but-deportable migrant labor generates structural hierarchies between racialized migrant workers and citizen workers: pitting workers against each other by scapegoating migrant workers for lowered wages, and further affixing race to citizenship. There is an entire class of workers who, even though they are living and laboring alongside us, are suddenly stratified differently in both the labor force and in the nation-state. Though they are our neighbors and in the same workforce as us, they have completely different rights and access to services. "Migrant workers" is a euphemism for "Third World" workers, and jobs like farm work, domestic work and service work that cannot be outsourced are being insourced through migrant work. Insourcing and outsourcing represent two sides of the same capitalist coin: deliberately deflated labor and political power. This means that we have to be able to take on the fight not only to end all detentions and deportations but to also fight for full and permanent immigration status, labor protections and living wages for all.

There is a mainstream consensus that countries have a right to set limits on how many people they allow to enter or move within their borders. Obviously, you disagree with this policy, so it would be most useful to share your views about borders and whether it is realistic to engage in a fight for a world without borders and for the implementation of a no-borders political regime.

There are at least 50,013 recorded deaths of migrants around the world since 2014. As of 2022, there are at least 89.3 million people worldwide who are

forcibly displaced. This is escalating with climate disasters; today an estimated one person every two seconds is being displaced due to a climate catastrophe. Liberalism reframes conversations about this immense, preventable violence into seemingly technocratic questions of visa types, quotas and legality. This has also removed immigration discussions from an analysis and accounting of global asymmetries of power — of capitalism, white supremacy, class, gender, caste, ableism and imperialism — and constrained them to domestic policy discussions. Finally, liberal and neoliberal discourse dampens revolutionary possibilities with talk of “pragmatism,” “realism” and “incrementalism.”

Given the violent deathscapes for literally millions of people around the world, what alternative is there other than to fight for a world without borders? We must refuse to live in a world where the majority of the world’s people are destined to live without adequate food, shelter or access to life-saving vaccines because of where they were born.

What is the function of borders today? Borders maintain asymmetric relations of wealth accrued from colonial impoverishment, of mobility for some and mass immobility and containment for most — essentially, a divided working class and system of global apartheid determining who can live where and under what conditions. Border policies cannot be tweaked or reformed, they must be dismantled if we believe in justice at a planetary scale. Real advocates of internationalism cannot accept the lingering reality of the “Global South,” which continues to exist in large part because of the continued differentiation of borders.

A world without borders is not the same as a world with open borders. In an open-borders world, the world stays configured the way it currently is with massive inequality, mass displacement and continued hierarchical differentiation, except borders are opened up. If people are still being forced from their lands, and some parts of the world are still being plundered and treated as sacrifice zones for the centers of power, there is no justice in that. A no-borders politics is more expansive than the site of the border itself. A no-borders politics is about dismantling all bordering, all ordering and all exploitative regimes.

To say that we need to live in a world that doesn’t have borders is not only to struggle for the rights of refugees and migrants, but to fight for freedom for *all* against displacement and immobility. It is to fight for liberation so that everyone

has a home and where we are all able to live freely in our neighborhoods, our lands and our homes, in relation and kinship with one another. The battle against borders is necessarily inclusive of movements against gentrification, liberation struggles against colonialism and occupation, the fight to be free from policing and cages and bosses and banks, the dream of being at home in our bodies, and to ensure we have a habitable Earth for all living creatures. We have to dismantle all the systems that uphold a system of apartheid that even allows the Global North to exist in relation to the Global South, or the conditions of the South within the North. A no-borders world includes the freedom to stay and the freedom to move, meaning that no one should be forcibly displaced from their homes and lands, and that people should have the freedom to move with safety and dignity. Those may seem contradictory, but they are actually necessary corollaries. We want an end to all detentions and deportations, full immigration status for all migrants, demilitarization, abolition of prisons and police, dismantling of capitalism and collective liberation for all. We only achieve this by believing in the necessity of a world without borders and by committing to the beautiful tradition of struggle.

Can changing the narrative change society and the world at large? If so, how do we change the narrative about migration and borders?

There is no crisis at the border and there is no crisis of migration. Rather, there is a relentless crisis of displacement and immobility within and across nation-state borders. The border, the prison, the sweatshop, the reservation, the checkpoint, the gated community are all part of the same carceral system operating through dispossession, capture, containment and immobility. These bordering/ordering regimes simultaneously manufacture and discipline surplus populations under capitalism and colonialism, while extracting land, labor and life itself.

