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October 2021



**Chomsky on the War
on Terror**

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U.S. Militarism's Toxic Impact on Climate Policy

By Medea Benjamin
and Nicolas J. S. Davies

President Biden addressed the UN General Assembly on September 21 with a warning that the climate crisis is fast approaching a “point of no return,” and a promise that the United States would rally the world to action. “We will lead not just with the example of our power but, God willing, with the power of our example,” he said.

But the U.S. is not a leader when it comes to saving our planet. Yahoo News recently published a report titled “Why the U.S. Lags Behind Europe on Climate Goals by 10 or 15 years.” The article was a rare acknowledgment in the U.S. corporate media that the United States has not only failed to lead the world on the climate crisis, but has actually been the main culprit blocking timely collective action to head off a global exist-

tential crisis.

The anniversary of September 11th and the U.S. defeat in Afghanistan should be ringing alarm bells inside the head of every American, warning us that we have allowed our government to spend trillions of dollars waging war, chasing shadows, selling arms and fueling conflict all over the world, while ignoring real existential dangers to our civilization and all of humanity.

The world’s youth are dismayed by their parents’ failures to tackle the climate crisis. A new survey of 10,000 people between the ages of 16 and 25 in 10 countries around the world found that many of them think humanity is doomed and that they have no future.

Three quarters of the young people surveyed said they are afraid of what the future will bring, and 40% say the crisis makes them hesitant to have children. They are also frightened, confused and angered by the failure of governments to respond to the crisis. As the BBC reported, “They feel betrayed, ignored and abandoned by politicians and adults.”

Young people in the U.S. have even more reason to feel betrayed than their European counterparts. America lags far behind Europe on renewable energy. European countries started fulfilling their climate

commitments under the Kyoto Protocol in the 1990s and now get 40% of their electricity from renewable sources, while renewables provide only 20% of electric power in America.

Since 1990, the baseline year for emissions reductions under the Kyoto Protocol, Europe has cut its greenhouse gas emissions by 24%, while the United States has failed to cut them at all, spewing out 2% more than it did in 1990. In 2019, before the Covid pandemic, the United States produced more oil and more natural gas than ever before in its history.

NATO, our politicians and the corporate media on both sides of the Atlantic promote the idea that the United States and Europe share a common “Western” culture and values. But our very different lifestyles, priorities and responses to this climate crisis tell a tale of two very different, even divergent economic and political systems.

The idea that human activity is responsible for climate change was understood decades ago and is not controversial in Europe. But in America, politicians and news media have blindly or cynically parroted fraudulent, self-serving disinformation campaigns by ExxonMobil and other vested interests.

While the Democrats have

been better at “listening to the scientists,” let’s not forget that, while Europe was replacing fossil fuels and nuclear plants with renewable energy, the Obama administration was unleashing a fracking boom to switch from coal-fired power plants to new plants running on fracked gas.

Why is the U.S. so far behind Europe when it comes to addressing global warming? Why do only 60% of Europeans own cars, compared with 90% of Americans? And why does each U.S. car owner clock double the mileage that European drivers do? Why does the United States not have modern, energy-efficient, widely-accessible public transportation, as Europe does?

We can ask similar questions about other stark differences between the United States and Europe. On poverty, inequality, healthcare, education and social insurance, why is the United States an outlier from what are considered societal norms in other wealthy countries?

One answer is the enormous amount of money the U.S. spends on militarism. Since 2001, the United States has allocated \$15 trillion (in FY2022 dollars) to its military budget, outspending its 20 closest military competitors combined.

The U.S. spends far more of its GDP (the total value of goods produced and services) on the military than any of the other 29 Nato countries—3.7% in 2020 compared to 1.77%. And while the U.S. has been putting intense pressure on NATO countries to spend at least 2% of their GDP on their militaries, only 10 of them have done so. Unlike in the U.S., the military establishment in Europe has to contend with significant opposition from liberal politicians and a more educated and mobilized public.

From the lack of universal healthcare to levels of child poverty that would be unacceptable in other wealthy countries, our government’s under-investment in everything else is the inevitable result of these skewed priorities, which leave America struggling to get by on what is left over after the U.S. military bureaucracy has raked off the lion’s share—or should we say the “generals’ share”?—of the available resources.

Federal infrastructure and “social” spending in 2021 amount to only about 30% of the money spent on militarism. The infrastructure package that Congress is debating is desperately needed, but the \$3.5 trillion is spread over 10 years and is not enough.

On climate change, the in-

frastructure bill includes only \$10 billion per year for conversion to green energy, an important but small step that will not reverse our current course toward a catastrophic future. Investments in a Green New Deal must be bookended by corresponding reductions in the military budget if we are to correct our government’s perverted and destructive priorities in any lasting way. This means standing up to the weapons industry and military contractors, which the Biden administration has so far failed to do.

The reality of America’s 20-year arms race with itself makes complete nonsense of the administration’s claims that the recent arms build-up by China now requires the U.S. to spend even more. China spends only a third of what the U.S. spends, and what is driving China’s increased military spending is its need to defend itself against the ever-growing U.S. war machine that has been “pivoting” to the waters, skies and islands surrounding its shores since the Obama administration.

Biden told the UN General Assembly that “...as we close this period of relentless war, we’re opening a new era of relentless diplomacy.” But his exclusive new military alliance with the UK and Australia, and his request for a further increase in military

spending to escalate a dangerous arms race with China that the United States started in the first place, reveal just how far Biden has to go to live up to his own rhetoric, on diplomacy as well as on climate change.

The United States must go to the UN Climate Summit in Glasgow in November ready to sign on to the kind of radical steps that the UN and less developed countries are calling for. It must make a real commitment to leaving fossil fuels in the ground; quickly convert to a net-zero renewable energy economy; and help developing countries to do the same. As UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres says, the summit in Glasgow “must be the turning point” in the climate crisis.

That will require the United States to seriously reduce the military budget and commit to peaceful, practical diplomacy with China and Russia. Genuinely moving on from our self-inflicted military failures and the militarism that led to them would free up the U.S. to enact programs that address the real existential crisis our planet faces - a crisis against which warships, bombs and missiles are worse than useless. **Z**

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As War Keeps Poisoning Humanity, Organizing Continues to Be the Antidote

By Norman Solomon

Last weekend, U.S. corporate media continued a 20-year repetition compulsion to evade the central role of the U.S. in causing vast carnage and misery due to the so-called War on Terror. But millions of Americans fervently oppose the military-industrial complex and its extremely immoral non-stop warfare.

CodePink and Massachusetts Peace Action hosted a national webinar to mark the 20th anniversary of 9/11—the

day before Sunday’s launch of the Cut the Pentagon campaign—and the resulting video includes more than 20 speakers who directly challenged the lethal orthodoxy of the warfare state. As part of the mix, here’s the gist of what I had to say:

When we hear all the media coverage and retrospectives, we rarely hear—and certainly almost never in the mass media hear—that when people are killed, whether it’s intentional or predictable, those are atrocities that are being financed by U.S. taxpayers. And so we hear about the evils of Al Qaeda and 9/11, and certainly those were evils, but we’re not hearing about the predictable as well as the intentional deaths: the tens of thousands of civilians killed by U.S. air strikes alone in the last two decades, and the injuries, and the terrorizing of people with drones and other U.S. weapons. We’re hearing very little about that.

Part of the role of activists is to make those realities heard, make them heard loud and clear, as forcefully and as emphatically and as powerfully as possible. Activist roles can sometimes get blurred in terms of becoming conflated with the roles of some of the best members of Congress. When progressive legislators push for peace

and social justice, they deserve our praise and our support. When they succumb to the foreign-policy “Blob”—when they start to be more a representative of the establishment to the movements rather than a representative of the movements to the establishment—we’ve got a problem.

It’s vital for progressive activists to be clear about what our goals are, and to be willing to challenge even our friends on Capitol Hill.

