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Chomsky on Blocking De-escalation in Ukraine



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Is Europe Sleepwalking Into Another World War?

By Boaventura de Sousa Santos

More than 100 years after World War I, Europe’s leaders are sleepwalking toward a new all-out war. In 1914, the European governments believed that the war would last 3 weeks; it lasted 4 years and resulted in more than 20 million deaths. The same nonchalance is visible with the war in Ukraine. The dominant view is that the aggressor should be left broken and humbled. Then, the defeated power was Germany. Some dissenting voices, such as John Maynard Keynes, felt that the humbling of Germany would be a disaster. Their warnings went unheeded. Twenty-one years later, Europe was back at war, which lasted 6 years and killed 70 million people. History neither repeats itself nor seems to teach us anything, but it does illustrate similarities and differences.

The 100 years before 1914

offered Europe relative peace. What wars took place were of a short-lived nature. The reason for this was the Congress of Vienna (1814-15), which brought together the victors and the vanquished from the Napoleonic wars to create a lasting peace. The chair of the conference was Klemens von Metternich, who made sure that the defeated power (France) paid for its actions with territorial losses but that it signed the treaty along with Austria, England, Prussia, and Russia to secure peace with dignity.

Negotiation or Total Defeat

While the Napoleonic wars took place between European powers, today’s war is between a European (Russia) and a non-European (United States) power. It is a proxy war, with both sides using a third country (Ukraine) to achieve geostrategic goals that go well beyond the country in question and the continent to which it belongs. Russia is at war with Ukraine because it is at war with the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), which is commanded by the United States. NATO has been at the service of U.S. geostrategic interests.

Once a steadfast champion of the self-determination of peoples, Russia is now illegally sacrificing these same principles to assert its own security concerns, after failing to have them recognized through peaceful means, and out of an undisguised imperial nostalgia. For its part, since the end of the first cold war, the U.S. has striven to deepen Russia’s defeat, a defeat which in fact was probably more self-inflicted than brought about by any superiority on the part of its opponent.

From NATO’s perspective, the goal of the war in Ukraine is to inflict an unconditional defeat on Russia, preferably one that leads to regime change in Moscow. The duration of the war depends on that goal. Where is Russia’s incentive to end the war when British Prime Minister Boris Johnson permits himself to say that sanctions against Russia will continue, no matter what Russia’s position is now? Would it be sufficient for Russian President Vladimir Putin to be ousted (as was the case with Napoleon in 1815), or is the truth of the matter that the NATO countries insist on the ousting of Russia itself so that China’s expansion can be halted? There was also regime change in the 1918 humbling of Germany, but it all ended up leading to Hitler and an

even more devastating war. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy's political greatness could be construed as being either in recognition of the brave patriot who defends his country from the invader to the last drop of blood or in recognition of the brave patriot who, faced with the imminence of so many innocent deaths and the asymmetry in military strength, successfully enlists the support of his allies to negotiate fiercely to secure a dignified peace. The fact that the former construction is now the prevalent one probably has little to do with President Zelenskyy's personal preferences.

Where Is Europe?

During the two world wars of the 20th century, Europe was the self-proclaimed center of the world. That is why we call the two wars world wars. About 4 million of Europe's troops were in fact African and Asian. Many thousands of non-European deaths were the price paid by the inhabitants of remote colonies of the countries involved, sacrificed in a war that did not concern them.

Now, Europe is but a small corner of the world, which the war in Ukraine will render even smaller. For centuries, Europe was merely the west-

ern tip of Eurasia, the huge landmass that stretched from China to the Iberian Peninsula and witnessed the exchange of knowledge, products, scientific innovations, and cultures. Much of what was later attributed to European exceptionalism (from the scientific revolution of the 16th century to the industrial revolution in the 19th century) cannot be understood, nor would it have been possible, without those centuries-old exchanges. The war in Ukraine—especially if it goes on for too long—runs the risk not only of amputating one of Europe's historic powers (Russia), but also of isolating it from the rest of the world, notably from China.

The world is far bigger than what you get to see through European or North American lenses. Seeing through these lenses, Europeans have never felt so strong, so close to their larger partner, so sure of standing on the right side of history, with the whole planet being run by the rules of the "liberal order," a world finally feeling strong enough to go forth sometime soon and conquer—or at least neutralize—China, after having destroyed China's main partner, Russia.

Seeing through non-European lenses, on the other hand, Europe and the U.S. stand haughtily all but alone, probably capable of winning

one battle, but on their way to certain defeat in the war of history. More than half of the world's population lives in countries that have decided not to join the sanctions against Russia. Many of the United Nations member states that voted (rightly) against the illegal invasion of Ukraine did so based on their historical experience, which consisted of being invaded, not by Russia, but rather by the U.S., England, France, or Israel. Their decision was not dictated by ignorance, but by precaution. How can they trust countries that created SWIFT—a financial transfer system aimed at protecting economic transactions against political interference—only to end up removing from that system a country on political grounds? Countries that arrogate to themselves the power to confiscate the financial and gold reserves of sovereign nations like Afghanistan, Venezuela, and now Russia? Countries that trumpet freedom of expression as a sacrosanct universal value, but resort to censorship the moment they are exposed by it? Countries that are supposed to cherish democracy and yet have no qualms about staging a coup whenever an election goes against their interests? Countries in whose eyes the "dictator" Nicolás Maduro becomes a trading partner

overnight because the circumstances have changed? The world is no longer a place of innocence—if it ever was.

This article was produced by Globetrotter.

On the Future of Ukraine and NATO's Neverending Wars

By Ramzy Baroud

Much has been said and written about media bias and double standards in the West's response to the Russia-Ukraine war, when compared with other wars and military conflicts across the world, especially in the Middle East and the Global South. Less obvious is how such hypocrisy is a reflection of a much larger phenomenon that governs the West's relationship with war and conflict

zones.

On March 19, Iraq commemorated the 19th anniversary of the U.S. invasion which killed, according to modest estimates, over a million Iraqis. The consequences of that war were equally devastating as it destabilized the entire Middle East region, leading to various civil and proxy wars. The Arab world is reeling under that horrific experience to this day.

Also, on March 19, the 11th anniversary of the NATO war on Libya was commemorated and followed, 5 days later, by the 23rd anniversary of the NATO war on Yugoslavia. Like every NATO-led war since the inception of the alliance in 1949, these wars resulted in widespread devastation and tragic death tolls.

None of these wars, starting with the NATO intervention in the Korean Peninsula in 1950, have stabilized any of the warring regions. Iraq is still as vulnerable to terrorism and outside military interventions and, in many ways, remains an occupied country. Libya is divided among various warring camps, and a return to civil war remains a real possibility.

