



Chomsky and Ellsberg on the Present Danger

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Paul Jay (PS): Hi, I'm Paul Jay. Welcome to *theAnalysis.news*. It is a special interview session today with Daniel Ellsberg and Noam Chomsky. Be back in just a few seconds. Please don't forget the donate button. We can't do this without you and be right back. Once again, joining me are Daniel Ellsberg and Noam Chomsky. Thank you, gentlemen, for joining us.

Daniel Ellsberg (DE): Good to be here. Thank you.

PS: I've asked Noam and Dan if they would actually kind of interview each other, and I'll jump in if I need to. But at any rate, Noam is going to go first and ask Dan a question. So go ahead, Noam.

Noam Chomsky (NC): Actually, I can ask quite a lot of questions. There are lots of things I'd like to hear your take on, which I have a limited grasp of. One of them is kind of in the forefront now, I think, or should be. There's a good deal of increasingly open talk in Washington— British analysts and others— about the fact that the United States is getting kind of a bargain out of the Ukraine war. Quite a part from the military industry, the fossil fuel industry, and Europe falling into Washington's pocket. The United States, as a number of military figures and others have pointed out, is able to significantly degrade the military capacity of its main military enemy at a very small cost to itself and can therefore husband its resources for the major war that it's planning with China. I'm just wondering what your take is on all of this.

DE: Noam, with my knowledge from the inside, it is very profitable to prepare for war, to plan for war, and above all produce for war. For instance, arms manufacturers would like very much to break through the limits on war material that we provide to Taiwan. That has been in place since about '79 when [Jimmy] Carter actually recognized Beijing as the capital

and there being 'One China'. Congress forced on that agreement a separate agreement that Congress would continue to budget for, and we would continue to sell military arms to Taiwan— you're talking about China now— despite the fact that Carter had just recognized Taiwan as a province of China, as virtually all Chinese regarded. Until this century, nearly all Taiwanese regarded it as a province of China. Now, there is an independence movement that has grown since the end of the last century, the end of the year, and since then. Generally, they are regarded as part of China. So we have this kind of paradox of sending weapons to a province of China. We don't send them to any other province of China, Zhejiang, for example, and we don't do that. But this move towards seeing Taiwan as a separate part, which of course, is by about 100 miles. But actually, it contradicts the idea of 'One China'. However, Congress insisted we're able to send, but with a limit, defensive arms, and not excessive amounts.

I can't help but believe that there are a lot of people who would like to break through that. They have been increasing the amount over the years and even more in the last year. Of course, we've been taking a lot of moves like Nancy Pelosi and even progressives like Ro Khanna to make visits to Taiwan of a kind that didn't occur before and which are in the line of recognizing Taiwan as a separate, independent and sovereign country.

Now, why? What's the pressure for that? I certainly am not an expert in that area. I think one contributor, just one, but not an insignificant one, is the desire to enormously increase the sales of arms that we make to Taiwan. No ceiling on that. If it is recognized as an independent country, which we're moving toward with these open statements of commitment to defend them from China, of course, an independent country can make alliances; that's sovereignty. In fact, all of Latin America is a sphere of influence in which countries have limited sovereignty. They cannot make alliances with, quote, "foreign powers." We're not a foreign power, of course, in the Western Hemisphere. They can't have bases, for example. If they were totally sovereign, they could. We were preparing to invade Cuba even before Russia in response to those plans.

After the Bay of Pigs in '61 and '62, they were providing arms, but not yet nuclear arms. There were great calls, pressing calls, for [John F.] Kennedy to announce an invasion of Cuba going right up to the moment when they turned up with nuclear weapons from Russia. Now, I'll come back. Since they have no legal status, as they don't, clearly, the position we take is, "no, no. Sovereign countries, independence, have [inaudible 00:06:04]." What Kennedy was preparing for and accelerated when the build-up appeared— totally aggression was illegal. We regard it as criminal and illegal for China to claim that it has a right to determine the nature of the government and to claim Taiwan as its own. But we come back to the question, which I don't fully answer— no, I'll come back to Noam. Aside from the desire to have, I think, Taiwan not only as a purchaser of our weapons and a great profit to our arms sales but as a base again, as it used to be before '79— they used to have nuclear weapons, US nuclear weapons in Taiwan. I visited bases with nuclear weapons in Taiwan in 1960 and