I’ll give you a very recent example. Two leaders of anti-war forces in the House of Representatives, a couple of weeks ago, circulated a “Dear Colleague” message encouraging members of the House to sign a letter urging the chair of the House Armed Services Committee, Adam Smith, to stand firm behind President Biden’s 1.6 percent increase in the Pentagon budget, over the budget that Trump had gotten the year before. The point of the letter was: Chairperson Smith, we want you to defend the Biden budget’s increase of 1.6 percent, against the budget that has just been approved by the Senate Armed Services Committee with a 3.3 percent increase. That kind of a letter moves the goal posts further and further to the liking of the military-industrial complex, to the liking of war profiteers,

to the liking of the warfare state. And so, when people we admire and support, in this case Rep. Mark Pocan and Rep. Barbara Lee, circulate such a Dear Colleague letter, there’s a tendency for organizations to say: “Yeah, we’re going to get behind you,” we will respond affirmatively to the call to urge our members to urge their representatives in Congress to sign this letter. And what that creates is a jumping-off point that moves the frame of reference farther and farther into the militarism that we’re trying to push back against. For that reason, my colleagues and I at RootsAction decided to decline an invitation to sign in support.

I bring up that episode because it’s indicative of the pathways and the crossroads that we face to create momentum for a stronger and more effective peace and social justice movement. And it’s replicated in many respects. When we’re told it’s not practical on Capitol Hill to urge a cutoff of military funding and assistance to all countries that violate human rights—and when we’re told that Israel is off the table—it’s not our job to internalize those limits that have been internalized by almost everyone in Congress, except for the Squad and a precious few others.

It’s our job to speak not only truth to power but also about

power. And to be clear and candid even when that means challenging some of our usual allies. And to organize.

At RootsAction, we’ve launched a site called Progressive Hub, as an activism tool to combine the need to know with the imperative to act.

It’s not easy, to put it mildly, to go against the powerful flood of megamedia, of big money in politics, of the ways that issues are constantly framed by powerful elites. But in the long run, peace activism is essential for overcoming militarism. And organizing is what makes that possible. **Z**

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A Climate Disaster Is Unfolding Before Our Eyes—

And Politicians Still Refuse to Take Action

By Sonali Kolhatkar

On August 29, 2005, Hurricane Katrina made landfall off the coast of Louisiana, triggering a slow-moving disaster as floodwaters breached the levees around New Orleans. Nearly 2,000 people were killed over several weeks, hundreds of thousands of homes were destroyed, and the city was left in ruins. Environmental scientists warned that Katrina was a taste of what was in store for the Gulf Coast region if climate change continued unchecked.

But greenhouse gas emissions have continued to rise, and exactly 16 years after Katrina, Hurricane Ida hit Louisiana as a Category 4 storm with winds of 150 miles per hour and up to 10 inches of rain, leaving more than 1 million households in Louisiana without power. The remnants of the storm traveled up the East Coast with flash floods killing at least 15 people in New York and damaging homes and public transport

infrastructure.

While some media coverage celebrated the fact that the post-Katrina levees around New Orleans remained intact, the real story is that Ida's behavior fits the profile of storms fueled by a rapidly changing climate, and no levees will be strong enough to provide enough protection against such relentless hurricanes year after year.

For Kali Akuno, co-founder and co-director of Cooperation Jackson, the wreckage of Ida is a surreal reminder of what he and others in the Gulf Coast region experienced 16 years ago. In a recent interview, Akuno shared that "it unfortunately brings back some painful memories." As the former executive director of the People's Hurricane Relief Fund (PHRF), which was founded in the aftermath of Katrina, Akuno has experience witnessing inept government responses to such disasters.

When the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), under President George W. Bush's leadership, spectacularly failed to address the needs of Katrina's victims and survivors, mutual aid groups like PHRF stepped in. Today, the same appears to be happening, and Akuno's newer, Mississippi-based organization Cooperation Jackson is scrambling to aid evac-

uees.

"The worst effects of climate change are here now, and we have to build the systems and infrastructure to be able to deal with this," says Akuno. But he admits that "Whatever we can amass is only going to scratch the surface of the overall need, and there has to be broader systemic change in order to deal with these crises in the future."

Satellite images show the shocking extent of devastation in the Gulf Coast from Hurricane Ida. Whether or not President Joe Biden's administration responds more efficiently to the needs of Ida's survivors compared to Bush's response during Katrina remains to be seen. But government responses to climate-related disasters, while necessary, are part of the "downstream" solutions that center on the symptoms of climate change.

The multiple "upstream" solutions to climate disasters include building resiliency before storms hit, and, most importantly, require swiftly mitigating the causes of climate change. Few political leaders since the 2005 Katrina disaster have been willing to take strong action on that critical front.

At the same time that residents of Louisiana, Mississippi, and New York are

facing the horrors of damaged homes, flooded streets, and no power, Indigenous communities in the Midwest are fighting against a pipeline that will transport climate-change-causing fuels across their lands. The Enbridge Line 3 pipeline is being upgraded in order to transport tar sands—which are considered the “dirtiest fuel left on the planet”—across pristine lands where the Anishinaabe people grow wild rice.

The state of Minnesota’s estimate put the social and climate impacts of the completed project at \$287 billion over 30 years. The last thing our rapidly changing climate needs is yet another oil pipeline, and yet few leaders appear willing to stand in the way of fossil fuel company profits.

“President Biden can suspend Line 3 right now,” says Tara Houska, founder of the Giniw Collective, in an interview. “All it would take is the stroke of a pen.” Houska has been part of a years-long resistance movement against the pipeline that has been calling on Democratic Party leaders like Biden and Minnesota Governor Tim Walz to stop the pipeline.

In spite of their stated acknowledgment of the dangers of climate change and the need to mitigate it, neither the federal nor state leader has

taken action against Line 3. “They say they get it. It’s a lot of talk, and very little walk,” says Houska. “They’re still allowing the [fossil fuel] industry to continue to build and expand.”

Akuno worries that the Republican Party, which has an even worse record on climate change, will try to exploit Democrats’ failures in their bid to resume political control of Congress in 2022. “We’re already hearing signs in some of the local right-wing media trying to make this [Hurricane Ida] an ‘Afghanistan.’”

In just a few months, national leaders and civil society members will convene in Glasgow, Scotland, for the next United National Climate Change Conference known as COP 26. Akuno has been involved in social movement responses to the conference and says without hesitation that the Biden administration has simply not done enough as a global participant. “We’ve been deeply dissatisfied with the approach and orientation that they’re taking toward the mitigation aspects of climate change,” he says.

A press release for the latest Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) report, which was released in early August, spells out deeply ominous warnings:

“Many of the changes observed in the climate are un-

precedented in thousands, if not hundreds of thousands of years, and some of the changes already set in motion—such as continued sea level rise—are irreversible over hundreds to thousands of years.”

Hurricane Ida is clearly illustrating the climate devastation we face, and the Line 3 pipeline offers an equally clear opportunity to do something about it. Yet, a Democratic administration that has a stated commitment to “tackling climate change” and a Democratic governor who has made a similar pledge are both refusing to act.

Governor Walz in defending his support of the Line 3 project said, “I’ve made the case and shown policies that we need to move away from fossil fuels but, in the meantime if we’re gonna transport oil, we need to do it as safely as we possibly can.” It is not clear why Walz feels such a strong obligation to ensure the transport of fossil fuels in the face of massive opposition and against his own stated desire to address the sources of climate change. “Do we really need to allow a fossil fuel company to do this?” asked Houska. “This oil is meant for foreign transport; it’s not meant for Minnesota’s energy security.”

She’s right. Neither Biden, nor Walz, and certainly not

the people of Minnesota nor the United States as a whole, gains anything of value from the Line 3 project. Instead, at stake is—in the words of Enbridge CEO Al Monaco—“lots of free cash flow” to the company’s shareholders.

