

We Can't Avoid Climate Breakdown Without Reducing Growth, Leading Economist Says



Herman Daly - Photo: Youtube.com

The current economic system is at the heart of the climate breakdown, argues Herman Daly, a leading expert in the field of ecological economics who for many decades has been at the forefront of the struggle to redirect economics toward environmental sustainability. For his contributions to economics and the environment, Daly has received numerous prestigious awards, including Sweden's Honorary Right Livelihood Award, the Heineken Prize for Environmental Science awarded by the Royal Netherlands Academy for Arts and Sciences, the Leontief Prize for contributions to economic thought, and the Medal of the Presidency of the Italian Republic. In this exclusive interview for *Truthout*, Daly — who is now professor emeritus at the University of Maryland School of Public Policy and who once served as a senior economist at the World Bank — explains why the current economic system is destroying the environment and outlines the policy steps that the world must take in order to achieve a sustainable future.

C.J. Polychroniou: You have been arguing for many years now that the present economic system, formed around the principles of neoclassical economics, ignores planetary limits and, as such, it is destroying the fabric of the ecology on Earth and posing an existential threat to humanity. However, it is only rather recently that this message has been making inroads into the wider public due to the increasing awareness of the link between fossil fuels and the climate crisis. Can you briefly describe the way the current economic system impacts on the global

ecosystem and is responsible for the climate crisis?

Herman Daly: Today's economy impacts our environment in the same way that a size 12 foot impacts a size 10 shoe — it stretches the shoe out of shape while painfully squeezing the foot. The ecological-economic term for this is “overshoot,” consisting of excessive *takeover* of land capable of supporting the capture of the current flow of solar energy by photosynthesis, and excessive *drawdown* of fossil fuels (the stored stock of the solar energy of Paleolithic summers), as well as other mineral deposits. It is these physical resources that human labor transforms into the psychic experience of the enjoyment of life, and into physical waste. The rate of transformation is excessive if it exceeds the rate of regeneration of renewable resources, the absorptive capacity of the environment for wastes, or the rate of improvement of resource-saving technologies.

Our current excessive rate of transformation of resources into wastes, the “metabolic throughput,” is driven by the excessive scale of population times the excessive scale of per capita resource consumption, relative to the finite and entropically constrained biosphere in which we live. Climate change is only one symptom of overshoot, although the major one. Other symptoms of overshoot include biodiversity loss, disruption of the biosphere with novel substances (tetraethyl lead, endocrine disruptors, radioactive materials, etc.) with which the biosphere has had no evolutionary experience, plus increasing inequality and poverty, sometimes resulting in violence.

In spite of all the evidence about the catastrophic effects of burning fossil fuels on the climate, the world systematically continues to emit carbon emissions into the atmosphere. Why is it so hard to come up with a reasonable policy that limits significantly the use of fossil fuels?

Because fossil fuels concentrate so much energy in such a small and convenient form compared to alternatives. Also, fossil fuels are collected from underground, and unlike the energy alternatives of wood or fodder for draft animals, do not compete with agricultural land surface for human food. Given the enormous stocks of fossil fuels, we were able for many years to live off of past accumulated “capital” rather than current solar “income.” This enabled the excessive scale of the human economy, the overshoot that is now coming to a forced end thanks to the combined costs of depletion and pollution that we could ignore in the empty world before we filled it with goods, “bads” and people.

We could and should transition to renewable resources, but that will require a reduction in the scale of the human economy to a smaller level that could be maintained more or less in a steady state. Renewable resources become nonrenewable if exploited beyond sustainable yield. Growthist values would have to be replaced by an ethic of sufficiency, sharing and qualitative development rather than quantitative growth. The fossil fuel industry strenuously resists this change in an effort to hold on to their enormous resource rents and monopoly profits. Transition to renewable energy should be encouraged, but there is a lot of unfounded optimism that renewables will be cheap and plentiful enough to replace fossil fuels without a reduction in the scale of the economy, or even in its rate of growth. The need to reduce the human scale is primary. Short of that, we can and should increase allocative efficiency by internalizing external costs, and improve distributive fairness by redistribution. But unless we also reduce the scale of the macroeconomy to a sustainable level, we will just be making the best of an ever-worsening situation, given that growth itself has become uneconomic.

The scale of the economy is the product of population times per capita resource consumption. A lot of ideological ink is wasted arguing over whether it is population increase or per capita consumption increase that is responsible for excessive scale. That is a bit like arguing whether it is length or width that most determines the area of a rectangle. In my lifetime, world population has quadrupled (from 2 to 8 billion), while [highly variable and unequal] per capita consumption has grown even more, perhaps nine-fold depending on how measured. Neither factor can be neglected.

You have introduced the concept of uneconomic growth to indicate that “growth is uneconomic when it increases environmental and social costs by more than it increases production benefits.” Indeed, you have rejected the idea that economic growth is a good measure of human well-being, and, in contrast, you call for a transition to a steady-state economy.

Growth was economic when the world was empty of us and our stuff. Now it is full, and further growth of our economy into the finite biosphere causes increasing marginal costs of preempted life support services in order to satisfy decreasing marginal benefits of trivial consumption that has to be aggressively advertised to be sold. Growth in rich countries now costs more than it is worth, it is uneconomic, even while growth in poor countries remains economic until they have reached a similar level of sufficiency. The poor cannot attain sufficiency

unless the rich make ecological room for them.

First, what are the policies suggested by steady-state economics? Second, is a steady-state economy a green economy? And, third, how does a steady-state economy balance conservation with growing human needs?

Ten policies for moving toward a steady-state economy are listed below. Many could be adopted independently and gradually, although they cohere in the sense that some compensate for the shortcomings of others. Of course, the question of the desired level of steady-state economy is crucial, and local, regional and global ecological limits must be considered in fashioning effective policies. Ten is an arbitrary number in order to be specific and focused. The reader is invited to add, subtract or consolidate.

Developing Cap-Auction-Trade systems for basic resources (especially fossil fuels): Set caps for basic natural resources according to three key rules: (1) renewable resources should not be depleted faster than they regenerate; (2) nonrenewable resources should not be depleted faster than renewable substitutes are developed; and (3) wastes from all resource use should not be returned to the ecosystem faster than they can be absorbed and reconstituted by natural systems. This approach achieves sustainable scale and market efficiency, avoids the [Jevons rebound effect](#) whereby increased resource efficiency induces greater use of the resource, and raises auction revenue for progressive redistribution.

