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Chomsky on the U.S. & China

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COMMENTARY/1

January 6 Committee Has Enough Evidence to Indict Trump/1

Marjorie Cohn on Trump's crimes

The IRA Should Be Just the Beginning/12

CJ Polychroniou looks at the Inflation Reduction Act

Online Media and Organizing/18

Thomas Klikauer on Covid activism

FEATURES/28

U.S Foreign Policy is Based on Fears of China's Rise/28

C.J. Polychroniou interviews Noam Chomsky

The Enduring Tyranny of Oil/43

Michael T. Klare on the oil industry and climate change

January 6 Committee Has Provided Sufficient Evidence for Garland to Indict Trump

By Marjorie Cohn

More than two years after Donald Trump orchestrated a massive criminal conspiracy to overturn the results of the 2020 presidential election, including directing an armed and violent mob to attack the U.S. Capitol, Attorney General Merrick Garland's Department of Justice (DOJ) has still not indicted the former president.

The House of Representatives Select Committee to Investigate the January 6 Attack on the U.S. Capitol ("Select Committee") presented overwhelming evidence—nearly all from Trump loyalists—that Trump committed at least two federal crimes, as well as criminal offenses in the state of Georgia. Although the Select Committee has no power to bring charges against

Trump, it can make a criminal referral. The decision to prosecute, however, rests solely with the DOJ.

During the course of eight public hearings, the committee demonstrated that Trump was the fulcrum of a multi-pronged conspiracy to fraudulently declare himself the winner of the election. The conspiracy included spreading false information that the election was stolen from him; attempting to weaponize the DOJ to corroborate his false claims; bullying Vice President Mike Pence to refuse to count or delay counting electoral votes that had been certified by the states; pressuring state election officials and legislators to change the results of their elections; ordering Republican legislators to generate fake electoral slates and send them to Congress; summoning a violent mob to Washington, D.C. and directing them to march on the U.S. Capitol; and refusing to take action for more than three hours to stop the violence he had set in motion until federal law enforcement had been summoned by Pence.

The Select Committee has developed evidence that Garland's office should use in prosecuting Trump for criminal conspiracy to defraud the United States and obstruction of Congress. (The following summary of that evidence

is detailed in Just Security's "Criminal Evidence Tracker.")

Criminal Conspiracy to Defraud the United States

Under federal statute Title 18 U.S. Code Section 371, it is a criminal offense: "If two or more persons conspire either to commit any offense against the United States, or to defraud the United States, or any agency thereof in any manner or for any purpose, and one or more of such persons do any act to effect the object of the conspiracy."

This crime requires: (1) an agreement between two or more people; (2) with the specific intent to obstruct a lawful government function; (3) using deceitful or dishonest means; and (4) one conspirator must have committed at least one overt act in furtherance of the conspiracy.

Agreement between two or more people.

Trump made agreements with John Eastman, Jeffrey Clark and Mark Meadows to defraud the United States.

Eastman, former dean at Chapman Law School, devised a plan for Pence to illegally reject or delay the electoral vote count. U.S. District Court Judge David O. Carter found that "there was likely

an agreement between President Trump and Dr. Eastman to enact the plan articulated” in two memos that Eastman wrote.

Trump and Clark, a former DOJ official with no criminal prosecutorial experience, met to discuss installing Clark as acting attorney general. Clark drafted a letter to battleground states with unsupported claims of election irregularities and recommendations that states appoint new slates of electors. Trump decided against Clark’s appointment following threats of massive resignations at the DOJ.

Meadows, Trump’s chief of staff, introduced Trump to Clark; emailed DOJ officials to investigate bogus fraud claims; encouraged state legislators to adopt Eastman’s plan; sent Pence’s staff a plan for him to reject electoral votes from battleground states; and organized and participated in Trump’s January 2, 2021, call to Georgia Secretary of State Brad Raffensperger asking him to “find” enough votes to overturn the election results.

Specific intent to obstruct a lawful government function.

The electoral vote count is a lawful government function. Eastman and Trump specifically intended to obstruct the count by applying repeated

pressure on Pence to adopt Eastman’s scheme, which Eastman admitted, in Trump’s presence, was illegal. Trump and Clark specifically intended to interfere with the DOJ’s lawful function by drafting a letter with unsupported claims of election irregularities. Trump planned well in advance of election day to declare victory regardless of who won.

After a meeting on December 19, 2020, in which plans for the military to seize voting machines were rejected, Trump tweeted, “Big protest in D.C. on January 6th ... Be there, will be wild!”

A January 2, 2021, email revealed that the march to the Capitol was premeditated. On January 6, Trump was furious that people with weapons were not being admitted, which would have made his crowd appear smaller. Cassidy Hutchinson, an aide to Meadows, testified that she heard him say something to the effect that “I don’t effing care that they have weapons. They’re not here to hurt me, take the effing mags away, let my people in. They can March to the Capitol from here, let the people in, take the effing mags away.” Mags refer to magnetometers, or metal detectors.

Trump was advised against accompanying the mob to the Capitol because they were

“going to get charged with every crime imaginable,” White House Counsel Pat Cipollone told Hutchinson. Cipollone “was also worried that it would look like we were inciting a riot or encouraging a riot to erupt at the Capitol,” Hutchinson added.

Nevertheless, Trump insisted on going to the Capitol. He even tried to grab the steering wheel from a Secret Service agent who was driving him back to the White House and lunged at the agent’s throat.

For more than three hours, Trump did nothing to stop the violent assault on the Capitol he had instigated, in spite of numerous entreaties by his staff, Republican leaders and family members to call off the insurrection. While he watched the rampage unfold on Fox News from the White House dining room, Trump called senators urging them to delay certification of the electoral vote count. It was only after the National Guard and FBI agents were summoned by Pence and congressional leaders that Trump ordered his supporters to go home.

Trump was told that the rioters were chanting, “Hang Mike Pence.” According to Meadows, Trump thought Pence deserved it and didn’t think they were doing anything wrong. The rioters came within 40 feet of Pence as he fled to safety. Members of his

security detail sent messages to their families, fearing they would never see them again. But during the riot, Trump tweeted that Pence was a “coward” for not halting the vote count. Committee member Elaine Luria said, “He put a target on his own vice president’s back.”

Deceitful or dishonest means.

Trump and his close allies knew or should have known that he lost the fair and free election. Attorney General Bill Barr, Acting AG Jeffrey Rosen, Acting Deputy Attorney General Richard Donoghue, Raffensperger, and others told him so.

Eastman knew his scheme violated the Electoral Count Act and admitted that the Supreme Court would unanimously reject it. The letter that Clark and Trump wanted the DOJ to send to battleground states contained deceptive, dishonest and unsupported claims. White House counsel told Trump and Clark that the letter was “a murder-suicide pact.” Meadows tried to get seven states to send deceptive and dishonest certificates saying that Trump had won those states.

Although Pence “never budged” in his position that he had no authority to reject electors or send them back to state legislatures, Trump dic-

tated a January 5 statement saying he and Pence were in “total agreement” that Pence had such authority.

On election night, Trump declared that all vote counting should stop because he didn’t want “them to find” more ballots at 4:00 AM even though he had been told it would take a long time to count mail-in ballots.

Overt acts in furtherance of the conspiracy.

Trump and Eastman repeatedly pressured Pence to follow Eastman’s plan. The two conspirators met with Pence twice in the Oval Office. Trump called Pence twice on January 6 and mocked him for “not [being] tough enough” to reject or delay the electoral count. Trump sent several tweets on January 6, one of which said, “All Mike Pence has to do is send them back to the States, AND WE WIN...”

