

Alias Bob Dylan - Heimwee naar de verbeelding



Het moet 1964 geweest zijn toen de mythe ontstond dat de jonge Robert Zimmerman, afkomstig uit Hibbing, Minnesota, als een soort eerbetoon aan de Ierse dichter Dylan Thomas, zijn naam had veranderd in Bob Dylan. Tot ver in de jaren zeventig dook het verhaal in allerlei artikelen en beschouwingen over Dylan op. In 1965 had

Dylan al tegen een journalist van *The Chicago Daily News* gezegd: 'I took the name Dylan because I have an uncle named Dillion. I changed the spelling but only because it looked better. I've read some of Dylan Thomas's stuff, and it's not the same as mine'.

Robert Shelton, journalist bij *The New York Times*, begon in 1966 aan een biografie over Dylan (*No Direction Home*. Het boek zou pas in 1986 verschijnen). Verschillende malen liet Dylan aan Shelton weten: 'Straighthen out in your book that I did not take my name from Dylan Thomas'.

Dylan was Shelton sowieso dankbaar, want in september 1961 had Shelton in de *New York Times* de eerste - lovende - recensie over een optreden van Dylan geschreven. Dylan was op dat moment slechts bekend bij een kleine kring van bezoekers van folkcafé's in Greenwich Village. De recensie bracht hem onder de aandacht van Columbia Records en van producer John Hammond en bezorgde hem een platencontract.



Interview

Inmiddels weten we dat veel van wat Dylan in interviews verklaarde met een flinke korrel zout genomen moet worden. Met biografische gegevens is hij altijd uiterst karig geweest en verschillende verhalen die hij over zijn jeugd en puberjaren vertelde, bleken achteraf geheel verzonnen. Legendarisch is een van zijn eerste radio-interviews. Nog voor de release van zijn eerste plaat interviewde presentatrice Cynthia Gooding hem in maart 1962 een uur lang voor WBAI-FM Radio, New York. Onduidelijk is of het programma ooit is uitgezonden maar het is gelukkig wel bewaard gebleven.

[1] Zo vertelt hij Gooding dat hij op jeugdige leeftijd wegliep van huis en enkele jaren met een circus door de Verenigde Staten was getrokken. In New Orleans zou hij op 12-jarige leeftijd kennis gemaakt hebben met oude bluesmuzikanten die hem het mondharmonicaspelen hadden geleerd. Niets van waar: het bleken gefingeerde biografische verhalen. Soortgelijke 'herinneringen' zou hij in zijn beginjaren nog wel vaker verkondigen.



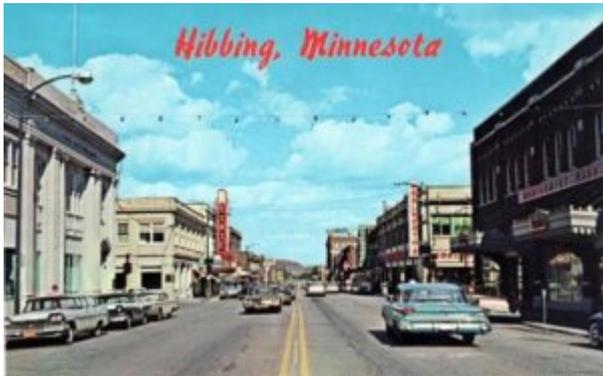
Artiestennaam

Maar als de naam Dylan geen betrekking had op Dylan Thomas, op wie dan wel? Dylan vertelde vrienden dat de naam gebaseerd was op Dillon, de achternaam van zijn moeder. Maar dat was niet waar zo bleek later, de moeder van Robert Zimmerman heette Beatrice Stone. Over de oom Dillion heeft Dylan nooit meer gesproken. In zijn highschool-jaren trad Robert Zimmerman zo nu en dan op schoolfeesten en county fairs op samen met jeugdvriend John Bucklen, overigens niet altijd tot genoegen van het publiek.

Voor iemand die het ver wilde schoppen in de muziek, en dat wilde de jonge Robert, was Zimmerman wellicht geen goeie artiestennaam. In 1958 zei hij tegen Bucklen: 'I know what I'm going to call myself. I've got this great name - Bob Dillon.'

Misschien is de achtergrond van de naam Dylan dan ook veel minder prozaïsch dan vaak gesuggereerd. Robert Zimmerman was in zijn jeugd een grote fan van de westerntelevisieserie Gunsmoke, waarin de rechtvaardige Marshal Matt Dillon

(acteur James Arness) in het westernstadje Dodge City de orde weet te handhaven. Mogelijk is de Dillon/Dylan-naamgeving niet meer dan de jeugdroom een held te willen zijn, of op zijn minst zich te willen onderscheiden van de rest.



Westernseries

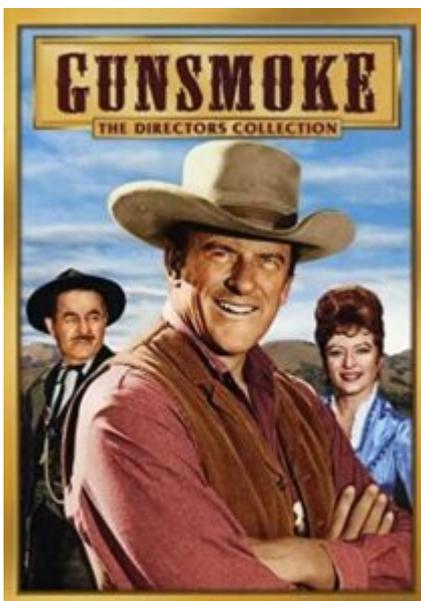
Hibbing, een plaatsje met zo'n tienduizend inwoners was tot bloei gekomen dankzij de omringende ijzerertsminen, maar in de jaren vijftig was de bloeitijd van het stadje al lang voorbij. Voor de opgroeiende jeugd was er niet veel te beleven. Er was een bioscoop, meer vermaak was er niet. In

1952 kon het gezin Zimmerman zich als eerste in Hibbing een televisie veroorloven. De jonge Bob bracht met zijn vrienden urenlang voor het toestel door.

Hij keek naar musicals en *variety shows*, maar zijn voorkeur ging uit naar westernseries als *Wyatt Earp*, *Kit Carson*, *Davey Crockett*, maar vooral de serie *Gunsmoke* was zijn favoriet.

Vertraagd geweld

Van de serie *Gunsmoke* werden tussen 1955 en 1975 635 afleveringen gemaakt. Met kijkersogen van nu, ruim zestig jaar later, oogt de serie als uitermate braaf. In de volgens een vast stramien opgebouwde afleveringen werden de problemen in het keurige, burgerlijke plaatsje Dodge City op een beschaafde manier door Marshal Dillon opgelost. Daarbij vielen natuurlijk wel schoten en doden vielen er ook, maar zichtbaar bloed vloede er nooit.



Voor veel acteurs en regisseurs was de serie het startpunt van hun carrière. Bijvoorbeeld voor Dennis Weaver, die in de jaren zeventig de succesvolle serie *McCloud* maakte, en voor regisseur Sam Peckinpah. Peckinpah had al naam gemaakt als scenarioschrijver van tientallen afleveringen van de populaire westernserie *Broken Arrow*, maar voor *Gunsmoke* mocht hij het als regisseur proberen. Tussen 1955 en 1958 regisseerde hij elf afleveringen. Daarnaast maakte hij afleveringen van de westernseries *The Rifleman* en *The Westerner*. In de

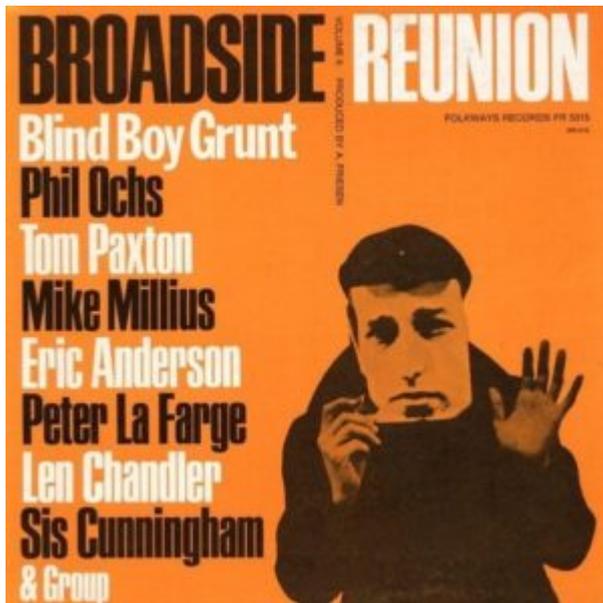
jaren zestig regisseerde hij de westerns *Wichita*, *Major Dundee* en *Villa Rides*. Bekendheid kreeg Peckinpah in 1969 als regisseur van de snoeiharde western *The Wild Bunch*, waarin hij alle film- en westernwetten overtrad door geweld vooral zo bloedig mogelijk in beeld te brengen, het liefst vertraagd vertoond en vanuit verschillende camerastandpunten gefilmd. In de jaren zeventig zou vertraagd geweld Peckinpahs handelsmerk blijken te zijn. Hij maakte onder meer films als *Straw Dogs*, *The Getaway*, *Bring me the Head of Alfredo Garcia* en *Cross of Iron*. In 1973 maakte hij zijn laatste western, *Pat Garret and Billy the Kid*, met in de hoofdrollen James Coburn en Kris Kristofferson.