Yet, enthusiasm for war remains high, as if over 70 years of failed military interventions have not taught us any meaningful lessons. Daily, news headlines tell us that the

U.S., the UK, Canada, Germany, Spain or some other western power have decided to ship a new kind of "lethal weapon" to Ukraine. Billions of dollars have already been allocated by Western countries to contribute to the war in Ukraine.

In contrast, very little has been done to offer platforms for diplomatic, non-violent solutions. A handful of countries in the Middle East, Africa and Asia have offered mediation or insisted on a diplomatic solution to the war, arguing, as China's foreign ministry reiterated on March 18, that "all sides need to jointly support Russia and Ukraine in having dialogue and negotiation that will produce results and lead to peace."

Though the violation of the sovereignty of any country is illegal under international law, and is a stark violation of the United Nations Charter, this does not mean that the only solution to violence is counter-violence. This cannot be truer in the case of Russia and Ukraine, as a state of civil war has existed in Eastern Ukraine for eight years, harvesting thousands of lives and depriving whole communities from any sense of peace or security. NATO's weapons cannot possibly address the root causes of this communal struggle. On the contrary,

they can only fuel it further.

If more weapons were the answer, the conflict would have been resolved years ago. According to the BBC, the U.S. has already allocated \$2.7 billion to Ukraine over the last 8 years, long before the current war. This massive arsenal included “anti-tank and anti-armor weapons ... US-made sniper (rifles), ammunition and accessories.”

The speed with which additional military aid has poured into Ukraine following the Russian military operations on February 24 is unprecedented in modern history. This raises not only political or legal questions, but moral questions as well—the eagerness to fund war and the lack of enthusiasm to help countries rebuild.

After 21 years of U.S. war and invasion of Afghanistan, resulting in a humanitarian and refugee crisis, Kabul is now largely left on its own. Last September, the UN refugee agency warned that “a major humanitarian crisis is looming in Afghanistan,” yet nothing has been done to address this “looming” crisis, which has greatly worsened since then.

Afghani refugees are rarely welcomed in Europe. The same is true for refugees coming from Iraq, Syria, Libya, Mali and other conflicts that directly or indirectly involved

NATO. This hypocrisy is accentuated when we consider international initiatives that aim to support war refugees, or rebuild the economies of war-torn nations.

Compare the lack of enthusiasm in supporting war-torn nations with the West’s unparalleled euphoria in providing weapons to Ukraine. Sadly, it will not be long before the millions of Ukrainian refugees who have left their country in recent weeks become a burden on Europe, thus subjected to the same kind of mainstream criticism and far-right attacks.

While it is true that the West’s attitude towards Ukraine is different from its attitude towards victims of western interventions, one has to be careful before supposing that the “privileged” Ukrainians will ultimately be better off than the victims of war throughout the Middle East. As the war drags on, Ukraine will continue to suffer, either the direct impact of the war or the collective trauma that will surely follow. The amassing of NATO weapons in Ukraine, as was the case of Libya, will likely backfire. In Libya, NATO’s weapons fueled the country’s decade-long civil war.

Ukraine needs peace and security, not perpetual war that is designed to serve the strategic interests of certain

countries or military alliances. Though military invasions must be wholly rejected, whether in Iraq or Ukraine, turning Ukraine into another convenient zone of perpetual geopolitical struggle between NATO and Russia is not the answer. **Z**

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More Than 80 Election-Denying Candidates Running for Governor, Attorney General and Secretary of State in 2022’s Primaries

By Steven Rosenfeld

Partisan propaganda about the untrustworthiness of

elections was worse in 2021 than during the 2020 presidential election, when Donald Trump claimed that he won and incited a riot at the U.S. capitol to block ratification of Joe Biden’s victory, according to state election directors who fear that 2022’s elections will see deepening disinformation from losing GOP candidates.

“2021 was far worse than 2020,” said Minnesota Elections Director David Maeda, speaking at an election security webinar at the Hubert Humphrey School of Public Affairs at the University of Minnesota. “The temperature from 2020 had carried over and gotten worse... [and] just keeps escalating because of all of the mistrust from this misinformation, and questions about the security and fairness of our voting systems.”

Those worries were echoed by current and former top officials from Colorado, Virginia, and the U.S. Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency, who recounted their responses but cited new developments, including ongoing threats to election officials by Trump backers and an exodus of those officials and poll workers.

“They’re not dealing with facts, obviously. They’re dealing in emotion,” said Chris Piper, the former Vir-

ginia election commissioner, whom Governor Glenn Youngkin, a Republican elected last fall, recently replaced with Susan Beals. “I can give you all the facts in the world, but if your confirmation bias is ‘elections are rigged,’ then the facts are only going to serve to help bolster their [mistaken] case.”

But one trend not cited by the career civil servants on the March 17 webinar was that scores of 2020 election-denying candidates are on 2022’s primary ballots, where they are vying to be this fall’s Republican nominee for governor, attorney general and secretary of state. This May and June, nearly 30 states will hold primary elections, including for these statewide offices.

“To put it simply, the future of fair, professional and nonpartisan elections is on the line,” said a 2021 year-end report that tracked anti-voter legislation in 41 states produced by States United, Law Forward and Protect Democracy, all groups that support inclusive and accurate elections.

In March, States United Action published a more troubling report, “Replacing the Refs,” that showed how the post-2020 trend of pro-Trump Republicans pushing for more restrictive voting legislation has morphed into

scores of election-denying candidates running for state office. As of March 1, there were “at least 53 election deniers” running for governor in 24 states, “at least 11 election deniers” running for attorney general in 11 states, and “at least 22 election deniers” running for secretary of state in 18 states.

“The anti-democracy playbook is simple: Change the rules, change the referees, in order to change the results,” their report said. “Politicians who continue to deny the results of the 2020 election want the power to overturn the will of American voters in the future if they don’t like the results. In 2021, legislators introduced more than 260 bills that would interfere with the nonpartisan administration of elections. Today, Election Deniers are lining up to oversee voting at all levels of the system—from top state offices to precinct-level poll workers. It’s all connected.”

“It’s critical to pay attention to this trend,” it continued. “Research suggests that hyper-partisan or poorly trained election administrators can negatively impact voter experience and affect outcomes. In 2021, some Election Deniers won their seats—and in 2022, certain candidates are running on election lies as a campaign issue and earning the endorsement of former

President Donald Trump and others who promote the myth that the 2020 election was ‘stolen.’ In fact, there is a coalition of ‘America First’ Secretary of State candidates—a group of at least eight people running for the post this cycle—that all backed former President Trump’s efforts to undermine the will of the voters in 2020.”

