

# Howard Zinn, een sympathieke bemoeial



*Howard Zinn - Photo: University of Iowa*

In het voorjaar van 1971 bereikten in de Verenigde Staten de protesten tegen de oorlog in Vietnam een hoogtepunt. Ruim zestig procent van de Amerikanen was tegen de oorlog, Washington werd bijna wekelijks overspoeld door massale demonstraties. Zo'n duizend Vietnamveteranen gooiden hun medailles over het hek bij het Capitool. Tijdens een van de demonstraties legden zo'n twintigduizend deelnemers het verkeer in Washington plat.

Een groepje gelijkgestemde vrienden dat te laat was om zich bij een demonstratie richting het Pentagon aan te sluiten, besloot toen maar op eigen houtje het verkeer op een kruispunt lam te leggen, nog onkundig van de massaal opgetrommelde politietroepen in de stad. Het groepje bestond uit een historicus, een docente aan de universiteit van Michigan, een Harvard- professor, taalkundige en filosoof Noam Chomsky, voormalig defensiemedewerker Daniel Ellsberg en historicus en activist Howard Zinn. Onder een wolk van traangas moest het groepje al gauw een zijstraat invluchten, waar het zich hergroepeerde en opnieuw een kruispunt blokkeerde, om vervolgens nog eens te worden verdreven. Het kat en muisspel duurde nog de hele middag.



*Daniel Ellsberg, Howard Zinn, Noam Chomsky, Cindy Fredericks, and Marilyn Young at Mayday protests, May 3, 1971*

### *Levensmotto*

Het was geen uitzondering dat historicus Howard Zinn, professor in de politieke wetenschappen aan de universiteit van Boston, deelnam aan een demonstratie. 'You can't be neutral on a moving train', was zijn levensmotto. In de jaren zestig was hij deelnemer aan tientallen demonstraties tegen segregatie, zette hij studieprogramma's op voor kansarme zwarte studenten, en was hij actief in de burgerrechtenbeweging. Op 24 augustus was het honderd jaar geleden dat hij werd geboren.

Met een niet aflatende stroom boeken, artikelen, lezingen, commentaren en interviews, gaf hij decennia lang zijn mening over historische onderwerpen, maatschappelijke kwesties als burgerrechten, militarisme en oorlog, maar ook over zaken als onderwijs, recht, maatschappelijke onvrede, terrorisme en racisme. Hij volgde de Amerikaanse binnen- en buitenlandse politiek nauwlettend en kritisch. Voortdurend ageerde hij tegen onrecht in de samenleving. Zinn omschreef zichzelf als 'something of an anarchist, something of a socialist, maybe a democratic socialist.'



Zinn met collega's, Engeland 1945

### *Bombardementen*

Zinn werd in 1922 geboren als kind van uit Oost-Europa afkomstige Joodse emigranten, woonachtig in de sloppenwijken van Brooklyn. Zijn ouders hadden het niet breed, in de crisisjaren dreef zijn vader een kleine snoepwinkel. In zijn jeugd jaren kon de leeshonger van de jonge Zinn maar moeilijk worden gestild, totdat zijn ouders hem een goedkope editie van het complete werk van Charles Dickens cadeau deden. Niet veel later stortte hij zich wonderlijk genoeg op het werk van Karl Marx. Op zijn zeventiende nam hij deel aan een antifascistische demonstratie op Times Square, georganiseerd door de Communist Party. Toen hij een jaar of twintig was vervulde hij allerlei baantjes, volgde een cursus creatief schrijven en kreeg uiteindelijk werk op een scheepswerf in New York. Door in het leger te gaan meende Zinn het fascisme effectief te kunnen bestrijden. Als tweede luitenant bij de Amerikaanse luchtmacht, nam hij tijdens de Tweede Wereldoorlog deel aan bombardementsvluchten vanuit Engeland op Berlijn en Tsjechoslowakije.

### *Napalm*

Tegen het einde van de oorlog maakte hij deel uit van de eenheid die voor het eerst in de geschiedenis napalm inzette. Het Amerikaanse leger experimenteerde in de nadagen van de oorlog al met napalm en bij wijze van proef werden terugtrekkende Duitse troepen in het Franse stadje Royan met napalm bestookt. Na de oorlog kreeg Zinn te horen dat bij deze aanval op Duitse eenheden ruim duizend burgers om het leven waren gekomen. Hij deed zijn oorlogsmedailles in een envelop, schreef er *Never Again* op en keek er nooit meer naar om.



Arrestatie van Zinn in Boston 1971

Na de oorlog bezocht hij Royan een aantal malen en deed er onderzoek naar de gevolgen van de bombardementen. Hij toonde aan dat deze strategisch van geen enkel nut waren geweest en dat de militaire autoriteiten hadden gelogen over het aantal burgerslachtoffers. De resultaten van zijn onderzoek publiceerde hij in *The Politics of History* (1970). Hierin bekritiseert hij scherp de geallieerde bombardementen op Dresden, Hamburg en Tokio tijdens de Tweede Wereldoorlog, waarbij vooral burgerslachtoffers vielen, en het werpen van de atombommen op Hiroshima en Nagasaki. Meerdere malen veroordeelde hij de nutteloze bombardementen van de VS op Bagdad tijdens de inval in Irak en de acties in Afghanistan waarbij honderden burgers het leven lieten, net als tijdens de Tweede Wereldoorlog door de VS vergoelijkt met termen als 'collateral damage' en 'accidental'.

### *Burgerrechten*

Na de oorlog ging Zinn geschiedenis en politicologie studeren. In 1958 werd hij hoofd van de geschiedenisfaculteit aan het Spelman College in Atlanta, een overwegend door zwarte vrouwen bezochte opleiding. De latere schrijfster Alice Walker was één van zijn leerlingen.

Hij raakte betrokken bij de strijd voor burgerrechten en sloot zich aan bij de Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), een organisatie die een vooraanstaande rol speelde in de burgerrechtenbeweging. Hij schreef een aantal boeken over de achtergronden van de segregatie en over de SNCC, raakte echter door zijn steun aan de burgerrechtenbeweging in conflict met de leiding van Spelman en moest uiteindelijk zijn positie opgeven. In 2005 kreeg hij - eindelijk gerechtigheid - van Spelman College een eredoctoraat toegekend.



*Howard Zinn en Noam Chomsky*

### *Pentagon Papers*

Na zijn aanstelling aan de universiteit van Boston raakte hij betrokken bij de antioorlogsbeweging. Zijn *Vietnam: The Logic of Withdrawal* (1967) was één van de eerste boeken waarin gepleit werd voor een onmiddellijke en onvoorwaardelijke terugtrekking van Amerikaanse troepen uit Vietnam. Noam Chomsky noemt dit Zinns belangrijkste boek: 'He was the first person to say - loudly, publicly, very persuasively - that this simply has to stop; we should get out, period, no conditions; we have no right to be there...'

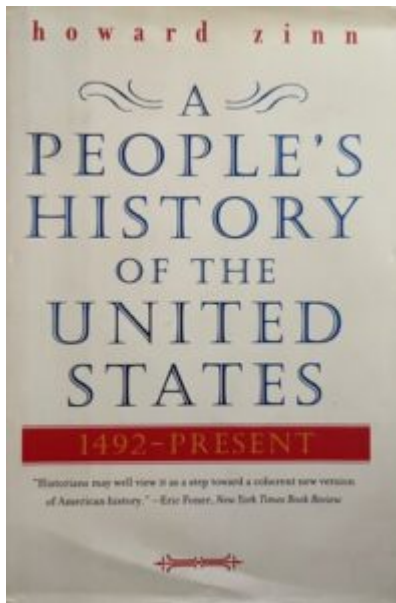
Gedurende het Tet-offensief bracht Zinn een bezoek aan Hanoi en slaagde hij erin drie Amerikaanse krijgsgevangenen vrij te krijgen.

Toen de Amerikaanse regeringsambtenaar Daniel Ellsberg in 1970 geheime regeringsdocumenten over de inmenging in Vietnam openbaar wilde maken, belandde een eerste pakket documenten in Zinns brievenbus. Hij redigeerde de documenten tot de uitgave van het boek *The Pentagon Papers*. De openbaarmaking betekende een flinke knauw in de reputatie van president Nixon.

