

# Noam Chomsky: The “Historic” NATO Summit In Madrid Shored Up US Militarism



*Noam Chomsky*

On June 28-30, 2022, NATO leaders gathered in Madrid, Spain, to discuss the major issues and challenges facing the alliance. The summit ended with far-reaching decisions that will have a dire impact on global peace and security. Hailed as “historic,” the summit was indeed transformative: NATO produced a new Strategic Concept and identified what it says are the key threats to western security, interests, and values — none other than Russia and China.

“The empire doesn’t rest,” quips Noam Chomsky, a public intellectual regarded by millions of people as a national and international treasure, in his assessment of NATO’s “historic” summit in the exclusive interview for *Truthout* that follows. Chomsky is one of the most widely cited scholars in modern history. He is institute professor emeritus at MIT and currently laureate professor of linguistics at the University of Arizona, and has published more than 150 books in linguistics, political and social thought, political economy, media studies, U.S. foreign policy and world affairs.

*C.J. Polychroniou: Noam, as was expected, the war in Ukraine dominated the recent NATO summit in Madrid and produced some extraordinary decisions which will lead to the “NATO-ization of Europe,” as Russia was declared “the most significant and direct threat” to its members’ peace and security. Turkey dropped its objections to Finland and Sweden joining the alliance after it managed to*

*extract major concessions, NATO's eastern flank will receive massive reinforcement, additional defense systems will be stationed in Germany, Italy, and elsewhere, and the U.S. will boost its military presence all across European soil. Given all of this, is it Russia that represents a threat to Europe, or NATO to Russia? And what does the "NATO-ization" of Europe mean for global peace and security? Is it a prelude to World War III?*

We can dismiss the obligatory boilerplate about high principles and noble goals, and the rank hypocrisy: for example, the lament about the fate of the arms control regime because of Russian-Chinese disruption, with no mention of the fact it is the U.S. that has torn it to shreds under W. Bush and particularly Trump. All of that is to be expected in "historic" pronouncements of a new [Strategic Concept for NATO](#).

The Ukraine war did indeed provide the backdrop for the meeting of NATO powers — with bitter irony, just after the conclusion of the first meeting of the states that signed the [Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons](#) (TPNW), which passed unnoticed.

The NATO summit was expanded for the first time to include the Asian "sentinel states" that the U.S. has established and provided with advanced high-precision weapons to "encircle" China. Accordingly, the North Atlantic was officially expanded to include the newly created Indo-Pacific region, a vast area where security concerns for the Atlanticist powers of NATO are held to arise. The imperial implications should be clear enough. There's a good deal more to say about this. I will return to it.

U.S. policy toward Ukraine and Russia was strongly affirmed in the Strategic Concept: no negotiations, only war to "weaken Russia."

This has been steady policy since George W. Bush's 2008 invitation to Ukraine to join NATO, vetoed by France and Germany, who agreed with high-level U.S. diplomats for the past 30 years that no Russian government could tolerate that, for reasons too obvious to review. The offer remained on the agenda in deference to U.S. power.

After the Maidan uprising in 2014, the U.S. began openly to move to integrate Ukraine into the NATO military command, policies extended under Biden, accompanied by official acknowledgment after the invasion that Russian security

concerns, meaning NATO membership, had not been taken into consideration. The plans have not been concealed. The goals are to ensure full compatibility of the Ukrainian military with NATO forces in order to “[integrate Ukraine into NATO de facto](#).”

Zelensky’s efforts to implement a diplomatic settlement were ignored, including his proposals last March to accept Austrian-style neutralization for the indefinite future. The proposals, which had indications of Russian support, were termed a “[real breakthrough](#)” by UN Secretary-General [António Guterres](#), but never pursued.

The official Russian stance at the time (March 2022) was that its military operations would end if Ukraine too were to “[cease military action](#), change its constitution to enshrine neutrality, acknowledge Crimea as Russian territory, and recognize the separatist republics of Donetsk and Lugansk as independent states.”

There was a considerable gap between the Ukrainian and Russian positions on a diplomatic settlement, but they might have been narrowed in negotiations. Even after the invasion, it appears that there may have remained some space for a way to end the horrors.