Even in the infrastructure bill that lawmakers are currently debating and that is a centerpiece of the Biden administration’s legislative agenda this year, few climate-mitigation aspects have survived the aggressive deal-making between the two major parties. In other words, as the nation is ravaged by floods, droughts, wildfires, and other real impacts of climate change, our political leaders have no plan to immediately do something about greenhouse gas emissions from fossil fuels.

As corporate profits continue to be valued more than our climate and our species, Houska urges us to have, “a radical shift in the way in which we view our place in the world.” Taking the long view—which our politicians appear unable or unwilling to take—she reminds us of what is far more important than corporate profits: “There has to be a recentering of nature in who we are as people and the centering of basic truths: that we cannot live without clean water, clean air, and

clean soil.”

This article was produced by Economy for All, a project of the Independent Media Institute.

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Your Body My Choice?

By Wim Laven

In the first few weeks of class I usually ask students: can you think of any part of your daily life that is not regulated?

It takes a minute to explain, but I use going to the bathroom as an example. It is good for a laugh, but students remember the recent efforts to decide who gets to use which bathrooms, and obviously we want to be careful about our waste, and so on...

There is good reason people cannot walk out into the middle of a traffic, pull down their pants, and urinate between passing cars. It would create a hazard and threaten

everyone’s safety.

My intention is to get students to understand rights, liberties, and the restrictions against them divorced from their political positions. At points I will even argue that good governance—restrictions—actually make us more free. Like when we can speed down freeways in relative safety because we trust that everyone will drive in the right direction and nobody will be urinating in the middle of the lane.

I ask: do you know why you cannot falsely yell fire in a crowded theater? Most of my students have heard about restrictions on the freedom of speech, but they are generally less familiar with some of the history. People have been trampled to death when such stampedes have happened.

“Fire!” is restricted when shouting it presents a clear and present danger.

One’s individual freedoms can be restricted when they push against or compete with another’s rights and liberties. The government is expected to manage some behaviors in order to keep us safe.

We also have expectations for the regulation of commerce and the environment. A business is not allowed to lie about what they are selling or dumping into a river. Nobody is legally free to poison our water supply.

I do my best to articulate two fundamental political questions before we discuss the sides. In the first political question citizens have to confront the trade-off between freedom and law and order. The second question is of the tension between freedom and equality. When, I ask, “are you willing to diminish your freedoms?” I’m setting them up. It is easy to give up other people’s freedoms and rights that are not important, but sacrifice is not easy—it better be worth it. Students tend to accept that speed limits are good because they reduce traffic accidents and make them less lethal. Many gun enthusiasts say they can accept 72-hour waiting periods for gun purchases if they actually reduce suicide deaths.

I cannot tell you how many times students have paraphrased Benjamin Franklin, “Those who would give up essential Liberty, to purchase a little temporary Safety, deserve neither Liberty nor Safety.” He was responding to a tax dispute, though people apply this to gun rights, privacy, and everything else, but it answers the wrong question. Those are the freedoms you are not willing to give up, but you do give up freedoms all the time. You accept that you may not marry nor have legal sex with a 12-year-old. You accept that

you may not engage in child sacrifice to appease your god. You accept that you may not move into a neighbor’s home while she is at work and claim it as your own. The list of limits on your freedoms that you already accept is long indeed.

The current political climate gives parallel examples. One in 500 Americans have been killed by COVID-19 and there are debates on mandates for masks and vaccines. Texas has created a bounty system, \$10,000 to any private citizen who turns in anyone who helps a person get an abortion once fetus cardiac activity is detectable (often so early in a pregnancy that the mother is unaware she is pregnant). And in Texas there is no exception for rape or incest—even when the rape or incest victim is a minor.

Overflowing hospitals and ICUs are compounding the problem. Treatable conditions are becoming fatal when patients are unable to get care: one story, “A Man Died After Being Turned Away From 43 ICUs At Capacity Due To COVID” describes a health-care system beyond overwhelmed.

The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) reports that COVID-19 hospitalizations average \$24,033. A review of data from the CDC and CMS indicates that costs for preventable (unvaccinat-

ed adults) COVID-19 hospitalizations for the last three months, from June through August 2021, exceeds \$5 billion.

It is all political; one side calls it the price of freedom, the other calls it preventable tragedy.

In my field of conflict transformation, I avoid coercive winner-takes-all approaches. I received my vaccine on the first day I was eligible. I reviewed the information and made the choice I thought was best for my community, family, and myself—informed consent.

I do not like the Texas law that removes choice and consent from pregnant women in their reproductive outcomes. I cannot imagine the government forcing anyone to deliver the child of their rapist or punishing individuals for helping women exercise autonomy in their medical choices. It is also clear that while COVID mandates have clear positive impacts on public health and abortion restrictions have negative health impacts.

I preach informed consent for a number of ethical and moral issues. There have been issues with the strategy of inconveniencing people as a way to force them to get the vaccines. There are legitimate reasons for people to have trust issues, after-all

there is a long history of lies made by the government and its institutions. The National Vaccine Injury Compensation Program reports \$4,273,742,418.51 in payments to petitioners through 2021 and the Vaccine Adverse Event Reporting System (VAERS) does make clear that while injuries are rare they do exist.

I also preach evidence-based decision-making and trust. This is what causes me the greatest concern. Ideological divides are causing people to dig into positions rather than make a careful review of the evidence. We are not healing, in part, because we are not committed to honest engagement. There is a clear tension: vaccines save lives but some people do not want vaccines.

Yes, a small number of those who get vaccines suffer injuries—bad side effects. The more than \$4 billion in injury payments for vaccine injuries pales in comparison to the \$16 Trillion COVID-19 price tag, but those who have suffered from vaccine injuries (even if rare) have legitimate complaints. We are seeking fair standards for all and the search does not have to be hate-filled.

The problem is not the people who have been confused or conned, the problem is that the campaigns to embolden conspiracy and empow-

er skepticism have gained a great foothold.

Research is misrepresented all the time and issues become conflated. While one big lie was being told on January 6th—that the election was stolen from Donald Trump—another one was also being told—“I wish I could tell you that Tony Fauci cares about your safety... I wish I could believe that voting machines worked... but none of this is happening,” according to Del Bigtree, a leader in the Anti-Vax movement.

The CDC is reporting that in August hospitalizations for children and adolescents quadrupled in states with low vaccination rates compared with states with higher vaccination rates. The pandemic is evolving, this should mean a return and recommitment to using the best data and methods available, but there has been no such consensus. For better and worse they do get to tell us what to do with our bodies, better when policies promote best practices—the mask I wear could save your life—and worse when politicians play games with human life.

If the U.S. does not reverse course on the anti-science trajectory, then the public will continue to suffer the consequences of unmanaged pandemics. But we will also be poorly prepared for oth-

er mounting crises. With the pandemic those who get the shots have a healthy chance at survival, but with other looming threats, like climate change, the anti-science campaign threatens species extinction. We need to get better before better is not possible.

Wim Laven, Ph.D., syndicated by PeaceVoice, teaches courses in political science and conflict resolution.

Donald J. Trump: Traitor

By Mel Gurtov

“There is an unfolding assault taking place in America today,” President Biden said in Philadelphia on July 13. “An attempt to suppress and subvert the right to vote in fair and free elections, an assault on democracy, an assault on liberty, an assault on who we are—who we are as Americans.”

All the world knows who is leading that assault: Donald Trump. Why then isn't the President, or Democrats, or liberal and progressive opinion writers calling Trump and his high-ranking followers

traitors? Not just “fascists” and “autocrats” but traitors. Aren’t the Trumpists committing treason by actively subverting constitutional democracy, the very fabric of our political system?

Trump and company have engaged in far more than undermining voting rights. Between November 4 and the January 6 insurrection, Trump spent virtually all his time trying to overturn the election results, even though his own campaign staff knew that claims of election fraud were baseless.