Classifications such as “migrant” or “refugee” do not even represent unified social groups as much as they symbolize state-regulated relations of difference and state-manufactured conditions of vulnerability. While the rich from wealthy states routinely enjoy borderless mobility around the world — whether as investors, bankers, expats or hipster colonist tourists — the world’s majority of racialized, poor people are subjected to criminalization, illegalization, immobility and premature death. The politics of what we know as “immigration and borders” must therefore be placed within globalized asymmetries of power, creating mass displacement and constricting mobility around the world. This is why the migration crisis being declared a *new* crisis with *Western* countries positioned as

its primary victims is so offensive. Capitalism, colonialism, genocide, slavery and indentureship are not only conveniently erased as continuities of violence in current invocations of a border crisis, but are also the very unfreedoms that are the conditions of possibility for the border itself.

This interview has been lightly edited for clarity.

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

Chomsky: Maintaining Class Inequality At Any Cost Is GOP's Guiding Mission



Noam Chomsky

The Republican Party has been steadily moving toward the extremely reactionary end of the scale over the past several decades. In some ways, Trump simply accelerated and finally cemented the GOP's transition into an anti-democratic, proto-fascist political organization — although the Trump phenomenon is, in other ways, singular in political history, and its impact on U.S. politics and society will undoubtedly be felt for many years to come.

In the interview that follows, world-renowned scholar and public intellectual Noam Chomsky offers a tour-de-force analysis of the evolution of the U.S. political setting and the vital role that class warfare and repression have played in making corporate culture the dominant force, turning American society into a neoliberal dystopia. Chomsky also sheds light on why today's GOP has turned U.S. politics into a culture war battle while pursuing policies that suppress social rights and strangle intellectual freedom, with Viktor Orbán's "racist Christian nationalist proto-fascist government ... hailed as the ideal for the future." In addition, he assesses the political situation in connection with the passage of the Inflation Reduction Act.

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, the Republican Party has become an unabashedly anti-democratic political organization steering the U.S. toward authoritarianism. In fact, most GOP voters continue to support a political figure that sought to overturn a presidential election and seem to be enamored with Hungary's strongman Viktor Orbán, who dismantled democracy in his own country. It is also of little surprise the way Republicans have responded to the FBI raid on Mar-a-Lago. The rule of law is of no consequence to them, yet conservatives charge that it is the Democrats who are moving the country toward authoritarianism. What's shaping the character of the current Republican Party?

Noam Chomsky: What is unfolding before our eyes is a kind of classical tragedy, the grim conclusion foreordained, the march toward it seemingly inexorable. The origins are deep in the history of a society that has been free and bountiful for the privileged, awful for those who were in the way or cast aside.

A century ago, a stage was reached that has some similarity to today. In his classic study, *The Fall of the House of Labor*, labor historian David Montgomery writes that in the 1920s "corporate mastery of American life seemed secure.... Rationalization of business could then proceed with indispensable government support." Inequality was soaring, along with corruption and greed. The vibrant labor movement had been crushed by Woodrow Wilson's Red Scare, after decades of violent repression.

"Modern America had been created over its workers' protests," Montgomery continued, "even though every step in its formation had been influenced by the activities, organizations, and proposals that had sprung from working class life." In the late 19th century, it seemed possible that the Knights of Labor, with its demand that those who work in the mills should own them, might link up with the radical farmers movement, the Populists, who were seeking a "cooperative

commonwealth” that would free farmers from the tyranny of northeastern bankers and market managers. That could have led to a very different America. But it could not withstand state-corporate repression and violence.

A few years after the fall of the house of labor came the Great Depression. The labor movement revived and expanded, moving to large-scale industrial organization and militant actions. Crucially, there was a sympathetic administration, and a lively and often radical political environment. All of this laid the basis for the New Deal reforms that enormously improved American life and had repercussions in European social democracy.

The business world was split. [Thomas Ferguson’s research shows](#) that capital-intensive internationally oriented business accepted New Deal policies, while labor-intensive domestically oriented business was bitterly opposed. Their publications warned ominously of the “hazard facing industrialists” from labor action backed by “the newly realized political power of the masses,” topics explored in depth in Alex Carey’s *Taking the Risks out of Democracy*, which inaugurated the study of corporate propaganda.