### *Amerikaanse geschiedenis*

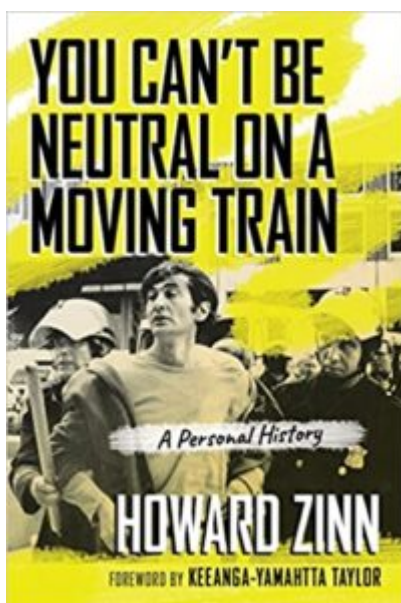
Zinn publiceerde tientallen boeken en honderden artikelen, onder meer in tijdschriften als *The Nation*, *Commonwealth*, *The Progressive* en *Ramparts*, over politiek, onderwijs, het Midden-Oosten, burgerrechten, ongelijkheid en vakbondsstrijd. Als zijn belangrijkste werk geldt *A People's History of the United States: 1492 - Present* (1980). Daarin prikt hij de mythes door van de klassieke Amerikaanse helden en presenteert hij de geschiedenis van de werkelijke Amerikanen: de oorspronkelijke indianenbevolking, de Franse en Engelse immigranten in de zeventiende en achttiende eeuw en de Europese arbeidersimmigranten in de negentiende eeuw. Zijn geschiedenis van de VS gaat niet over veldslagen, heldendom en presidenten, maar over strijd van de

inheemse bevolking en arbeiders, strijd tegen armoede, verpaupering, crisis, militarisme en de macht van de staat, niet over de Pilgrimfathers, maar over boerenopstanden en vakbondsstrijd. In eerste instantie werd het boek uitgebracht in een oplage van vijfduizend exemplaren, maar inmiddels zijn er miljoenen exemplaren van verkocht. Het boek bracht een verschuiving teweeg in de wijze waarop tegen geschiedenis wordt aangekeken, in de manier waarop geschiedenis moet worden gepresenteerd en hoe het moet worden beoordeeld.



Geschiedenis is niet een opsomming van droge feiten die uit het hoofd geleerd dienen te worden, maar een aaneenschakeling van gebeurtenissen in het verleden, die doorwerken tot op de dag van vandaag. De actualiteit is onlosmakelijk gekoppeld aan het verleden, meende Zinn, en door het in die context te plaatsen, door lijnen uit het verleden naar het heden door tetrekken, helpt geschiedenis ons om een mening te kunnen vormen en ons handelen te kunnen bepalen. Het kreeg bovendien een vervolg in 2004 met *Voices of a People's History of the United States*, een boek met artikelen, toespraken, poëzie, songteksten, essays en

andere bijdragen van 'gewone' Amerikanen. Later verscheen opnieuw een vervolg: een dvd getiteld *The People Speak*, gewijd aan mensen die in opstand kwamen tegen onrecht en onrechtvaardigheid, met bijdragen van Zinn zelf, acteurs Matt Damon en Morgan Freeman, Eddie Vedder, Bruce Springsteen, Bob Dylan en anderen.



### *Toekomst*

In 2008 vertelde hij over de leidraad van zijn denken: 'We cannot create blueprint for future society now, but I think it is good to think about that. I think it is good to have in mind a goal.

It is constructive, it is helpful, it is healthy, to think about what future society might be like, because then it guides you somewhat what you are doing today, but only so long as these discussions about future society don't become obstacles to working towards this future society.'

Het werk van Zinn 'changed perspective and understanding for a whole generation,' stelde Noam Chomsky na het overlijden van Zinn in 2017. 'He opened up approaches to history that were novel and highly significant. Both by his actions, and his writings for fifty years, he played a powerful role in helping and in many ways inspiring the Civil rights movement and the anti-war movement.'

In 1988 nam Zinn afscheid van Boston University.

Zijn laatste college beëindigde hij een half uur eerder om bij een picket-line te kunnen zijn.

Hij nodigde zijn studenten uit mee te gaan. Een honderdtal deed dit.

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## **Chomsky: Six Months Into War, Diplomatic Settlement in Ukraine Is Still Possible**



*Noam Chomsky*

The war in Ukraine continues unabated. There are no visible signs of a conclusion to this tragedy, although it's hard to imagine the current situation remaining unchanged for much longer. The war has exposed dramatic weaknesses in Russia's armed forces, while Ukrainian resistance has surprised even military experts. In the meantime, it is more than obvious that the U.S. is fighting a "proxy" war in Ukraine, as Noam Chomsky underlines in the exclusive interview

for *Truthout*, thus making it extremely difficult for Russia's military planners to make major advances.

From day one, Noam Chomsky established himself as one of the most important voices on the war in Ukraine. He condemned Russia's invasion as a criminal aggression while analyzing the subtle political and historical context surrounding Putin's decision to launch an attack on Russia's neighbor. In the interview that follows, Chomsky reiterates his condemnation of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, suggests that the situation over peace talks inevitably recalls the "Afghan trap," and talks about the exceptional form of censorship that is taking place in the U.S. through a systematic suppression of unpopular ideas over the war in Ukraine.

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: It's been six months since Russia's invasion of Ukraine, yet there is no end to the war in sight. Putin's strategy has backfired in a huge way, as it not only failed to take down Kyiv but also revived the western alliance while Finland and Sweden ended decades of neutrality by joining NATO. The war has also caused a massive humanitarian crisis, brought higher energy prices, and made Russia into a pariah state. From day one, you described the invasion as a criminal act of aggression and compared it to the U.S. invasion of Iraq and the Hitler-Stalin invasion of Poland, in spite of the fact that Russia felt threatened from NATO's expansion to the east. I reckon that you still hold this view, but do you think that Putin would have had second thoughts about an invasion if he knew that this military adventure of his would end up in a prolonged war?*

*Noam Chomsky: Reading Putin's mind has become a cottage industry, notable for the extreme confidence of those who interpret the scanty tea leaves. I have some*



guesses, but they are not based on better evidence than others have, so they have low credibility.

My guess is that Russian intelligence agreed with the announced U.S. government expectations that conquest of Kyiv and installation of a puppet government would be an easy task, not the debacle it turned out to be. I suppose that if Putin had had better information about the Ukrainian will and capacity to resist, and the incompetence of the Russian military, his plans would have been different. Perhaps the plans would have been what many informed analysts had expected, what Russia now seems to have turned to a Plan B: trying to establish firmer control over Crimea and the passage to Russia, and to take over the Donbas region.

Possibly, benefiting from better intelligence, Putin might have had the wisdom to respond seriously to the tentative initiatives of Macron for a negotiated settlement that would have avoided the war, and might have even proceeded to Europe-Russia accommodation along the lines of proposals by de Gaulle and Gorbachev. All we know is that the initiatives were dismissed with contempt, at great cost, not least to Russia. Instead, Putin launched a murderous war of aggression which, indeed, ranks with the U.S. invasion of Iraq and the Hitler-Stalin invasion of Poland.

That Russia felt threatened by NATO expansion to the East, in violation of firm and unambiguous promises to Gorbachev, has been stressed by virtually every high-level U.S. diplomat with any familiarity with Russia for 30 years, well before Putin. To take just one of a rich array of examples, in 2008 when he was ambassador to Russia and Bush II recklessly invited Ukraine to join NATO, current CIA director William Burns warned that "Ukrainian entry into NATO is the brightest of all redlines for the Russian elite (not just Putin)." He added that "I have yet to find anyone who views Ukraine in NATO as anything other than a direct challenge to Russian interests." More generally, Burns called NATO expansion into Eastern Europe "premature at best, and needlessly provocative at worst." And if the expansion reached Ukraine, Burns warned, "There could be no doubt that Putin would fight back hard."

Burns was merely reiterating common understanding at the highest level of government, back to the early '90s. Bush II's own Secretary of Defense Robert Gates [recognized](#) that "trying to bring Georgia and Ukraine into NATO was truly

overreaching, ... recklessly ignoring what the Russians considered their own vital national interests.”

The warnings from informed government sources were strong and explicit. They were rejected by Washington from Clinton on. In fact, on to the present moment. That conclusion is confirmed by the recent [comprehensive Washington Post study](#) of the background to the invasion. Reviewing the study, George Beebe and Anatol Lieven [observe](#) that “the Biden administration’s efforts to avert the war altogether come across as quite lacking. As Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov put it during the weeks preceding the invasion, for Russia ‘the key to everything is the guarantee that NATO will not expand eastward.’ But nowhere in the *Post*’s account is there any mention that the White House considered offering concrete compromises regarding Ukraine’s future admission into NATO.” Rather, as the State Department had already [conceded](#), “the United States made no effort to address one of Vladimir Putin’s most often stated top security concerns — the possibility of Ukraine’s membership into NATO.”

In brief, provocations continued to the last minute. They were not confined to undermining negotiations but included expansion of the project of integrating Ukraine into the NATO military command, turning it into a “de facto” member of NATO, as [U.S. military journals](#) put it.

The glaringly obvious record of provocation is, presumably, the reason for the tacit rule that the Russian assault must be called “unprovoked,” a term otherwise scarcely if ever used but required in this case in polite society. Psychologists should have no problem explaining the curious behavior.

Though the provocations were consistent and conscious over many years, despite the warnings, they of course in no way justify Putin’s resort to “the supreme international crime” of aggression. Though it may help explain a crime, provocation provides no justification for it.

