

# Chomsky: US Policy Toward Russia Is Blocking Paths To De-Escalation In Ukraine



*Noam Chomsky*

Russia's war in Ukraine is producing an earthquake in international affairs. The war has raised new questions about national security across Europe and is [shaking up energy geopolitics](#). In addition, the war seems to be creating new divisions between the Global North and the Global South while Russia and China strengthen their strategic relationship.

In the interview that follows, world-renowned scholar and leading dissident Noam Chomsky addresses some of the new developments taking place in the world system on account of Russia's assault on Ukraine. Chomsky also ponders the question of whether Vladimir Putin can be prosecuted for war crimes in light of the mounting evidence that brings to mind the atrocities committed by the Nazis during World War II. [Recent evidence](#) also indicates that Ukrainian forces have also engaged in war crimes by killing captured Russian soldiers.

Chomsky, who is internationally recognized as one of the most important intellectuals alive, is the author of some 150 books and the recipient of scores of highly prestigious awards, including the Sydney Peace Prize and the Kyoto Prize (Japan's equivalent of the Nobel Prize), and of dozens of honorary doctorate degrees from the world's most renowned universities. Chomsky is Institute Professor Emeritus at MIT and currently Laureate Professor at the University of Arizona.

*C. J. Polychroniou: The war in Ukraine has turned Russia into a pariah state throughout Europe and North America, but Moscow continues to receive support from many countries in the Global South. The strategic relationship between Russia and China seems to be getting stronger, although both countries had identified each other as major factors for maintaining order and stability in an “emerging polycentric world” long before Putin and Xi Jinping. In fact, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said following a recent meeting with his Chinese counterpart that the two countries are working together to advance a vision of a new world order, a new “democratic world order.” Is the new world order one that pits Global North and Global South countries against each other? And what do you make of the statement of Russia and China working together to promote a new “democratic world order?” To me, the idea of two autocratic states working together to promote democracy across the world sounds like a crude joke.*

*Noam Chomsky: The idea that Russia and China will be working together to promote a “democratic world order” is, of course, ludicrous. They will be doing so in much the way that the U.S. was laboring to “promote democracy” in Iraq, the goal of the invasion as President Bush announced when it became clear that the “single question” — will Saddam abandon his nuclear weapons program? — had been answered the wrong way. With rare exceptions, the intellectual class and even most scholarship leaped to attention and vigorously proclaimed the new doctrine, as I suppose is also the case today in Russia and China.*

As U.S.-run polls showed, Americans enthralled by the “noble” goals belatedly proclaimed were even joined by some Iraqis: [1 percent of those polled](#). Four percent thought the U.S. invaded in order to help Iraqis. The rest concluded that if Iraq’s exports had been asparagus and pickles, and the center of global petroleum production was in the South Pacific, the U.S. wouldn’t have invaded.

I don’t pretend to have any expert knowledge, but from my own experience in past weeks with the Global South — press, many interviews and meetings, much personal discussion — it doesn’t seem to me quite accurate to say that it is supporting Moscow, except in the sense that Moscow is getting support from the Western powers that keep paying it for petroleum products and food (probably by now the source of Russia’s main export earnings).

My impression is that the Global South has sharply condemned the Russian invasion, but has asked: “What’s new?” The general reaction to President Biden’s

harsh condemnation of Putin as a war criminal seems to be something like this: *It takes one to know one*. We agree that he is a war criminal, and as creatures of the Enlightenment, we adopt the Kantian principle of universality that is dismissed with contempt by the West, sometimes with angry charges of whataboutism.

It is, after all, not easy for people in the civilized world — increasingly, the Global South — to be impressed by the “moral outrage” of Western intellectuals who just a few years ago, when all the horrific facts were in, were enthusiastically applauding the success of the invasion of Iraq, [spouting pieties](#) about noble intentions that would have embarrassed the most abject apparatchik. And we can just imagine the reaction when they read the pious [invocation of the Nuremberg judgment](#) by the editors of *The New York Times*, who are just now coming to recognize that, “To initiate a war of aggression, therefore, is not only an international crime: it is the supreme international crime, differing only from other war crimes in that it contains within itself the accumulated evil of the whole.” The accumulated evil includes the instigation of ethnic conflict that has torn apart not only Iraq but the whole region, the horrors of ISIS, and much more.

Not, of course, what the editors have in mind. The supreme international crimes that they have supported for 60 years somehow escaped the Nuremberg judgment.

While there is appreciation in the Global South for the fact that at long last Western intellectuals and the political class are coming to perceive that aggressors can commit hideous crimes, they seem to feel that it is perhaps a little late, and curiously skewed, as they know from ample experience. They are also able to perceive that Westerners consumed with moral outrage over the crimes of enemies are still able to maintain their usual silence while their own leaders carry out terrible crimes right now — in Afghanistan, Yemen, Palestine, Western Sahara, and all too many other places where they could act at once, and expeditiously, to mitigate or end these crimes.

Let’s turn to the “strategic relationship between Russia and China.” It does indeed seem to be strengthening, though it is not much of a partnership. The corrupt Russian kleptocracy can provide raw materials and advanced weapons to the economic system that Beijing is systematically establishing through mainland Asia, reaching also to Africa and the Middle East, and by now even to U.S. domains in Latin America. But not much more. Russia’s role in this highly unequal

relationship is, I think, likely to diminish further, much as Europe's international role is likely to diminish after Putin has handed Europe on a golden platter to the U.S.-run "Atlanticist" system, a gift of substantial significance, as [we've discussed before](#).

*Can China help end the war in Ukraine? If yes, what's stopping Beijing from using its influence over Moscow for a peace agreement to be reached in Ukraine?*

China could act to advance the prospects for a peaceful negotiated settlement in Ukraine. It seems that the Chinese leadership sees no advantage in doing so.

China's "information system" appears to be pretty much [conforming](#) to the Russian propaganda line. But more generally, it doesn't seem to diverge much from a fairly common stance in the Global South, illustrated graphically by the [sanctions map](#). The states joining in sanctions against Russia are in the Anglosphere and Europe, as well as Japan, Taiwan and South Korea. The rest of the world condemns the invasion, but is mostly standing aloof.

This should not surprise us. It is nothing new. We recall well that the Iraq invasion had virtually no global support. Less familiar is the fact that the same was true of the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan after 9/11. A few weeks after the invasion, an international [Gallup](#) poll asked the question: "Once the identity of the [9/11] terrorists is known, should the American government launch a military attack on the country or countries where the terrorists are based or should the American government seek to extradite the terrorists to stand trial?"

The wording reflects the fact that their identity was not known. Even eight months later, in his first major press conference, FBI Director Robert Mueller could only affirm that al-Qaeda was suspected of the crime. If the poll had asked about actual U.S. policy, the very limited support would doubtless have been even lower.

World opinion overwhelmingly favored diplomatic-judicial measures over military action. Opposition to invasion was particularly strong in Latin America, which has a little experience with U.S. intervention.

The free press spared Americans knowledge of international opinion. It was therefore able to [proclaim](#) that "the opposition [to the U.S. invasion] was mostly limited to the people who are reflexively against the American use of power."

Quite a few suffer from this malady, apparently. Global opinion today should come as no great surprise.

China's unwillingness to devote its efforts to a negotiated settlement of the Ukraine conflict deserves criticism, but it is hard to see how such criticism can properly come from Americans. After all, China is adhering to official U.S. policy. Simply put, the policy is to "fight to the last Ukrainian for Ukrainian independence" while offering no way to save Ukraine from further tragedy. Even worse, current policy undermines such hopes by informing Putin that he has no way out: It's The Hague or proceed to destroy Ukraine.

The quote and the opinions just paraphrased are those of one of the most astute and widely respected U.S. diplomats, [Ambassador Chas Freeman](#), who goes on to spell out the options, and to remind us of the history.

Like anyone who cares in the least about the fate of Ukrainians, Ambassador Freeman recognizes that the only alternative to Russian destruction of Ukraine — which, with their backs to the wall, Putin and his narrow circle of [siloviki](#) can implement — is a negotiated settlement that will be ugly, offering the aggressors an escape. He also carries the history back further than we have done in our earlier discussions, back to the Congress of Vienna of 1814, which followed the Napoleonic Wars. Metternich and other European leaders, he observes, "had the good sense to reincorporate [defeated] France into the governing councils of Europe," overlooking its virtual conquest of Europe. That led to a century of substantial peace in Europe, which had long been the most violent part of the world. There were some wars, but nothing like what preceded. The century of peace ended with World War I.

Freeman goes on to remind us that the victors in the war did not have the good sense of their predecessors: "The victors — the United States and Britain and France — insisted on excluding Germany from a role in the affairs of Europe, as well as this newly formed Soviet Union, the result was World War II and the Cold War."