As soon as the war ended, the business world launched a major assault on labor. It was impressive in scale, ranging from forced indoctrination sessions for the workforce even to taking over sports leagues. This was all part of the project of “[selling free enterprise](#),” while the salesmen were happily gorging at the public trough where the hard and creative work of constructing the new high-tech economy was on the account of the friendly taxpayer.

Violent repression was no longer adequate to restoring the glory days of the ‘20s. More subtle means of indoctrination were devised, including “scientific methods of strike-breaking,” by now honed to a high art with the support of administrations since Reagan that barely pay attention to such labor laws as still exist.

The business campaign was expedited by the attack on civil liberties called “McCarthyism,” which led to expulsion of many of the most effective labor activists and organizers. Unions entered into a compact with capital to gain benefits for members (though not the public) in return for abandoning any significant role on the shop floor.

The regimented capitalism of the early postwar years has been called the “golden

age of [state] capitalism,” with high and egalitarian growth. By the mid-‘60s popular activism was beginning to expose some of the long-concealed record of American history, and addressing some of its brutal legacy, again with the cooperation of a sympathetic administration.

By the early ‘70s, the established social order was tottering under the impact of the “Nixon shock” that undermined the postwar Bretton Wood system, stagflation, and not least, the growing threat of the popular movements that were civilizing the society. Elite concerns are well attested by major publications bracketing the mainstream spectrum of opinion.

At the left-liberal end, the liberal internationalists of the Trilateral Commission released their first publication, *The Crisis of Democracy*. The political flavor of the Commission is illustrated by the fact that the Carter administration was drawn largely from its ranks. The “Crisis” that concerned them was the activism of the ‘60s, which was mobilizing people to press their concerns in the political arena. These “special interests,” as they are called, were imposing too many pressures on the state, causing a crisis of democracy. The solution they recommended is more “moderation in democracy” by the special interests: minorities, women, the young, the old, workers, farmers, in short, the population, who are to be “spectators” not “participants,” in accord with liberal democratic theory (Walter Lippmann, Harold Lasswell, Reinhold Niebuhr, and other distinguished figures).

Unspoken is a crucial premise: the “special interests” are to be “put in their place,” as Lippmann advised, so that ample room is left for the “national interest” that is upheld by the “masters of mankind,” Adam Smith’s term for the business classes, who shape national policy so that their own interests are “most peculiarly attended to.” Smith’s words, which resonate loudly today.

Of particular concern to the Trilateral liberals were the failures of the institutions responsible “for the indoctrination of the young,” particularly the schools and universities. That’s why we see young people protesting for civil rights, women’s rights, ending a criminal war of aggression, and other diversions from the proper course of passivity and conformism. Here, too, a change of course is necessary for a proper social order to be sustained, tasks that were attended to in due course.

Another concern was the media, out of control and adversarial, threatening “democracy” by raising too many questions. The Commission advised that state

intervention might be necessary to overcome this crisis.

That is how “the time of troubles” was perceived at the left end of the mainstream spectrum. At the right end, positions were much harsher. The most important example is the Powell Memorandum, submitted to the Chamber of Commerce by corporate lawyer (later Supreme Court Justice) Lewis Powell. Written in apocalyptic terms, the Memorandum is a call to arms to the business world to defend the “American economic system” and “The American political system of democracy under the rule of law,” all “under broad attack” in a manner unprecedented in American history. The attack is so powerful that the very survival of the economic system and political democracy is at stake, as “no thoughtful person can question.”

Powell recommends that business rise from its traditional passivity and take strong measures to counter this “massive assault upon its fundamental economies, upon its philosophy, upon its right to continue to manage its own affairs, and indeed upon its integrity.”

The business world can easily take such measures, Powell reminds it. It holds the wealth of the country and largely owns the institutions that are bent on destruction of the business world, and American democracy and freedom with it.

The measures he outlines range widely. Thus “There should be no hesitation to attack the Naders and the Marcuses and others who openly seek destruction of the system. ... Perhaps the single most effective antagonist of American business is Ralph Nader, who — thanks largely to the media — has become a legend in his own time and an idol of millions of Americans.” The left that dominates the media is so incorrigible as to commend Nader’s efforts to make cars safer, an outrageous attack on our fundamental values.

