

# PLAN

## OPINION

### ***PUTIN IS THE FRANKENSTEIN'S MONSTER OF NEOLIBERALISM***

#### ***- Only civil resistance now can save our democracy and our planet***

All of us know ([even J.P. Morgan](#)) that Neoliberalism, the extreme political religion which forced upon us massive cuts to public services, financial deregulation and free-market capitalism, usurping democracies around the world by transferring power to unaccountable banks, corporations and speculators, has led us to this moment of extreme danger. The spiralling inequality, resource depletion and climate breakdown that are its consequences now jeopardise all those who we love and so much of life on earth in all its wonder and beauty.

All that is left to us now to resist the unspeakable horror of our current trajectory, and to reclaim our democracies from this flawed and fatal ideology, is the collective power of non-violent direct action.

And as Ukrainians fight for their lives and their freedom, cheered on from the side-lines by Western politicians scenting distraction and political survival, let us remember that Ukrainians stand for us too. There is a pertinent question those same politicians prefer us not to ask:

#### **“What happened to Russian democracy that enabled Putin to seize power?”**

The historical record is clear and damning. From 1989, following the fall of the Soviet Union, neoliberal elites in Russia and the West conspired to suppress Russian democracy with violence, in order to divide Russia's wealth between those who would become known as the oligarchs on the one hand, and Western fund managers and shareholders on the other.

It was that deliberate strategy that paved the way for the violent authoritarianism of Vladimir Putin, much as Western neoliberalism and corporate greed was responsible for suppressing democracy in Chile in 1973 and for the bloody regime that followed under General Augusto Pinochet. Properly understood, Vladimir Putin is yet another Frankenstein's monster of neoliberalism.

And now, as the vultures of [“disaster capitalism”](#) sense rich pickings from the present conflict, it is not only the people of Ukraine who stand on the brink, it is all of us (even if, for many of us in the Global North, the danger is harder to grasp).

The share price in [fossil fuels](#) and [arms manufacturers](#) is already soaring on the wings of war.

Shell is [reconsidering its decision](#) to pull out of the Cambo oilfield in light of the rising price of oil.

Just a few months after proclaiming on the world stage that COP26 was the [“last chance”](#) to save the planet, Boris Johnson has:

- announced a [“climate pass”](#), saying he wants to [“remove barriers”](#) to increased extraction of fossil fuels from the North Sea; and
- [gone begging to Saudi Arabia to increase its oil supply](#).

If vested interests in the carbon economy are allowed to exploit the suffering in Ukraine to ramp up fossil fuel production in this way, it is all over for us. The survival of humanity, which hangs by the thread of the 1.5°C Paris temperature threshold, demands that global carbon emissions be halved by 2030<sup>1</sup> (in 2021 they [rose by 6%](#)).

The UK, a self-proclaimed “climate champion”, remains the President of the UN climate negotiations until November. If the UK reinforces the carbon economy at this critical juncture it is inevitable that others will follow and that average global warming will soon breach the 1.5°C.

But what exactly does that mean? According to the peer-reviewed science, beyond 1.5°C warming, the world faces intolerable consequences, including:

1. [Multiple, simultaneous crop failure](#), leading to famine
2. [Vast regions of the world](#) (including the tropics, home to 40% of the world’s population) becoming uninhabitable
3. Crossing critical tipping points in the climate system, leading to a [“hothouse earth”](#) inhospitable to humanity, implying the potential extinction of the human race.

The Government’s own [Net Zero Strategy](#) from October 2021 alludes to this existential threat:

**“People are rightly concerned, with the latest IPCC report showing that if we fail to limit global warming to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels, the floods and fires we have seen around the world this year will get more frequent and more fierce, crops will be more likely to fail, and sea levels will rise driving mass migration as millions are forced from their homes. Above 1.5°C we risk reaching climatic tipping points like the melting of arctic permafrost – releasing millennia of stored greenhouse gases – meaning we could lose control of our climate for good.”**

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<sup>1</sup> See [Glasgow Climate Pact](#), para. 17. The 45% reduction referred to uses 2010 as the benchmark. Global emissions have risen substantially since then (from around 30 to 36 GtC), meaning it is now a greater than 50% reduction that is required from current levels over the next 8 years.