The candidates for secretary of state have garnered the most attention because they oversee their state’s elections. Many have continued to claim that Trump was robbed of a second term despite numerous lawsuits in their states that never produced any proof that he won. But governors and attorneys general also have roles in elections. Beyond driving media narratives, attorneys general participate in post-election litigation and governors certify presidential victors.

Many of the election-denying candidates will not emerge as Republican nominees on the fall 2022 general election ballot, as some states have multiple candidates vying for the same statewide post. The candidates for the different offices appear to have slightly different strategies with casting doubt on the 2020 election’s results. These stances, which reflect their hoped-for office’s authority, are seen in their statements

on social media, on podcasts, and in press clips.

Shades of Election Denial

States United defines an “election denier” as a candidate who meets one of the following criteria: They “[f]alsely claimed former President Trump won the 2020 election instead of the legitimate winner”; they “[s]pread lies about the legitimacy of the 2020 presidential election in public fora”; they “[c]alled for a ‘forensic audit’ of the 2020 presidential election after the results were certified and/or officially audited and/or stood up to multiple legal challenges”; they “[p]romoted conspiracies about the 2020 presidential election in public fora”; and they “[t]ook actions to undermine the integrity of the 2020 presidential election” by backing lawsuits seeking to overturn the results, or organizing or taking part in “Stop the Steal” events.

“It’s so important to remember that it’s all connected,” said Lizzie Ulmer, senior vice president of communications for States United. “The lies about the 2020 election, the January 6 insurrection, the corrupt election reviews we are seeing happen all over the country, the election hijacking and interference

attempts we are seeing happen in state legislatures, the threats against election workers, election deniers running for office. Those things are all connected, and they all drive distrust in our system.”

The candidates for attorney general were most oblique in their election-denial statements. Nonetheless, Steve Marshall, the Republican incumbent in Alabama’s attorney general race, showed up at the White House in December 2020 to support Trump’s post-election fight. Abraham Hamadeh, a Republican candidate in Arizona’s attorney general election, attacked the former recorder in the state’s most populous county (Adrian Fontes, a Democrat now running for secretary of state in Arizona) for unspecified “unconstitutional” actions “to hijack our elections.” Ashley Moody, the Republican incumbent in Florida’s attorney general race, urged the U.S. Supreme Court to hear a motion from Texas’s attorney general seeking to overturn the Electoral College results from other battleground states, saying “the process” was not followed, but not citing evidence. Matthew DePerno, a Republican candidate for Michigan’s attorney general, attacked the Democratic incumbent “Dana Nessel, the Radical Left, and the RINOs [Republicans in name

only]” and touted his role (“he gets results”) in an error-filled and debunked post-2020 “audit” in Antrim County, as he reiterated Trump’s September 16, 2021, endorsement in February 2022.

The candidates for governor were more explicit in their attacks on the voting process and President Biden’s legitimacy. Alaska’s Christopher Kurka said that questioning the results was patriotic and called for an audit and hand count of all 2020 ballots. Charlie Pierce, who is also running to be Alaska’s Republican nominee for governor, said on social media that problems ranged from “100,000+ Alaskan’s [sic] data being stolen at the State Level to vote dumps in the middle of the night in Swing States.” (The stolen data was voter lists, which are unrelated to counting ballots. Top Republican election officials in Arizona and Georgia said there were no vote dumps.)

In Colorado’s gubernatorial race, Laurie Clark claimed that one voting system maker, Dominion, has stolen elections “since 2005,” while another Colorado candidate, Danielle Neuschwanger, repeated false claims about the election from Pennsylvania and Georgia, pledging, “When I am elected Governor of Colorado, on day one my priority will be restoring

election integrity.” Much the same claims were made by Republican candidate for Georgia’s governor David Perdue, a former U.S. senator who in a January 2021 runoff election lost his 2020 re-election bid and who in November 2020 had called for the resignation of his secretary of state, Brad Raffensperger, also a Republican, for rejecting Trump’s demand to find enough votes so that he’d win the state in 2020. Like-minded candidates also are running in Arizona, California, Florida, Idaho, Illinois, Kansas, Maine, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, Nebraska, Nevada, New York and Ohio.

Many of their election-denying statements were made on social media platforms and podcasts that cater to right-wing audiences, screenshots of which States United included in its reports. In 2021, these platforms championed post-2020 partisan audits (led by the Cyber Ninjas’ review in Arizona) and skepticism about vaccines in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Some of these platforms and personalities are now promoting Russia’s perspective on the war in Ukraine.

Conspiracy-Minded Secretaries of State?

The candidates for top statewide election administrator were most explicit in perpetuating the stolen election narrative and attacking key features of the voting process. Wes Allen, a Republican candidate in Alabama’s secretary of state election, supported suing to overturn other states’ election results. Arizona’s Shawna Bolick, a state legislator running for secretary of state, sponsored a (failed) bill allowing the legislature to reject the voters’ presidential choice. Another Arizona Republican lawmaker running for secretary of state, Mark Finchem, has regularly invited other election conspiracy theorists to the state. Eddie Joe Williams, a former Arkansas state senator now running for secretary of state, won’t say that Biden won the election.

Colorado’s Tina Peters, a county clerk who shared proprietary voting-system data with pro-Trump activists—drawing wide criticism from election professionals—is running against David Winney, another promoter of stolen election conspiracies, for the GOP nomination in the Colorado secretary of state race. Georgia, similarly, has two candidates attacking the Republican incumbent, Brad Raffensperger.

“The Real Lie is Brad looking us in the eyes and telling

us that 2020 was the most secure election in Georgia's history," said David Belle Isle, one of the Republican candidates in Georgia's secretary of state race. Georgia Republican Congressperson Jody Hice, also running for secretary of state in Georgia, boasted of voting against ratifying Georgia's 2020 Electoral College votes, and has said that "[t]hey stole the presidential race" and that his candidacy "means being vigilant to all fraud and irregularities."

The other candidates have spread similar misinformation, saying that denying the 2020 election results is patriotic. They have attacked media outlets that report that Biden's victory was legitimate. And they have continued to claim that hidden hands secretly manipulated vote totals, even though they have produced no proof.

States United's Ulmer said that the election-denying candidacies and the false beliefs they present about American elections pose a continuing threat to American democracy.

"It's a warning sign that the challenges that we saw launched at our free and fair elections in 2020 are far from over," she said. "And while some have tried to downplay those threats, or move on from 2020, we cannot. It is so

important to our system of democracy, and how the people of this country are represented, and their votes are counted, that we have nonpartisan trusted election officials in these positions that are making these decisions. And what we are seeing happen across the country is putting that system at risk." **Z**

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This article was produced by Voting Booth, a project of the Independent Media Institute.