Trump called Georgia Governor Brian Kemp and urged him to convene a special legislative session to appoint alternate electors; called Georgia’s chief elections investigator urging her to find voter fraud; and called Raffensperger demanding that he “find” enough votes for Trump to prevail over Biden.

Trump and Eastman called state legislators to overturn

the election. At Trump’s behest, Meadows executed a plan to send alternate slates of electors to Congress, declare false electors in battleground states, and submit fake electoral certificates with Trump as the winner.

Three weeks after the election, Trump called in to a Pennsylvania Senate hearing and stated that the “election has to be turned around.” On December 3, 2020, Eastman and Trump’s lawyer Rudy Giuliani made similar appeals to officials in Georgia, and Eastman asked them to adopt an alternate slate of electors. Trump called the Arizona House Speaker at least twice, asking him to substitute Trump electors for Biden’s.

Between December 23 and January 3, 2021, Rosen testified, Trump “either called me or met with me virtually every day,” badgering him and the DOJ to pursue fraud allegations to support Trump’s efforts to overturn the election. Trump pressured the DOJ to write to state legislatures, appoint a special counsel for election fraud, file a lawsuit in the Supreme Court and make public statements with claims of election fraud.

Trump asked Donoghue to “just say that the election was corrupt and leave the rest to [Trump] and the Republican congressmen.” Since Donoghue had told Trump that the

fraud allegations were false, Trump was asking Donoghue to lie publicly.

Meadows asked Rosen to meet with Giuliani and another individual who appeared in a YouTube video discussing a false conspiracy theory. It alleged that an Italian defense contractor uploaded software to a satellite which then switched votes from Trump to Biden.

After his scheme to have the military seize voting machines was rebuffed, Trump tweeted the Big Lie, summoning his supporters to D.C. In response, groups mobilized and organized their members to come to Washington. Many tweets and online posts revealed that Trump’s supporters understood his tweet as a call for violence.

In his speech on the morning of January 6, Trump made several references to Pence, urging him to go along with the plan to stop or delay the vote count. Trump said, “We will see whether Mike Pence enters history as a truly great and courageous leader. All he has to do is refer the illegally submitted electoral votes back to the states that were given false and fraudulent information where they want to recertify.” Later, rioters hung a noose outside the Capitol and repeatedly chanted, “Hang Mike Pence.”

Obstruction of Congress
Title 18 U.S. Code § 1512(c) (2) provides: “Whoever corruptly — ... obstructs, influences, or impedes any official proceeding, or attempts to do so, shall be fined under this title or imprisoned not more than 20 years, or both.”

Title 18 U.S. Code § 1512(k) adds: “Whoever conspires to commit any offense under this section shall be subject to the same penalties as those prescribed for the offense the commission of which was the object of the conspiracy.”

This crime requires: (1) the individual(s) acted corruptly; (2) with the specific intent to obstruct, influence, or impede; (3) an official proceeding; (4) two or more people entered an agreement; and (5) knowingly and intentionally joined the conspiracy with awareness of its unlawful purpose.

Individuals acted corruptly.
Although Trump and his close allies knew or should have known that Trump lost the fair and free election, they pursued Eastman’s admittedly unlawful plan to overturn the election. Trump and Eastman called state legislators to get them to submit false electoral slates. Trump and his attorneys pressured several state legislatures to decertify Biden slates of electors and recertify Trump slates.

Meadows, acting on Trump’s behalf, planned to send false slates of electors to Congress. Trump and Eastman bullied Pence to illegally stop or delay the electoral count.

Trump tried to get the DOJ to seize voting machines but Barr refused. Clark, on Trump’s behalf, drafted a letter for DOJ to send to battleground states with false claims of election irregularities and urging that states appoint new slates of electors. Trump asked Donoghue to “just say that the election was corrupt and leave the rest to [Trump] and the Republican congressmen.” Trump called Rosen every day for two weeks urging him to act on his fraud claims and pressuring him to appoint a special counsel on election fraud. Trump threatened to fire and replace DOJ leadership who refused to go along with his scheme to weaponize the DOJ. Trump backed down on his intention to replace Rosen with Clark after being told there would be “hundreds and hundreds” of DOJ leadership resignations if he fired Rosen.

Trump alleged fraud months before the election. In April 2020, he declared that the only way he could lose the election was if there was fraud. All told, the Trump campaign expended millions of dollars on television and media ads that claimed the

election results were fraudulent.

Trump and Giuliani declared that the election in Arizona was corrupted by fraud, including voting by dead people and undocumented immigrants. Evidence of voter fraud in Arizona was never presented. Giuliani admitted, “we’ve got lots of theories. We just don’t have the evidence.” Eastman told the Arizona speaker of the House to “just do it and let the courts sort it out.”

Trump publicly claimed that “massive voter fraud” occurred in Georgia even though the vote was counted three times and the counts were “all remarkably close.” Trump and Giuliani asserted that election workers pulled out a “suitcase” with 18,000 fake ballots for Biden and counted them several times. All claims of election fraud in Georgia were investigated and proven false. Trump called Raffensperger and pressured him to “find 11,780 votes” and when he refused, Trump threatened him with criminal prosecution.

On election night, on the advice of an “apparently inebriated” Giuliani, Trump claimed victory before all votes were counted despite opposition from his campaign officials.

Trump had advocated and later ratified the violence by

calling on the Proud Boys in a presidential debate to “stand back and stand by” and urging his supporters to “fight like hell” on January 6.

Specific intent to obstruct, influence or impede.

Eastman’s plan was designed to obstruct, influence and impede the electoral vote count. Trump and Eastman repeatedly pressured Pence to execute the plan. Clark drafted a letter with false claims that the DOJ found election irregularities and recommended that states appoint alternative slates of electors. Meadows, on Trump’s behalf, specifically intended to impede and influence the vote count by advancing the scheme to send fake slates of electors to Congress.

White nationalist groups Oath Keepers and Proud Boys coordinated with Trump allies Michael Flynn and Roger Stone to get the mob to travel to D.C. on January 6. Trump pardoned Flynn on November 25 and Stone on December 23.

Many members of the mob said they came to D.C. because “Trump asked us to come” to stop the election from being stolen. Even though he was told that several rioters had weapons, Trump did not want them screened so the crowd would look bigger during his speech on the Ellipse. After

he became convinced that Pence would not stop or delay the vote count, Trump added veiled threats against Pence to his speech on the Ellipse, telling the rioters to “fight like hell.” When he was told that the rioters were chatting, “Hang Mike Pence,” Trump replied, “Maybe our supporters have the right idea. [Pence] deserves it.”

For more than three hours, Trump did nothing to stop the violent attack on the Capitol and the effort to hang Pence. By permitting the mob to continue to assault the Capitol, Trump intended that they obstruct the Congressional vote count. When Trump finally told the rioters to go home, he called them “very special” “patriots” whom he claimed to “love.” Once again, Trump was endorsing the attempted insurrection.

Official proceeding.
A congressional count of electoral votes is an official proceeding.

Agreement.
U.S. District Judge Carter concluded that Trump and Eastman likely agreed to enact Eastman’s illegal plan to overturn the election. Trump and Clark agreed to pursue a strategy to overturn the election. Trump and Meadows agreed to advance Eastman’s plan and pressure Raffens-

sperger to “find” enough votes to change the election results.

Knowingly and intentionally joined the conspiracy.

Trump and his close allies knew or should have known that he lost the free and fair election because Barr, Rosen, Donoghue, Raffensperger, and others told him so.