Dylan, bevriend met Kristofferson, toonde interesse in een rol in de film en kreeg via de producer het script toegespeeld. Hij ging naar een voorstelling van *The Wild Bunch* en raakte zozeer enthousiast over de stijl van Peckinpah dat hij meteen erna de song *Billy the Kid* schreef. [2] Peckinpah was onder de indruk van het nummer en draaide het vrijwel continu.

Dylan mocht de soundtrack voor de film schrijven en kreeg zowaar een rolletje toebedeeld, als Alias, een hulpje van Billy the Kid.

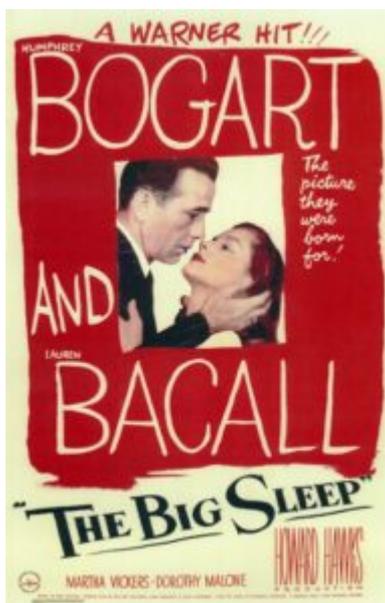
Pseudoniemen

Alias. Hoe toepasselijk kan een naam zijn, want in de loop der jaren bediende Dylan zich van vele pseudoniemen. Hij noemde zich Elston Gunn toen hij in 1959 drie dagen lang deel uitmaakte van de begeleidingsgroep van vroege rocker Bobby Vee, totdat hij uit de band werd gezet omdat hij teveel aandacht van het publiek opeiste. Als Tedham Porterhouse speelde hij in 1964 harmonica op de elpee *Ramblin' Jack* van Ramblin' Jack Elliot. In datzelfde jaar speelde hij als Blind Boy Grunt enkele songs op een plaat van het folktijdschrift *Broadside*.



Op de elpee *The Blues Project. A Compendium of the Very Best on the Urban Blues Scene* uit 1965, met o.a. Geoff Muddaur, Dave van Ronk en Eric von Schmidt, speelt hij piano als Bob Landy.[3] 'To musicians, his piano playing is almost legend', staat vermeld in de hoestekst. In 1972 verscheen hij als Robert Milkwood Thomas (!) op de plaat *Somebody Else's Troubles* van Steve Goodman. Als Lucky Wilbury maakte hij deel uit van *The Traveling Wilburys*, de groep met George

Harrison, Jeff Lynne, Roy Orbison en Tom Petty (1988), op hun tweede plaat heette hij Boo Wilbury (1990). Onder de naam Sergei Petrov schreef hij mee aan het scenario voor de film *Masked and Anonymous* (2003), waarin Dylan de rocklegende Jack Fate speelt. De afgelopen decennia produceerde hij zijn eigen platen onder de naam Jack Frost.



Speelfilms

Bob Dylan is een filmliefhebber, dat is bekend. In 1956, na het zien van de film *Giant* met James Dean, wilde hij niets liever dan de nieuwe James Dean worden. Zijn rebellie uitte hij dan wel niet als filmster maar als folk- en rockartiest, zijn liefde voor film en met name voor western is in zijn songs terug te vinden.

Michael Gray, auteur van de indrukwekkende studie *Song & Dance Man III. The Art of Bob Dylan* (2000), was de eerste die merkte dat sommige passages in Dylansongs een opvallende overeenkomst vertoonden met dialogen of zinsneden uit speelfilms. Nauwgezette

studie bracht aan het licht dat Dylan uit maar liefst 61 speelfilms citaten in songs heeft gebruikt, of verwijst naar filmtitels.[4] Negen daarvan zijn westerns, negentien titels - waarvan zes films met Humphrey Bogart - stammen uit de jaren veertig en vijftig, de periode van de film noir, bijvoorbeeld *Casablanca*, *To Have and Have Not*, *Shoot the Piano Player* en *Rear Window*.

Enkele voorbeelden:

The Big Sleep (1946)

Bogart: 'What's wrong with you?'

Bacall: 'Nothing you can't fix'

Dylan in *Seeing the Real You at Last*:

'At one time there was nothing wrong with me,

That you could not fix'

The Oklahoma Kid (1939)

Cagney: 'You want to talk with me'

Bogart: 'Go ahead and talk'

Dylan in *Tight Connection on my Heart*:

'You want to talk to me

Go ahead and talk'

The Lusty Men (1952)

Mitchum: 'Broken bottles, broken bones, everything is broken'

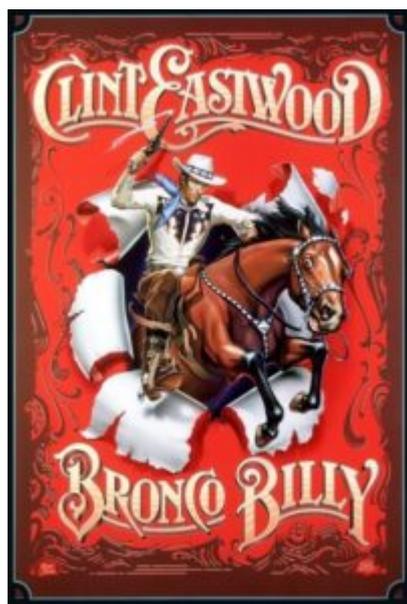
Dylan in *Everything is Broken*:

'Broken bottles, broken plates,

Broken switches, broken gates

...

Everything is broken'



In *Bronco Billy* (1980), een film over een rodeocowboy (eigenlijk een moderne western) zegt Clint Eastwood: 'I'm looking for a woman who can ride like Annie Oakley and shoot like Belle Starr'.^[5] In de song *Seeing the Real You at Last* (1985) zingt Dylan:

'When I met you baby

You didn't show no visible scars.
You could ride like Annie Oakley
You could shoot like Belle Starr'

Het zou zo een citaat uit een film met Humphrey Bogart kunnen zijn.

Amerika

Meer nog dan Dylans soundtrack voor Pat Garrett and Billy the Kid ademt zijn achtste elpee John Wesley Harding de sfeer van een westernfilm uit. Titel en titel song verwijzen niet alleen naar outlaw en gunfighter John Wesley Hardin (1853-1895), een song als *The Ballad of Frankie Lee and Judas Priest* roept beelden op van een westernstadje waar oplichters, mysterieuze godsdienstpredikers en zwervende outlaws de dienst uitmaken. Beelden zoals we die wel kennen uit klassieke westernfilms. Op de plaat heerst een geheimzinnige, soms onheilspellende sfeer, waarbij een Bijbels noodlot ieder moment lijkt te kunnen toeslaan. (De plaat bevat zo'n zestig verwijzingen naar de Bijbel, maar dat is een ander verhaal.)



Big Pink - Woodstock

De elpee dateert uit dezelfde periode (1968) waarin de beroemde *Basement Tapes* werden opgenomen. Dylan en The Band namen ruim honderd songs op in de kelder van het huis Big Pink in Woodstock. De in 1975 uitgebrachte plaat *The Basement Tapes* was hiervan slechts een magere selectie. De in 2014 uitgebrachte box *The Basement Tapes Raw, The Bootleg Series Vol. 11* bood bijna alle opgenomen songs. De opnames lijken die van John Wesley Harding in een breder kader te plaatsen. Oude folk- en bluessongs en nieuwe songs van

Dylan schetsen het beeld van een verdwenen Amerika, een negentiende eeuwse gebied bevolkt door outlaws, hobo's, landarbeiders, slaven en immigranten. Ballades uit de Appalachian Mountains, countrysongs, murderballads, kinderliedjes en gospelsongs vertellen de geschiedenis van dat verdwenen Amerika. *The Basement Tapes* weerspiegelen dat verleden en maken de luisteraar deelgenoot van die geschiedenis, alsof het filmbeelden zijn van een nog te maken epos over een mythisch, vrijwel vergeten land. Een land dat misschien alleen in de verbeelding bestaat. In die verbeelding kan Marshall Matt Dillon de orde handhaven.



Noten

[1] Het interview met Dylan is te beluisteren

op <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=483m8ADfG48>

[2] Bob Dylan: Billy the Kid (audio)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZEi83f_CEqM

[3] Geoff Mudaur,

Downtown Blues, on piano Bob Landy
(audio) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BCSsCK86ldc>

[4] Movie quotes in Bob Dylan songs <http://www.geocities.ws/linwood/cinema/Dylan-Film/>

[5] Annie Oakley (1860-1926), legendarische Amerikaanse scherpschutster. Belle Starr (1848- 1889), outlaw, maakte deel uit van de bende van Jesse en Frank James.

De oudste bewegende beelden van Dylan (ca.1961)

Noam Chomsky: Biden's Foreign Policy Is Largely Indistinguishable From Trump's



Noam Chomsky

President Joe Biden's domestic policies, especially on the economic front, are quite encouraging, [offering plenty of hope for a better future](#). The same, however, cannot be said about the administration's foreign policy agenda, as Noam Chomsky's penetrating insights and astute analysis reveal in this exclusive interview for *Truthout*. Chomsky is a world-famous public intellectual, Institute Professor Emeritus at MIT and Laureate Professor of Linguistics at the University of Arizona.

C.J. Polychroniou: Noam, two months after being in the White House, Biden's foreign policy agenda is beginning to take shape. What are the signs so far of how the Biden administration intends to address the challenges to U.S. hegemony posed by its primary geopolitical rivals, namely Russia and China?

Noam Chomsky: The challenge to U.S. hegemony posed by Russia and particularly China has been a major theme of foreign policy discourse for some time, with persistent agreement on the severity of the threat.