Tax shifting: Shift the tax base from “value added” (labor and capital) to that to which value is added, namely natural resource throughput, which has become the limiting factor. Such taxes will raise the price of the limiting factor, improving allocative efficiency and inducing resource-saving technology, as well as providing government revenue.

Limiting the range of inequality: Establish minimum and maximum income limits, maintaining differences large enough to preserve incentives, but small enough to suppress the plutocratic tendencies of market economies which have become extreme. Also remove rival goods and services from the open-access commons (e.g., atmospheric waste absorption) and tax them for the public benefit, while freeing non-rival goods (e.g., knowledge and information) from the artificial scarcity needed to make them fit the price system. That is, stop treating the scarce as if it were free, and stop treating the free as if it were scarce.

Reforming the banking sector: Move from a fractional reserve banking system to 100 percent reserve requirements on demand deposits. Money would no longer be mainly interest-bearing debt created by private banks, but non-interest-bearing government debt issued by the Treasury. Every dollar loaned for investment would be a dollar previously saved by someone else, restoring the classical balance between investment and abstinence from consumption, and dampening boom and bust cycles, as well as inflationary tendencies.

Managing international trade for the public good: Move from free trade and free capital mobility to balanced and regulated international trade. While the interdependence of national economies is inevitable, their integration into one global economy is not. Free trade undercuts domestic cost-internalization policies, while also encouraging cheap-labor policies, leading to a competitive race to the bottom by underpricing resources and labor. Free capital mobility also invalidates the basic comparative advantage argument for free trade in goods.

Expanding leisure time: Reduce conventional work time in favor of part-time work, personal work and leisure, thereby embracing well-being as a core metric of prosperity while reducing the drive for limitless production. From a welfare perspective, in our current society the freedom to choose between the basic alternatives of work time and leisure time is highly restricted, while the freedom to choose between a thousand brands of breakfast cereal is guaranteed.

Stabilizing population: Strive toward a balance in which births plus in-migrants equals deaths plus out-migrants, and in which every birth is a wanted birth, and every immigrant has legal documentation.

Reforming national accounts: Separate GDP into a cost account and a benefits account so that throughput growth can be stopped when rising marginal costs equal falling marginal benefits and further growth becomes uneconomic. Accurately measuring costs and benefits is difficult, but even inaccurate measures and comparisons makes a lot more sense than simply conflating them under the rubric of "economic activity."

Restoring full employment: Restore the U.S. Full Employment Act of 1945 and its equivalent in other nations in order to make full employment once again the end, and economic growth the temporary means. Un/under-employment is the price we pay for growth from automation, off-shoring, deregulated trade and a cheap-labor immigration policy. Under steady-state conditions, productivity improvements

would lead to expanded leisure time rather than unemployment.

Advancing just global governance: Seek world community as a federation of national communities, not the dissolution of nations into a single “world without borders.” Globalization by free trade, free capital mobility and [mass crisis-driven] migration dissolves national community, leaving nothing to federate. Such globalization is individualism writ large — a post-national corporate feudalism in a global commons. Instead, strengthen the original Bretton Woods vision of interdependent national economies, and resist the World Trade Organization vision of a single integrated global economy. Respect the principle of subsidiarity: although climate change and arms control require global institutions, basic law enforcement and infrastructure maintenance remain local issues. Focus our limited capacity for global cooperation on what truly demands it.

What practical steps need to be taken to make the transition to a steady-state economy, and what role do you see activism play in helping us make the transition to a sustainable future?

Good policies based on sound scientific and moral understanding are necessary but not sufficient. Passionate activism in support of the policies is also necessary, but insufficient. We need both — both mind and spirit, both intellectual understanding and moral inspiration — if we are to sustain with justice the miraculous world we have inherited, and which is now under very serious threat of self-destruction.

This interview has been lightly edited for clarity.

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: US Government's Nonresponse To Climate Crisis Has Historical Precedent



Noam Chomsky

Coal baron Sen. Joe Manchin's decision to block his own party's clean energy program represents a huge setback in the fight against climate breakdown. It is even more dramatic considering that the U.S. is the only major economy in the world without a national climate policy. Of course, this sad state of affairs is not merely due to the likes of Manchin, but to the overall reactionary nature of the country's political and economic landscape, as Noam Chomsky highlights in this exclusive interview for *Truthout*. Indeed, the dark forces at work in the contemporary United States are so powerful that they can stifle reform even when

the future of the planet is at stake. But Chomsky argues that, as in the past, organized activism — engagement on the ground — can offer a way out even from the most exceedingly onerous conditions.

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 Environment and Social Justice at the University of Arizona. One of the worlds 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); *The Precipice: Neoliberalism, the Pandemic and the Urgent Need for Social Change* (with C. J. Polychroniou; Haymarket Books, 2021).

C.J. Polychroniou: Noam, the United States, by all accounts, is doing a horrendous job at tackling the climate crisis. The Environmental Performance Index, developed by Yale and Columbia universities, ranks the U.S. [43rd among 180 nations](#) on performance indicators covering climate change and environmental health, and ecosystem vitality. In fact, the U.S. is the only major economy without a national climate change policy, and Biden's push for a clean energy program is all but dead, thanks to the determination of a single senator to protect his own portfolio investment over the future of the planet. On top of that, the Supreme Court has restricted the EPA's authority to regulate greenhouse gas emissions. Clearly, then, the U.S. is not going to meet the target of achieving a 50-52 percent reduction from 2005 levels of greenhouse gas emissions in 2030. So, the question of paramount importance, in my own humble view, is this: Why is the U.S. so uniquely bad in confronting the climate crisis? There has got to be more to the story besides the influence of the fossil fuel industry, no?

Noam Chomsky: A lot more. Some indications about what is underway were given in the Supreme Court EPA decision. In the first place, there was no reason at all for the court to take up this case, which had to do with a 2015 proposal that was never implemented and is not in force. Presumably the court went out of its way to select the case as part of a long-term campaign to undermine the "administrative state" — that is, to undermine public capacity to restrict rapacious and in this case destructive private power. Or to put it more vividly, the

capacity to restrict what Adam Smith called the “Vile Maxim”: “All for ourselves and nothing for other people,” the maxim that seems to guide “the masters of mankind ... in every age of the world.”

In his age, the masters were the merchants and manufacturers of England; in ours, the private institutions that have become increasingly concentrated and obscenely wealthy during the neoliberal assault against the global population. The fossil fuel companies are among them, but others in the economic stratosphere will be beneficiaries of dismantling of the administrative state, a substantial intensification of the neoliberal class war. That’s what we are likely to see in the days ahead if the GOP, with its extreme subordination to private wealth and corporate power, extends its already substantial hold over the society.