One of Trump’s lawyers tried to sell Republican leaders on a six-point plan for Vice President Mike Pence to throw out election results in six states.

Trump pressured leaders of the justice department to find the election fraudulent, and when they demurred he said “Just say the election was corrupt. I’ll do the rest” along with Republicans.

Jeffrey Clark, a Trump supporter at the justice department, composed a letter which, had it gone out, amounted to “an attempted coup happening not only with the knowledge of Trump, but at his behest,” as Chris Cillizza of CNN puts it. It is impossible to imagine the chaos that would have ensued had other justice department officials agreed to Trump’s demand.

In the end Trump and associates encouraged mob violence—“What I wanted is what they wanted,” he said of his January 6 speech to supporters—to stop the electoral process in Congress. He expressed “delight” as he watched the riot at the Capitol unfold on TV. As Trump urged openly and in private, he wanted Pence to refuse to certify Biden’s victory—in short, prevent the peaceful transfer of power. General Mark Milley, chair of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, said (according to the Philip Rucker-Carol Leonnig book, *I Alone Can Fix It*) that Trump’s speech was a “Reichstag moment,” “the gospel of the Führer.” Sounds to me like promoting a coup. Isn’t that treason?

Trump’s Treason

Senator Richard Blumenthal rightly concludes that Trump acted “intently and concertedly” to overthrow the election results. And Trump’s not done: He continues to push supporters in several states to audit the November vote numbers, even though there isn’t a ghost of a chance anything will change.

But, as Steve Schmidt says, Trump’s purpose is to cause chaos. At every level of American government we find half-crazed conspiracy mongers desperate to show

their loyalty to Trump, not just by endlessly repeating the Big Lie but, even more dangerously, supporting breaking into election machines and threatening election officials and healthcare workers.

Far-right members of Congress such as Marjorie Taylor Greene, Matt Gaetz, Mo Brooks, and Madison Cawthorn, devoted to pleasing the Trump cult, openly promote civil war.

None other than former President George W. Bush called them to account when he said, on the 20th anniversary of the 9/11 attacks: “There is little cultural overlap between violent extremists abroad and violent extremists at home. But in their disdain for pluralism, in their disregard for human life, in their determination to defile national symbols, they are children of the same foul spirit. And it is our continuing duty to confront them.”

Professor Timothy Snyder, the premier authority on authoritarian rule, predicts just such trouble. Interviewed by the *Washington Post*’s Dana Milbank, Snyder said: “We’re looking almost certainly at an attempt in 2024 [by pro-Trump Republicans] to take power without winning election.” Voter suppression and empowerment of Republican-controlled state legislatures to control electoral

results, said Snyder, “are all working toward the scenario in 2024 where they lose by 10 million votes but they still appoint their guy.”

Rick Hasen, a University of California-Irvine law professor, agrees. He said on MSNBC on September 25 that Republican officials in some red states are now planning a “respectable bloodless coup.” He means they will not merely challenge next year’s election results; they will seek to change the outcome on some technicality, making winners of losers like Trump, who of course bears responsibility for this plotting.

I wrote three years ago on Trump’s treasonous behavior with the Russians. I listed several by now well-known instances in which he colluded with Putin’s gang to help him win in 2016 and then pursue pro-Russian policies from the White House. John Brennan, the former CIA director, said back then that Trump “exceeds the threshold of ‘high crimes & misdemeanors.’”

Trump’s people, surely with his support, also colluded with emissaries from Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates during the 2016 campaign, trading campaign contributions (and possibly real estate opportunities) for backing (which they got) of their foreign policy objectives. All those instances should be add-

ed to a bill of particulars that would haul Donald J. Trump before a court on the charge of treason against the United States of America.

The Duty to Confront

The conservative critic Robert Kagan began his much-discussed *Washington Post* column September 23 with an ominous warning: “The United States is heading into its greatest political and constitutional crisis since the Civil War, with a reasonable chance over the next three to four years of incidents of mass violence, a breakdown of federal authority, and the division of the country into warring red and blue enclaves.”

Some observers think we’re already there. What will it take for people in high places to call things for what they are?

Never before in our history have we had to deal with a president who sought not only to overturn an election but to ensure, by subterfuge, that he will win the next one. He has already been impeached twice, the second time for incitement to insurrection, yet he is undeterred. He cannot tolerate defeat, and he’s willing to take the country down to regain power. The rule of law, he evidently thinks, doesn’t apply

to him. The House January 6 select committee’s ongoing investigation will surely find otherwise, but will Trump be indicted?

Robert Reich proposes that Trump should be held accountable under section 3 of the 14th Amendment, which bars any former official from again holding office who “shall have engaged in insurrection or rebellion against the same, or given aid or comfort to the enemies thereof.”

In other words, treason.

This would-be dictator, already facing numerous charges of criminal behavior, having run a regime in which at least 11 associates were convicted of crimes, and now facing mounting evidence of his attempt to foment a coup, must be stopped and called to account.

Rep. Anthony Gonzalez, the Ohio Republican who voted in favor of Trump’s impeachment and has decided not to run for reelection, called Trump “a cancer for the country.”

That’s it exactly. And like any cancer, we must fight it and seek to remove it. **Z**

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The US-Led “War on Terror” Has Devastated Much of the World

Noam Chomsky interviewed by C.J. Polychroniou

C.J. Polychroniou: Nearly 20 years have passed since the September 11 terrorist attacks in 2001. With nearly 3,000 dead, this was the deadliest attack on U.S. soil in history and produced dramatic ramifications for global affairs, as well as startling impacts on domestic society. I want to start by asking you to reflect on the alleged revamping of U.S. foreign policy under George W. Bush as part of his administration's reaction to the rise of Osama bin Laden and the jihadist phenomenon. First, was there anything new to the Bush Doctrine, or was it simply a codification of what we had already seen take place in the 1990s in Iraq, Panama, Bosnia and Kosovo? Second, was the U.S.-NATO led invasion of Afghanistan legal under international law? And third, was the U.S. ever committed to nation-building in Afghanistan?

Noam Chomsky: Washington's immediate reaction to 9/11/2001 was to invade Afghanistan. The withdrawal of U.S. ground forces was timed to (virtually) coincide with the 20th anniversary of the invasion. There has been a

flood of commentary on the 9/11 anniversary and the termination of the ground war. It is highly illuminating, and consequential. It reveals how the course of events is perceived by the political class, and provides useful background for considering the substantive questions about the Bush Doctrine. It also yields some indication of what is likely to ensue.

Of utmost importance at this historic moment would be the reflections of “the decider,” as he called himself. And indeed, there was an interview with George W. Bush as the withdrawal reached its final stage, in the *Washington Post*.

In the Style section.

The article and interview introduce us to a lovable, goofy grandpa, enjoying banter with his children, admiring the portraits he had painted of Great Men that he had known in his days of glory. There was an incidental comment on his exploits in Afghanistan and the follow-up episode in Iraq:

Bush may have started the Iraq War on false pretenses, but at least he hadn't inspired an insurrection that turned the U.S. Capitol into

a combat zone. At least he had made efforts to distance himself from the racists and xenophobes in his party rather than cultivate their support. At least he hadn't gone so far as to call his domestic adversaries "evil."

"He looks like the Babe Ruth of presidents when you compare him to Trump," former Senate Majority Leader and one-time Bush nemesis Harry M. Reid (D-NV) said in an interview. "Now, I look back on Bush with a degree of nostalgia, with some affection, which I never thought I would do."

Way down on the list, meriting only incidental allusion, is the slaughter of hundreds of thousands; many millions of refugees; vast destruction; a regime of hideous torture; incitement of ethnic conflicts that have torn the whole region apart; and as a direct legacy, two of the most miserable countries on Earth.

First things first. He didn't bad-mouth fellow Americans.