thereafter. I don't think the Navy has ever fully reconciled itself to losing Taiwan as a base. With all this talk about containing China with a circle of friendly powers, a NATO-like encirclement of China, as we did with Russia, I think Taiwan would be a marvelous part of that circle of containment. It would be just wonderful to contain China from these various things, including parts of China that they read as Chinese. I'll turn the question back to you.

NC: I'm wondering what this conception that's now spreading in high circles is that we can degrade Russia on the cheap by losing Ukrainian lives to degrade the Russian forces. We can kind of control it enough so that it doesn't lead to a strong Russian response. We'll just keep it under control while at the same time preparing for a massive assault on China. I'm just wondering, for example, recently, there were reports about the Marines shifting their tactics from heavy armaments to island hopping, go back to Iwo Jima, and so on. I mean, can they really seriously be thinking that we can be preparing for a war with China where the Marines will be attacking islands as in the Second World War, and it's not going to blow up into total catastrophe?

DE: I don't believe they're preparing to invade Taiwan. I think it would have to be with the request, or politicians who indeed may have been induced in various ways to make that request, bribed, or impelled in some ways. I cannot believe they have in mind an amphibious invasion of Taiwan. They do intend [crosstalk 00:09:14]— like the puppets. Do you really believe that? I think the idea would be that like our puppet government in Saigon [Ho Chi Minh City] asking us— they asked us sometime after the Marines had arrived. Phan Huy Quát, I know very well the Prime Minister. I know very well a fact that Phan Huy Quát, whom I did meet but didn't know well, was not informed that Marines were about to land at Da Nang in 1964. But of course, he endorsed it once it happened. The rest of the involvement there did have the appearance of asking a request of a government that we described as sovereign. Although we had created South Vietnam, the US created South Korea, South Vietnam had not existed before we drew [inaudible 00:10:11]. Taiwan, as I say, went back and forth and so forth, but for many years we treated it as an American base, and we didn't do that by invading it. We had people there who relied on it and profited from it, in fact, wanted us to support Chiang Kai-shek's pretensions that his claim to being the ruler of all of China was based on his firm intention to reinvade China. We supported operations against China from Taiwan and from the offshore islands, some of them a mile and a half from China. When China was opposing those, they were opposing bases that we were using for covert operations.

How to keep them in the US; that is Chiang Kai-shek's hands? The answer was there's only one way to do that. They're a mile and a half, some of them, a few more within sight of mainland China. Only nuclear weapons can keep them away. [Dwight D.] Eisenhower was prepared to initiate nuclear war to maintain islands that are just within sight of the mainland as part of the defense of Taiwan, which we regarded, in effect, as a subordinate. So 65 years ago, it was still top secret that Eisenhower had been ready, if necessary, to hold

those islands to initiate nuclear war, with the understanding in his eyes that although China didn't have nuclear weapons, read Ukraine, its allies and a supplier of Russia did have nuclear weapons. Eisenhower expected a response from the US against Taiwan, Shanghai, and possibly bases in Japan and Guam that were supporting this effort. In other words, to which our response would be an all-out war, which, as I found in '61, the Joint Chiefs expected to kill 600 million people. They didn't know then in 1958 or '61, and they didn't know until 1983 when nuclear winter became conceptualized and predicted by many scientists and confirmed today that it wouldn't be just 600 million that would be killed. We expected to attack. We planned to attack. We targeted every city in Russia, over 100,000, and 80% of the cities over 25,000, and the same in China. That's where you get up to 600 million and fall out from those attacks. What we didn't figure out then was that the smoke from the burning cities would be lofted by nuclear attacks. Hard to do this with non-nuclear attacks, but possible. We did it in Hamburg, Dresden, and Tokyo, creating firestorms that lofted the smoke into the stratosphere where it wouldn't burn out. But that was only three cities. With 100 to 200 cities with that smoke in the atmosphere, and you get that firestorm every time with nuclear weapons, it blocks 70% of the sunlight for up to a decade. It kills all of us, and it starves nearly everyone to death. Not everyone— Argentina.