France and Germany continued to make overtures toward diplomatic settlement. These are completely dropped in the recent Strategic Concept, which simply “reaffirms” all plans to move toward incorporating Ukraine (and Georgia) into NATO, formally dismissing Russian concerns.

The shifts in the European stance reflect Europe’s increasing subordination to the U.S. The shift was accelerated by Putin’s choice of aggression after refusing to consider European initiatives that might have averted the crime and possibly even opened a path toward Europe-Russia accommodation that would be highly beneficial to all — and highly beneficial to the world, which may not survive great power confrontation.

That is not a throw-away line. It is reality. The great powers will either find a way to cooperate, to work together in confronting imminent global threats, or the future will be too grim to contemplate. These elementary facts should be kept firmly in mind while discussing particular issues.

We should also be clear about the import of the new Strategic Concept. Reaffirming the U.S. program of de facto incorporation of Ukraine within NATO is also reaffirming, unambiguously, the refusal to contemplate a diplomatic settlement. It is reaffirming the Ramstein declarations a few weeks ago that the war in Ukraine must be fought to weaken Russia, in fact to weaken it more severely than the Versailles treaty weakened Germany, if we assume that U.S. officials mean what they say — and we can expect that adversaries take them at their words.

The Ramstein declarations were accompanied by assurances that Ukraine would drive Russia out of all Ukrainian territory. In assessing the credibility of these assurances, we may recall that they come from the sources that confidently predicted that the U.S.-created Iraqi and Afghan armies would resist ISIS [also known as Daesh] and the Taliban, instead of collapsing immediately, as they did; and that the Russian invasion would conquer Kyiv and occupy Ukraine in three days.

The message to Russia is: You have no escape. Either surrender, or continue your slow and brutal advance, or, in the event that defeat threatens, go for broke and destroy Ukraine, as of course you can.

The logic is quite clear. So is the import beyond Ukraine itself. Millions will face starvation, the world will continue to march toward environmental destruction, the likelihood of nuclear war will increase.

But we must pursue this course to punish Russia severely enough so that it cannot undertake further aggression.

We might pause for a moment to look at the crucial underlying premise: Russia is bent on further aggression, and must be stopped now, or else. Munich 1938. By now this has become a Fundamental Truth, beyond challenge or inquiry. With so much at stake, perhaps we may be forgiven for breaking the rules and raising a few questions.

Inquiry at once faces a difficulty. There has been little effort to establish the Fundamental Truth. As good a version as any is presented by *Peter Dickinson*, editor of the prestigious *Atlantic Council's UkraineAlert Service*. [The heart of Dickinson's argument is this:](#)

Putin has never made any secret of the fact that he views the territory of modern Ukraine as historically Russian land. For years, he has denied Ukraine's right to exist while claiming that all Ukrainians are in fact Russians ("one people"). The real question is which other sovereign nations might also fit Putin's definition. He recently set off alarm bells by commenting that [the entire former Soviet Union](#) was historically Russian territory.

Nor is it clear if Putin's appetite for reclaiming Russian lands is limited to the 14 non-Russian post-Soviet states. Imperial Russia once also ruled Finland and Poland, while the Soviet Empire after WWII stretched deep into Central Europe and included East Germany. One thing is clear: unless he is stopped in Ukraine, Putin's imperial ambitions are certain to expand.

That is clear, requiring no further argument.

The totality of evidence is given in the linked article. But now another problem arises. In it, Putin says nothing remotely like what set off the dramatic alarm bells. More like the opposite.

Putin says that the old Soviet Union "ceased to exist," and he wants "to emphasise that in recent history we have always treated the processes of sovereignisation that have occurred in the post-Soviet area with respect." As for Ukraine, "If we had had good allied relations, or at least a partnership between us, it would never have occurred to anybody [to resort to force]. And, by the way, there would have been no Crimea problem. Because if the rights of the people who live there, the Russian-speaking population, had been respected, if the Russian language and culture had been treated with respect, it would never have occurred to anybody to start all this."