Scarcely less dangerous is Herbert Marcuse, with his enormous sway over the college campuses. These far-left bastions are “graduating scores of bright young men who despise the American political and economic system” and who then move into media and government, institutions from which business and advocates of “free enterprise” are virtually barred. As every “business executive knows, few elements of American society today have as little influence in government as the American businessmen, the corporation, or even the millions of corporate stockholders” (who the left falsely believes are skewed toward the wealthy).

In this case Powell at last provides evidence, not just rants from rightwing screeds: "Current examples of the impotency of business, and of the near-contempt with which business's views are held, are the stampedes by politicians to support almost any legislation related to 'consumerism' or to the 'environment'," scare quotes for these absurd concoctions of the raging left.

It's not just the college campuses that must be "cured" of the pathology of despising everything American. The same holds for media, particularly TV, which must be carefully monitored and "kept under constant surveillance ... in the same way that textbooks should be." The monitoring should be carried out by neutral and independent advocates of the American way, as determined by the business world. It is of highest importance to monitor "the daily 'news analysis', which so often includes the most insidious type of criticism of the enterprise system."

Business has remained silent as this "assault on the enterprise system ... has gradually evolved over the past two decades." The innocents in corporate headquarters never even dreamt of developing programs to "sell free enterprise," contrary to what scholarship documents in extensive detail.

The harshly oppressed business community will find it "difficult to compete with an Eldridge Cleaver or even a Charles Reich for reader attention," or with the "ultraliberal Jack Newfield, who wrote in the journal *New York* that the root need in our country is 'to redistribute wealth'."

The horror, the horror!

The task of redistributing wealth even further to the very rich was undertaken soon after, in part influenced by Powell's memorandum, though the process was underway independently under the ideological leadership of Powell's major sources, notably Milton Friedman. The disarray of the '70s provided the opportunity for the neoliberal gurus to move beyond destroying the economy of Chile, as they were then doing (the crash came soon after), to applying their doctrines to the U.S. and U.K., and much of the world beyond.

Powell's Memorandum provides interesting insight into the Chamber of Commerce mentality. The basic stance is that of a spoiled 3-year-old who owns everything imaginable but has a tantrum if someone takes one of the marbles from a collection he had forgotten about. Having virtually everything is not enough. We cannot be deterred from the pursuit of the "Vile Maxim of the

masters of mankind: All for ourselves and nothing for other people," a maxim that seems to hold "in every age of the world," as Adam Smith observed.

It didn't take long for the assault of the masters to be understood. In 1978, UAW president Doug Fraser withdrew from a Carter-organized labor-management commission, condemning business leaders for having "chosen to wage a one-sided class war in this country — a war against working people, the unemployed, the poor, the minorities, the very young and the very old, and even many in the middle class of our society," and having "broken and discarded the fragile, unwritten compact previously existing during a period of growth and progress," the golden age of fragile class collaboration.

And then on to the full-fledged class war of the neoliberal years.

The political parties adapted to the business assault and helped accelerate it. The Democrats abandoned their limited commitment to working people, becoming a party of affluent professionals and Wall Street. Moderate Republicans, who had barely been distinguishable from liberal Democrats, disappeared. Today they would not even be RINOs [Republicans In Name Only]. The Party leadership understood well that they cannot gain votes on their actual policies of abject service to the super-rich and the corporate sector and must therefore shift voters' attention to what are called "cultural issues." That process began with Nixon's Southern Strategy, designed to switch southern Democrats to Republicans with racist dog-whistles, which under Reagan became open shouts. They also recognized that by pretending to strenuously oppose abortion they could pick up the Evangelical and Catholic vote. Then came guns, and all the rest of the current apparatus of deception. Meanwhile, behind the curtain, the Party pursued the Vile Maxim with a vengeance.

While the Democrats had delivered working people to their class enemy, still barriers to the assault remained. The Reaganites understood the need to deprive their enemy of any means of defense. Like Thatcher in England, their first act was a major attack on labor, opening the door for the corporate world to intensify the war against working people that had been resumed at the end of WWII. Clinton cooperated, with his policies of neoliberal globalization, designed to maximize corporate profits and undermine labor still further.