Allen Rose is having dinner with us tonight, leading environmental scientists— 90% to 98% starve to death in a year. He has a big peer-reviewed study that says it will be over 5 billion. He was telling me it'll be a lot more than that. I'm bringing this up to today. That's what we're facing now with the prospect of continuing this war, including moving toward the invasion of Crimea and the full expulsion of all Russians from Donbas, where Russian troops have been for eight years now. They've all got to go. Putin has said he is prepared to use nuclear weapons to prevent that. That Crimea, for example, is a trigger if he's really facing expulsion, which he wouldn't be, in my opinion, from Ukrainians alone. But if some people, including many major factors in Ukraine, including Zelenskyy, and so on, want and get direct US involvement on this and not just a matter of arms sales and provisions, but troops and pilots, not just F-16s, then Putin would be seeing a real challenge and may as well, in Donbas. I don't think he is bluffing. He could be. People have bluffed in the past and have not bluffed in the past. I don't think he's bluffing now.

I am getting away from your point that there are people who don't want to press it to that point because they want war with China, which is a nuclear power, of course. Actually, China doesn't have the number of weapons that Russians do. China doesn't need a first-use threat like Putin in its own region. Twenty years since [Bill] Clinton sent carriers to the Taiwan Straits as a challenge to them when they were sending test missiles in the area of Taiwan, we sent two carriers; the Chinese have been building up their conventional capabilities, including anti-aircraft carrier cruise missiles, and a lot of airfields among other things. The US can't do that again. They will control it. It's pretty well recognized that they have at least conventional parity there, if not superiority. That's the difference from Europe. That used to be the way it was in Europe. We thought there was an overwhelming conventional superiority of Russians,

Soviet troops against West Europe. Now, that was always a hyped-up hoax. There was a basis for that supposedly rationalized, the idea that we would initiate more the basis of NATO planning. We don't have to do that anymore in Europe.

Why is Putin doing it? Because he's in the position we used to be. He's imitating our old policy. He has a conventional inferiority in Europe. So he's doing what we did for 70 years, threatening initiation of nuclear war and blowing the world up. It has no more justification than we had for 70 years, and we're still making it.

Here's the point I was leading up with regard to your question. President Biden could easily, actually, said in 2016, when he was just leaving office as vice president, he couldn't think of any circumstances in which it would be to the benefit to initiate nuclear war or to threaten it. That was Vice President Biden in 2016. He ran on that in 2020—no first use. We will not initiate nuclear war, which seems, you know, sort of a bedrock of sanity, except for the fact that we have been saying the opposite for 70 years. But here we had a presidential candidate who was, at last, recognizing that it will be immoral and insane to initiate nuclear war in any way.

Well, he's been in office for two years. He hasn't said that. He's not going to say it. He could very well afford to say that. He could say cold threats are now tarn-justified, totally immoral, as they are, and with no longer saying, and we're saying the same. Hard for us to say that now because that is NATO policy right now, what he's threatening. He won't say that, I think, because many Americans feel he will need that threat in Taiwan. To hold on to Taiwan as an independent state, in effect, which we haven't openly recognized, but saying that we will defend them goes pretty far. We can't assure a conventional defense. We could actually defend it with non-nuclear weapons. If Biden says, "no nuclear weapons or first use threat for Taiwan," he will be accused by political factors and authoritative people saying, "you are now inviting a Chinese invasion into Taiwan." And that goes along with our ideology and our commitments of the last 50 years, you know, very openly till '79. After '79, as we move toward treating Taiwan as an independent to which we are, in effect, abide, we're back to threatening it.

So, in short, we need Putin's threat for Taiwan, even not in Europe. And that is what makes me a little pessimistic that without pressure, Biden will not do what he would be, I think, quite willing to do in Europe.