As for Russia’s becoming a “pariah state,” I think some qualifications are in order. It is surely becoming a pariah state in Europe and the Anglosphere, to an extent that has amazed even seasoned cold warriors. Graham Fuller, one of the top figures in U.S. intelligence for many years, [recently commented that](#):

- “I don’t think that I’ve ever seen—in my entire life—such a dominant American media blitz as what we’re seeing regarding Ukraine today. The U.S. isn’t only

pressing its *interpretation* of events — the U.S. is also engaging in full-scale *demonization* of Russia as a state, as a society, and as a culture. The bias is extraordinary — I never saw anything like this when I was involved in Russian affairs during the Cold War.”

Picking up those tea leaves again, one might perhaps surmise that as in the required reference to the “unprovoked” invasion, some guilt feelings are not too well concealed.

That is the stance of the U.S. and to varying degrees its close allies. Most of the world, however, continues to stand aloof, condemning the aggression but maintaining normal relations with Russia, just as western critics of the U.S.-U.K. invasion of Iraq maintained normal relations with the (entirely unprovoked) aggressors. There is also considerable ridicule of the pious proclamations on human rights, democracy and “sanctity of borders” issued by the world champions in violence and subversion — matters the Global South knows about well from ample experience.

*Russia claims that the U.S. is directly involved in the Ukraine war. Is the U.S. fighting a “proxy war” in Ukraine?*

That the U.S. is heavily involved in the war, and proudly so, is not in question. That it is fighting a proxy war is widely held outside of the Europe-Anglosphere domain. It is not hard to see why. Official U.S. policy, open and public, is that the war must go on until Russia is so severely weakened that it cannot undertake further aggression. The policy is justified by exalted proclamations about a cosmic struggle between democracy, freedom, and all good things vs. ultimate evil bent on global conquest. The fevered rhetoric is not new. The fairy tale style reached comical heights in the major Cold War document NSC 68 and is commonly found elsewhere.

Taken literally, official policy entails that Russia must be subjected to harsher punishment than Germany was at Versailles in 1919. Those targeted are likely to take explicit policy literally, with obvious consequences as to how they may react.

The assessment that the U.S. is dedicated to a proxy war is reinforced by common Western discourse. While there is extensive discussion of how to fight Russian aggression more effectively, one finds hardly a word about how to bring the horrors to an end — horrors that go far beyond Ukraine. Those who dare to raise

the question are usually vilified, even such revered figures as Henry Kissinger — though, interestingly, calls for a diplomatic settlement pass without the usual demonization when they [appear in the major establishment journal](#).

Whatever terminology one prefers to use, the basic facts about U.S. policy and plans are clear enough. To me, “proxy war” seems a fair term, but what matters are the policies and plans.

*As was to be expected, the invasion has also led to a prolonged propaganda war on the part of all sides involved. On that note, you said recently that, with the banning of RT and other Russian media venues, Americans have less access to the official adversary than Soviets had in the 1970s. Can you elaborate a bit on this, especially since your statement about censorship in the U.S. over the war in Ukraine was totally distorted, leaving readers to think that what you implied is that censorship in the U.S. today is worse than it was under communism in Russia?*

On the Russian side, the domestic propaganda war is extreme. On the U.S. side, while there are no official bans, it’s hard to deny Graham Fuller’s observations.

Literal censorship in the U.S. and other western societies is rare. But as George Orwell wrote in 1945 in his (unpublished) introduction to *Animal Farm*, the “sinister fact” about free societies is that censorship is “largely voluntary. Unpopular ideas can be silenced, and inconvenient facts kept dark, without the need for any official ban,” generally a more effective means of thought control than overt force.

Orwell was referring to England, but the practice goes far beyond, in revealing ways. To take a current example, the highly respected Middle East scholar Alain Gresh was [censored by French TV](#) because of his critical comments on Israel’s latest terrorist crimes in occupied Gaza.

Gresh observed that “this form of censorship is exceptional. On the question of Palestine, it is rarely presented in such an obvious manner.” A more effective form of censorship is exercised by careful selection of commentators. They are acceptable, Gresh concludes, if they “regret the violence” while adding that Israel has “the right to defend itself” and stress the need to “fight extremists on both sides,” but “it seems there is no room for those who radically criticise Israel’s occupation and apartheid.”

In the United States, such means of silencing unpopular ideas and keeping inconvenient facts dark have been honed to a high art, as one would expect in an unusually free society. By now there are literally thousands of pages documenting the practices in close detail. Fine organizations of media critique like *FAIR* in the U.S. and *Media Lens* in England pour out more on a regular basis.

There is also extensive discussion in print about the advantages of western models of indoctrination over the crude and transparent measures of totalitarian states. The more sophisticated devices of free society instill doctrines by presupposition, not assertion, as in the case Gresh describes. The rules are never heard, just tacitly assumed. Debate is allowed, even encouraged, but within bounds, which are unexpressed and rigid. They become internalized. As Orwell puts it, those subjected to subtle indoctrination, with a good education for example, have instilled into them the understanding that there are certain things “it wouldn’t do to say” — or even to think.

The modes of indoctrination need not be conscious. Those who implement them already have internalized the understanding that there are certain things “it wouldn’t do to say” — or even to think.

Such devices are particularly effective in a highly insular culture like that of the U.S., where few would dream of seeking foreign sources, particularly those of a reviled enemy, and where the appearance of limitless freedom offers no incentive to go beyond the established framework.

It’s in this general context that I mentioned the case of banning of Russian sources such as *RT* — “exceptional” as Gresh pointed out. Though there was no time to elaborate in a few brief remarks in a long interview on other topics, the direct banning brought to mind [an interesting topic I had written about 30 years ago](#). Like much other work, the article reviewed many cases of the usual modes of silencing unpopular ideas and suppressing unwanted facts in free societies, but it also reported government-academic studies seeking to determine where Russians were getting their news in the ‘70s: the late Soviet period, pre-Gorbachev. The results indicated that despite the rigid censorship, a remarkably high percentage of Russians were accessing such sources as BBC, even illegal Samizdat, and may well have been better informed than Americans.

I checked at the time with Russian émigrés who related their own experiences of

evading the intrusive but not very efficient censorship. They basically confirmed the picture, though they felt that the numbers reported were too high, possibly because the samples might have been skewed to Leningrad and Moscow.

Direct banning of the publications of adversaries is not only illegitimate but also harmful. Thus, it would be important for Americans to have been aware that immediately before the invasion, the Russian Foreign Minister was emphasizing that “the key to everything is the guarantee that NATO will not expand eastward” to Ukraine — the firm redline for decades. Had there been any concern to avoid horrible crimes and to move to a better world, this could have been an opening to explore.

The same is true of Russian government pronouncements when the invasion was already underway; for example, Lavrov’s [statement on May 29](#) that:

- “We have goals: to demilitarise Ukraine (there should be no weapons threatening Russia on its territory); to restore the rights of the Russian people in line with the Constitution of Ukraine (the Kiev regime violated it by adopting anti-Russia laws) and the conventions (in which Ukraine takes part); and to denazify Ukraine. Nazi and neo-Nazi theory and practice have deeply permeated daily life in Ukraine and are codified in its laws.”

It might be useful for Americans to have access to such words by a flip of the switch on TV, at least those Americans with some interest in ending the horrors rather than plunging into the apocalyptic battle conjured up from the tea leaves to cage the rampaging bear before it devours all of us.

*Peace negotiations between Russia and Ukraine have stagnated since early spring. Apparently, Russia wants to enforce peace on its own terms, while Ukraine seems to have adopted the position that there can be no negotiations until Russia’s prospects on the battlefield become dim. Do you see an end to this conflict any time soon? Is negotiating to end the war an appeasement, as those who oppose peace talks claim?*

Whether negotiations have stagnated is not entirely clear. Little is reported, but it seems possible that “[Talks to end the war are back on the agenda: A meeting between Ukraine, Turkey and the UN shows that Kyiv may be warming to the idea of discussions with Moscow](#),” and that “Given Russian territorial advances,” it may be that Ukraine “has softened its opposition to considering a diplomatic end

to the war.” If so, it’s up to Putin to show whether his “avowed zeal for negotiations is really a bluff,” or has some substance.

What’s happening is obscure. It brings to mind the “Afghan trap” that we discussed earlier, when the U.S. was fighting a proxy war with Russia “to the last Afghan,” as Cordovez and Harrison put it in their definitive study of how the UN managed to arrange for a Russian withdrawal despite U.S. efforts to prevent a diplomatic settlement. That was the period when Carter’s National Security Adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski, who claimed credit for instigating the Russian invasion, applauded the outcome even though it came at the cost of some “agitated Muslims.”

Are we witnessing something similar today? Perhaps.

No doubt Russia wants to enforce peace on its own terms. A negotiated diplomatic settlement is one that each side tolerates while relinquishing some of its own demands. There’s only one way to find out whether Russia is serious about negotiations: Try. Nothing is lost.

On the battlefield prospects, there are confident and sharply conflicting claims by military experts. I have no such credentials; I think it’s fair to conclude from the spectacle that the fog of war has not lifted. We do know what the U.S. position is, or at least was last April at the Ramstein Air Base conference of NATO powers and other military leaders that the U.S. organized: “Ukraine clearly believes it can win and so does everyone here.” Whether it was actually believed then, or is now, I don’t know, and know of no way to find out.