It will be a short-term victory, however. There are good reasons why in past years the business world regularly called for regulation and other forms of state intervention to protect itself from the ravages of uncontrolled markets. The not-very-hidden principle underlying the Vile Maxim is that you, the “unpeople” of the world, are to be thrown into the market to find some way to survive. We, the masters, demand and receive ample protection from the nanny state.

The need for a “visible hand” is vastly more urgent now as the world hurtles towards destruction of organized human life, with the narrow window for survival being closed by the masters and their servants in the political system, basking in the applause of the most enthusiastic [proponents of the Vile Maxim](#).

That leaves unanswered the deeper question: Why is the U.S. so “uniquely bad”? It hasn’t always been so. That’s important to remember. What is happening today is chillingly reminiscent of the 1930s, when the global state capitalist system was collapsing, with many “morbid symptoms.” Gramsci’s phrase, writing in Mussolini’s prison cells. Then the U.S. was a beacon of hope. While Europe was descending into fascist darkness, the U.S. was paving the way to social democracy under the impact of a revived and militant labor movement, with a sympathetic administration.

To be sure, much of the business world was strenuously opposed to these developments, biding its time for the opportunity to restore the business rule that has been unusually strong in the U.S., for historical reasons that we have discussed before. World War II put the conflicts in the background. When the war

ended, the campaign to dismantle social democratic heresies was undertaken with vigor, but didn't become triumphant until the neoliberal years, aided by neoliberal ideologues fresh from their service in Pinochet's vicious dictatorship.

The fate of Biden's energy program carries lessons as well. While nowhere near sufficient, the program was a long step beyond anything that preceded, as a result of major activist campaigns and the Sanders movement. The final blow was indeed delivered by coal baron Joe Manchin, who had been chipping away at the program steadily and finally declared that he'd accept nothing meaningful.

Manchin gave reasons: his concern over the deficit and inflation. Hardly credible. On the deficit, one way to address it is by reversing the radically regressive tax cuts of the neoliberal years, culminating in Trump's one legislative achievement: the [Donor Relief Act of 2017](#), as Joseph Stiglitz called it, a huge gift to the very rich and corporate sector, stabbing everyone else in the back. For the GOP, that is a red line that can't be touched (along with funding the IRS to enable it catch wealthy tax cheats). Manchin goes along. No taxes on the rich. We have to preserve one of the great achievements of the neoliberal programs: For the first time in a century, billionaires pay taxes at a lower rate than workers.

What about inflation? There's no credible argument that relates Biden's climate program to the worldwide inflation. And if Manchin had concerns about this, he'd be calling for a windfall tax on corporate profits, cutting the bloated Pentagon budget, reversing the sharply regressive tax changes of the neoliberal years, and lots more.

Most Democrats are deeply dissatisfied with Biden's overall approach to the climate crisis, according to a Pew Research Center [report](#) released just last week. This is especially so among young Americans, which leaves room for hoping that the course of the country can change in the near future. In any case, couldn't the case be made that the Democrats' sweeping plan to tackle the climate crisis was destined to fail if they tried to accomplish this through backroom deals rather than taking the cause directly to people and communities across the land?

Biden is unfairly blamed for this and other failures of his legislative program. The prime reason for the failure is the Mitch McConnell strategy: Block anything that might help the country, blame the harsh outcomes on the Democrats, retake power and intensify the harm for the population while enriching still more the

constituency that counts. It works.

A popular-based party committed to the common good would have organized throughout the country, at the grassroots. That's not the modern Democratic Party. Would it have made any difference? It's hard to say. Could it, for example, have touched the Republican voting base, now in thrall to their denialist leadership and the divine Trump? Recall the recent polls that show that given a choice of 29 issues of concern for the coming election, [moderate Republicans picked climate change as 28th](#), the rest 29th. That's not easy to break through.

Not easy, but not necessarily impossible. It's useful to recall the Yellow Vest slogan: You privileged people are worried about the end of the world, we're worried about the end of the month. When people are concerned about how to survive in their precarious lives, there's not much use telling them that scientists, who they distrust anyway, are predicting dire consequences down the road.

Certainly, that message should never be suppressed. People care about their grandchildren. But it should be accompanied by showing how you can get a better life and better jobs right now by shifting from destruction of the environment that sustains life to creating a better one. Right now. I can refer again to Bob Pollin's outstanding work, both scrupulous analysis and direct engagement on the ground.

President Joe Biden said he will use his presidential powers to tackle the climate emergency. Every president since Washington has used executive powers in various ways, but it is unclear what Biden has in mind with regard to climate policy. For instance, he can issue an executive order power to stop approvals of all new fossil fuel infrastructure projects and ban federal fossil fuel leasing and drilling. Yet, he has been pushing all along for more oil production and approved more permits for oil and gas leasing on federal lands in 2021 than Trump did in the first year of his presidency. So, whom is he kidding when he talks about using the executive order power to tackle the climate emergency?

On approving more production and permits, there is an excuse: It was ordered by the right-wing judiciary. Whether the excuse is valid or a pretext, one can debate. The reaction to Russia's invasion of Ukraine should move the minute hand of the Doomsday Clock even closer to midnight by reversing the limited efforts to move toward sustainable energy. Again, one can debate to what extent that choice was

forced. The range of executive orders is limited, and the court might again resort to its “major questions” doctrine to accelerate the race to catastrophe, as it did in *West Virginia v. EPA*.

There is one conclusion that we can draw with fair confidence. Unless a mass popular movement develops that is powerful enough to break through the many barriers, humanity is facing a bitter fate.

The Pew Research Center report cited earlier reveals that an overwhelming majority of America favors planting a trillion trees to absorb carbon emissions and providing a tax credit to businesses for developing technology to capture and store carbon emissions. This confirms similar public views on climate policy captured by Pew surveys in past years, which seems to indicate that the vision of the Green New Deal has yet to make inroads into mainstream America. If this is the case, what has gone wrong? And what does it say about the prospect of implementing a Global Green New Deal, which was first launched by the United Nations Environmental Project in 2009?

The two favored policies have a common feature: no reduction in fossil fuel use — or reduction in profits for the fossil fuel conglomerate (the producers, the banks, the corporations otherwise involved in poisoning the atmosphere). The much harder message to get across is that we have to make serious moves right now to face the looming challenge, which is right in front of our eyes these scorching days. The longer we delay, the more forbidding the obstacles, the greater the cost and suffering. We can see what’s gone wrong. There’s no secret about how to steer the Titanic away from the icebergs. There’s still time.