The matter is plainly complex. It's a good rule of thumb to cast a skeptical eye when there is general agreement on some complex issue. This is no exception.

What we generally find, I think, is that Russia and China sometimes deter U.S. actions to enforce its global hegemony in regions on their periphery that are of particular concern to them. One can ask whether they are justified in seeking to

limit overwhelming U.S. power in this way, but that is a long distance from the way the challenge is commonly understood: as an effort to displace the U.S. global role in sustaining a liberal rule-based international order by new centers of hegemonic power.

Do Russia and China actually challenge U.S. hegemony in the ways commonly understood?

Russia is not a major actor in the world scene, apart from the military force that is a (very dangerous) residue of its earlier status as a second superpower. It does not begin to compare with the U.S. in outreach and influence.

China has undergone spectacular economic growth, but it is still far from approaching U.S. power in just about any dimension. It remains a relatively poor country, ranked 85th in the UN Human Development Index, between Brazil and Ecuador. The U.S., while not ranked near the top because of its poor social welfare record, is far above China. In military strength and global outreach (bases, forces in active combat), there is no comparison. U.S.-based multinationals have about half of world wealth and are first (sometimes second) in just about every category. China is far behind. China also faces serious internal problems (ecological, demographic, political). The U.S., in contrast, has internal and security advantages unmatched anywhere.

Take sanctions, a major instrument of world power for one country on Earth: the U.S. They are, furthermore, third-party sanctions. Disobey them, and you're out of luck. You can be tossed out of the world financial system, or worse. It's pretty much the same wherever we look.

If we look at history, we find regular echoes of Sen. Arthur Vandenberg's 1947 advice to the president that he should "scare hell out of the American people" if he wanted to whip them up to a frenzy of fear over the Russian threat to take over the world. It would be necessary to be "clearer than truth," as explained by Dean Acheson, one of the creators of the postwar order. He was referring to NSC-68 of 1950, a founding document of the Cold War, declassified decades later. Its rhetoric continues to resound in one or another form, again today about China.

NSC-68 called for a huge military build-up and imposition of discipline on our dangerously free society so that we can defend ourselves from the "slave state" with its "implacable purpose... to eliminate the challenge of freedom"

everywhere, establishing “total power over all men [and] absolute authority over the rest of the world.” And so on, in an impressive flow.

China does confront U.S. power — in the South China Sea, not the Atlantic or Pacific. There is an economic challenge as well. In some areas, China is a world leader, notably renewable energy, where it is far ahead of other countries in both scale and quality. It is also the world’s manufacturing base, though profits go mostly elsewhere, to managers like Taiwan’s Foxconn or investors in Apple, which is increasingly reliant on intellectual property rights — the exorbitant patent rights that are a core part of the highly protectionist “free trade” agreements.

China’s global influence is surely expanding in investment, commerce, takeover of facilities (such as management of Israel’s major port). That influence is likely to expand if it moves forward with provision of vaccines virtually at cost in comparison with the West’s hoarding of vaccines and its impeding of distribution of a “People’s Vaccine” so as to protect corporate patents and profits. China is also advancing substantially in high technology, much to the consternation of the U.S., which is seeking to impede its development.

It is rather odd to regard all of this as a challenge to U.S. hegemony.

U.S. policy might help create a more serious challenge by confrontational and hostile acts that drive Russia and China closer together in reaction. That has, in fact, been happening, under Trump and in Biden’s first days — though Biden did respond to Russia’s call for renewing the New START Treaty on limiting nuclear weapons at the last minute, salvaging the one major element of the arms control regime that had escaped Trump’s wrecking ball.

Clearly what is needed is diplomacy and negotiations on contested matters, and real cooperation on such crucial issues as global warming, arms control, future pandemics — all very severe crises that know no borders. Whether Biden’s hawkish foreign policy team will have the wisdom to move in these directions is, for now, at best unclear — at worst, frightening. Absent significant popular pressures, prospects do not look good.

Another issue that calls for popular attention and activism is the policy of protecting hegemony by seeking to harm potential rivals, very publicly in the case of China, but elsewhere too, sometimes in ways that are sometimes hard to

believe.

A remarkable example is buried in the [Annual Report for 2020 of the Department of Health and Human Services](#), proudly presented by Secretary Alex Azar. Under the subheading “Combatting malign influences in the Americas,” the report discusses the efforts of the Department’s Office of Global Affairs (OGA)

to mitigate efforts by states, including Cuba, Venezuela and Russia, who are working to increase their influence in the region to the detriment of U.S. safety and security. OGA coordinated with other U.S. government agencies to strengthen diplomatic ties and offer technical and humanitarian assistance to dissuade countries in the region from accepting aid from these ill-intentioned states. Examples include *using OGA’s Health Attaché office to persuade Brazil to reject the Russian COVID-19 vaccine, and offering CDC technical assistance in lieu of Panama accepting an offer of Cuban doctors.* [Emphasis mine].

In the midst of a raging pandemic, according to this report, we must block malignant initiatives to help miserable victims.

Under President Jair Bolsonaro’s grotesque mismanagement, Brazil has become the global horror story of failure to deal with the pandemic, despite its outstanding health institutes and fine past record in vaccination and treatment. It is suffering from a severe shortage of vaccines, so the U.S. takes pride in its efforts to prevent it from using the Russian vaccine, which Western authorities recognize to be comparable to the Moderna and Pfizer vaccines used here.

Even more astonishing, as the author of [this article](#) in the EU-based *Brasil Wire* comments, is “that the US dissuaded Panama from accepting Cuban doctors, who have been on the global front line against the [pandemic](#), working in over 40 [countries](#).” We must protect Panama from the “malign influence” of the one country in the world to exhibit the kind of internationalism that is needed to save the world from disaster, a crime that must be stopped by the global hegemon.

Washington’s hysterical dedication to crush Cuba from almost the first days of its independence in 1959 is one of the most extraordinary phenomena of modern history, but still, the level of petty sadism is a constant surprise

With regards to Iran, also there do not seem to be signs of hope as the Biden administration has named Richard Nephew, an architect of sadistic sanctions

against Iran under Barack Obama, as its deputy Iran envoy. Right or wrong?

Biden adopted Trump's Iran program with virtually no change, even in rhetoric. It is worthwhile to recall the facts.

Trump withdrew U.S. participation in the JCPOA (the nuclear agreement), in violation of UN Security Council Resolution 2331, which obligates all states to abide by the JCPOA, and in violation to the wishes of all other signers. In an impressive display of hegemonic power, when the UN Security Council members insisted on abiding by 2331 and not extending UN sanctions, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo told them to get lost: You are renewing the sanctions. Trump imposed extremely harsh new sanctions to which others are obliged to conform, with the goal of causing maximum pain to Iranians so that perhaps the government might relent and accept his demand that the JCPOA be replaced by a new agreement that imposes much harsher restrictions on Iran. The pandemic offered new opportunities to torture Iranians by depriving them of desperately needed relief.

Furthermore, it is Iran's responsibility to take the first steps towards negotiations to capitulate to the demands, by terminating actions it took in reaction to Trump's criminality.

As we've discussed before, there is merit in Trump's demand that the JCPOA can be improved. A far better solution is to establish a nuclear weapons-free zone (or WMD-free zone) in the Middle East. There is only one barrier: the U.S. will not permit it, and vetoes the proposal when it arises in international forums, most recently seen by President Obama. The reason is well-understood: It's necessary to protect Israel's major nuclear arsenal from inspection. The U.S. does not even formally acknowledge its existence. To do so would prejudice the vast flood of U.S. aid to Israel, arguably in violation of U.S. law, a door that neither political party wants to open. It's another topic that will not even be discussed unless popular pressure makes suppression impossible.

In U.S. discourse, Trump is criticized because his policy of torturing Iranians didn't succeed in bringing the government to capitulate. The stance is reminiscent of Obama's highly praised moves towards limited relations with Cuba, because, as he explained, we need new tactics after our efforts to bring democracy to Cuba had failed — namely, a vicious terrorist war that led almost to

extinction in the 1962 missile crisis and sanctions of unparalleled cruelty that are unanimously condemned by the UN General Assembly (Israel excepted). Similarly, our wars in Indochina, the worst crimes since World War II, are criticized as a “failure,” as is the invasion of Iraq, a textbook example of the “supreme international crime” for which Nazi war criminals were hanged.

These are among the prerogatives of a true hegemon, immune to the cackles of foreigners and confident in the support of those whom an acerbic critic once called “the herd of independent minds,” the bulk of the educated classes and the political class.

Biden took over the entire Trump program, without any change. And to twist the knife further, he appointed Richard Nephew as deputy Iran envoy. Nephew has explained his views in his book *Art of Sanctions*, where he [outlines](#) the proper “strategy to carefully, methodically, and efficiently increase pain on areas that are vulnerabilities while avoiding those that are not.” Just the right choice for the policy of torturing Iranians because the government that most of them despise will not bend to Washington’s demands.

U.S. government policy towards Cuba and Iran provides very valuable insight into how the world works under the domination of imperial power.

Cuba since independence in 1959 has been the target of unremitting U.S. violence and torture, reaching truly sadistic levels — with scarcely a word of protest in elite sectors. The U.S., fortunately, is an unusually free country, so we have access to declassified records explaining the ferocity of the efforts to punish Cubans. Fidel Castro’s crime, the State Department explained in the early years, is its “successful defiance” of U.S. policy since the Monroe Doctrine of 1823, which declared Washington’s right to control the hemisphere. Plainly harsh measures are required to stifle such efforts, as any Mafia Don would understand — and the analogy of world order to the Mafia has considerable merit.