**But the good news is that there is, still, a path to avoid catastrophic climate change.”** [Executive Summary, p.14, emphasis added]

There is, of course, no democratic mandate to pursue policies that threaten the conditions which make the planet habitable. Who would ever vote for that? To the contrary, polling makes it clear the public want to integrate the logics of breaking our fossil fuel dependency on Russia and confronting the climate crisis:

[“Exclusive polling: Brits want more climate action as energy prices bite”](#).

But how, in this moment of crisis, can ordinary people oppose the extraordinary power and influence of the vested interests in the carbon economy? With our votes in the local elections in May? By writing letters to our MPs? We might as well resist Russian tanks with a pea-shooter. No. The lesson of history is that power concedes nothing without collective resistance.

Standing with Ukrainians for peace, life and democracy, means standing against not only Putin’s authoritarian regime - but also the neoliberal ideology which put him in power in the first place.. And it means doing it now.

### ***The West’s suppression of democracy in Russia following the fall of the Soviet Union***

In the early 1990s, as Russians’ progress towards democracy appeared to be advancing at pace, the vast majority believed the fairest way to distribute the assets of the state would be through workers’ cooperatives. But that ran counter to neoliberal orthodoxy and threatened to deny spectacular profits to foreign investors and a handful of Russians. From the outset, democracy and neoliberalism in the new Russia were set on a course of collision.

Influential publications in the West argued that privatisation and “economic reform” should be imposed by force. In 1990, for example, the Economist urged Gorbachev to adopt “*strong-man rule ... to smash the resistance that has blocked serious economic reform*”<sup>2</sup>. In 1991, the Washington Post proposed General Pinochet’s dictatorship in Chile as the model: “[Pinochet’s Chile A Pragmatic Model For Soviet Economy](#)”.

As a reminder of what that implied: in 1973, the CIA backed General Augusto Pinochet’s violent coup in Chile against the democratically elected government of Salvador Allende, in order to open up Chile’s resources to US corporations. Pinochet crushed democratic resistance with [murder, internment and torture](#) on a massive scale.

Such publications foreshadowed what was to come. The US backed Boris Yeltsin in planning a programme of radical economic reform to be forced through so fast the Russian public wouldn’t know what hit them. According to Joseph Stiglitz, chief economist at the World Bank at the time:

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<sup>2</sup> See Naomi Klein, The Shock Doctrine, Chapter 11

**“Only a blitzkrieg approach during the ‘window of opportunity’ provided by the ‘fog of transition’ would get the changes made before the population had a chance to organise ...”<sup>3</sup>**

As the asset strippers feasted, millions of Russians lost their savings and by 1992 a third of the Russian population had fallen below the poverty line.<sup>4</sup> The Russian Parliament attempted to push back. Yeltsin declared a state of emergency to bypass Parliament, which Russia’s constitutional court ruled unlawful. The US backed Yeltsin with substantial financial support.

On 3 October 1993, Yeltsin ordered the army to surround [the Russian Parliament](#). Demonstrators were machine-gunned - about 100 were killed. On 4 October he ordered the storming of Parliament with tanks, setting the Russian “White House” on fire.

The Guardian’s contemporary report carries the headline: “[Yeltsin crushes revolt: Parliament taken in tank battle: Opposition parties and newspapers banned](#)”. It records that:

**“Western leaders ... promptly declared support [for Yeltsin’s assault on Parliament]”**

With all opposition removed, there was no impediment to the fire sale of Russian public assets for the vast and immediate enrichment of a handful of Yeltsin’s political allies (now known as “the oligarchs”) and foreign fund managers and shareholders. Giant oil and metals companies were sold-off for a fraction of their market value. Shell and BP grabbed their lucrative shares. The Wall Street Journal flaunted the extraordinary prizes on offer:

**“Looking for an investment that could gain 2,000 per cent in three years? Only one stock market offers that hope ... Russia.”<sup>5</sup>**

The political problem with this feeding-frenzy was that it came at the expense of the Russian people, whose security and economic circumstances collapsed. As a distraction, and to stave off rebellion, in December 1994 Yeltsin invaded Chechnya. Yeltsin’s national security chief, Oleg Rabov explained to Sergei Yushenkov, a Russian legislator<sup>6</sup>:

**“We need a small, victorious war to raise the president’s ratings”.**

The Guardian [wrote at the time](#):

**“If, as many are suggesting, Yeltsin was reckoning on a short, sharp Falklands-style war to boost his authority and popularity, he has misjudged, and**