Big Oil's War Bonanza

By Mel Gurtov

In case you haven't noticed, a major consequence of the Ukraine war is the bonanza it has provided for the oil and gas industry. U.S. sanctions on Russian oil and gas have

given the industry yet another reason for more drilling and fiercer opposition to environment-friendly energy sources.

Yes, a tight oil market and inflationary prices are good for electric car production. But the oil and gas industry is doing even better, not just because of high gas prices, but also because they can demand more access to public lands for drilling—and blame the administration for the high gas prices if the companies don't get to drill more. This is a false argument on five counts.

Drill, Baby, Drill

First, the Biden administration is granting oil and gas drilling permits at a higher rate than was true under Trump. "No more drilling on public lands," Biden had said during his presidential campaign. Drilling leases are now being offered on 80 million acres in the Gulf of Mexico alone. And this allowance was two months before Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

Second, we've all learned not to expect gas prices to go down even when more gas comes on the market. That supply-and-demand argument doesn't fit with industry promises or practice.

Third, as Earth Justice points out, the oil and gas industry is sitting on 9,000

drilling permits that it chooses not to use. Why not? Because: "drilling costs money the industry doesn't want to spend. In 2021 alone, Exxon Mobil, Shell, BP, and Chevron made a combined \$75 billion in profits. Instead of spending some of this massive profit on drilling the leases they already hold, oil companies are buying back their own shares, funneling dividends to their shareholders, and paying lobbyists to demand cheap new federal leases so they can stockpile them for future profit."

The real winners in this war are the stockholders and executives of the Big Four oil companies.

Fourth, besides the U.S. market, Biden needs to satisfy the European Union countries as they look for ways to delink from reliance on Russian gas. Biden has promised to find and ship other sources, and the Germans are leaning heavily on him. That means increased U.S. gas production from shale and other sources, a calamitous option for the environment, and construction of new LNG terminals over the next several years.

"For now," the *New York Times* reports, "climate concerns appear to be taking a back seat as U.S. and European leaders seek to punish President Vladimir V. Putin of Russia for invading

Ukraine . . ." Building new terminals will mean "streamlining" environmental regulations to facilitate loans and construction.

A fifth factor favoring Big Oil is the unwillingness of Saudi Arabia and the other Middle East oil producers to step up their oil output. Tense relations with those countries over Iran, Yemen, and now the Russian invasion of Ukraine have given them excuses for once again demonstrating what unreliable allies they are. That's good news for Moscow, but not for Biden as he searches for more oil to satisfy our insatiable demands.

A Back Seat for Conservation and Clean Energy

In short, the pressure is on Biden to push domestic production, and although he's released oil from the strategic reserves, that won't be nearly enough to stave off industry and political pressures. The industry has launched yet another disinformation campaign designed to make gasoline prices "Biden's war on oil" and discredit his clean energy agenda.

The administration has had to concede some ground. Here's Jennifer Granholm,

the energy secretary, pleading for more oil production: "Yes, right now, we need oil and gas production to rise to meet current demand." But "we're serious about decarbonizing while providing reliable energy that doesn't depend on foreign adversaries."

We know what more drilling means: It "wrecks ecosystems, coasts, groundwater, and critical habitats. Our country has laws in place precisely to protect people from corporate greed and ensure that the environmental and human cost of fossil fuel extraction is taken into account."

Biden has options to protect the environment and conserve energy even without passage of his Build Back Better bill. He has already used executive orders over 50 times to overturn Trump-era environmental deregulation actions.

For example, recently the administration issued a new rule to substantially cut tailpipe emissions in cars and small trucks. New fuel efficiency standards are on the way. Still, there's no getting away from it: truly significant climate crisis legislation that will make a meaningful contribution to carbon neutrality and demonstrate leadership on saving the planet is not going to happen. Big Oil is doing its part to ensure that we continue to have energy and

environmental insecurity.

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Corporations Are Suppressing Wages—There’s an Easy Fix for That

By Sonali Kolhatkar

Amid all the good news about successful labor organizing and job growth in the United States is the stark reality that wages continue to remain inexcusably low even as inflation rises. A new government report by numerous agencies including the U.S. Treasury Department came to the stark conclusion that corporate power is suppressing wages.

Two weeks later, the international aid organization Oxfam America released a report consistent with this finding, that millions of American workers continue to earn less than \$15 an hour. People of color and particularly women of color are disproportionately impacted—as is always the

case.

But, pro-corporate coverage paints a rosy picture about the U.S. economy—one that requires no intervention because things are apparently humming along just fine on their own.

The government report, barely noted in the media, was the result of a collaboration between the Treasury Department, the Department of Justice, the Department of Labor, and the Federal Trade Commission. It concluded that wages in the U.S. are 20 percent lower than they should be and that this state of affairs is the direct result of corporations wielding their power over the labor market.

Yet, conservative think tanks like the Competitive Enterprise Institute (CEI) continue to insist that wages are “naturally rising far beyond... [the federal minimum wage] due to basic supply and demand,” and therefore government intervention to raise the floor would be a bad idea. CEI cites how Target is already paying workers between \$15 and \$24 an hour. It offers no solution for how underpaid workers can afford to live if inflation continues to rise. Indeed, the only problem that the organization seems to care about is how rising wages could contribute to inflation.

But the Treasury Depart-

ment’s report points out that corporate power is unnaturally suppressing wages in myriad ways including the offshoring of labor to nations where wages are even lower, the imposition of so-called “noncompete” contracts that undermine workers’ ability to switch jobs within their field, and the misclassification of workers that prevents them from exercising labor rights such as joining a union.

There is nothing “natural” about that.

A decade ago, the Fight for Fifteen movement, which was born in Chicago’s fast-food industry, demanded at least \$15 an hour in wages. Ten years after the campaign was launched, most states still do not require employers to pay \$15 an hour. While Washington, D.C., now has a \$15.20-an-hour minimum wage, it remains an exception. Large states like California and New York are inching upward in the right direction, and a total of 30 states now require minimum wages to be higher than the federal minimum wage. But that is an extremely low standard.

The federal government’s minimum wage ought to be a national shame, remaining unchanged since 2009 at an embarrassingly paltry \$7.25 an hour. This is the longest that the government has gone without raising the feder-

al minimum wage since the New Deal.

According to Oxfam America’s new report, “The Crisis of Low Wages in the US,” “more than 31.9 percent of the US labor force, or 51.9 million workers, currently make less than \$15 per hour, and many are stuck at the federal minimum wage.”