Eastman admitted his plan was illegal and the Supreme Court would unanimously reject it. Nevertheless, Trump and Eastman bullied Pence to execute the plan. Although he knew the scheme was unlawful, Meadows proceeded to urge battleground states to send fake certificates saying that Trump, not Biden, had won those states.

Several members of the House of Representatives, including Mo Brooks, Matt Gaetz, Louie Gohmert, Andy Biggs, Scott Perry and Marjorie Taylor Green, sought presidential pardons for their roles in trying to overturn the election. Meadows and Giuliani also expressed interest in receiving pardons. Seeking a pardon is tantamount to an admission of guilt.

Criminal Charges Against Trump May Be Imminent in Georgia

In Georgia, Fulton County District Attorney Fani Willis empaneled a special grand jury, subpoenaed high-profile witnesses and indicated that criminal charges against Trump could be forthcoming in the fall. Trump’s January 2 call to Raffensperger demanding that he just “find 11,780 votes,” one more than Biden received in Georgia, will likely play a central role in Willis’s prosecution. The scope of her investigation indicates that she may be considering charges of conspiracy to commit election fraud or racketeering-related offenses.

The Select Committee’s formidable work provides a detailed roadmap for Garland to use to indict Trump for criminal conspiracy to defraud the United States and for obstruction of Congress. Garland has suggested there will be no federal indictment of Trump before the November election.

Committee Vice Chair Liz Cheney stated that Trump “summoned this mob, assembled the mob, and lit the flame.” As the Select Committee hearings revealed, Trump started his conspiracy well before January 6, and in advance of the November election. After Trump lit the flame and his supporters attacked the Capitol, he continued to facilitate the insur-

rection by refusing to stop the carnage as he watched it unfold on Fox News.

Judge Carter found that Trump and Eastman tried to undermine the election with actions amounting to “a coup in search of a legal theory.” They never found one because their coup was illegal.

Trump must be held to account for both his state and federal crimes with no further delay. Z

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The Inflation Reduction Act Should Be Just the Beginning

By C.J. Polychroniou

The Schumer-Manchin reconciliation bill known as the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA), which is expected to become law after it cleared the Senate on a party line vote and key House Democrats have already signaled that they will vote for it when it moves to the lower chamber of Congress, aims to boost the economy and fight the climate crisis. It will also extend the Affordable Care Act subsidies through 2024, lower a handful of prescription drug prices (for those who are on Medicare), boost IRS enforcement, and require large corporations to pay at least 15 percent of their total profits in taxes.

This reconciliation bill is a slim-down version of the Build Back Better Act. It’s a compromise, and therefore hardly adequate to address the needs of American working-class people and confront the climate challenge. In fact, to call IRA a “historic piece of legislation” is an overstatement. But it is a step in the right direction, especially for a country where corporations and big business run roughshod over the common good.

First, forget inflation, in spite of the title that the bill carries, IRA would have no

impact on inflation in 2022 and a negligible effect in 2023, according to a report from the Congressional Budget Office.

A major piece of the bill focuses on healthcare. There are some positive aspects in it but, again, hardly enough to make anything beyond a moderate impact on the well-being of average Americans. It extends Affordable Care Act subsidies for the next three years, lowers, somewhat, healthcare costs for low-income families, and permits Medicare for the first time in its history to negotiate prices for some prescription drugs. Prescription drugs cost much more in the U.S. (in some instances by as much as over 400%, as in the case of Humira, which is used to treat many inflammatory conditions in adults) than in other developed countries, and the U.S. remains the only country in the developed world without a universal healthcare system.

As Bernie Sanders charged, “this bill does nothing to address the systemic dysfunctionality of the American health care system.”

IRA also seeks to address tax fairness and reduce inequality. It claims that it will create a more equitable United States by compelling corporations with more than \$1 billion in profits to pay a 15

percent minimum tax. Conservative democratic senator Kyrsten Sinema, who always sides with the rich and the corporations, first forced the removal of the carried interest tax provision from the bill and then delivered a gift to private equity firms by protecting them from the minimum tax aimed at large corporations.

Forcing corporations making more than \$1 billion in profits pay a minimum corporate tax rate of 15 percent can hardly be considered a major step forward in addressing the issue of inequality. However, the corporate minimum tax in the Inflation Reduction Act has quite different rules from the global minimum tax. It is possible, but not likely, that corporations could end up facing both taxes, and that would indeed be a useful start towards tackling extreme inequality.

Energy and climate are what the Inflation Reduction Act is mostly all about. IRA would raise approximately \$739 billion over 10 years and spend \$433 billion on new investments over a decade, resulting in an overall deficit reduction of roughly \$300 billion. The big winners from this deal are indeed energy and climate as IRA pledges \$369 billion towards energy security and clean energy. The climate and envi-

ronmental measures included in the bill are expected to reduce carbon emissions by 40 percent below 2005 levels by 2030.

So, let's take a brief look at the energy and climate provisions included in the act.

There are dozens of clean energy provisions in IRA that would accelerate the deployment of clean energy technologies and reduce carbon emissions—all while continuing and even enhancing the reliance on fossil fuels. Indeed, the most striking aspect of the energy and climate provisions in IRA is the undeniably concerted effort on the part of its architects to balance climate protections with the interests of the fossil fuel industry. As such, there is no pathway in IRA towards a transition to a post-fuel economy.

First, there is a plethora of tax credits for energy produced from certain renewable sources as well as for projects designed for the installation of solar and wind facilities located in low-income communities. Direct air capture facilities are also eligible for generous credits provided that they capture at least 1,000 metric tons. Tax credits are also extended to biodiesel and alternative fuels, “green” hydrogen, and to residential and commercial energy efficient buildings.

The act also enhances the tax credit available for certain new clean vehicles, creates new incentives for clean energy investments, and establishes a credit for qualified sustainable transportation fuel.

There is financial assistance, in addition to tax incentives, for renewable energy, as well as for carbon capture systems, for rural and agricultural communities. Rural America will be the recipient of approximately \$40 billion in clean energy programs and climate change mitigation projects over the next ten years. There is also funding for the National Forest System and for state and private forestry conservation programs.

There are many positive but also negative aspects behind the climate investment initiatives included in IRA. The renewable-energy funding across the board is the foundation building block of a clean energy economy. However, without more direct intervention on the part of the public sector in combatting the climate crisis, what IRA will produce is a green capitalist industry with profit-making as the overriding concern. Worse yet, investing in unproven carbon capture technologies is a sure way to keep the fossil fuel industry in the game. Indeed,

IRA provides no pathway to a post-fossil fuel economy and shies away from tackling climate injustice.

As part of its goal to enhance energy protection, which in reality means protecting the long-term interests of the fossil fuel industry, IRA mandates new sales for oil and gas drilling in Alaska and the Gulf of Mexico. It extends the definition of “outer continental shelf” to include land both within the exclusive economy zone of the U.S. and adjacent to U.S. territory, and essentially nullifies President Biden's 9/8/20 memorandum withdrawing certain areas from leasing.

Currently, there are more than 9,000 approved, but unused, leases for drilling on federal and tribal lands, and IRA is throwing open even more public lands to oil drilling. In addition, IRA restricts the Department of the Interior from issuing a right-of-way for wind and solar energy development on federal land during the 10-year period after the bill is enacted.

Coal baron Joe Manchin also managed to secure a pledge from Democrats for his support of IRA that there would be no obstacles to the construction and operation of the controversial gas line known as the Mountain Valley Pipeline.

His corruption, as in the

case of Sinema, knows no boundaries.