I’ll reiterate something so obvious it shouldn’t even have to be articulated. This must be a common effort, everywhere. Crucially, that means a common effort of the great powers, hard as this may be to conceive at the moment. It means concern for the most miserable and tortured victims, who are not responsible for the crisis that has been created by the rich in the rich societies but will be punished more severely than anyone else. It means concern for the species that enrich the earth and are being destroyed by our foolishness and cruel disregard for what we are doing to our common home.

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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).

Op de Dam



Zaterdag toch maar even gekeken bij die demonstratie op de Dam. Voor een opknapbeurt is het Nationale Monument ingepakt. Hopelijk zijn de oren goed afgeplakt zodat de onvervalste retoriek van de nieuwe bruinhemden en aanhang, de complotlandwacht, aan het Monument is voorbijgegaan.

Aldus mijn tachtigjarige buurman vanochtend in een lange e-mail.

The Future Of The Planet Is In Our Hands—Effective Activism Is Essential



CJ

Polychroniou

Building long-term progressive power is key to bringing into force a comprehensive climate change policy

The United States is a global outlier on multiple fronts. It is the only country in the developed world without a universal healthcare system. It ranks number one in firearms per capita and has the second highest firearm homicide rate in the world. The U.S. is also a childcare outlier (developed countries contribute an average of \$14000 on childcare for 2 and under, compared with \$400 in the U.S.) and now a global outlier on abortion rights.

The U.S. is also doing a horrendous job when it comes to climate and the environment. In the 2022 [Environmental Performance Index](#) (EPI), which uses 40 performance indicators and ranks 180 countries “on their national efforts to protect environmental health, enhance ecosystem vitality, and mitigate climate change,” the U.S. is ranked 43rd, behind shining democracies like Bulgaria, Hungary, North Macedonia, and the United Arab Emirates.

Indeed, speaking of the U.S. as a global outlier, the country is also the only major economy in the world without a national climate policy. So, what if it is the biggest carbon emitter in history and the climate crisis represents one of the biggest existential threats facing humanity? In a political system where the interests of the rich and powerful take precedence over the common good, it should not be surprising that the planetary environment is treated as an afterthought. The forces of reaction have no interest in protecting the planet for

future generations. West Virginia Senator Joe Manchin may be the villain of the day, the monster of the week, but the perpetual problem in the U.S. is the dark forces that shape the nation's economic, political, and cultural landscape and have the ability, through support of the likes such as Manchin, to stifle reform even when humanity is close to the edge and the future of this planet is at stake.

So, what can be done to turn the situation around? Surely, climate organizers have been thinking long and hard about how to create and maintain strong momentum on climate change action. Periodic climate protests and acts of civil disobedience may raise public support for climate action, but surely much more is needed in a country like the United States where change comes very slowly, and the views of average citizens have little or no impact on public policy.

Building long-term progressive power is key to bringing into force a comprehensive climate change policy. The Sunrise Movement, probably the primary organizer of climate activism in the U.S., came to the realization of the importance of political power and changed its strategy accordingly. In a recent phone conversation, Sunrise national spokesperson John Paul Mejia told me that the organization now focuses on three pillars of change: (1) People Power, which is essentially engaging and training young people to become organizers and using the collective voice of people to demand climate action; (2) Political Power, which is basically influencing policymaking by endorsing progressive candidates running for office and helping them get elected; and (3) People's Alignment, which is the task of creating a "New Common Sense" in the fight against global warming by promoting the Green New Deal project through the development of strong relationships with labor, climate, and indigenous organizations.

This is an ambitious undertaking on the part of a grassroots youth organization that was created just six years ago. Of course, it's hard to judge how influential the organization has been so far in radically changing public opinion in the U.S. about the need for climate action, and, more specifically, from steering the debate about climate change away from "pathetic incrementalism," in the words of its co-founder Varshini Prakash, to a growing demand for a radical transformation of the existing economic system.

The truth of the matter is that the public in the U.S. continues, amazingly enough, to treat the climate crisis as a rather trivial issue. For instance, in the recently released study of public opinion on major issues by the [Yale University Program](#)

[on Climate Change Communication](#), out of 29 major issues posed to subjects, “registered voters overall indicated that global warming is the 24th most highly ranked voting issue.”

One would be hard pressed to identify more depressing news coming out of mainstream America than what is captured in the above-mentioned study. “It is only the most important issue that has ever arisen in human history alongside nuclear weapons,” [Noam Chomsky](#) quipped in a recent interview.

Moreover, ditching incrementalism in favor of an all-or-nothing attitude is hardly common sense, and surely bad politics. When Sunrise Movement labelled last fall’s bipartisanship infrastructure bill the “Exxon Plan,” it may have scored points with some activists, but it is highly doubtful that it made inroads with average voters. Moreover, in a capitalist environment, securing concessions from those that hold the reins of political and economic power is no small matter.

In addition, one has to wonder to what extent engagement with political and ideological issues beyond the climate crisis, such as the Palestinian cause and defunding the police, is helping the cause of making the transition to a post-fossil fuel economy.

Be that as it may, the Sunrise Movement’s new strategic orientation is a major step in the struggle to create a mass movement and alter the balance of political power. Working closely with local hubs and facilitating community-led climate action while offering support at the same time to candidates willing to fight for the Green New Deal in the corridors of power is the mark of an activist organization coming of age.

Climate action has suffered a huge setback after coal baron Joe Manchin’s decision to oppose legislation that could have been a turning point for tackling global warming. As such, the U.S. remains a country without a federal climate policy, but all is not yet lost. To paraphrase Noam Chomsky, human agency is not finished.

The struggle against the forces of reaction continues, and our only hope for a sustainable future lies with organized and effective activism.

Source:

<https://www.commondreams.org/views/2022/07/19/future-planet-our-hands-effecti>

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Noam Chomsky: Biden's Middle East Trip Contains Echoes Of Trump's Policies



Noam Chomsky

After 18 months in office, President Joe Biden decided to pay a visit to the Middle East region. Oil is most likely what is dragging him back to the Middle East, and why for months now he had been warming up to Saudi Arabia, despite having said as a presidential candidate that he would make the Saudis “pay the price, and make them in fact the pariah that they are,” while saying that there was “very little social redeeming value in the present government in Saudi Arabia.”