It shouldn't be necessary to review the consequences once again, from the

“transfer” of some \$50 trillion to the coffers of the top 1% to the wide range of other achievements of class war with few restraints. One revealing illustration is mortality: “from the 1980s onward, the U.S. started falling behind its peers” in mortality, [reaching over a million extra deaths by 2021](#). The increase in mortality in the past half-dozen years is without precedent apart from war and pestilence. It is also since about 1980 that U.S. health care costs began to diverge radically from comparable countries, [along with some of the worst outcomes](#).

Other dimensions reveal similar departures from the norm — incarceration, to mention only one. In the 1970s, U.S. incarceration rates were within the range of comparable countries. By now they are 5 to 10 times as high, another indication of social breakdown.

During these years the Republicans virtually abandoned any pretense of being a normal parliamentary party, to an extent that arouses amazement among long-time political analysts. Thomas Mann and Norman Ornstein of the American Enterprise Institute describe the former party as a “radical insurgency” that has abandoned normal parliamentary procedures. Some go further. The veteran political analyst of the London *Financial Times* Edward Luce writes that “I’ve covered extremism and violent ideologies around the world over my career. Have never come across a political force more nihilistic, dangerous & contemptible than today’s Republicans. Nothing close.” His comment is [endorsed by former CIA Director Michael Hayden](#).

Mann and Ornstein trace the sharp decline of the GOP to Newt Gingrich’s weaponization of the Party, turning it into an instrument to hold power by any means. The process accelerated under Mitch McConnell, barely concealed. Obama’s election provided new fodder for the white supremacist element of the campaign of diverting attention to “cultural issues,” fostering the grievances of “the Great Replacement.”

It is quite remarkable to see what has happened to the remnants of what was once an authentic political party. By now, qualifications for Congress are pretty much reduced to voting “No” on McConnell’s command and occasional trips to Mar-a-Lago to shine Trump’s shoes.

The popular base has been affected by the decline, particularly in the years of Trump worship. Some 70 percent believe that the 2020 election was stolen. Two-

thirds “[believe the country’s demographic changes](#) are being orchestrated by ‘liberal leaders actively trying to leverage political power by replacing more conservative white voters’,” the [Great Replacement theory](#) that not long ago was restricted to a neo-Nazi fringe. Half of Republicans think that “[Top Democrats are involved in elite child sex-trafficking rings.](#)” The almost unbelievable story goes on.

Most ominous is the marginal concern with global warming, a reflection of obedient leadership denialism since the Koch brothers’ juggernaut of 2009 that successfully terminated the mild deviation toward sanity under McCain. In this case, the shocking cowardice of the GOP leadership may do us all in if the GOP regains power — perhaps permanently, as a minority party, if their radical efforts to undermine democracy succeed. And with a deeply reactionary Supreme Court, they may.

If it does, we can guess what’s in store. Trump has been very clear about his intent to “drain the swamp” by destroying the nonpartisan civil service that is the foundation of anything resembling a democracy. The recent Budapest and Dallas conferences where the Conservative Political Action Conference (CPAC) — the core of the GOP — was the star attraction made it clear enough where the organization is headed. Its guide is Viktor Orbán, whose racist Christian nationalist protofascist government was hailed as the ideal for the future. For the world, the Trump project of constructing an alliance of brutal reactionary states is likely to be consolidated. And worst of all, the world will careen to terminal disaster while profits flood the fossil fuel companies and the banks that invest in them.

Stepping back, U.S. political parties are mainly candidate-producing organizations, with little room for popular initiative, and participation limited to pushing a lever every few years.

The current primary season provides a good illustration. A candidate organizes an event in some town, appears, and says “here’s what I’m going to do for you.” Maybe a few even believe it. Then they go home and decide how to cast their vote.

Suppose we lived in a democratic society. The people in the town would have meetings in which they decided on their priorities for a coming election. They

might decide to invite some declared candidate to attend a town meeting to listen to the programs they had decided on, and either accept them or not. Acceptance might mean that the candidate is now considered.

More serious steps toward democracy would go far beyond the limited political sphere, but even such small steps as these are scarcely on the horizon.