Nothing more is quoted. That's the totality of evidence Dickinson presents, apart from what has become the last resort of proponents of the thesis that unless "stopped in Ukraine, Putin's imperial ambitions are certain to expand": musings of no clear import about Peter the Great.

This is no minor matter. On this basis, so our leaders instruct us, we must ensure that the war continues in order to weaken Russia; and beyond Ukraine itself, to drive millions to starvation while we march on triumphantly toward an unlivable earth and face increasing risk of terminal nuclear war.

Perhaps there is some better evidence for what is so “clear” that we must assume these incredible risks. If so, it would be good to hear it.

Putin’s cited remarks, as distinct from the fevered constructions, are consistent with the historical and diplomatic record, including the post-invasion Russian official stance just quoted, but much farther back.

The core issue for 30 years has been Ukraine’s entry into NATO. That has always been understood by high U.S. officials, who have warned Washington against the reckless and provocative acts it has been taking. It has also been understood by Washington’s most favored Russian diplomats. Clinton’s friend Boris Yeltsin objected strenuously when Clinton began the process of NATO expansion in violation of firm promises to Gorbachev when the Soviet Union collapsed. The same is true of Gorbachev himself, who accused the West and NATO of destroying the structure of European security by expanding its alliance. “No head of the Kremlin can ignore such a thing,” he said, adding that the U.S. was unfortunately starting to establish a “[mega empire](#),” words echoed by Putin and other Russian officials.

I am unaware of a word in the record about plans to invade anyone outside the long-familiar red lines: Ukraine and Georgia. The only Russian threats that have been cited are that if NATO advances to its borders, Russia will strengthen its defenses in response.

With specific regard to Ukraine, until recently Putin was calling publicly for implementation of the Minsk II agreement: neutralization of Ukraine and a federal arrangement with a degree of autonomy for the Donbass region. It is always reasonable to suspect dark motives in great power posturing, but it is the official positions that offer a basis for diplomacy if there is any interest in that course.

On Crimea, Russia had made no moves until it was about to lose its sole warm water naval base, in the Crimean Peninsula. The background is reviewed by John Quigley, the U.S. State department representative in the OSCE [Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe] delegation that considered the problem of Ukraine after the collapse of the Soviet Union.

[Crimea, he reports, was a particular focus of attention](#). His intensive efforts to find a solution for the problem of Crimea faced a “dilemma.” Crimea’s population “was majority Russian and saw no reason to be part of Ukraine.” Crimea had been

Russian until 1954, when, for unknown reasons, Soviet Communist Party Chair Nikita Khrushchev decided to switch Crimea from the Soviet Russian republic to the Soviet Ukrainian republic. As Quigley notes,

Even after 1954, Crimea was effectively governed more from Moscow than from Kyiv. When the Soviet Union was dissolved, Crimea's population suddenly found itself a minority in a foreign country. Ukraine accepted a need for a certain degree of self-rule, but Crimea declared independence as what it called the Crimean Republic. Over Ukraine's objection, an election for president was called in the declared Crimean Republic, and a candidate was elected on a platform of merger with Russia. At the time, however, the Russian government was not prepared to back the Crimeans.

Quigley sought a compromise that would provide autonomy for Crimea under a Ukraine-Crimea treaty, with international guarantees to protect Crimea from Ukrainian infringement. The "treaty went nowhere, however.... Ukraine cracked down on the Crimean Republic, and the conflict remained unresolved. Tension simmered until 2014, by which time Russia was prepared to act to take Crimea back. Crimea was then formally merged into the Russian Federation."

It's not a simple matter of unprovoked Russian aggression, as in the received U.S. version.

Like many others familiar with the region, Quigley now calls for a diplomatic settlement and wonders whether the current U.S. goal "is less to force Russia out of Ukraine than to fight Russia to the last Ukrainian."

Is there still an option for diplomacy? No one can know unless the possibility is explored. That will not happen if it is an established Fundamental Truth that Putin's ambitions are insatiable.

Apart from the question of Putin's ambitions, there is a small matter of capability. While trembling in fear of the new Peter the Great, western powers are also gloating over the demonstration that their firm convictions about Russia's enormous military power were quickly dispelled with the Russian debacle in its attack on Kyiv. U.S. intelligence had predicted victory in a few days. Instead, tenacious Ukrainian resistance revealed that Russia could not conquer cities a few miles from its border defended by a mostly citizens' army.