As we've discussed earlier, a leading theme throughout the Cold War was the status of Europe: Should it subordinate itself to the U.S. within the Atlanticist-NATO framework, the U.S. preference? Or should it become an independent "third force" along Gaullist lines, accommodating Russia within a Europe without

military alliances from the Atlantic to the Urals?

The question arose starkly when the USSR collapsed, and Mikhail Gorbachev outlined the vision of a “common European home” with no military alliances from Lisbon to Vladivostok. In a limited form, the concept was revived by French President Emmanuel Macron in his recent abortive interchanges with Putin.

If there had been anyone in the Kremlin who resembled a statesman, they would have leaped at the opportunity to explore something like the Gorbachev vision. Europe has strong reasons to establish close relations with Russia, ranging from commerce to security. Whether such efforts might have succeeded, avoiding the Ukraine tragedy, we can only guess. The answer could only have been found out by trying. Instead, the hard men in Moscow turned to violence, compounding their criminal aggression with self-defeating foolishness.

The Gorbachev conception had some partial U.S. support within the framework of the Partnership for Peace, a U.S. initiative intended to provide a cooperative security system with a limited relation to NATO. Ambassador Freeman, who had a significant role in establishing it, describes its fate in words that are worth heeding:

*What happened in 1994, which was a midterm election year, and 1996, which was a presidential election year, was interesting. In 1994, Mr. Clinton was talking out of both sides of his mouth. He was telling the Russians that we were in no rush to add members to NATO, and that our preferred path was the Partnership for Peace. The same time he was hinting to the ethnic diasporas of Russophobic countries in Eastern Europe — and, by the way, it's easy to understand their Russophobia given their history — that, no, no, we were going to get these countries into NATO as fast as possible. And in 1996 he made that pledge explicit. [In] 1994 he got an outburst from [Boris] Yeltsin, who was then the president of the Russian Federation. [In] 1996 he got another one, and as time went on, when Mr. Putin came in, he regularly protested the enlargement of NATO in ways that disregarded Russia's self-defense interests. So, there should have been no surprise about this. For 28 years Russia has been warning that at some point it would snap, and it has, and it has done it in a very destructive way, both in terms of its own interests and in terms of the broader prospects for peace in Europe.*

None of this provides any excuse for Putin's invasion, Freeman emphasizes. But it is important to understand that, "There were those people in the United States who were triumphalist about the end of the Cold War.... This allowed the United States to incorporate all the countries right up to Russia's borders and beyond them, beyond those borders in the Baltics, into an American sphere of influence. And, essentially, they posited a global sphere of influence for the United States modeled on the Monroe Doctrine. And that's pretty much what we have."

Russian leadership tolerated Clinton's violation of the firm U.S. commitment to Gorbachev not to extend NATO beyond East Germany. They even tolerated George W. Bush's further provocations, and U.S. military actions that struck directly at Russian interests, undertaken in such a way as to humiliate Russia. But Ukraine and Georgia were red lines. That was clearly understood in Washington. As Freeman continues, no Russian leader was likely to tolerate the NATO expansion into Ukraine that began after the 2014 "coup, [carried out] to prevent neutrality or a pro-Russian government in Kiev, and to replace it with a pro-American government that would bring Ukraine into our sphere.... So, since about 2015 the United States has been arming, training Ukrainians against Russia," effectively treating Ukraine "as an extension of NATO."

As [we've discussed](#), that stance became explicit policy in Biden's September 2021 [official statement](#), possibly a factor in Russia's decision to escalate to direct aggression a few months later.

Crucially, to repeat, current U.S. policy is to "fight to the last Ukrainian" while offering no way to save Ukraine from further tragedy and in fact undermining such hopes by informing Putin that he has no way out: It's The Hague or proceed to destroy Ukraine.

China is probably relatively satisfied with the course of events. Very likely the same is true in Washington. Both have gained from the tragedy. And the euphoria among weapons and fossil fuel producers is unconcealed as they lead the way toward indescribable catastrophe, underscored in vivid terms by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change [report](#) of April 4.

*Turkey's position over the war in Ukraine is to maintain neutrality while acting as a mediator in the Russian-Ukrainian crisis. Can Turkey continue to maintain such a balancing act since we know that it has been supplying military assistance to*



*Ukraine since 2019 and that it is aligned with the geo-strategic vision of Washington over Ukraine?*

Turkey has had an ambiguous position in global affairs for many years. It is a member of NATO, but the EU has rejected its appeals for membership on human rights grounds. In the 1990s, Turkey was indeed responsible for hideous crimes: its massive state terror against its Kurdish population, leaving tens of thousands dead, 3,500 towns and villages destroyed, a flood of hundreds of thousands of people from the devastated Kurdish regions to miserable slums in Istanbul. The crimes were mostly concealed by the “free press,” perhaps because Clinton was pouring arms into Turkey, the flow escalating as atrocities mounted. Turkey became the leading recipient of U.S. military aid (apart from Israel-Egypt, a separate category), extending a very close correlation between human rights abuses and U.S. aid that goes far back, but somehow does not detract from its much-lauded nobility.

By 2000, Turkish state crimes were abating, and in the following years the situation greatly improved — something I was able to witness personally, with much appreciation. By 2005, under President Recep Erdoğan’s increasingly harsh rule, the progress ended and reversed. That might have been in part a reaction to the continued refusal of the European Union to accept Turkish membership, ignoring the great steps forward in recent years and fortifying the sense that Europeans simply won’t accept Turks into their club.

Since then, Erdoğan’s rule has become far more brutal, again targeting Kurds but also attacking civil and human rights on a broad front. And he has been trying to turn Turkey into a major actor in regional affairs, with hints of a renewed Ottoman caliphate. He accepts Russian weapons over strong U.S. objections but remains a central part of the NATO system of regional — by now global — dominance. The “balancing act” with regard to Ukraine is a case in point.

If Turkey can facilitate negotiations that will bring the Ukraine horrors to an end, that will be a most welcome development, to be applauded. We can only speculate about what the chances are while the U.S. insists on perpetuating the conflict “to the last Ukrainian” while blocking an ugly negotiated settlement that is the alternative to destruction of Ukraine and perhaps even nuclear war.

*Russian gas continues to flow to Europe although Putin had demanded that*



*European governments pay for it in rubles. What would be the impact in the geo-strategic relations between Europe and Russia if the former became independent from Russian gas?*

It doesn't look likely in the near future. Europe could manage to end the use of Russian coal and oil, but gas is a different matter. That requires pipelines, which it would take years to build, or transport facilities for liquified natural gas that barely exist. But the question we should be asking I think is different. Can we ascend to the wisdom of the reactionary tyrants who provided Europe with a century of peace in Vienna in 1814? Can we move towards the Gorbachev vision of a European common home with no military alliances, a conception not too far from the U.S.-initiated Partnership for Peace that was undermined by President Clinton? Can some resemblance to statesmanship appear in today's Russia? Such questions as these should, I think, be in the forefront of our thinking, and our active engagement in trying to influence discussion and debate, and policy choices.

*Evidence of Russian war crimes is mounting. Can Putin be prosecuted for war crimes in Ukraine?*

Prosecution for war crimes, in the real world, is "victor's justice." That was clear from the Nuremberg Tribunal and was not even concealed in the accompanying Tokyo Tribunal. At Nuremberg, saturation bombing of densely settled urban areas was excluded because it was a specialty of the Allies. German war criminals were exculpated if they could show that the Allies carried out the same crimes. In subsequent years, the Nuremberg principles were thrown out the window. They have only recently been discovered as a cudgel to beat official enemies.

There can be no thought of trying the U.S. for its many horrendous crimes. An effort was once made to bring the U.S. to justice for its war against Nicaragua. The U.S. responded to the International Court of Justice orders to end the crimes by sharply escalating them while the press dismissed the court as a "hostile forum" as shown by its daring to convict the U.S. (per *The New York Times's* editors), following ample precedent.

Putin might be tried for crimes if he is overthrown within Russia and Russia can be treated as a defeated country. That is what the record indicates.

Imaginably, the world might rise to a level of civilization in which international

law can be honored instead of righteously wielded against selected targets. We should never cease efforts to bring that about. In doing so, we should not succumb to the illusions fostered by the global doctrinal systems.

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## **Noam Chomsky: Russia's War Against Ukraine Has Accelerated The Doomsday Clock**



*Noam Chomsky*

Since the start of the war in Ukraine, there has been a lot of speculation about Russia's military strategy and President Vladimir Putin's geostrategic aims. Indeed, it is still unclear what Putin wants, and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy's repeated offers of a face-to-face meeting have been rejected by Moscow, although that could soon change. In the meantime, the destruction of Ukraine continues unabated, while European countries and the United States [ramp up military spending](#) in what is perhaps the clearest indication yet that a new Cold War may be underway. The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) is reinforcing its eastern front and there are no signs from Washington that the Biden administration is interested in engaging in constructive diplomacy to end the war in Ukraine. In fact, President Joe Biden is adding fuel to the fire by using highly inflammatory language against the Russian president.

