

Chomsky: We Must Insist That Nuclear Warfare Is An Unthinkable Policy



Noam Chomsky

The war in Ukraine is now in its fourth month, but there is no sign of a ceasefire or resolution anywhere in sight. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy has ruled out a ceasefire or concessions, yet he maintains that only diplomacy can end the war. In the meantime, Russian forces are trying to capture eastern Ukraine, while the policy of the United States is to provide military support to Zelenskyy's government for as long as it might take to weaken Russia in hope that regime change will come to Moscow.

These developments do not bode well either for Ukraine or for the world at large, argues Noam Chomsky, a public intellectual regarded by millions of people as a national and international treasure. In this new and exclusive interview for *Truthout*, Chomsky urges the forces capable of ending the war to devote their energy to finding constructive ways to put a halt to the unfolding tragedies. In addition, he analyzes the new and highly dangerous global order that is taking shape. Perhaps to the surprise of many, especially considering the ongoing war in Ukraine, he does not describe the U.S.-Russia confrontation as the central element of the new global order in the making. Chomsky is institute professor and professor of linguistics at MIT and currently laureate professor at the University of Arizona, and has published some 150 books in linguistics, political and social thought, political economy, media studies, U.S. foreign policy and international affairs.

C.J. Polychroniou: After months of fighting, there is still very little hope of peace in Ukraine. Russia is now refocusing its efforts on taking control of the east and south of the country with the likely intent of incorporating them into the Russian Federation, while the West has signaled that it will step up military support for Ukraine. In the light of these developments, Ukrainian officials have ruled out a ceasefire or concessions to Moscow, although President Volodymyr Zelenskyy also went on record saying that only diplomacy can end the war. Don't these two positions cancel each other out? Doesn't a mutually acceptable agreement for a war to end always contain concessions? Indeed, back in March, the Ukrainian government had signaled its intention that it was willing to make big concessions for the war to end. So, what's going on? Could it be that neither side is fully invested in peace?

Noam Chomsky: I'll come back to the questions, but we should carefully consider the stakes. They are very high. They go far beyond Ukraine, desperate and tragic as the situation is there. Anyone with a moral bone in their body will want to think through the issues carefully, without heroic posturing.

Let's consider what is at stake.

First, of course, is Putin's invasion of Ukraine, a crime (to repeat once again) that can be compared to the U.S. invasion of Iraq or the Hitler-Stalin invasion of Poland, the kind of crimes against peace for which Nazi war criminals were hanged — though only the defeated are subject to punishment in what we call "civilization." In Ukraine itself, there will be a terrible toll as long as the war persists.

There are broader consequences, which are truly colossal. That's no exaggeration.

One is that tens of millions of people in Asia, Africa and the Middle East are literally facing starvation as the war proceeds, cutting off desperately needed agricultural supplies from the Black Sea region, the primary supplier for many countries, including some already facing utter disaster, like Yemen. Will return to how that is being handled.

A second is the growing threat of terminal nuclear war. It is all too easy to construct plausible scenarios that lead to a rapid climb up the escalation ladder. To take one, right now the U.S. is sending advanced anti-ship missiles to Ukraine.

The flagship of the Russian fleet has already been sunk. Suppose more of the fleet is attacked. How does Russia then react? And what follows?

To mention another scenario, so far Russia has refrained from attacking the supply lines used to ship heavy armaments to Ukraine. Suppose it does so, placing it in direct confrontation with NATO — meaning the U.S. We can leave the rest to the imagination.

Other proposals are circulating that would very likely lead to nuclear war — which means the end, for all of us, facts that do not seem to be properly understood. One is the widely voiced call for a no-fly zone, which means attacking anti-aircraft installations inside Russia. The extreme danger of such proposals is understood by some, notably the Pentagon, which so far has been able to veto the most dangerous proposals. For how long in the prevailing mood?

These are horrendous prospects. Prospects: what *might* happen. When we look at what actually *is* happening, it gets worse. The Ukraine invasion has reversed the much-too-limited efforts to address global warming — which will soon become global frying. Prior to the invasion, some steps were being taken to avert catastrophe. Now that has all been thrown into reverse. If that continues, we're done.

One day the IPCC issues another severe warning that if we are to survive, we must start right now to reduce use of fossil fuels. Right now, no delay. The next day President Biden announces vast new expansion of fossil fuel production.