In 2021, the U.S. committed itself to reducing carbon emissions to 50-52 percent below 2005 levels by 2030. IRA expects to cut U.S. greenhouse gas emissions by 40 percent by 2030. Thus, it narrows but does not close the gap with the goal the Biden administration set under the Paris climate agreement. However, it is highly debatable whether the climate provisions included in IRA will actually reduce emissions by 40 percent by 2030.

Providing \$369 billion over 10 years to fight the climate crisis is not enough in itself to reduce carbon emissions by 40 percent by 2030. It all depends on how much private investment in new energy supply infrastructure IRA will encourage.

Economist Robert Pollin of the University of Massachusetts at Amherst estimates that public spending on clean energy through IRA will encourage at least another \$600 billion in private spending, which will bring total public plus private clean energy spending from the IRA to approximately \$100 billion per year, or \$1 trillion over 10 years. In an interview at *Truthout*, Pollin states the following: “By my own estimates and those by others, for the U.S. to reach the emission

reduction targets set out by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC)—i.e., 50 percent CO₂ emissions cut by 2030 and zero emissions by 2050—will require about \$400 billion in today's economy and an average of \$600 billion per year between now and 2050. So, the total amount of public and private clean energy spending generated by the IRA would deliver, at best, about 25 percent of the necessary funding level.”

And this is supposed to be the best-case scenario.

The Inflation Reduction Act should have been a transformational piece of legislation, but unfortunately it isn't. It is a step though in the right direction, and clear proof that activism can initiate tangible change.

The struggle continues. **-Z**

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Online Media and Organizing

By Thomas Klikauer

The on-going Covid-19 pandemic has not stopped trade unions, it has not stopped workers from organizing, and it has not stopped protest movements like Black Lives Matter. Yet, ever since the December 31, 2019, when a strange virus was detected by the Wuhan Municipal Health Commission, workers and trade unions face a different landscape when organizing. The Covid-19 pandemic had a very serious impact on workers and trade unions—globally.

It all started in the days after January 11, 2020, when China reported the first Corona deaths. Perhaps on all of that, one might not forget a local health worker in Wuhan—

Dr. Li Wenliang—whom the BBC called the Chinese doctor who tried to warn others about coronavirus. Since then, almost every country has reported Covid-19 cases, every region has had deaths, and many, if not almost all, people have been effected in one way or the other. By mid-2022, the Covid-19 pandemic continued approaching 6.4 million—officially recognized—global deaths because of the Covid-19 pandemic.

While we know many of the facts surrounding the Covid-19 pandemic, what we do not know it is full detail is what is the impact of the—at times—rather contradictory relationship between our response to Covid-19 and online media used when organizing actually is. Beyond that, the Covid-19 pandemic had more non-public-health related “side effects.”

For example, the Covid-19 pandemic has impacted on global food production as we are moving into a scenario where upwards of one billion people will be living in extreme poverty. This will be turbo-charged by the standard pathologies of capitalism, such as, for example, the unrelenting destruction of food just to keep market prices up.

On the other side of capitalism’s drive to sell—often highly processed and unhealthy—food to us is the

fact global food corporations have created 650 million obese people globally. Global capitalism has a long history of structural food insecurity. Finally, there are also the war in the Ukraine and global warming.

Of course, behind the contradiction between online media and the Covid-19 pandemic also lurk some of the many additional contradictions of capitalism such as, for example, the one between market logic of protecting the economy and a public health logic of protecting lives. What neoliberal academics like to call protecting the economy actually means assuring the profits of what evil heretics call Big Pharma.

Underneath all this, the Covid-19 pandemic has also proven Hollywood-style disaster movies featuring the individual hero who saves the world as well as right-wing U.S. doomsday preppers wrong again. The Covid-19 pandemic did not lead to a disintegration of society or civil war, and it did not lead to Armageddon either.

Instead, human nature did the very opposite of Herbert Spencer’s deeply ideological survival of the fittest (1880) liked to suggest. During the Covid-19 pandemic, we saw once again that cooperation, not competition, was necessary. Solidarity by supporting

strangers, not social atomization, was required and human beings delivered exactly this, again.

Apart from all that, the inextricable conflict between labor and capital did not cease during the pandemic nor did trade union organizing. Yet, Covid-19 has impacted on 98% of the globe’s working population leading to the loss of 225 million full-time equivalent jobs.

For both—changes in working conditions and union organizing—online media were critical. Most commonly, these were Instagram and Facebook, with some organizing work done on Twitter and private email messages, as well as Facebook groups, Twitter, Reddit and Zoom and Telegram.

In that, union organizers used Facebook Live with weekly question and answer sessions as well as weekly podcasts. On that, one trade unionist noted, Zoom, WhatsApp and Google Hangout enabled us to stay on top of what’s going on. Meanwhile, another organizer warned, there’s a sense of false security thinking Facebook or Instagram will respect privacy. But people feel confident with WhatsApp to organize actions.

On the other hand, living in an OECD country makes it easy to forget that Inter-

net service is not free and so workers on reduced income because of the pandemic have to pay for the service. In other words, there still is capitalism’s global digital divide.

Yet on the upswing, a local government worker in the UK noted, union members have adapted quickly to teleconferencing or Zoom, becoming familiar with speaking on camera. And another unionist mentioned that they were using email and Facebook which we called a tea-break meeting which ran from 10:40 AM to 11:00 AM while also saying, we used WhatsApp groups to organize picketing.

A trade unionist at a university also cautioned, we had used the University’s email system but stopped three years ago over concerns about the University accessing our communications. On the whole however, one might argue that the pandemic has shown the benefits of online media for organizing workers.

Beyond union organizing and set against the neoliberal dogmatism of competition is good, many people have set up non-profit mutual aid groups. Perhaps it is Kropotkin’s 1902 seminal masterpiece *Mutual Aid* and not Hayek’s short pamphlet on serfdom, after all.

Most, if not all, people working in and for mutual aid organizations reject ide-

ologies that champion the individual over society. In championing working with and for others, while rejecting the neoliberal hyper-individualization of human beings, Zoom has made it easier for people to work together.

Yet, another trade unionist argues that online media can help but they are by no means all when he said, the trade union movement is built on camaraderie. Can you get that camaraderie on a Zoom call? I suspect you won’t. Online meetings have many, many, many benefits. But it will never get over that sort of thing.

Virtually the same can be said about online media and mental health. And indeed, many might like to argue that the Covid-19 pandemic changed the lives of those effected by mental health issues. It can be said that for those experiencing mental health challenges, digital meetings cannot replace those encounters that take place in a shared spatial and temporal environment. Worse, online media and online meetings can even lead to what has been identified as the Chronic Zoom Syndrome.

Investigating the role of online media and the Covid-19 pandemic leads to the examination of one of the most severely hit branches of the capitalist economy: creative

arts. During the year 2020 alone, over ten million jobs were lost in the creative arts.

One might argue that the Covid-19 pandemic had an even more disastrous impact in Brazil, particularly under the right-wing populist president Bolsonaro. Interestingly, one artist commented, before my home and workspace were separated spaces. Now it’s in my living room. This is rather unsurprising as many office workers moved from an office building onto the kitchen table.

Almost self-evidently, the pandemic lockdowns enforced a moment of isolation on many, which made it difficult to organize people. Yet, linking isolated people via online media also has some entirely different connotations. Video conferencing use, which has become so crucial during the pandemic, is controlled by three products, Zoom, Microsoft Teams, and Google Meet. It has been estimated there are over 300 million Zoom calls each day covering 50% of the market in at least 44 countries.

In the end, one can safely say that our individual experiences during the pandemic can indeed be generalized. Once done, it reveals the systemic problems inherent in existing social, economic, and political structures. Yet, it also identifies those respon-

sible for failing to adequately deal with the crisis.