In the interview that follows, world-renowned scholar and leading dissident Noam Chomsky delves into the latest developments concerning the war in Ukraine, but also takes us into a tour de force exposé of extreme selectivity in moral outrage on the part of the U.S. and, additionally, shares some of his insights into the contemporary political culture in the U.S., which includes the reshaping of the ideological universe of the Republican Party, political fervor and book banning.

*C.J. Polychroniou: Noam, the latest reports about the war in Ukraine indicate that Russia seems to be shifting its strategy, with an intent of partitioning the country "like North and South Korea," according to some Ukrainian officials. In the meantime, NATO decided to reinforce its eastern front, as if Russia has plans to invade Bulgaria, Romania and Slovenia, while Washington not only continues to be mum about peace in Ukraine, but we heard Biden engage in some toxic masculinity talk against Putin in his recent visit to Poland, prompting, in turn, French President Emmanuel Macron to warn against the use of inflammatory language as he is actually trying to secure a ceasefire. In fact, even American veteran diplomat Richard Haass said that Biden's words made a dangerous*

*situation even more dangerous. Posing this question in all sincerity, does the U.S. ever think that conflicts can be resolved by any other means other than through intimidation and the use of continuous force?*

*Noam Chomsky:* There are several questions here, all important, all worth more discussion than I can try to give here. Will go through them pretty much in order.

On the current military situation, there are two radically different stories. The familiar one is provided by Ukraine's military intelligence head, Gen. Kyrylo Budanov: Russia's attempt to overthrow the Ukrainian government has failed, so Russia is now retreating to the occupied south and east of the country, the Donbas region and the eastern Azov sea coast, planning a "[Korean scenario](#)."

The head of the Main Operational Directorate of the General Staff of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation, Col. Gen. Sergey Rudskoy, tells a very different story ([as of March 25](#)): a rendition of George W. Bush's "Mission Accomplished" in Iraq, though without the dramatic trappings:

The main goal of the "special military operation" was to defend the Donbass People's Republic from the genocidal assaults of Ukrainian Nazis over the past eight years. Since Ukraine rejected diplomacy, it was necessary to extend the operation to "demilitarization and denazification" of Ukraine, destroying military targets with great care to spare civilians. The main goals have been efficiently achieved exactly according to plan. What remains is the full "liberation of Donbass."

Two tales, same ending, which I presume is accurate.

The West, quite plausibly, adopts the former story. That is, it adopts the story that tells us that Russia is incapable of conquering cities a few miles from its border that are defended by what are limited military forces by world standards, supported by a citizen's army.

Or does the West adopt this story? Its actions indicate that it prefers the version of General Rudskoy: an incredibly powerful and efficient Russian military machine, having quickly achieved its objectives in Ukraine, is now poised to move on to invade Europe, perhaps overwhelming NATO just as efficiently. If so, it is necessary to reinforce NATO's eastern front to prevent the impending invasion by this monstrous force.

Another thought suggests itself: Could it be that Washington wishes to establish more firmly the great gift that Putin has bestowed on it by driving Europe into its grip, and is therefore intent on reinforcing an eastern front that it knows is under no threat of invasion?

So far, Washington has not strayed from the position of the joint statement that we [discussed earlier](#). This crucially important policy statement extended Washington's welcome to Ukraine to join NATO and "finalized a Strategic Defense Framework that creates a foundation for the enhancement of U.S.-Ukraine strategic defense and security cooperation" by providing Ukraine with advanced anti-tank and other weapons along with a "robust training and exercise program in keeping with Ukraine's status as a NATO Enhanced Opportunities Partner."

There is much learned discussion plumbing the deep recesses of Putin's twisted soul to discover why he decided to invade Ukraine. By moving on to criminal aggression, he carried a step forward the annual mobilizations on Ukraine's borders in an effort to elicit some attention to his unanswered calls to consider Russia's security concerns, which are recognized as significant by a host of top U.S. diplomats, CIA directors, and numerous others who have warned Washington of the foolishness of ignoring these concerns.

Perhaps exploring Putin's soul is the right approach to understanding his decision in February 2022. There is, perhaps, another possibility. Perhaps he meant what he and all other Russian leaders have been saying since former President Boris Yeltsin, 25 years ago, about neutralization of Ukraine; and perhaps, even though the highly provocative joint statement has been silenced in the U.S., Putin might have paid attention to it and therefore decided to escalate the disregarded annual efforts to direct aggression.

A possibility, perhaps.

The press [reports](#) that, "Ukraine is ready to declare neutrality, abandon its drive to join NATO and vow to not develop nuclear weapons if Russia withdraws troops and Kyiv receives security guarantee..."

That raises a question: Will the U.S. relent, and move to expedite efforts to save Ukraine further misery instead of interfering with these efforts by refusing to take part in negotiations and maintaining the position of the policy statement of last

September?

The question brings us to Biden's ad-libbed call for Putin to be removed, offering Putin no escape. Biden's statement, recognized to be a virtual declaration of war that could have horrifying consequences, did cause considerable consternation worldwide, not least among his staff, who hastened to ensure the world that his words didn't mean what they said. Judging by the stance of his close circle on national security issues, it's hard to be confident.

Biden has since explained that his comment was a spontaneous outburst of "moral outrage," revulsion at the crimes of the "butcher" who rules Russia. Are there some other current situations that might inspire moral outrage?

It's not hard to think of cases. One of the most terrifying is Afghanistan. Literally millions of people are facing starvation, a colossal tragedy. There is food in the markets, but lacking access to banks, people with a little money have to watch their children starve.

Why? A major reason is that Washington is refusing to release Afghanistan's funds, kept in New York banks in order to punish poor Afghans for daring to resist Washington's 20-year war. The official pretexts are even more shameful: The U.S. must withhold the funds from starving Afghans in case Americans want reparations for crimes of 9/11, for which Afghans bear no responsibility. Recall that the Taliban offered complete surrender, which would have meant turning over the al-Qaeda suspects. (They were only suspects at the time of the U.S. invasion, in fact long after as the FBI confirmed.) But the U.S. firmly responded with the edict that, "The United States is not inclined to negotiate surrenders." That was Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld, echoed by George W. Bush.

If there is any moral outrage about this current crime, it's hard to detect. It is far from the only case. Are there some lessons to be learned? Perhaps, but though they seem simple enough, maybe they merit a few words.

Moral outrage over Russian crimes in Ukraine is understandable and justified. The extreme selectivity in moral outrage is also understandable, but not justified. It is understandable because it is so common.

It is hard to think of a more elementary moral principle than the Golden Rule — in the Jewish tradition, the rule that "what is hateful to you, do not do to others."

There is no rule that is more elementary, or more consistently violated. That is also true for a corollary: Energy and attention should be focused on where we can do most good. With regard to international affairs, that typically means focusing on the actions of one's own state, particularly in more or less democratic societies where citizens have some role in determining outcomes. We can deplore crimes in Myanmar [also known as Burma], but we cannot do much to alleviate the suffering and misery within Myanmar. We could do a lot to help the miserable victims who fled or were expelled, the [Rohingya in Bangladesh](#). But we don't.

The observation generalizes. The principle is indeed elementary. To say that actual practice fails to conform to it would be a vast understatement.

It is not that we do not understand and honor the principle. We do, with true passion, when the principle is observed in the societies of official enemies: We greatly admire the Russians who are courageously defying the harsh Russian autocracy and protesting the Russian invasion. That keeps to a long tradition. We always greatly honored Soviet dissidents who condemned the crimes of their own state, and never cared at all about what they said about others, even when they applauded major U.S. crimes. Same with Chinese and Iranian dissidents. It is only when the principle applies to ourselves that it can barely even be contemplated.

One dramatic illustration among many is the U.S. invasion of Iraq. It can be criticized as a "strategic blunder" (according to Barack Obama) but not as what it was: unprovoked and murderous aggression, the "supreme international crime" according to the Nuremberg judgment.

Accordingly, the dramatic selectivity in moral outrage is understandable, and another outrage. In some weak form of extenuation, we can add that it is no U.S. invention. Our predecessors as hegemonic imperial powers were no different, including Britain; arguably worse, though after centuries of disgraceful behavior there is now some beginning of reckoning.

Turning to the next question, does the U.S. ever think that conflicts can be resolved by peaceful means? No doubt. There are examples, which deserve a closer look. We can learn a lot from them about international affairs, if we choose.