The sole interview with Bush captures well the essence of the flood of commentary. What matters is us. There are many laments about the cost of these ventures: the cost to us, that is, which "have exceeded \$8 trillion, according to new estimates by the Costs of War project at Brown University," along with American lives lost and disruption of our fragile society.

Next time we should assess the costs to us more carefully, and do better.

There are also well-justified laments about the fate of women under Taliban rule. The laments sometimes are no doubt sincere, though a natural question arises: Why weren't they voiced 30 years ago when U.S. favorites, armed and enthusiastically supported by Washington, were terrorizing young women in Kabul who were wearing the "wrong" clothes, throwing acid in their faces and other abuses? Particularly vicious were the forces of the arch-terrorist, Gulbuddin Hekmatyar,

recently on the U.S. negotiating team.

The achievements in women's rights in Russian-controlled cities in the late 1980s, and the threats they faced from the CIA-mobilized radical Islamist forces, were reported at the time by a highly credible source, Rasil Basu, a distinguished international feminist activist who was UN representative in Afghanistan in those years, with special concern for women's rights.

Basu reports: "During the [Russian] occupation, in fact, women made enormous strides: illiteracy declined from 98% to 75%, and they were granted equal rights with men in civil law, and in the Constitution. This is not to say that there was complete gender equality. Unjust patriarchal relations still prevailed in the workplace and in the family with women occupying lower level sex-type jobs. But the strides they took in education and employment were very impressive."

Basu submitted articles on these matters to the major U.S. journals, along with the feminist journal *Ms. Magazine*. No takers, wrong story. She was, however, able to publish her report in *Asia: Asian Age*, on December 3, 2001.

We can learn more about how Afghans in Kabul perceive the late years of the Russian occupation, and what followed, from another expert source, Rodric Braithwaite, British ambassador to Moscow from 1988 to 1992, and then chair of the Joint Intelligence Committee, also author of the major scholarly work on the Soviets in Afghanistan.

Braithwaite visited Kabul in 2008, and reported his findings in the *London Financial Times*: "In Afghanistan today new myths are building up. They bode ill for current western policy. On a recent visit I spoke to Afghan journalists, former Mujahideen, professionals, people working for the 'coalition'—natural supporters for its claims to bring peace

and reconstruction. They were contemptuous of [US-imposed] President Hamid Karzai, whom they compared to Shah Shujah, the British puppet installed during the first Afghan war. Most preferred Mohammad Najibullah, the last communist president, who attempted to reconcile the nation within an Islamic state, and was butchered by the Taliban in 1996: DVDs of his speeches are being sold on the streets. Things were, they said, better under the Soviets. Kabul was secure, women were employed, the Soviets built factories, roads, schools and hospitals, Russian children played safely in the streets. The Russian soldiers fought bravely on the ground like real warriors, instead of killing women and children from the air. Even the Taliban were not so bad: they were good Muslims, kept order, and respected women in their own way. These myths may not reflect historical reality, but they do measure a deep disillusionment with the ‘coalition’ and its policies.”

The policies of the “coalition” were brought to the public in *New York Times* correspondent Tim Weiner’s history of the CIA. The goal was to “kill Soviet Soldiers,” the CIA station chief in Islamabad declared, making it clear that “the mission was not to liberate Afghanistan.”

His understanding of the policies he was ordered to execute under President Ronald Reagan is fully in accord with the boasts of President Jimmy Carter’s National Security Adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski about their decision to support radical Islamist jihadis in 1979 in order to draw the Russians into Afghanistan, and his pleasure in the outcome after hundreds of thousands of Afghans were killed and much of the country wrecked: “What is more important in world history? The Taliban or the collapse of the Soviet empire? Some agitated Moslems or the liberation of Central Europe and the end of the cold war?”

It was recognized early on by informed

observers that the Russian invaders were eager to withdraw without delay. The study of Russian archives by historian David Gibbs resolves any doubts on the matter. But it was much more useful for Washington to issue rousing proclamations about Russia’s terrifying expansionist goals, compelling the U.S., in defense, to greatly expand its own domination of the region, with violence when needed (the Carter Doctrine, a precursor of the Bush Doctrine).

The Russian withdrawal left a relatively popular government in place under Najibullah, with a functioning army that was able to hold its own for several years until the U.S.-backed radical Islamists took over and instituted a reign of terror so extreme that the Taliban were widely welcomed when they invaded, instituting their own harsh regime. They kept on fairly good terms with Washington until 9/11.

Returning to the present, we should indeed be concerned with the fate of women, and others, as the Taliban return to power. For those sincerely concerned to design policies that might benefit them, a little historical memory doesn’t hurt.

The same is true in other respects as well. The Taliban have promised not to harbor terrorists, but how can we believe them, commentators warn, when this promise is coupled with the outrageous claim by their spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid that there is “no proof” that Osama bin Laden was responsible for the 9/11 attack?

There is one problem with the general ridicule of this shocking statement. What Mujahid actually said was both accurate and very much worth hearing. In his words, “When Osama bin Laden became an issue for the Americans, he was in Afghanistan. Although there was no proof he was involved” in 9/11.

Let’s check. In June 2002, eight months after 9/11, FBI Director Robert Mueller made

his most extensive presentation to the national press about the results of what was probably the most intensive investigation in history. In his words, “investigators believe the idea of the September 11 attacks on the World Trade Center and Pentagon came from al Qaeda leaders in Afghanistan,” though the plotting and financing apparently trace to Germany and the United Arab Emirates. “We think the masterminds of it were in Afghanistan, high in the al Qaeda leadership.”

What was only surmised in June 2002 could not have been known eight months earlier when the U.S. invaded. Mujahid’s outrageous comment was accurate. The ridicule is another example of convenient amnesia.

Keeping Mujahid’s accurate statement in mind, along with Mueller’s confirmation of it, we can move towards understanding the Bush Doctrine.

While doing so, we might listen to Afghan voices. One of the most respected was Abdul Haq, the leading figure in the anti-Taliban Afghan resistance and a former leader of the U.S.-backed Mujahideen resistance to the Russian invasion. A few weeks after the U.S. invasion, he had an interview with Asia scholar Anatol Lieven.

Haq bitterly condemned the U.S. invasion, which, he recognized, would kill many Afghans and undermine the efforts to overthrow the Taliban from within. He said that “the US is trying to show its muscle, score a victory and scare everyone in the world. They don’t care about the suffering of the Afghans or how many people we will lose.”

Haq was not alone in this view. A meeting of 1,000 tribal elders in October 2001 unanimously demanded an end to the bombing, which, they declared, is targeting “innocent people.” They urged that means other than slaughter and destruction be employed to overthrow the hated Taliban regime.

The leading Afghan women’s rights orga-

nization, Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan (RAWA), issued a declaration on October 11, 2001, strongly opposing the “vast aggression on our country” by the U.S., which will shed the blood of innocent civilians. The declaration called for “eradication of the plague of the Taliban and al-Qaeda” by the “uprising of the Afghan nation,” not by a murderous assault of foreign aggressors.

All public at the time, all ignored as irrelevant, all forgotten. The opinions of Afghans are not our concern when we invade and occupy their country.

The perception of the anti-Taliban Afghan resistance was not far from the stance of President Bush and his Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld. Both dismissed Taliban initiatives to send bin Laden for trial abroad despite Washington’s refusal to provide evidence (which it didn’t have). Finally, they refused Taliban offers to surrender. As the president put it, “When I said no negotiations, I meant no negotiations.” Rumsfeld added, “We don’t negotiate surrenders.” E.g., we’re going to show our muscle and scare everyone in the world.

The imperial pronouncement at the time was that those who harbor terrorists are as guilty as the terrorists themselves. The shocking audacity of that proclamation passed almost unnoticed. It was not accompanied by a call to bomb Washington, as it obviously implied. Even putting aside the world-class terrorists in high places, the U.S. harbors and abets retail terrorists who keep to such acts as blowing up Cuban commercial airliners, killing many people, part of the long U.S. terrorist war against Cuba.