Fortunately, significant changes are well within reach in what remains a very free society by comparative standards. But opportunities have to reach consciousness, and be grasped, firmly. We cannot overemphasize the fact that now survival is literally at stake.

Republicans are much less divided on culture than Democrats. Is this why the GOP is so keen on cultural and social fights in its attempt to return to power?

The GOP has had a problem since it shed its more liberal elements and adopted the Powell-Friedman et al., neoliberal project since the early '70s, gaining power with Reagan. Put simply, one can't approach voters saying, "I'm going to rob you blind and destroy all your support systems, so vote for me." Even a political operator like Trump can't carry that off. He has to pose with a banner in one hand reading "I love you," while the other hand stabs you in the back with the actual legislative programs.

The solution is culture wars to divert attention from policies. And it is clear enough what works with the targeted population: white supremacy, Christian nationalism, no abortion, lots of guns, no more public schools that disturb white children by teaching history or basic biology, no public education altogether because it's run by sex fiends and Marxists. Or whatever will be concocted next, perhaps by QAnon, increasingly the source of "ideas" for the organization.

It doesn't take much imagination to think up ideas that work. There's a substantial store that are deeply rooted in American tradition. That's understood by the thinkers on the Roberts Court. As Justice Alito observed in his decision reversing *Roe v. Wade*, there's little to support women's rights in American history and tradition. Certainly, they were of little concern to the Founders or authors of the 14th Amendment. So, the convenient forms of "originalism" that have recently become judicial doctrine provide no basis for the "egregiously wrong" *Roe* decision.

Same with much else. When I was a student at an Ivy League college 75 years ago, classes that brought up evolution would often begin by an admonition that you don't have to believe this, but you should know what some people think.

Recent polls have been welcomed by those who have been hoping for some progress in this domain, but the actual results tell a more complex story. One of the most detailed studies, commissioned by the pro-science People for the American Way Foundation, shows that "Among the majority of Americans favoring evolution, 20 percent say schools should teach only evolution, with no mention of creationism." But not evolution — or "evolution theory," as it's called. "[To put it simply, this poll shows](#) that most Americans believe that God created evolution," said Ralph G. Neas, president of the foundation.

In this and many other respects, the U.S. remains in many ways a pre-modern society, easily attracted to well-crafted "culture wars." That will very likely become even more so in the future as [the GOP pursues its totalitarian efforts](#) to restrict what children are allowed to read and what libraries are allowed to purchase, laws that have a broad chilling effect beyond their direct application.

Such efforts to strangle intellectual freedom are likely to be reinforced by the medieval proclivities of the current Supreme Court, revealed by recent decisions undermining the Establishment clause of the Constitution by [compelling adherence to religious doctrine](#).

These decisions effectively adopt [Justice Alito's conception](#) that the religious are a persecuted sector in our secular society, which has to be taught to respect freedom of religion.

Perhaps the religious are as severely persecuted as the business community in the American society of Justice Powell's vivid imagination.

The effort to eliminate public education has been a core part of the broader neoliberal effort to atomize the population and destroy social bonds. It has caused severe harm to what had been a major American contribution to democracy: mass public education. Much more than education is involved. Public schools establish communities of participation for the common good, helping to create a healthy democratic society. That is not what is sought by bitter class war.

A prime way of destroying a public institution is defunding. That leads inevitably

to failure and public discontent, hence susceptibility to privatization so that the institution will be under the control of unaccountable private power. With superb irony, this is called “handing the institution back to the people.”

Defunding reaches to teacher’s salaries. The Economic Policy Institute, which monitors such matters, reports that [“In 2021, the relative teacher wage penalty](#) — how much less teachers are paid than other college-educated professionals — grew to a record high of 23.5%. The financial penalty that teachers face discourages college students from entering the teaching profession. It also makes it difficult for school districts to keep current teachers in the classroom.”

That is by now no small problem. The Bureau of Labor Statistics reports that [“roughly 300,000 public school educators](#) and staff left the field between Feb. 2020 and May 2022. And an alarming 55 percent of educators indicated that they could be leaving their profession or retire early, according to a survey from the National Education Association.”

Harassment of teachers and school boards contributes its share to rendering the profession intolerable, and to the long-term goal of eliminating public education. That would be a further contribution to atomizing and dumbing down the population, leaving people more susceptible to control and to “indoctrination of the young,” thus reducing the threat of another crisis of democracy.