Biden's call to increase fossil fuel production is sheer political theater. It has nothing to do with today's fuel prices and inflation, as claimed. It will be years before the poisons reach the market — years that could be spent on moving the world rapidly to renewable energy. That's perfectly feasible, but barely discussed in the mainstream. There's no need to comment here. The topic has recently been [expertly analyzed by economist Robert Pollin](#) in another of his essential contributions to understanding this critical issue of survival and acting on that understanding.

It is crystal clear that settling the Ukraine crisis is of extraordinary significance, not just for Ukraine itself but because of the calamitous consequences beyond if the war persists.

What then can we do to facilitate ending the tragedy? Let's begin with virtual truism. The war can end in one of two ways: Either there will be a diplomatic settlement, or one side will capitulate. The horror will go on unless it ends with a diplomatic settlement or capitulation.

That at least should be beyond discussion.

A diplomatic settlement differs from capitulation in one crucial respect: Each side accepts it as tolerable. That's true by definition, so it is beyond discussion.

Proceeding, a diplomatic settlement must offer Putin some kind of escape hatch — what is now disdainfully called an “off-ramp” or “appeasement” by those who prefer to prolong the war.

That much is understood even by the most dedicated Russia-haters, at least those who can entertain some thought in their minds beyond punishing the reviled enemy. One prominent example is the distinguished foreign policy scholar Graham Allison of Harvard University's Kennedy School of Government, who also has long direct experience in military affairs. Five years ago, he instructed us that it was then clear that Russia as a whole is a “demonic” society and “deserves to be strangled.” Today he adds that few can doubt that Putin is a “[demon](#),” radically unlike any U.S. leader, who at worst only make mistakes, in his view.

Yet even Allison argues that we must contain our righteous anger and bring the war to a quick end by diplomatic means. The reason is that if the mad demon “is forced to choose between losing and escalating the level of violence and destruction, then, if he's a rational actor, he's going to choose the latter” — and we may all be dead, not just Ukrainians.

Putin is a rational actor, Allison argues. And if he is not, all discussion is useless because he can destroy Ukraine and maybe even blow up the world at any moment — an eventuality we cannot prevent by any means that won't destroy us all.

Proceeding with truism, to oppose or even act to delay a diplomatic settlement is to call for prolonging the war with its grim consequences for Ukraine and beyond. This stand constitutes a ghastly experiment: Let's see whether Putin will slink away quietly in total defeat, or whether he will prolong the war with all its horrors, or even use the weapons that he indisputably has to devastate Ukraine

and to set the stage for terminal war.

All of this seems obvious enough. Or it should, but not in the current climate of hysteria, where such near truisms elicit a great flood of utterly irrational reactions: *The monster Putin won't agree, it's appeasement, what about Munich, we have to establish our own red lines and keep to them whatever the monster says, etc.*

There is no need to dignify such outpourings with a response. They all amount to saying: Let's not try, and instead undertake the ghastly experiment.

The ghastly experiment is operative U.S. policy, and is supported by a wide range of opinion, always with noble rhetoric about how we must stand up for principle and not permit crime to go unpunished. When we [hear this from strong supporters of U.S. crimes](#), as we commonly do, we can dismiss it as sheer cynicism, the Western counterpart to the most vulgar apparatchiks of the Soviet years, eager to eloquently denounce Western crimes, fully supportive of their own. We also hear it from opponents of U.S. crimes, from people who surely do not want to carry out the ghastly experiment that they are advocating. Here other issues arise: the rising tide of irrationality that is undermining any hope for serious discourse — a necessity if Ukraine is to be spared indescribable tragedy, and even if the human experiment is to persist much longer.

If we can escape cynicism and irrationality, the humane choice for the U.S. and the West is straightforward: seek to facilitate a diplomatic settlement, or at least don't undermine the option.

On this matter, official Western opinion is split. France, Germany and Italy have been [calling for negotiations](#) to establish a ceasefire and move toward a diplomatic settlement. The U.S. and Britain, the West's two warrior states, object. Their position is that [the war must proceed](#): the ghastly experiment.

The longstanding U.S. policy of undermining diplomacy, which we have reviewed in detail in earlier discussions, was presented in sharper form a few weeks ago at a meeting of NATO powers and others organized by Washington at the U.S. airbase in Ramstein, Germany. The U.S. issued the marching orders: The war must be continued so as to harm Russia. That is the widely advocated "Afghan model" that we have discussed: In the words of the definitive scholarly study of the topic, it is the policy of "fighting Russia to the last Afghan" while seeking to

delay Russian withdrawal and to undermine the UN diplomatic efforts that finally brought the tragedy to an end.