Right at this moment, we are all called upon to celebrate a remarkable example of U.S. initiative to resolve conflict by peaceful means: the ongoing "Negev Summit" of Israel and four Arab dictatorships, which will "expand the potential for peace



and conflict resolution across the region,” [according to Secretary of State Antony Blinken](#), Washington’s representative at the historic meeting.

The summit brings together the most brutal and violent states within the U.S. orbit, based on the Abraham Accords, which formalized the tacit relations between Israel, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Morocco, with Saudi Arabia present implicitly via its satellite, the Bahrain dictatorship. They are joined at the summit by Egypt, now suffering under the most vicious dictatorship in its ugly history, with some 60,000 political prisoners and brutal repression. Egypt is the second-largest recipient of U.S. military aid, after Israel. There should be no need to review the sordid record of the leading recipient, recently designated the [apartheid state](#) by Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International.

The UAE and Saudi Arabia share primary responsibility for what the UN describes as the world’s worst humanitarian crisis: Yemen. The official death toll last year reached 370,000. The actual toll no one knows. The shattered country is facing mass starvation. Saudi Arabia has intensified its blockade of the sole port used for food and fuel imports. The UN is issuing extreme warnings, including the threat of imminent starvation of hundreds of thousands of children. The general warnings are echoed by U.S. specialists, notably Bruce Riedel of the Brookings Institution, formerly the top CIA analyst on the Middle East for four presidents. He [charges](#) that the Saudi “offensive action” should be investigated as a war crime.

The Saudi and Emirati air forces cannot function without U.S. planes, training, intelligence, spare parts. Britain is taking part in the crime, along with other Western powers, but the U.S. is well in the lead.

The Moroccan dictatorship was also welcomed by the Trump peace initiative. In his last days in office, Donald Trump even formally recognized Morocco’s annexation of Western Sahara in defiance of the UN Security Council and the International Court of Justice — incidentally firming up Morocco’s virtual monopoly of potassium, a vital and irreplaceable resource, now within U.S. domains.

Authorizing of Morocco’s criminal annexation should have come as no surprise. It [followed Trump’s recognition](#) of Israel’s annexation of the Syrian Golan Heights and of vastly expanded Greater Jerusalem, in both cases in violation of Security

Council orders. Trump's support for violation of international law was undertaken in both cases in the splendid isolation that the U.S. often enjoys, as in its torture of Cuba for 60 years.

These are just further illustrations of the commitment to the "rule of law" and the sanctity of sovereignty that Washington has demonstrated for 70 years in Iran, Guatemala, Brazil, Chile, Iraq, and on and on — the commitment that requires the U.S. to extend the welcome mat to Ukraine to join NATO.

The summit that we are now celebrating is a direct outgrowth of the Abraham Accords. For implementing them, Jared Kushner has been [nominated](#) for the Nobel Peace Prize (by Harvard Law Professor Alan Dershowitz).

The Abraham Accords and today's Negev Summit are by no mean the first time that Washington has demonstrated its dedication to peaceful settlement of conflicts. After all, Henry Kissinger won the Nobel Peace Prize for his achievements in bringing peace to Vietnam, shortly after issuing one of the most extraordinary calls for genocide in the diplomatic record: "A massive bombing campaign in Cambodia. Anything that flies on anything that moves." The consequences were horrendous, but no matter.

Kissinger's prize brings to mind the reported proposal by an Israeli physicist that [founder of Israel's Likud party and former prime minister] Menachem Begin should be granted the physics prize. When asked why, he said: "Look, he's been granted the Peace Prize, so why not the Physics Prize?"

Sometimes the quip is unfair. Jimmy Carter surely deserved the Peace Prize that was awarded for his efforts after he left the presidency, though the award committee [emphasized](#) that while still in office, President Carter's "vital contribution to the Camp David Accords between Israel and Egypt [was] in itself a great enough achievement to qualify for the Nobel Peace Prize."

Carter's 1978 efforts were also no doubt undertaken with the best of intentions. It didn't quite turn out that way. Menachem Begin did agree to abandon Israel's project of settling the Egyptian Sinai but insisted that Palestinian rights should be excluded from the accords, and illegal settlement sharply increased under Ariel Sharon's direction, always with vital U.S. aid and in violation of Security Council directives. And as Israeli strategic analysts quickly pointed out, removal of the Egyptian deterrent freed Israel to escalate its attacks on Lebanon, leading finally

to the U.S.-backed 1982 invasion that killed some 20,000 Lebanese and Palestinians and destroyed much of Lebanon, with no credible pretext.

Ronald Reagan finally ordered Israel to end the assault when the bombing of the capital city of Beirut was causing international embarrassment to Washington. It of course complied but maintained its control of South Lebanon with constant atrocities against what it called “terrorist villagers” resisting the brutal occupation. It also established a vicious torture chamber in Khiam, which was kept as a memorial after Israel was forced finally to withdraw by Hezbollah guerrilla warfare. I was taken through it before it was destroyed by Israeli bombing to erase memory of the crime.

So, yes, there are some cases when the U.S., like other hegemonic imperial powers before it, has sought to resolve conflicts by peaceful means.

*Back home, Republicans are backing up strong policies against Russia, although their “Great Leader” keeps changing his tune about Putin in order to stay in line with ongoing developments. The question here is this: Why is there still support among GOP members for Russia and Putin, especially on the far right of the political spectrum? What’s motivating the far right in the U.S. to break ranks with the Republican Party over Russia when the overwhelming majority of public opinion in the country is in support of Ukraine?*

It’s not just Russia and Ukraine. While Europe has condemned Prime Minister Viktor Orbán’s “illiberal democracy” in Hungary, it has become the darling of much of the American right. *Fox News* and its prime broadcaster Tucker Carlson are in the lead, but other prominent “conservatives” are [joining in](#) with odes to the proto-fascist Christian nationalist regime that Orbán has imposed while shredding Hungarian freedom and democracy.

All of this reflects a conflict within the Republican Party — or to be more accurate, what remains of what was once a legitimate political party but is now ranked alongside of European parties with neo-fascist origins. Trump accelerated tendencies that trace back to Newt Gingrich’s takeover of the party 30 years ago. And Trump is now being outflanked from the right, difficult as that was to imagine not long ago. Much of the leadership is drifting towards the Orbán model or beyond, bringing a worshipful mass base with them. I think the debate within the party over Russia and Ukraine should be considered against this background.

*GOP lawmakers are intensifying efforts to ban books on race, as if slavery and racial oppression in the U.S. are figments of one's imagination instead of historical facts. Are the pushes to ban books and suppress votes linked? Do these developments represent yet another indication that a civil war may be brewing in the U.S.?*

Book-banning is nothing new in the U.S. and suppressing votes of the “wrong” people is as American as apple pie, to borrow the cliché. They are now returning with force as the Republican organization, soon to retake power it seems, moves towards a kind of [proto-fascism](#). Some careful analysts predict civil war. At the very least, a serious internal crisis is taking shape. There has long been much talk about American decline. To the extent that it is real, the major factor is internal. If we look deeper, much of the internal social decay results from the brutal impact of the neoliberal programs of the past 40 years, topics we’ve discussed before. It’s bad enough when Hungary drifts towards Christian nationalist proto-fascism. When that happens in the most powerful state in world history, the implications are ominous.

*Imposing harsh sanctions on countries that refuse to go along with Washington's commands is a long-established tactic on the part of the U.S. In fact, even scholars living in countries under sanctions are treated as undesirables. And the overall political culture in the U.S. is not too keen at all on permitting dissident voices to be widely heard in the public arena. Do you wish to comment on these foundational features of the political culture in the United States?*

This is too large a topic to take up here. And much too important for casual comment. But it’s worth remembering that, once again, it is nothing new. We all recall when the august Senate changed French fries to “freedom fries” in furious reaction to France’s impudent refusal to join in Washington’s criminal assault on Iraq. We may see something similar soon if President Macron of France, one of the few reasonable voices in high Western circles, continues to call for moderation in words and actions and for exploring diplomatic options. The easy decline to scaremongering goes back much further, reaching comic depths when the U.S. entered World War I and all things German instantly became anathema.

The plague you mention is not confined to U.S. shores. To take one personal example, I recently heard from a colleague that an article of his was returned to him, unread, by a highly respected philosophy journal in England, with a notice

that the article could not be considered because he is a citizen of a country under sanctions: Iran.

The sanctions are strongly opposed by Europe, but as usual, it submits to the Master, even to the extent of banning an article by an Iranian philosopher. Putin's great gift to Washington has been to intensify this subordination to power.

I can add many examples right here, some from my own personal experience, but it should not be overlooked that the malignancy spreads well beyond.