But no matter: The new Peter the Great is on the march. Lack of evidence of intention and official proposals to the contrary are as irrelevant to Fundamental Truth as lack of military capacity.

What we are observing is nothing new. Russian devils of incomparable might aiming to conquer the world and destroy civilization have been a staple of official rhetoric, and obedient commentary, for 75 years. The rhetoric of the critical internal document NSC-68 (1950) is a striking illustration, almost unbelievable in its infantile crudity.

At times, the method has been acknowledged. From his position as “present at the creation” of the Cold War, the distinguished statesman Dean Acheson recognized that it was necessary to be “clearer than truth” in exercises (like NSC-68) to “[bludgeon the mass mind](#)” of government into obedience with elite plans. That was in fact “NSC-68’s purpose.”

Scholarship has also occasionally recorded the fact. Harvard Professor of Government and long-time government adviser Samuel Huntington observed that “you may have to sell [intervention or other military action] in such a way as to create the misimpression that it is the Soviet Union that you are fighting. That is what the United States has been doing ever since the Truman Doctrine,”

Today’s formula is no innovation.

We often tend to forget that the U.S. is a global power. Planning is global: What is happening in one part of the world is often replicated elsewhere. By focusing on one particular manifestation, we often miss the global tapestry in which it is one strand.

When the U.S. took over global hegemony from Britain after World War II, it kept the same guiding geopolitical concepts, now greatly expanded by a far more powerful hegemon.

Britain is an island off the coast of Europe. A primary goal of British imperial rule was to prevent a unified hostile Europe.

The U.S.-run western hemisphere is an “island” off the coast of the Eurasian land mass, with far grander imperial objectives (or “responsibilities,” as they are politely termed). It must therefore make sure to control it from all directions,



North being a new arena of conflict as global warming opens it up to exploitation and commerce. The NATO-based Atlanticist system is the Western bulwark. The Strategic Concept and its ongoing implementation places this bulwark more firmly in Washington's hands, thanks to Putin.

With virtually no notice, there are similar developments on the Eastern flank of the Eurasian land mass as NATO extends its reach to the Indo-Pacific region under the new Concept. NATO is deepening its relations with its island partners off the coast of China — Japan, Australia, South Korea, New Zealand — even inviting them to the NATO summit, but much more significant, enlisting them in the “encirclement” of China that is a key element of current bipartisan U.S. strategy.

While the U.S. is firming up its control of the western flank of the Eurasian landmass at the NATO Summit, it is carrying out related exercises at the eastern flank: the Rim of the Pacific (RIMPAC) programs now underway. Under the direction of the U.S. Navy, these are “[the grandest of all war games](#),” Australian political scientist Gavan McCormack writes, “the largest air, land, and sea war manoeuvres in the world. They would assemble a staggering 238 ships, 170 aircraft, 4 submarines and 25,000 military personnel from 26 countries... To China, scarcely surprisingly these exercises are seen as expression of an anti-China ‘Asian NATO design.’ They are war games, and they are to include various simulations engaging ‘enemy forces,’ attacking targets and conducting amphibious landings on Hawaii Island and in Hawaiian waters.”

RIMPAC is supplemented by regular U.S. naval missions in China's Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ). These are merely “innocent passage” in accord with the principle of “freedom of navigation;” the U.S. protests when China objects, as does India, Indonesia, and many others. The U.S. appeals to the Law of the Sea - which bars threat or use of force in these zones. Quietly, the U.S. client state Australia, of course, in coordination with Washington, [is engaged in “military espionage”](#) in the EEZ, installing highly sophisticated sensing devices “so that the U.S. can more effectively destroy Chinese vessels as quickly as possible at the start of any conflict.”

These exercises on the Eastern Flank are accompanied by others in the Pacific Northeast region and, in part, in the Baltic region, with participation of new NATO members Finland and Sweden. Over the years, they have been slowly

integrated into the NATO military system and have now taken the final step, pleading “security concerns” that are scarcely even laughable but do benefit their substantial military industries and help drive the societies to the right.