Much the same is true of Iran since 1979, when a popular uprising overthrew the tyrant installed by the U.S. in a military coup that rid the country of its parliamentary regime. Israel had enjoyed very close relations with Iran during the years of the Shah’s tyranny and extreme human rights violations, and like the U.S., was appalled by his overthrow. Israel’s de facto Ambassador to Iran, Uri Lubrani, expressed his “strong” belief that the uprising could be suppressed, and

the Shah restored “by a very relatively small force, determined, ruthless, cruel. I mean the men who would lead that force will have to be emotionally geared to the possibility that they would have to kill ten thousand people.”

U.S. authorities pretty much agreed. President Carter sent NATO Gen. Robert E. Huyser to Iran to try to convince the Iranian military to undertake the task — a surmise confirmed by recently released internal documents. They refused, considering it hopeless. Shortly after, Saddam Hussein invaded Iran — an attack that killed hundreds of thousands of Iranians, with full support from the Reagan administration, even when Saddam resorted to chemical weapons, first against Iranians, then against Iraqi Kurds in the Halabja atrocities. Reagan protected his friend Hussein by attributing the crimes to Iran and blocking congressional censure. He then turned to direct military support for Hussein with naval forces in the Gulf. One vessel, the *USS Vincennes*, shot down an Iranian civilian airliner in a clearly marked commercial airspace, killing 290 people, returning to a royal welcome at its home base where the commander and flight officer who had directed the destruction of the airliner were rewarded with Medals of Honor.

Recognizing that it could not fight the U.S., Iran effectively capitulated. Washington then turned harsh sanctions against Iran, while rewarding Hussein in ways that sharply increased threats to Iran, which was then just emerging from a devastating war. President Bush I invited Iraqi nuclear engineers to the U.S. for advanced training in nuclear weapons production, no small matter for Iran. He pushed through agricultural aid that Hussein badly needed after having destroyed rich agricultural areas with his chemical weapons attack against Iraqi Kurds. He sent a high-level mission to Iraq headed by the Republican Senate leader Bob Dole, later presidential candidate, to deliver his respects to Hussein, to assure him that critical comment about him would be curbed on *Voice of America*, and to advise Hussein that he should ignore critical comment in the press, which the U.S. government can't prevent.

This was April 1990. A few months later, Hussein disobeyed (or misunderstood) orders and invaded Kuwait. Then everything changed.

Almost everything. Punishment of Iran for its “successful defiance” continued, with [harsh sanctions](#), and new initiatives by President Bill Clinton, who issued executive orders and signed congressional legislation sanctioning investment in Iran's oil sector, the basis of its economy. Europe objected, but had no way to

avoid U.S. extraterritorial sanctions.

U.S. firms suffered too. Princeton University Middle East specialist Seyed Hossein Mousavian, former spokesman for Iran nuclear negotiators, [reports](#) that Iran had offered a billion-dollar contract to the U.S. energy firm Conoco. Clinton's intervention, blocking the deal, closed off an opportunity for reconciliation, one of many cases that Mousavian reviews.

Clinton's action was part of a general pattern, an unusual one. Ordinarily, particularly on energy-related issues, policy conforms to Adam Smith's comments on 18th-century England, where the "masters of mankind" who own the private economy are the "principal architects" of government policy, and act to ensure that their own interests are foremost, however "grievous" the effect on others, including the people of England. Exceptions are rare, and instructive.

Two striking exceptions are Cuba and Iran. Major business interests (pharmaceuticals, energy, agribusiness, aircraft, and others) have been eager to break into Cuban and Iranian markets and to establish relations with domestic enterprises. State power bars any such moves, overruling parochial interests of the "masters of mankind" in favor of the transcendent goal of punishing successful defiance.

There's a good deal to say about these exceptions to the rule, but it would take us too far afield.

The release of the Jamal Khashoggi murder report disappointed almost everyone, save Saudi Arabia. Why is the Biden administration taking such a soft approach towards Saudi Arabia, and Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman in particular, which prompted New York Times columnist Nicholas Kristof to write that, "Biden ... let the murderer walk"?

Not hard to guess. Who wants to offend the close ally and regional power that the State Department described during World War II as "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." The world has changed in many ways since, but the basic reasoning remains.

Biden had promised that, if elected, he would scale back Trump's nuclear

weapons spending, and that the U.S. would not rely on nuclear weapons for defense. Are we likely to see a dramatic shift in U.S. nuclear strategy under the Biden administration whereby the use of these weapons will be far less likely?

For reasons of cost alone, it is a goal that should be high on the agenda of anyone who wants to see the kinds of domestic programs the country badly needs. But the reasons go far beyond. Current nuclear strategy calls for preparation for war — meaning terminal nuclear war — with China and Russia.

We should also remember an observation of Daniel Ellsberg's: Nuclear weapons are constantly used, much in the way a gun is used by a robber who aims his gun at a storekeeper and says, "Your money or your life." The principle in fact is enshrined in policy, in the important 1995 document "Essentials of Post-Cold War Deterrence" issued by Clinton's Strategic Command (STRATCOM). The study concludes that nuclear weapons are indispensable because of their incomparable destructive power, but even if not used, "nuclear weapons always cast a shadow over any crisis or conflict," enabling us to gain our ends through intimidation; Ellsberg's point. The study goes on to authorize "preemptive" use of nuclear weapons and provides advice for planners, who should not "portray ourselves as too fully rational and cool-headed." Rather, the "national persona we project" should be "that the US may become irrational and vindictive if its vital interests are attacked and that "some elements may appear to be potentially 'out of control.'"

Richard Nixon's "madman theory," but this time not from reports by associates but from the designers of nuclear strategy.

Two months ago, the UN Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons went into effect. The nuclear powers refused to sign, and still violate their legal responsibility under the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons to undertake "effective measures" to eliminate nuclear weapons. That stance is not carved in stone, and popular activism could induce significant moves in that direction, a necessity for survival.

Regrettably, that level of civilization still seems beyond the range of the most powerful states, which are careening in the opposite direction, upgrading and enhancing the means to terminate organized human life on Earth.

Even junior partners are joining in the race to destruction. Just a few days ago,

British Prime Minister Boris Johnson “[announced a 40 per cent increase in UK’s stockpile of nuclear warheads](#). His review... recognised ‘the evolving security environment’, identifying Russia as Britain’s ‘most acute threat’.”

Lots of work to do.

This interview has been lightly edited for clarity and length.

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Is Neoliberalism Dying? A Structuralist Approach To Predatory Global Capitalism And The Challenge of Reform*



C.J. Polychroniou

Forty years of neoliberal rule have produced devastating effects on lower and working-class people and on the social fabric throughout the world: wages have stagnated, labor rights have been trampled, and economic inequalities have exploded. Neoliberalism has also proven detrimental to democracy as many forms of collective decision-making and even faith and trust in the ability of government to solve problems have been severely eroded by the marketization project. Citizens have been encouraged to think and act like consumers and powerful private interests have made a mockery of the idea of a common good. Moreover, trends of ongoing income and wealth inequality combined with job insecurity and the hijacking of the state by the economic elites has led to the eruption of popular anger, leading to the rise of a new generation of authoritarian rulers and to a concomitant attack on the traditional democratic order, along with an explosion of xenophobic rage and racism.

Nonetheless, neoliberalism has remained the hegemonic paradigm in the workings of contemporary capitalism and the operating framework of the global economy, even though this particular form of economic governance is prone to systemic crises and in spite of challenges and sporadic forms of resistance from below.

At least until now, that is. For the eruption of the pandemic appears to have discredited market fundamentalism and state interventionism has returned with vengeance throughout the West. We have seen massive monetary and fiscal packages introduced both in Europe and the United States in order to provide relief for unemployed workers and struggling businesses in ways that have not been seen in many decades. During the global financial crisis of 2008, the state bailed out the financial sector and turned a blind eye towards homeowners and the millions of people suffering from the consequences of “predatory capitalism”

that neoliberalism gave rise to from the mid-1970s and continued to fuel throughout the next four decades. However, during the era of the pandemic, the state has come to some degree to the rescue of the entire economy, although still not as aggressively as economic thinking associated with the name and work of John Maynard Keynes would surely recommend for a crisis as severe as the one thrust upon the world by the eruption of the Covid pandemic, which has created a classic capitalist crisis of accumulation.

Be that as it may, the question popping up suddenly (once again, we might add, since the same question popped up after the financial crisis of 2008) is whether the return of “Big Government” during the pandemic is signaling the end of neoliberalism.

My view on this matter is that it is too early to tell, and, more importantly, that neoliberalism is not going to wither away without an increased role of participatory democracy and the emergence of political vehicles (political parties and social movements) envisioning and fighting for an alternative social order. Neoliberalism is not merely an ideology or even a specific policy at this point, but an institutional component, a substructure, of the very capitalist system that has been built in the age of globalization, and thus the measures taken today to address the economic effects of the pandemic may be quite temporary and the world could easily return to “business as usual” once the pandemic has been brought under control.

Let me elaborate

Any effort to fully understand the nature of contemporary capitalism should begin with the recognition that the whole is indeed greater than the sum of its parts. It is also pertinent that we recognize the importance of structural causality in making sense of contemporary capitalist developments while avoiding methodological reductionism. As such, we need to look at the overall structure of the system; that is, we need to comprehend the different constitutive parts of the system that keep it together and running in ways which are harmful to the interests of the great majority of the population, dangerous to democracy and public values, and detrimental to the environment and earth’s ecosystem. Focusing on one element of the system while ignoring other things (perhaps because we think that they constitute incidental outcomes or processes of secondary nature) may limit our understanding by creating a flawed perspective about the dynamics and the contradictions of contemporary capitalism and

thereby undermine our ability to propose sound and realistic solutions.