We live in dangerous times. We may recall that the Doomsday Clock abandoned minutes and shifted to seconds under Trump, and is now set at 100 seconds to midnight — termination. The analysts who set the clock give three reasons: nuclear war, environmental destruction, and collapse of democracy and a free public sphere, which undermines the hope that informed and aroused citizens will compel their governments to overcome the dual race to disaster.

The war in Ukraine has exacerbated all three of these disastrous tendencies. The nuclear threat has sharply increased. The dire necessity of sharply reducing fossil fuel use had been reversed by adulation of the destroyers of life on Earth for saving civilization from the Russians. And democracy and a free public sphere are in ominous decline.

It is all too reminiscent of 90 years ago, though the stakes are far higher today. Then, the U.S. responded to the crisis by leading the way to social democracy, largely under the impetus of a revived labor movement. Europe sank into fascist darkness.

What will happen now is uncertain. The one certainty is that it is up to us.

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## **Stopping The War In Ukraine Now Is The Only Option**



*Willem de Haan*

It might not be 'cool' to lay down weapons now, but it would mean the end of senseless violence and prevent the annihilation of Ukraine.

Reuters estimates that, after three weeks of war, 14,000 people have been killed, 2,7 million people have fled, 1,700 buildings have been destroyed and damages exceed 110 billion euro. The trauma that will result from what is happening in Ukraine will last decades.

Defense budgets all over Europe are being increased and relationships with Russia will be disrupted for years to come.

Whenever there is fighting, we seem to be grabbed by a hunger for war: Nuances disappear and a choice must be made between good and evil. The complex reality doesn't matter anymore, nor do the reasons for the conflict.

### *Language as a weapon*

Language also becomes a weapon in times of war: "Those who do not support us militarily, want us to slowly die", says Zelensky. It may sound logic, but it's not true - nobody wants the Ukrainian people to slowly die.

The appeal is clear, however. If you care about us, you support us with weapons, whatever it takes. The Netherlands is also understanding of Zelensky's call for Polish fighter jets and Finland's wish to become a member of NATO. Both would be an extremely dangerous escalation.

Ukraine did not start this war, but every day Zelensky chooses to continue this unequal battle, he also bears responsibility for the death toll, the refugees and the destruction of his country.

### *A high price to pay*

Continuing to fight maybe cool, but the people of Ukraine and soldiers on both sides are paying a terrible price. Putting weapons down might not be cool, but it would end the senseless violence and prevent the annihilation of Ukraine.

Even if it would cost him his life, ending the war would make Zelensky immortal, a true hero. Defending your country sounds noble, but what if the price is a completely destroyed country? With tens of thousands more dead and millions of refugees?

A report from the NOS Journaal (Dutch news report) sticks with me. A captured Russian soldier being interrogated somewhere in Ukraine. "How old are you?" Answer: 21 years old. "Where are you from?" From St Petersburg. "What are you doing here?" I was sent here. "What do you want?" I want to go home.

According to the voice-over the young man was later executed. Refusing to



perform military service is incredibly difficult in both Russia and Ukraine. Soldiers do not have a choice, political leaders do. As Bob Dylan wrote in his song *Masters of War* in 1963: 'You put a gun in my hand / And you hide from my eyes.'

### *Peaceful protest*

War is terrible and the next violent outbursts are already announcing themselves: Moldavia, Georgia, the Baltic States, Taiwan. Will we push the world closer to the brink of war? I prefer to draw hope from the peaceful protest Gandhi used against the British rule in India, the kind that Martin Luther King used to end segregation in the United States, how mass protests around the world helped end the war in Vietnam and how peaceful protest from the East Germans brought down the Berlin Wall in 1989.

According to War Resisters' International (WRI), an organization founded in 1921 to promote peace and antimilitarism, over 1,1 million Russians have signed a petition against the war started by Russian human rights activist Lev Ponomarev. Yurii Sheliashenko of the Ukrainian Pacifist Movement called for peaceful protest three days after the start of the war, where most people only see military solutions. He considers a neutral Ukraine the best option for the future.

### *The only option*

They know that violence only begets violence, history is full of it. Pacifism is not a popular concept in times of war, but among the people who believed in it and practiced it were Jesus of Nazareth and Albert Einstein, John Lennon and Mother Theresa. Call them idealists, but the world would be a far worse place without them.

Stopping the war now is the only option. Does that mean Putin gets his way? No. If he wants to occupy all of Ukraine and succeeds, he inherits a country of 44 million dissidents. Even for a dictator, that is a nightmare.

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*Translation: Sunny Resch*

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# Chomsky: Let's Focus On Preventing Nuclear War, Rather Than Debating "Just War"



*Noam Chomsky*

NATO leaders announced Wednesday that the alliance plans to reinforce its eastern front by deploying many more troops in countries like Bulgaria, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia — including [thousands of U.S. troops](#) — and sending [“equipment to help Ukraine defend itself against chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear threats.”](#) And while the NATO alliance itself is not directly providing weapons to Ukraine, many of its member countries are [pouring weapons into Ukraine](#), including missiles, rockets, machine guns, and more.

In all likelihood, Russian President Vladimir Putin believed that his military would overrun Ukraine within a matter of a few days on February 24, when he ordered an invasion into the neighboring country after a long and massive military buildup on Ukraine's border.

A month later, however, the war is still raging, and several Ukrainian cities have been devastated by Russian air attacks. Peace talks have stalled, and it is unclear whether Putin still wants to overthrow the government or is instead aiming now for a “neutral” Ukraine.

In the interview that follows, world-renowned scholar and leading dissident voice

Noam Chomsky shares his thoughts and insights about the available options for an end to the war in Ukraine, and ponders the idea of “just” war and whether the war in Ukraine could potentially lead to the collapse of Putin’s regime.

Chomsky is internationally recognized as one of the most important intellectuals alive. His intellectual stature has been compared to that of Galileo, Newton and Descartes, as his work has had tremendous influence on a variety of areas of scholarly and scientific inquiry, including linguistics, logic and mathematics, computer science, psychology, media studies, philosophy, politics and international affairs. He is the author of some 150 books and the recipient of scores of highly prestigious awards, including the Sydney Peace Prize and the Kyoto Prize (Japan’s equivalent of the Nobel Prize), and of dozens of honorary doctorate degrees from the world’s most renowned universities. Chomsky is Institute Professor Emeritus at MIT and currently Laureate Professor at the University of Arizona.

*C.J. Polychroniou: Noam, we are already a month into the war in Ukraine and peace talks have stalled. In fact, Putin is turning up the volume on violence as the West increases military aid to Ukraine. In a [previous interview](#), you compared Russia’s invasion of Ukraine to the Nazi invasion of Poland. Is Putin’s strategy then straight out of Hitler’s playbook? Does he want to occupy all of Ukraine? Is he trying to rebuild the Russian empire? Is this why peace negotiations have stalled?*

*Noam Chomsky:* There is very little credible information about the negotiations. Some of the information leaking out sounds mildly optimistic. There is good reason to suppose that if the U.S. were to agree to participate seriously, with a constructive program, the possibilities for an end to the horror would be enhanced.

What a constructive program would be, at least in general outline, is no secret. The primary element is commitment to neutrality for Ukraine: no membership in a hostile military alliance, no hosting of weapons aimed at Russia (even those misleadingly called “defensive”), no military maneuvers with hostile military forces.

That would hardly be something new in world affairs, even where nothing formal exists. Everyone understands that Mexico cannot join a Chinese-run military

alliance, emplace Chinese weapons aimed at the U.S. and carry out military maneuvers with the People's Liberation Army.

In brief, a constructive program would be about the opposite of the [Joint Statement on the U.S.-Ukraine Strategic Partnership](#) signed by the White House on September 1, 2021. This document, which received little notice, forcefully declared that the door for Ukraine to join NATO (the North Atlantic Treaty Organization) is wide open. It also “finalized a Strategic Defense Framework that creates a foundation for the enhancement of U.S.-Ukraine strategic defense and security cooperation” by providing Ukraine with advanced anti-tank and other weapons along with a “robust training and exercise program in keeping with Ukraine’s status as a NATO Enhanced Opportunities Partner.”

The statement was another purposeful exercise in poking the bear in the eye. It is another contribution to a process that NATO (meaning Washington) has been perfecting since Bill Clinton’s 1998 violation of George H.W. Bush’s firm pledge not to expand NATO to the East, a decision that elicited strong warnings from high-level diplomats from George Kennan, Henry Kissinger, Jack Matlock, (current CIA Director) William Burns, and many others, and led Defense Secretary William Perry to come close to resigning in protest, joined by a long list of others with eyes open. That’s of course in addition to the aggressive actions that struck directly at Russia’s concerns (Serbia, Iraq, Libya, and lesser crimes), conducted in such a way as to maximize the humiliation.