Dr. Kaitlyn Henderson, a senior research adviser with Oxfam America’s U.S. Domestic Policy Program, who authored the report, told me in an interview that “it is shocking, especially considering that this is the highest [that] inflation has been in four decades.”

Even those making \$15 an hour earn barely enough to get by. The supposedly high upper limit “breaks down to \$31,200 a year—before taxes,” explained Henderson. This means they “have a harder time keeping a roof over their head and food on the table. This is not enough for an individual to live [on], much less a working family.”

If this crisis is not apparent to the public, we can thank institutions like CEI that spread nonsense about wages “naturally” rising, and the corporate media’s near-exclusive focus on the number of jobs over the quality of jobs and pay. Media outlets routinely obscure the catastrophe of low wages each month when

the Labor Department’s jobs report generates stories that focus on employment numbers and little else.

For example, the *New York Times* on March 4 covered the February 2022 report signaling “a flood of new jobs and new workers last month,” which to the paper meant that “the pandemic’s vise grip on the economy may be loosening.” The story featured quotes from pro-corporate economists such as Morgan Stanley’s Robert Rosener who said, “We’ve continually been surprised by the resilience of the U.S. labor market.”

This upbeat tone continued throughout the story, even when discussing wages: “The labor force grew, unemployment fell, and average hourly earnings were virtually unchanged from January, although they are up significantly over the past year, particularly for workers in low-wage industries.”

Anyone reading the *New York Times* or CEI’s reports would come away feeling optimistic about the state of the economy and adopt a hands-off approach. But Oxfam America’s report, which covers wages through December 2021, arrives at a very different conclusion where nearly a third of workers are scraping by on meager wages. “In the United States, the value

we attribute to shareholders is somehow greater than the value we attribute to the workers who make our society function,” writes Henderson in the report.

Another major blind spot in pro-corporate economic coverage is how income inequality is delineated along racial lines. According to Henderson, “low-wage workers are disproportionately women, people of color, and women of color especially.” Henderson referred to the “occupational segregation” that Black and Latino workers are subjected to.

“When you’re thinking about it through an intersectional lens, where you’re considering race and gender, the pay gap increases substantially,” Henderson told me. So, women of color, who are overrepresented in industries like child care, are among the hardest hit. It should not surprise us then that, as per Henderson, “Child care is one of the lowest-paid professions in the United States,” and this “reflects the value system we have in this country.”

The Center on Budget and Policy Priorities (CBPP) suggested that while elite figures and institutions were celebrating Women’s History Month in March, one way to put their money where their mouths are is to support the women who work in child care and home

health care. CBPP's Diana Azevedo-McCaffrey wrote that the women of color who dominate these industries and are grossly underpaid to do so are "performing the labor that underpins the nation's economy and maintains families' health and well-being."

CBPP backs myriad basic federal policies to fix this problem, including paid leave and federal funding for child care and home health care. Similarly, Oxfam America backs straightforward solutions such as federal funding boosts as well as the passage of the Raise the Wage Act, which would gradually raise the federal minimum wage from \$7.25 an hour to \$15 an hour—hardly a big ask 10 years after the Fight for Fifteen movement, and already inadequate to meet working people's needs.

The problem of low wages in the U.S. ought to shock us, in spite of the pro-corporate optimism about the economy and the media's refusal to amplify the problem. The solutions are obvious, easy, and hardly radical. **Z**

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

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Ketanji Brown Jackson Brings Advocacy And Protection Of Worker's Rights To The Supreme Court

By Ken Bank

President Biden's appointment of Ketanji Brown Jackson to the Supreme Court signals a shift in decision making on the court that will match or even exceed the liberal philosophy that characterized her predecessor, retiring justice Stephen Breyer. In her 8 years as a district court judge in the District Of Columbia her decisions were mostly favorable to progressive opinions regarding issues of economic and social justice. Such decisions included, but were not limited to, immigration, consumer safety and health, civil rights, and abuses of executive authority. Perhaps her most consequential decision involved the re-

fusal of White House Counsel Don McGahn to testify at congressional hearings by House members investigating Donald Trump's attempts to influence and obstruct justice with regard to investigations about Russian influence in the 2016 election, as well as Trump's efforts to undermine support by Congress for the Ukrainian government in its struggle against Russian attacks on its sovereignty. McGahn justified his refusal to testify on grounds of executive privilege, and that Trump had the sole authority to decide whether he can testify or not. With her pronouncement that "Presidents are not Kings" she ruled that McGahn must testify. The issue was finally settled when McGahn gave testimony to House members, after Trump left office, in a closed-door session.

Of important interest and relevance to issues affecting economic justice for workers, in particular employees of the federal government, Judge Jackson ruled several times in favor of government workers whose bargaining rights and ability to determine working conditions became increasingly vulnerable to efforts by the Trump Administration to curtail, limit and even eliminate those protections entirely. In 2018, as a district judge in Washington, DC,

Jackson invalidated three executive orders by the Trump Administration that compromised worker rights of federal employees. In *AFL-CIO v. Trump*, Jackson negated three executive orders that would have made collective bargaining significantly more difficult. The orders put limitations on the amount of time union representatives could spend meeting with workers, the right of workers to appeal disciplinary actions taken against them, and also limited the kinds of issues that labor union representatives can negotiate. Jackson argued that although the President had executive authority to issue orders relevant to federal labor-management relations, those orders cannot conflict with the will of Congress in its statutory role setting rules and regulations that pertain to collective bargaining and workers rights. She ruled in her decision that when such a conflict did occur the court had a right to intervene and resolve the conflict. In this instance she resolved the conflict in favor of the unions. Although Jackson's decision was reversed upon appeal on jurisdictional grounds, one of the appellate judges who ruled against her decision, Republican Thomas Griffith, has enthusiastically endorsed her nomination to the Supreme Court, praising her

"careful approach and agreeable manner."

More recently, a few weeks before President Biden nominated Judge Jackson to the Supreme Court, she issued her first ruling as a member of the U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals for the District Of Columbia. In the case of *American Federation of Government Employees v. Federal Labor Relations Authority*, Jackson overturned the FLRA rule that limited workers rights to bargain collectively against working conditions. The Federal Labor Relations Authority is a semi-independent agency of the federal government whose mission is to facilitate and coordinate relationships between management and non-postal employees of the federal government. With her decision, Judge Jackson determined that new rules established by the FLRA put unfair and onerous restrictions on the collective bargaining rights of federal government employees to determine circumstances dictating workplace conditions. She also wrote that the new standards imposed by the FLRA on collective bargaining were arbitrary and capricious. She was joined in her opinion by judges Cornelia Pillard and David Tatel.