As Noam Chomsky notes in this exclusive interview for *Truthout*, Biden is carrying on a U.S. tradition: Relations with Saudi Arabia “have always proceeded amicably, undisturbed by its horrifying record of human rights abuses, which persists.” Security also likely figures in the equation of Biden’s trip, particularly with regard to Israel. He will also visit the West Bank and meet with Palestinian leaders, but it’s hard to say what he hopes to accomplish there. As Chomsky points out, “Palestinian hopes lie elsewhere.”

Chomsky has been, for decades, one of the most astute analysts of Middle Eastern politics and a staunch supporter of Palestinian rights. Among his many books on the Middle East are *Fateful Triangle: The United States, Israel, and the Palestinians*; *Middle East Illusions*; *Perilous Power: The Middle East and U.S. Foreign Policy* (with Gilbert Achcar); *On Palestine* (with Ilan Pappé); and *Gaza in Crisis* (with Ilan Pappé). 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.

C.J. Polychroniou: U.S. foreign policy under Joe Biden is barely distinguishable from that of Trump’s, as you [pointed out](#) just a few months after Biden took office. Indeed, as a presidential candidate, Biden had called Saudi Arabia a “pariah” state following the killing of journalist Jamal Khashoggi, but as president he is warming up to its de facto and murderous leader Mohammed bin Salman (MBS). What do you think is the purpose of his visit to Saudi Arabia?

*Noam Chomsky: It is surely a mistake to carry out a sadistic assassination of a journalist for the *Washington Post*, particularly one who was hailed as “a guardian of truth” in 2018 when he was chosen as [Person of the Year](#) by *Time Magazine*.*

That’s definitely bad form, particularly when done carelessly and not well concealed.

U.S. relations with the family kingdom called “Saudi Arabia” have always proceeded amicably, undisturbed by its horrifying record of human rights abuses, which persists. That’s hardly a surprise in the case of “a stupendous source of strategic power, and one of the greatest material prizes in world history ... probably the richest economic prize in the world in the field of foreign investment,” as the State Department described the prize in the mid-1940s, when

the U.S. wrested it from Britain in a mini-war during World War II. More generally, the Middle East was regarded at a high level as the most “strategically important area in the world,” as President Eisenhower said. While assessments have varied over 80 years, the essence remains.

The same is true with regard to countries that do not rise to this impressive level. The U.S. has regularly provided strong support for murderous tyrants when it was convenient, often to the last minute of their rule: Marcos, Duvalier, Ceausescu, Suharto, and a long string of other villains, including Saddam Hussein until he violated (or maybe misunderstood) orders and invaded Kuwait. And of course, the U.S. is simply following in the path of its imperial predecessors. Nothing new, not even the rhetoric of benevolent intent.

The most revealing examples are when the intent really is benevolent, not unconcealed Kissingerian cynicism (“realism”). An instructive case is Robert Pastor’s explanation of why the Carter Human Rights administration reluctantly had to support the Somoza regime, and when that proved impossible, to maintain the U.S.-trained National Guard even after it had been massacring the population “with a brutality a nation usually reserves for its enemy,” killing some 40,000 people.

The Latin America specialist of the [Jimmy Carter] administration and a genuine liberal scholar, Pastor was doubtless sincere in voicing these regrets. He was also perceptive in providing the compelling reasons: “The United States did not want to control Nicaragua or the other nations of the region, but it also did not want developments to get out of control. It wanted Nicaraguans to act independently, *except* when doing so would affect U.S. interests adversely” (his emphasis).

We sincerely want you to be free — free to do what we want.

It’s much the same with Saudi Arabia. We wish they were more polite, but first things first.

In the case of Biden’s visit, first things presumably include renewed efforts to persuade MBS to increase production so as to reduce high gas prices in the U.S. There would be other ways, for example, a windfall tax on the fossil fuel industries that are drowning in profits, with the revenues distributed to those who have been gouged by the neoliberal class war of the past 40 years, which has transferred some \$50 trillion to the pockets of the top 1%. That, however, is

“politically impossible.”

Politically even more impossible in elite calculations would be the feasible measures to try to stave off catastrophe by moving rapidly to cut off the flow of these poisons. These need not, however, be the calculations of those who have some interest in leaving a decent world to their children and grandchildren. Time is short.

There are broader considerations in Biden’s Middle East tour. One goal surely is to firm up Trump’s one great geopolitical achievement: the Abraham Accords, which raised tacit relations among the most brutal and criminal states of the Middle East North Africa (MENA) region to formal alliance. The accords have been widely hailed as a contribution to peace and prosperity, though not all are delighted. Not, for example, Sahrawis, handed over to the Moroccan dictatorship to secure its agreement to join the accords — in violation of international law, but in conformity to the “rules-based international order” that the U.S. and its allies prefer to the archaic and unacceptable UN-based order.

Sahrawis can join Palestinians and Syrian Druze, whose territories have been annexed by Israel in violation of the unanimous orders of the Security Council, now endorsed by the U.S. And they can also join other “unpeople,” not least the Palestinian victims of Israel’s brutal and illegal occupation in areas not officially annexed.

Celebration of these diplomatic triumphs will presumably also be heralded as one of the achievements of Biden’s visit, though not exactly in these terms.

Israel may be the only country in the world where Biden is less popular than Trump, and one cannot of course forget the numerous times that he had been humiliated by former Israeli Prime Minister Bibi Netanyahu. Is there anything that Biden aims to accomplish with his visit to Israel other than reaffirm U.S. support and deepen the role of the alliance between the two countries in the region? After all, the Biden administration proceeded with whitewashing Israel’s killing of Palestinian American journalist Shireen Abu Akleh in advance of the president’s visit to the Middle East.

As in the Khashoggi case, the handling of Abu Akleh’s killing was bad form. Not just the killing — or, quite likely, assassination. It’s not wise, in front of TV cameras, to allow the IDF to attack a funeral procession and even the pallbearers,

forcing them to almost drop the coffin. The brazenness of the assault is a revealing illustration of the drift of Israel to the right and the confidence that the boss will accept virtually anything. The confidence is not entirely misplaced, particularly after the four Trump years of lavish gifts and kicking Palestinians in the face.

I haven't seen polls, but it wouldn't be much of a surprise to find that Trump is also popular in Hungary's "illiberal democracy," praised by Trump and virtually worshipped by media star Tucker Carlson on the far right. Orbán's Hungary is now becoming a close ally of Israel on the basis of shared racist attitudes and practices and shared grievances about being unappreciated by soft-hearted liberals in the West.