It doesn’t strain credulity to suspect that that the joint statement was a factor in inducing Putin and the narrowing circle of “hard men” around him to decide to step up their annual mobilization of forces on the Ukrainian border in an effort to gain some attention to their security concerns, in this case on to direct criminal aggression — which, indeed, we can compare with the Nazi invasion of Poland (in combination with Stalin).

Neutralization of Ukraine is the main element of a constructive program, but there is more. There should be moves towards some kind of federal arrangement for Ukraine involving a degree of autonomy for the Donbass region, along the general lines of what remains of Minsk II. Again, that would be nothing new in world affairs. No two cases are identical, and no real example is anywhere near perfect, but [federal structures exist in Switzerland and Belgium](#), among other

cases — even the U.S. to an extent. Serious diplomatic efforts might find a solution to this problem, or at least contain the flames.

And the flames are real. Estimates are that some 15,000 people have been killed in conflict in this region since 2014.

That leaves Crimea. On Crimea, the West has two choices. One is to recognize that the Russian annexation is simply a fact of life for now, irreversible without actions that would destroy Ukraine and possibly far more. The other is to disregard the highly likely consequences and to strike heroic gestures about how the U.S. “will never recognize Russia’s purported annexation of Crimea,” as the joint statement proclaims, accompanied by many eloquent pronouncements by others who are willing to consign Ukraine to utter catastrophe while advertising their bravery.

Like it or not, those are the choices.

Does Putin want to “occupy all of Ukraine and rebuild the Russian empire?” His announced goals (mainly neutralization) are quite different, including his statement that it would be madness to try to reconstruct the old Soviet Union, but he might have had something like this in mind. If so, it’s hard to imagine what he and his circle still do. For Russia to occupy Ukraine would make its experience in Afghanistan look like a picnic in the park. By now that’s abundantly clear.

Putin does have the military capacity — and judging by Chechnya and other escapades, the moral capacity — to leave Ukraine in smoldering ruins. That would mean no occupation, no Russian empire and no more Putin.

Our eyes are rightly focused on the mounting horrors of Putin’s invasion of Ukraine. It would be a mistake, however, to forget that the joint statement is only one of the pleasures that the imperial mind is quietly conjuring up.

A few weeks ago, [we discussed](#) President Biden’s National Defense Authorization Act, as little known as the joint statement. This brilliant document — again quoting Michael Klare — calls for “an unbroken chain of U.S.-armed sentinel states — stretching from Japan and South Korea in the northern Pacific to Australia, the Philippines, Thailand, and Singapore in the south and India on China’s eastern flank” — meant to encircle China, including Taiwan, “ominously enough.”

We might ask how China feels about the fact that the U.S. Indo-Pacific command is now reported to be planning to enhance the encirclement, doubling its spending in fiscal year 2022, in part [to develop](#) “a network of precision-strike missiles along the so-called first island chain.”

For defense, of course, so the Chinese [government has] no reason for concern.

*There is little doubt that Putin’s aggression against Ukraine fails [just war theory](#), and that NATO is also morally responsible for the crisis. But what about Ukraine arming civilians to fight against the invaders? Isn’t this morally justified on the same grounds that resistance against the Nazis was morally justified?*

Just war theory, regrettably, has about as much relevance to the real world as “humanitarian intervention,” “responsibility to protect” or “defending democracy.”

On the surface, it seems a virtual truism that a people in arms have the right to defend themselves against a brutal aggressor. But as always in this sad world, questions arise when we think about it a little.

Take the resistance against the Nazis. There could hardly have been a more noble cause.

One can certainly understand and sympathize with the motives of Herschel Grynszpan when he assassinated a German diplomat in 1938; or the British-trained partisans who assassinated the Nazi murderer Reinhard Heydrich in May 1942. And one can admire their courage and passion for justice, without qualification.

That’s not the end, however. The first provided the Nazis with the pretext for the atrocities of Kristallnacht and impelled the Nazi program further toward its hideous outcomes. The second led to the shocking Lidice massacres.

Events have consequences. The innocent suffer, perhaps terribly. Such questions cannot be avoided by people with a moral bone in their bodies. The questions cannot fail to arise when we consider whether and how to arm those courageously resisting murderous aggression.

That’s the least of it. In the present case, we also have to ask what risks we are willing to take of a nuclear war, which will not only spell the end of Ukraine but

far beyond, to the truly unthinkable.

It is not encouraging that [over a third of Americans](#) favor “taking military action [in Ukraine] even if it risks a nuclear conflict with Russia,” perhaps inspired by commentators and political leaders who should think twice before doing their Winston Churchill impersonations.

Perhaps ways can be found to provide needed arms to the defenders of Ukraine to repel the aggressors while avoiding dire consequences. But we should not delude ourselves into believing that it is a simple matter, to be settled by bold pronouncements.

*Do you anticipate dramatic political developments inside Russia if the war lasts much longer or if Ukrainians resist even after formal battles have ended? After all, Russia’s economy is already under siege and could end up with an economic collapse unparalleled in recent history.*

I don’t know enough about Russia even to hazard a guess. One person who does know enough at least to “speculate” — and only that, as he reminds us — is Anatol Lieven, whose insights have been a very useful guide all along. He regards “dramatic political developments” as highly unlikely because of the nature of the harsh kleptocracy that Putin has carefully constructed. Among the more optimistic guesses, “the most likely scenario,” [Lieven writes](#), “is a sort of semi-coup, most of which will never become apparent in public, by which Putin and his immediate associates will step down ‘voluntarily’ in return for guarantees of their personal immunity from arrest and their family’s wealth. Who would succeed as president in these circumstances is a totally open question.”

And not necessarily a pleasant question to consider.

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Project. He has published scores of books and over 1,000 articles which have appeared in a variety of journals, magazines, newspapers and popular news websites. Many of his publications have been translated into a multitude of different languages, including Arabic, Chinese, Croatian, Dutch, French, German, Greek, Italian, Japanese, Portuguese, Russian, Spanish and Turkish. His latest books are *Optimism Over Despair: Noam Chomsky On Capitalism, Empire, and Social Change* (2017); *Climate Crisis and the Global Green New Deal: The Political Economy of Saving the Planet* (with Noam Chomsky and Robert Pollin as primary authors, 2020); *The Precipice: Neoliberalism, the Pandemic, and the Urgent Need for Radical Change* (an anthology of interviews with Noam Chomsky, 2021); and *Economics and the Left: Interviews with Progressive Economists* (2021).

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## **We Need An Economy Without Bosses And Managers. Participatory Economics Is How.**



*Michael Albert - Photo: youtube.com*

Interest in worker cooperatives has been [spreading](#) lately across the U.S. This is largely due to growing insecurity in the face of structural changes in the workplace during the neoliberal era, which have intensified since the last financial crisis. In fact, worker cooperatives are well established in many countries of Europe, especially in France, Italy and Spain — countries with long

anarchist and socialist traditions.

The movement for workers cooperatives goes beyond capitalism as it breaks down hierarchical structures and puts workers and community at the core of business operations. Yet critical questions remain about the function and impact of cooperative economics. For example, what would a post-capitalist economy where workers run productive facilities look like? How would decisions be made about production, distribution, and who earns what? And what would be the role of money under an economic system without owners or bosses? Is such an economic future even realistic, or a mere utopian dream?

Michael Albert has been advancing a vision of participatory economics for over 40 years now. In his view, “Participatory economics proposes a few key institutions that its advocates feel to be essential for an economy to fulfill quite widely held worthy aspirations including solidarity, diversity, equity, self management, and sustainability—classlessness—and to of course also be viable for producing and allocating to meet needs and develop potentials of everyone.”

Albert’s latest book, [\*No Bosses: A New Economy for a Better World\*](#), presents a detailed pathway toward an economy based on genuine self-management and solidarity.

*C.J. Polychroniou: Your new book, No Bosses: A New Economy for a Better World, advances a vision for a new economy called participatory economics (parecon). A key idea behind your vision of an alternative economic system is worker self-management. Can you outline how such an economy would function with regard to decisions about production, allocation and rewards where workers run enterprises without bosses or owners?*

*Michael Albert:* You ask a key question: With no owners, who will decide what? Participatory economics says we should all have a say in decisions that affect us in proportion to the degree to which we are affected. Workers’ councils should therefore make workplace decisions.

But beyond being made by their involved workers, workplace decisions need to be insightful and informed. What can facilitate that?

Look around now. About 20 percent of current employees do mainly empowering tasks. About 80 percent do mainly disempowering tasks. The empowering

situations of the 20 percent convey to them information, skills, access to decisions, connections with others and confidence. The rote, repetitive and generally disempowering situations of the 80 percent diminish their information, skills, access, connections and confidence. Looking down at workers below, we have empowered managers, lawyers, engineers, financial officers, and other employees I call the *coordinator class*. Looking up at coordinators above, we have disempowered cleaners, short-order cooks, carriers, assemblers, and other employees I call the *working class*.