As judge on the District Court and Circuit Court of Appeals for the District of

Columbia, Ketanji Brown Jackson has already made her impact felt on labor and management relations with her precedent setting rulings regarding attempts by Republican bosses at the federal level to eliminate protections and collective bargaining rights of government workers. In every decision she blocked Trump Administration managers from obstructing workers who wanted to bargain with management on the subject of working conditions. Judge Jackson's decisions also protected the right of unions representing government employees to organize and bargain collectively on behalf of their membership. The precedents established by her rulings in *AFL-CIO v. Trump* and *American Federation of Government Employees v. FLRA* will help protect workers at the federal level and also state and local government employees as well.

Based on her decisions at the district court and appellate level, Ketanji Brown Jackson has proven beyond doubt that as an Associate Justice on the Supreme Court she will be a forceful and tireless advocate on behalf of federal employees and collective bargaining rights of all workers, public and private. **Z**

U.S. Policy Toward Russia Is Blocking Paths to De-escalation in Ukraine

Noam Chomsky interviewed by C.J. Polychroniou

C.J. Polychroniou: *The war in Ukraine has turned Russia into a pariah state throughout Europe and North America, but Moscow continues to receive support from many countries in the Global South. The strategic relationship between Russia and China seems to be getting stronger, although both countries had identified each other as major factors for maintaining order and stability in an “emerging polycentric world” long before Putin and Xi Jinping. In fact, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said following a recent meeting with*

his Chinese counterpart that the two countries are working together to advance a vision of a new world order, a new “democratic world order.” Is the new world order one that pits Global North and Global South countries against each other? And what do you make of the statement of Russia and China working together to promote a new “democratic world order?” To me, the idea of two autocratic states working together to promote democracy across the world sounds like a crude joke.

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

As U.S.-run polls showed, Americans enthralled by the “noble” goals belatedly pro-

claimed were even joined by some Iraqis: 1 percent of those polled. Four percent thought the U.S. invaded in order to help Iraqis. The rest concluded that if Iraq’s exports had been asparagus and pickles, and the center of global petroleum production was in the South Pacific, the U.S. wouldn’t have invaded.

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

My impression is that the Global South has sharply condemned the Russian invasion, but has asked: “What’s new?” The general reaction to President Biden’s harsh condemnation of Putin as a war criminal seems to be something like this: It takes one to know one. We agree that he is a war criminal, and as creatures of the Enlightenment, we adopt the Kantian principle of universality that is dismissed with contempt by the West, sometimes with angry

charges of whataboutism.

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

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

While there is appreciation in the Global South for the

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

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

golden platter to the U.S.-run “Atlanticist” system, a gift of substantial significance, as we’ve discussed before.

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

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

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

This should not surprise us. It is nothing new. We recall well that the Iraq invasion had virtually no global support. Less familiar is the fact that the same was true of the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan after 9/11. A few weeks after the invasion, an international

Gallup poll asked the question: “Once the identity of the [9/11] terrorists is known, should the American government launch a military attack on the country or countries where the terrorists are based or should the American government seek to extradite the terrorists to stand trial?”

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

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

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

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

China’s unwillingness to

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

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

Like anyone who cares in the least about the fate of Ukrainians, Ambassador Freeman recognizes that the only alternative to Russian destruction of Ukraine—which, with their backs to the wall, Putin and his narrow circle of siloviki can implement—is a negotiated settlement that will be ugly, offering the aggressors an escape. He also carries the history back further than we have done in our earlier discussions, back to the Congress of Vienna of 1814, which followed the Napoleonic Wars.

Metternich and other European leaders, he observes, “had the good sense to reincorporate [defeated] France into the governing councils of Europe,” overlooking its virtual conquest of Europe. That led to a century of substantial peace in Europe, which had long been the most violent part of the world. There were some wars, but nothing like what preceded. The century of peace ended with World War I.

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

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

The question arose starkly when the USSR collapsed, and Mikhail Gorbachev out-

lined the vision of a “common European home” with no military alliances from Lisbon to Vladivostok. In a limited form, the concept was revived by French President Emmanuel Macron in his recent abortive interchanges with Putin.

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

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

“What happened in 1994, which was a mid-term election year, and

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

both in terms of its own interests and in terms of the broader prospects for peace in Europe.”

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

Russian leadership tolerated Clinton’s violation of the firm U.S. commitment to Gorbachev not to extend NATO beyond East Germany. They even tolerated George W. Bush’s further provocations, and U.S. military actions that struck directly at Russian interests, undertaken in such a way as to humiliate Russia. But Ukraine and Georgia were red lines. That was clearly understood in Washington. As Freeman continues, no Russian leader was likely to tolerate the NATO expansion into Ukraine that began after the 2014 “coup, [carried

out] to prevent neutrality or a pro-Russian government in Kiev, and to replace it with a pro-American government that would bring Ukraine into our sphere.... So, since about 2015 the United States has been arming, training Ukrainians against Russia,” effectively treating Ukraine “as an extension of NATO.”

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

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

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

Turkey’s position over the war in Ukraine is to maintain neu-

trality while acting as a mediator in the Russian-Ukrainian crisis. Can Turkey continue to maintain such a balancing act since we know that it has been supplying military assistance to Ukraine since 2019 and that it is aligned with the geo-strategic vision of Washington over Ukraine?

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

By 2000, Turkish state

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

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

If Turkey can facilitate negotiations that will bring the Ukraine horrors to an end, that will be a most welcome development, to be applauded. We can only speculate about what the chances are while the U.S. insists on perpetuating the conflict “to the

last Ukrainian” while blocking an ugly negotiated settlement that is the alternative to destruction of Ukraine and perhaps even nuclear war.

Russian gas continues to flow to Europe although Putin had demanded that European governments pay for it in rubles. What would be the impact in the geo-strategic relations between Europe and Russia if the former became independent from Russian gas?

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

and our active engagement in trying to influence discussion and debate, and policy choices.

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

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

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

following ample precedent.

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

Imaginably, the world might rise to a level of civilization in which international law can be honored instead of righteously wielded against selected targets. We should never cease efforts to bring that about. In doing so, we should not succumb to the illusions fostered by the global doctrinal systems. **Z**

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From Mosul to Raqqa to Mariupol, Killing Civilians is a Crime

By Medea Benjamin & Nicolas J.S. Davies

Americans have been shocked by the death and destruction of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, filling our screens with bombed buildings and dead bodies lying in the street. But the United States and its allies have waged war in country after country for decades, carving swathes of destruction through cities, towns and villages on a far greater scale than has so far disfigured Ukraine.