The empire doesn’t rest. The stakes are too high.

In official rhetoric, as always, these programs are undertaken for benign purposes: to enforce “the rules-based international order.” The term appears repeatedly in the Strategic Concept of the NATO Summit. Missing from the document is a different phrase: “UN-based international order.” That is no accidental omission: The two concepts are crucially different.

The UN-based international order is enshrined in the UN Charter, the foundation of modern international law. Under the U.S. Constitution (Article VI), the UN Charter is also “the supreme law of the land.” But it is unacceptable to U.S. elite opinion and is violated freely, with no notice, by U.S. presidents.

The Charter has two primary flaws. One is that it bans “the threat or use of force” in international affairs, apart from designated circumstances that almost never arise. That means that it bans U.S. foreign policy, obviously an unacceptable outcome. Consequently, the revered Constitution can be put aside. If, unimaginably, the question of observing the Constitution ever reached the Supreme Court, it would be dismissed as a “political question.”

The rules-based international order overcomes this flaw. It permits the threat and use of force freely by the Master, and those he authorizes. Illustrations are so dramatically obvious that one might think that they would be difficult to ignore. That would be a mistake: they are routinely ignored. Take one of the major international crimes: annexation of conquered territory in violation of international law. There are two examples: Morocco’s annexation of Western Sahara in violation of the ruling of the International Court of Justice, and Israel’s annexation of the Golan Heights in Syria and Greater Jerusalem in violation of unanimous Security Council orders. All have been supported by the U.S. for many years, and were formally authorized by the Trump administration, now by Biden. One will have to search hard for expressions of concern, even notice.

The second flaw is that the UN Security Council and other international institutions, like the World Court, set the rules. That flaw is also overcome in the rules-based international order, in which the U.S. sets the rules and others obey.

It is, then, easy to understand Washington's preference for the rules-based international order, now forcefully affirmed in the NATO Strategic Concept, and adopted in U.S. commentary and scholarship.

Turning elsewhere, we do find serious commentary and analysis. Australian strategic analyst Clinton Fernandes discusses the matter in some depth in his book *Sub-Imperial Power* (Melbourne 2022).

Tracing the concept to its western origins in British imperial rule, Fernandes shows that

the rules-based order differs sharply from the United Nations-centred international system and the international order underpinned by international law. The United States sits at the apex of the system, exercising control over the sovereignty of many countries. The United Kingdom, a lieutenant with nuclear weapons and far-flung territories, supports the United States. So do subimperial powers like Australia and Israel. The rules-based international order involves control of the effective political sovereignty of other countries, a belief in imperial benevolence and the economics of comparative advantage. Since policy planners and media commentators cannot bring themselves to say 'empire', the 'rules-based international order' serves as the euphemism.

"The economics of comparative advantage," as Fernandes discusses, is another euphemism. Its meaning is "stay in your place," for the benefit of all. It is often advised with the best of intentions. Surely that was the case when Adam Smith advised the American colonies to keep to their comparative advantage in agriculture and import British manufactured goods, thus "promoting the progress of their country toward real wealth and greatness."

Having overthrown British rule, the colonies were free to reject this kind advice and to resort to the same kinds of radical violation of orthodox free trade principles that Britain used in becoming the world's great center of manufacturing and global power. That pattern has been replicated with impressive consistency. Those that adopted the favored principle, usually under force, became the third world. Those that violated it became the wealthy first world, including the one country of the South that resisted colonization, Japan, and thus was able to violate the rules and develop, with its former colonies in tow.

The consistency of the record is close to axiomatic. After all, development means

changing comparative advantage.

In short, the rules-based order confers many advantages on the powerful. One can easily understand why it is viewed so favorably in their domains, while the UN-based order is dismissed except when it can be invoked to punish enemies.