Now, we know what capitalism is, and how it basically works. It is a specific, historically determined mode of production, a ruthless economic system representing the most advanced form of commodity production. It is not an economic system designed to serve the needs of society as such, because the extraction of profit is the “logic” that drives capitalist commodity production. Not only that, but when left to operate without regulations, capitalism can wreak havoc on societies. Exploitation and inequality represent structural necessities of the system itself, and capital itself is nothing other than value that generates surplus value.

Moreover, capital accumulation is an anarchic and contradictory process, and with a constant need to expand, all of which result all too frequently in systemic crises that threaten to destroy capitalism itself and which, subsequently, mandate the intervention of the state in order to save the system from collapse. In the age of the financialization of capital, systemic crises have become far more frequent, and with greater severity, and government bailouts have emerged as the essential tool through which the system avoids a catastrophic collapse.

Capitalist expansion has taken place over the course of the past five centuries via different venues, ranging from plunder and exploitation, through trade, to investment in industry and the financialization of assets. However, the state has been the driving agency behind the spread and consolidation of capitalism from the very start. And it is no less the case than with the architecture of contemporary capitalism.

The landscape of contemporary capitalism has been structured around three interrelated elements: financialization, neoliberalism and globalization. All three of these components constitute part of a coherent whole which has given rise to an entity that can be briefly described as “predatory global capitalism.”

As such, contemporary capitalism is characterized by a political economy which revolves around finance capital, is based on a savage form of free market fundamentalism and thrives on a wave of globalizing processes and global financial networks that have produced global economic oligarchies with the capacity to influence the shaping of policymaking across nations. Indeed, today’s brand of capitalism is particularly anti-democratic and simply incapable of

functioning in a way conducive to maintaining sustainable and balanced growth. By waging vicious class warfare, the economic elite and their allies have managed in the contemporary era to roll back progress on the economic and social fronts by resurrecting the predatory, “free-market” capitalism that immiserated millions in the early 20th century while a handful of obscenely wealthy individuals controlled the bulk of the wealth.

The capitalist order we have in place today has its roots in the structural changes that took place in the accumulation process back in the mid-to-late 1970s. The 1970s was a decade of economic slowdown and inflationary pressures in the advanced capitalist world. The crisis, brought about by new technological innovations, declining rates of profit and the dissolution of the social structures of accumulation that had emerged after World War II, led to sluggish growth rates, high inflation and even higher rates of unemployment, bringing about a phenomenon that came to be known as “stagflation.”

From a policy point of view, “stagflation” signaled the end of an era in which there was a trade-off between inflation and unemployment (shown by the Phillips curve) and, by extension, the end of the dominance of the Keynesian school of thought.

As with all other capitalist crises in the past, the crisis of the 1970s compelled capital and the economic elite to restructure the way the capitalist economy had functioned up to that time. The restructuring process unfolded in several ways, which included, among other things, increasing the pace of market liberalization, attacking the traditional welfare state and the interests of unionized workers in an attempt to eliminate social programs and suppress wages and create greater flexibility in the labor market, respectively, and initiating a new wave of globalization under the aegis of both industrial and financial capital.

The new economic orthodoxy (which came to be known as the “Washington Consensus”) called for open markets, deregulation, privatization, labor flexibility, short-term optimization as a more attractive way to ensure competition and growth, low taxation for corporations and the rich, and a minimum welfare state. The desire was to return to an era in which capitalism functioned unfettered by government and social constraints, in other words, back to the age when capital grew by running roughshod over labor.

Indeed, a counterrevolution was under way, and it seemed to be global in nature and scope. The radical paradigm shift in economics was taking place in highly diverse economic environments, ranging from Chile under Augusto Pinochet's reign of terror to liberal democracies in the Anglo-Saxon world (in the United Kingdom under Margaret Thatcher and in the United States under Ronald Reagan) and even to communist China under Deng Xiaoping. By the mid-1980s, most capitalist nations around the world, including many Western European countries with long traditions with social democratic policies, had shifted from Keynesianism to neoliberalism, although by no means in a uniform manner.

The march to "economic freedom," which is how the neoliberal counterrevolution was celebrated by arch-conservative thinkers, captivated by the nonsense of Austrian economics, did not take place on the basis of some abstract entity known as the "free market." On the contrary, it required active intervention by the capitalist state across society and the economy. Indeed, how else was the welfare state going to be reduced and the power of the labor unions weakened? How else could policies be introduced that increased the upward flows of income, created new investment sites, promoted a new wave of privatization and permitted banks and other financial institutions to practice financial chicanery? How else could failed financial institutions be bailed out with public funds if governments and elected officials had not been turned into the minions of the money class?

The capitalist state everywhere resorted to the use of both hard (i.e., repression) and soft (propaganda) power in order to secure the transition to the new economic and social order commanded by finance capital and big business interests. But the story does not stop here. International organizations such as the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, but also countless non-governmental organizations throughout the world, were mobilized for the promotion of this goal. The corporate-owned mainstream media and the overwhelming majority of academics and intellectuals also joined the show as cheerleaders of the global neoliberal vision.

In sum, the return to "predatory capitalism" was prompted by a crisis in the workings of the postwar capitalist regime and realized through active political intervention, i.e., class politics, by the capitalist state and international organizations, and the support provided by the intellectual elite and mass media. Yet, its success depended on the redesigning of the global economy (a cycle of upswing in the movement towards the global integration of national economies

enforced by the market liberalization policies of leading and ascending states), and not merely on the institutionalization of neoliberal policies within a national context. Neoliberalism had to be global, or it could not possibly work as efficiently if it was confined only to the national setting.

As noted earlier, the three pillars on which contemporary capitalism is structured around are financialization, neoliberalism and globalization. But what is their connection? Can neoliberalism, for example, be dismantled while leaving untouched the current processes of financialization and globalization?

First, we know that the surge of financial capital long predates the current neoliberal era, and the financialization of the economy takes place independently of neoliberalism, although it is greatly enhanced by the weakening of regulatory regimes and the collusion between finance capital and political officials that prevails under the neoliberal order. Neoliberalism, with its emphasis on corporate power, deregulation, the marketization of society, the glorification of profit and the contempt for public goods and values, provides the ideological and political support needed for the financialization of the economy and the undermining of the real economy. Thus, challenging neoliberalism – a task of herculean proportions given that virtually every aspect of the economy and of the world as a whole, from schools to the workplace and from post offices to the IMF, functions today on the basis of neoliberal premises – does not necessarily imply a break on the financialization processes under way in contemporary capitalist economies.

Financialization needs to be tackled on its own terms, possibly with alternative finance systems and highly interventionist policies, which include the nationalization of banks, rather than through regulation alone.

The surge of finance capital can be traced at least since the beginning of the 20th century. In a major study addressing “the economic characteristics of the latest phase of capitalist development,” published in 1910, Rudolf Hilferding, an Austrian-born Marxist economist and main theoretician for the Social Democratic Party of Germany during the Weimar Republic, devoted special attention to the processes of the concentration and centralization of capital, and outlined a theory of imperialism as a necessary development in the evolution of capitalism. In the course of this process he also made it clear that systematic investigation of the role of money and credit, the expansion of capitalist enterprises into corporations and their conversion into corporations was of the utmost importance for the understanding of the evolution of capitalism.

Hilferding demonstrated that the rise of the industrial corporation reflects an objective “change in the function of the industrial enterprise.” The industrial corporation, or the joint-stock company, allows anyone in possession of money to become a money capitalist. In effect, what Hilferding was observing was the phenomenon of the separation of ownership of capital from control in the joint-stock company. According to him, this process not only accelerated the concentration of capital, but also provided the joint-stock company with the ability to expand far more rapidly than the individually owned enterprise, thereby leading to the centralization of capital.

For Hilferding, however, it was the emergence of financial institutions and banks, in particular, that truly intensified the processes toward concentration. He stressed that in the mature stage of capitalism, banks, which were quite necessary to the growth of industry, had become fully dominant and directly controlled the economic life of the system. Through its vast resources of liquid capital, banks were able to obtain control of major trusts in industry, since the latter needed idle capital in order to increase and expand the production process. Viewed from this perspective, industrial capital was inextricably intertwined with banking capital and wholly dependent on money capital.

The merging process between industrial and banking capital gives rise to a new form of capital: finance capital. Moreover, the establishment of an intimate relationship between banking capital and industrial capital results in an increased tendency toward the export of capital. The concentration of capital, which leads to monopolization, encourages the export of capital by virtue of the fact that the over-accumulation of capital can no longer find profitable investment opportunities at home.

While it is true that Hilferding mistakenly considered the dependence of industrial capital on banking capital as a permanent state of affairs (the great monopolistic corporations became independent of banking capital and today’s large corporations use their own retained profits to finance investment), there can be no mistake that the transition “from the domination of capital in general to the domination of finance capital” emerged as a key feature of “modern” capitalism even before the outbreak of World War I. Indeed, the Great Depression of the 1930s revealed in unmistakable terms the extent to which finance and financial capitalism had taken central stage, reshaping in a profound way the United States’ economy and affecting dramatically developments across the world.