Explaining U.S.-NATO goals at Ramstein, Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin [said](#) that “we want to see Russia weakened to the degree that it can’t do the kinds of things that it has done in invading Ukraine.”

Let’s think about it. How do we ensure that Russia can never again invade another country? We put aside here the unthinkable question of whether reshaping U.S. policy might contribute to this end, for example, examining Washington’s openly declared refusal to consider any Russian security concerns and many other actions that we have discussed.

To achieve the announced goal, it seems that we must at least reenact something like the Versailles Treaty, which sought to ensure that Germany would not be able to go to war again.

But Versailles did not go far enough, as was soon made clear. It follows that the new version being planned must “strangle the demon” in ways that go beyond the Versailles effort to control the Huns. Perhaps something like the [Morgenthau Plan](#).

That is the logic of the pronouncements. Even if we don’t take the words seriously and give them a limited interpretation, the policy entails prolonging the war, whatever the consequences are for Ukrainians and the “collateral damage” beyond: mass starvation, possible terminal war, continued destruction of the environment that sustains life.

Narrower questions of a similar sort arise with regard to the blockade, with its lethal effects in the Global South. Right now, Ukrainian ports are blockaded by the Russian Navy, preventing desperately needed exports. What can be done about it?

As always, there are two directions to explore: military or diplomatic. “War/War or Jaw/Jaw” in the phrase attributed to Churchill, who assigned priority to the latter.

War/War is official U.S. policy: Send advanced anti-ship missiles to force Russia to stop blockade of ports. Beyond the Russian flagship, more can be sunk. Will the

Russians observe quietly? Maybe. How would the U.S. react in similar circumstances? We can put that aside.

Another possibility, [proposed by the Wall Street Journal editors](#), is “to use warships to escort merchant ships out of the Black Sea.” The editors assure us that it would conform to international law, and that Russians will stop at nothing. So, if they react, we can proclaim proudly that we upheld international law as all goes up in flames.

The editors observe that there are precedents: “The U.S. has marshalled allies for such a mission twice in recent decades. In the late 1980s the U.S. reflagged and protected Kuwaiti oil tankers as they sailed out of the Persian Gulf during the Iran-Iraq tanker war.”

That is correct, though there is a small oversight. The U.S. did indeed intervene directly to provide crucial support for Reagan’s good friend Saddam Hussein in his invasion of Iran. That was after supporting Saddam’s chemical warfare that killed hundreds of thousands of Iranians, and even charging Iran for Saddam’s massacre of Kurds with chemical warfare. Iran was the demon of the day. A fine precedent.

Those are options for ending the blockade, keeping to convention by restricting attention to force rather than possible peaceful steps.

Are there any? One cannot know without thinking about them, looking at what is transpiring, and trying. It may be of relevance that Russia did propose something of the sort, though in our increasingly totalitarian culture, it can be reported only at the extreme margins. Quoting from a [libertarian website](#):

Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Andrey Rudenko ... [argued] his country is not solely responsible for the burgeoning food emergency while pointing to Western sanctions blocking the export of grain and fertilizers.

“You have to not only appeal to the Russian Federation but also look deeply at the whole complex of reasons that caused the current food crisis. [Sanctions] interfere with normal free trade, encompassing food products including wheat, fertilizers and others,” Russian Deputy Foreign Minister [Andrey Rudenko said](#).

s it worth considering? Not in our culture, which automatically reaches for the

revolver.

The reflexive preference for violence, and its grim consequences, have not been overlooked abroad. That's common in the Global South, which has ample experience with Western practice, but even among allies. The editor of the Australian international affairs journal *Arena* [deplores the rigid censorship and intolerance of even mild dissent in U.S. media](#), concluding that "This means it is almost impossible within mainstream opinion to simultaneously acknowledge Putin's insupportable actions *and* forge a path out of the war that does not involve escalation, and the further destruction of Ukraine."

Quite correct. And unless we can escape this self-imposed trap, we are likely to march on to annihilation. It is all reminiscent of the early days of World War I when the Great Powers enthusiastically undertook a self-destructive war, but this time with incomparably more severe consequences lurking not far in the distance.

I've said nothing about what Ukrainians should do, for the simple and sufficient reason that it's not our business. If they opt for the ghastly experiment, that's their right. It's also their right to request weapons to defend themselves from murderous aggression.