*Turkey continues to resist joining sanctions against Russia and acts, in fact, as a sanctions “safe haven” for Russian oligarchs. Yet it is treated by the U.S. and the NATO alliance in general as a reliable strategic ally, and everyone ignores the fact that Erdoğan’s regime is as blatantly authoritarian and oppressive as that of Putin. In fact, following his somersault vis-a-vis Saudi Arabia, the Biden administration is now warming up to Erdoğan and wants to upgrade Turkey’s fleet of American-made F-16 fighter jets. How should we interpret this anomalous situation within the NATO alliance? Yet another instance of western hypocrisy or the dictates of Realpolitik?*

What is anomalous is that Erdoğan is playing his own game instead of just obeying orders. There’s nothing anomalous about his being “blatantly authoritarian and oppressive.” That’s not a concern [for the U.S.], as in numerous other cases. What is a concern is that he’s not entirely a “reliable strategic ally.” Turkey was actually sanctioned by the U.S. for purchasing Russian missile defense system. And even after the invasion of Ukraine, Erdoğan left open whether he would purchase Russian arms or depart from his “[friendship](#)” with Mr. Putin. In this particular regard, Turkey is acting more like the Global South than like NATO.

Turkey has departed from strict obedience in other ways. It delayed the accession of Sweden and Finland into NATO. The reason, it seems, is Turkey’s commitment to intensify its murderous repression of its Kurdish population. Sweden had been granting asylum to Kurds fleeing Turkish state violence — “terrorists” in Turkish official lingo. There are legitimate concerns that an ugly underground bargain may have been struck when Turkey dropped its opposition to full Swedish entry into NATO.

The background should not be overlooked. Brutal repression of the Kurds in Turkey has a long history. It reached a crescendo in the 1990s, with a state terror campaign that killed tens of thousands of Kurds, destroyed thousands of towns and villages, and drove hundreds of thousands from their homes, many to hideous

slums in barely survivable corners of Istanbul. Some were offered the opportunity to return to what was left of their homes, but only if they publicly blamed Kurdish PKK guerrillas. With the amazing courage that has been the hallmark of the Kurdish struggles for justice, they refused.

These terrible crimes, some of the worst of the decade, were strongly supported by the U.S., which poured arms into Turkey to expedite the atrocities. The flow increased under Clinton as the crimes escalated. Turkey became the leading recipient of U.S. arms (apart from Israel-Egypt, a separate category), replacing Colombia, the leading violator of human rights in the Western hemisphere. That extends a long and well-established pattern. As usual, the media cooperated by ignoring the Turkish horrors and crucial U.S. support for them.

By 2000, the crimes were abating, and an astonishing period began in Turkey. There was remarkable progress in opening up the society, condemning state crimes, advancing freedom and justice. For me personally, it was a great privilege to be able to witness it first-hand, even to participate in limited ways. Prominent in this democratic revolution were Turkish intellectuals, who put their western counterparts to shame. They not only protested state crimes but carried out regular civil disobedience, risking and often enduring harsh punishment, and returning to the fray. One striking example was Ismail Beşikçi, who as a young historian was the first non-Kurdish academic to document the horrific repression of the Kurds. Repeatedly imprisoned, tortured, abused, he refused to stop his work, continuing to document the escalating crimes. There were many others.

By the early 2000s it seemed that a new era was dawning. There were some thrilling moments. One unforgettable experience was at the editorial offices of Hrant Dink, the courageous journalist who was assassinated with state complicity for his defense of human rights, particularly the rights of the Armenian community that had been subjected to genocidal slaughter, still officially denied. With his widow, I was standing on the balcony of the office, observing an enormous demonstration honoring Hrant Dink and his work, and calling for an end to ongoing crimes of state, no small act of courage and dedication in the harshly repressive Turkish state.

The hopes were soon to wane as Erdoğan instituted his increasingly brutal rule, moving to restore the nightmare from which Turkey had begun to emerge. All similar to what happened a few years later in the Arab Spring.

Turkey is also extending its aggression in Syria, aimed at the Kurdish population who, in the midst of the horrendous chaos of the Syrian conflicts, had managed to carve out an island of flourishing democracy and rights (Rojava). The Kurds had also provided the ground troops for Washington's war against ISIS in Syria, suffering over 10,000 casualties. In thanks for their service in this successful war, President Trump withdrew the small U.S. force that served as a deterrent to the Turkish onslaught, leaving them at its mercy.