Quite apart from that scandal, it is worth stating the unspeakable: The U.S. had no charge against the Taliban. No charge, before 9/11 or ever. Before 9/11, Washington was on fairly good terms with the Taliban. After

9/11, it demanded extradition (without even a pretense of providing required evidence), and when the Taliban agreed, Washington refused the offers: “We don’t negotiate surrenders.” The invasion was not only a violation of international law, as marginal a concern in Washington as the anti-Taliban Afghan resistance, but also had no credible pretext on any grounds.

Pure criminality.

Furthermore, ample evidence is now available showing that Afghanistan and al-Qaeda were not of much interest to the Bush-Cheney-Rumsfeld triumvirate. They had their eyes on much bigger game than Afghanistan. Iraq would be the first step, then the entire region. I won’t review the record here. It’s well-documented in Scott Horton’s book, *Fool’s Errand*.

That’s the Bush Doctrine. Rule the region, rule the world, show our muscle so that the world knows that “What we say goes,” as Bush I [George H.W. Bush] put it.

It’s hardly a new U.S. doctrine. It’s also easy to find precursors in imperial history. Simply consider our predecessor in world control, Britain, a grand master of war crimes, whose wealth and power derived from piracy, slavery and the world’s greatest narco-trafficking enterprise.

And in the last analysis, “Whatever happens, we have got, The Maxim gun, and they have not.” Hilaire Belloc’s rendition of Western civilization. And pretty much Abdul Haq’s insight into the imperial mindset.

Nothing reveals reigning values more clearly than the mode of withdrawal. The Afghan population was scarcely a consideration. The imperial “deciders” do not trouble to ask what people might want in the rural areas of this overwhelmingly rural society where the Taliban live and find their support, perhaps grudging support as the best of bad alternatives. Formerly a Pashtun movement, the “new Tal-

iban” evidently have a much broader base. That was dramatically revealed by the quick collapse of their former enemies, the vicious warlord Abdul Rashid Dostum, along with Ismail Khan, bringing other ethnic groups within the Taliban network. There are also Afghan peace forces that should not be summarily dismissed. What would the Afghan population want if they had a choice? Could they, perhaps, reach local accommodations if given time before a precipitous withdrawal? Whatever the possibilities might have been, they do not seem to have been considered.

The depth of contempt for Afghans was, predictably, reached by Donald Trump. In his unilateral withdrawal agreement with the Taliban in February 2020, he did not even bother to consult with the official Afghan government. Worse still, Bush administration foreign policy specialist Kori Schake reports, Trump forced the Afghan government to release 5,000 Taliban fighters and relax economic sanctions. He agreed that the Taliban could continue to commit violence against the government we were there to support, against innocent people and against those who’d assisted our efforts to keep Americans safe. All the Taliban had to do was say they would stop targeting U.S. or coalition forces, not permit al-Qaeda and other terrorist organizations to use Afghan territory to threaten U.S. security and subsequently hold negotiations with the Afghan government.

As usual, what matters is us, this time amplified by Trump’s signature cruelty. The fate of Afghans is of zero concern.

Trump timed the withdrawal for the onset of the summer fighting season, reducing the hope for some kind of preparation. President Joe Biden improved the terms of withdrawal a little, but not enough to prevent the anticipated debacle. Then came the predictable reaction of the increasingly shameless Republican leadership. They were barely able to remove

their gushing tributes to Trump's "historic peace agreement" from their web page in time to denounce Biden and call for his impeachment for pursuing an improved version of Trump's ignominious betrayal.

Meanwhile, the Afghans are again hung out to dry.

Returning to the original question, the Bush Doctrine may have been formulated more crudely than the usual practice, but it is hardly new. The invasion violated international law (and Article VI of the U.S. Constitution), but Bush's legal team had determined that such sentimentality was "quaint" and "obsolete," again breaking little new ground except for brazen defiance. As to "nation building," one way to measure the commitment to this goal is to ask what portion of the trillions of dollars expended went to the Afghan population, and what portion went to the U.S. military system and its mercenaries ("contractors") along with the morass of corruption in Kabul and the warlords the U.S. established in power.

At the outset, I referred to 9/11/2001, not just 9/11. There's a good reason. What we call 9/11 is the second 9/11. The first 9/11 was far more destructive and brutal by any reasonable measure: 9/11/73. To see why, consider per capita equivalents, the right measure. Suppose that on 9/11/2001, 30,000 people had been killed, 500,000 viciously tortured, the government overthrown and a brutal dictatorship installed. That would have been worse than what we call 9/11.

It happened. It wasn't deplored by the U.S. government, or by private capital, or by the international financial institutions that the U.S. largely controls, or by the leading figures of "libertarianism." Rather, it was lauded and granted enormous support. The perpetrators, like Henry Kissinger, are highly honored. I suppose bin Laden is lauded among jihadis.

All should recognize that I am referring to Chile, 9/11/1973.

Another topic that might inspire reflection is the notion of "forever wars," finally put to rest with the withdrawal from Afghanistan. From the perspective of the victims, when did the forever wars begin? For the United States, they began in 1783. With the British yoke removed, the new nation was free to invade "Indian country," to attack Indigenous nations with campaigns of slaughter, terror, ethnic cleansing, violation of treaties—all on a massive scale, meanwhile picking up half of Mexico, then onto much of the world. A longer view traces our forever wars back to 1492, as historian Walter Hixson argues.

From the viewpoint of the victims, history looks different from the stance of those with the maxim gun and their descendants.

In March 2003, the U.S. initiated a war against Iraq as part of the neoconservative vision of remaking the Middle East and removing leaders that posed a threat to the interests and "integrity" of the United States. Knowing that the regime of Saddam Hussein had nothing to do with the 9/11 terrorist attacks, possessed no weapons of mass destruction and subsequently posed no threat to the U.S., why did Bush invade Iraq, which left hundreds of thousands of Iraqis dead and may have cost more than \$3 trillion?

9/11 provided the occasion for the invasion of Iraq, which, unlike Afghanistan, is a real prize: a major petro-state right at the heart of the world's prime oil-producing region. As the twin towers were still smoldering, Rumsfeld was telling his staff that it's time to "go massive—sweep it all up, things related and not," including Iraq. Goals quickly became far more expansive. Bush and associates made it quite clear that bin Laden was small potatoes, of little interest (see Horton for many details).

The Bush legal team determined that the UN Charter, which explicitly bars preemptive/

preventive wars, actually authorizes them—formalizing what had long been operative doctrine. The official reason for war was the “single question”: Hussein’s weapons of mass destruction. When the question received the wrong answer, the reason for aggression instantly switched to “democracy promotion,” a transparent fairy tale swallowed enthusiastically by the educated classes—though some demurred, including 99 percent of Iraqis, according to polls.

Some are now praised for having opposed the war from the start, notably Barack Obama, who criticized it as a strategic blunder. Perhaps my memory is faulty, but I don’t recall praise for Nazi generals who regarded Hitler’s Operation Barbarossa as a strategic blunder: They should have knocked out Britain first. A different judgment was rendered by the Nuremberg Tribunal. But the U.S. doesn’t commit crimes, by definition; only blunders.

The regime-change agenda that had defined U.S. foreign policy under the Bush administration was apparently behind NATO’s decision to remove Muammar Qaddafi from power in Libya in the wake of the “Arab Spring” revolutions in late 2010 and early 2011. But as in the case of Iraq, what were the real reasons for dealing with the leader of an alleged “rogue state” that had long ceased being one?

The Libya intervention was initiated by France, partly in reaction to humanitarian posturing of some French intellectuals, partly I suppose (we don’t have much evidence) as part of France’s effort to sustain its imperial role in Francophone Africa. Britain joined in. Then Obama-Clinton joined, “leading from behind” as some White House official is supposed to have said. As Qaddafi’s forces were converging on Benghazi, there were loud cries of impending genocide, leading to a UN

Security Council resolution imposing a no-fly zone and calling for negotiations. That was reasonable in my opinion; there were legitimate concerns. The African Union proposed a ceasefire with negotiations with the Benghazi rebel about reforms. Qaddafi accepted it; the rebels refused.