Here we return to what is our business: ourselves. How should we respond to these requests? I'll repeat in a moment my personal belief, but here too a little honesty wouldn't hurt. There are many ringing declarations upholding the sacred principle that victims of criminal assault must be supported in their just demand for weapons to defend themselves. It is easy to show that those who issue them don't believe a word of what they are saying, and in fact, almost always, strongly support providing weapons and crucial diplomatic support to the aggressor. To take just the most obvious case, where are the calls to provide Palestinians with weapons to defend themselves from half a century of brutal criminal occupation in violation of Security Council orders and international law — or even to withdraw the decisive U.S. support for these crimes?

One can, of course, read the reports of U.S.-backed settler-IDF atrocities in the Israeli press, in the daily columns of the great journalist Gideon Levy. And we can read the [withering reports](#) by another honorable Israeli journalist, Amira Hass, reviewing the bitter condemnations of the ecological damage caused by the "demonic" Russians in Ukraine, which somehow miss the Israeli attack on Gaza

last May, when “Israeli shells ignited hundreds of tons of pesticides, seeds, fertilizers, other chemicals, nylon and plastic sheeting, and plastic piping in a warehouse in the northern Gaza town of Beit Lahia.” The shelling ignited 50 tons of hazardous substances, with lethal effects on the shattered population, which is living in conditions of bare survival, international agencies report, after decades of U.S.-backed Israeli sadism. It is “chemical warfare by indirect means,” the highly reputable Palestinian legal research and activism agency al-Haq reports, after extensive investigation.

None of this, and vastly more, inspires any word in the mainstream about ending huge U.S. support for the murderous occupier, or of course for any means of defense.

But enough of such outrageous “whataboutism,” otherwise known as elementary honesty, and a common theme outside of our tightly controlled doctrinal system. How should the principle apply in the unique case of Ukraine, where the U.S. for once opposes aggression? My own view, to repeat, is that the Ukrainian request for weapons should be honored, with caution to bar shipments that will escalate the criminal assault, punishing Ukrainians even more, with potential cataclysmic effects beyond.

If the war in Ukraine can be ended through diplomacy, a peace deal could take many forms. The diplomatic solution advanced by many experts is the one based on a Ukrainian treaty of neutrality while Russia drops its objections to Ukraine’s membership in the EU, although the road to membership will inevitably be very long. However, there is one scenario which is rarely discussed, yet this is where things could be headed. This is Graham Allison’s “Korean scenario,” where Ukraine is divided into two parts without a formal treaty. Do you regard this as a likely or possible scenario?

It is one of a number of possible very ugly outcomes. Speculation seems to me rather idle. Better, I think, to devote our energy to thinking of constructive ways to overcome the developing tragedies — which, again, go far beyond Ukraine.

We might even envision a broader framework, something like the “common European home” with no military alliances proposed by Mikhail Gorbachev as an appropriate framework of world order after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Or we might pick up some of the early wording of the Partnership for Peace, initiated

by Washington in the same years, as when President Clinton in 1994 assured Boris Yeltsin that “the broader, higher goal [is] European security, unity and integration - a goal I know you share.”

These promising prospects for peaceful integration were soon undercut, however, by [Clinton’s plans for NATO expansion](#), over strong Russian objections, long preceding Putin.

Such hopes can be revived, to the great benefit of Europe, Russia and world peace generally. They might have been revived by Putin had he pursued Macron’s tentative initiatives towards accommodation instead of foolishly choosing criminal aggression. But they are not necessarily dead.

It’s useful to recall some history. For centuries, Europe was the most vicious place on earth. For French and Germans, the highest goal in life was to slaughter one another. As recently as my childhood, it seemed unimaginable that it could ever end. A few years later, it did end, and they have since been close allies, pursuing common goals in a radical reversal of a long history of brutal conflict. Diplomatic successes need not be impossible to achieve.

It is now a commonplace that the world has entered a new Cold War. In fact, even the once-unthinkable scenario of using nuclear weapons in warfare is no longer taboo talk. Have we entered an era of confrontation between Russia and the West, a geostrategic and political rivalry reminiscent of the Cold War?

Nuclear warfare had better become taboo talk, and unthinkable policy. We should be working hard to restore the arms control regime that was virtually dismantled by Bush II and Trump, who didn’t have quite enough time to complete the job but came close. Biden was able to rescue the last major relic, New Start, just days before its expiration.

The arms control regime should then be extended, looking forward to the day when the nuclear powers will join the UN Treaty on Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, now in force.