If we reject having owners but we retain this corporate division of labor, the empowered 20 percent will consider themselves special, responsible and important. They will set agendas and make decisions. They will pursue their own interests and defend their own dominance. The disempowered 80 percent will have to obey a new boss in place of the old boss. To eliminate this class hierarchy in which 20 percent decide and 80 percent obey, *all* workers will need to be comparably prepared to participate in informed decision-making. Thus, participatory economics apportions tasks into jobs so the particular mix of tasks you do and the different mix I do, and indeed the mix every worker does provides to all a comparable level of empowerment.

*No Bosses* argues that “balanced job complexes” would not only end the coordinator/worker class division but also be productive, efficient and effective. But *No Bosses* also urges that we would still have a decision-related problem because beyond its workers, what occurs in a workplace also affects direct consumers of the workplace’s products as well as bystanders who may be inundated with pollutants. For self-management, direct consumers and also adjacent bystanders also need appropriate say. Moreover, if a workplace uses a particular quantity of some input to produce a desired amount of some output, other workers elsewhere can no longer use that same bit of input to produce a different output. Metals forged into bombs can’t be forged into bridges. So, everyone needs a say in what gets made, with what, by whom, for whom. A question arises: How will participatory workplaces and consumers together exercise self-managing say to arrive at properly accounted outcomes?

Nowadays, economists tell us we have no alternative. To allocate, we must use markets and/or central planning. But *No Bosses* reveals that while markets and central planning do a very credible job for dominant elites, for the rest of us, they diminish worker and consumer well-being, destroy ecological balance, demolish

dignity, produce anti-sociality and enforce coordinator class rule.

To escape all that, participatory economics proposes that self-managing workers' and consumers' councils develop and refine their respective preferences through rounds of decentralized deliberation that bring production and consumption into accord.

*No Bosses* demonstrates how this "participatory planning" with no top and no bottom would settle on appropriate product amounts and valuations and deliver equitable incomes consistently with self-management and balanced jobs. It shows how "participatory planning" would efficiently utilize society's productive assets to seek human fulfillment and development in light of ecological, social and personal implications. It shows how "participatory planning" would generate solidarity and not a rat race; diversity and not homogenization; dignity and not alienation; and ecological sustainability and not collective ecocide.

*What would be the role of money under this new economic system? And how would a national-based "self-management" economy deal with the forces driving the global economy?*

In a participatory economy, money would account. It wouldn't accrue. People would receive income either for the duration, intensity and onerousness of their socially valued work, or because they can't work but get a full income nonetheless. Some goods would be free, like health care and much else, but on the consumer side, people would mostly choose from the social product the particular mix of goods and services they wish to enjoy up to their income/budget. On the producer side, workplaces would use diverse inputs to generate outputs. Participatory planning would mediate it all without competition or authoritarian command. Items would have prices to convey information that allows people to consume in accord with their income and to produce to meet needs and develop potentials without undue waste and while respecting the environment. Imagine a debit card to make purchases. Money just facilitates equitable allocation. There is no making money by having money.

If the global economy were composed of national participatory economies interacting by way of international participatory planning, the needs and desires of the populations of its many countries would drive it. But suppose some participatory economies operate in a world that is still market guided. The

participatory economies would have their own domestic valuations that reflect true social costs and benefits. The rest of the world would have market valuations that reflect bargaining power. I would hope that a participatory economy would transact with other economies using whichever of the two prices would allocate the benefits of each trade in a way that would further equity rather than abet accumulation by the rich at the expense of the poor.

*How would unemployment be dealt with under this new economic system, or with individuals in general who refuse to join a workers' enterprise or execute tasks assigned to them at workplace by the collective?*

In a participatory economy, the amount of available work reflects people's desires for the output of work. Divide all the sought work among all the potential workers and everyone is employed. If in sum people seek less output, it means everyone works less, not that some work while others don't. The planning process plus participatory economy's remunerative norm correlates people who seek work with workplaces who seek workers. And though I have barely mentioned it, that remunerative norm — that income is for the duration, intensity and onerousness of your socially valued labor — is another defining feature critical to participatory economy being an equitable and viable vision.

As you note, work in a participatory economy would occur via workers councils. If I was to refuse to be part of any workers council, I wouldn't work so I also wouldn't get income for work. Similarly, if I were to violate collectively agreed, self-managed norms in my workplace — for example, if I didn't do my tasks, or if I did them really poorly — I could lose my job. In a participatory economy, we would get income for the duration and intensity of our socially valued work. Between jobs we would retain income. We would get income only for work that is socially valued. Someone unskilled in medicine or basketball wouldn't be able to do surgery or shoot hoops for income. No one would want such an inferior product. No associated workers council would employ someone incapable of doing worthy work. But how do workplace councils get allotted appropriate total income for their workers? In our councils, how do we each get our fair share? How do we opt to do one job and not another? How do we get items to consume? *No Bosses* addresses all that and much more. But for your immediate question, in a participatory economy, unemployment of people able to work would only occur temporarily when people transition from one job to another. And such unemployed workers would retain their incomes as well.

*I assume you are aware of the practical challenges facing the transition to a worker-self management economy. So, what practical advice do you offer as to how we can proceed with the type of reforms needed that would create the building blocks for an economic system without bosses?*

We want enlivening, equitable, self-managing participatory economics to replace moribund, impoverishing, class-ruled capitalism. This requires that we fundamentally revolutionize the defining features of a central sphere of social life. But, as you suggest, on the way to that result, we will have to win lesser changes both for their immediate benefits to deserving constituencies, and to create the conditions for ultimately winning and implementing our greater goals. Two issues centrally arise. First, what kinds of things should we seek to win as part of the process of winning a new economy? Second, how should we fight for such immediate reforms in ways that contribute to winning a new economy?

What we might win in current society is anything that betters the lot of people suffering economic ills. For example: wage increases. Dignity. Free medical care. A degree of say over work. Free internet. Changes in investment patterns. Changes in national and local budgets. Free education. Protection against ecological violations. And so on.

And how do we win such changes in current society? We create a situation in which those who have power to implement the changes do so because the risk to their power and wealth of refusing to give in is greater than the losses they will incur due to giving in.

Next, *how* do we fight for such changes? What words should we use? What demands should we make? What organizations should we develop? Even more, what desires should we address and arouse? Answer: We should choose among possibilities based on whether our choice enables us to win a sought reform, but also based on whether it builds a desire to fight on for more, and based on whether it strengthens our means to win more due to how we have conducted our struggle.

We fight for a higher minimum wage, but we talk about equitable incomes. We fight for dignity and improved work conditions, but we talk about self-management and build worker and consumer councils. We fight for restraints on dumping and for reduced military expenditures, but we talk about escaping

market absurdity and attaining participatory planning.

Moreover, we don't address economy alone. Entwined with the above economic path, and with equal commitment, creativity, inspiration, audacity and priority, we simultaneously develop and seek to win cultural/community, sex/gender, and political vision with all together composing a participatory society.

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## **After February's Dire IPCC Report,**



# The Green New Deal Is More Urgent Than Ever

The ongoing war in Ukraine does not bode well for the future of peace and sustainability on planet Earth. As Noam Chomsky [said](#) in a recent interview for *Truthout*, “We are at a crucial point in human history. It cannot be denied. It cannot be ignored.” The latest report by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), released on February 28, spells out the dire consequences of inaction to human-induced climate change. So, where do we stand in the fight against global warming? Is the Green New Deal project making inroads?

In the interview that follows, two leading climate activists — Margaret Kwateng, a national Green New Deal organizer at [Grassroots Global Justice Alliance](#), and Ebony Twilley Martin, co-executive director of [Greenpeace USA](#) — discuss the significance of the Green New Deal project and its potential power as a transformative policy for saving the planet and creating a more fair and just social order.

*C.J. Polychroniou: What would achieving the Green New Deal look like, and can it be accomplished in the next decade given the current political climate in the U.S.?*



*Margaret Kwateng - Photo:  
Grassroots Global Justice Alliance*

*Margaret Kwateng:* We are living in a moment where nearly all of our lives are being deeply impacted by the climate crisis — especially frontline communities around the world. From extreme droughts to floods, hurricanes, tornadoes and [wildfires](#), whole communities are being devastated. The IPCC just released its latest global assessment of climate impacts that proclaimed the climate crisis is happening now, faster and more intensely than we expected. People are more aware than ever of the urgent need to stop the burning of the planet. The colliding crisis of climate change and the global pandemic has demonstrated that tragedies do not happen in a vacuum; rather, a crisis in one sector has ripple effects throughout our economy and touches on numerous parts of people's lives. The real solutions to the climate crisis require a transformation of the extractive economy (away from fossil fuel and other resource extraction, labor exploitation and corporate profiteering) that has brought us to this breaking point.