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<sup>3</sup> *The New Russia*, Klein and Pomer eds, Preface

<sup>4</sup> Russian Economic Trends, 1997, p. 46

<sup>5</sup> *Bond Investors Gamble on Russian Stocks*, 24 March 1995

<sup>6</sup> *Chechnya: Calamity in the Caucasus*, Gall and De Wall, 161

**now risks igniting the North Caucasian region and provoking a clash between Orthodox and Muslim.”**

Approximately [80,000 civilians were killed](#) in this first Chechen War (about 40% of them children). The consequences of this horrific bloodshed would pave the way for the rise of Vladimir Putin.

In September 1999, Russia was hit by a number of terrorist attacks attributed to Chechen militants. Putin was put in charge of the response, launching the second Chechen war later that month.

Al Jazeera estimates that [300,000 people have been killed](#) in the two Chechen wars. As Yeltsin succumbed to alcoholism, Putin was anointed as his natural successor - he took power without elections in December 1999.

Reflecting on this grim history, Wayne Merry, chief political analyst at the US embassy in Moscow between 1990 and 1994 [admitted in 2000](#), with what now seems like understatement:

**“The US Government chose the economic over the political ... Unfortunately, the choice was to ignore popular will and to press on with the policy. And I think there was a huge cost on the long-term development of rule of law and constitutional government in Russia from making that choice.”**

### ***Now is the moment to resist***

As the vested interests in the carbon economy seek to turn the fog of war to their short-term advantage (and long-term suicide), forcing through policies, which would otherwise meet popular and expert resistance, we should remember this history of the West's collusion in the suppression of Russian democracy amid the public disorientation that followed the fall of the Soviet Union.

We should remember also how the US and UK Governments exploited 9/11 to lead us into disastrous wars, including in Iraq. [Hundreds of thousands were killed](#). The [real motivation](#), as we now know, was to open up Iraq's nationalised oil industry to Western corporations, such as Exxon, Chevron, BP and Shell. Tellingly, former US Federal Reserve Chairman, Alan Greenspan, wrote in his memoir:

**"I am saddened that it is politically inconvenient to acknowledge what everyone knows: the Iraq war is largely about oil."**

And how the banker induced financial crisis of 2008 was exploited to impose "austerity", i.e. to wage war on neoliberalism's favourite targets - our communities and the public sector.

And how the Government's lies and corruption through the pandemic accompanied a [bonanza for its friends and corporate sponsors](#), while it waged war on dissent, including by fining a [nurse £10,000](#) for protesting a below inflation pay-rise and by proposing legislation which threatens peaceful protestors with [10 years' imprisonment](#) (legislation that would make headlines if introduced in Russia or China).

But now the stakes are higher still.

Compared to the horrific bloodshed in Ukraine, the fight for 1.5°C may seem abstract and remote, but it is, in fact, all too real and too proximate. That's why [Ukrainian climate scientists](#) are determined to continue their work, even as their labs and offices are being bombed. It is the fight for all those on the frontline of the climate crisis, in particular our children and our young people and the majority of the world's population in the Global South. It is the fight for a peaceful and organised international community. It is the fight for the story of humanity. It is the fight for all of those we love.

And the expert advice could not be clearer: winning the fight means [ending investment in new fossil fuel supply projects now](#).

How can we be sure that the triumph of authentic democracy over neoliberalism is the answer? Because we already know that, armed with good information, space to question and deliberate, and empowered to make meaningful decisions through citizens' assemblies, people will choose neither war nor climate chaos. One thing all life has in common is the will to survive and the desire to pass on the flame of life undimmed.

The people of Ukraine, the people of Russia, the people of the UK and people everywhere share common goals: self-determination and a sustainable future. They also face common enemies: disaster capitalism (the sequel to colonialism) and the monsters it creates. It's time to take a stand up for what you believe in. Now.

**CREDIT:** This second part of this article in particular draws heavily on [Chapter 11 of Naomi Klein's Shock Doctrine](#) (*Bonfire of a Young Democracy*), which takes on new significance in light of the war in Ukraine.

***“Neoliberalism’, ‘colonialism’ - different names, same greed”, Vandana Shiva***

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[XR UK, “We Will Not Be Bystanders”, from 9 April  
Just Stop Oil](#)

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