At that point, the France-Britain-U.S. coalition decided to violate the Security Council resolution they had introduced and to become, in effect, the air force of the rebels. That enabled the rebel forces to advance on ground, finally capturing and sadistically murdering Qaddafi. Hillary Clinton found that quite amusing, and joked with the press that, “We came, We saw, He died.”

The country then collapsed into total chaos, with sharp escalation in killings and other atrocities. It also led to a flow of jihadis and weapons to other parts of Africa, stirring up major disasters there. Intervention extended to Russia and Turkey, and the Arab dictatorships, supporting warring groups. The whole episode has been a catastrophe for Libya and much of West Africa. Clinton is not on record, as far as I know, as to whether this is also amusing.

Libya was a major oil producer. It’s hard to doubt that that was a factor in the various interventions, but lacking internal records, little can be said with confidence.

The debacle in Afghanistan has shown beyond any doubt the failure of U.S. strategy in the war on terror and of the regime-change operations. However, there is something more disturbing than these facts, which is that, after each intervention, the United States leaves behind “black holes” and even betrays those that fought on its side against terrorism. Two interrelated questions: First, do you think that the failed war on terror will produce any new lessons for future U.S. policymakers? And second, does this failure reveal anything

about U.S. supremacy in world affairs?

Failure is in the eyes of the beholder. Let's first recall that Bush II didn't declare the global war on terror. He re-declared it. It was Reagan and his Secretary of State George Shultz who came into office declaring the global war on terror, a campaign to destroy the "the evil scourge of terrorism," particularly state-backed international terrorism, a "plague spread by depraved opponents of civilization itself [in a] return to barbarism in the modern age."

The global war on terror quickly became a huge terrorist war directed or supported by Washington, concentrating on Central America but extending to the Middle East, Africa and Asia. The global war on terror even led to a World Court judgment condemning the Reagan administration for "unlawful use of force"—aka, international terrorism—and ordering the U.S. to pay substantial reparations for its crimes.

The U.S. of course dismissed all of this and stepped up the "unlawful use of force." That was quite proper, the editors of *The New York Times* explained. The World Court was a "hostile forum," as proven by the fact that it condemned the blameless U.S. A few years earlier it had been a model of probity when it sided with the U.S. in a case against Iran.

The U.S. then vetoed a Security Council resolution calling on all states to observe international law, mentioning no one, although it was clear what was intended. I'm not sure whether it was even reported.

But we solemnly declare that states that harbor terrorists are as guilty as the terrorists themselves. So the invasion of Afghanistan was "right" and "just," though ill-conceived and too costly. To us.

Was it a failure? For U.S. imperial goals? In some cases, yes. Reagan was the last supporter of the Apartheid regime in South Africa, but

was unable to sustain it. In general, though, it extended Washington's imperial reach.

Bush's renewal of the global war on terror has not had similar success. When the U.S. invaded Afghanistan, the base for radical Islamic fundamentalist terrorism was largely confined to a corner of Afghanistan. Now it is all over the world. The devastation of much of Central Asia and the Middle East has not enhanced U.S. power.

I doubt that it has much impact on U.S. global supremacy, which remains overwhelming. In the military dimension, the U.S. stands alone. Its military spending eclipses rivals—in 2020, \$778 billion as compared to China's \$252 billion and Russia's \$62 billion. The U.S. military is also far more advanced technologically. U.S. security is unrivaled. The alleged threats are at the borders of enemies, which are ringed with nuclear-armed missiles in some of the 800 U.S. military bases around the world (China has one: Djibouti).

Power also has economic dimensions. At the peak of U.S. power after World War II, the U.S. had perhaps 40 percent of global wealth, a preponderance that inevitably declined. But as political economist Sean Starrs has observed, in the world of neoliberal globalization, national accounts are not the only measure of economic power. His research shows that U.S.-based multinationals control a staggering 50 percent of global wealth and are first (sometimes second) in just about every sector.

Another dimension is "soft power." Here, America has seriously declined, well before Trump's harsh blows to the country's reputation. Even under Clinton, leading political scientists recognized that most of the world regarded America as the world's "prime rogue state" and "the single greatest external threat to their societies" (to quote Samuel Huntington and Robert Jervis, respectively). In the Obama years, international polls found that

the U.S. was considered the greatest threat to world peace, with no contender even close.

U.S. leaders can continue to undermine the country, if they choose, but its enormous power and unrivaled advantages make that a hard task, even for the Trump wrecking ball.

A look back at the 9/11 attacks also reveals that the war on terror had numerous consequences on domestic society in the U.S. Can you comment on the impact of the war on terror on American democracy and human rights?

In this regard, the topic has been well enough covered so that not much comment is necessary. Another illustration just appeared in *The New York Times Review of the Week*, the eloquent testimony by a courageous FBI agent who was so disillusioned by his task of “destroying people” (Muslims) in the war on terror that he decided to leak documents exposing the crimes and to go to prison. That fate is reserved to those who expose state crimes, not the perpetrators, who are respected, like the goofy grandpa, George W. Bush.

There has of course been a serious assault on civil liberties and human rights, in some cases utterly unspeakable, like Guantánamo, where tortured prisoners still languish after many years without charges or because the torture was so hideous that judges refuse to allow them to be brought to trial. It’s by now conceded that “the worst of the worst” (as they were called) were mostly innocent bystanders.

At home, the framework of a surveillance state with utterly illegitimate power has been established. The victims as usual are the most vulnerable, but others might want to reflect on Pastor Niemöller’s famous plea under Nazi rule.

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The Publication of Origin for this article is *Truthout*.

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Reconciling the Reconciliation Bill

By Jack Rasmus

Recent maneuvers within the Democratic party intensified over the content and magnitude of the two pending fiscal stimulus bills—the Infrastructure Bill (with \$550 billion of net new spending) and the Reconciliation Bill (with initial \$3.5 trillion human infrastructure and climate change spending). While the maneuvering appears as a deep difference of views between progressives in the U.S. House and Senate demanding both bills pass simultaneously and Democrat Senators, Manchin and Senema, in that body blocking both bills in their current form. The actual conflict is really between the corporate wing of the Democratic party (in both the Senate and House) versus the wing that sees passage of both bills in their current form as necessary to ensure a sustained economic recovery in 2022—and thus the Democrats retaining majorities in the House and Senate in the November 2022 midterm elections.

Manchin-Senema in the Senate and Cuellar and his ten associates in the House are really the point persons for the corporate wing. The differences and split within the Democrat-

ic party are not about individual Senators or Representatives; it's about the corporate forces that dominate and control the majority of that party (as they have since 1990) and those same corporate interests intent on ensuring the two spending bills are not so large that taxes will have to be significantly raised in order to pay for them. More specifically, ensuring that the Trump \$4.5 trillion tax cuts of 2017 are not rolled back.

Those corporate interests in the Democratic party have already prevailed in rolling back the Infrastructure Bill to a level of only \$550 billion in new spending (from its original \$2.3 trillion) to ensure paying for the \$550 billion is not done by raising any taxes on corporations, investors and the wealthiest Americans. They have already succeeded. Now the same fight is underway to prevent the Reconciliation Bill requiring tax hikes on the same capital incomes. To ensure no tax hikes for that bill, spending will have to be significantly cut or delayed, or perhaps both.

The corporate wing of the Democratic Party is as opposed to the tax hikes as are the Republican party and McConnell. To borrow a

phrase from the 1990s: “it’s the tax cuts, stupid.”