We envision a decade of the Green New Deal because we know this scale of global crisis will require more profound change than we have seen in years. Our movements are stepping forward with a vision and a demand focused on the reorganizing of our economy to center life and well-being.

In this way, the Green New Deal is not one law or policy. The Green New Deal is a whole set of transformative policies that are able to address multiple crises at once. The [THRIVE Act](#), which the [Green New Deal Network](#) (GNDN) worked with congressmembers to introduce in 2021, called for a \$10 trillion investment to mobilize our economy and confront climate chaos, racial injustice and economic inequality. This is the floor of what is required to confront these crises, not the ceiling.

A realized Green New Deal would grow union jobs in renewables; build affordable housing and expand clean accessible public transportation; divest from brutal systems like prisons and the military; and invest in community infrastructure. The goal is not to simply regenerate the fabric of our society but to also create a national community that values the essential labor of care workers like domestic workers, home care workers and teachers; actualizes justice for communities that have long been left behind; and reduces the ripple effect when global, local or personal crises strike.

Our current conjuncture of overlapping crises — continued pandemic, climate chaos, chronic racial injustice, democracy under attack and escalating

militarization — poses both turbulent terrain to pass bold visionary policies and also the ripe opportunity for intersectional solutions that address these crises together. We need to divest from the billions of dollars going to war and violent policing of our communities, and redirect investment to renewable energy, clean transportation, affordable housing and the care sector.

Our work is not to accept the intransigence of our governments and obstructionist politicians, but to shift the political landscape entirely by demanding the full scale of what we need to survive and to offer an irresistible vision of a future in which we all thrive. That is the power and potential of our movements mobilized together behind a truly transformative Green New Deal.

*What was the impetus for diverse sectors of the climate justice movement, including labor, care workers, racial justice groups and Indigenous groups to come together to form the Green New Deal Network, and what role is the GNDN playing in achieving a Green New Deal?*

*Kwateng:* While the demand for a Green New Deal and Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez's Green New Deal resolution have dramatically shifted the national debate on climate change policy since 2018, the vision at the heart of a Green New Deal has been around for much longer.

Many communities have been working to make Green New Deal-like shifts a reality for decades, under other banners like climate justice and a just transition. For example, when miners realized coal jobs were leaving Kentucky and community members were fed up with the contaminated water resulting from those same mines, they decided to launch [Appalachia's Bright Future](#), creating plans for how to move away from disease-causing, environment-degrading fossil fuel extraction to an alternative future together.

Despite this level of on-the-ground expertise, many communities on the front lines of the climate crisis have been left out of larger conversations on how to address it. The vision for the Green New Deal Network is to be an intersectional coalition that brings together workers, community groups, activists, and Black and Indigenous organizations, particularly those on the front lines of crises, in the fight for visionary climate, care, jobs and justice policies.

The work of organizations like the [Indigenous Environmental Network](#) (IEN) has pushed the scope of the Green New Deal vision beyond just switching out gas cars

for electric ones and, instead, toward centering racial justice and social, economic and ecological transformation. Just last October, IEN and allies [descended on the capital](#) to say that real climate justice means both respecting Indigenous sovereignty and stopping fossil fuel extraction.

In addition, groups like the Grassroots Global Justice Alliance and Service Employees International Union are at the table to advocate for a robust and dignified care economy as a critical component of a Green New Deal. Care workers are on the front lines of the climate crisis, and they are the backbone of a sector that will need to expand as climate crises intensify.

Because there are groups ranging from the Movement for Black Lives, to the Center for Popular Democracy, to the Working Families Party at the Green New Deal Network, we are building a united front capable of creating a Green New Deal that doesn't replicate historically exclusive policies — in leaving out communities like women and Black folks — and instead is able to tackle the multiple crises we are facing. We are generating shared policy, electing progressives and holding them accountable, and organizing to change the social and political landscape to make the kind of change where communities across the country can thrive.

*What are the barriers to bring about a Green New Deal this decade, and how do we break them down?*



*Ebony Twilley Martin - Photo: Greenpeace*

*Ebony Twilley Martin:* The Green New Deal is built on the vision of a world in which all people have what they need to thrive and the boundaries of the planet are respected. One of the biggest barriers to realizing this future is the profit-driven economic system in which massive corporations and a few wealthy elites control and exploit land, communities and legislation. This system prioritizes profits over the well-being of families while also driving the continued extraction from and commodification of the Earth. As you can see in the latest [IPCC report](#), this is drastically upsetting the balance of life on the planet.

Unity is key in breaking down this barrier. But unity is not always easy. As we look to recover from COVID-19, address the climate crisis, advance racial justice and build an economy that puts people first, corporate overlords and those who do their bidding in Congress continually try to pit these priorities against each other in an attempt to divide us. We saw this play out last year when corporations lobbied against the Build Back Better Act attempting to put climate action, health care, workers' rights and child care on the chopping block, despite all being overwhelmingly popular with the majority of Americans. The Green New Deal Network provides a space where organizations and communities can work together across priorities to establish a unified front. We know these crises are interconnected, and to solve one, we must address them all.

Disinformation is also a huge barrier that needs to be addressed. For years, corporations have offered us a false choice between a healthy economy or a healthy planet and communities. Oil and gas companies, in particular, like to hide behind the prospect of jobs and stability to justify their destructive "business as usual." The truth is, we have a better chance at creating millions of good-paying, stable, union jobs with renewable energy than we do with fossil fuels. Just before the pandemic struck, [clean energy jobs outnumbered fossil fuel jobs](#) nearly three to one, totaling about 3.3 million jobs and growing [70 percent faster](#) than the economy overall. And the clean energy industry proved resilient through 2020, too: Despite the pandemic and resulting economic crisis, [2020 was a record year](#) for [solar](#) and [wind](#) installations, as the industry continued to attract [investor interest](#).

Another piece of disinformation is that the current system is somehow safer. The Departments of Homeland Security and Defense, as well as the National Security Council and director of national intelligence, have all issued reports stating that [climate change poses a threat to national security](#). Financial regulators are also

calling it [an emerging threat to the stability of the U.S. financial system](#). Most alarmingly, climate change threatens the health and safety of our families. [Air pollution from fossil fuels killed 8.7 million people](#) globally in 2018 alone. Pollution from fracked-gas infrastructure has [increased the risk of cancer for 1 million Black Americans](#). It has also contributed to 138,000 asthma attacks and 101,000 lost school days for Black children like my sons.

Making this the decade of the Green New Deal will address these threats to our health and safety by transitioning off of fossil fuels and toward renewable energy. The House Committee on Oversight and Reform recently held hearings on the fossil fuel industry's role in spreading disinformation, and at Greenpeace USA, [we filed a complaint](#) with the Federal Trade Commission against Chevron for greenwashing. People are starting to wise up to these tactics, but both government and private companies need to take measures to stop the spread of disinformation, and those who spread it need to be held accountable.

*Why should people care about the work of the Green New Deal Network? How will this work benefit everyday people?*

*Martin:* This question cuts to one area where we can certainly improve, and that's how we communicate the goals and ambitions of a Green New Deal to our communities, families and friends. I know when a lot of my friends and family hear "Green New Deal," they recognize the term, but don't know what it includes or what it would do for them personally. Most of what is contained in the Green New Deal is extremely popular and would improve the livelihoods of everyday people. Things like clean energy and job investments, affordable housing, paid family and medical leave, and reducing child poverty — all regularly see support of around 60 percent and above in [polls](#). It is our job as the Green New Deal Network to better help people to understand that the Green New Deal is the pathway to securing a better future.

At its core, the Green New Deal is about caring and uplifting one another. As we talked about earlier, we can overcome these challenges through unity. The Green New Deal Network is envisioned as a coalition that embodies this unity. Since the Green New Deal Network has both national and state-based priorities, our work covers everything from large federal legislation in Washington, D.C., to local fights in our communities. Whether your passion is preventing pollution,



improving workers' rights, building a fairer economy or improving the health care system, there is a space for people to get involved with the state coalitions and the organizations that are part of the Green New Deal Network.

If all of us in the Green New Deal Network can succeed in enacting the vision of a Green New Deal into federal, state, tribal and local governments across the country, then people throughout the U.S. will feel some relief from the oppressive, exploitative and downright violent forces that exist in everyday life. For some folks, these forces are outside their direct lived experience and exist only on the edges. For others, these are examples happening every day.

The Green New Deal will not solve all our problems — but it will show us that solutions are possible and that a transformation toward a more just, fair, green and equitable society is within our power to make a reality.

*This interview has been lightly edited for clarity.*

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