NC: Well, based on your incomparable experience with these guys, is it conceivable, in your view, that they are now thinking the gang around Biden, that they can calibrate the war in Ukraine carefully enough so as to keep degrading Russia, sacrificing Ukrainians, not lead to Putin's escalation of the war, and at the same time prepare the Marines, your old friends, to start island hopping in a planned war against China, which they will somehow be able to calibrate as well to keep it short of Chinese nuclear weapons and gain the goal of degrading

China as well? Can it be that they're really thinking of that?

DE: The Marines, as I understand it, moved to training in recent years for amphibious operations, which were the essence of my three years in the Marines as a platoon leader and then incumbent in commander, but as a battalion planning officer, assistant battalion planning officer. It's all for amphibious operations. But now, you know, gradually, much more helicopters instead of landing crafts. I probably went down the nets from the ship. A rather challenging project, actually, when you have a big pack on your back and weapons— more than 100 times. I practiced it all the time. Of course, based on the island hopping of World War II, yes, they've been rehearsing now for helicopters for a long time, but they do, as you say, seem to be moving back. I don't know the details of this, but they are moving back toward more operations like that in their training.

Now, something that occurs to me, which my memory isn't too precise on, but hasn't China been very much warming their relationships with the Solomon Islands? Guadalcanal? My first brother-in-law died in 1942 during the Battle of the Guadalcanal. Well, before they can go back to that, we have the islands that the Chinese have built up in the South China Sea to some extent for airstrips and so forth. Yeah, you could take over those.

Coming back to the first part of your question, initially and now the attitudes on Europe, what do they plan there? It's true. They are— especially Republicans. They seem to be sounding almost sane direction on Ukraine in the sense of not an indefinite amount of escalation here. Not forever. You even have— what to say. How shall I describe Marjorie Taylor Greene? A maniac saying it would be insane to invade Crimea. Well, that's true. You have Democrats who are denying that and going along with Zelenskyy and pronouncing that we're going to invade Crimea. Taylor Green thinks— I have used it, but I'm afraid it is not good even for a joke, but I have used it. I said I do have a principle you can't count on. You might think you could use, as a compass point, somebody who is always wrong. Lindsey Graham offers himself for that, for instance. One would think Marjorie Taylor Green. I've often said you can't count on anyone to be wrong on everything all the time. As I mentioned that somebody said to me, "even Lindsey Graham had a good resolution on immigration the other day." Maybe I've been misjudging him. That means you just can't set your compass court opposite to these people or reliably, pretty reliably, though.

So in Europe, I think that the democratic leaders like [Antony] Blinken, [Lloyd] Austin, [Jake] Sullivan, and Biden have shown a willingness and even a desire for the war in Ukraine to continue indefinitely at this level and somewhat higher. I don't think they want— I'm pretty sure they don't want nuclear war, but it's like Condoleezza Rice said, "we don't want the smoking gun to be a mushroom cloud." Well, how do you know if you've gone enough in pressing the Russians or too much? You know it when this comes up [inaudible 00:25:32] and Crimea offers itself as an abyss. I don't think they want a two-sided nuclear war or even a one-sided one in Europe. They are threatening a one-sided war in Taiwan, and I think they'll