It's an open question how much domestic capital Biden will win with his expected professions of eternal love for Israel. That stance has become less popular among his liberal base than it used to be as Israel's criminal behavior becomes harder to gloss over. All-out support for Israel has shifted to Evangelicals and the right, sectors of which believe Biden is not the elected president and a substantial contingent of which [believes Biden and other top Democrats are grooming children for sexual abuse](#). But there will still probably be some domestic gains. And it will show the hawkish elements that run foreign policy that he's committed to containment of Iran by an Israel-Saudi alliance, to borrow prevailing doctrine.

Biden may hope to firm up the alliance, but they scarcely need his help. Rhetoric aside, the alliance has been firm since 1967.

In brief, at the time, there was a sharp conflict in the Arab world — in fact, an actual war in Yemen — between Saudi-based radical Islam and Egypt-based secular nationalism. Like Britain before it, the U.S. tended to support radical Islam, seeing it as less of a threat to imperial dominance. Israel settled the matter for the time being by handing the victory to Saudi Arabia. It was at that point that U.S. support for Israel took the extreme form that has since prevailed, as part of a Middle East strategy based on three pillars: Israel, Saudi Arabia, Iran (then under the Shah). Technically, the three were at war. In reality, they were tacit allies, very close allies in the case of Israel and Iran.

The Abraham Accords raise the alliance to a formal level, now with a slightly different cast of characters. It seems to be proceeding well on its own on the basis

of shared interests. It's not clear that Biden can do much beyond expressing U.S. support, which in any event is hardly in doubt.

Do you see any reason why Palestinian leaders should meet with Biden? Can they accomplish anything else by doing so other than have their pictures taken with the president of the United States?

Failure to do so will evoke a stream of hostile propaganda, the last thing the beleaguered Palestinians need right now. Doing so will achieve little or nothing, but it's the least bad option, it seems.

On this narrow question, that is. Palestinian hopes lie elsewhere.

It may seem strange to say this, in the light of the colossal and unprecedented U.S. support for Israel since its demonstration of its military strength in 1967, but Palestinian hopes may lie in the United States. There are cracks in the formerly solid support for Israeli actions. Liberal opinion has shifted toward support for Palestinian rights, even among the Jewish community, [as Norman Finkelstein documented a decade ago](#). The increasingly brutal torture of the 2 million inhabitants of Gaza's open-air prison has had particularly dramatic effects.

These shifts have not yet influenced policy, but they are likely to become more pronounced as Israel continues its drift to the right and the almost daily crimes become harder to conceal or explain away. If Palestinians can overcome their sharp internal divisions and effective solidarity movements develop in the U.S., changes can come, both at the people-to-people level and in government policy.

There's a background. In the 1970s, Israel made a fateful decision to choose expansion over security, rejecting opportunities for peaceful settlement along the lines of a growing international consensus. That compelled reliance on the U.S., which also entails submission to U.S. demands. Such demands were made by every president before Obama, and however reluctantly, Israel has to obey. Changing U.S. government policy, if significant, cannot fail to influence the array of policy options for Israel.

That could be a path toward the elusive goal of a just peace in the former Palestine, and even for regional accords that will not merely reflect the interests of repressive power structures but of the people of the region, who have repeatedly struggled for a more decent fate.

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

Noam Chomsky: Humanity Faces Two Existential Threats. One Is Nearly Ignored



Noam Chomsky

We live in dangerous and disconcerting times. Humanity is facing two existential threats that could end civilization as we know it — as well as other life on Earth. Yet, in the case of both global warming and nuclear weapons, international cooperation is sorely missing. What is even worse with regard to nuclear weapons is that since the Russian invasion of Ukraine, there is a growing trend toward normalizing the idea of nuclear war. In fact, as Noam Chomsky argues in this exclusive interview for *Truthout*, dismissals of the true threat of nuclear annihilation have grown to highly dangerous levels and “the means for reducing the threat of terminal war are being cast out the window.” But it doesn’t have to be that way.

“Human agency has not ended,” Chomsky points out. “There are realistic ways to protect humanity from the existential threat that nuclear weapons pose.”

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, Russia’s invasion of Ukraine has triggered several unexpected and unintended consequences. One of them, which is not as widely discussed as it should be, is that the use of nuclear arsenals, perhaps with lower yields, has been almost normalized. Indeed, in the course of this war, we have

heard of several scenarios for how Russia might use nuclear weapons, and, in the early days of the invasion, Russian President Vladimir Putin even ordered his country's nuclear forces on a higher alert. And, just last month, he said that Russia will use nuclear weapons to defend its sovereignty and stressed that the "era of the unipolar world" has ended. On the other hand, we have people like Francis Fukuyama saying that the possibility of a nuclear war "is not something anyone should be worrying about" because there are many stopping points before we get to that point. How did we get to a stage where people are having such a nonchalant attitude about nuclear weapons?

Noam Chomsky: Before turning to the important issues raised, we should keep firmly in mind one overriding concern: The great powers will find a way to cooperate in addressing today's critical problems, or the wreckage of human society will be so extreme that no one will care. All else fades alongside of recognition of that fundamental fact about the contemporary world, very possibly the last stage in human history. It cannot be reiterated too often or too strongly.

In the *Toronto Star*, the veteran journalist and political analyst Linda McQuaig [wrote](#) that she had just heard "what struck me as possibly the most foolish remark ever uttered on TV. And I know that's a high bar."

McQuaig was referring to "the celebrated U.S. political scientist Francis Fukuyama" and the comment of his that you just quoted. Put simply, "there's no need to be concerned about nuclear war. Take my word for it."

In defense of "possibly the most foolish remark ever uttered on TV," we might argue that it is not only commonly voiced, but in fact is implicit in official U.S. policy. Last April, Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin said that Washington's goal in Ukraine is "to see Russia weakened to the degree that it can't do the kinds of things that it has done in invading Ukraine." He was reprimanded by the president, but "[officials acknowledged that was indeed the long-term strategy, even if Mr. Biden did not want to publicly provoke Mr. Putin into escalation.](#)"

The long-term strategy, then, is to keep the war going in order to weaken Russia, and to a degree considerably harsher than the treatment of Germany at Versailles a century ago, which did not succeed in the proclaimed goal.

The long-term strategy was [reaffirmed clearly enough](#) in the recent North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) summit, providing a new "Strategic Concept" based

on a core principle: no diplomacy on Ukraine, only war to “weaken Russia.”

It takes no great insight to see that this approximates what may be the most foolish remark ever uttered. The tacit assumption is that while the U.S. and its allies are proceeding to weaken Russia sufficiently, Russian leaders will stand by quietly, refraining from resorting to the advanced weapons we all know Russia has.