In his insightful book *Organising during the Coronavirus Crisis - The Contradictions of Our Digital Lives*, Mike Healy argues that the pandemic and the use of on-line media when organizing has also enabled us to see who our allies will be in a precarious future. These are not the established institutions of capitalism, nor will it be neo-liberalism's hyper-individualism or its relentless drive for competition. Instead, it will be—just as the Covid-19 pandemic has shown during the past years—mutual aid. **Z**

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21st-Century US Foreign Policy Is Shaped by Fears of China's Rise

Noam Chomsky interviewed by C.J. Polychroniou

C.J. Polychroniou: Noam, western powers are responding to China's rise as a dominant economic and military power with ever-increasing calls in favor of bellicose diplomacy. U.S. General Mark Milley, chair of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, said during a recent trip to the Indo-Pacific that China has become more aggressive in the region and the Biden administration has described it as a "pacing threat." Rishi Sunak, currently the leading candidate to replace outgoing prime minister Boris Johnson, said China is the U.K.'s "biggest threat." Sunak has promised to ban Confucius Institutes, learning centers funded and run by an organization affiliated with the Chinese government,

from the U.K. if he becomes the next prime minister. Why is the west so frightened of a prospering China and what does it say about imperialism in the 21st century?

Noam Chomsky: It may be useful to take a brief but broader look, first at the record of the fears, then at the geostrategic circumstances of their current manifestations. We are speaking here of the West in a narrow sense, specifically the Anglo-American "special relationship," which since 1945 has been the United States with Britain a junior partner, sometimes reluctant, sometimes eager to serve the master, strikingly in the Blair years.

The fears are far-reaching. In the case of Russia, they go back to 1917. Secretary of State Robert Lansing warned President Wilson that the Bolsheviks were appealing "to the proletariat of all countries, to the ignorant and mentally deficient, who by their numbers are urged to become masters... a very real danger in view of the present social unrest throughout the world."

Lansing's concerns were reiterated in different circumstances by Secretary of State John Foster Dulles 40 years later, when he lamented that the U.S. is "hopelessly far behind the Soviets in developing controls over the minds and

emotions of unsophisticated peoples." The basic problem, he elaborated, is the Communist "ability to get control of mass movements . . . something we have no capacity to duplicate.... The poor people are the ones they appeal to and they have always wanted to plunder the rich."

These are recurrent fears of the privileged, in one form or another, throughout history.

Scholarship substantially agrees with Lansing's concerns. The acknowledged dean of Cold War scholarship, John Lewis Gaddis, traces the Cold War back to 1917, with the Bolshevik challenge "to the very survival of the capitalist order... a profound and potentially far-reaching intervention by the new Soviet government in the internal affairs, not just of the West, but of virtually every country in the world." The Bolshevik intervention was what Lansing recognized: working people around the world might take note and react, the feared domino effect, a dominant theme in planning. Gaddis goes on to argue that the Western (including U.S.) invasion of Russia was a justified act of self-defense against this intolerable challenge to what is right and just, what is now termed "the rule-based international order" (in which the U.S. sets the rules).

Gaddis was appealing to a

concept that the U.S. War Department in 1945 called "logical illogicality," referring to the postwar plans for the U.S. to take control of most of the world and surround Russia with military force, while denying the adversary any comparable rights. The superficial observer might regard that as illogical, but it has a deeper logic, the War Department recognized—a logic called "imperialism" by the unkind.

The same doctrines of logical illogicality reign today as the U.S. defends itself from Eurasian threats. At the Western border of Eurasia, the U.S. defends itself by expanding to the Russian border the aggressive military alliance it runs, NATO. At the Eastern border, the U.S. defends itself by establishing a ring of "sentinel states" to "encircle" China, armed with high precision weapons aimed at China, backed with huge naval military exercises (RIMPAC) aimed not very subtly at China. All of this is part of the more extensive efforts at encirclements, jointly with "subimperialist" Australia, which we have discussed earlier, borrowing Clinton Fernandes's term and analysis. One effect might be to increase the incentive for China to attack Taiwan in order to break out of the encirclement and have open access to the oceans.

Needless to say, there are no reciprocal rights. Logical illogicality.

Always the actions are in "self-defense." If there was a violent power in history that wasn't acting in "self-defense," it would be helpful to be reminded of it.

Fear of China is more visceral, drawing from the deep racist currents that have poisoned American society since its origins. In the 19th century, Chinese people were kidnapped and brought to work as virtual slaves to build railroads as the nation expanded to its "natural borders"; the slur that was applied to them ("coolie") was an import from Britain, where Chinese workers also served as virtual slave laborers generating Britain's wealth. Chinese people who tried to settle were subjected to vicious racist attacks. Chinese laborers were banned entry for 10 years in the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act, and Chinese were banned entirely in the racist 1924 immigration act, aimed primarily at Italians and Jews (sending many to gas chambers when entry to the U.S. was denied).

Yellow Peril hysteria was reawakened in the 1950s, after China's stunning defeat of MacArthur's army in Korea. The fears resonate often, ranging widely in nature. At one level, Lyndon Johnson warned that without superi-

or air power, unless we stop “them” in Vietnam, “they” will sweep over us and take all “we” have. At another level, when Congress breaks its GOP-imposed logjam to pass legislation to reconstruct collapsing infrastructure and the crucial chip industry, not because the U.S. needs them but to overcome the challenge of China’s development.

There are others who pose imminent threats to our survival. Right now, Russia. The Chair of the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence, Adam Schiff, draws on deeply rooted cultural maladies when he warns that unless we stop them in Ukraine, they’ll be attacking our shores.

There is never a dearth of terrifying enemies, but the “heathen Chinese” have always conjured up special fears.

Let’s turn from understandable paranoia about the poor who want to plunder the rich to the second topic: world order and imperialism in the 21st century, and the intense U.S.-U.K. geopolitical concerns about an emergent China.

It’s useful to recall the experience of our predecessor in global dominance. An island off the coast of Europe, Britain’s primary concern was to prevent unification of Europe into a force beyond its con-

trol. Similarly, though magnified far beyond, the U.S. and its western hemisphere domains can be regarded as an “island” off the coast of the Eurasian land mass—which is the basis for world control according to the “heartland theory” of Halford Mackinder, a founder of modern geopolitics, whose thoughts are now being revived by global strategists.

Extending the logic of imperial Britain, then, we would expect the U.S. to be seeking to prevent unification of the “heartland” as an independent force, not subject to U.S. domination. The self-defense operations at the western and eastern ends of the heartland also fall into place.

Conflict over heartland unification has been a significant theme in post-WWII history. During the Cold War years, there were some European initiatives to construct a unified Europe incorporating Russia that would be an independent force in world affairs. Such ideas were advanced most prominently by Charles de Gaulle, with echoes in Germany. They were beaten back in favor of the Atlanticist system, NATO-based, largely run from Washington.

Heartland unification took on new prominence with the collapse of the Soviet Union. The idea of a “common European home” from Lisbon

to Vladivostok was advanced by Mikhail Gorbachev, who looked forward to transition to social democracy in Russia and its former domains, and to a coequal partnership with the U.S. in creating a world order based on cooperation rather than conflict. These are topics of substantial scholarship, explored in unusual depth by historian Richard Sakwa.

Predictably, the U.S.—the island off the coast of Eurasia—strongly opposed these initiatives. Throughout the Cold War, they were not much of a problem given power relations and prevailing doctrine about the Kremlin conspiracy to conquer the world. The task took new forms with the collapse of the Soviet Union. With some wavering at the margins, the U.S. quickly adopted the policy of “enlargement” of the Atlantic power system, with Russia participating only on subordinate terms. Coequal partnership proposals continued to be put forth during the Putin years, until quite recently. They were “anathema to those who believe in enduring hegemony of the Atlanticist power system,” Sakwa observes.