The next step in the corporate wing’s anti-tax hike offensive will occur in the U.S. House. Pelosi had promised weeks ago not to break out the two bills for separate votes, but vote on both at the same time. That was the promise made to the party’s progressive forces months ago, in order to get Sanders and progressives in the Senate and the House to go along and remove trillions of dollars in spending on human infrastructure measures from the original Infrastructure Bill.

That made the Infrastructure Bill palatable to the corporate wing in the party since paying for it could now be done by “smoke and mirrors: financing that involved no tax hikes. The corporate wing wants separate votes now on the two bills, the remaining Infrastructure Bill first. Passing the watered down Infrastructure Bill first would leave the \$3.5 trillion Reconciliation Bill with weakened support and unable to pass—for certain in the Senate and maybe even in the House as well. Human infrastructure spending on Medicare, education, elderly-child care, and climate change mitigation and prevention—and the tax hikes to pay for it—would be dead in the water.

The progressive caucus in the House and the Sanders-Warren faction in the Senate are demanding, however, that Pelosi honor her earlier pledge to vote on both bills at the same time. But will she? If she reneges on that promise and the House votes up both bills, the corporate wing in the Senate will never vote for budget reconciliation (50 + 1 vote) to pass either of the two bills. The Senate likely will then vote on the Infrastructure Bill and let the \$3.5 trillion Reconciliation Bill die. That will put Pelosi and the House progressives behind the eight ball: refuse to vote for the Senate-passed Infrastructure Bill or take the heat in elections for refusing to pass anything. One can guess what the pragmatists will then

do, including Pelosi.

So what are the possible scenarios in the House?

One will be for Pelosi to vote on both bills as promised. While possible, it is the least likely to happen, however. A second is to reduce the \$3.5 trillion spending total dramatically. The progressive caucus won’t go along with that, however.

How then to “reconcile the reconciliation bill”?

A more likely compromise outcome may be to backload most of the \$3.5 trillion (or a reduced amount). That is, make the Reconciliation Bill spending take effect over a ten or even fifteen year period, with most of the spending occurring five to ten years into the 10-15 year bill. So maybe spend \$1.5 trillion over the first five to 7 years (Manchin’s signalled he might accept) and the rest not taking effect until 2027 or after. In turn, make the proposed tax hikes to pay for it to take effect in the latter years as well.

That way Pelosi can placate the progressive caucus and the Democrats can still say they passed a big “human infrastructure” Reconciliation Bill. Backloading might then satisfy Manchin, Cuellar, Senema, and the party’s corporate wing. They can say they “won” since the spending and taxing is only on paper. Republicans and McConnell will later cut the backload spending and delete the tax hikes once they take over again. That scenario could satisfy the Democrats’ corporate wing.

Another scenario may be for Pelosi not to hold a simultaneous dual vote because her progressive caucus won’t support a separating of the votes and will vote against the Infrastructure Bill if held separately. In this case, Pelosi and the Democrats will then revert to the tried and true Democrat party “fall back” message saying they’ll return to the vote on both bills after the 2022 midterms. That means everyone should vote for more Democrats in

2022 in order to pass both bills in 2023. But that's a high risk strategy, since it will clearly appear that Biden and the Democrats can't deliver on their election promises—especially if the U.S. economic recovery is not robust by the fall of 2022 due to lack of fiscal stimulus in the fall of 2021, which is very likely since the current summer 2021 rebound of the economy already appears to be slowing.

The three scenarios in the House are: Pelosi votes both bills up same time and they both pass; Pelosi reneges and holds separate votes and progressives vote down both bills; Pelosi and progressives agree on a compromise and backload most of the Reconciliation Bill spending and taxing.

The first scenario almost ensures Manchin-Senema will never compromise and vote for Senate budget reconciliation on either bills. The second means Biden and Democrats are “toast” in the 2022 midterms. Something like the third may, therefore, be the most likely outcome.

Whatever the scenario, it was already decided by party leaders last week when Biden called Shumer and Pelosi into his office, reportedly in a closed door meeting that no one else attended. Biden thereafter called in separately a group of progressives and then a group of moderates (i.e. what the mainstream media calls the corporate wing). Reportedly both Shumer and Pelosi came out of the meeting smiling and upbeat. What did they agree to with Biden? Not even Democrat members in the House or Senate know, since Pelosi-Shumer aren't telling them.

The Democrat corporate wing is as adamantly opposed to the spending—and the tax hikes it would require—as are McConnell and his Republicans. Thousands of corporate lobbyists have invaded Washington D.C. in recent months, with the single purpose of demanding the Democrats don't touch the Trump tax cuts. They have already convinced

both Republicans and the Democrat's corporate wing not to raise their taxes. So watch for 'smoke & mirrors' financing in a final, much reduced spending Reconciliation bill—just as the same was previously engineered with the Infrastructure bill. **Z**

ADDENDUM

(Note: interested readers should follow me on twitter for my daily commentary on events regarding the bills at @drjackrasmus. The following addendum to this post are some of my running commentary last week on twitter.)

(TWITTER Commentary @drjackrasmus)

Sep 23

#Reconciliationbill Watch for 'smoke & mirrors' in Pelosi-Shumer 'deal'. One possibility: approve \$1.5T now and the rest not to begin taking effect until 5 yrs from now. Ditto for tax hikes: token now & real hikes years out! Of course, between now and 2026 it'll all disappear

Sep 23

#Reconciliationbill Reported today, Shumer and Pelosi both believe they 'have a deal' on \$3.5T Reconciliation & .550T infrastructure bills. Notably, however, they refuse to say what it is—not just publicly but even to other members of Congress! Be suspicious.

Sep 23

#Reconciliationbill Will Dem progressive caucuses in House and Senate now do what they warned they would, and not vote for the massive cuts? Or will they in the end cave? My bet is the latter. Excuse will be: vote for more of us in 2022 and we'll finish the job! The old refrain.

Sep 23

#Austerity Don't you find it interesting yesterday Fed signaled continued \$120B/mo. free money & near zero rates for bankers for 9 more months, while Dems in Congress are busy cutting spending proposals by \$trillions for households? Dems on road to be 'toast' in 2022 midterms!

Sep 23

#ReconciliationBill Former political hacks for Obama and Clinton admins (mouthpieces for corporate wing of Dem party) now all jumping on the bandwagon to say \$3.5T must be cut, now that Biden admin. has signaled support for same. Bill will be what Manchin-Senema want (corp wing).

Sep 23

#Reconciliationbill Biden press sec'y, Psaki, signals today the \$3.5T bill will have to be reduced. Decision likely made yesterday when Biden met with Pelosi-Shumer, Sanders, & Manchin. Watch for final bill close to Manchin's \$1T. Forget Medicare, Education, & other proposals

Sep 22

#reconciliationbill (aka American Families \$3.5T bill). Watch Biden today tell Pelosi-Shumer to do separate votes on \$550B Infrastructure bill and \$3.5T Reconciliation bill. Why does media call Manchin-Senema 'moderates' when they should be called 'corporate wing' of Dem party?

Sep 20

#Infrastructure & \$3.5T Family bills: latest Dem retreat strategy building: Shelve it all in 2021. Raise again in 2022. Manchin in Senate & Clyburn in House pushing this 'solution'. No stimulus 2021 + Fed rate hike + China slowing & Asia in funk= double dip recession coming 1Q22

Sep 19

#Stimulus Former \$3.5T 'American Families Plan/Human Infrastructure' bill now called 'Reconciliation' bill by both parties. True, it's all about 'reconciling' how to cut \$2.5T from the \$3.5T in order not to have to recover (i.e. raise) any of Trump's \$4.5T 2017 tax cuts

Sep 16

#Stimulus Top measures most likely to be cut from Biden's \$3.5T stimulus: Higher education (\$445B). Paid family & medical leave (\$225B). Health Insurance Tax credits (\$163B). Earned Income Tax Credit (\$105B). IRS enforcement of tax evaders (\$460B) + Climate Change mitigation (?)