However, the task of stabilizing financial capitalism's inherent tendency towards instability has clearly been severely undermined with the onset of neoliberalism, and the global financial crisis of 2008 represented just the latest act in a long series of financial crises since the early 1970s, and with each new crisis getting bigger and becoming more severe than the previous one. Yet, it is equally clear that scores of financial crises, mainly "systemic banking crises," have occurred prior to the installation of a neoliberal regime. Moreover, because of globalization, "Big Government" action has been restrained and the challenges posed to central banking from globalized finance are quite severe, with financial globalization leading to growing frequency and severity of systemic financial crises. Thus, globalization is in itself a contributing factor to the spread of financial crises while also providing a greater impetus for the deepening of neoliberalism.

Now, although finance is at the forefront of globalization, there is hardly an aspect of contemporary life that is not affected by globalization, making it therefore a very elusive concept indeed, while adding new levels of complexity to the task of forming appropriate economic and political responses to a system bent on instability and prone to large-scale crises. The reshaping of the global economy to the economics of profitability along neoliberal lines is now an entity that, having come into being, has formed a specific structure of its own upon which neoliberalism depends on in order to continue to thrive.

Globalization, of course, has also created new systemic risks (and crises of all sorts, including the rapid spread of pandemics) which we are simply uncertain how to address given the existing power structure in the global political economy where a plutocracy reigns supreme as national governments have capitulated to the whims of the corporate and financial elite and the formal global governance structure needed is missing. Yet, this is precisely the environment that makes predatory capitalism thrive, and makes one wonder whether neoliberalism can actually wither away in a national setting without actually altering the very nature of the globalizing economic processes at work in the contemporary era. For, to put it bluntly, globalization is now the oxygen mask through which neoliberalism is able to breathe.

Having said that, this is not to imply that meaningful reform cannot take place, and there is no short supply of proposed solutions for tackling the major problems facing the contemporary world, including that of global warming. The worst

effects of neoliberal capitalism can be addressed through short-range (proposals for tax reform that will close the gap between rich and poor) and medium-range goals (reregulation and nationalization) to some rather long-range structural reforms (redesigning the architecture of the global financial system). Taming global warming also represents a long-range goal, in fact of vital importance for the stability of any future social and economic order.

On the political front, the task of recapturing the state is absolutely essential for any progressive movement or political party seeking to reestablish balance in the relationship between labor and capital, resurrect democracy, redress social injustice and reorient the economy toward sustainable and balanced growth. Still, such undertakings are likely to fail if they are pursued in the absence of a solid understanding of the nature of the current system, without having captured the public imagination, and without a vision towards a new global order. A long-term vision should not stand in the way of pursuing immediate reforms that alleviate human pain and suffering, and short-term goals should not block the imagination from opening up a world of new possibilities for human relations.

In sum, what the above analysis suggests is that doing away with neoliberalism may require, in addition to progressive forces recapturing the state, major reforms in financialization and the disruption of at least certain features of the present-day wave of globalization. And this means, in a nutshell, making significant alterations in the way international organizations such as the IMF, the World Bank, and WTO operate. This is a tall order, indeed, but the building of a sustainable world will, in the end, require much more than just temporary economic stimulus packages mandated by the need created from the threat a pandemic has posed to capitalist economic life.

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Chomsky: Biden's Early Agenda Gives Hope, But Activist Pressure Must Not Cease



Noam Chomsky

Joe Biden's first months in office have comprised a flurry of actions on the domestic front, including a historic stimulus bill. In this exclusive interview, the celebrated public intellectual Noam Chomsky shares his views on some key policies embraced by the Biden administration. Chomsky is Institute Professor Emeritus at MIT and Laureate Professor of Linguistics at the University of Arizona. His latest books are *Climate Crisis and the Global Green New Deal: The Political Economy of Saving the Planet* (co-authored with Robert Pollin and C. J. Polychroniou; Verso, 2020), *Chomsky for Activists* (Routledge, 2020) and *Consequences of Capitalism: Manufacturing Discontent and Resistance* (Haymarket Books, 2020).

C.J. Polychroniou: President Joe Biden has been in office for approximately two

months now, in the course of which he has signed scores of executive orders meant to reverse the policies of Donald Trump. But he has also managed to pass a huge and ambitious stimulus bill unlike anything seen during peacetime. What's your assessment of Biden's actions so far to deal with the most pressing issues facing U.S. society: namely, the coronavirus pandemic and the pain caused to millions of Americans on account of the pandemic?

Noam Chomsky: Better than I'd anticipated. Considerably so.

The stimulus bill has its flaws, but considering the circumstances, it's an impressive achievement. The circumstances are a highly disciplined opposition party dedicated to the principle announced years ago by its maximal leader, Mitch McConnell: *If we are not in power, we must render the country ungovernable and block government legislative efforts, however beneficial they might be. Then the consequences can be blamed on the party in power, and we can take over.* It worked well for Republicans in 2009 — with plenty of help from Obama. By 2010, the Democrats lost Congress, and the way was cleared to the 2016 debacle.

There's every reason to suppose that the strategy will be renewed — this time under more complex circumstances. The voting base in the hands of Trump, who shares the objective but differs from McConnell on who will pick up the pieces: McConnell and the donor class, or Trump and the voting base he mobilized, almost half of whom worship him as the messenger God sent to save the country from ... we can fill in our favorite fantasies, but should not overlook the fact that what may sound [ridiculous] has roots in the lives of the victims of the neoliberal globalization of the past 40 years — extended by Trump, apart from some rhetorical flourishes.

In those circumstances, passing a stimulus bill was a major accomplishment. Republicans who favor it, and know that their constituents do, nevertheless voted against it, in lockstep obedience to what the Central Committee determines. Some Democrats insisted on watering it down. But what finally passed has valuable elements, which could be a basis for moving on.

There are huge gaps. The bill surely should have contained an increase in the miserable minimum wage, an utter scandal. But that would have been very difficult in the face of total Republican opposition, along with a few Democrats. And there are other crucial features that are missing. Nevertheless, if the short-term measures on child poverty, income support, medical insurance and other

basic needs can be extended, it would be a substantial step toward fulfilling the promise envisioned by such careful observers as Roosevelt Institute President Felicia Wong, [who reflected that](#), “As I see it, both the scale and the direction of the American Rescue Plan break the neoliberal, deficits-and-inflation-come-first mold that has hollowed out our economy for a generation.” We haven’t seen anything that could elicit such hopes for a long time.

There is also hope in appointments on economic issues. Who would have imagined that a regular contributor to radical economics journals would be appointed to the Council of Economic Advisers (Heather Boushey), joined by the senior economic adviser of the labor-oriented Economic Policy Institute, (Jared Bernstein)?

Biden’s strong support for Amazon workers, and unions generally, is a welcome shift. Nothing like it has been heard from the chambers of power in many years. In a sharp reversal of Trump legislation, the tax changes raise incomes mostly for the poor, not the rich. Economic Policy Institute President Thea Lee summarizes the package by saying that it “will provide crucial support to millions of working families; dramatically reduce the race, gender, and income inequalities that were exacerbated by the crisis; and create the conditions for a truly robust recovery once the virus is under control and people are able to resume normal economic activity.” Optimistic, but within reach.

House Democrats have passed other important legislation. H.R. 1 protects voting rights, a critical matter now, with Republicans working overtime to try to block the votes of [people of color] and the poor, recognizing that this is the only way a minority party dedicated to wealth and corporate power can remain viable.

On the labor front, the House passed the Protecting the Right to Organize (PRO) Act, [“a critical step toward restoring](#) workers’ right to organize and bargain collectively,” the Economic Policy Institute reports, a fundamental right that “has been eroded for decades as employers exploited weaknesses in the current law.” It’ll probably be killed by the Senate. Even apart from party loyalty, there is little sympathy for working people in Republican ranks.

But even so, it’s a basis for organizing and education. It can be a step toward revitalizing the labor movement, a prime target of the neoliberal project since Reagan and Thatcher, who understood well that working people must be deprived of means to defend themselves from the assault.

Decline of union membership is by now recognized, even in the mainstream, to be a major factor in rising inequality — a phrase that translates to “robbery of the

general public by a tiny fraction of super-rich.” The Economic Policy Institute has reviewed the facts regularly, most recently in a chart that [graphically demonstrates](#) the remarkable correlation between rising/falling union membership and falling/rising inequality.

More generally, there is a good opportunity to overcome the baleful legacy of Trump’s bitterly anti-labor Labor Department, headed by corporate lawyer Eugene Scalia, who used his term in office to [eviscerate worker rights](#), notoriously during the pandemic. Scalia was perfectly chosen for the transformation of the Republicans to a “working-class party,” as hailed by Marco Rubio and Josh Hawley in a triumph of propaganda, or maybe sheer chutzpah.

Michael Regan’s appointment as Environmental Protection Agency administrator should replace corporate greed by science and human welfare in this essential agency, a move toward human decency that in this case is a prerequisite for survival.

It’s easy to find serious omissions and deficiencies in Biden’s programs on the domestic front, but there are signs of hope for emerging from the Trump nightmare and moving on to what really should, what really must be done. The hopes are, however, conditional. The temporary measures of the stimulus on child poverty and many other issues must be made permanent, and improved. Crucially, activist pressure must not cease. The masters of the universe pursue their class war relentlessly, and can only be countered by an aroused public opposition that is no less dedicated to the common good.

What do you think of Biden’s refusal to cancel \$50,000 in student loans?

A bad decision. What the realistic options were, I don’t frankly know. Higher education at a high level should be recognized to be a basic right, freely available, as it is elsewhere: in our Mexican neighbor, in rich developed countries like Germany, France, the Nordic countries, and a great many others, with at most nominal fees. As it substantially was in the U.S. when it was a much poorer country than it is today. The postwar GI Bill of Rights provided free education for great numbers of white males who would never have gone to college otherwise. There is no reason why young people of any race should be denied the privilege today.