Putin’s invasion of Ukraine, after dismissing tentative French and German efforts to avert the tragic crime, have settled the issue, at least for

now. For now, Europe has succumbed to the Atlanticist doctrine, even adopting the formal U.S. goal of “weakening Russia” severely, whatever the cost to Ukraine and well beyond.

For now. Without integration, German-based Europe and Russia will very likely decline. Russia, with its enormous natural resources, is likely to continue to drift into the massive China-based Eurasian development project, the Belt-and-Road Initiative (BRI), now expanding to Africa and even Latin America.

The temptation for Europe to join the BRI system, already strong, will likely intensify. The German-based integrated production system in Europe, stretching from the Netherlands to Russia’s former Eastern European satellites, has become the most successful economic system in the world. It relies heavily on the huge export market and investment opportunities in China, and on Russia’s rich natural resources, even including metals needed for transition to renewable energy. Abandoning all of that, along with access to the expanding global BRI system, will be quite a price to pay for hanging on to Washington’s coattails. Such considerations will not be absent as the world system takes shape in the wake of the COVID

crisis and Russia’s invasion of Ukraine.

The question of Eurasian integration in a common European home falls within a more general framework, which cannot be forgotten for a moment. Either the great powers will cooperate to face ominous global crises or they will march to oblivion together.

With the bitter antagonisms of today, it may seem impossible to imagine such cooperation. But it need not be an unattainable idea. In 1945 it seemed no less impossible to imagine that France, Germany, England, and smaller European powers could cooperate in a Western Europe without borders and with some common institutions. They are not without internal problems, and Britain has recently pulled out, dooming itself to becoming a probably fading U.S. satellite. Nonetheless, it is a stunning reversal of centuries of savage mutual destruction, peaking in the 20th century.

Taking note of that, Sakwa writes, “What for one generation is a sad delusion, for another becomes a realistic and necessary project.” A project that is essential if a livable world is to emerge from today’s chaos and violence.

China-Russia ties have deepened after Russia’s invasion

of Ukraine, though there are probably limits to the partnership. In any case, is there something else in this strategic relationship between two autocratic nations besides the concern for limiting U.S. power and influence? And to what extent could the U.S. take advantage of potential strains and divisions in the Sino-Russian relationship as it did during the Cold War era?

The record during the Cold War is instructive. Even when Russia and China were close to war, the U.S. kept insisting on the immense threat posed by the imagined “Sino-Soviet alliance.” Something similar was true of North Vietnam. Its leaders recognized that their real enemy was China: the U.S. could devastate Vietnam with its incomparable means of violence, but it would go away. China would always be there, a permanent threat. U.S. planners refused to hear.

Kissinger’s diplomacy belatedly recognized the facts and exploited China-Russia conflicts. I don’t think that carries lessons for today. Circumstances are very different.

Putin and associates appear to have visions of a Russian sphere occupying an independent place between the Atlanticist and China-based global systems. That does not seem

very likely to transpire. More likely China will accept Russia as a subordinate, providing raw materials, advanced weapons, scientific talent, maybe more.

The Atlanticist powers along with their Asian subimperial associates are becoming isolated in the world scene. The Global South is mostly standing aloof, not joining in sanctions against Russia or breaking commercial and other relations. Though it has serious internal problems, China keeps moving ahead with its vast development, investment, loan programs abroad and technological progress at home. It is far in the lead in the fast-growing sustainable energy sector and has just surprised the world by creating a super-advanced chip, still probably years short of production but a central part of the modern advanced economy.

There are many uncertainties, but it seems a fair guess that these tendencies will persist. If there is a break, it may be unwillingness of German-based Europe to continue to suffer the effects of subordination in the Atlanticist system. The advantages of a common European home may well become increasingly tempting, with major consequences for world order.

India is being wooed by China, Russia and the U.S. Does India have anything to worry about in a strong Sino-Russian partnership? Can the Quad rely on India for full cooperation in connection with its mission and objectives in the Indo-Pacific region?

Before discussing India's foreign policy concerns, let's not forget some stark facts. South Asia is facing major catastrophe. Summer heat is already at a level that is barely survivable for the vast poor majority, and much worse is coming. India and Pakistan must cooperate on this and related crises, like management of dwindling water resources. Instead, each is devoting scarce resources to unwinnable wars, for Pakistan an intolerable burden.

Both states have severe internal problems. In India, PM Modi has been leading an effort to destroy India's secular democracy, which, with all its flaws, is still one of the great achievements of the post-colonial era. His program is aimed at creating a racist Hindu ethnocracy. He is a natural associate in the growing alliance of states with similar characteristics: Hungary along with Israel and its Abraham Accord partners, closely linked with the core sectors of the GOP. That's aside from the brutal repres-

sion of Kashmir, reportedly the most militarized territory in the world and the scene of harsh repression. The occupation of foreign territory again qualifies him for association with the Abraham accords, which bring together the other two cases of criminal annexation and occupation, Israel and Morocco.

All of that is part of the background for addressing the serious questions of India's international relations.

India is engaged in a difficult balancing act. Russia remains by far its major source of arms. It is engaged in a long and worsening border dispute with China. It therefore must eye with concern a deepening Russia-China alliance. The U.S.-run Quad (U.S.-Japan-Australia-India) is intended to be a core part of the encirclement of China, but India is a reluctant partner, unwilling to fully adopt the subimperial role. Unlike the other members of the Quad, it joins the rest of the Global South in refusing to become embroiled in what they see as a U.S.-Russia proxy war in Ukraine. India cannot however move too far in alienating the U.S., which is also a natural ally, particularly so in the framework of the emerging GOP-centered alliance of reactionary states.

Altogether, a complex situation, even overlooking the

enormous internal problems facing South Asia.

The U.S. is a country in political and social turmoil and possibly in the midst of a historic transition. Its influence in the world has been weakening in recent years and its institutions are under severe attack from dark and reactionary forces. Indeed, with U.S. democracy in sharp decline, there is even talk of a radical plan for the restructuring of the federal government in the event that Donald Trump returns to power in 2024. To what extent has imperial overstretch contributed to the decline of the domestic society, and to what degree can domestic politics have an effect on foreign policy decision-making? In either case, is a declining U.S. less or more likely to represent a threat to global peace and security?

There has been much talk of U.S. decline for decades. There is some truth to it. The peak of U.S. power, with no historical parallel, was in 1945. That obviously couldn't last and has been declining since, though by some measures U.S. power remains about as it was then, as Sean Kenji Starrs shows in his important studies of control of wealth by transnationals.

There is a great deal to say

about this general topic, discussed elsewhere. But keeping to the narrower question raised, recent U.S. decline is mostly from internal blows. And it is severe. One crucial measure is mortality. The headline of one recent study reads: "America Was in an Early-Death Crisis Long Before COVID." The study goes on to show that "Even before the pandemic began, more people here were dying at younger ages than in comparably wealthy nations." The data are startling, going well beyond even the "deaths of despair" phenomenon among working-age white Americans that has led to increasing mortality, something unheard of apart from war and pestilence. That is only one striking indication of how the country has been falling apart socioeconomically and politically since the neoliberal assault took shape with Reagan-Bush, Clinton, and their successors.