Take our word for it.

Perhaps so, but quite a gamble, not only with the fate of Ukrainians but far beyond.

In further defense of this colossal foolishness, we might add that it is prevailing common sense. It is commonly just taken for granted that we can disregard the shocking record of the past 75 years, which demonstrates with brilliant clarity that it is a near miracle that we have escaped nuclear war — terminal war if major powers are involved.

Illustrations are everywhere. To take one, some of the most careful and sophisticated studies of public opinion on major issues are carried out by the Yale University Program on Climate Change Communication. Though climate is the main focus of their concerns, the studies range much more broadly.

The most recent study, just released, poses 29 major current issues and asks subjects to [rank them in terms of significance for the upcoming November election](#). Nuclear war is not mentioned. The threat is severe and increasing, and it's easy to construct all-too-plausible scenarios that would lead up the escalation ladder to terminal destruction. But our leaders and “celebrated political scientists” assure us, either directly or implicitly: “No need for concern, take our word for it.”

What is omitted from the study is terrifying enough. What is included is hardly less so. “Of 29 issues we asked about,” the directors of the poll report, “registered voters overall indicated that global warming is the 24th most highly ranked voting issue.”

It is only the most important issue that has ever arisen in human history, alongside of nuclear war.

It gets worse on a closer look. Republicans may well take Congress in a few months. Their leadership is not concealing their intent to find ways to hold on to virtually permanent political power, independent of the popular will, and might succeed with the help of the ultra-reactionary Supreme Court. The party — to dignify it with that word — has been 100 percent denialist on global warming since it succumbed to the Koch conglomerate onslaught in 2009, and the leadership has carried along the voting base. In the Yale study, moderate Republicans ranked global warming as 28th among the 29 options offered. The rest ranked it 29th.

The two most important issues in human history, issues of literal survival, may soon be off the agenda in the most powerful state in human history, carrying forward the grim experience of the four Trump years.

Not completely off the agenda, of course. There are voices of sanity, some with considerable prestige and experience. A decade ago, four of them — William Perry, Henry Kissinger, George Shultz and Sam Nunn — wrote an [op-ed](#) in *The Wall Street Journal* [calling for](#) “reversing the world’s reliance on nuclear weapons, to prevent their proliferation into potentially dangerous hands, and ultimately ending them as a threat to the world.”

They are not alone. Last month (June 21-23), the first meeting was convened of states-parties to the 2017 Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW). Citing “increasingly strident nuclear rhetoric,” the TPNW states-parties issued the [Vienna Declaration](#), which condemns all threats to use nuclear weapons as violations of international law, including the UN Charter. The [declaration](#) demands “that all nuclear-armed states never use or threaten to use nuclear weapons under any circumstances.”

The nuclear states have refused to join the treaty, but that can change under popular pressure, as we have often seen before.

In August, the 10th review conference of the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT) will convene. That could offer an opportunity for an organized public to demand adherence to its provisions, which call for “good faith” efforts to remove the scourge of nuclear weapons from the Earth, and while pursuing these efforts, to sharply reduce the enormous threats they pose.

That will not happen if the two most important issues in human history are

removed from attention, one almost completely while the other barely reaches a fraction of the concern it requires if there is to be a livable world.

We need not be passive observers, content to be mere instruments in the hands of the powerful. That is a choice, not a necessity.

Recently, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy warned in an interview with CNN that the world should take seriously the possibility that Russia might use nuclear weapons in Ukraine. However, on various occasions, he himself has hinted at the idea of Ukraine developing nuclear weapons even though the country is a signatory to the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty. I don't know if Ukraine has the capabilities to proceed with the development of a nuclear weapons program, but wouldn't it be absolutely suicidal to do so?

Completely suicidal. Even the first tentative efforts would lead to harsh retaliation, and then up the escalatory ladder. But in the light of the level of sanity exhibited by the leaders of the world, is it unthinkable?

Putin has openly stated that Russia is open to dialogue on nuclear non-proliferation, but the perspective on the part of the U.S. appears to be that Russia's invasion of Ukraine has subverted the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty. I'd like your comments on this issue.

Let's recall the overriding concern: The great powers will find a way to cooperate in addressing today's critical problems, or the wreckage of human society will be so extreme that no one will care.

It follows that every option for dialogue should be seriously considered, and where at all feasible, pursued. Dialogue can in fact be pursued in an international setting at the upcoming NPT review conference. Or the option can be simply dismissed as unthinkable, adopting the stance of the West at the G20 conference last week, where Russian foreign minister, Sergey Lavrov, was treated ["like a skunk at the tropical resort party, shunned by many, though by no means all."](#)

The final qualification is of no slight significance. Those who did not join the West in shunning the skunk included the Indonesian hosts, who welcomed him, and a number of others: China, India, Brazil, Turkey, Argentina and others, along with Indonesia. That raises once again the question of just who is being isolated in the new world order that is taking shape.

That is no idle question, and it is not ignored. There are some serious reflections about it close to the centers of power. One case is [an analysis of the evolving world order](#) by Graham Fuller, former vice chair of the National Intelligence Council at CIA with responsibility for global intelligence estimates. His analysis raises issues that merit close attention.

Fuller has no illusions about the nature and roots of the war. Prime responsibility falls on the agents of the criminal aggression, Putin and his circle. That should be beyond controversy. But “secondary condemnation belongs to the U.S. (NATO) in deliberately provoking a war with Russia by implacably pushing its hostile military organization, despite Moscow’s repeated notifications about crossing red lines, right up to the gates of Russia. This war did not have to be if Ukrainian neutrality, á la Finland and Austria, had been accepted. Instead, Washington has called for clear Russian defeat.”

Fuller sees the conflict not as a “Ukrainian-Russian war but an American-Russian war fought by proxy to the last Ukrainian... And most of the rest of the world — Latin America, India, the Middle East and Africa — find few national interests in this fundamentally American war against Russia.”

Those who refused to shun Russia at the G20 conference strongly condemned the invasion but did not take too seriously the professed outrage of the U.S. and its allies. Very likely, they were asking whether the U.S. was shunned as a pariah after carrying out its many violent criminal exploits, which there is no need to review. For many, the memories are heightened by vivid and ugly direct experience. How can they be expected to pay attention to the protestations of high principles from the leading violators of these principles, always with immunity from anything more than occasional mild reprimands?