Other measures can be taken to alleviate the threat, among them implementing Nuclear Weapons-Free Zones (NWFZ). They exist in much the world, but are blocked by U.S. insistence on maintaining nuclear weapons facilities within them. The most important would be a NWFZ in the Middle East. That would end the

alleged Iranian nuclear threat and eliminate any thin pretext for the criminal U.S.-Israeli bombings, assassinations and sabotage in Iran. That crucial advance in world peace is, however, blocked by the U.S. alone.

The reason is not obscure: It would interfere with Washington's protection of Israel's huge nuclear arsenal. That has to be kept in the dark. If exposed, U.S. law would come into play, threatening Washington's extraordinary support for Israel's illegal occupation and constant crimes — another topic that is unmentionable in polite society.

All steps should be taken to remove the scourge of nuclear weapons from the earth, before they destroy all of us.

In the world system that is taking shape, the confrontation with Russia is something of a sideshow. Putin has handed Washington a marvelous gift by turning Europe into a virtual U.S. vassal, cutting off the prospects that Europe might become an independent "third force" in international affairs. A consequence is that the fading Russian kleptocracy, with its huge stock of natural resources, is being incorporated into the Chinese-dominated zone. This growing system of development and loans stretches over Central Asia and reaches to the Middle East through the UAE and Maritime Silk Road, with tentacles stretching to Africa and even to Washington's "little region over here," as FDR's Secretary of War Henry Stimson described Latin America while calling for dismantling of all regional associations except for our own.

It is the "China threat" that is the centerpiece of U.S. strategy. The threat is enhanced if resource-rich Russia is incorporated as a junior partner.

The U.S. is now vigorously reacting to what it calls "Chinese aggression," such as devoting state resources to developing advanced technology and internal repression. The reaction, initiated by Trump, has been carried forward by Biden's policy of "encirclement" based on a ring of "sentinel states" off the coast of China. These are armed with advanced weapons, recently upgraded to high-precision weapons, aimed at China. The "defense" is backed by a fleet of invulnerable nuclear submarines that can destroy not just China but the world many times over. Since that is not good enough, they are now being replaced as part of the enormous Trump-Biden military expansion.

The stern U.S. reaction is understandable. "China, unlike Russia, is the only

country powerful enough to challenge U.S. dominance on the world stage,” Secretary of State Antony Blinken [announced](#) in describing this intolerable threat to world order (aka U.S. dominance).

While we talk of “isolating Russia,” if not “strangling” this “demonic” society, most of the world is keeping its ties open to Russia and to the China-dominated global system. It is also watching, bemused, as the U.S. destroys itself from within.

Meanwhile the U.S. is developing new alliances, which will presumably strengthen in November if the GOP takes over Congress and manages to gain long-term control of the political system through its quite open efforts to undermine political democracy.

One such alliance is being firmed up right now with the racist self-declared “illiberal democracy” of Hungary, which has crushed free speech and independent cultural and political institutions and is worshipped by leading figures of the GOP from Trump to media star Tucker Carlson. Steps toward that goal were taken a few days ago at the conference of far right elements in Europe that met in Budapest, where the star attraction was the Conservative Political Action Conference, a core element of the Republican Party.

The alliance between the U.S. and the European extreme right has a natural ally in the Abraham alliance forged by Trump and Jared Kushner. This widely hailed alliance formalized the tacit relations between Israel and the most reactionary states of the MENA (Middle East-North Africa) region. Israel and Hungary already have close relations, based on shared racist values and a sense of grievance for being shunned by more liberal elements in Europe. Another natural partner is today’s India, where Prime Minister Modi is shattering Indian secular democracy and establishing a Hindu ethnocracy, bitterly repressing the Muslim population, and extending India’s domains with his brutal occupation of Kashmir.

The U.S. is already virtually alone in recognizing the two existing illegal MENA occupations in violation of Security Council orders: Israel’s annexation of the Syrian Golan Heights and of vastly expanded Greater Jerusalem, and Morocco’s annexation of Western Sahara to extend its near monopoly of irreplaceable phosphate reserves. With the GOP in power, the U.S. might complete the picture by recognizing Hindu India’s violent takeover of Kashmir.

A new global order is taking shape, but the U.S.-Russia confrontation is not its central element.