The "radical plan" to undermine the remnants of American democracy was announced a few days before the November election, and quickly forgotten in the ensuing turmoil. It was revealed only recently in an Axios investigation. The basic idea is to reverse the programs since the 19th century to create an apolitical civil service, an essential foundation for a func-

tioning democracy. Trump issued an executive order giving the president (intended to be him, or maybe more accurately Him) the authority to fill the top ranks of the civil service with loyalists, a step towards the fascist ideal of a powerful party with a Maximal Leader that controls the society. Biden reversed the order. Congressional Democrats are seeking to pass legislation to bar such a direct attack on democracy, but Republicans are unlikely to go along, anticipating that their many current initiatives to establish their permanent rule as a minority party will bear fruit. The reactionary Roberts Court might well approve.

More may be in store. The Court decided to take up an outlandish case, *Moore v. Harper*, which, if the Court approves, would permit state legislatures, mostly Republican because of well-known GOP structural advantages, to pick electors who reject the popular vote and keep to party loyalty. This "independent state legislature theory" does have some constitutional basis but has been considered so outrageous that it has been dismissed—until now, as the GOP hurtles forward in its campaign to hold on to power no matter what the irrelevant population wants.

It doesn't seem to me that the GOP campaign to under-

mine democracy results from imperial overstretch. There's a good deal of valuable scholarship about its nature and roots, which seem to lie elsewhere, primarily in search for power.

It's not clear what the impact would be on foreign policy. Trump himself is a loose cannon, with no clear idea in his head apart from ME! He also has a penchant for wrecking whatever anyone else has helped construct—while always adhering very closely to the primary principle: Enrich the super-rich and corporate power, at least that part that doesn't veer to some criticism of his august majesty. His GOP competitors are in such awe and fear of his power over the mass voting base that they say very little.

The general implications for global peace and security seem clear enough. Trump's triumphs in this domain were to greatly enhance the two major threats to survival of organized human society: environmental destruction and nuclear war. Neither were spared his wrecking ball. He pulled out of the Paris agreements on impending climate catastrophe, and did what he could to eliminate regulations that somewhat mitigate the effects on Americans. He carried forward the GOP program (started by G.W. Bush) to dismantle the arms control

regime that has been laboriously constructed to reduce the threat of terminal nuclear war. He also wrecked the Joint Agreement with Iran on nuclear policy (JCPOA), violating the UN Security Council endorsement of the Agreement, again enhancing global threats.

What he might do on particular issues is anyone's guess. Perhaps what he had just heard on Fox News.

The idea that the future of the world might soon again be in such hands almost surpasses belief.

There's no shortage of vital tasks ahead. **Z**

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

The Enduring Tyranny of Oil

By Michael T. Klare

It may seem hard to believe, but only 15 years ago many of us were talking confidently about “peak oil”—the moment of maximum global oil output after which, with world reserves dwindling, its use would begin an irreversible decline. Then along came hydraulic fracturing, or fracking, and the very notion of peak oil largely vanished. Instead, some analysts began speaking of “peak oil demand”—a moment, not so far away, when electric vehicle (EV) ownership would be so widespread that the need for petroleum would largely dis-

appear, even if there was still plenty of it to frack or drill. However, in 2020, EVs made up less than 1% of the global light-vehicle fleet and are only expected to reach 20% of the total by 2040. So peak-oil demand remains a distant mirage, leaving us deeply beholden to the tyranny of petroleum, with all its perilous consequences.

For some perspective on this, recall that, in those pre-fracking days at the start of the century, many experts were convinced that world petroleum output would hit a daily peak of perhaps 90 million barrels in 2010, dropping to 70 or 80 million barrels by the end of that decade. In other words, we would have little choice but to begin converting our transportation systems to electricity, pronto. That would have caused a lot of disruption at first, but by now we would be well on our way to a green-energy future, with far less carbon emissions and a slowing pace of global warming.

Now, compare those hopeful scenarios to the latest data from the U.S. Energy Information Administration (EIA). At the moment, world oil production is hovering at around 100 million barrels daily and is projected to reach 109 million barrels by 2030, 117 million by 2040, and a jaw-dropping 126 million by 2050.

So much, in other words, for “peak oil” and a swift transition to green energy.

Why global oil consumption is expected to hit such heights remains a complex tale. Foremost among the key factors, however, has certainly been the introduction of fracking technology, permitting the exploitation of mammoth shale reserves once considered inaccessible. On the demand side, there was (and remains) a worldwide preference—spearheaded by American consumers—for large, gas-guzzling SUVs and pickup trucks. In the developing world, it's accompanied by an ever-expanding market for diesel-powered trucks and buses. Then there's the global growth in air travel, sharply increasing the demand for jet fuel. Add to that the relentless efforts by the oil industry itself to deny climate-change science and obstruct global efforts to curb fossil-fuel consumption.

The question now facing us is this: What are the consequences of such a worrisome equation for our future, beginning with the environment?

**More Oil Use
= More Carbon
Emissions = Rising World Tem-**

peratures

We all know—at least, those of us who believe in science—that carbon-dioxide emissions are the leading source of the greenhouse gases (GHGs) responsible for global warming and the combustion of fossil fuels is responsible for the lion's share of those CO2 emissions. Scientists have also warned us that, without a sharp and immediate decline in such combustion—aimed at keeping global warming from exceeding 1.5 degrees Celsius above the pre-industrial era—genuinely catastrophic consequences will ensue. Those will include the complete desertification of the American West (already experiencing the worst drought in 1,200 years) and the flooding of major coastal cities, including New York, Boston, Miami, and Los Angeles.

Now consider this: in 2020, oil accounted for more global energy consumption than any other source—approximately 30%—and the EIA projects that, on our present course, it will remain the world's number-one source of energy, possibly until as late as 2050. Because it's such a carbon-intensive fuel (though less so than coal), oil was responsible for 34% of global carbon emissions in 2020

and that share is projected to rise to 37% by 2040. At that point, oil combustion will be responsible for the release of 14.7 million metric tons of heat-trapping GHGs into the atmosphere, ensuring even higher average world temperatures.

With CO2 emissions from oil use continuing to rise, there's zero chance of staying within that 1.5 degrees Celsius limit or of preventing the catastrophic warming of this planet, with all it portends. Think of it this way: the stunning heatwaves experienced so far this year from China to India, Europe to the Horn of Africa, and this country to Brazil are only a mild foretaste of our future.

Oil and the War in Ukraine

Nor are heat waves the only perilous consequence of our still growing reliance on petroleum. Because of its vital role in transportation, industry, and agriculture, oil has always possessed immense geopolitical significance. There have, in fact, been scores of wars and internal conflicts over its ownership—and the colossal revenues it generates. The roots of every recent conflict in the Middle East, for ex-

ample, can be traced back to such disputes. Despite much speculation about how peak-oil-demand scenarios could theoretically end all that, petroleum continues to shape world political and military affairs in a critical fashion.

To appreciate its enduring influence, just consider the multiple connections between oil and the ongoing war in Ukraine.

To begin with, it's unlikely that Vladimir Putin would have ever been in a position to order the invasion of another well-armed country if Russia weren't one of the planet's top oil producers. Following the implosion of the Soviet Union in 1991, what remained of the Red Army was in shambles, barely capable of crushing an ethnic insurgency in Chechnya. However, after becoming Russia's president in 2000, Vladimir Putin imposed state control over much of the nation's oil and gas industry and used the proceeds from energy exports to finance the rehabilitation and modernization of that military. According to the Energy Information Administration, revenue from oil and natural gas production provided, on average, 43% of the Russian government's total annual revenue between 2011 and 2020. In other words, it allowed Putin's forces to build up the vast stocks of the

guns, tanks, and missiles that it's been using so mercilessly in Ukraine.