In light of the January 6 attack on the U.S. Capitol, Biden has vowed to fight domestic terrorism by passing a new law “that respects free speech and civil

liberties.” Does the U.S. need a new domestic terrorism agenda?

A prior question is whether we should retain the current domestic terrorism agenda. There are strong reasons to question that. And any expansion should be a matter of serious concern. That aside, white supremacist violence is no laughing matter. Through the Trump years, the FBI and other monitors report steadily increasing white supremacist terror, by now covering almost all recorded terror. Armed militias are rampant — Trump’s “tough guys” as he’s admiringly called them. The problems can’t be overlooked, but have to be handled with great caution and a close eye on the temptations for abuse.

Biden has proposed a plan to strengthen the middle class by encouraging unionization and collective bargaining, and his recent affirmation of the rights of workers to unionize, which was widely interpreted as support for Amazon workers’ rights to organize in Alabama, has spread considerable enthusiasm among progressives. Indeed, Biden’s support for unions is in pace with the highly favorable ratings that unions have been receiving in the last couple of years. What’s behind the support for unions in the present era?

One reason is objective reality. The sharp rise in inequality is a growing curse, with extremely harmful effects across the society. As mentioned earlier, it closely tracks decline of unions, for reasons that are well understood. Historically, labor unions have been in the forefront of struggles for justice and rights. They also pioneered the environmental movement, as we’ve discussed before. Workers’ organizations are changing in character with the growth of service and knowledge-based economies. They have shared interests, and foster the values of solidarity and mutual aid on which the hope for a decent future rest. Many unions retain the word “international” in their names. It should not just be a symbol or a dream. The dire challenges we face have no borders. Global heating, pandemics, disarmament will be dealt with internationally, if at all. The same is true of labor rights and human rights more generally. At every level, associations of working people should once again be prominent, if not leading the way, toward a better world.

This interview has been lightly edited for clarity.

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Phasing Out Fossil Fuels Is Possible. These State-Level Plans Show How



Robert Pollin

When it comes to climate change, state governments across the United States have been way ahead of the federal government in providing leadership toward reducing carbon pollution and building a clean energy economy. For example, when Trump announced in 2017 his intention to withdraw the U.S. from the Paris

Agreement, the governors of California, Washington and New York pledged to support the international agreement, and by 2019, more than 20 other states ended up joining this alliance to combat global warming.

Robert Pollin, distinguished professor of Economics and co-director of the Political Economy Research Institute at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst, has been a driving force behind several U.S. states' efforts to curb carbon emissions and make a transition to a green economy. In this exclusive Truthout interview, Pollin talks about how states can take crucial, proactive steps to build a clean energy future.

C.J. Polychroniou: Bob, you are the lead author of [commissioned studies](#), produced with some of your colleagues at the Political Economy Research Institute of the University of Massachusetts at Amherst, to fight climate change for scores of U.S. states, including Pennsylvania, Ohio, West Virginia, Maine, Colorado, Washington, New York and California. The purpose of those studies is to show the way for states to attain critical reductions in carbon emissions while also embarking on a path of economy recovery and a just transition toward an environmentally sustainable environment. In general terms, how is this to be done, and is there a common strategy that all states can follow?

Robert Pollin: The basic framework that we have developed is the same for all states. For all states, we develop a path through which the state can reduce its carbon dioxide (CO₂) emissions by roughly half as of 2030 and to transform into a zero emissions economy by 2050. These are the emissions reduction targets set out by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (the IPCC) that are meant to apply to the entire global economy. The IPCC — which is a UN agency that serves as a clearinghouse for climate change research — has concluded that these CO₂ emissions reduction targets have to be met in order for we, the human race, to have a reasonable chance to stabilize the global average temperature at no more than 1.5 degrees Celsius above the preindustrial level, [the level of] about the year 1800.

The IPCC has concluded that stabilizing the global average temperature at no more than 1.5 degrees Celsius above preindustrial levels provides the only realistic chance for avoiding the most severe destructive impacts of climate change in terms of heat extremes, heavy precipitation, droughts, floods, sea level rise, biodiversity losses, and the corresponding impacts on health, livelihoods,

food security, water supply and human security. Given that these emissions reduction targets must be met on a global scale, it follows that they also must be met in every state of the United States, with no exceptions, just like they must be met in every other country or region of the world with no exceptions.

By far the most important source of CO₂ emissions entering the atmosphere is fossil fuel consumption — i.e., burning oil, coal and natural gas to produce energy. As such, the program we develop in all of the U.S. states centers on the state's economy phasing out its entire fossil fuel industry — i.e., anything to do with producing or consuming oil, coal or natural gas — at a rate that will enable the state to hit the two IPCC emissions reduction targets: the 50 percent reduction by 2030 and zero emissions within the state by 2050.

Of course, meeting these emissions reduction targets raises a massive question right away: How can you phase out fossil fuels and still enable people to heat, light and cool their homes and workplaces; for cars, buses, trains and planes to keep running; and for industrial machinery of all types to keep operating?

It turns out that, in its basics, the answer is simple and achievable, in all the states we have studied (and everywhere else for that matter): to build a whole new clean energy infrastructure that will supplant the existing fossil fuel dominant infrastructure in each state. So the next major feature of our approach is to develop investment programs to dramatically raise energy efficiency standards in buildings, transportation systems and industrial equipment, and equally dramatically expand the supply of clean renewable energy sources, i.e. primarily solar and wind energy, but also geothermal, small-scale hydro, as well as low-emissions bioenergy.

For all but one of the states we have studied, we estimate that the amount of clean energy investments that are needed amounts to between 1-3 percent of all state economic activity, i.e. the state's GDP (Gross Domestic Product). That can be a lot of money — like \$6.6 billion in Washington State (1.2 percent of projected average GDP between 2021-2030), \$22.6 billion in Pennsylvania (2.5 percent of projected average GDP between 2021-2030) and \$76 billion in California (2.1 percent of projected average GDP between 2021-2030). But still, these spending levels, amounting to 1-3 percent of GDP, do still mean that something like 97-99 percent of all the state's economic activity can be devoted to everything else *besides* clean energy investments. West Virginia is the one outlier in the states we

have studied so far. But even here, we estimate the investment program will need to be only somewhat higher, at 4.2 percent of the state's projected average GDP for 2021-2030, equal to \$3.6 billion per year.

A critical and totally straightforward result of these state-level investment programs is that they will create an abundance of jobs — something like, for example, 40,000 in Washington State, 150,000 in Pennsylvania, and 420,000 in California. This conclusion runs completely counter to the widespread, if not prevalent, view that any kind of climate stabilization program is going to be a jobs killer. This view, feasted on by Trump and many others of his ilk, is that you can, maybe, stabilize the climate, or you can increase job opportunities, *but you can't do both*. Our research shows exactly the opposite: that you can indeed do both, through the same program of building a clean energy infrastructure in each state.

Estimating the number of jobs that get created in each state, the types of jobs, what the pay levels are for these jobs at present in each state, and how to improve job quality is a big part of what we focus on in these studies. Raising unionization rates in the range of growing clean energy sectors will be critical for improving wages and working conditions. These new job opportunities must also become much more open to women and people of color.

It is true that the workers and communities in each state that are right now dependent on the oil, coal and gas industries for their livelihoods will be facing major job losses and community dislocations. Recognizing this reality is exactly why the other major focus of our studies in each state is to develop a just transition program, for both the workers and communities that are now dependent on the fossil fuel industry. For the workers facing dislocation, the just transition programs that we develop in each state include pension guarantees and re-employment guarantees at pay levels at least equal to their previous fossil fuel jobs, along with retraining and relocation support as needed.

It turns out that the costs of even a generous program of this type are trivial as a share of the state's overall economy. For Ohio, we estimate the full costs of the program at around one one-hundredths of one percent of the state's GDP. In Pennsylvania, with a larger fossil fuel industry, the figure is higher, but still only to two one-hundredths of one percent of state GDP.

That's the overall approach that we have applied to all of the states. Of course,

there are also significant differences between the various states that we also have to take into account. For example, the economies of Ohio and Pennsylvania are similar in many ways. But there are big differences between the energy infrastructures in the two states, with Pennsylvania, unlike Ohio, being a major producer of natural gas through fracking technology, a major producer of nuclear energy, and a large-scale electricity exporter to other states. We heard a lot about fracking in Pennsylvania during the 2020 presidential campaign, with even Biden insisting that he will not ban fracking in the state because of its negative impact on jobs. In fact, shutting down Pennsylvania's fracking industry will end up costing the state an average of about 1,000 jobs per year. Meanwhile, building Pennsylvania's clean energy infrastructure will generate about 160,000 jobs in the first year of the investment program, and that higher level of investments will continue at least until 2030.

The latest study is for West Virginia, once a thriving state and the top coal producer in the country, but now, according to a report by West Virginia's University Bureau of Business and Economic Research, facing a dreary future as the coal industry has essentially collapsed and people are leaving the state. How would a clean energy investment program help to transform the West Virginia economy? More precisely, how many new jobs would be created, how much public money would be needed for the plan to be carried out, and how would the clean energy transition affect fossil fuel workers?

As I mentioned above, we estimate that to bring down West Virginia's CO₂ emissions by 50 percent as of 2030 will require about \$3.6 billion per year in both public and private investments in energy efficiency and clean renewable energy, equal to about 4 percent of the state's GDP. Those investments will produce about 25,000 jobs in the state, with that increased level of employment being sustained from 2021-2030. There will be new job opportunities for, among others, carpenters, car mechanics, material scientists, secretaries, accountants and truck drivers.