continue to do that. Putin is threatening what he hopes, I believe, is a one-sided war to hold on to Crimea, where virtually all Russians, I understand, do regard that as part of Russia. It would be an existential threat to lose it, and so forth. He has a lot of support for that. Donbas is a more complicated issue. Will he really blow up the world to keep all of his troops in Donbas as opposed to going back to pre-2023 and pre-2022, February 24? We don't know. Noam, as you keep pointing out in other channels, it's outrageous that there is no negotiation going on on this point and there to be no communication. The fact that Blinken and [Sergey] Lavrov's Foreign Minister's first discussion since the war began was ten minutes a day at a conference which Blinken used to say, "get all your troops and withdraw, in effect, withdraw from Crimea," that's not going to happen. A nuclear war, I think he knows that. We can just say no communication. Well, that's outrageous in terms of the interests of the world, but I think to keep it going, there's nothing but a benefit for the ruling circles in this country. The profit to the military-industrial complex, the share profits of Lockheed, Raytheon, General Dynamics, and Boeing have gone up, as have the profits of the oil companies. I would say they're not going down. But even more important, as you said, for the arms sales aspects, is the fact that NATO is back having appeared to have no purpose, no rationale since about 1992, with the end of the USSR, the end of the Warsaw Pact, the Warsaw Pact moving and not existing as a Russian set of satellites, it seemed to have no purpose of NATO. Now Putin is back as an enemy as a [inaudible 00:28:21] factor for NATO with the US as its head. I have to say we've taken on, and with a lot of consensus, the role of a military protector in Europe. A protectorate, first in West Europe, now in East Europe. Now it's hard to get the benefits of being a protector, a protection racket unless you're protecting them against somebody. I think that [George F.] Kennan's and [Mikhail] Gorbachev's desire for a peaceful, democratic Russia to be part of a peaceful, democratic Europe community, from Lisbon to Vladivostok, but anyway, from Lisbon, a very wide European community, that was not desired. Kennan said, "you won't get this if you go into Ukraine." [Jack] Matlock, [William] Burns, and many others said, "you can't have a peaceful, democratic Russia if you talk about going into Ukraine. If you get Ukraine into NATO, you will have very bad relations with Russia." I think that was heard by other people. Aha, that gives us our roadmap. We'll do everything we can to get Putin, in a sense, to look like an enemy and to do things that make him appear; that's a trap he fell into.

We have Putin back— that's full. We have all the benefits now of being a protector of Europe, and it is indeed committing aggression, massacring people, and in every way encouraging people [to purchase] F-35s. He's the greatest salesman for this dog of a plane, the F-35S, which is in the shop all the time and cannot fly near a thunderstorm because it doesn't have good lightning protection. All of the other competitors for fighter bombers, Saab Gripen, and Dassault Rafale, they're all out. It's F-35s all over. Well, that's okay with Lockheed. They've been lobbying for that since the '90s. Anyway, it's a perfect little war, as they used to say— the Spanish-American War. In this case, it can't go on too long without the constant risk of inciting Putin to carry out threats of a kind we have often made but haven't yet been carried out.

NC: Well, actually, Lindsey Graham, who you mentioned, is one of those who's been celebrating the fact that the US is degrading the Russian military with very little expense to ourselves, a great deal of expense to Ukraine and the rest of the world. But notice what's happening. NATO is now at its last summit, an Indo-Pacific power. We have now been able to enlist Europe in our planned confrontation with China, which is pretty much a bipartisan agreement in the main conflict. We'll sort of somehow calibrate things so that it doesn't get out of hand, and Europe will fight to the last Ukrainian, as some are putting it. Meanwhile, we'll prepare for China. The US has now sent— it's not only the shift in the Marine strategy, which I mentioned, the US now has for the first time established permanent bases for B-52s in Darwin, Australia, in Guam, maybe pretty soon in the Philippines. They're now building up the military connections with the Philippines that had declined. It looks as though they seriously think that they can somehow continue to provoke China. Also, the commercial war, which is trying to prevent China from any technological and economic development, maybe bring them to their knees. Can they really? I mean, judging by what you've seen on the inside, can anybody be crazy enough to really be thinking this?

DE: I haven't been on the inside since about the time I got to know you, read your books, and be influenced by you. So I'm not on the inside. In fact, I want to ask you what your opinion is here. By the way, your book was about American power and the Mandarins. I'm just looking at it. I'll tell you why in a minute. But of course, that looked at the Pacific war in World War II in a way that totally changed my understanding of it as somebody who had grown up slightly from 10 to 14 during World War II; it certainly changed my attitude. So why do they seem to be acting that way? Not all of them, but not every politician, but most of them, actually, and more Democrats than Republicans. It's certainly in Europe, only Europe, but also on the Pacific. Why? I don't know. I'll tell you right away, as an outsider, I don't know why they are acting as if they want war with China. You tell me.

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