For what it’s worth, I personally respect the [words of Jeremy Corbyn](#) published on the day after the Ramstein war conference opened, words that contributed to his being virtually expelled from the Labour Party: “There must be an immediate ceasefire in Ukraine followed by a Russian troop withdrawal and agreement between Russia and Ukraine on future security arrangements. All wars end in a negotiation of some sort — so why not now?”

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## **Liberal States Like California Are Also Failing To Make Progress On Climate**



*CJ*

*Polychroniou*

California has a well-established reputation as a national and global climate leader, but despite its remarkable successes in cutting emissions between 2006 and 2016, it has recently begun showing signs of having lost its way.

California is increasingly falling behind on its emissions reduction targets, and its



existing policies have now been deemed insufficient to hit its 2030 target of reducing carbon emissions 40 percent below 1990 levels by 2030, [according to new modeling](#) from the climate policy think tank Energy Innovation.

“Compared to historical trends, California will need to more than triple the pace of emissions reductions to hit its 2030 target of reducing greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions 40 percent below 1990 levels by 2030,” the Energy Innovation report states.

The report is disappointing news, representing a weakening of the climate action that began with California’s passage of AB 32 in 2006. Otherwise known as the Global Warming Solutions Act, AB 32 was a landmark program in the struggle to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Up until 2006, the United States was the largest emitter of carbon dioxide emissions in the world, and California was the second highest state in terms of total greenhouse gas emissions.

Under AB 32, California was required to reduce statewide emissions to 1990 levels by 2020. It also required that California greenhouse gas emissions be reduced to 80 percent below 1990 levels by 2050. The California Air Resources Board, established in 1967, became the agency responsible for the implementation of the law.

California met its goal to reach 1990 emissions levels by 2020 four years ahead of schedule. In 2016, lawmakers passed SB 32 as a follow up to AB 32. SB 32 requires the California Air Resources Board to ensure the state’s greenhouse gas emissions are reduced to 40 percent below the 1990 levels by 2030.

Surprisingly enough, however, California’s emission reduction efforts appeared to lose momentum after SB 32 was signed into law.

Unsurprisingly enough, an environmental group gave California a near failing grade on the climate crisis in 2021. This was the first time that California Environmental Voters, or EnviroVoters, gave a “D” mark to the state since the group began issuing its annual scorecard in 1973.

What explains California’s woeful progress on climate solutions?

For one, California hasn’t enacted any transformative climate bills over the past 4 years. Perhaps there is a connection between California’s recent inaction on the

climate crisis and the fact that fossil fuel companies “spent four times as much as environmental advocacy groups and almost six times as much as clean energy firms on lobbying efforts in California between 2018 and 2021,” [according to Capital & Main](#).

Indeed, California lawmakers are failing to advance bills that include deep decarbonization initiatives. When a new bill AB 1395, a net-zero bill co-authored by Assembly Members Al Muratsuchi and Cristina Garcia, was introduced on the last day of last year’s legislative session, it was [resoundingly defeated](#). It would have codified in law the state’s pledge to achieve carbon neutrality as soon as possible and by no later than 2045. It was opposed by the oil and gas sector, the agricultural industry and business groups.

California’s clean-air regulators are also relying on programs and strategies for reducing greenhouse gas emissions that are of questionable nature, according to experts. The California Air Resources Board released in May a proposal called [a scoping plan](#) that ignores the need for immediate action and leans heavily on carbon dioxide removal technologies to reach the 2045 carbon neutrality target. [“The plan does California a disservice,”](#) said one state advisor, while more than 70 environmental justice groups called the proposal “a setback for the state and the world.”

Transformative pieces of legislation on the side of climate justice are also being ditched in a state with a reputation for progressive politics. Just recently, the California Justice40 Act (AB 2419) introduced by Assembly Member Isaac Bryan, which would have ensured the equitable implementation of infrastructure investments, was killed in the Senate Appropriations Committee. The bill aimed to achieve environmental justice by investing at least 40 percent of federal climate and infrastructure funding on projects that provide “direct benefits” to low-income, indigenous, and rural communities and communities of color. The California Green New Deal Coalition and many other environmental organizations had expressed strong support for AB 2419.

This was a critical piece of legislation that would have benefitted directly the communities facing the greatest environmental burdens. Infrastructure policies in the U.S. have historically promoted and exacerbated racial and economic inequality. During the New Deal, for instance, the Federal Housing Authority provided low-interest mortgages to white families but refused to issue mortgages

in African American neighborhoods. Communities of color were designated as “risky areas.” The 1956 Interstate Highway Act intentionally displaced hundreds of thousands of low-income families and communities of color. A landmark 1987 report, entitled “[Toxic Wastes and Race in the United States](#),” revealed that race was the most significant indicator for the location of toxic waste sites.

A [study released by the Gender Equity Policy Institute](#) found that, if enacted, AB 2419 “would powerfully advance gender and racial equality in California.” The report estimated that six in ten residents of the state could benefit from infrastructure investments targeted to low-income and disadvantaged communities. The bill would benefit women of color since they are more likely to live in polluted or low-income areas. Indeed, in the San Francisco Bay area, 1.3 million women of color would benefit from AB 2419’s targeted investments, and in southern California 3.2 million women of color who live in heavily polluted communities would benefit, the report said.

But to no avail. The bill was obviously too “radical” even for the Democratic members in the Senate’s Appropriations Committee.

California is proof that simply being a liberal state is not a sufficient enough factor to secure progress in the fight against the climate crisis. Money talks. Powerful interest groups can easily hijack the policy agenda. The role of bureaucrats also cannot be overlooked when it comes to issues of critical importance for the common good. The California Air Resources Board’s view on carbon removal technology represents in reality a form of continued investment in the fossil fuel industry.

The irony is that California has at its disposal a comprehensive climate stabilization program that includes climate justice and economic growth, courtesy of a group of progressive economists at the Political Economy Research Institute at the University of Massachusetts-Amherst. Robert Pollin and some of his coworkers produced last year a commissioned program that [demonstrates that California can achieve its official greenhouse gas emissions reduction targets by 2030](#) and reach zero emissions by 2045. They also showed that the program can serve as a powerful new engine of job creation and ensure a just transition for the state’s fossil fuel workers and communities.

The project was embraced by the union movement in California. Some 20 unions

across the state endorsed the program, including a couple representing thousands of oil workers, so it cannot be said that there are no sustainable transition projects available to California or that such projects lack the approval of labor unions. The only obstacles in California to a decarbonized future are politicians stuck in “piecemeal approach” mode and the influence of corporate lobbying on climate policies.

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# **The Inflation Reduction Act**

# Should Be Just The Beginning



CJ

*Polychroniou*

*Without more direct intervention on the part of the public sector in combatting the climate crisis, what IRA will produce is a green capitalist industry with profit-making as the overriding concern.*

*The Schumer-Manchin reconciliation bill known as the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA), which is expected to become law after it cleared the Senate on a party line vote and key House Democrats have already signaled that they will vote for it when it moves to the lower chamber of Congress, aims to boost the economy and fight the climate crisis. It will also extend the Affordable Care Act subsidies through 2024, lower a handful of prescription drug prices (for those who are on Medicare), boost IRS enforcement, and require large corporations to pay at least 15 percent of their total profits in taxes.*

This reconciliation bill is a slim-down version of the Build Back Better Act. It's a compromise, and therefore hardly adequate to address the needs of American working-class people and confront the climate challenge. In fact, to call IRA a "historic piece of legislation" is an overstatement. But it is a step in the right direction, especially for a country where corporations and big business run roughshod over the common good.

First, forget inflation, in spite of the title that the bill carries. IRA would have no impact on inflation in 2022 and negligible effect in 2023, according to a report from the [Congressional Budget Office](#).

A major piece of the bill focuses on healthcare. There are some positive aspects in it, but, again, hardly enough to make anything beyond a moderate impact on the well-being of average Americans. It extends Affordable Care Act subsidies for the next three years, lowers somewhat healthcare cost for low-income families, and permits Medicare for the first time in its history to negotiate prices for some prescription drugs. Prescription drugs cost much more in the U.S. (in some instances by as much as over 400%, as in the case of Humira, which is used to

treat many inflammatory conditions in adults) than in other developed countries, and the U.S. remains the only country in the developed world without a universal healthcare system.

As Bernie Sanders charged, "[this bill does nothing to address the systemic dysfunctionality of the American health care system.](#)"

IRA also seeks to address tax fairness and reduce inequality. It claims that it will create a more equitable United States by compelling corporations with more than \$1 billion in profits to pay a 15 percent minimum tax. Conservative democratic senator Kyrsten Sinema, who always sides with the rich and the corporations, first forced the removal of the carried interest tax provision from the bill and then delivered a gift to private equity firms by protecting them from the minimum tax aimed at large corporations.

Forcing corporations making more than \$1 billion in profits pay a minimum corporate tax rate of 15 percent can hardly be considered a major step forward in addressing the issue of inequality. However, the corporate minimum tax in the Inflation Reduction Act has quite different rules from the global minimum tax. It is possible, but not likely, that corporations could end up facing both taxes, and that would indeed be a useful start towards tackling extreme inequality.