We also developed a plan to upgrade West Virginia's economy base through additional investments in manufacturing, infrastructure, land restoration and agriculture. This will entail another \$1.6 billion in investment spending within the state. It will generate an additional roughly 16,000 jobs in various industries including small-scale organic farming. We estimate that the combined investment program will generate about 41,000 new jobs, equal to about 5 percent of West

Virginia's current labor force. Meanwhile, we estimate that about 1,400 fossil fuel industry-based workers will be displaced per year. All of these workers in West Virginia will receive pension guarantees, re-employment guarantees at their current pay levels, as well as relocation and retraining support. Even in West Virginia, this program will cost less than two-tenths of one percent of West Virginia's GDP.

How does West Virginia get the money to pay for all this? We estimate that the breakdown in spending in West Virginia would be about \$2 billion per year in public funds and \$3 billion in private funds, with the private funds being motivated by the incentives built into the state's clean energy policies. That would include what are termed "renewable portfolio standards," through which, for example, the state would require the privately owned utilities to cut their coal-burning to produce electricity by, say, 5 percent per year, or face heavy penalties. The \$2 billion per year in total public funding would be less than what the state would receive under the Build Back Better infrastructure program that President Biden promoted during his presidential campaign (assuming West Virginia's allocation of Build Back Better was only equal to its share of the U.S. population). So, the money should be there. This program should be seen as a huge opportunity to transform West Virginia's economy.

What has been the reception of these studies so far by state officials and other interested parties?

The earlier studies that we did, for New York and Washington States in 2017 and Colorado in 2019, were well received, due to the important organizing work by the groups that had commissioned our studies in each state. These included the broad coalition called NY Renews in New York and the AFL-CIO leadership in Colorado. New York and Colorado now have climate stabilization programs in place that reflect a lot of what we developed in our studies. At the same time, especially in New York, the experience has been that many great-sounding climate programs have passed into law with major fanfare, but a whole lot less has been accomplished in practice. In some ways, having great policies on paper that are not implemented seriously in practice is worse than nothing because it distracts people from seeing that real accomplishments are lagging far behind the promises.

As with Colorado, our study for Washington State was also commissioned by the

state's AFL-CIO leadership. In fact, Washington's mainstream labor leadership had done a tremendous job organizing a broad coalition throughout the state to support a ballot initiative that would have implemented most of the program we had developed. But in the last month leading up to the November 2018 election that included this ballot measure, the big oil companies mounted a \$30 million propaganda campaign that succeeded in persuading a majority of Washington State's voters to oppose the initiative.

The struggle in Washington State and elsewhere is ongoing. The reception to our more recent studies in Ohio, Pennsylvania and West Virginia has been positive so far. But we have a long way to go before we see good proposals being converted into truly transformative policies, not just on paper, but in real-life practice.

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The Current Hardships Facing

Palestinian Refugees



[The United Nations' Relief and Works Agency](#) (UNRWA)—known as the main international relief and human development organization for Palestinian refugees—defined Palestinian refugees as “persons whose normal place of residence was Palestine during the period 1

June 1946 to 15 May 1948, and who lost both home and means of livelihood as a result of the 1948 conflict.” However, most notably, Palestinians displaced because of the 1967 war, and subsequent hostilities, are not referred to or registered as refugees by the Agency, but they are eligible to receive services by UNRWA. Despite this fact, within segments of the international community, Palestinians who lost both their homes and means of livelihood as a result of the 1967 war, and subsequent hostilities, are also regarded as refugees.

In the five areas where UNRWA is in operation, namely, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, the Gaza Strip, and the West Bank (including East Jerusalem), the hardships faced by the Palestinian refugees has worsened in recent history.

Most recently, with respect to the coronavirus pandemic, the Palestinian refugee population is increasingly in a vulnerable position with little-to-no access to the COVID-19 vaccine. Within the occupied territories of Gaza and the West Bank, [COVID-19 cases are surging](#) with more than 2,236 fatalities and 16,000 active cases in these areas (including East Jerusalem). Meanwhile, Israel has been [internationally lauded](#) for carrying out the world's speediest vaccination drive, with over 90 percent of Israelis above the age of 50 having been fully vaccinated as of February 2021. However, Israel has denied Palestinians living within the occupied territories significant access to the vaccines as Israel argues that the Oslo Accords places responsibility on the Palestinian Authority regarding issues of public health. But even under the Oslo Accords, Israel does have a commitment to help Palestinians living in the occupied territories fight the pandemic. [Article 17, stipulation 6 of the Accord states:](#) “Israel and the Palestinian side shall exchange information regarding epidemics and contagious diseases, shall cooperate in combating them and shall develop methods for

exchange of medical files and documents.”

Moreover, given that Israel is the occupying power—under international law, namely, the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949, Israel has a responsibility to ensure the welfare of the population which it is occupying—namely, the Palestinian people in the West Bank, East Jerusalem, and Gaza. The West Bank remains occupied by Israel which “controls entrance and egress, much of the infrastructure, the roads, the currency...in short, all the means of Palestinian independence”—as pointed out by [Mitchell Plitnick](#), the former US director of the Israeli human rights organization, B’Tselem. In the case of Gaza, Israel since 2007 has imposed a land, air, and sea blockade of Gaza. Most notably, the effects of Israel’s blockade, coupled with Israel’s routine bombing of Gaza, has crumbled its infrastructure, led to massive poverty, food insecurity, [and resulted in less than 4% of the water in that territory](#), consisting of nearly 2 million people, being fit for human consumption. Israel thus, in addition to the West Bank, also continues to occupy the Palestinians living within the Gaza Strip, and therefore, Israel as their occupier has a responsibility to vaccinate Gazans. In February 2021, Palestinian officials condemned Israel for [blocking the entry of 2,000 coronavirus vaccine doses](#) into Gaza to assist its health workers. Despite evidence to the contrary, even if Israeli claims with respect to the Oslo Accords is valid, this is irrelevant, as stated by scholar [Yara M.Asi](#), “the [Geneva] convention specifies that no agreement between the parties supersedes its protections while occupation continues. This would include the Oslo Accords, signed in 1995 as an interim agreement.” Furthermore, Israel, instead of first seeking to vaccinate Palestinians in the occupied territories, [pledged](#) to provide its spare vaccines to foreign allies such as Honduras and the Czech Republic.

In areas outside of the occupied territories, such as Lebanon which is home to an estimated 207,000 Palestinian refugees, according to UN figures, it has been [reported](#) that “Palestinian refugees in Lebanon are three times more likely to die with COVID-19 than the population as a whole.”

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the United Nations’ Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA), responsible for providing healthcare and education to millions of Palestinians living both inside and outside the occupied territories, was [“recognized as a major contributor](#) to the containment of the COVID-19 virus”—having quickly adapted its provision of services in compliance with the World Health Organization recommendations. UNRWA [implemented](#) remote

education curriculum practices, adopted door-to-door delivery of food and medicines, as well as innovative health and psychosocial support hotlines which have been regarded as a significant lifeline to the refugee population during the pandemic. Moreover, UNRWA is also responsible for [waste disposal and sanitation services](#) to Palestinian refugee camps across the Middle East — “this includes disinfectant treatments to roads and installations to prevent the spread of COVID-19.”

However, due to the United States’ complete [termination of funding](#) to UNRWA under President Trump in 2018, the operations of the Agency were almost brought to a complete halt.

When the pandemic broke out, UNRWA was operating on a shoestring budget with Elizabeth Campbell, UNRWA’s director in Washington, [stating in May 2020](#) that due to America’s termination of funding, “We are basically operating on a month-to-month basis. Right now, we have funding to pay our 30,000 health care workers until the end of this month.”

Even once the COVID-19 pandemic is over, it does not appear that there will be any end in sight to the suffering faced by Palestinian refugees. The hardships faced by Palestinian refugees will continue until the central issues of contention are fully addressed within a final settlement to the conflict. The central issues of contention as it pertains to Palestinian refugees is, firstly, the right of return, secondly, the right of Palestinians for compensation from Israel due to the destruction of Palestinians’ homes, and their livelihoods as a result of the 1948 war, the 1967 war, as well as further hostilities, and the third issue of contention is the assimilation and resettlement of refugees in different countries. Most significantly on the first two points, there is serious doubt as to whether right of return and compensation (both issues which are notably embodied within United Nations General Assembly Resolution 194) is politically feasible and there is doubt as to whether there are legitimate frameworks within international law that firmly allows stateless Palestinians to successfully advocate for the right of return and compensation.

The Taba Summit is widely regarded as perhaps the closest instance that a final settlement to end the longstanding conflict was almost reached between the Israelis and the Palestinians. At the time of the Taba Summit, the Israelis expressed an understanding on the issue of compensation, with Israel advocating that an international commission be created to gather, verify, and pay individual

compensation claims. However, at that time, you had a government in Israel that, at least, gave the public impression that it was willing to negotiate on key issues required to reach a permanent settlement to the conflict. Presently, however, the center-left parties in Israel, such as the Labour Party, are a shell of its former self and a significant segment of the population in Israel strongly supports Benjamin Netanyahu and his far-right Likud Party, which has been expanding Israeli settlements in the occupied territories, further jeopardizing any viable solution to the conflict. There is also disunity among the Palestinians with friction between the Palestinian Authority in the West Bank and Hamas in Gaza. Lastly, unless the United States is willing to apply meaningful pressure on Israel to seriously negotiate a final settlement with the Palestinians, an end to the protracted refugee crisis will not be possible.