Speaking of a new Cold War, I must say I am in utter disbelief by the delirious reaction on the part of so many in the U.S. to analyses seeking to provide background to Russia's invasion of Ukraine, and the same is true in connection with voices calling for diplomacy to end the war. They conflate explanation and justification and willfully ignore historical facts, such as the decision of the U.S. to expand NATO eastward without consideration to Russia's security concerns. And it isn't as if this decision was greeted at the time with approval by leading diplomats and foreign affairs experts. Former U.S. envoy to the Soviet Union Jack F. Matlock Jr. and former Secretary of State Henry Kissinger warned against NATO expansion and Ukraine's inclusion. George Kennan's reaction to the Senate's 1998 ratification of NATO eastward expansion up to the borders of Russia was even more blunt: "I think it is the beginning of a new cold war.... I think the Russians will gradually react quite adversely.... I think it is a tragic mistake. There was no reason for this whatsoever.... Of course there is going to be a bad reaction from Russia, and then [the Nato expanders] will say that we always told you that is how the Russians are - but this is just wrong."

Were these top U.S. diplomats Russian pawns, as is often said today of anyone offering background information why Russia has invaded Ukraine? I like to have your thoughts on this matter.

You can add others who delivered stern warnings to Washington that it was reckless and needlessly provocative to ignore Russia's announced security concerns, including current CIA Director William Burns and his predecessor Stansfield Turner, even hawks like Paul Nitze, in fact almost the whole of the diplomatic corps who had any deep knowledge of Russia. Those warnings were particularly strong with regard to Russia's concerns, well before Putin and including every Russian leader, over incorporation into NATO of Georgia and Ukraine. These are Russia's geostrategic heartland as is evident by a look at a topographic map and recent history, Operation Barbarossa.

Are they all Russian pawns? I suppose that can be claimed in today's climate of frenzied irrationality, a danger to ourselves and the world.

It's useful to have a look at chapters of history that are far enough back so that

we can consider them with some degree of detachment. An obvious choice, as mentioned earlier, is the First World War. It is now recognized that it was a terrible war of futility and stupidity in which none of the agents had a tenable stand.

That's now. Not at the time. As the great powers of the day stumbled into war, the educated classes in each proclaimed the nobility of the cause of their own state. A famous manifesto of prominent German intellectuals appealed to the West to support the land of Kant, Goethe, Beethoven, and other leading figures of civilization. Their counterparts in France and Britain did the same, as did the most distinguished American intellectuals when Woodrow Wilson joined the war shortly after having won the 1916 election on a platform of Peace without Victory.

Not everyone took part in the celebration of the grandeur of their own state. In England, Bertrand Russell dared to question the party line; in Germany, he was joined by Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht; in the U.S., by Eugene Debs. All were imprisoned. Some, like Randolph Bourne in the U.S., escaped that fate. Bourne was only barred from all liberal journals.

This pattern is not a departure from the historical norm. It pretty much is the norm, regrettably.

The World War I experience did provide important lessons. That was recognized very quickly. Two highly influential examples are Walter Lippmann and Edward Bernays. Lippmann went on to become a most prominent U.S. 20th century public intellectual. Bernays became one of the founders and intellectual leaders of the huge public relations industry, the world's major propaganda agency, devoted to undermining markets by creating uninformed consumers who will make irrational choices and to fostering the unbridled consumerism that ranks alongside the fossil fuel industries as a threat to survival.

Lippmann and Bernays were Wilson-Roosevelt-Kennedy liberals. They were also members of the propaganda agency established by President Wilson to convert a pacifist population to raging anti-German fanatics, the Creel Committee on Public Information, a properly Orwellian title. Both were highly impressed by its success in "manufacture of consent" (Lippmann), "engineering of consent" (Bernays). They recognized this to be a "new art in the practice of democracy," a means to ensure that the "bewildered herd" — the general population — can be "put in

their place” as mere “spectators,” and will not intrude into domains where they do not belong: policy decisions. These must be reserved for the “intelligent minority,” “the technocratic and policy-oriented intellectuals” in the Camelot version.

That is pretty much reigning liberal democratic theory, which Lippmann and Bernays helped forge. The conceptions are by no means new. They trace back to the early democratic revolutions of the 17th and 18th centuries in England and then its U.S. colony. They were invigorated by the World War I experience.

But while the masses may be controlled with “necessary illusions” and “emotionally potent oversimplifications” (in the words of Reinhold Niebuhr, venerated as the “theologian of the liberal establishment”), there is another problem: the “value-oriented intellectuals” who dare to raise questions about U.S. policy that go beyond tactical decisions. They can no longer be jailed, as during World War I, so those in power now seek to expel them from the public domain in other ways.

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