Energy and climate are what the Inflation Reduction Act is mostly all about. IRA would raise approximately \$739 billion over 10 years and spend \$433 billion on new investments over a decade, resulting in an overall deficit reduction of roughly \$300 billion. The big winners from this deal are indeed energy and climate as IRA pledges \$369 billion towards energy security and clean energy. The climate and environmental measures included in the bill are expected to reduce carbon emissions by 40 percent below 2005 levels by 2030.

So, let's take a brief look at the energy and climate provisions included in the act.

There are dozens of clean energy provisions in IRA that would accelerate the deployment of clean energy technologies and reduce carbon emissions—all while continuing and even enhancing the reliance on fossil fuels. Indeed, the most striking aspect of the energy and climate provisions in IRA is the undeniably concerted effort on the part of its architects to balance climate protections with the interests of the fossil fuel industry. As such, there is no pathway in IRA towards a transition to a post-fuel economy.

First, there is a plethora of tax credits for energy produced from certain renewable sources as well as for projects designed for the installation of solar and wind facilities located in low-income communities. Direct air capture facilities are also eligible for generous credits provided that they capture at least 1,000 metric tons. Tax credits are also extended to biodiesel and alternative fuels, “green” hydrogen, and to residential and commercial energy efficient buildings.

The act also enhances the tax credit available for certain new clean vehicles, creates new incentives for clean energy investments, and establishes a credit for qualified sustainable transportation fuel.

There is financial assistance, in addition to tax incentives, for renewable energy, as well as for carbon capture systems, for rural and agricultural communities. [Rural America](#) will be the recipient of approximately \$40 billion in clean energy programs and climate change mitigation projects over the next ten years. There is also funding for the National Forest System and for state and private forestry conservation programs.

There are many positive but also negative aspects behind the climate investment initiatives included in IRA. The renewable-energy funding across the board is the foundation building block of a clean energy economy. However, without more direct intervention on the part of the public sector in combatting the climate crisis, what IRA will produce is a green capitalist industry with profit-making as the overriding concern. Worse yet, investing in unproven carbon capture technologies is a sure way to keep the fossil fuel industry in the game. Indeed, IRA provides no pathway to a post-fossil fuel economy and shies away from tackling climate injustice.

As part of its goal to enhance energy protection, which in reality means protecting the long-term interests of the fossil fuel industry, IRA mandates new sales for oil and gas drilling in Alaska and the Gulf of Mexico. It extends the definition of “outer continental shelf” to include land both within the exclusive economy zone of the U.S. and adjacent to U.S. territory, and essentially nullifies President Biden’s 9/8/20 memorandum withdrawing certain areas from leasing.

Currently, there are more than 9,000 approved, but unused, leases for drilling on federal and tribal lands, and IRA is throwing open even more public lands to oil drilling. In addition, IRA restricts the Department of the Interior from issuing a

right-of-way for wind and solar energy development on federal land during the 10-year period after the bill is enacted.

Coal baron Joe Manchin also managed to secure a pledge from Democrats for his support of IRA that there would be no obstacles to the construction and operation of the controversial gas line known as the [Mountain Valley Pipeline](#).

His corruption, as in the case of Sinema, knows no boundaries.

In 2021, the U.S. committed itself to reducing carbon emissions to 50-52 percent below 2005 levels by 2030. IRA expects to cut U.S. greenhouse gas emissions by 40 percent by 2030. Thus, it narrows but does not close the gap with the goal the Biden administration set under the Paris climate agreement. However, it is highly debatable whether the climate provisions included in IRA will actually reduce emissions by 40 percent by 2030.

Providing \$369 billion over 10 years to fight the climate crisis is not enough in itself to reduce carbon emissions by 40 percent by 2030. It all depends on how much private investment in new energy supply infrastructure IRA will encourage.

Economist Robert Pollin of the University of Massachusetts at Amherst estimates that public spending on clean energy through IRA will encourage at least another \$600 billion in private spending, which will bring total public plus private clean energy spending from the IRA to approximately \$100 billion per year, or \$1 trillion over 10 years. In an interview at [Truthout](#), Pollin states the following: “By my own estimates and those by others, for the U.S. to reach the emission reduction targets set out by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC)—i.e., 50 percent CO<sub>2</sub> emissions cut by 2030 and zero emissions by 2050—will require about \$400 billion in today’s economy and an average of \$600 billion per year between now and 2050. So, the total amount of public and private clean energy spending generated by the IRA would deliver, at best, about 25 percent of the necessary funding level.”

And this is supposed to be the best-case scenario.

The Inflation Reduction Act should have been a transformational piece of legislation, but unfortunately it isn’t. It is a step though in the right direction, and clear proof that activism can initiate tangible change.



The struggle continues.

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# Let's Acknowledge Inflation Reduction Act's Significance — And Its Inadequacy



*Robert Pollin*

The Schumer-Manchin reconciliation bill, called the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA), is a massive piece of legislation that aims to boost the economy and fight the climate crisis. It passed the Senate on Sunday, and is expected to quickly pass the House. On the economic front, the bill will reduce the deficit, close critical tax loopholes exploited by big corporations, and create millions of new jobs over a

decade through the implementation of numerous energy and climate measures. The IRA is the most important climate bill in U.S. history. Nonetheless, it is also a bill full of defects, and parts of it will actually make the climate crisis worse, says Robert Pollin, one of the world's leading progressive economists, in this exclusive interview for *Truthout*. Pollin is distinguished professor of economics and codirector of the Political Economy Research Institute at the University of Massachusetts-Amherst. He is the author of numerous books, including *Climate Crisis and the Global Green New Deal: The Political Economy of Saving the Planet* (coauthored with Noam Chomsky), as well as of scores of green economy transition programs for U.S. states (including California, Maine, New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania and West Virginia) and different countries.

*C.J. Polychroniou: The IRA is far less ambitious than what was originally envisioned in the Build Back Better Act, but still regarded as a step in the right direction. If it becomes law, it will address some outstanding concerns about climate, health care and corporate taxes. The agreement would raise approximately \$739 billion over 10 years and spend \$433 billion over a decade, which means it will reduce the deficit. However, the big winners from this deal will be climate and energy as the IRA pledges \$369 billion toward energy security and clean energy. The bill's supporters in Congress state that the climate and environmental measures included in the bill will reduce carbon emissions by 40 percent below 2005 levels by 2030. So, let's start with the climate details in the act. First, is the sum of \$369 billion spent over a decade big enough to address an existential threat like global warming? In fact, will the climate and energy provisions incorporated into the bill, which include the requirement that the Interior Department offers at least 2 million acres a year for offshore oil and gas leases, even achieve the designated emissions-reduction target by 2030?*

*Robert Pollin: The Inflation Reduction Act is the most significant piece of climate legislation ever enacted by the U.S. government. It is also, in itself, not close to sufficient, to move the U.S., much less the global economy, onto a viable climate stabilization path. We need to be 100 percent clear on both points. This is the only way that we can, at once, take maximum advantage of the major resources the IRA will provide to fight the climate emergency while also recognizing the huge areas where the bill accomplishes little to nothing as well as where it actually contributes to worsening the crisis.*

First, on the positive side, it is a big deal for the federal government to provide

roughly \$400 billion over 10 years to fight climate change. To put this into perspective, this is exactly \$400 billion more than what had been on the table only three weeks ago. This level of federal support will also encourage at least another \$600 billion in private spending. The public funds will leverage private investment through, among other specific programs, tax credits for clean energy investments, consumer rebates for electric vehicle and heat pump purchases, loan guarantees that lower risks to banks for clean energy investments, and a national Green Bank underwritten by the federal government. This would bring total public plus private clean energy spending from the IRA to roughly \$1 trillion over 10 years, or about \$100 billion per year.

This is a huge sum of money, but also not nearly enough. Keep in mind that \$100 billion equals about 0.4 percent of current overall economic activity, i.e., GDP. By my [own estimates](#) and those by others, for the U.S. to reach the emission reduction targets set out by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) — i.e., a 50 percent CO<sub>2</sub> emissions cut by 2030 and zero emissions by 2050 — will require about \$400 billion in today's economy and an average of \$600 billion per year between now and 2050. So the total amount of public and private clean energy spending generated by the IRA would deliver, at best, about 25 percent of the necessary funding level. Again, 25 percent is way better than 0 percent. But it is also way worse than 100 percent.

I want to emphasize that this is a best-case scenario. The main reason is because of what Sen. Joe Manchin extracted from his fellow Democrats in exchange for his endorsement. Manchin agreed to support the IRA only if, in return, his fellow Democrats would [support the construction](#) of the 300-mile Mountain Valley natural gas pipeline that would run through West Virginia as well as Virginia.