As we recently reported,

the U.S. and its allies have dropped over 337,000 bombs and missiles, or 46 per day, on 9 countries since 2001 alone. Senior U.S. Defense Intelligence Agency officers told *Newsweek* that the first 24 days of Russia's bombing of Ukraine was less destructive than the first day of U.S. bombing in Iraq in 2003.

The U.S.-led campaign against ISIS in Iraq and Syria bombarded those countries with over 120,000 bombs and missiles, the heaviest bombing anywhere in decades. U.S. military officers told Amnesty International that the U.S. assault on Raqqa in Syria was also the heaviest artillery bombardment since the Vietnam War.

Mosul in Iraq was the largest city that the United States and its allies reduced to rubble in that campaign, with a pre-assault population of 1.5 million. About 138,000 houses were damaged or destroyed by bombing and artillery, and an Iraqi Kurdish intelligence report counted at least 40,000 civilians killed.

Raqqa, which had a population of 300,000, was gutted even more. A UN assessment mission reported that 70-80% of buildings were destroyed or damaged. Syrian and Kurdish forces in Raqqa reported counting 4,118 civilian bodies. Many more deaths remain uncounted in the rub-

ble of Mosul and Raqqa. Without comprehensive mortality surveys, we may never know what fraction of the actual death toll these numbers represent.

The Pentagon promised to review its policies on civilian casualties in the wake of these massacres, and commissioned the Rand Corporation to conduct a study titled, "Understanding Civilian Harm in Raqqa and Its Implications For Future Conflicts," which has now been made public.

Even as the world recoils from the shocking violence in Ukraine, the premise of the Rand Corp study is that U.S. forces will continue to wage wars that involve devastating bombardments of cities and populated areas, and that they must therefore try to understand how they can do so without killing quite so many civilians.

The study runs over 100 pages, but it never comes to grips with the central problem, which is the inevitably devastating and deadly impacts of firing explosive weapons into inhabited urban areas like Mosul in Iraq, Raqqa in Syria, Mariupol in Ukraine, Sanaa in Yemen or Gaza in Palestine.

The development of "precision weapons" has demonstrably failed to prevent these massacres. The United States

unveiled its new "smart bombs" during the First Gulf War in 1990-1991. But they in fact comprised only 7% of the 88,000 tons of bombs it dropped on Iraq, reducing "a rather highly urbanized and mechanized society" to "a pre-industrial age nation" according to a UN survey.

Instead of publishing actual data on the accuracy of these weapons, the Pentagon has maintained a sophisticated propaganda campaign to convey the impression that they are 100% accurate and can strike a target like a house or apartment building without harming civilians in the surrounding area.

However, during the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003, Rob Hewson, the editor of an arms trade journal that reviews the performance of air-launched weapons, estimated that 20 to 25% of U.S. "precision" weapons missed their targets.

Even when they do hit their target, these weapons do not perform like space weapons in a video game. The most commonly used bombs in the U.S. arsenal are 500 lb bombs, with an explosive charge of 89 kilos of Tritonal. According to UN safety data, the blast alone from that explosive charge is 100% lethal up to a radius of 10 meters, and will break every window within 100 meters.

That is just the blast effect.

Deaths and horrific injuries are also caused by collapsing buildings and flying shrapnel and debris—concrete, metal, glass, wood etc.

A strike is considered accurate if it lands within a "circular error probable," usually 10 meters around the object being targeted. So in an urban area, if you take into account the "circular error probable," the blast radius, flying debris and collapsing buildings, even a strike assessed as "accurate" is very likely to kill and injure civilians.

U.S. officials draw a moral distinction between this "unintentional" killing and the "deliberate" killing of civilians by terrorists. But the late historian Howard Zinn challenged this distinction in a letter to the *New York Times* in 2007. He wrote, "These words are misleading because they assume an action is either 'deliberate' or 'unintentional.' There is something in between, for which the word is 'inevitable.' If you engage in an action, like aerial bombing, in which you cannot possibly distinguish between combatants and civilians (as a former Air Force bombardier, I will attest to that), the deaths of civilians are inevitable, even if not 'intentional.'"

Does that difference exonerate you morally? The terrorism of the suicide bomber and the terrorism of aerial bom-

bardment are indeed morally equivalent. To say otherwise (as either side might) is to give one moral superiority over the other, and thus serve to perpetuate the horrors of our time."

Americans are rightfully horrified when they see civilians killed by Russian bombardment in Ukraine, but they are generally not quite so horrified, and more likely to accept official justifications, when they hear that civilians are killed by U.S. forces or American weapons in Iraq, Syria, Yemen or Gaza. The Western corporate media play a key role in this, by showing us corpses in Ukraine and the wails of their loved ones, but shielding us from equally disturbing images of people killed by U.S. or allied forces.

While Western leaders are demanding that Russia be held accountable for war crimes, they have raised no such clamor to prosecute U.S. officials. Yet during the U.S. military occupation of Iraq, both the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and the UN Assistance Mission to Iraq (UN-AMI) documented persistent and systematic violations of the Geneva Conventions by U.S. forces, including of the 1949 Fourth Geneva Convention that protects civilians from the impacts of war and

military occupation.

The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and human rights groups documented systematic abuse and torture of prisoners in Iraq and Afghanistan, including cases in which U.S. troops tortured prisoners to death.

Although torture was approved by U.S. officials all the way up to the White House, no officer above the rank of major was ever held accountable for a torture death in Afghanistan or Iraq. The harshest punishment handed down for torturing a prisoner to death was a five-month jail sentence, although that is a capital offense under the U.S. War Crimes Act.

In a 2007 human rights report that described widespread killing of civilians by U.S. occupation forces, UN-AMI wrote, “Customary international humanitarian law demands that, as much as possible, military objectives must not be located within areas densely populated by civilians. The presence of individual combatants among a great number of civilians does not alter the civilian character of an area.”

The report demanded “that all credible allegations of unlawful killings be thoroughly, promptly and impartially investigated, and appropriate action taken against military personnel found to have used

excessive or indiscriminate force.”

Instead of investigating, the U.S. has actively covered up its war crimes. A tragic example is the 2019 massacre in the Syrian town of Baghuz, where a special U.S. military operations unit dropped massive bombs on a group of mainly women and children, killing about 70. The military not only failed to acknowledge the botched attack but even bulldozed the blast site to cover it up. Only after a *New York Times* exposé years later did the military even admit that the strike took place.

So it is ironic to hear President Biden call for President Putin to face a war crimes trial, when the United States covers up its own crimes, fails to hold its own senior officials accountable for war crimes and still rejects the jurisdiction of the International Criminal Court (ICC). In 2020, Donald Trump went so far as to impose U.S. sanctions on the most senior ICC prosecutors for investigating U.S. war crimes in Afghanistan.