There is an old Kurdish proverb that the Kurds have no friends but the mountains. There is just concern that Turkish-Swedish NATO maneuverings might confirm it.

*The NATO summit reached the interesting conclusion that China represents a "security challenge" to the interests and security of its member states, but it is not to be treated as an adversary. Semantics aside, can the West really stop China from exercising an ever-increasing role in global affairs? Indeed, is a unipolar power system a safer alternative to world peace than a bipolar or multipolar system?*

The U.S. is quite openly seeking to restrict China's role in global affairs and to impede its development. These are what constitute the "security challenge." The challenge thus has two dimensions, roughly what is called "soft power" and "hard power."

The former is internal development of industry, education, science and technology. This provides the basis for the expansion of China's arena of influence through such projects as the Belt-and-Road (BRI) initiative, a massive multidimensional project that integrates much of Eurasia within a Chinese-based economic and technological system, reaching to the Middle East and Africa, and even to U.S. Latin American domains.

The U.S. complains, correctly, that Chinese internal development violates the rules-based international order. It does, radically. China is following the practices that the U.S. did, as did England before it and all other developed societies since. China is rejecting the policy of "[kicking away the ladder](#)": First climb the ladder of development by any means available, including robbery of higher technology and ample violence and deceit, then impose a "rules-based order" that bars others from doing the same. That is a staple of modern economic history, now formalized in the highly protectionist investor-rights agreements that are masked under the

cynical pretense of “free trade.”

The “security challenge” also has a military dimension. This is countered by the program of “encircling” China by heavily-armed “sentinel states,” and by such projects as the massive RIMPAC exercises now underway, defending the U.S. off the coasts of China. No infringement on U.S. domination of the “Indo-Pacific” region can be tolerated, even a threat that China might set up its second overseas military base in the Pacific Solomon Islands (the first is in Djibouti).

Digressing briefly to criminal “whataboutism,” we might mention that the U.S. has 800 bases worldwide, which, along with their very prominent role in “defense” (aka imperial domination), enable hundreds of “[low-profile proxy wars](#)” in Africa, the greater Middle East, and Asia.

Washington, along with concurring commentary in the media and journals of opinion, are quite correct in charging China with violation of the rules-based order that the U.S. upholds, now with even more firm European support than before. They are also correct in deploring severe human rights violations in China, but that is not a concern of the rules-based order, which easily accommodates and commonly vigorously supports such violations.

The question of how best to enhance world peace does not arise in this connection. Everyone is in favor of “peace,” even Hitler: on their own terms. For the U.S., the terms are the rules-based international order. Others have their own ideas. Most of the world is the proverbial grass on which the elephants trample.

*The climate crisis was also on the agenda at the three-day summit in Madrid. In fact, it was recognized as “a defining challenge of our time” and NATO General-Secretary Jens Stoltenberg informed the world that the organization will “set the gold standard on addressing the security implications of climate change.” Personally, I sure feel better now knowing that militarism can be added to the methods of tackling the climate crisis. How about you?*

How encouraging that NATO will address “the security implications of climate change,” where “security” has the usual meaning that excludes the security of people.

The issues raised here are the most important of all and are the most easily summarized. The human species is advancing toward a precipice. Soon



irreversible tipping points will be reached, and we will be falling over the precipice to a “hothouse earth” in which life will be intolerable for those remnants that survive.

Military expenses make a double contribution to this impending disaster: first, in their enormous contribution to destroying the conditions for tolerable existence, and second, in the opportunity costs — what *isn't* being done with the huge resources devoted to undermining any hope for the future.

Putin’s aggression in Ukraine made the same double contribution: destruction and robbery of the resources that must be used to avert environmental destruction. All of this couldn’t have happened at a worse time. The window for constructive action is closing while humanity persists on this mad course.

All else pales into insignificance. We will find ways to cooperate to avert disaster and create a better world, as we still can. Or we will bring the human experiment to an inglorious end.

It’s as simple as that.

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Chomsky, 2021); and *Economics and the Left: Interviews with Progressive Economists* (2021).