The left of the Democratic party contributes in its own way to the GOP exploitation of “cultural issues.” Class politics, workers’ rights, even social and economic issues have been rather generally sidelined in favor of identity concerns. These are important in themselves, but we should not be oblivious to the consequences of displacement of traditional left concerns, or to the effects on the general public of how legitimate concerns are sometimes manifested.

The Republican Party’s long-term relationship with Big Business is showing signs of deep friction over culture and social causes. How likely is it that we may become witness to a divorce between the two entities? And what might be the political ramifications of such decoupling?

Not very likely, in my opinion. I think the masters of mankind understand very well where their interests lie and will continue to support pro-business elements in both parties, disregarding rhetoric that they do not expect to be translated into policy. Such support can be lavish in the wake of Supreme Court decisions that

place few limits on buying elections (*Buckley v. Valeo, Citizens United*), only one of the means by which the masters can ensure that their own interests “are most peculiarly attended to.”

There has been class warfare in the U.S. for the last 40 years, and it's been a one-sided fight. However, there are political developments underway over the last few years indicating that it is no longer a one-sided class war. Do you agree with this overall assessment of class politics in the U.S.?

Class war is unceasing, but there are variations in how one-sided it is. For many historical reasons, the U.S. has had a highly class-conscious and unusually powerful business class, the underlying reason for the violence and brutality of its labor history and the lack of social benefits, by now extreme in comparative terms. The New Deal period was a break, lasting into the transitional 1970s, leading to resumption of class war in force. In the past few years there has been a renewed popular commitment to some form of social democracy, in part under Bernie Sanders's highly effective leadership, in part through popular movements that have arisen on their own. These developments have somewhat ameliorated the savagery of the neoliberal class war, but so far at least, there has not been a major breakthrough. Even such popularly supported initiatives as joining the rest of the world in providing health care, a bare minimum for a civilized society, have not been able to overcome relentless business pressures.

Such pressures sometimes reach astonishing levels. A current illustration is the legislation in GOP-run states to punish banks that seek to save human society from destruction by curtailing investment in fossil fuels. It is hard to find appropriate words for such cases of capitalist frenzy going totally berserk.

However reluctantly, segments of the business world are taking some measures that reflect popular concerns about survival. Still, I think it is not enough to cause a break between the masters and the political organization that has mostly loyally served them.

The Schumer-Manchin reconciliation bill, which Biden signed into law, reaffirmed the idea that transformational policies are extremely difficult under the two-party system even when Democrats are in control and humanity's future is at stake. On the other hand, of course, the U.S. remains in many respects a conservative nation to the point that Democrats believe that they have to be moderate

otherwise they will die. Your thoughts on the political situation in connection with the Inflation Reduction Act?

It was observed long ago that the U.S. is basically a one-party state: the business party, with two factions, Democrats and Republicans. Now there is one faction: the Democrats. The Republicans hardly qualify as an authentic parliamentary party. That's fairly explicit under McConnell's rule. When Obama took office, McConnell made it clear that his primary goal was to ensure that Obama could achieve virtually nothing, so that Republicans could return to power. When Biden was elected, McConnell reiterated that position even more strongly. And he's lived up to it. On virtually every issue, the GOP is 100 percent opposed, even when they know that the legislation is popular and would be very valuable for the population. With a handful of right-wing Democrats joining the uniform GOP opposition, Biden's platform has been cut down very sharply. Perhaps he could have done more, but he's being unfairly blamed, I think, for the failure of what would have been constructive programs, badly needed. That includes Biden's climate program, inadequate but far better than anything that preceded it, and if enacted, a stepping stone for going further.

There is a lot wrong with the whole electoral system, but in this case, I don't see how Biden had many options. The final bill — the Inflation Reduction Act — was passed with Joe Manchin's agreement, while he was laughing all the way to the bank. Kyrsten Sinema also had to throw in her two cents for the benefit of the mostly predatory private equity industry.

The act has some good features. It's better than nothing, perhaps much better, some credible analysts believe.

The political situation is ugly, and very likely to get much worse in November if the GOP manages to take over. It is likely to get so much worse that it will literally threaten survival, "as no thoughtful person can question," to quote the estimable Justice Powell.

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