The Rand study repeatedly claims that U.S. forces have “a deeply ingrained commitment to the law of war.” But the destruction of Mosul, Raqqa and other cities and the history of U.S. disdain for the UN Charter, the Geneva Conventions and internation-

al courts tell a very different story.

We agree with the Rand report’s conclusion that, “DoD’s weak institutional learning for civilian harm issues meant that past lessons went unheeded, increasing the risks to civilians in Raqqa.” However, we take issue with the study’s failure to recognize that many of the glaring contradictions it documents are consequences of the fundamentally criminal nature of this entire operation, under the Fourth Geneva Convention and the existing laws of war.

We reject the whole premise of this study, that U.S. forces should continue to conduct urban bombardments that inevitably kill thousands of civilians, and must therefore learn from this experience so that they will kill and maim fewer civilians the next time they destroy a city like Raqqa or Mosul.

The ugly truth behind these U.S. massacres is that the impunity senior U.S. military and civilian officials have enjoyed for past war crimes encouraged them to believe they could get away with bombing cities in Iraq and Syria to rubble, inevitably killing tens of thousands of civilians.

They have so far been proven right, but U.S. contempt for international law and the failure of the global commu-

nity to hold the United States to account are destroying the very “rules-based order” of international law that U.S. and Western leaders claim to cherish.

As we call urgently for a ceasefire, for peace and for accountability for war crimes in Ukraine, we should say “Never Again!” to the bombardment of cities and civilian areas, whether they are in Syria, Ukraine, Yemen, Iran or anywhere else, and whether the aggressor is Russia, the United States, Israel or Saudi Arabia.

And we should never forget that the supreme war crime is war itself, the crime of aggression, because, as the judges declared at Nuremberg, it “contains within itself the accumulated evil of the whole.” It is easy to point fingers at others, but we will not stop war until we force our own leaders to live up to the principle spelled out by Supreme Court Justice and Nuremberg prosecutor Robert Jackson:

“If certain acts in violation of treaties are crimes, they are crimes whether the United States does them or whether Germany does them, and we are not prepared to lay down a rule of criminal conduct against others which we would not be willing to have invoked against us.”

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Military and Economic Power Once Again Fail to Produce Happiness

By Lawrence Wittner

Although the rulers of the world’s major military and economic powers have repeatedly claimed that they are making their nations great again, their policies have not resulted in widespread public happiness among their citizens.

That conclusion emerges from the recent World Happiness Report-2022, published by the UN Sustainable Development Solutions Network. Based on Gallup World Polls conducted from 2019 through 2021, this extensive study provides a revealing look at how roughly 150,000 respondents in 146 countries rated their own happiness. The study’s findings underscore the limited levels of happiness in the world’s major military-economic powers.

There is little doubt about which nations belong in this category. In 2020 (the latest year for which accurate figures are available), the world’s biggest military spenders were the United States (#1), China (#2), India (#3), and Russia (#4). Collectively, they accounted for nearly 59 percent of the world’s military spending and the vast majority of the world’s nuclear weapons.

When nations are ranked by total wealth, a similar pattern appears: United States (#1), China (#2), India (#7), Russia (#13). Despite their ostensibly different economic models, they all boast a hefty share of the world’s billionaires, and once again their ranking is rather similar: United States (#1), China (#2), India (#3), and Russia (#5).

And what has this enormous array of military and econom-

ic power produced for their citizens? Well, as it turns out, not a great deal of happiness. The most positive thing that can be said for it is that the United States currently ranks a rather dispiriting 16th on this score. China ranks 72nd. Russia ranks 80th. And India is 136th. Furthermore, over the decade since the annual world happiness surveys began, in 2012, none of these major powers has ever appeared among the 10 happiest nations.

In 2022, the 10 happiest countries were: Finland (#1), Denmark (#2), Iceland (#3), Switzerland (#4), Netherlands (#5), Luxembourg (#6), Sweden (#7), Norway (#8), Israel (#9), and New Zealand (#10).

It is deceptively easy to conclude that the explanation for this high level of happiness lies in the fact that these 10 are all fairly comfortable, economically advanced nations. Even so, there is no significant correlation between a nation's rank in happiness and its per capita income. Indeed, seven of the nations (Finland, Denmark, Iceland, Netherlands, Sweden, Israel, and New Zealand) did not place at all among the top 12 nations in per capita income during 2021. Finland, ranking #1 for happiness for the fifth year in a row, ranked #25 in per capita income. New Zealand,

ranking #10 for happiness, ranked #31 for per capita income. Conversely, Singapore, which ranked #3 in per capita income, ranked #27 for happiness, while United Arab Emirates, which ranked #6 in per capita income, ranked #24 for happiness. Factors other than top incomes were clearly at work in producing the happiest nations.

One such factor appears to be the provision of substantial public services. A striking feature of the world's nations is that all five Nordic countries rank among the 10 happiest. What these five countries have in common are social democratic policies that counteract income inequality and dramatically reduce poverty by providing free or low cost healthcare, dental care, housing, education, and childcare, as well as ample pensions and a range of other "welfare state" benefits. Moreover, the other five happiest countries also maintain significant social welfare systems.

The happiest nations also stand out for their relatively egalitarian distribution of wealth. Each of the 10 happiest nations, except Israel, has greater equality of wealth than do the four major military-economic powers. And even that nation's wealth distribution is considerably more equal than that of the United

States and only slightly more unequal than China's.

Yet another contrast appears when it comes to military spending. Given the enormous Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of the four biggest military-economic powers, an adequate "defense" of their nations should be less of an economic burden on them than it would be on the economies of these 10 much smaller, less wealthy nations. But, in fact, the reverse is true in eight of the happiest nations, which devoted a smaller percentage of their GDP to military spending in 2020 (the latest year for which accurate figures are available) than did all but one of the four major military-economic powers. Sweden, for example, spent only 1.22 percent, Denmark 1.44 percent, and Finland 1.53 percent of their small GDPs on their armed forces, while India spent 2.88 percent, the United States 3.74 percent, and Russia 4.26 percent of their much larger GDPs to fund their military might.

Admittedly, poverty and national insecurity do appear to play important roles in reducing human happiness. The lowest ranking nations in World Happiness Report-2022 are very poor nations, or nations plagued by violence, or both, such as the Palestinian territories

(#122), Myanmar (#126), Yemen (#132), and Afghanistan (#146).

Even so, as the global happiness studies indicate, great military and economic power bring nations only so far. Ultimately, a high level of happiness requires social solidarity. **Z**

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