Europe is already suffering badly, Fuller continues, and will, sooner or later, have to “return to the purchase of inexpensive Russian energy.” It has little realistic choice. “Russia lies on the doorstep and a natural economic relationship with Russia will possess overwhelming logic in the end.” Beyond that, “Europe can even less afford to blunder into confrontation with China — a ‘threat’ perceived primarily by Washington yet unconvincing to many European states and much of the world.” It will cost Europe dearly to isolate itself from China’s Belt and Road Initiative, “perhaps the most ambitious economic and geopolitical project in world history,” which runs right through Russia and “is already linking China with

Europe by rail and sea... The end of the Ukraine war will bring serious reconsideration in Europe about the benefits of propping up Washington's desperate bid to maintain its global hegemony."

Another consequence of this desperate bid is that,

'Russia's geopolitical character has very likely now decisively tilted towards Eurasia... Russian elites now no longer possess an alternative to accepting that its economic future lies in the Pacific where Vladivostok lies only one or two hours away by air from the vast economies of Beijing, Tokyo, and Seoul. China and Russia have now been decisively pushed ever more closely together specifically out of common concern to block unfettered US freedom of unilateral military and economic intervention around the world. That the US can split US-induced Russian and Chinese cooperation is a fantasy. Russia has scientific brilliance, abundant energy, rich rare minerals and metals, while global warming will increase the agricultural potential of Siberia. China has the capital, the markets, and the manpower to contribute to what becomes a natural partnership across Eurasia.'

Fuller is far from alone. "The idea of Eurasia is once again the subject of geopolitics," reads [a headline in the London Economist](#). The report reviews the renewed attention to the principle of the founder of modern geopolitics, Halford Mackinder, that control of the central Asian heartland is key to world control. These conceptions are taking new form as the Ukraine war reshapes the global strategic landscape in ways that may turn out to be profound.

The "utter corruption" of the media, Fuller writes, is one of the most disturbing features of the current crisis: "In the midst of a virulent anti-Russian propaganda barrage whose likes I have never seen during my Cold Warrior days, serious analysts must dig deep these days to gain some objective understanding of what is actually taking place in Ukraine."

That is sensible advice. There is more. The tendencies that are shaping world order are not immutable. Human agency has not ended. That crucially encompasses the agency of an organized public that demands an end to cynical posturing and a serious commitment to grasp the opportunities that exist for dialogue and accommodation. The alternatives are too grim to contemplate.

The campaign for nuclear disarmament goes back to the late 1950s. Yet the

prospects for nuclear disarmament are dim, if not nonexistent. Nuclear disarmament requires that nation-states trust each other, which is a zero-probability event in the real world, but it is also extremely doubtful that the nuclear knowledge genie can ever be put back in the bottle. So, what is to be done? What are the most realistic ways to avoid nuclear war?

There are realistic ways to reduce the likelihood of terminal war — once again, the appropriate term for nuclear war involving great powers. The most immediate is a serious arms control regime. Elements of such a regime had been laboriously constructed since Eisenhower's Open Skies proposals in 1955 — dismantled by Trump in May 2020 when he was wielding his wrecking ball. There were other important steps forward, among them the Reagan-Gorbachev Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty (INF) in 1987, which significantly reduced the threat of outbreak of terminal war in Europe — and, we should not forget, was impelled by enormous popular anti-nuclear protests in Europe and the U.S. Another step was the 1972 Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty, which both sides recognized to be a “substantial factor in curbing the race in strategic offensive arms.”

The Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty was dismantled by George W. Bush, the INF treaty by Trump.

At the end of the Trump years, very little was left beyond the New START treaty, which Biden was able to rescue from demolition literally by a few days. It was due to expire shortly after his inauguration.

There is more, such as Trump's destruction of the joint agreement (JCPOA) on Iranian nuclear programs in violation of the UN Security Council, which had endorsed it, another contribution of the modern GOP to global destruction.

One of the great tragedies of the Ukraine war is that these means for reducing the threat of terminal war are being cast out the window. The U.S. cannot deign to descend to agreements with the skunk at the party. The tragedy is enhanced by the impending return to full power of the party of the wreckers.

Nonetheless, the same kinds of mass mobilization that helped bring about earlier steps toward sanity can be effective again. That means first resurrecting the tattered arms control regime, and then moving well beyond.

Other steps could be taken right now if sufficient popular pressures were

mounted. In the coming weeks in fact, at the August NPT conference. Beyond moves to advance the TPNW and the professed goals of the NPT itself, there are further possibilities. One crucial issue that is likely to be raised again at the conference is a Nuclear-Weapons-Free Zone (NWFZ) in the Middle East. That could be a significant step towards international security. Popular pressures could help bring it to realization.

Establishment of a Middle East NWFZ has come up regularly at NPT review sessions, primarily at the initiative of the Arab states, who have even threatened to withdraw from the NPT if moves are not taken to implement it. It has almost unanimous global support, but is always blocked by Washington, most recently by Obama at the 2015 conference.

To review the basic facts once again, the call for a Mideast NWFZ is backed by the Arab states, Iran, and the Global South, G-77, now expanded to 134 countries, the large majority of the world. Europe raises no objections. The unilateral U.S. veto is accompanied with various pieties, easily dismissed. The real reasons are well understood: the massive Israeli nuclear weapons system, the only one in the region, must not be subject to international regulation. That is off the table, as *The New York Times* editors made clear recently in calling for a “[Nuclear-Weapons-Free Persian Gulf](#)” — *Persian Gulf*, not Middle East. A Persian Gulf NWFZ, the editors say, would be “One Way Forward on Iran,” which is causing troubles once again by adhering to the unanimous consensus (minus the Master).

The U.S. refuses to officially acknowledge Israel’s nuclear weapons facilities, presumably because to do so would call into question the legality of all U.S. aid to Israel, under U.S. law. That’s a door that both political parties have insisted on keeping tightly shut, but as public opinion on the matter has been visibly shifting, there are some breaks in rigid discipline. Congressional Rep. Betty McCollum, for one, has aroused much ire for sponsoring legislation to bar Israel from [using U.S. military aid to attack Palestinian children](#).

Establishment of NWFZs is an important step toward reducing the nuclear weapons threat, even apart from the symbolism of global rejection of these monstrous achievements of human ingenuity. More accurately, it would be an important step if these could be implemented. Unfortunately, they are blocked by U.S. insistence on maintaining nuclear weapons facilities within them, matters we have reviewed before.

All of this could be on the agenda, right now, as ways of addressing the terminal threat.

Beyond that, there is the overriding concern: To repeat again, the great powers will find a way to cooperate in addressing today's critical problems, or nothing else will matter.

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