The pipeline will likely create major environmental damage, including the contamination of rural streams and land erosion. But still worse is the obvious fact that building a new natural gas pipeline only makes economic sense if we are still burning natural gas to produce energy for the next 50 years or so. This is despite the fact that burning natural gas — along with burning oil and coal — to produce energy is, by far, the main cause of climate change. Support for the Mountain Valley pipeline in West Virginia is, unfortunately, fully consistent with the point you mentioned, that the IRA mandates the expansion of oil and gas exploration leases on federal land and water.

How can we possibly reconcile a supposedly transformative piece of climate legislation with building new natural gas pipelines? The only conceivable way to get there is to also support massive-scale deployment of carbon capture technology as a major component of the overall U.S. emissions-reduction program. 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. To date, the general class of carbon capture technologies have not been proven to work at a commercial scale, despite decades of efforts to accomplish this. After all, carbon capture would be the savior for oil, coal and natural gas industries if the technology could be made to work commercially at scale. A major problem with most carbon capture technologies is the prospect for carbon leakages that result through flawed transportation and storage systems. These dangers will only increase to the extent that carbon capture does end up becoming commercialized and operates under an incentive structure in which maintaining safety standards cuts into corporate profits.

Matters become still worse to the extent that the IRA channels big-time funding into carbon capture, as could easily happen. Several of the major programs within the overall bill do not have fully specified mandates, including the Greenhouse Gas Reduction Fund, the Clean Energy Investment and Production Tax Credits, and the Clean Energy Loan Guarantees. When push comes to shove — and, in particular, with oil companies and the likes of Senator Manchin doing the pushing and shoving — big chunks of funding through these programs are likely to be channeled into carbon capture. This would then mean less money for solar and wind — where the money needs to go.

Another fundamental problem with the IRA is the major level of funding that it is slated to provide nuclear energy development. This support is coming at exactly the same time that Russia's invasion of Ukraine has demonstrated, yet again, the unavoidable dangers that result through operating nuclear power plants. In the earliest stages of the war, the Russian military took control of both the inactive Chernobyl nuclear plant as well as the highly active Zaporizhzhia plant, the largest in Europe. As of just last week, 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." There is absolutely [no reason](#) to rely to any significant extent on nuclear energy

when the prospect for disaster is staring us in the face, and when building a high-efficiency renewable-dominant energy infrastructure is a realistic, safe and low-cost alternative.

I need to highlight two other major defects with the IRA's climate program. One is the absence of any just transition support for the working people and communities in the U.S. that are now dependent on the fossil fuel industry. This includes about 2.5 million people throughout the country — about 1.7 percent of the U.S. workforce — employed in the oil, natural gas and coal sectors as well as several ancillary industries, including gas stations and pipeline construction. Implementing just transition policies for these workers and communities — including guaranteed reemployment at equal wages for displaced workers and high levels of clean energy investments in current fossil fuel-dependent regions — can be accomplished at very low costs. I [estimate](#) that, as an average through 2050, the costs would be about \$3 billion per year. That is about 0.5 percent of an adequate overall clean transition program. One possible explanation as to why there is not even a mention of such measures in the IRA is that phasing out fossil fuels is truly not part of its agenda, while carbon capture is right at its center.

The other major hole in the IRA is the total lack of support for a global clean energy transition. The U.S. and other rich countries are mostly responsible for causing the crisis. At the same time, the only way to move onto a viable stabilization path is if all countries stop burning fossil fuels to produce energy and build clean energy-dominant infrastructures. As a matter of simple fairness as well as self-preservation, the rich countries need to deliver the bulk of funding for this global project. The fact that the IRA is silent on this issue means that we have to struggle to deliver the necessary financial support to the global community through other channels. One place to start would be to transfer a significant share of the nearly \$800 billion annual U.S. military budget into a global clean energy investment fund.

We also need to generalize this point. As I said at the outset, the IRA is, at once, the most ambitious climate program ever enacted in the U.S. as well as being not close to adequate relative to the magnitude of the crisis. It is therefore critical that we organize as effectively as possible to use the IRA as a springboard through which we can overcome all of its many major failings. One simple but effective way to accomplish this is to set increasingly stringent fossil fuel consumption phase-out standards at the state and municipal government levels.

This would not necessarily entail any significant government spending. One example would be a requirement for utilities to cut their fossil fuel consumption by, say, 5 percent per year every year, with CEOs facing major personal liability for noncompliance.

*The agreement reached between Schumer and Manchin sets a new corporate minimum tax of 15 percent. Is this supposed to be a new principle of just taxation? Indeed, how does one respond to the claim of orthodox economists that the IRA is just a "tax increase bill?"*

The IRA includes two new corporate tax measures: the 15 percent minimum tax on the domestic profits of large U.S. companies, and a 1 percent tax when corporations buy back their own shares in order to artificially boost their stock prices on Wall Street. Both of these are generally positive developments. The minimum corporate profit tax rate provision is designed to prevent corporations from using accounting tricks to cut their tax burden well below the 21 percent profit tax rate that is currently on the books and frequently avoiding taxes altogether. At least now, even if the accountants have figured out how to avoid the 21 percent standard corporate tax rate, the companies are still stuck with a minimum 15 percent tax bill.

Corporate executives' overall compensation is generally tied to their firms' stock market performance. Boosting share prices artificially through stock buybacks is therefore an easy way for CEOs to give themselves a raise. The 1 percent tax rate on buybacks will certainly not end the practice. But it may encourage CEOs to spend a bit less of their working days worrying about goosing stock prices and a bit more time on operating a company that treats its employees and community well and creates good products.

*The IRA is expected to strengthen the economy and create some new jobs by spurring major investments in renewables, energy storage and advanced grid technologies. You and some of your colleagues at the Political Economy Research Institute at the University of Massachusetts-Amherst have in fact concluded a major report on the employment impact of the Schumer-Manchin agreement, which is drawing lots of attention. Can you highlight the job creation impact that the act is likely to have? Moreover, will all states benefit from the job creation and employment opportunities that it entails?*

We have estimated that the average level of job creation through the combination of public and private spending resulting from the IRA will be about [912,000 jobs](#). Jobs will be generated across all sectors of the economy and in all parts of the country. This is a healthy, but not a massive, expansion within the overall U.S. labor force. It is equal to about 0.5 percent of the overall labor force. We cannot expect any greater impact when the level of spending will be about 0.4 percent of GDP. At the same time, this level of job creation will certainly refute the long-repeated climate deniers' mantra that advancing a viable climate stabilization program has to be a job killer. In fact, even the relatively modest IRA will generate far more jobs than those that would be lost every year through something like a 20-year fossil fuel industry phase out.

We can't yet say that these new jobs will necessarily offer high-quality opportunities that pay decently, offer good benefits and working conditions, and provide opportunities for workers to freely become union members. These are features that workers and organizers will need to fight for as the new wave of IRA investments emerge. The fact that the overall investment program will be heavily subsidized by the federal government means that the government will have the leverage to establish strong labor standards for any firms with their hands in the till for subsidies.

*What about inflation? Will the act help reduce inflation?*

The IRA will not have an impact immediately on inflation. But after a few years, it will help to lower prices through two main channels. The most obvious is by lowering energy prices by substituting cheap renewables for expensive fossil fuel energy. According to the International Renewable Energy Agency, the costs for producing electricity with fossil fuel energy in the advanced economies ranged between 5.5 to 14.8 cents per kilowatt hour as of 2020, with these figures rising in 2021 in the aftermath of the COVID lockdown. By contrast, the average prices for onshore wind and solar photovoltaics were 3.3 and 4.8 cents respectively in 2021. Moreover, the costs of solar and wind power fell sharply between 2010 to 2021, led by the massive 88 percent decline in solar PV. The [average costs](#) for solar and wind should continue to decline still further as advances in technology proceed along with the rapid global expansion of these sectors. What could, nevertheless, wipe out this opportunity to reduce inflationary pressures is if the U.S. does actually proceed with attempting to keep its fossil fuel industry alive through unproven and expensive carbon capture technologies.

The story is similar with nuclear. The U.S. Energy Information Administration [estimates](#) that generating a kilowatt of electricity through nuclear as of 2027 will cost 8.2 cents, more than twice the current figure for onshore wind and nearly double that for solar PV.

The other major way in which the IRA could be anti-inflationary is through the provisions of the bill on health care that we have not been discussing. In particular, under the IRA, the federal government will be empowered to negotiate the prices that the Medicare program pays to private pharmaceutical corporations to purchase prescription drugs. In the U.S. at present, the most widely used prescription drugs cost an average of roughly twice as much as what the exact same drug costs in other high-income countries. This is because, in the other countries, the governments negotiate prices with the pharma corporations, preventing them from extracting monopolistic profits. In the U.S., by contrast, the pharmaceutical companies regularly mark up drug prices far beyond what is needed to cover their costs. This is the main reason they have consistently been [the most profitable industry](#) in the U.S.

Overall, then, the IRA can contribute to reducing inflationary pressures in the U.S. to the extent that it succeeds in fighting the power now exercised by the giant oil and drug companies.

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*Political Economy of Saving the Planet* (with Noam Chomsky and Robert Pollin as primary authors, 2020); *The Precipice: Neoliberalism, the Pandemic, and the Urgent Need for Radical Change* (an anthology of interviews with Noam Chomsky, 2021); and *Economics and the Left: Interviews with Progressive Economists* (2021).