No less important, after his military's failure to take Kyiv, the Ukrainian capital, Putin would certainly have lacked the ability to continue the fight without the cash he receives every day from foreign oil sales. Although Russian petroleum exports have declined somewhat due to Western sanctions imposed after the war began, Moscow has been able to find clients in Asia—notably China and India—willing to buy up its excess crude oil once destined for Europe. Even if Russia is selling that oil at discounted prices, the undiscounted price has risen so sharply since the war began—with Brent crude, the industry standard, soaring from \$80 a barrel in early February to \$128 a barrel in March—that Russia is making more money now than when its invasion began. Indeed, economists at the Helsinki-based Center for Research on Energy and Clean Air have determined that, during the first 100 days of the war, Russia earned approximately \$60 billion from its oil exports—more than enough to pay for its ongoing military operations in Ukraine.

To further punish Moscow, the 27 members of the European Union (EU) have

agreed to ban all tanker-delivered Russian oil by the end of 2022 and cease its pipeline imports by the end of 2023 (a concession to Viktor Orbán of Hungary, which gets most of its crude oil via a Russian pipeline). This, in turn, would eliminate the monthly \$23 billion that EU countries have been spending on those imports, but could, in the process, drive global prices higher yet, an obvious boon to Moscow. Unless China, India, and other non-Western buyers can be persuaded (or somehow compelled) to eliminate Russian imports, oil will continue to finance the war against Ukraine.

Oil, Ukraine, and the Global Inflationary Tsunami

The connections between oil and the war in Ukraine don't end there. In fact, the two have combined to produce a global crisis unlike any in recent history. Because humanity has become so thoroughly reliant on petroleum products, any significant rise in the price of oil ripples through the global economy, affecting nearly every aspect of industry and commerce. Naturally, transportation takes the biggest hit, with all forms of it—from daily com-

muting to airline travel—becoming ever more costly. And because we're so thoroughly dependent on oil-powered machines to grow our crops, any increase in the price of oil also automatically translates into increased food costs—a devastating phenomenon now occurring worldwide, with dire consequences for poor and working people.

The price data tell it all: From 2015 to 2021, Brent crude averaged around \$50 to \$60 a barrel, helping to spur automobile purchases while keeping inflation rates low. Prices started rising a year ago, driven by growing geopolitical tensions, including sanctions on Iran and Venezuela, as well as internal unrest in Libya and Nigeria—all major oil producers. Nevertheless, the price of crude only reached \$75 per barrel as 2021 ended. Once the Ukraine crisis kicked in early this year, however, the price shot up rapidly, reaching \$100 per barrel on February 14th and finally stabilizing (if such a word can even be used under the circumstances) at the current rate of approximately \$115. This huge price spike, a doubling of the 2015 to 2021 average, has substantially increased travel, food, and shipping costs, only compounding the supply-chain problems sparked by the Covid-19 pandemic and fuel-

ing an inflation tsunami.

An inflationary tide of this sort can only cause distress and hardship, particularly for less affluent populations across the planet, leading to widespread unrest and public protest. For many, such hardships have only been compounded by Russia's blockade of Ukrainian grain exports, which has contributed significantly to rising food prices and increasing starvation in already troubled parts of the world. In Sri Lanka, for instance, anger over high food and fuel prices combined with disdain for the country's inept governing elite sparked weeks of mass protests that culminated in the flight and resignation of that country's president. Angry protests against high fuel and food prices have swept through other countries as well. Ecuador's capital, Quito, was paralyzed for a week in late June by just such an upheaval, leaving at least three people dead and nearly 100 wounded.

In the United States, distress over rising food and fuel prices is widely seen as a major liability for President Joe Biden and the Democrats as the 2022 congressional elections approach. The Republicans clearly intend to exploit public anger over soaring inflation and gas prices in

their campaigns. In response, Biden, who promised while running for president to make climate change a major White House priority, has recently been scouring the planet for additional sources of petroleum in a desperate drive to lower prices at the gas pump. At home, he released 180 million barrels of oil from the national strategic petroleum reserve, a vast underground reservoir created after the “oil shocks” of the 1970s to provide a cushion against a time like this, and lifted environmental regulations prohibiting the summer use of an ethanol-based blend known as E15, which contributes to smog during warmer months. Abroad, he’s sought to renew contacts with the previously pariah regime of Venezuela’s President Nicolás Maduro, once a major oil exporter to the United States. In March, two senior White House officials met with Maduro in what was widely viewed as an attempt to restore those exports.

In the most controversial expression of this drive, in July the president traveled to Saudi Arabia—the world’s leading oil exporter—to meet its de facto leader, Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman. MBS, as he’s known, was viewed by many, including analysts at the Central Intelligence Agency (and

Biden himself), as the person ultimately responsible for the October 2018 murder in Turkey of Jamal Khashoggi, a U.S.-based Saudi dissident and *Washington Post* columnist.

The president insisted that his principal motives for meeting MBS were to bolster regional defenses against Iran and counter Russian and Chinese influence in the Middle East. “This trip is about once again positioning America in this region for the future,” he told reporters in the Saudi city of Jeddah on July 15th. “We are not going to leave a vacuum in the Middle East for Russia or China to fill.”

But most independent analysts suggest that his primary objective was to secure a Saudi promise to substantially increase that country’s daily oil output—a move they only acceded to after Biden agreed to meet MBS, terminating his pariah status in Washington. According to press accounts, the Saudis did indeed agree to boost their rate of production, but also promised to delay announcing the increase for several weeks to avoid embarrassing Biden.

Ending the Enduring Tyranny of Oil

It’s telling that the “climate” president was so willing to

meet the Saudi leader to obtain the short-term political benefit of lower gas prices before American voters go to the polls this November. In truth, though, oil still plays a far deeper role in White House calculations. Although the United States no longer relies on Middle Eastern oil imports for a large share of its own energy needs, many of its allies—as well as China—do. In other words, from a geopolitical perspective, control of the Middle East remains no less important than it did in 1990 when President George H.W. Bush launched Operation Desert Storm, this country’s first Persian Gulf war, or in 2003, when his son, President George W. Bush, invaded Iraq.

Indeed, the government’s own projections suggest that, if anything, by 2050 (yes, that distant year again!), Middle Eastern members of the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries, or OPEC, could actually command a larger share of global crude oil production than they do now. This helps explain Biden’s comments about not leaving a vacuum in the Middle East “for Russia or China to fill.” The same line of reasoning is bound to shape U.S. policy towards other oil-producing areas, including in West Africa, Latin America, and the offshore regions of Asia.

It doesn’t take much imagination to suggest, then, that oil is likely to play a crucial role in American foreign and domestic policies for years to come, despite the hopes of so many of us that declining petroleum demand would foster a green-energy transition. No doubt Joe Biden had every intention of moving us in that direction when he assumed office, but it’s clear that—thank you, Joe Manchin!—he’s been overpowered by the tyranny of oil. Worse yet, those who do the bidding of the fossil-fuel industry, including virtually every Republican in Congress, are determined to perpetuate that tyranny at whatever cost to the planet and its inhabitants.

Overcoming such a global phalanx of oil-industry defenders will require far more political muscle than the environmental camp has yet been able to muster. To save the planet from an all-too-literal hell on earth and protect the lives of billions of its inhabitants—including every child alive today or to be born in the years to come—petroleum tyranny must be resisted with the same ferocity that anti-abortion forces have employed in their campaign to protect (or so they claim) unborn fetuses. We must, like them, work tirelessly to elect like-minded politicians and advance our legislative agen-

da. Only by fighting to reduce carbon emissions today can we be sure that our children and grandchildren will live in an unscorched, habitable planet. **Z**

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