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## 21st-Century US Foreign Policy Is Shaped By Fears Of China's Rise, Chomsky Says



*Noam Chomsky*

Is the increasing influence of China in international affairs a threat to world order? The United States thinks so, and so does Britain, its closest ally. Indeed, the U.S.-China rivalry is likely to dominate world affairs in the 21st century. In this geostrategic game, certain states outside the western security community, such as India, are expected to play a key role in the new stage of imperialism under way. The U.S. is a declining power and can no longer dictate unilaterally; however, as Noam Chomsky underscores in this exclusive interview for *Truthout*, the decline of the U.S. is “mostly from internal blows.” As an imperial power, the U.S. poses a threat to world peace as well as to its own citizens. There is even a radical plan to dismantle whatever is left of U.S. democracy in the event that Trump returns to the White House in 2024. Other Republican winnable dictators

could also enforce the plan. What's next for U.S. imperial power, and its impact on the world stage?

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*C.J. Polychroniou: Noam, western powers are responding to China's rise as a dominant economic and military power with ever-increasing calls in favor of bellicose diplomacy. U.S. General Mark Milley, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, said during a recent trip to the Indo-Pacific that China has become more aggressive in the region and the Biden administration has described it as a "pacing threat." Rishi Sunak, currently the leading candidate to replace outgoing prime minister Boris Johnson, said China is the U.K.'s "biggest threat." Sunak has promised to ban Confucius Institutes, learning centers funded and run by an organization affiliated with the Chinese government, from the U.K. if he becomes the next prime minister. Why is the west so frightened of a prospering China and what does it say about imperialism in the 21st century?*

*Noam Chomsky: It may be useful to take a brief but broader look, first at the record of the fears, then at the geostrategic circumstances of their current manifestations. We are speaking here of the West in a narrow sense, specifically the Anglo-American "special relationship," which since 1945 has been the United States with Britain a junior partner, sometimes reluctant, sometimes eager to serve the master, strikingly in the Blair years.*

The fears are far-reaching. In the case of Russia, they go back to 1917. Secretary of State Robert Lansing warned President Wilson that the Bolsheviks were appealing "to the proletariat of all countries, to the ignorant and mentally deficient, who by their numbers are urged to become masters... a very real

danger in view of the present social unrest throughout the world.”

Lansing’s concerns were reiterated in different circumstances by Secretary of State John Foster Dulles 40 years later, when he lamented that the U.S. is “hopelessly far behind the Soviets in developing controls over the minds and emotions of unsophisticated peoples.” The basic problem, he elaborated, is the Communist “ability to get control of mass movements . . . something we have no capacity to duplicate.... The poor people are the ones they appeal to and they have always wanted to plunder the rich.”

These are recurrent fears of the privileged, in one form or another, throughout history.

Scholarship substantially agrees with Lansing’s concerns. The acknowledged dean of Cold War scholarship, John Lewis Gaddis, traces the Cold War back to 1917, with the Bolshevik challenge “to the very survival of the capitalist order... a profound and potentially far-reaching intervention by the new Soviet government in the internal affairs, not just of the West, but of virtually every country in the world.” The Bolshevik intervention was what Lansing recognized: working people around the world might take note and react, the feared domino effect, a dominant theme in planning. Gaddis goes on to argue that the Western (including U.S.) invasion of Russia was a justified act of self-defense against this intolerable challenge to what is right and just, what is now termed “the rule-based international order” (in which the U.S. sets the rules).

Gaddis was appealing to a concept that the U.S. War Department in 1945 called “logical illogicality,” referring to the postwar plans for the U.S. to take control of most of the world and surround Russia with military force, while denying the adversary any comparable rights. The superficial observer might regard that as illogical, but it has a deeper logic, the War Department recognized — a logic called “imperialism” by the unkind.

The same doctrines of logical illogicality reign today as the U.S. defends itself from Eurasian threats. At the Western border of Eurasia, the U.S. defends itself by expanding to the Russian border the aggressive military alliance it runs, NATO. At the Eastern border, the U.S. defends itself by establishing a ring of “sentinel states” to “encircle” China, armed with high precision weapons aimed at China, backed with huge naval military exercises (RIMPAC) aimed not very subtly

at China. All of this is part of the more extensive efforts at encirclements, jointly with “subimperialist” Australia, which we have [discussed earlier](#), borrowing Clinton Fernandes’s term and analysis. One effect might be to increase the incentive for China to attack Taiwan in order to break out of the encirclement and have open access to the oceans.

Needless to say, there are no reciprocal rights. Logical illogicality.

Always the actions are in “self-defense.” If there was a violent power in history that wasn’t acting in “self-defense,” it would be helpful to be reminded of it.

Fear of China is more visceral, drawing from the deep racist currents that have poisoned American society since its origins. In the 19th century, Chinese people were kidnapped and brought to work as virtual slaves to build railroads as the nation expanded to its “natural borders”; the slur that was applied to them (“coolie”) was an import from Britain, where Chinese workers also served as virtual slave laborers generating Britain’s wealth. Chinese people who tried to settle were subjected to vicious racist attacks. Chinese laborers were banned entry for 10 years in the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act, and Chinese were banned entirely in the racist 1924 immigration act, aimed primarily at Italians and Jews (sending many to gas chambers when entry to the U.S. was denied).

Yellow Peril hysteria was reawakened in the 1950s, after China’s stunning defeat of MacArthur’s army in Korea. The fears resonate often, ranging widely in nature. At one level, Lyndon Johnson warned that without superior air power, unless we stop “them” in Vietnam, “they” will sweep over us and take all “we” have. At another level, when Congress breaks its GOP-imposed logjam to pass legislation to reconstruct collapsing infrastructure and the crucial chip industry, not because the U.S. needs them but to overcome the challenge of China’s development.

There are others who pose imminent threats to our survival. Right now, Russia. The Chair of the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence, Adam Schiff, draws on deeply rooted cultural maladies when he warns that unless we stop them in Ukraine, they’ll be attacking our shores.

There is never a dearth of terrifying enemies, but the “heathen Chinese” have always conjured up special fears.

Let’s turn from understandable paranoia about the poor who want to plunder the

rich to the second topic: world order and imperialism in the 21st century, and the intense U.S.-U.K. geopolitical concerns about an emergent China.

It's useful to recall the experience of our predecessor in global dominance. An island off the coast of Europe, Britain's primary concern was to prevent unification of Europe into a force beyond its control. Similarly, though magnified far beyond, the U.S. and its western hemisphere domains can be regarded as an "island" off the coast of the Eurasian land mass — which is the basis for world control according to the "heartland theory" of Halford Mackinder, a founder of modern geopolitics, whose thoughts are now being revived by global strategists.

Extending the logic of imperial Britain, then, we would expect the U.S. to be seeking to prevent unification of the "heartland" as an independent force, not subject to U.S. domination. The self-defense operations at the western and eastern ends of the heartland also fall into place.

Conflict over heartland unification has been a significant theme in post-WWII history. During the Cold War years, there were some European initiatives to construct a unified Europe incorporating Russia that would be an independent force in world affairs. Such ideas were advanced most prominently by Charles de Gaulle, with echoes in Germany. They were beaten back in favor of the Atlanticist system, NATO-based, largely run from Washington.

Heartland unification took on new prominence with the collapse of the Soviet Union. The idea of a "common European home" from Lisbon to Vladivostok was advanced by Mikhail Gorbachev, who looked forward to transition to social democracy in Russia and its former domains, and to a coequal partnership with the U.S. in creating a world order based on cooperation rather than conflict. These are topics of substantial scholarship, [explored in unusual depth by historian Richard Sakwa](#).

Predictably, the U.S. — the island off the coast of Eurasia — strongly opposed these initiatives. Throughout the Cold War, they were not much of a problem given power relations and prevailing doctrine about the Kremlin conspiracy to conquer the world. The task took new forms with the collapse of the Soviet Union. With some wavering at the margins, the U.S. quickly adopted the policy of "enlargement" of the Atlantic power system, with Russia participating only on subordinate terms. Coequal partnership proposals continued to be put forth

during the Putin years, until quite recently. They were “anathema to those who believe in enduring hegemony of the Atlanticist power system,” Sakwa observes.

Putin’s invasion of Ukraine, after dismissing tentative French and German efforts to avert the tragic crime, have settled the issue, at least for now. For now, Europe has succumbed to the Atlanticist doctrine, even adopting the formal U.S. goal of “weakening Russia” severely, whatever the cost to Ukraine and well beyond.

For now. Without integration, German-based Europe and Russia will very likely decline. Russia, with its enormous natural resources, is likely to continue to drift into the massive China-based Eurasian development project, the Belt-and-Road Initiative (BRI), now expanding to Africa and even Latin America.

The temptation for Europe to join the BRI system, already strong, will likely intensify. The German-based integrated production system in Europe, stretching from the Netherlands to Russia’s former Eastern European satellites, [has become the most successful economic system](#) in the world. It relies heavily on the huge export market and investment opportunities in China, and on Russia’s rich natural resources, even including metals needed for transition to renewable energy. Abandoning all of that, along with access to the expanding global BRI system, will be quite a price to pay for hanging on to Washington’s coattails. Such considerations will not be absent as the world system takes shape in the wake of the COVID crisis and Russia’s invasion of Ukraine.

The question of Eurasian integration in a common European home falls within a more general framework, which cannot be forgotten for a moment. Either the great powers will cooperate to face ominous global crises or they will march to oblivion together.

With the bitter antagonisms of today, it may seem impossible to imagine such cooperation. But it need not be an unattainable idea. In 1945 it seemed no less impossible to imagine that France, Germany, England, and smaller European powers could cooperate in a Western Europe without borders and with some common institutions. They are not without internal problems, and Britain has recently pulled out, dooming itself to becoming a probably fading U.S. satellite. Nonetheless, it is a stunning reversal of centuries of savage mutual destruction, peaking in the 20th century.

Taking note of that, Sakwa writes, “What for one generation is a sad delusion, for

another becomes a realistic and necessary project." A project that is essential if a livable world is to emerge from today's chaos and violence.

*China-Russia ties have deepened after Russia's invasion of Ukraine, though there are probably limits to the partnership. In any case, is there something else in this strategic relationship between two autocratic nations besides the concern for limiting U.S. power and influence? And to what extent could the U.S. take advantage of potential strains and divisions in the Sino-Russian relationship as it did during the Cold War era?*

The record during the Cold War is instructive. Even when Russia and China were close to war, the U.S. kept insisting on the immense threat posed by the imagined "Sino-Soviet alliance." Something similar was true of North Vietnam. Its leaders recognized that their real enemy was China: the U.S. could devastate Vietnam with its incomparable means of violence, but it would go away. China would always be there, a permanent threat. U.S. planners refused to hear.

Kissinger's diplomacy belatedly recognized the facts and exploited China-Russia conflicts. I don't think that carries lessons for today. Circumstances are very different.

Putin and associates appear to have visions of a Russian sphere occupying an independent place between the Atlanticist and China-based global systems. That does not seem very likely to transpire. More likely China will accept Russia as a subordinate, providing raw materials, advanced weapons, scientific talent, maybe more.

The Atlanticist powers along with their Asian subimperial associates are becoming isolated in the world scene. The Global South is mostly standing aloof, not joining in sanctions against Russia or breaking commercial and other relations. Though it has serious internal problems, China keeps moving ahead with its vast development, investment, loan programs abroad and technological progress at home. It is far in the lead in the fast-growing sustainable energy sector and has just surprised the world by creating a super-advanced chip, still probably years short of production but a central part of the modern advanced economy.

There are many uncertainties, but it seems a fair guess that these tendencies will persist. If there is a break, it may be unwillingness of German-based Europe to

continue to suffer the effects of subordination in the Atlanticist system. The advantages of a common European home may well become increasingly tempting, with major consequences for world order.

*India is being wooed by China, Russia and the U.S. Does India have anything to worry about in a strong Sino-Russian partnership? Can the Quad rely on India for full cooperation in connection with its mission and objectives in the Indo-Pacific region?*

Before discussing India's foreign policy concerns, let's not forget some stark facts. South Asia is facing major catastrophe. Summer heat is already at a level that is barely survivable for the vast poor majority, and much worse is coming. India and Pakistan must cooperate on this and related crises, like management of dwindling water resources. Instead, each is devoting scarce resources to unwinnable wars, for Pakistan an intolerable burden.

Both states have severe internal problems. In India, PM Modi has been leading an effort to destroy India's secular democracy, which, with all its flaws, is still one of the great achievements of the post-colonial era. His program is aimed at creating a racist Hindu ethnocracy. He is a natural associate in the growing alliance of states with similar characteristics: Hungary along with Israel and its Abraham Accord partners, closely linked with the core sectors of the GOP. That's aside from the brutal repression of Kashmir, reportedly the most militarized territory in the world and the scene of harsh repression. The occupation of foreign territory again qualifies him for association with the Abraham accords, which bring together the other two cases of criminal annexation and occupation, Israel and Morocco.

All of that is part of the background for addressing the serious questions of India's international relations.

India is engaged in a difficult balancing act. Russia remains [by far its major source of arms](#). It is engaged in a long and worsening border dispute with China. It therefore must eye with concern a deepening Russia-China alliance. The U.S.-run Quad (U.S.-Japan-Australia-India) is intended to be a core part of the encirclement of China, but India is a reluctant partner, unwilling to fully adopt the subimperial role. Unlike the other members of the Quad, it joins the rest of the Global South in refusing to become embroiled in what they see as a U.S.-Russia



proxy war in Ukraine. India cannot however move too far in alienating the U.S., which is also a natural ally, particularly so in the framework of the emerging GOP-centered alliance of reactionary states.

Altogether, a complex situation, even overlooking the enormous internal problems facing South Asia.

*The U.S. is a country in political and social turmoil and possibly in the midst of a historic transition. Its influence in the world has been weakening in recent years and its institutions are under severe attack from dark and reactionary forces. Indeed, with U.S. democracy in sharp decline, there is even talk of a radical plan for the restructuring of the federal government in the event that Donald Trump returns to power in 2024. To what extent has imperial overstretch contributed to the decline of the domestic society, and to what degree can domestic politics have an effect on foreign policy decision-making? In either case, is a declining U.S. less or more likely to represent a threat to global peace and security?*

There has been much talk of U.S. decline for decades. There is some truth to it. The peak of U.S. power, with no historical parallel, was in 1945. That obviously couldn't last and has been declining since, though by some measures U.S. power remains about as it was then, as Sean Kenji Starrs shows in [his important studies of control of wealth by transnationals](#).

There is a great deal to say about this general topic, discussed elsewhere. But keeping to the narrower question raised, recent U.S. decline is mostly from internal blows. And it is severe. One crucial measure is mortality. The headline of one recent study reads: "[America Was in an Early-Death Crisis Long Before COVID](#)." The study goes on to show that "Even before the pandemic began, more people here were dying at younger ages than in comparably wealthy nations." The data are startling, going well beyond even the "deaths of despair" phenomenon among working-age white Americans that has led to increasing mortality, something unheard of apart from war and pestilence. That is only one striking indication of how the country has been falling apart socioeconomically and politically since the neoliberal assault took shape with Reagan-Bush, Clinton, and their successors.

The "radical plan" to undermine the remnants of American democracy was announced a few days before the November election, and quickly forgotten in the

ensuing turmoil. [It was revealed only recently in an Axios investigation.](#) The basic idea is to reverse the programs since the 19th century to create an apolitical civil service, an essential foundation for a functioning democracy. Trump issued an executive order giving the president (intended to be him, or maybe more accurately Him) the authority to fill the top ranks of the civil service with loyalists, a step towards the fascist ideal of a powerful party with a Maximal Leader that controls the society. Biden reversed the order. Congressional Democrats are seeking to pass legislation to bar such a direct attack on democracy, but Republicans are unlikely to go along, anticipating that their many current initiatives to establish their permanent rule as a minority party will bear fruit. The reactionary Roberts Court might well approve.

More may be in store. The Court decided to take up an outlandish case, [Moore v. Harper](#), which, if the Court approves, would permit state legislatures, mostly Republican because of well-known GOP structural advantages, to pick electors who reject the popular vote and keep to party loyalty. This “independent state legislature theory” does have some constitutional basis but has been considered so outrageous that it has been dismissed — until now, as the GOP hurtles forward in its campaign to hold on to power no matter what the irrelevant population wants.

It doesn't seem to me that the GOP campaign to undermine democracy results from imperial overstretch. [There's a good deal of valuable scholarship](#) about its nature and roots, which seem to lie elsewhere, primarily in search for power.

It's not clear what the impact would be on foreign policy. Trump himself is a loose cannon, with no clear idea in his head apart from ME! He also has a penchant for wrecking whatever anyone else has helped construct — while always adhering very closely to the primary principle: Enrich the super-rich and corporate power, at least that part that doesn't veer to some criticism of his august majesty. His GOP competitors are in such awe and fear of his power over the mass voting base that they say very little.

The general implications for global peace and security seem clear enough. Trump's triumphs in this domain were to greatly enhance the two major threats to survival of organized human society: environmental destruction and nuclear war. Neither were spared his wrecking ball. He pulled out of the Paris agreements on impending climate catastrophe, and did what he could to eliminate regulations

that somewhat mitigate the effects on Americans. He carried forward the GOP program (started by G.W. Bush) to dismantle the arms control regime that has been laboriously constructed to reduce the threat of terminal nuclear war. He also wrecked the Joint Agreement with Iran on nuclear policy (JCPOA), violating the UN Security Council endorsement of the Agreement, again enhancing global threats.

What he might do on particular issues is anyone's guess. Perhaps what he had just heard on *Fox News*.

The idea that the future of the world might soon again be in such hands almost surpasses belief.

There's no shortage of vital tasks ahead.

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